

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.

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Danielle Gilson

24 October 2013

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Full Name of Degree: Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English and Creative Writing

Thesis Title: Unpalatable Fiction: An Exploration of Transgressive Gender Identity in *Hannibal*

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Year: 2013

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A big thank you to those who have travelled with me on this incredible journey:

Dr Anne Surma—I cannot imagine having gone through this experience without you as my supervisor. You have been unwavering in your support, encouragement, knowledge, and positivity. I always looked forward to our meetings. Thank you so much.

Dr Helena Grehan—without our initial meeting I do not know whether I would have done Honours. Thanks for planting the seed!

The Honours Crew—the laughter we have shared this year has been invaluable to me. You have all been so supportive and I am so thankful to have shared this experience with such an amazing group of people.

Loved Ones—thank you for everything you say and do.

My beautiful Mama—words are not enough.

## 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.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 'The Politics of Literature' Jacques Rancière declares realist literature to be "the art of writing that specifically addresses those who should not read" (2004, 15). We can divide this declaration into two parts and examine them accordingly. Firstly, what is meant by the *art* of writing within literature? Secondly, who exactly are those who should not read? Rancière defines realist literature as an invention of the nineteenth century whereby speech was democratised and the hierarchy of previous texts (modes of speech depending on social class, for example) broke down. Through examination of French author Gustave Flaubert's writing, Rancière establishes the novel's potential as a powerful democratic medium. Flaubert's prose, according to Rancière, is "the embodiment of democracy" (2004, 13), a "dismissal of any principle hierarchy among the characters and subject matters, of any principle appropriateness between a style and a subject matter" (2004, 13). Rancière argues, "the literary ... redistributes social space and roles, because it introduces a very different perspective on authority than that of the spoken word proffered by a speaker holding sway as a result of his or her special right to a position in the public forum" (Rancière in Bell 2004, 138). He defines democracy as "more than a social state—it is a specific regime whose effect is to upset any steady relationship between speaking, manners of doing and manners of doing" (Rancière 2004, 14). This definition seems deliberately ambivalent—how does one *define* something that changes according to the context of its realisation? Nevertheless, in relation to literature, Rancière's definition of democracy can help us to understand the novel as a democratic medium in which to explore social transgression.

It is through this understanding of the novel as democratic medium within a thoroughly consumerist culture that Thomas Harris's 1999 novel *Hannibal* develops a space for transgression. The narrative takes an unapologetic approach to exploring gendered identity and experiences that mainstream society relegates to the margins.<sup>1</sup> The Gothic genre can be viewed as the original democratic medium and, consequently, the catalyst for transgressive texts such as *Hannibal*. By examining *Hannibal* in the context of the traditional Gothic, we begin to see Harris's text as a contemporary Gothic that has re-conceptualised traditional elements of the genre, creating a democratic space for contemporary issues to be explored.

*Hannibal* is the third novel in the *Hannibal Lecter* series. After the popular success of its predecessor *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), readers waited a decade for the release of *Hannibal*. According to the 1999 *The New York Times Bestseller List*, *Hannibal* debuted at number one on the first week of its release.<sup>2</sup> After seventeen weeks the novel was at number twelve. By the

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Langman uses the term "sanctioned deviance" when describing the modern day carnival (based on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival—see *Rabelais and His World* 1984) as an event now heavily tied up with capitalist consumer culture. Langman describes this concept of sanctioned deviance as "transitory, encapsulated realms of agency ... [where] transgressions of official codes are tolerated, even celebrated" (2003, 224). We can also link the concept of sanctioned deviance to Gabriel A. Almond's (1991) discussion of democracy and capitalism. Almond examines democracy's ability to subvert capitalism as being invaluable in maintaining a balance between the two. He goes on to write that democracy does have the chance to flourish in a capitalist society, thus continuing to foster capitalism, by creating "regulatory frameworks that mitigate the harmful impact and shortfalls of capitalism" (Almond 1991, 470). One can argue that the democracy enabled within a literary space, a form of sanctioned deviance, can be cynically viewed as a capitalist method to subdue discontent because achieving a balance between the two sees *both* continuing alongside each other. However, the novel as sanctioned deviance, the novel as resistance, is significant because unlike events such as the carnival, it is permanent or at least long-lived.

<sup>2</sup> For the Bestseller List of 1999 see Hawes Publications. 2013. *Adult New York Best Seller Lists for 1999*. <http://www.hawes.com/1999/1999.htm>.

For the first week see <http://www.hawes.com/1999/1999-06-27.pdf>.

For the seventeenth week see <http://www.hawes.com/1999/1999-10-17.pdf>.



eighteenth week it was no longer on the list. The reasons for the abrupt removal of the narrative are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis. The negative reception that followed its release reveals a strong discomfort felt by readers and critics alike. Despite this reaction still persisting over a decade since its publication, I argue for *Hannibal* as being worthy of reconsideration in terms of academic analysis.

This thesis argues that the representation and treatment of transgressive gender identity within *Hannibal* enables an incisive critique of stereotyped and restricted notions of gender identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>3</sup> I use the terms stereotyped and restricted notions interchangeably since mainstream development of the former is explicitly tied to the prohibitive power of the latter. Drawing mainly on Judith Butler's post-structuralist readings of gender construction and gender identity, I will discuss how transgressive gender identity subverts normative, heterosexual gender identity within *Hannibal*.<sup>4</sup> Following Rancière, who, as indicated above, argues for the value of realist literature as a democratic space, I show how *Hannibal* provides a platform for the imaginative exploration of mainstream society's underrepresented identities (focusing specifically on the lesbian identity of the character of Margot Verger) and marginalised or outlawed experiences.

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For the eighteenth week see <http://www.hawes.com/1999/1999-10-24.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis I use "identity" and "identities" interchangeably. Its singular use is employed mostly in relation to comments on *transgressive* gender identity, referring to Margot Verger's singular identity in the *Hannibal* narrative and transgressive gender identities as a whole. Whilst I acknowledge that there are various transgressive gender identities in society, irreducible to a single identity, I use the term to alleviate potential reader confusion.

<sup>4</sup> Although Butler provides the main theoretical framework for this thesis, numerous gender and feminist theorists will be incorporated into my close reading of *Hannibal* in Chapter Four.

Chapter Two provides a brief overview of Harris and his work, focusing mainly on a critical comparison between *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*. I will discuss contemporary scholarly material on *Hannibal* and outline the underlying gaps that reflect the complete lack of transgressive gender identity analysis in relation to *Hannibal*. Chapter Three focuses on the main theoretical concepts supporting my argument. I will analyse the Gothic genre in order to situate *Hannibal* within its literary context, and examine how Harris employs traditional Gothic elements and re-conceptualises these elements (concentrating on theories of “Gothicism” and the “anti-gothic”) so as to provide a democratic space for the exploration of gender transgression. Focusing on an analysis of transgressive gender identity within *Hannibal*, I will then outline how Judith Butler’s main theories and readings of gender can help us read the anti-gothic, and develop an argument for *Hannibal* as being a critique of restrictive gender identity. Chapter Four provides a close reading of Harris’s portrayal of gender identity in *Hannibal* and will examine in particular the characters of Paul Krendler and Margot Verger in relation to Butler’s theories, and in relation to each other. By contrasting these two characters, considered secondary to the Hannibal–Clarice dynamic, I show how Margot transgresses heteronormative gender identity, and how her character may be read as challenging heterosexual insistence on gender conformity and essentialist notions of gender identity. The thesis concludes with a discussion of Margot’s omission from the film version of the novel, and explores the consequences of this absence of transgressive fictional characters on the levels of marginalisation in the material world. After discussing what each chapter of the thesis realises, I will assert that, in agreeance with Rancière, the novel remains the purest democratic medium.

## Chapter Two

### A Critical Overview of *Hannibal* and the *Hannibal Lecter* Series

The mixed reviews of Thomas Harris's *Hannibal* (1999) signal a dramatic shift in reader response when compared to its popularly successful predecessor *Silence of the Lambs* (1988) (hereafter referred to as *Silence*).<sup>5</sup> If we examine the current Amazon.com page devoted to *Hannibal* we see a rather bizarre ratio of negative to positive reader reviews.<sup>6</sup> There is almost one one-star scathing attack for every five-star piece of praise.<sup>7</sup> Amidst reviews titled "Elegant Thriller" and "Haunting Masterpiece" lies the opposing commentary of the unimpressed—"An Insult to the Reader", "Mr Harris Should be Ashamed of Himself", "Please Recycle!". One need only glance at the innumerable negative fan reviews to realise that readers considered something in the narrative completely unacceptable. On closer examination we come to realise that it was the eventual romantic coupling of Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter in *Hannibal* that aroused such a response. One reviewer claimed they would have given the novel four out of five stars if Harris had omitted the final chapter. Readers were outraged as the moral centre of the series and feminist hero, Clarice, was, in *Hannibal*, so easily seduced by Hannibal and recreated as a kind of partner-in-crime. The dignity and strength of the earlier Clarice, for many readers, was shattered, as was faith in Harris as an author.

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<sup>5</sup> Harris, renowned for being a recluse, has published only five novels since 1975 (Szumskyj 2007, 9): *Black Sunday* (1975), *Red Dragon* (1981), *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006). *Red Dragon* introduces us to the character of Hannibal Lecter and is technically the second in a group of four narratives (*Hannibal Rising* being written as a prequel to the series). Despite the popular success of *Red Dragon*, I will be focusing largely on the comparisons between *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* since several characters in *Silence* are relevant to my discussion of *Hannibal*.

<sup>6</sup> The Amazon web page dedicated to *Hannibal* was last checked on 24/8/2013.

<sup>7</sup> As of 24/8/2013, there were 744 five-star reviews and 696 one-star reviews.

Unlike *Silence*, scholarly material focusing on *Hannibal* is limited, as mentioned by Benjamin Szumskyj, editor of *Dissecting Hannibal Lecter: Essays on the Novels of Thomas Harris* (2008), when he discusses *Hannibal* as a narrative which warrants reconsideration (Szumskyj 2008, 12).<sup>8</sup> Szumskyj writes that the essays comprising *Dissecting Hannibal Lecter* will provide the reader with a chance to “witness the genius of Thomas Harris ... showcasing the many layers of psychological, philosophical, literary, historical, theological elements ... behind his greatest works of fiction” (2008, 8). Despite the good intentions behind *Dissecting Hannibal Lecter*, the essays focus solely on the characters of Hannibal and Clarice, and the works that discuss *Hannibal* specifically are purely concerned with the close up of the Clarice–Hannibal dynamic within a Gothic framework. As indicated in Chapter One, this thesis focuses on the underrepresented identities within the novel, focusing on a gender analysis of the characters hitherto overlooked by critics and readers. This chapter explores the possible reasons for *Hannibal*’s negative reception in comparison to its popular predecessor, and argues for the novel’s importance as a socio-political critique and as providing a space for reader reflection. After providing a brief synopsis of *Hannibal* and discussing the key commentary on the novel, I will examine the issues left unexplored by the commentary and suggest how this thesis will help bridge the gap through critical analysis.

