Oh, the Horror!

– Images of Female Monstrousness in Penny Dreadful

Abstract

In this paper, I argue that, through its representations of monstrous female agency, Showtime's television series *Penny Dreadful* produces a challenge to the binary system of gender naturalised and stabilised by the ideological structures constituting contemporary systems of power. By adopting aspects of 'masculine' gender, *Penny Dreadful's* female protagonist, Vanessa Ives, broadens the concept of conventional gender by becoming, in a sense, a cross-gendered subject. In accordance with the theoretical concept of 'drag,' Vanessa disrupts the sexual stylisation of her body with a performativity that continuously goes beyond the restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the dichotomy active/male/masculinity and passive/female/femininity as the exclusive understanding of gender subjectivity. I consider the idea that the gender representation provided through Vanessa can be ideologically progressive outside of viewing practices and that the spectator's own gender is implicated and constructed (as self-representation) through the viewing experience. My analysis shows that the multiplicity of the cinematic gaze is what enables Vanessa to evade cultural expectations of gendered behavior, and that the multivalent spectatorial positions afforded by the gaze provide for the spectator a site for creative reinvention of gender identity.

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Introduction

There's a real simple way to look at gender: once upon a time, someone drew a line in the sands of a culture and proclaimed with great self-importance, "On this side, you are a man; on the other side, you are a woman." It's time for the winds of change to blow that line away. Simple.
        – Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us

In her book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, transgender activist Kate Bornstein asks, "Isn't it amazing the lengths we'll go to in order to maintain the illusion that there are only two genders, and that these genders must remain separate?" (108). Indeed, it is. The continued refusal in Western society to admit ambiguously gendered bodies into functional social relations is, for lack of a better word, amazing, and I will argue that the processes by which this refusal is sustained need to be made visible, discussed, and, ideally, to be rectified. To this point, let me begin by stating that this paper is, essentially, a discussion concerned with the contestation of the meaning of gender identity. More specifically, it is a critique of the gender categories naturalised and immobilised by the ideological structures constituting contemporary systems of power. This critique arises from the fact that conventional gender categorisation imposes a false binary on the sexes, suggesting gendered identity to be defined in accordance with the notion of sexual difference. The reasons why, from a poststructuralist perspective, the notion of sexual difference is highly problematic are obvious. Fortified on the ontological level, sexual difference is anchored in essentialism and insists upon masculine and feminine as pre-fixed, symbolic positions beyond all contestation. Such that, the social production of norms and their subsequent descriptions find a ready-made ontological division, ready to essentialise Man and Woman and ground these essences in being – causing the binarism of masculine and feminine to exhaust the semantic field of gender identity. Poststructuralist philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler has theorised the relationship between the perception of sexual difference and the creation of gender subjectivity, arguing that identity markers such as 'sexuality' and 'gender' are performative in the sense that they embrace already established, prevailing cultural conventions. Butler argues that social reality is not a given but is continually created as an 'illusion' through language and a repetition of bodily acts. She states that by endlessly citing the conventions and ideologies of the social world around us, we enact reality, and that in the act of performing the conventions of reality we make those artificial

conventions appear to be natural and necessary (Butler 1999:5). Indeed, by enacting conventions, we do make them 'real' to some extent – but that does not make them any less artificial. As part of the performative citation of conventions governing our perception of reality, the enactment of gender norms has 'real' consequences: they create the illusion of an interior and organising gender core, which purports to express the subject's sense of self, of subjectivity (Butler 1999:173). Thus, although we may believe that our subjectivity is the source of our actions, Butler contends that our sense of independent, self-willed subjectivity is really a retroactive construction that comes about only through the enactment of social norms. Philosopher Tom Harré agrees with Butler's statement. He also proposes a social constructionist account of both presented selves and of the sense of subjective singularity. He states that "it has become clear that many of the attributes that persons appear to have by nature can be shown to be synthetic unities produced in and through clusters of discursive practices of self-presentation" (Harré 53). In other words, the self is produced by virtue of its role in the discursive practices of expressing it. These practices are referred to by Harré as 'discursive positionings of selves' – a term expressive of the fact that the individual is always positioned in a social location as a speaker/actor in a discourse which makes available to the individual only a certain limited repertoire of possible contributions to that discourse (Harré 57). This means that the production of selves is always controlled and organised by discourses, which construct participants in communication and/or practice by determining what can be talked about/done, how it can be talked about/done and by whom.

