

UNPALATABLE FICTION:
An Exploration of Transgressive Gender Identity in *Hannibal*

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English and Creative Writing at Murdoch University 2013

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Danielle Gilson

24 October 2013

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ABSTRACT

Mainstream culture often renders gender identities that do not conform to heteronormative ideals as 'deviant' and inauthentic—a failure of the norm. This thesis offers a close reading of Thomas Harris's 1999 work of fiction, *Hannibal*, and analyses the ways in which, as a contemporary Gothic text, the narrative provides a space for the exploration of transgressive gender identity. Since its inception in the late eighteenth century, the Gothic genre has been primarily concerned with exploring subjects considered taboo within mainstream consciousness. Through an analysis that situates *Hannibal* within a Gothic framework, the thesis argues that Harris re-conceptualises elements of the traditional Gothic and thus produces a subversive narrative that draws attention to gender identities excluded from the heteronormative matrix. Judith Butler's readings of gender help expand the reading of *Hannibal* as a re-conceptualisation of generic gender roles in the Gothic, and facilitate an analysis of transgressive gender identity in the novel. Within the democratic space of the contemporary Gothic, *Hannibal* can thus be read as critiquing mainstream culture's treatment of those who inhabit a space outside the confinement of the naturalised heterosexual binary matrix. Focusing on selected characters identified as pivotal in the novel, the thesis demonstrates Butler's argument that heteronormative gender categories are illusory, formed as they are on the repudiation of those considered a disruption or failure of the norm. The concluding discussion reinforces this argument by examining the parochialism of mainstream culture and the continued marginalising of alternative gender identities in society.