At the start of the *Hannibal* narrative, it has been seven years since Hannibal Lecter escaped the police forces and Clarice Starling brought the villainous Jame Gumb to justice in *Silence*. We are re-introduced to Clarice

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<sup>8</sup> This collection of scholarly essays on Thomas Harris’s work is the only text of its kind. According to Szumskyj, Harris “is one of those authors in the field whom everybody—from reviewers to authors—has showered with constructive and unconstructive criticism, but [he] has rarely received the professional criticism he deserves” (2008, 7).

in the first chapter of *Hannibal* and see that the glory and veneration she achieved after the Jame Gumb incident was short-lived. After a failed drug-raid in which Clarice was forced to shoot and kill an African-American woman holding a child to her breast, her days as a federal agent for the FBI are evidently limited. Paul Krendler's taunting during her hearing with the heads of the Bureau is interrupted by the arrival of new information on Hannibal Lecter, which comes in the form of a letter addressed to Clarice. This first piece of news concerning Hannibal in seven years is not only made known to the FBI but the novel's villain, wealthy American capitalist Mason Verger. In order for Clarice to keep her job, former mentor Jack Crawford insists that displacing her would jeopardise the Hannibal Lecter case. In other words, no Clarice, no Lecter. Clarice is sent to interview the vengeful Mason who, we learn, is a surviving victim of Hannibal's, attested to by his grotesque appearance.<sup>9</sup> During her visit to the Verger estate, Muskrat Farm, Clarice is introduced

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<sup>9</sup> Mason Verger is described as being "noseless and lipless, with no soft tissue on his face, [who is] all teeth, like a creature of the deep, deep ocean" (Harris 1999, 61). In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin discusses the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style— "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (1984, 303). The nose and the mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body. The eyes, however, "have no part in these comic images [but] express an individual ... human life" (Bakhtin 1984, 316). The shock of Mason's appearance "comes with the recognition that this is a human face with a mind behind it" (Harris 1999, 61). There is a key difference here between Bakhtin's grotesque and Harris's reworking of the concept: Mason's grotesque appearance parodies Bakhtin's optimism in that there is nothing comical about him. Mason does not represent something "deeply positive ... [and] universal" (Bakhtin 1984, 12), but a "private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life" (1984, 12). According to Bakhtin, "special attention is given to the shoots and branches [of the grotesque body], to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside" (Bakhtin 1984, 316-317). Harris reworks this concept of bodily offshoots by having Mason attached by tubes and pipes to a respirator and other medical equipment. In addition to the "Stanford White-designed mansion", the modern wing Mason inhabits is described as sticking out from the eastern elevation "like an extra limb in a grotesque medical experiment" (1999, 56-7). Mason is a grotesque medical experiment within something symbolising a grotesque medical experiment. His existence is physically solitary, his emotional link with the world outside is perverse and harmful, and he is a complete inversion of Bakhtin's humanist approach to the grotesque.

to Mason's sister, Margot, who, "beneath her corded neck [and] massive shoulders and arms"(Harris 1999, 57) is clearly a bodybuilder.

Throughout the narrative we learn of the disturbing past Mason and Margot share, the latter having suffered physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her brother. Their present relationship sees Margot continuously bullied by her brother for her lesbianism, as Mason mocks her relationship with girlfriend Judy, and refuses to provide them with his sperm despite Margot's longing for a "Verger baby"(Harris 1999, 253).

Meanwhile, readers are provided with the rare opportunity to experience the narrative through Hannibal's eyes as he finds residence in Florence as a highly respected curator. Upon realising that the new curator, Dr Fell, is Hannibal Lecter (the results of Hannibal's facial surgery delays this realisation), disgraced Chief Inspector of the Questura, Rinaldo Pazzi, is determined to get his hands on the millions offered by Mason Verger for Hannibal's capture. This capture, we soon learn, has been devised so that Hannibal be brought alive to a farm in Sardinia where Mason has instructed his henchmen to rear man-eating pigs so they can, in turn, devour Hannibal. When Hannibal manages to evade the Italians, killing Pazzi in the process, he flies to Baltimore, Maryland, where the events of *Silence* took place. Whilst following Clarice and attempting to leave a birthday present in her car, Hannibal is shot with a tranquiliser dart by Mason's Sardinian henchmen and brought to the Verger estate to continue Mason's plan involving the man-eating swine. It is at this moment that Clarice realises her full disenchantment with the Bureau, having previously been stripped of badge and gun, and she decides to save Hannibal on her own. During the chaos taking place at the Verger estate, Clarice manages to free Hannibal before being shot with a tranquiliser dart herself. As Hannibal carries Clarice to safety, the henchmen fall

victim to the herd of swine while Mason is killed by Margot (who manages to get her brother's sperm by cattle-prod to the prostate gland). We are then witness to the chapters which divided the readers, in which Hannibal nurtures Clarice, drug-affected in the early stages, before the two of them partake in the shared cannibalising of Clarice's nemesis, Paul Krendler. The final chapter takes place three years later in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where we witness Clarice and Hannibal attending the opera together, in a relationship that "has a great deal to do with the penetration of Clarice Starling, which she avidly welcomes and encourages ... [and] with the envelopment of Hannibal Lecter, far beyond the bounds of his experience"(Harris 1999, 513).

Since my argument, like Szumskyj's above, focuses strongly on *Hannibal* warranting critical analysis, I am indebted to Stephen M. Fuller (2005) who opens a persuasive rebuttal and articulate critique of the negative reader reviews of *Hannibal*. A possible reason for the perverse twist comprising the novel's ending, Fuller argues, is Harris's response to the USA's (Western) tendency to commodify fictional characters into representations of cultural righteousness and conservatism. On this foundation we can analyse the ways in which *Hannibal's* transgressions perhaps account for the negative response the novel received. Firstly, Harris transgresses the generic formula of the detective/thriller novel, subsequently inverting what Fuller refers to as the "moral order" of the previous novels (Fuller 2005, 828). The conventional detective/thriller novel distinguishes between hero, anti-hero, and villain—what Szumskyj labels as "Hollywoodesque"(Szumskyj 2008, 210).<sup>10</sup> According to Fuller,

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<sup>10</sup> For texts exploring the conventional detective/thriller narrative, see P.D. James's *Talking About Detective Fiction*; Elizabeth Willis's 'English Detective Fiction and the "People's War"'.

Harris's previous novels (*Red Dragon* and *Silence*) "satisfy those who prize conclusions that see evil vanquished and virtue prevail, and tend to erase from memory any subtle imbricating of the hero, anti-hero, and villain categories" (2005, 822). *Silence* is easily classifiable as a suspense thriller with elements of the traditional detective genre, and depicts characters whom readers find relatively easy to categorise.

Indeed, perhaps this was Harris's plan—to lull the reader into a false sense of security during *Silence* only to be bewildered throughout *Hannibal*. The Clarice Starling whose perspective readers are encouraged to share in *Silence* is a "comforting, old-fashioned, gun-slinging hero who hailed from America's interior, an Eden where the just are raised hardworking, chaste, and Lutheran" (Fuller 2005, 821). Clarice remains our steadfast protagonist from the beginning of *Silence* to its end, the embodiment of "adherence to, faith in, and the success of reason and a universal set of truths and certainties that her identity as an American seems to legitimate and, indeed, produce" (2005, 821). Through her eyes we are witness to the complexity of Hannibal Lecter as both civilised and barbaric anti-hero, and the madness of villain Jame Gumb. From Clarice's perspective, even the institution of the conventional Federal Bureau of Investigation, portrayed as corrupt and malicious in *Hannibal*, is generically portrayed in *Silence* as the usual "idealized crime-busting machine of popular fiction" (Fuller 2005, 828).

The subtle imbrication of character categories in the previous novels is amplified in *Hannibal* to the point where Harris not only "suggests the permeability of these categories, but [he] also wholly collapses the



boundaries”(2005, 822).<sup>11</sup> The disruption of character distinctions throughout the narrative is exaggerated most uniquely, and, for many readers, most disturbingly, in the eventual coupling of Clarice with Hannibal, which serves to merge the hero with the anti-hero/villain (2005, 822). This joining allows for both characters to embrace the traits of the other, which further blurs the line.<sup>12</sup> For example, if Hannibal is the villain, what does his coupling with Clarice say about our protagonist? Can Hannibal even be considered an anti-hero, let alone a villain, if he kills only for self-preservation? The civilised/barbaric dialectic constructing Hannibal’s character reminds the reader that the “cannibal is never far removed from the scholar”(Magistrale in Szumskyj 2008, 139).<sup>13</sup> Peter

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<sup>11</sup> *Silence* provides us with characters easily classifiable in terms of the conventional hero, anti-hero, villain formula, which is why any imbrication of character categories throughout the novel is subtle and overshadowed by the extremity of certain events. For example, Jame Gumb’s atrocious crimes are juxtaposed with revealing snippets into his confusion, resentment and anger in terms of being denied sex-reassignment, despite his wish/obsession to be a woman. Gumb is a damaged soul, appearing all the more insane when compared to the cool demeanour of Hannibal Lecter. Gumb cannot be labelled simply villainous, cold and emotionless, but when our protagonist Clarice defeats him in his own territory, a simple villain is how he will be remembered. *Hannibal*’s imbrication of character categories is much more overt, and can be regarded as one of the overarching features of the novel. The fact that Hannibal appears to be the hero of his own narrative, along with Clarice, obscures the categories to a bewildering degree, as seen by the reader response previously discussed.

<sup>12</sup> Though the union of Clarice and Hannibal is transgressive in terms of inverting conventional thriller narrative moves, it continues to sustain heterosexual ideals. In comparison to Margot’s storyline, Clarice and Hannibal’s joining, although perhaps unexpected, remains within the realm of heterosexual gender norms. Although not as transgressive as Margot, their dynamic reveals that those within heteronormative gender roles are not necessarily restricted by socially normative ideals—for it is certainly not socially acceptable for Clarice, as protagonist, to be with a cannibal—and that the capacity to resist conformity lies even within those who are perceived to have adhered to the gender binary.

<sup>13</sup> This idea of the civilised/barbaric dialectic in Hannibal was developed in light of Matthew Beaumont’s fascinating article, ‘Heathcliff’s Great Hunger: The Cannibal Other in *Wuthering Heights*’ (2004). Beaumont describes Heathcliff as “emblematic figure of the cannibal ... the ultimate emblem of enlightened civilization’s dark other”(2004, 139). Although eventually “civilized” through wealth and social standing, Heathcliff’s barbarity is “a reflection of civilized culture’s own fractured and troubled identity”(2004, 140). If Heathcliff represents the inseparability of civilization and barbarism through metaphorical cannibalism, so too does Hannibal through his literal cannibalism. I believe

Messent refers to this dialectic as a “type of doubling that occurs in [Harris’s novels] ... typical of the Gothic form (Messent in Szumskyj 2008, 23). Messent argues that Harris’s use of the literalisation of metaphor and of doubling (cannibalism as metaphor for capitalism, for example), is a traditional Gothic characteristic (2008, 31). In accordance with the civilised/barbaric dialectic, Messent claims that “doubling appears throughout Harris’s texts in his representations of the monstrous–civilized relation”(2008, 23). The Gothic genre will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

The conventional character category of the villain is constantly blurred by Hannibal’s ability to project a classical elegance and intelligence whilst maintaining a deep-rooted barbarity beneath. Hannibal can be viewed as a character in whom generic categories are re-signified to the extent of being rendered unrecognisable. In other words, his complex characterisation allows us to question the attributes conventionally thought heroic or villainous in the thriller genre. It is this dialectic within the character of Hannibal and an overarching theme of the narrative— what Simpson refers to as the “intermingling of culture and primitivism central to the Gothic tradition”(Simpson in Szumskyj 2008, 65)— epitomised by Clarice and Hannibal’s shared cannibalising of Paul Krendler that left many readers feeling outraged and betrayed. Simpson insists that this intermingling of culture and primitivism is “one of Harris’s most obvious literary conceits”(2008, 65), one that horrified readers and critics overlooked. Comparing the union of the main

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the dialectic to be even stronger within Hannibal since we are provided with numerous occasions of his almost super-human intelligence only moments before an act of barbarity. For example, Hannibal’s successful lecture on the poetry of Dante Alighieri to the professors of the Studiolo (the revered scholars of Italian culture and history) is followed by his brutal disembowelling of Chief Inspector Pazzi.

characters in Harris's first novel *Black Sunday* (1975) with Clarice and Hannibal in *Hannibal*, Simpson demonstrates the author's re-conceptualisation of the Gothic romance formula to create "killer couples".<sup>14</sup> The comparison allows readers to reflect on Harris's "fascination with romantic dalliances between killers" (Simpson in Szumkyj 2008, 57) developed within two of his novels, written almost twenty-five years apart. It also reveals Harris's tendency within his works to question traditional gender roles through these romantic pairings. Although these romances depict heterosexual characters and do not transgress heteronormative relations as such, the romance itself is transgressive in comparison to conventional narratives.<sup>15</sup>