Butler stresses the importance of developing a critical awareness about the social practices constituting our existence, as the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on the norms produced by such practices. She argues that the capacity to develop a critical relation to the norms presupposes a distance from them as well as a capacity, invariably collective, to articulate an alternative version of sustaining norms or ideals that enable the subject to act and, thus, construct a reality different from the one produced through the dominant discourse (Butler 2004:3). In that regard, Butler promotes fantasy as a means of re-articulation:

> To posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part
> of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure
> for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is. [Fantasy] moves us beyond

what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable (Butler 2004:28).

I agree with Butler's assumption; namely, that in order to articulate an alternative reality of (un)gendered subjectivity we must produce a counter-discourse that allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise.[1] The question is, however, how one would produce such a discourse. To answer this question, I turn to Teresa De Lauretis, who, in her essays on film theory, suggests that gender, both as representation and self-presentation, is the product of various social technologies such as cinema (De Lauretis 2). I will consider the idea that cinematic representation can be ideologically progressive outside of viewing practices; that media texts can resonate with spectators to the extent that gender representations become absorbed subjectively by each spectator, implementing in the individual a change of consciousness that opens up a discourse oppositional to the one created by the dominant system. Such that, as De Lauretis states, "the spectator's own gender is implicated and constructed (as self-presentation) in relation to the representation of gender produced by cinema" (96). In other words, I will consider the idea that cinematic representation could have the ability to posit possibilities beyond those of conventional (binary) gender and, thus, through spectatorial identification, offer to the spectator a new subjectivity. In order for me to make such an argument, I will adopt a theory of cinematic spectatorship as a mode of performance – specifically, 'spectatorship-as-drag.'[2] In her book *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (1996), film theorist Rhona J. Berenstein presents the idea that cinema spectatorship is a cultural venue in which conventional gender roles are temporarily, unevenly, and alternately worn and discarded during the viewing experience. Her theory offers possibilities for plural, shifting gazes and multivalent spectatorial/subject positions that cut across gender identification boundaries as well as incorporate the performativity of gender. According to Berenstein, the concept of drag offers a

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[1] Of course, by accepting Butler's constructivist approach to identity formation (that is, identity as a performative construction) I limit the theoretical optics of my paper. To argue, as Butler does, that the theory of performativity can account for the construction of *all* gender identities does indeed raise the question as to whether one essential subject (stable, coherently sexed and gendered) is merely being replaced by another (unstable and performative). This critique will be addressed in chapter 3.

[2] Like the theory of performativity, the concept of drag also brings with it certain theoretical considerations. These will also be discussed in chapter 3.

useful framework for addressing gender identities as performative, because it effectively dismisses the notion of a 'true' (ontological, essential) gender identity by playing upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed (39).

Berenstein positions her theory within the genre of cinematic horror, because, in her opinion, the genre demands a more fluid theory of spectatorship given its affinity for representing monstrous identities as constantly in flux (Berenstein 37). The idea that monstrous identity is especially prone to cross-gendered representation is, I think, very interesting, and I will return to it in a moment to discuss it in detail. First, however, I think it necessary to argue for the relevance of cinematic horror in relation to the concept of gender identity. According to Berenstein, the horror genre is, at its core, about transgression. It threatens to subvert and undermine rules and conventions taken to be normative – including dominant assumptions about gender. Berenstein's assumption is supported by literary theorist Donna Heiland, who argues that horror fiction (especially gothic fiction) generally focuses on transgressions of various sorts: across social boundaries, sexual boundaries, and the boundaries of one's own identity (Heiland 3). She states that horror fiction has long been theorised for its corruption of, or resistance to, ideological (patriarchal) structures that shaped/shapes political life, and she notes that gender roles and gender identity within those structures come in for particular scrutiny (Heiland 5). Indeed, horror's preoccupation with the exploration of identity can be detected throughout the genre – from its conception in the mid-1700s to the present day. As early as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is generally accepted as the first major gothic novel, the main elements of the horror genre were already in place; namely, a concern with the desires – which are usually presented as monstrous – to extend or to deconstruct the self (Jancovich 21). This thematic tendency recurred in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* from 1818 as well as in the horror fiction of the late nineteenth century, which saw a dramatic resurgence of the genre. The period produced classics such as H.G. Well's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). These nineteenth-century horror novels deal with the problem of identity by examining it through the transformation of physical or psychological states of being (Jancovich 40). The themes explored by gothic fiction were revisited with the emergence of cinematic horror, which took its shape during the silent era – particularly in Germany. The films there produced were overtly expressionistic. F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), for example,