The previous chapter briefly mentioned the link between the traditional Gothic novel and *Hannibal*. As I will go on to discuss in Chapter Three, identifying *Hannibal* as a contemporary Gothic text is not an attempt to pigeonhole a narrative that is more difficult to define than its predecessor. Indeed, my argument is that the novel's resistance to (sub)generic definition is part of its allure and complexity. Comparing the novel to the traditional Gothic, a prominent theme throughout the above commentary, provides a literary foundation upon which we can study the notion of transgression within the novel. It provides a space in which we can

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<sup>14</sup> *Black Sunday* is a stand-alone text and is not set in the Hannibal Lecter universe. Simpson does not define the Gothic romance formula, saying instead "Harris's formula for Gothic romance" (2008, 57). I understand this to mean Harris's *version* of the traditional Gothic romance—that is, his inversion of the traditional Gothic romance configurations such as the damsel and villain and the damsel and hero. This inversion of traditional formula as an act of subversion will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>15</sup> This can actually be compared to *Silence* in which the end of the narrative hints at a developing romance between Clarice and Smithsonian entomologist Noble Pilcher, a conventional man with no obviously transgressive behaviours. Any mention of this romance is omitted from *Hannibal* and the reader is left guessing as to whether it developed into something serious or simply lasted one night. Either way, after Hannibal makes his first contact, he (Hannibal) has Clarice's full attention.

examine *Hannibal* as a double-layered text—one that inverts Gothic conventions *and* cultural norms. The critical responses to *Hannibal* referred to above explicitly discuss the narrative's Gothic expressions. As I discuss in Chapter Three, traditional Gothic narratives dramatise transgression in ways that can be explored and incorporated into mainstream consciousness.

As seen by the negative responses to *Hannibal*, it is reader resistance to transgression that proves difficult to overcome. It might be argued that the overwhelmingly negative response to the novel reflects mainstream distaste for the unconventional narrative trajectory. However, readers are made aware of Hannibal's cannibalism from the first novel so it seems this kind of transgressive behaviour is accepted, expected, and even favoured. Indeed, one would seemingly expect nothing less from a novel within the Gothic genre, which has always incorporated a range of transgressive behaviours—murder, mutilation, and incest to name a few. However, within this range of outré behaviours, transgressive gender identity remains unexplored. I argue that the public distaste with *Hannibal* stems from the novel's concentration on and exploration of transgressive gender identity, an issue that has been ignored by critical analyses.

The above paragraphs reveal Hannibal and Clarice to be the main focus of both critical responses and reader reviews. Although they are certainly interesting individuals in their own right, my analysis concentrates mainly on the characters of Krendler and Margot. Harris is meticulous when providing readers with details of these characters' backgrounds and their marginalisation in popular analyses deserves to be reconsidered. There appears to be a general lack of interest in characters outside of the Clarice–Hannibal dynamic, even though the polyphony of the narrative

emphasises the interrelation of all characters.<sup>16</sup> This chapter has shown that there is an analytical gap in critical responses to *Hannibal* in relation to transgressive gender identity. In the coming chapters, I intend to emphasise the novel's potential to be read as a critique of restricted gender identity.

Chapter Three aims to show how, through the use of Gothic elements, *Hannibal* affords a democratic space in which normative gender identity is questioned and its subsequent transgressions are explored through Margot, a vibrant character that has, it seems, been deemed insignificant and unworthy of analysis.<sup>17</sup> I will provide a detailed discussion of the use of Gothic elements within *Hannibal* and examine how Harris re-conceptualises certain traditional elements of the genre to create a space for transgression. Through the destabilisation of conventional genre characteristics, the status quo is disrupted and a questioning of cultural norms is thus enabled. Judith Butler's post-structuralist theories of gender identity are introduced as a means of reading transgressive gender identity as an instance of this disruption in *Hannibal*.

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<sup>16</sup> In his essay, 'Discourse in the Novel', Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the polyphonic novel as "...a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised" (1981, 262). Simon Dentith clarifies the definition of the polyphonic novel further, describing it as a novel that "grants the voices of the main characters as much authority as the narrator's voice" (2004, 41). Throughout *Hannibal* the reader is subject to the private thoughts of many characters, not just Clarice and Hannibal. Although this is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge Harris's polyphonic technique as providing the reader with an intricate narrative that can be analysed beyond the Clarice-Hannibal dynamic, so entrenched in mainstream consciousness because of the popular success of *Silence*.

<sup>17</sup> In a majority of reader reviews, further transgressions within the novel—the shared cannibalism, paedophilia, and incest—are considered disgusting, shock-value, or ignored entirely. Although this thesis does not provide a detailed psychoanalytical examination of these issues, they remain dynamically bound to the discussion of gender as I show in Chapter Four's close reading of *Hannibal*.

## Chapter Three

### The Literary and Conceptual Contexts: The Gothic and Gender Theory

This chapter outlines the main theoretical framework within which the thesis is built and on which Chapter Four's close reading and analysis of *Hannibal* can elaborate. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first comprises a discussion of the traditional Gothic genre in relation to *Hannibal*. The theory of Gothicism and the concept of the "anti-gothic" will be explored in order to provide a suitable literary context for exploration of transgressive gender identity. The second part of the chapter introduces Judith Butler's post-structuralist account of gender. After briefly analysing how Butler's work can expand the theory of Gothicism and help us read the anti-gothic in relation to *Hannibal*, I will introduce her concept of performativity and explore its main tenets such as repetition, agency, and citationality. Butler's theorising of gender will help us tease out questions of gender and provide the context in which to explore transgressive gender identity in relation to characters Paul Krendler and Margot Verger. I show how *Hannibal*, as an anti-gothic text, provides a democratic space in which exploration of transgressive gender identity can take place.

#### The Gothic and *Hannibal*

Before discussing *Hannibal* in relation to the Gothic novel, it is important that some sort of definition of Gothic is first established. The definition is provisional but its purpose is to enable an examination of contemporary use of Gothic elements in narrative—why and how the Gothic genre is adopted and adapted in our contemporary context. By establishing a definition of the genre we can then examine how *Hannibal's* adaption of

elements of the genre mobilise an incisive critique of stereotypical gender roles in the narrative.

Since its inception in the late eighteenth century with the publishing of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (2004), the term Gothic has been co-opted as a genre incorporating a variety of narrative styles, with many differing greatly from Walpole's original.<sup>18</sup> Gothic texts characteristically comprise elements of pain and terror, whether emotional or physical, subtle or overt. Despite such texts being linked by these elements they may differ completely in terms of narrative and characterisation. A cursory reading of *Jane Eyre* (Bronte 2008) and *Frankenstein* (Shelley 2013) would reveal little similarity between the two, yet both can be considered Gothic given that they share the generic elements mentioned above. That the texts are so stylistically different—from each other and from *The Castle of Otranto*—is testament to the genre's variety. In his work on the Gothic novel Andrew L. Cooper (2010, 5) provides us with a rather vexing truth: "While [the Gothic] does have a set of historical meanings and associations worthy of study, no academic writer will ever legitimately declare a decisive victory in the battle over its meaning." Cooper goes on to discuss the genre's roots in medieval romances and Renaissance tragedies, as portrayed in Walpole's work and within the work of his immediate literary successors, such as Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe (Cooper 2010, 5).

If we examine Walpole's text in light of Cooper's comment, we can establish a provisional definition of the traditional Gothic novel as being set within a medieval context with a set of characters clearly defined as

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew L. Cooper (2010, 5) writes, "Most critics agree that the Gothic tradition began in the eighteenth century." I have chosen to continue along this line of thought.

hero, damsel, and villain. Inhabiting buildings reminiscent of a medieval romance, such as the castle and its labyrinthine interior, the characters are often consumed with passion and revenge in a narrative pervaded by the sense of the supernatural. Perhaps the popularity of the Gothic in the late eighteenth century reflects artists' satirical response to the Enlightenment and their desire for the romance of the past, as an escape from the age of science and reason. Terry Castle recalls Edwardian critic George Saintsbury as viewing Walpole as "nothing more than a frivolous pasticheur" (2005, 674).<sup>19</sup> Many of Walpole's contemporaries would have undoubtedly seen *The Castle of Otranto* as superfluous nonsense. Pastiche may account for the medievalism but why write something so ludicrous, which the novel in some senses certainly is, deliberately to invite criticism? Castle provides an answer through the work of cultural philosopher and critic Tzvetan Todorov. On the basis of Todorov's writings on the fantastic, Castle argues that supernatural tales flourished when they did because, "in an age of repressed decorums, they provided an imaginative format in which forbidden psychosexual themes ... might be broached with relative impunity" (Todorov in Castle 2005, 695).

Messent describes this imaginative form as a type of liminality inherent to the Gothic. Liminality, according to Messent, is a type of threshold, provisional and unstable, which "allows for illumination as well as extinction" (Messent in Szumskyj 2008, 13). In other words, this threshold

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<sup>19</sup> According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, pastiche refers to a "literary work composed from elements borrowed either from various other writers or from a particular earlier author" and "can be used in a derogatory sense to indicate lack of originality, or more neutrally to refer to works that involve a deliberate and playfully imitative tribute to other writers" (2008, 249). In relation to *The Castle of Otranto*, I would argue that Walpole playfully imitates medieval literature, with a strong focus on the supernatural, as an escape from the scientific discourses of the Enlightenment. Clearly, George Saintsbury viewed Walpole's pastiche as a work which simply lacked narrative intricacy and originality.



provides a space for illumination of certain social taboos, which subsequently sees the social taboo lose its prohibitive power. It can also be viewed from this perspective: the illumination of certain social transgressions within a novel sees the extinction of a preconceived notion of (im)morality. Although the reader may perceive herself as possessing a clear sense of right and wrong, the illumination of certain social transgressions in the novel has the potential to obfuscate these principles. Hannibal's cannibalism epitomises this concept of illumination and extinction. We know cannibalism is 'wrong', but what if those cannibalised are the immoral ones and not the cannibal himself? The Gothic genre is "most intensely concerned with simultaneously liberating repressed emotion and exploring foreclosed social issues" (Messent in Szumskyj 2008, 31). As Messent points out, according to William Veeder, the Gothic "presents most aggressively the range of outré emotions conventionally considered beyond the pale—incest, patricide, familial dysfunction, archaic rage, homoerotic desire" (Messent in Szumskyj 2008, 31). Thus, the Gothic prevails as the literary genre that can incisively interrogate cultural norms and neutralise the prohibitive power over those excluded from mainstream culture (certain identities, acts, and so on). In direct reference to *Hannibal*, Messent elaborates this list further, adding "fratricide, pedophilia, mutilation, murder, cannibalism, and the animal consumption of human flesh" (2008, 31). These taboos can be represented in the Gothic text and whilst such texts may have received public censure, they have typically escaped censorship.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Along with the negative reviews of *Hannibal* discussed in Chapter Two, Simpson includes a scathing review of the novel by Robert Plunket in the U.S. based national gay and lesbian news magazine, *The Advocate*: "...never has a mainstream thriller been quite so fraught with stereotypically homosexual themes and motifs. Among the more prominent: opera, body building, pornography, fussy entertaining, drugs, cosmetic surgery, the daddy obsession, and—I swear to God—a lesbian couple contemplating artificial insemination" (Simpson in Szumskyj 2008, 66).

In relation to *Hannibal* and the exploration of the taboo, Harris remains true to the Gothic and provides us with a transgressive narrative from beginning to end. For example, Hannibal's habit of dissecting and cannibalising his victims is a narrative element that can be traced back to a nineteenth century Gothic text, Petrus Borel's *Andreas Vesalius the Anatomist* (2001). Dissection, or perhaps more disturbingly, methodical dismemberment—that is, dismemberment for the purposes of scientific experiment rather than in the chaos of battle, for example—is a prominent theme in this novel. We are introduced to doctor and scientist Andreas Vesalius, a Fleming residing in a prosperous residence in one of Madrid's minor laneways. On the day of his wedding to his young bride, Castilian beauty Maria, people gather at the gates of his mansion—"the groundlings from the lowest gutter" (2001, 70)—in revolt. From their protestations we are made aware of the public suspicions concerning Vesalius and cannibalism. He is a man who "often dines on cutlets that never came from the butcher's" (2001, 71) and whose Castilian victims could "make a ring around Madrid ... [if they] turned up to get back their skins!" (2001, 71)

As the story progresses we learn of Maria's eventual adultery for which she begs forgiveness from the old doctor. Upon hearing her confession, Vesalius drags her to his laboratory and reveals the skeletons of her paramours. Revelling in Maria's horror, the doctor explains that, "until now, without having dissected any living bodies, we have had only a vague and incomplete notion of the circulation of the blood or the action of the muscles" (2001, 80). Shortly after Vesalius expresses his eternal gratitude to Maria for providing the bodies, we are told, "That night ... you could have caught sight of Andreas Vesalius at his work-bench, dissecting the body of a beautiful woman..." (2001, 80). We have proof of

the doctor's methodical dismemberment and dissection of innocent people but his cannibalism remains only a lingering suspicion.

By comparing *Hannibal* with Borel's short narrative we can perhaps gain a clearer understanding of McAleer's concept of Gothicism. The adding of the suffix "ism" creates a framework within which one can examine the traditional Gothic. The term Gothicism can be viewed as "a theory of reading by first re-reading, re-discovering and re-conceptualising the Gothic" (McAleer 2012, 7). This theory implies that we—the reader, the scholar, and the author—re-examine the traditional Gothic text within an understanding of contemporary social issues (transgressive gender identity being most relevant in relation to *Hannibal*). Re-examining the traditional Gothic can question notions that are archaic, even offensive, in contemporary society. For example, if we were to re-examine traditional Gothic narratives within our understanding of contemporary issues, the gender inequality present in a majority of those earlier works becomes incredibly clear. The common relegation of the female character to the role of helpless victim in the traditional Gothic *needs* to be re-conceptualised. Harris inverts traditional Gothic elements in *Hannibal* so as to destabilise their fixedness within the genre. It is important to note here that, like *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein* mentioned above, there is traditional Gothic literature and then there are *expressions* of the Gothic in literature, which is where *Hannibal* is positioned (McAleer 2012, 2). Within this framework, we can analyse Harris's expressions of the Gothic in *Hannibal* and explore *how* he has adapted them for a contemporary readership and to what purpose.

How does *Hannibal* re-conceptualise the Gothic genre through its expressions of Gothic elements? We know Hannibal is a cannibal and that his choice of victim can be either systematic or impulsive. His understanding of anatomy is not presented as the sole reason for his actions but simply an extra layer of pleasure added to the experience. On the basis of both *Hannibal* and *Andreas Vesalius the Anatomist* including cannibalism and scientific/anatomical exploration, we can suggest Hannibal as being roughly modelled on Vesalius but with a key difference: Hannibal's concept of morality. Whilst Vesalius takes whatever body he can get in the name of science, Hannibal, bar a few impulsive moments, is more fastidious. According to Nurse Barney, Hannibal once told him [Barney] that, "Whenever it was 'feasible', he preferred to eat the rude. 'Free-range rude', he called them" (Harris 1999, 94).<sup>21</sup> It is Hannibal's concept of morality that distinguishes between the rude and the polite, the potential victim and the tolerated acquaintance. Hannibal never questions whether it is wrong to kill—if, for the sake of self-preservation, he has to kill someone polite and, in his eyes, undeserving of death, then so be it. To Hannibal, killing is natural, so much so that he has a particular preference of victim as one would a dish at dinnertime. The reader comes to see his preference of prey as a kind of vigilante justice that we cannot help but condone because Hannibal himself is portrayed as morally superior to his victims (again, reinforcing the blurring of the boundaries between civility and barbarity). This is one of the more obvious of Harris's re-

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<sup>21</sup> We are first introduced to Barney in *Silence* where he works as the chief orderly in the maximum security wing of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. During his six years as chief orderly, Barney had regular contact with Hannibal who occupied the cell at the end of the corridor. In *Hannibal*, Clarice asks Barney how he managed to last with Hannibal for so long without getting maimed or killed. Barney replies, "Security was separate from conversation ... security was never personal, even when I had to shut off his mail or put him in restraints" (Harris 1999, 93). In the *Hannibal* narrative, Barney has achieved a Licensed Practical Nurse qualification and begins working for Mason Verger about halfway through the text.

conceptualisations of the Gothic. Through the character of Hannibal, Harris presents us with an anti-hero who blurs the formula of villain–hero always so clear-cut in early Gothic texts. Hannibal exhibits habits similar to Vesalius but has a moral complexity that leaves the reader ultimately perplexed. Should we feel a connection with a man many people label a monster? If so, what exactly is that connection? Harris creates a character who is variously “gentleman, genius, [and] cannibal” (Harris 1999, back cover page) and provides us with a constant feeling of unease in terms of reader–character loyalty – that is, the hesitation we experience as readers when we find ourselves sympathising with the ‘monster’. This unsettling follows us throughout the narrative and lingers beyond the final page.

A second way in which Harris re-conceptualises the Gothic is through his creation of the female protagonist, Clarice Starling. The development of this character, I would argue, represents Margaret Atwood’s concept of the “anti-gothic”, as articulated by Krista R. Vokey (1994), whereby the work of a contemporary author is understood as re-conceptualising Gothic elements in order to examine the perils of traditional Gothic thinking (Vokey 1994, 10). Though often treated as a subordinate by the male characters, Clarice is certainly not a female character typical of earlier Gothic texts. Clarice serves as an inversion of traditional female gender roles—the damsel (such as Borel’s Maria), the marginalised and incoherent female (*Jane Eyre’s* Bertha Mason), or the passive, subservient female (*Frankenstein’s* Elizabeth Lavenza). Clarice is represented as strong-willed and physically capable. According to Nurse Barney, Hannibal “admires and respects her courage and discipline” (Harris 1999, 295). In his first letter to Clarice, their first contact in seven years, Hannibal calls her a “warrior” (1999, 34). The eventual union of Clarice and Hannibal, through the cannibalising of nemesis Paul Krendler, reveals a further

inversion of the traditional Gothic formula whereby the female protagonist joins the anti-hero instead of either being destroyed by his hand or rescued by her saviour. In fact, we can suggest that Hannibal himself is her saviour, but the inversion comes in the knowledge that Clarice is also *his*.

This moment of realisation—when both Clarice and Hannibal become fully conscious of their interdependence—is reminiscent of Immanuel Kant’s concept of the sublime. According to Terrence Des Pres, the Gothic novel “emerged as a prominent genre at precisely the time when the category of the sublime became central to art and philosophy” (1983, 144).<sup>22</sup> A Kantian perspective places emphasis on the power of the judging subject to regulate the sublime experience. The individual has authority over what stimulates terror and he/she is in control. In Des Pres’s words, “Kant pits the power of the mind against nature’s demonic forces (forces external, but also internal, to man) the outcome being that special moment when the mind reveals to itself its own sublime estate” (1983, 141). This special moment for Clarice, burning slowly throughout the narrative and reaching a climax in a pivotal scene, is the shared cannibalising of Krendler with Hannibal. The sublime object (Hannibal) becomes attractive to Clarice in terms of its fearfulness. Through his complete disregard for hegemonic ideals—in his attachment to cannibalism and his refusal to

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<sup>22</sup> Des Pres is referring here to the publication of Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), in which Burke defines the sublime as “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror ... is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke in Des Pres 1983, 135). Burke’s sublime is the moment created during the terror of an external impact and our internal response. The moment of horror is delightful in its evocation of primal emotions—fear, passion, rage. With Burke’s emphasis on the overwhelming forces of nature, we can see why the Gothic emerged as a prominent genre during the rising popularity of the sublime in art and philosophy. Early Gothic emphasis on the terror of natural forces beyond our human understanding (ranging from the untameable forces of nature to supernatural occurrences) reflects Burke’s sublime in aesthetic form.

acknowledge social norms more generally—Hannibal, as (Clarice’s) sublime object and vessel for private salvation, “raises the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace”(Des Pres 1983, 141), by which Clarice discovers within herself the power to resist not only the fearfulness of Hannibal, but her continual subjugation by men. This resistance is when “the mind sheds its fear and exults in a strength it gained by internalising, or identifying with, terror’s own power”(1983, 142). Clarice’s choice to not simply view Hannibal as a monster results in her “transcendence and exultation through identification with overwhelming power of the other”(1983, 142). This special moment is a popular element of the early Gothic narrative which often “aggrandises [the] protagonist whose superior power derives from identification with the source of terror... [through] a pact with the devil”(1983, 144).

However, as mentioned above, Harris inverts this generic element through use of a *female* protagonist participating in this pact willingly *and* emerging triumphant. The inversion of the traditional female role in Harris’s anti-gothic narrative paves the way for the triumph of the novel’s other female protagonist, Margot, who does not only invert but completely *subverts* generic gender roles through her transgressive gender identity. Margot serves more as an intervention than a re-conceptualisation. She represents a subversion of traditional Gothic gender identities. In relation to gender, she is the main agent of transgression in the *Hannibal* narrative since, ultimately, the final union between Hannibal and Clarice simply restores and sustains heteronormative relations.

According to Paulina Palmer (1999) the Lesbian Gothic (theorised as recently as the 1970s) portrays lesbian identity in several ways, including

through the figures of the witch, crone, vampire, and spectre, as symbols of repressed desire. These portrayals, excluding the crone, represent a feminised version of the lesbian. Popular culture's insistence on heterosexualising the lesbian sees characters like 'manly' and 'unfeminine' Margot completely omitted from mainstream fiction. In other words, despite the Gothic's liminality providing a space for transgression, this transgression is rarely gender-related. However, Harris creates in Margot a disruption of the conventional Gothic. She may be read as representing an intervention on behalf of transgressive gender identity in popular fiction. The concept of liminality in the traditional Gothic, despite failing to adequately explore transgressive gender identity, provides Harris with the very space to use Margot as a contemporary critique of this mainstream desire to omit those who do not conform to heteronormative ideals.

Harnessing McAleer's theory of Gothicism and Atwood's concept of the anti-gothic, I read *Hannibal* as re-conceptualising traditional Gothic elements (especially generic gender roles) in order to incorporate contemporary gender-related issues. Nevertheless, one might argue, what is the point in adopting Gothic elements if only to subvert them? Why not write a different style of narrative altogether? Judith Butler provides us with the answer: "it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that ... subversion ....becomes possible"(Butler 1990, 199; emphasis in original). Butler is referring here to gender identity specifically but her point is relevant to this discussion. It is only by repeating certain Gothic elements that one is able to re-signify them in accordance with contemporary understanding and questioning of gender-related issues. Butler's theorising of gender can help us re-read the traditional Gothic,



understand the anti-gothic, and, ultimately, reconsider *Hannibal* as sharp socio-political critique of essentialist notions of gender identity.