deliberately disturbed conventional cinematic sense in order to depict "a world internally awry" (Jancovich 53). Films such as *Nosferatu* established many of the forms that would be developed in the dramatic proliferation of the horror genre – from the Hollywood horror films of the 1930s onwards. A common feature among several being the tendency to encourage readings and interpretations in conflict with the ideological structures of their historical and cultural location. Which is why, Berenstein argues, the horror genre can be said to give form to ideological contradiction, overturning what is generally accepted as possibility by sacrificing the simplistic benefits of conventions (203). In doing so, horror produces a space in excess of the 'real,' where, as Butler suggests, the human becomes a point of departure for an articulation that is not constrained by pre-determined cultural conventions. In other words, horror becomes part of the work of fantasy, that which traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture, that which "points elsewhere, and when embodied, brings the elsewhere home" (Butler 2004:29).

However, in order to produce a discourse oppositional to the one created by the dominant system – a discourse that seeks to re-imagine the reality of gender as we know it – it is necessary not only to understand how the terms of gender are instituted, naturalised, and established as presuppositional norms but to identify and utilise the moments where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged. Moments where, as Butler states, the coherence of conventional gender categories is put into question and where the very social life of gender turns out to be transformable (2004:216). In this paper, I suggest that the British-American horror television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) constitutes such a moment. Through its representations of female monsters, the series opens up a field of multiply constituted agency, generating new possibilities of gender subjectivity by releasing the Feminine from the demand to be one thing or to comply with a singular norm, the norm devised for it by phallocentric means. Multiplicity is, Butler notes, "a way of understanding the play of forces that work upon one another and that generate new possibilities of life. Multiplicity is not the death of agency, but its very condition. We misconstrue where action comes from if we fail to understand how multiple forces interact and produce the very dynamism of life" (2004:194). In accordance with Berenstein's concept of drag, *Penny Dreadful* seeks to question what is real and what 'must' be in relation to the Feminine by showing us 1) that a set of ontological presuppositions about gender and gender behaviour governs contemporary notions of reality, and 2) that these presuppositions can be rearticulated and that new modes of reality can become instituted. This is

accomplished through the series' representations of female monsters, whose bodies are not understood as an accomplished fact but as a process, "a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone" (Butler 2004:29). This kind of bodily representation returns us to Berenstein's claim that monstrous identities are, by virtue of their fluidity, especially prone to cross-gendered representation. To this point, literary theorist Kelly Hurley presents the notion of the 'abhuman,' which, I think, helps explain how monstrous identity is conceptualised within the horror genre. In her book *The Gothic Body* (1996), Hurley examines the ways in which gothic horror concerns itself with the 'ruination' of the human subject – or more precisely with the ruination of conventional constructs of human identity. In doing so, gothic horror allows for the emergence of the abhuman, the "not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (Hurley 3). Such that, instead of an integral human body signifying a stable category of gendered identity, horror offers a body undifferentiated, a metamorphosis toward a condition yet unknowable and unrecognisable. In other words, the genre offers a subject, a self no longer defined or confined by the norms of the dominant system. Consequently, monstrosity arises from that which threatens to dissolve the crucial binarisms that lie at the foundation of human identity (Hurley 25). That which is undead, that which is simultaneously human and animal, that which shifts from one gendered identity to another – in short, anything radically different from the conventional human subject or which threatens it with deconstruction – is excluded as monstrous, abominable, evil. As a result, monstrosity becomes a concept at one with the category of otherness itself. And otherness itself becomes a signifier for the general anxiety about the nature of human identity permeating contemporary Western culture; an anxiety generated by poststructuralist discourse, which serves to dismantle conventional notions of the gendered human subject. Cinematic horror manages – or, rather, *aggravates* – this anxiety by reframing it within the non-realistic, the fantastic, inventing new representational strategies by which to imagine the human (or not-so-human) subject. These strategies give rise to cinematic monsters, who function as displacements for culture's fears and anxieties, "reflecting back to us images of everything that we have cast out as undesirable or threatening to the status quo, and forcing us to face that which we would prefer to leave hidden" (Heiland 100). The figure of the monster is thus best understood as an embodiment of non-