Butler's texts *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Butler 1993) provide us with detailed and compelling examinations of the concepts and practices of gender, sex, identity, and the concept of a 'natural self'. Drawing on Butler's own work and Butlerian scholarship, part two of this chapter will discuss her concept of performativity and explore its main tenets such as repetition, agency, and citationality, so as to provide a context for the close analysis of transgressive gender identity in Chapter Four.<sup>23</sup>

### **Judith Butler: An Introduction**

Butler's understanding of identity derives from two lines of thought: social constructivism and post-structuralism. A social constructivist perspective maintains that "identity is, at least in part, a reflexive process between the individual and social practice" (McKinlay 2008, 234). This view maintains that a large part of our identity is contingent on socio-cultural factors and is constituted by the "interrelationship among discourses, power relations, historical experiences, and cultural practices"

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<sup>23</sup> Butler's main argument in *Gender Trouble* revolves around the concept of gender as performative and not as innate to the individual. Through discussion of heteronormative gender identities as social constructions, constructed as regulatory ideals through highly regulated practices, Butler attempts to denaturalise gender in the hope of destabilising the apparent naturalness of heterosexual gender categories. *Bodies That Matter* elaborates this argument further by exploring the notion of sex as normative which, like gender ideals, "produces the bodies it governs" (Butler 1993, 3). Whereas Butler's concept of performativity is relegated to the final chapter of *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter* elaborates the idea in more detail, clarifying numerous issues that may have seemed quite vague in the previous text—for example, the difference between performativity and performance (discussed in more detail below). I acknowledge that I am only concentrating on a small, but influential, part of Butler's body of work, which includes significant texts such as *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) and her more recent reflections on gender matters in *Undoing Gender* (2004).

(Youngblood Jackson 2004, 674). Butler draws on the work of Michel Foucault when she discusses the concept of genealogical critique, which investigates “the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices [and] discourses” (Butler 1990, xxxi). These institutions, practices, and discourses impel compulsory heterosexuality into mainstream consciousness and develop a masculine-privileged society (xxxii).<sup>24</sup> This phallogocentric economy divides up “human bodies into male and female sexes [because] such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality” (Butler 1990, 153).<sup>25</sup> Sex, Butler argues, is as culturally constructed as gender and the latter “ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex” (Butler 1990, 10). The supposed naturalness of the sex binary is continually reinforced by gendered commodity production. For example, the female body, capable of reproduction, constructs the social norm of female/mother/carer. The social construction of sex and gender

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<sup>24</sup> For example, legal, medical, and religious institutions/practices/discourses.

<sup>25</sup> Simply, the economic needs of heterosexuality within our contemporary capitalist society refers to the biological reproduction of the species as imperative for continuation of the labour force. Motherhood as a social construction has been acknowledged by feminists for decades. The market is saturated with products designed specifically for mothers and mothers-in-waiting. Capitalism exists on a paradoxical basis—its ideology of the heterosexual, nuclear family (reproduction and childbearing) is contrasted by its material greed, which sees the spread of wage labour and individual autonomy weaken the bonds that once kept a family together (D’Emilio 1998, 138). Since the heterosexual family is no longer the main institution for producing material goods (bread and clothing, for example, goods that could be produced within the household in the pre-capitalist era), we have seen the development of a nostalgic ideology of the family as the source of emotional happiness, pleasure and stability (1998, 133). The impact of this ideology on those who do not fit into the gender binary (lesbians, gay men, intersex, transgender) has been severe with many used as scapegoats to explain the instability of the family ideal. Herein lies another contradiction of the capitalist system—only when individuals began to partake in wage labour, instead of being a part of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for “homosexual desire to coalesce into personal identity” (1998, 134). True to the dialectic mentioned above, if the measure of autonomy provided by capitalism encourages transgressive sexualities and sexual relations then we can be sure that this “liberation” is exploited in the reinforcement of capitalist ideology.

are both considered by Butler to be what Foucault terms a “regulatory ideal” whose “materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices” (Butler 1993, 1). These practices produce the limits of a discursively conditioned experience, limits that “are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality” (Butler 1990, 12).<sup>26</sup> The construction of sex and gender operates through exclusionary means—that is, the cultural intelligibility of the heterosexual matrix is dependent on rendering non-normative gendered beings as “incoherent” or “discontinuous” (Butler 1990, 23). Butler reiterates this idea in *Bodies That Matter* explaining that this “economy of repudiation suggests that heterosexuality and homosexuality ... can only coincide through rendering the one culturally viable and the other a transient and imaginary affair” (1993, 74). However, it is precisely those who do not conform to gendered norms who reinforce the instability of the category of masculine/feminine heterosexuality, which is consistently “naturalised” through regulated practices.

We can simplify the rationale of social constructivism by drawing on personal experience—I am who I am, who I consider myself to be, because of my childhood, schooling, culture, and so on. Butler challenges the notion of there being an essential ‘self’ and, according to Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery, sees “the self [as being] no more than a discursive construction” (2009, 140). Butler emphasises here that “to claim discourse [as] formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively

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<sup>26</sup> Butler’s use of “language of universal rationality” can be compared to the Bakhtinian idea of centripetal forces of language, the forces that “serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world” (Bakhtin 1981, 270). The language used to express certain ideologies becomes “official” through the institutions, practices, and discourses previously mentioned. Butler uses the example of “It’s a girl!” (Butler 1993, 177) to discuss the immediacy of forced regulatory ideals within contemporary society.

composes that which it concedes”(Butler 1993, 10). Rather, the claim is made to reveal the ideal of a pure body, one completely untouched by surrounding discourse, as false essentialism. It is the discourses constituting our childhood, our schooling, and our culture that produce our identity (our body, our gender, our sexuality). This identity should not be seen as fixed or definitive. The post-structuralist identity is “*always—indeed, is only—process*”(McKinlay 2008, 234; emphasis in original).<sup>27</sup> Both social constructivist and post-structuralist understandings of identity are balanced on socially and culturally contingent premises. In other words, our identities are dependent on the contexts in which they are produced and, unless a situation is forever fixed, we are always in the process of becoming.<sup>28</sup>

Gender, as a stable category, is an impossible ideal and “one which compels a daily mime that can, by definition, never succeed in its effort to approximate that ideal”(McKinlay 2008, 232). Regulated practices construct gender ideals precisely so they are never realised, never fully embodied and these inapproximable ideals act as a catalyst for the subject’s perpetual state of becoming. A large majority of us find ourselves always striving for these ideals, often subconsciously, and this can be seen as a method of social control. The feminine and masculine ideals are so embedded in social practices that we are often forced into what Butler

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<sup>27</sup>According to *The Encyclopaedia of Case Study Research*, post-structuralism is “associated with revealing paradox, contradiction, and fragmentation within apparently cohesive signifying systems”(2010, 705). From a post-structuralist perspective, linguistic signifiers (for example, “man” and “woman”) are socially constructed and, therefore, are not natural and fixed as we are encouraged to believe.

<sup>28</sup> Similar to Butler and Foucault, the Bakhtinian perspective of “self” is a “continuous and mobile process, a perpetual state of becoming...”(Thomson 1991, 212-213). Bakhtin views the phenomenon of “self-ness” as “constituted through the operation of a dense and conflicting network of discourses, cultural and social practices, and institutional structures...”(Thomson 1991, 212-213).

terms “compulsory heterosexuality”(Butler 1990, 24). According to Youngblood Jackson, “Compulsory repetitions [of heterosexuality]” continue to “construct illusory origins of gender that function as regulatory regimes to keep people within a particular grid of intelligibility by governing and punishing non-normative behaviour” (Youngblood Jackson 2004, 680).

However, these compulsory repetitions do not mean we are necessarily doomed to repeat, for Butler is not suggesting here that we are so socially determined that we are completely without agency (Youngblood Jackson 2004, 681). The question of agency, Butler argues, must be “reformulated as a question of how signification and resignification work”(Butler 1990, 197). In other words, our agency within a society of forced repetition depends on *how* we repeat, *how* we re-signify the norms. Butler emphasises the dynamic relationship between construction and agency by claiming the former to be “the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible”(1990, 201). This reformulation of agency is expanded on in *Bodies That Matter* where Butler discusses the potential for agency to flourish within the “possibilities opened up in and by ... the compulsory appropriation and identification with ... normative demands”(1990, 12).

Butler’s idea of performativity provides us with a method of resistance to compulsory heteronormativity through subversion of the very categories we are forced to repeat. According to Butler, gender is an “identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*”(Butler 1990, 191; emphasis in original). This repetition of acts, this compulsory repetition, is due to what Butler terms the “sedimented effect of reiterative or ritual practice”(Butler 1993, 10). In

Youngblood Jackson's words, the language within these reiterative practices "engages us to perform (repeat) an action (gender) that conforms to an established model within a discourse"(2004, 680). The use of the word reiterative implies that this performance is not a single act but a process of becoming that can change depending on the context in which it is enacted. Since we do not elect a gender role to act out as in a theatrical performance, Butler uses the term performativity to express how we *become* subjects through repetition (Youngblood Jackson 2004, 680). Performativity is a "process concept that seeks to escape—or at least reject—the dualism of structure and agency"(McKinlay 2008, 236), by combining the two so as to "urge repetition and the possibility of disruption"(Youngblood Jackson 2004, 682). Butler is a political optimist and whilst acknowledging the extent of socially embedded ideology, she insists that we can subvert gender conformity depending on *how* we choose to repeat (Butler 1990, 202).

Performativity is "the materialisation of norms, a process that is inherently unstable, latent with possibility of resistance"(McKinlay 2008, 236), and since there is no essential, collective human identity, "the repetition never looks the same [and] never exhausts its performative possibilities..."(Youngblood Jackson 2004, 679). Butler's idea of citationality—the idea that the citation of a gender norm can be "an interpretation of the norm and an occasion to expose the norm itself as a privileged interpretation"(Allen 1998, 462)—reveals an element of individual agency which can be achieved within dominant discourses. If we must subject ourselves to gender norms (this is usually a subconscious subjection) there is a chance to re-configure our subjectivity because "discourses fracture at various points and create spaces for alternative constructions of subjectivity"(Youngblood Jackson 2004, 674). This

reconfiguration of subjectivity depends heavily on individual agency *within* heteronormative categories of gender since it is only within “the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (Butler 1990, 199).

If agency within certain categories can reconfigure subjectivity it can also re-signify the very meaning of that category, revealing its instability and fracturing the illusion of it as a coherent identity. Transgressing normative gender identity through repetition serves to reconfigure, re-signify, and *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself (Butler 1990, 203). As Youngblood Jackson points out, this is what constitutes subversive repetition as a way of making categories vulnerable to change and to future re-significations (2004, 681). The concept of performativity, not to be misconstrued as a performance, or a bounded act, provides a space for the individual to “turn power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power” (Butler 1993, 184), revealing the inefficacy of gendered norms.<sup>29</sup> Inhabiting the practices of rearticulation and transgressing normative demands has the potential to reveal apparently static categories of gender as fragile and susceptible to change.

Butler’s concepts of gender and performativity reveal gender to be regulatory ideals built on the social construction of an illusory origin. In other words, heterosexuality is repeatedly constructed as the natural gender through institutions, practices, and discourses which render

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<sup>29</sup> In the final chapter of *Bodies That Matter*, the reader receives clarification on the confusion between performativity and performance that arose in *Gender Trouble*. According to Butler, “performance as a bounded ‘act’ is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (Butler 1993, 178). In other words, performativity underlies the subject’s “selfhood” as a continuing process of becoming, a process which is never definitive and never produces a finite, single identity.

variations of the norm (such as homosexuality) incoherent and discontinuous. The masculine/feminine binary within the heterosexual matrix has become culturally intelligible through the forced repetition of gendered practices and norms in society and within literature, as seen by the generic gender formula—damsel, hero, villain—of the traditional Gothic novel (an example of Butler’s sedimented effect of reiterative practices). Butler’s concept of performativity provides a method of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality through the re-signification of the very norms one is forced to repeat. The re-signification of norms through subversive repetition, such as drag and butch/femme identities, reveals the instability and fragility of supposedly coherent gender identities. This idea of re-signification through subversive repetition complements the theory of Gothicism and the concept of the anti-gothic, where one must re-read and *repeat* certain traditional Gothic characteristics in order to re-conceptualise the genre in relation to contemporary understanding and questions of gender. Written within the framework of the traditional Gothic, I read *Hannibal* as a narrative questioning entrenched notions of gender identity through the subversive repetition of heterosexual norms.

It is on this note of heteronormative gender transgression that I wish to proceed with a close reading of gender matters in *Hannibal*. In the following chapter I will discuss the heteronormative aggression seen in FBI Justice agent Paul Krendler, and the “hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’” (Butler 1990, 200) seen in butch lesbian Margot Verger. Through the development of Margot and her eventual triumph by the narrative’s end, I argue that *Hannibal* re-conceptualises Gothic gender roles, *disrupts* these gender roles, and displaces naturalised heteronormativity.



## Chapter Four

### A Close Reading of *Hannibal*

This chapter offers a close reading of gender identities to support my argument that *Hannibal* may be interpreted as offering an incisive critique of gender stereotyping. I will examine the character of Margot in *Hannibal* in relation to transgressive gender identity and, in order to explore *how* the character transgresses heteronormative gender identity, I compare her to the character of Paul Krendler, who represents the heterosexual norm. I will first discuss Krendler and his role in the novel, followed by a close analysis of Margot and her role as a critique of essentialist notions of gender identity.

To understand Krendler's adversarial approach in *Hannibal* it is imperative to examine the environment he inhabits—an environment pervaded by aggressive capitalism. Joan Acker (2004, 19) discusses how the free market, a key tenet of western capitalism, signifies the “potential commodification of almost everything, including the human body and human ‘nature’”. Capitalism relies on the reproduction of human beings and their ability to labour in order to continue commodity production (2004, 23). Acker suggests that human beings, our bodies and our sense of self, are commodified by the market economy and continue to bolster the phallogocentric economy (as mentioned in Chapter Three). To use Butler's terms, this commodification, for example the production of designated male/female clothing, is a capitalist method of maintaining the heterosexual matrix through exclusionary means. Butler questions the fundamental incongruity of the very binarism of sex in the hope that such deconstruction might lead to the “denaturalisation of gender” (Butler 1990, 203).

While heterosexual relations and motherhood can be and clearly are empowering and fulfilling choices for many women, compulsory heterosexuality is a system consisting of “inequalities, divisions, and differences socially constructed around assumed distinctions between female and male”(Acker 2004, 20). Freud’s pervasive psychoanalytical model of human sexuality takes the male subject as normative, and therefore portrays the female body as “unnatural” and “other”, as the “terrain for neurotic symptoms”(Halberstam 2002, 354). It is this assumed privilege of the (white) heterosexual male who maintains that his body bestows upon him the right to higher social and economic power that continually renders the female subordinate. Centuries of discourses of manhood have “been designed to make white male masculinity equivalent to political personhood and public power”(2002, 345). Historically, the rise of capitalism sees “the emergence of a hegemonic hyper-masculinity that is aggressive, ruthless, competitive, and adversarial”(Acker 2004, 29). It is men who continue to control the majority of capitalist enterprises within which oppressive or violent actions towards women are rationalised as simply business necessity (2004, 31).<sup>30</sup> This hyper-masculinity is “supported by the ethos of the free market ... [the] “win or die” environment”(2004, 29). The market is constantly producing gendered images and ideologies of femininity and

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<sup>30</sup> Clarice’s demotion early on in the narrative, encouraged by Krendler, is a clear case of the subordination of women in the workforce. Envious of her successful capture of Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs*, Krendler wants nothing more than to see Clarice at the bottom of the FBI food-chain. The finding of Hannibal Lecter will be *his* success and *his* chance for glory. At every opportunity Krendler sabotages Clarice’s reputation. In his mind “Starling definitely had to go. Left alone, following the threads with the picky, petty homemaking skills of a woman, Clarice Starling would find Hannibal Lecter”(Harris 1999, 360). This treatment of Clarice *appears* as “simply business necessity”. Krendler consistently portrays Clarice as a “loose cannon” who, if relegated to a powerless position within the FBI, would “stop rocking the boat”. “That the rocking boat moves the cannon bothered him not at all”(Harris 1999, 362) emphasises Clarice’s involuntary subjugation to (masculine) FBI politics.

masculinity which are used in “various sectors of the capital to construct desirable workers and desirable behaviours”(2004, 34). It is the workplace environment in which the discussion of Paul Krendler begins. My reading of the character of Krendler aims to demonstrate that his heteronormative gender identity is constructed in a way that highlights the transgressive nature of Margot’s gender identity.

Krendler is based within the FBI, perhaps, one of the more conspicuously western masculinist institutions, as is evident by its popular portrayal through film and literature. Founded by a controversial figure notorious for his ruthlessness and intimidatory tactics, hegemonic hyper-masculinity has become entrenched within the institution. FBI Special Agent James J. Knights (2004) provides statistics concerning the proportion of women in the Special Agent category (2,105 out of 11,649) in comparison to women in non-Agent, “traditionally female” positions (10,589 out of 15,972). These clerical positions are a type of labour that fails to “threaten patriarchy financially or psychologically”(Millett 1970, 41). The beginning scenes of *Hannibal* see Special Agent Clarice Starling fall from grace through no fault of her own. After a failed drug raid resulting in Clarice shooting African-American drug-lord EVELDA Drumgo as she held a baby in her arms is captured and leaked by the press, Clarice is summoned to a gathering of middle-management officials to discuss her fate. Despite the shooting being committed in self-defence, Clarice finds herself surrounded by seven men, “the way a sidling pack turns its attention suddenly on the cripple in the herd”(Harris 1999, 40). Krendler, who since Clarice’s success in the Buffalo Bill case seven years ago “had dripped poison into her personnel files at every opportunity”(1999, 40), appears to oversee the interrogation unofficially. Krendler, someone Clarice acknowledges as the person “who arrives at the battlefield after

the battle is over and bayonets the wounded”(1999, 41), is an example of the heteronormative masculine subject provoked continually by the threat of the successful woman. He represents the heterosexual man insistent on his own and others’ conformity to gender norms as seen by his treatment of Clarice, Hannibal, and Margot.

We learn that Krendler’s aggressive approach to Clarice is due not only to the threat she represents through her skill and intelligence but also due to his unsuccessful attempt at seduction of her. Through a flashback prior to the case of Buffalo Bill, we find out that an inebriated Krendler had rung Clarice to ask her out: “He said he could come by in half an hour. He was married”(Harris 1999, 101). Clarice’s rejection damages Krendler’s ego, an ego formed around the expectation of masculine privilege. He represents the male body that has, in Butler’s words, “engaged in the most fabulous and extensive misrecognition of the realness of embodiment”(Butler in Halberstam 2002, 358). Harris has created in Krendler a man dependent on the concept of the phallus as ultimate source of power.<sup>31</sup> Clarice refuses Krendler’s advances on the basis of her contempt for him as a human of questionable morals and ethics. Krendler sees the rejection as a direct attack on his manhood, an attack which Clarice has no right to commit. By resisting his advances, Clarice refuses Krendler the power the phallus signifies within, what Butler terms after Jacques Lacan, as symbolic law (Butler 1990, 60). The feminine subject wields the power since the refusal of reciprocal desire renders the autonomous power of the masculine subject illusory (1990, 61). However, according to Butler, Lacan “disputes

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<sup>31</sup> Butler discusses Lacan’s definition of the phallus as “privileged signifier”, in which “the power is wielded by this feminine position of not-having, that the masculine subject who ‘has’ the phallus requires this Other [the heterosexual feminine subject] to confirm”(Butler 1990, 60). In other words, similar to the interdependence arising within the master–slave dialectic, the masculine subject is dependent on the reciprocation of feminine desire to confirm his heterosexual identity.

the notion that *men* signify the meaning of *women* or that *women* signify the meaning of *men*" (1990, 62; emphasis in original). The heterosexual masculine subject and the heterosexual feminine subject both assume meaning not from each other but from the symbolic concept of the phallus. The phallus as signifier belongs purely to symbolic law and can never be physically assumed "in more than token form by either position" (1990, 62). Heterosexual relations and interactions constructed around ideals belonging to the symbolic expose the illusion behind naturalised heteronormativity.

Krendler's subsequent behaviour towards Clarice stems from his sense of sexual 'failure' in relation to her. He continues to treat her as an object of lust and rage in equal measure: "it was Krendler's nature to both appreciate Starling's leg and look for the hamstring" (Harris 1999, 47). I would argue that the narrative dramatises this "nature" not as biological but as psychological and cultural. Raised in an environment that prizes hyper-masculinity Krendler has come to expect what Adrienne Rich calls "sex colonisation", whereby women are identified primarily as "sexual beings whose responsibility is the sexual service of men" (Rich 1980, 23). According to Krendler, "if a woman gets a promotion that women shouldn't have, the most efficient way is to say she won it on her back" (Harris 1999, 361). Rejected by Clarice, someone who simply *should not* reject him, Krendler seeks revenge by attacking her body and sexuality. He calls her a "cornpone country pussy", a "pretty cold fish", and claims her living with a young African-American woman is "very likely a sex thing" (Harris 1999, 286). Krendler epitomises the man who accuses a woman of being "dried up" and sexless, or lesbian if she too decisively resists his sexual overtures (1999, 21).

Calling Clarice a lesbian simply because she refuses his advances is not so much a homophobic comment as it is a reflection of Krendler's own insecurities. There is a pivotal scene in which Krendler recalls the time he was in a car with "a girl of Starling's colouring ... her pants around one ankle asking him what in the hell was the matter with him, and why didn't he come on and do it, was he *some kind of queer? some kind of queer? some kind of queer?*" (Harris 1999, 361; emphasis in original). Significantly, Butler discusses how the term "queer" has operated as the "shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation" (Butler 1993, 172; emphasis in original). "Queer", Butler argues, "derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult" (1993, 172). In Krendler's case, we can add impotence to the list. This concept of "demasculinized manhood" (Butler 1993, 52) through impotence reveals the power of Freud's phallus to be imaginary and, in Krendler's case, creates a fear of "regression" to homosexuality, therefore, "a fear of losing cultural sanction and privilege altogether" (Butler 1990, 118). Krendler's frustration stems from his sense of inability to conform to the social norm of heterosexual man as sexual aggressor (exposed as illusory through impotence). According to Butler, "the forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of "sex"... through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which a subject cannot emerge" (1993, 3). If Krendler cannot identify with the normative phantasm of "sex", if he physically cannot comply with heteronormative gender ideals because of his impotence, the only other option is homosexuality—the abject domain. He experiences this first-hand when being labelled a "queer" by a heterosexual woman.

In Krendler's mind, his inability to 'perform' sexually simply renders him a homosexual (reinforcing the heterosexual assumption that homosexual desire is formed from some sort of failure within the heterosexual matrix). This threatening spectre of homosexuality fuels Krendler's hatred towards homosexuality, a hatred which, Butler argues, "is homosexual desire turned back on itself; the self-beratement of conscience is the reflexive rerouting of homosexual desire" (1993, 35). Krendler's own self-debasement is veiled by his calling Hannibal a homosexual in front of Clarice because of Hannibal's apparent taste for "all this artsy-fartsy stuff. Chamber music and tea-party food" (Harris 1999, 282). Similarly, Krendler's treatment of Margot reinforces his fears and insecurities in this regard, since it is she who embodies the masculinity he so desperately wishes to project.

It is exactly this idea of projection which denaturalises the category of heterosexual masculinity.<sup>32</sup> As Butler discusses in relation to Lacan, the morphology of the body is "a psychically invested projection, an idealization or 'fiction'" (1993, 42). Similar to performativity, projection takes place through forced repetition as we aspire to regulatory ideals which are exactly that—ideals. Through highly regulated practices these ideals—simply, the heterosexual feminine female and heterosexual masculine male—represent the standards to which one should aspire to in order to become a viable subject within the domain of cultural intelligibility (Butler 1993, 2). Since the ideal is inapproximable, however,

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<sup>32</sup> Lacan's concept of projection takes places during what he calls the mirror stage. According to Butler, the mirror does not reflect or represent a pre-existing ego but provides the space for a "psychic and phantasmatic projective elaboration ... of the ego" (Butler 1993, 43). In order to develop the ego, projection during the mirror stage involves a subject's psychic elaboration of the body. This elaboration is prescribed through highly regulated practices—for example, the mirror reflects a "female" body, therefore I subconsciously project an ego in accordance with heteronormative notions of femininity.

we can only project the norm, *cite* the norm, which reinforces its own instability.