convention, a breaker of category that unsettles what has been constructed to be perceived as natural, as human. In refusing to participate in any systematic structuration, the monster notoriously appears as a kind of 'third term' questioning binary thinking (Cohen 6). And it is by virtue of being a kind of third term – something non-binary – that monstrous identity is conceptualised. It is identity come 'undone,' which, as a result, comes to imagine the human subject otherwise, beyond its conventional limits, creating for the subject new possibilities in excess of the 'real.'

Penny Dreadful

Showtime's *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) is a gothic horror television series written and produced by John Logan. It is set in Victorian London, where we meet some of the most iconic characters of Gothic literature and horror cinema such as Dr. Victor Frankenstein and his creation, Dorian Gray, the Wolf Man, and various characters from *Dracula*. Most intriguing of all, however, is the series' female protagonist, Vanessa Ives, whose monstrous nature constitutes the central mystery of the series. What begins as a mission to save Vanessa's childhood friend, Mina, who has been forced into the service of a mysterious vampire lord, unfolds into an exploration of human monstrousness – presenting a thrilling and haunting look at the monsters within us all.

Above, I present *Penny Dreadful* as a counter-discourse providing a 'denaturalisation' of the institution of binary gender by representing its female characters as transformable and in possession of multivalent agency. I also state that the series questions the institution of binary gender by, simultaneously, presenting the viewer with a set of ontologically defined presuppositions about female gender and taking these presuppositions and rearticulating them into a new mode of reality. In my analysis, I will address both of these aspects. The second aspect I will examine in reference to Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Rhona Berenstein's theory of spectatorship-as-drag – both of which offer a framework for addressing gender identities as performatively constructed. The first aspect I will examine in reference to Barbara Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine, in which she presents a sexual conceptualisation of the figure of the female monster. With her theory, Creed states that, within the dominant discourse, images that represent Woman as monstrous define her primarily in relation to her sexuality – that is, in relation to her reproductive body. Of course, as a feminist theorist, Creed contests this definition and argues

that the association of female sexuality with the concept of monstrosity is an ideological construct designed to perpetuate the Feminine within a sexually determined discourse that produces a binary framework for both sex and gender (Creed 83). Within this binary framework, identities are generated through sexually constituted gender norms that both consolidate and naturalise the power of the dominant system. As such, constituting the female monster in relation to her sexuality is a means by which the system seeks to reproduce its ideological structures and, as a result, re-establish its dominance over the Feminine. True horror, Creed argues (in agreement with Kelly Hurley), emerges from that which threatens the power of the dominant system by opposing its ideological structures. That which, in contrast to sexual determinacy, disregards or contradicts the binary structures of gender identity; namely, transgressive gender (Creed 42). In my analysis, I will adopt Creed's critique and argue that the significance of *Penny Dreadful's* female monsters is that of transgressive gender – not sexuality. Which brings me to my thesis:

That the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role is prone to a monstrous representation and that acts of transgressive gender are associated with the figure of the female monster.

In order to explore my thesis I will conduct an analysis of *Penny Dreadful's* female monsters – mainly of the series' female protagonist, Vanessa Ives, whose monstrous nature, I argue, is founded in female agency. The notion of agency results in a monstrous representation as Vanessa repeatedly transgresses against the performative norms of her gender, disrupting the sexual conceptualisation of her body with 'male' performativity and an active 'male' gaze (the signifiers of her agency). I claim that, by adopting aspects of 'masculine' gender, the female monster broadens the concept of gender by becoming, in a sense, a cross-gendered subject who 'denaturalises' the institution of binary gender categories. I also claim that, by virtue of its monstrous representations, *Penny Dreadful* opens up a counter-discourse that, through processes of spectatorial identification, could have the ability to posit social possibilities beyond those of conventional (binary) gender and, thus, offer to the spectator a subjectivity unconstrained by the dichotomy male/masculinity and female/femininity.