Through the construction of Krendler, I read the narrative as questioning the ethical integrity of that which is culturally intelligible. Krendler is one of the novel's villains. He is immoral, prejudiced, and narcissistic. Yet, it is *he* who also represents the social norm—the viable heterosexual subject (complicated by his apparent inability to perform sexually that can be seen as exposing the fragility of essentialist notions of gender identity). Ultimately suffering a brutal killing at the hands of Hannibal through a lobotomy at the dinner table (culminating in a crossbow arrow to the heart), Krendler's performance is punished for its insistence on gender essentialism—essentialism established through exclusionary means and the repudiation of those he considers a disruption to or failure of the norm. His death reflects the paradox of heteronormativity: its performativity exposes the instability and incoherence of heteronormative gender identity. Despite Krendler's psychic insistence on heteronormative gender identity and his subconscious subjection to the norm, he is a failure, a fact reinforced by Hannibal considering him “the icon of failure and frustration” (Harris 1999, 484). Krendler is not a failure of the norm but a failure for his *insistence* on the norm through the repudiation of those he sees as unable to conform.

Within the *Hannibal* narrative it is the character of Margot Verger who most strongly represents the repudiated subject, marginalised to the abject domain. Margot is, perhaps, the most complex character next to that of Hannibal Lecter. Our first description of her is provided by Clarice when the latter arrives at the Verger estate: “At close inspection she [Margot] was a woman ... Clearly Margot Verger was a bodybuilder. Beneath her



corded neck, her massive shoulders and arms stretched the mesh of her tennis shirt”(Harris 1999, 57). Initially Clarice sees a “broad-shouldered person with short blond hair”(1999, 57). We can assume that by “person” Clarice perhaps thought Margot to be a man.<sup>33</sup> This immediately establishes a foundation for reader discomfort, something Harris does particularly well.

Lesbianism has long been linked in mainstream discourses to female ugliness and has become a site of aesthetic displeasure (Halberstam 2002, 359). The fact that we *know* this stereotype, have met her character previously in film and literature, confirms “the persistence of this union of the ugly with the non-heterosexual”(2002, 362). Harris presents Margot as a bodily stereotype but stereotypes, for all their essentialising and simplifying, reveal many complexities. She can be seen as simply a butch lesbian who spends her days in the gym.<sup>34</sup> In conventional terms, she can also be viewed as an example of heteronormative ideals restricting the lesbian, creating “a vision of her as mannish, unfeminine, unattractive—the invert figure of a man trapped in a woman’s body”(Robbins 2000, 205). Through Harris’s use of bodily stereotype we are confronted with what Butler calls a parodic repetition of gender which “exposes ... the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance ... [a] hyperbolic exhibition of ‘the natural’ that, in [its] very exaggeration, reveals [the body’s] fundamentally phantasmatic status”(Butler 1990, 200). In other words, Margot exposes the fissure in the assumption of “natural”

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<sup>33</sup> Margot’s blurring (or blending) of the gender binary is captured perfectly in the scene where Margot and Barney, after finishing a workout together, crack walnuts and an egg whilst making a smoothie. The egg is cracked, the two walnuts are cracked, and, essentially, the stability of the female and male category is shattered.

<sup>34</sup> According to the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture* (2011), butch is a lesbian identity based on a highly masculinised gender model. The butch identity is frequently viewed as the masculine counterpart of the femme lesbian identity (highly feminised in comparison).

gender identity because she has built her body to enact a different gender role. We know that she has used drug-enhancers in the process of building her body — “I shrivelled my ovaries with all the stuff I took” (Harris 1999, 253). According to Butler, our bodies are mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification, “a figure that cross-checks with the figure of feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the male signifier for entrance into language and culture” (Butler 1990, 202). Margot’s male signifier is her brother, Mason, who reveals their history of (forced) brother-sister incest — “You used to be able to make me come when we were kids, Margot” (Harris 1999, 254). Margot responds with the reminder that he hurt her when she was little and dislocated her elbow making her do such things.<sup>35</sup>

Although Adrienne Rich (1980) claims that the assumption of a woman turning to other women out of hatred for men is a lie, we cannot help but think of Mason’s violation as part of the catalyst for Margot’s current lifestyle. Harris makes us question her sexuality — not so much her being sexually attracted to other women — but of her *being* a lesbian, of her *enacting* this stereotype of the butch dyke. Rich claims that “lesbian existence is also represented as mere refuge from male abuses, rather than as an electric and empowering charge between women” (1980, 35) but with

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<sup>35</sup> Mason’s cruelty and perversity is revealed throughout the narrative in brief, unexpected pieces of dialogue. Upon Clarice’s first meeting with Mason, he reveals his past work for Ugandan President Idi Amin: “In the corner there, that’s the little portable guillotine I used for Idi Amin. You can throw it in the back of a Jeep, go anywhere, the most remote village” (Harris 1999, 64). The reader also learns that the in-house day-care facility Mason runs, in the room next to his own chambers for welfare kids from Baltimore, is simply an accessible way for him to make children cry and then drink their tears from a martini glass. Cordell, Mason’s nurse, is also a paedophile who, after being accused by Mason of “interfering” with one of the kids, claims that he would never do it in Mason’s home because he loves his job. Mason’s sadism needs a psychoanalytic examination of its own and cannot be fully analysed within the scope of this thesis. For the most part, his character is examined purely in relation to Margot.

Margot's history of abuse, we can see both refuge and empowerment occurring. At the time of events, she has been with her partner Judy—portrayed as the femme lesbian—for five years and they are planning on having a child (a "Verger child" which sees her determined to get Mason's sperm). She also resists the advances of Barney, a good-guy character she bonds with throughout the narrative, proud and confident of her sexuality. But can we infer that her physical abuse by a male at so young an age has *made* her develop into the bodily stereotype of the butch lesbian?<sup>36</sup> If so, Butler's assertion that naturalised knowledge of gender (heterosexual male/masculine subject and heterosexual female/feminine subject) operates as a "preemptive and violent circumscription of reality" (Butler 1990, xxiv) is affirmed. In other words, Mason's understanding of gender (naturalised through highly regulated practices) permits his violent subjugation of Margot. This naturalised knowledge continuously restricts gender identities to the heterosexual man/heterosexual woman binary. In this sense, I would argue that Margot's body remained mute *until* Mason began abusing her, and that this violent act of male signification influenced Margot's bodily elaboration and projection of the butch identity.

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<sup>36</sup> I am not suggesting a causal tie between physical abuse by a heterosexual masculine subject and the Butch lesbian identity. This is only my argument in relation to Margot's context. I agree strongly with Rich's claims, which are similar to Butler's critique of "lesbian desire figured [within regulatory discourse] as the fatal effect of a derailed heterosexual causality" (Butler 1993, 86). The butch/femme identities are a perfect example of Butler's "citational politics" (1993, 21). The subversive replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames—the butch/femme relationship—brings into relief "the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" (Butler 1990, 43). According to Butler, these contentious practices, including drag and cross-dressing, can be understood as a "specific reworking of abjection into political agency" (1993, 21) and reaffirm the importance of *how* one repeats the norm. The practices of drag and cross-dressing, along with the subversive replication of heterosexual constructs, is what Butler calls "parodic repetition" (1990, 200) which denaturalises heterosexuality through hyperbolism. Alison Eves (2004) also discusses how within some lesbian subcultures, butch and femme are recognised as types of performance "available to anyone [and] often a source of humour as well as sexual role play" (2004, 483).

We can argue that Margot's butch identity is constructed as contingent on several social factors and, therefore, is a prime example of Butler's concept of gender as performative. Mason has wielded and continues to wield power over Margot by forcing himself upon her sexually, controlling and robbing her of potential children by not willingly providing her partner with his sperm, and confining her physically and preventing her movement through memories of incest and rape as a kind of emotional terrorism.<sup>37</sup> Margot's response is to intimidate the men around her by becoming physically stronger. Of course, a woman's choice to body-build does not mean she *desires* to be 'masculine', for this is essentialising and devaluing the exercise of free will. I am arguing that Margot may be read as having this desire due to external factors and that her character is used as a device for denaturalising heteronormative gender identity (Butler 1990, 203). Her portrayal as a masculine woman "refuses the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone, [and is] a deliberate counterfeit masculinity that undermines the currency of maleness" (Halberstam 2002, 345). Margot enacts a version of masculinity, what ruthless capitalist culture dictates as masculine, and this serves as a challenge to the cultural ideology of maleness as essential to masculinity (2002, 355).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I am referring here to Kathleen Gough's characterising of male power in archaic and contemporary societies as quoted in Adrienne Rich's (1980) "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence".

<sup>38</sup> Another scene with Barney adds to Margot's complexity. After a workout Margot joins Barney in the communal shower where it is "male etiquette to pay little attention to other bathers" (Harris 1999, 340). Frustrated by her naked appearance, Barney questions his attraction to her — "he had never felt any attraction to men. But Margot for all her muscles was clearly not a man, and he liked her" (1999, 341). When Margot sees his erection she becomes furious and calls him a "faggot". Calling Barney a faggot, a derogatory term for a gay man, suggests that Margot sees herself as a man and therefore his attraction to her is homosexual desire. Although Margot represents the rebuke of maleness as essential to masculinity, Barney's reaction exposes the restriction of named sexual parts (penis, vagina, breasts, and so on) on the body as a whole (Butler 1990, 156). In the shower, he notices Margot's small breasts, nipples, groin, and "[her] pussy, framed

Not only can Margot be considered the threatening spectre of homosexuality, but also the embodiment of a masculinity that the heterosexual Krendler fails to achieve. Margot possesses physical strength and the love of a feminine woman whilst Krendler has neither. Margot's masculinity disrupts the naturalised causal tie between male anatomy and masculinity, a tie Krendler has come to heavily depend on for his sense of identity. According to Butler, the naturalised link between the phallus and masculine morphology (specifically the penis) "can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization" (1993, 53).<sup>39</sup> Krendler's manhood is destabilised by Margot's phallicised femininity. Margot represents what Butler terms the "Phallic-Other" (1990, 73), considered Other through a double repudiation of her representing the butch lesbian identity—a double repudiation because not only is she a lesbian but her specific butch identity is considered culturally unintelligible. The possibility of a lesbian phallus as a site of desire questions and re-signifies the phallus–penis link. Krendler, threatened by Margot's lesbianism and masculinity, mocks her lack of a penis ("He bet Margot wished she had a dick") despite his own impotence revealed in the flashback.<sup>40</sup> Margot

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in a blond trimmed mohawk" (Harris 1999, 340). The subsequent questioning of his attraction to Margot emphasises how 'natural' those parts of the body are understood to be in relation to the male/female binary. Despite knowing Margot is a lesbian, Barney is still aroused by those sexual parts because he could not help it and is "not a damn eunuch" (1999, 342).

<sup>39</sup> This idea is reinforced further by Freud's own contradictory claim that "erotogenicity can be a general characteristic of all organs and [we] may then speak of an increase or decrease of it in a particular part of the body" (Freud in Butler 1993, 32). Therefore, the penis is *not* needed in order to possess the phallus since the phallus is a "property defined by its very plasticity, transferability, and expropriability" (Butler 1993, 32), potentially belonging to *all* organs.