Theory

In this chapter, I present the theories that will enable me to examine cinematic representations of female monstrousness and to consider how these representations might affect the viewers exposed to them.

Spectator Identification

Studies of cinematic spectatorship focus on how 'subject positions' are constructed by media texts and how the viewer is involved and engaged in the viewing experience. In accounting for how a spectator experiences a film, theorists have turned to psychoanalytic discussions about unconscious states of being, drawing heavily on Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's theories of early childhood development. In *The Mirror Stage* (1949), Lacan proposes that the child, in infancy, passes through a stage in which an external image of the body (a mirror reflection) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an 'I' (58). The child identifies with the image, which serves to establish its emerging perceptions of selfhood. In the mind of the child, this image establishes itself as an Ideal-I by virtue of which s/he obtains a sense of singularity and autonomy. This state of being, however, does not correspond to the actual physical reality the child experiences or to the actual conditions of the child's existence. It is an idealisation of the self "precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (Lacan 58). It is, as Lacan states, an identification of the ego before its social determination (58). As such, the mirror stage is positioned in the transitional Oedipal stage, in which the mental perception of the child shifts from an initial state of undifferentiation, not yet distinguishing between self and other, to a recognition of self as constituted in relation to objects external to it (that is, in relation to an 'other'). Now, it is important to note that the theoretical approach with which I plan to conduct my analysis is not psychoanalytic. On the contrary, I will offer a critique of psychoanalytical interpretations of gender and gender identity by adopting a poststructuralist and social constructionist approach to the examination of gender and gender formation. That being said, I still find Lacan's idea of the mirror stage useful in describing the process of spectator identification, which can also be understood as the individual

production of an 'I,' of subjectivity. In a cinematic context, the film screen serves as the mirror image that allows for the production of an imaginary and ideal self unconstrained by language or social reality (Baudry 45). In relation to the process of gender formation, on-screen identification can thus be said to provide for the spectator possibilities for imagining him/herself otherwise, beyond his/hers existing gender relations. It is, however, unsure to what extent on-screen identifications progress when, as Lacan states, they become socially determined; that is, when they are restored in identification with the other (the external) in accordance with the dominant order of the symbolic. A definitive answer to this question has not yet been provided and is, for that matter, far beyond the scope of this paper. However, it seems unrealistic to assume that cinema's investment in a multiplicity of social and cultural representations should not, to some extent, impact the minds of people exposed to them. Indeed, one cannot rule out the possibility that spectatorial identifications can be ideologically progressive outside of viewing practices. Such that media texts, like *Penny Dreadful*, can be argued to resonate with spectators, causing them to react to the impact of possible social disruption. After all, certain media texts, such as horror films, do provide rich opportunities for viewers to imagine themselves differently, to 'identify against themselves' with social roles contrasting with those they adopt or are asked to adopt on a day-to-day basis (Berenstein 58). According to Berenstein, horror extends the invitation to identify with and desire against everyday behaviors as well as the invitation to play with the masks that Western culture treats as core identities – such as male and female. She states, "horror celebrates mobile spectatorial positions, the dissolution of conventional gender traits, […] and the precariousness of patriarchal institutions and values" (Berenstein 59). Significantly, the dissolution of conventional gender roles with which spectators are invited to identify, is, Berenstein argues, made possible by the representation of monsters (a central element to the horror genre), which, by virtue of their third-term conceptualisation, disrupt the practice of binary categorisation by invoking both genders at once (39). Evidently, Berenstein's claim that cinematic monsters possess the ability to initiate gender-transgression contradicts several prevailing feminist spectatorship theories that all confine the viewing process to patriarchal mandates of binary gender conventions. As stated by E. Ann Kaplan, these theories illustrate that our culture is deeply committed to a set of clearly demarcated sex differences – masculine and feminine – and that these revolve on a complex gaze-apparatus establishing misogynistic patterns of dominance and submission (215).

The Gaze

In her now-classic 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey took a feminist stance toward the gender dynamics of psychoanalytic theories by interrogating the male specificity on which the entire framework of identification and ego-formation rests. From a psychoanalytic perspective, "woman cannot enter the world of the symbolic, of language, because at the very moment of the acquisition of language, she learns that she lacks the phallus, the symbol that sets language going through a recognition of difference. In patriarchal structures, thus, woman is located as other (enigma, mystery), and is thereby viewed as outside (male) language" (Kaplan 209). According to Mulvey, cinema is constructed through a phallocentric discourse that parallels the language of the symbolic; meaning that film language is dictated by a male-controlled system that perpetuates Man as the sole signifier and the sole maker of meaning. This system, Mulvey argues, is designed for the benefit of male pleasure inextricably linked with the act of looking and with the objectification of the female image. Cinema thus ascertains representations of (masculine) power and (female) powerlessness through the potency of the gaze, which has been split between positions of active/male and passive/female – a dichotomy that perpetuates Woman as 'image' and Man as 'bearer of the look.' The pleasure in looking, Mulvey notes, is also constructed in accordance with this dichotomy, by means of which "the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly […] with [her] appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that [she] can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 2008:206). Problematically, Woman then stands "bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey 2008:203). This means that, as a source of identification, the Feminine provides for the spectator a subject position defined in accordance with the notion of sexual difference, by virtue of which Woman's 'lack' (that is, her lack of the phallus, the symbol of the signifier) designates her as a passive, objectified other.

The dominance of the male look leaves no place for the female spectator's own pleasure in seeing other than masochism (pleasure in her own pain). In her essay *When the Woman Looks* (1984), film theorists Linda Williams argues that this is exactly the reason why the female spectator

refuse to look altogether: because she is given so little to identify with on-screen except a reflection of her own powerlessness (15). Williams suggests that Woman's exercise of an active (male) gaze only occurs simultaneously with her own victimisation. She argues that the active, investigating look of female protagonists is always punished in the end by narrative processes, undermining the authentic subjectivity of this look (Williams 17). E. Ann Kaplan continues this discussion by arguing that, as the passive recipient of the male gaze, Woman's pleasure in looking can only be constructed around her own objectification; it cannot be a pleasure that comes from desire for the other – instead, her desire is to be desired, to be looked at (213). Kaplan does admit that, especially in resent cinema, women are permitted in representation to assume, step into, the position defined as masculine, as long as the man then steps into *her* position, so as to keep the dominance-submission structure intact. As such, "the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position" (Kaplan 216). As it follows, cinematic 'power of action' is always associated with the masculine.

Contrary to these theories, Berenstein theorises filmic spectatorship as far less conventional and fixed. To her, spectatorship is a messy matter in which identification and desire slip between positions of activity and passivity, of masculinity and femininity. She offers an interpretation of spectatorship as performative, dismissing the dichotomy of active/male and passive/female spectators. Berenstein rejects the psychoanalytic interpretation of viewership that casts sadistic male viewers as archetypal spectators, as well as the assertion that female audience members are necessarily masochistic and passive. Instead, she theorises spectatorship as a mode of performance in which gender roles are "temporarily, unevenly, and alternately worn and discarded during the viewing experience" (Berenstein 37). Berenstein dubs this fluid state of gender identification and role-playing 'spectatorship-as-drag.' Spectatorship as a form of drag is actually invoked by Mulvey in *Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* (1981), where she argues that female spectators shift between positions of passivity and transvestitism. In the first role, they are allied with on-screen women (stylised as passive objects). In the second, they adopt a male point of view, identifying instead with on-screen male characters in order to escape their female passivity. As such, the female spectator reactivates for herself a 'fantasy' of action that 'correct' femininity demands should be repressed. A fantasy that finds expression through a metaphor of masculinity, which eases a transition out of her own sex into another (Mulvey 2010:224). However, while this approach

includes cross-sex connotations, Mulvey views it as confining and, therefore, as conventional. Nowhere does she allow for the possibility that spectatorial transvestitism offers women the pleasures of identifying against their socially prescribed roles. Thus, this metaphor acts as a straitjacket, becoming instead an indicator of female oppression. Opposed to Mulvey, Berenstein uses drag as a framework for addressing viewing experiences as enabling behavioural transgressions of conventional gender traits. She conceptualises drag as "a reversal of the cultural relationship between assumptions about biological sex and gender displays," a "performative paradigm […] that, like monstrosity, poses a crisis of categories for those who perform and watch it. [It is] a practice that both relishes boundary crossing and questions the validity of boundaries themselves" (Berenstein 39). As such, drag offers a framework in which to situate horror's display of transgressive gender.