<sup>40</sup> Mason's physiology also weakens the phallus–penis link. Under the sheet on the elevated hospital bed his "long-paralyzed body tapered away to nothing" (Harris 1999, 61) and we learn of his penile dysfunction when he tells Margot that she "could suck it till [she's] blue in face ... nothing happens" (254). It is also revealed by Hannibal that Mason ingested his own nose when he mutilated his face under the influence of drugs (and Hannibal himself). According to Bakhtin's grotesque the exaggerated image of the nose always symbolises the phallus (Bakhtin 1984, 316). Once again, Harris inverts

represents the symbolic castration of Krendler, more so than Clarice, because Margot would deny him as she would every man, and her relationship with another woman reveals the penis as inessential to female sexual pleasure.<sup>41</sup>

In the eyes of Paul Krendler, Margot is unable to conform to what is considered culturally intelligible and is nothing but a “developmental failure ... [a] logical impossibility” (Butler 1990, 24). The possibility of Margot simply *refusing* to conform is not considered by Krendler. Refusing something natural, something apparently innate to every ‘normal’ human being is impossible for Krendler to understand. Therefore, Margot is a ‘slip-up’ in the natural order of things and someone whom Krendler deems almost inhuman. However, it is this “slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect [that] provides the ... occasion and index for consequential disobedience” (Butler 1993, 82). In other words, Margot’s ‘failure’ to conform renders her a disobedient subject, one who has disobeyed the ideals of heterosexuality. However, Butler stresses that it is this very act of disobedience, this transgression of the norm (deemed transgressive *by* the norm) that becomes a site of eroticisation as a consequence of the prohibition of transgressive practices (1990, 57). Margot’s ultimate act of disobedience is not her transgression of heteronormative identity but her triumph (or survival) in the narrative. Margot subverts the common narrative element whereby the fate of the butch lesbian is decided by the heterosexual man,

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Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque by removing Mason’s nose completely, symbolising the fragility of the masculine ego. Mason does not possess the phallus as a site of desire/power but money. Without his inheritance (*his* because Margot was left out of the will on the basis of her lesbianism) Mason would be powerless and undesired.

<sup>41</sup> This symbolic castration is repeatedly portrayed through Margot’s penchant for cracking two walnuts in her fist before ingesting them.

often through violent means.<sup>42</sup> She succeeds in eliminating Mason herself and retrieving his sperm, displacing the very man who forced heterosexuality onto her at a young age. Mason's perversity and sadism simply provoke readers to question the morality behind what society deems the norm. Margot's ultimate success is knowing that she and her partner will raise the child of Mason's sperm into a decent human being, emphasising to the reader once again that human identity is developed culturally and psychologically, rather than biologically.<sup>43</sup>

I have discussed the characters of Krendler and Margot so as to explore gender identities that inhabit opposing social spaces, the former being culturally intelligible whilst the latter remains on the fringes of society. If Krendler represents the heteronormative ideal—*representative* because the ideal can only be cited and never fully achieved—then Margot's lesbianism and perceived masculinity, her hyperbolic exhibition of the

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<sup>42</sup> Halberstam (2002, 350) discusses the common narrative element whereby the threat deployed by the butch "will inevitably be reduced to another form of femininity or else violently eradicated (impregnated, killed or sexually humiliated)". Margot inverts this generic formula by sexually humiliating Mason via cattle prod to his prostate gland, killing him by attaching his pet eel to his lipless mouth, and planning to use his sperm to impregnate her partner, Judy, so they can start a family.

<sup>43</sup> The construction of Hannibal's identity is no different. The reader learns of his past trauma involving the cannibalisation of his younger sister Mischa by wartime deserters after the collapse of the Eastern Front. With both parents dead, a six-year old Hannibal watches helplessly as Mischa is taken away only later to see a few of her "milk teeth in the reeking stool pit his captors used" (Harris 1999, 274). The reader is led to believe that the cannibalism displayed by "Hannibal the Cannibal" stems from witnessing cannibalisation in the past. *Hannibal Rising* (Harris 2006) explores Hannibal's past in more detail and we find out that he avenges his sister's death by tracking down her killers and murdering them, often involving some element of cannibalism. Hannibal is what Langman and Ryan call a "carnival character", a contemporary elaboration of Bakhtin's medieval carnival, who is "articulated in fantastic forms of consumption ... underpinned by narcissistic pathologies ... [and] transgressive consumer culture" (2009, 480). He is articulated by his consumption of actual human parts and through his cannibalism he inhabits one of the more extreme examples of transgressive consumer culture, juxtaposed with his obsession of exquisite material things. This foremost characteristic of his identity, this need to consume, can, apparently, be linked to past trauma and is only further abetted by the consumer culture of Western society.

'natural', can be seen as an effective, aggressive transgression of the norm. The obvious differences between these two characters, physically as well as psychologically, expose heteronormative ideals as illusory. Margot's exaggerated transgression of heteronormative practices reveals the heterosexual masculine/feminine binary as a social construction that has its origins in regulatory practices rather than biology. We can re-word Butler's argument using these terms: since gender (and sex) are socially constructed, they can be deconstructed and *reconstructed* through subversive repetition, displacing the very social constructions that enable the repetition itself (Butler 1990, 203). In Butler's own words, subversive repetition is the "taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there" (1990, 199). In Margot's case, the "taking up" of the tools sees her becoming a gendered being disruptive of the norm, a bodily stereotype used by Harris to confront the reader with a character that not only destabilises gender norms but unsettles conventions of the contemporary Gothic.

Through an analysis of Margot and Krendler, this chapter explored the representation and treatment of transgressive gender identity within *Hannibal*, an anti-gothic narrative that re-conceptualises generic Gothic elements to provide a space for exploration of gender transgression. The above discussion shows how the triumph of transgressive Margot and failure of heteronormative Krendler can be read as an incisive critique of stereotyped and restricted gender identity—a critique of mainstream culture's treatment of those who inhabit the space outside the confinement of the naturalised heterosexual binary.



## Conclusion

The novel's lack of popular appeal brought about noticeable differences in the film version of the novel, *Hannibal* (Mamet and Zaillian 2001). For one, Hannibal and Clarice do not end up together as they do in the climactic scene in the novel. In the film, Hannibal escapes once again leaving their relationship unresolved, appealing to the reader majority who rejected their eventual pairing in the novel. Secondly, the film fails to provide a space for potential destabilisation and disruption of gender norms because the character of Margot does not figure at all. Her role in the novel as a critique of restrictive gender stereotyping, strengthened by her final triumph over Mason and the killing of Krendler at the hands of Hannibal, is completely elided in the filmic version of the text. In other ways, the film plot does not differ greatly from the novel. Hannibal is on the loose in Florence, grotesque Mason remains set on avenging himself by feeding Hannibal to a herd of man-eating swine, and Krendler still succumbs to his gruesome fate at the dinner table. In other words, the film remains reasonably faithful to the narrative text.

Perhaps, then, Margot's omission exposes the parochialism of mainstream consciousness. This reveals something very concerning: if those at the top of filmmaking hierarchy (Hollywood executives, financiers, the director, the scriptwriter, and so on) sanction the exclusion of certain transgressive characters, what chance do such characters have in becoming accepted into popular culture?<sup>44</sup> More concerning still, what does this omission of

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the business interests that drive the Hollywood film industry, see: Isquith, Elias. 2013. 'Hollywood's Real Bias is Conservative (but Not in the Way Liberals Often Say).' *The Atlantic*, January 9. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/hollywoods-real-bias-is-conservative-but-not-in-the-way-liberals-often-say/266960/>

certain *fictional* characters reveal about the levels of marginalisation in the material world?

Despite both the novel and the film being released over a decade ago, the issues relating to gender identity are still pertinent in 2013. The film reinforces the privileging of dominant voices, and we can see the influence of this mainstream parochialism on the current socio-political debates in Australia and elsewhere involving gay marriage rights. Those excluded from the heterosexual matrix must continually fight for cultural viability. Civil unions, whilst evidence of social progress, may be seen as simply reinforcing the heterosexual/Other binary. Those outside the heterosexual gender binary are provided with an *alternative* to the heteronormative construct of Church marriages, and this is evidence of the marginalisation of certain 'deviant' identities in mainstream society, reinforced by highly regulated practices and discourses.

As shown by this thesis, heteronormative ideals remain firmly in place. The overview of key commentary on *Hannibal* in Chapter Two revealed a complete absence of gender identity analysis by critics of the work. I am

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Daniel P. Franklin also confirms the view that the market dictates the film. See: *Politics and Film: The Political Culture of Film in the United States* (2006).

Ann M. Ciasullo (2001) discusses the heterosexualisation of the lesbian within mainstream media during the 1990s. Ciasullo examines the invisibility of the butch lesbian in comparison to her femme counterpart, the latter's body employed by mainstream media because it could be easily "de-lesbianized" (2001, 602). In other words, the femme body represents the heterosexual idea of what is attractive and sexually appealing in women whilst the butch body, 'unnatural' and therefore unacceptable, is resigned to the margins. Margot is not palatable for mainstream consumers to consume so she is omitted from the film. However, this omission, this attempt to render her invisible does the opposite. Attempting to make an object invisible renders it hyper-visible. This is reinforced by Ciasullo's discussion of the "butch's presence in cultural *imagination* and her lack of presence on cultural *landscapes*" (2001, 579; emphasis in original). The very lack of presence on cultural landscapes (novels, film, and so on) sees the butch becoming hyper-visible within the cultural imagination and, therefore, constantly subject to stereotyping and essentialist notions of gender identity.

surprised that a character as transgressive as Margot is not even considered in analyses that attempt to prove *Hannibal's* worth as a subversive narrative.<sup>45</sup> Chapter Three elaborated on the idea of *Hannibal* as a contemporary Gothic and revealed how, within an anti-gothic framework, the narrative may be read as a text that disrupts normative gender roles of the traditional Gothic. Not only does the character of Clarice invert traditional female gender roles by joining the anti-hero, Hannibal, but Margot represents an explicit intervention on behalf of transgressive gender identity in popular fiction. To help us expand on the concept of the anti-gothic as a democratic space for exploring gender transgression in relation to normative categories, Judith Butler's theory of performativity provided a framework in which to explore the characters of Margot and Krendler. Drawing on Butler's readings of gender, Chapter Four focused on *how* Margot is portrayed as challenging heteronormative gender identity as constructed through the character of Krendler. Margot is represented as a bodily stereotype, a masculine lesbian woman, and might be read as an example of Butler's parodic repetition, serving to expose the apparently coherent categories of heterosexual man and heterosexual woman as illusory. Margot's identity as a butch lesbian and her relationship with femme lesbian, Judy, is a subversive replication of heterosexual constructs that, again, destabilises the apparent 'naturalness' of heterosexuality.

Discussing Margot's identity as performative reinforces Krendler's own heteronormative gender identity as naturalised through highly regulated practices, rather than as innate to the individual subject. Butler's idea of gender and sex as social constructions—regulatory ideals—is emphasised

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<sup>45</sup> I am referring here to the key commentary on *Hannibal* discussed in Chapter Two: Szumskyj (2008), Simpson (2008), Magistrale (2008), Messent (2008), Fuller (2005).

through the exploration of the aggressive masculine–privileged environment that Krendler inhabits, and through an analysis of Margot’s history of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her brother. Though there is not necessarily a causal relationship between physical abuse by a man and the subsequent development of the butch lesbian identity in the woman, the text can be read as portraying Margot in this way, thus underscoring Butler’s notions of gender as socially and culturally contingent.

This thesis showed how *Hannibal*, as an anti-gothic text, provides a democratic space in which a most significant subversion of gender norms could occur: the survival of the butch lesbian. The survival, or better yet the *triumph*, of Margot in a narrative considered mainstream fiction reveals the novel to be what Rancière terms “the embodiment of democracy” (2004, 13). By contrast, and as seen by the film version of the *Hannibal* narrative, the mainstream film industry, whilst not per se anti-democratic, is apparently subject to specific ideological, economic and political constraints within culture.

As a final comment, I have had various responses when trying to explain the purpose of my argument to friends and family. Whilst discussing the restrictions of the heterosexual masculine/feminine gender binary, someone asked, “What other genders are there?” In response to this question, I offer this thesis.

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