Drag and Performativity

According to Butler, the gendered subject comes into being via performative repetition, via "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1999:43). This disciplinary production of gender, Butler argues, effects a false stabilisation in the interests of the idealised heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality, which disguises itself as a developmental law (1999:173). The concept of drag, however, exposes the regulatory ideal of heterosexual coherence as a norm and a fiction regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe. Drag does so by opposing what has been designated 'the sex-gender system'; a symbolic system that assigns meaning to each individual "in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exits the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes" (De Lauretis 5). In her book *Mother Camp* (1972), Esther Newton describes how drag questions the 'naturalness' of the sex-gender system by drawing attention to the fact that if sex-role behaviour can be achieved by the 'wrong' sex, it logically follows that it is in reality also achieved, not inherited, by the 'right' sex, which means that, ultimately, sex-roles are performatively achieved (103). Thus, "the effect of the drag system is to wrench the sex roles loose from that which supposedly determines them, that is, genital sex," and to show "that the possession of one type of genital equipment by no means

guarantees the 'naturally appropriate' behavior" (Newton 103). In this sense, drag subverts the so-called inner/outer distinction, which, through corporal signs, produces gender identity – that is, the internal core of substance – on the surface of the body, designating the expressive model of gender and the notion of gender identity as an effect of a corporeal signification. The performance of drag plays upon this distinction by emphasising the discrepancy between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. In other words:

> If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggest a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. It also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – we see sex and gender denaturalized (Butler 1999:175).

That gender is created through performances means that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin and that the very notions of an essential sex and of true abiding masculinity or femininity are constituted as part of an imaginary construction, a culturally instituted fantasy that claim's the place of the 'real' via the naturalised 'heterosexualisation' of bodies. That the gendered body is performative also suggests the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of compulsory heterosexuality where the exclusive notions of masculinity and femininity constitute the all-inclusive framework for human identity. Such configurations, Butler argues, are achieved by the 'strange,' the incoherent, that which falls 'outside' the mundane and taken-for-granted world of sexual meanings. She states: "The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, […] about the meanings that are said to inhere in them […] are suddenly and significantly upset be those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions" (Butler 1999:140). Such examples, she continuous, give us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorisation as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might be constructed differently. Like drag, Marjorie Garber's description of the transvestite offers an example of the 'incoherent,' that which does not comply and throws

into question the concept of an essential identity. According to Garber, transvestism offers, not a critique of gender roles, but rather a critique of gender itself as a category. One of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture, she argues, is to disrupt, expose, and challenge, to put into question the very notion of stable identity by signalling not just another category crisis, but – much more disquietingly – a crisis of 'category' itself (Garber 32). Thus, the cultural effect of transvestism is to destabilise the binary male/female and take up a 'third' space (Garber 133). As such, the transvestite takes up a role similar to the role of monsters in horror. Like transvestites, monsters transgress ontological classifications of sexual difference and, as a result, confuse those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational building blocks of human identity. In so doing, monsters move gender representations from the discourse produced by/in the sex-gender system toward a space not yet represented. "It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses" (De Lauretis 26). Consequently, monsters open up a field of multiply constituted agency that constitutes a constant alteration of the performative repetition and thereby signifies a state of transition from the restrictive, heterosexual paradigm to a new, anxiety-producing field of cross-gendered possibilities.

The Monstrous-Feminine

In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), Barbara Creed describes the way that women have historically been constructed as "biological freaks whose bodies represent a fearful and threatening form of sexuality" (6). From a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective, Creed argues that when the Feminine is constructed as monstrous, it is almost always done in conjunction with its mothering and reproductive functions. Her main thesis sustains that the prototype of all monstrosity related to the Feminine is linked to the woman's reproductive body (Creed 7). Of course, the association of Woman's maternal and reproductive functions with the concept of monstrosity is a construct of patriarchal ideology; Woman is not, by her very nature, a monstrous being. Her representation in popular discourses as monstrous is, according to Creed, "a project designed to perpetuate the belief that woman's monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as Man's sexual other" (83). As a result, she argues, definitions of female

monstrosity is always produced in terms of sexuality, subjugating Woman to the cultural processes from which, seemingly, her sexuality cannot be separated. As such, Creed describes seven guises of the monstrous-feminine all rooted in female sexuality: archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, monstrous mother, and castrator.

In order to account for Woman's mothering and reproductive functions as inherently monstrous within phallocentric ideology, Creed draws heavily on the concept of 'abjection' presented by feminist scholar Julia Kristeva. According to Kristeva, the abject refers to the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, between self and other. It is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). The concept of abjection is, thus, best described as the process by which one separates one's sense of self (be that biological or cultural) from that which is considered 'disruptive.' According to Kristeva, the abject is situated at a place before the subject enters into the symbolic order; an archaic space into which "the ego [is taken] back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away" (15). Thus, abjection exists as a pre-condition of the Symbolic, signifying that which threatens the order of the Symbolic and the law of the Father. Significantly, the prohibitions, rules, and laws of the symbolic order are what constitute the abject as that which threatens to turn these aside, to mislead and corrupt – constituting abjection as a 'perversion' of the laws institutionally ritualised by the symbolic order (Kristeva 68). Gender transgressions, for example, produce a loss of distinction between the notions male and female, masculine and feminine that would be considered abject and monstrous by paternal law, which is constituted on the notion of sexual difference. Thus, monstrosity can be produced by transgressing the border that separates those who take up their 'proper' gender roles from those who do not (Creed 11). In this sense, the notion of abjection seems comparable with Berenstein's claim that monstrousness is constructed through the dissolution of conventional gender roles. However, whereas Berenstein theorises monstrousness as performative transgressions of conventional gender traits, Kristeva ascribes to the feminine an archaism rooted in the maternal body, which, she argues, signifies an autonomous force threatening to the symbolic order (91). As a result, she designates the Feminine as bearer of pre-cultural meanings, causing what Butler calls "a collective, sex-specific biological constitution" that "bases itself on a univocal conception of the female sex" (1999:116). Kristeva

does point out that the threat posed by the 'archaic mother' is purely phantasmatic. It *is*, nonetheless, from the mother's generative power that the threat of the feminine arises; a threat that patriarchy has the burden of subduing through sexual prohibitions intended to separate men from women and insure the power of the former over the latter (Kristeva 77). Behaviour prohibitions are meant to ensure the separation of the sexes and to protect patriarchy from that which threatens its dominance. However, "the masculine (power), apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an uncontrollable power. It is always to be noticed that the attempt to establish a male, phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex, which is oppressed. That other sex [by virtue of its feminine power] becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed" (Kristeva 70).

In discussing the representation of Woman as monstrous in relation to castration (which is linked more directly to questions of sexual desire than to the area of reproduction), Creed refers to Freud's theory of unconscious male castration anxiety, in which Freud argues that Woman terrifies because she appears to be physically castrated. In his essay *Medusa's Head* (1922), Freud links the sight of the horrifying decapitated head of Medusa to the equally horrifying sight of the mother's genitals. As such, "Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals, or rather [...] it isolates their horrifying effects from their pleasure-giving ones" (Freud 1955:274). The horrifying aspect of the female genitals is perpetuated in the myth of the *vagina dentata*, which "appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth" (Neumann 168). The myth of the vagina dentata supports Creed's argument that Man's fear of castration has led him to construct a monstrous phantasy of Woman as castrator rather than castrated. The Medusa myth thus mediates a narrative about the difference of female sexuality as a difference grounded in monstrousness; a monstrousness represented by the female genitals, which, by virtue of their 'devouring' qualities, invoke castration anxiety in the male spectator. The argument that Woman's genitals terrify because they might castrate challenges the Freudian view – that terror is associated with the physical appearance of the female genitals (a passive perspective) – as well as the view that the male spectator is always situated in a sadistic position and the female spectator in a masochistic one. However, the presence of female monsters will, inevitable, according to Creed's theory, signify male fears rather than authentic female subjectivity.

Methodology

I will conduct my analysis in reference to the presented theories. They will enable me to explore the ideological practices by which *Penny Dreadful's* representations of female monstrousness are constructed and, thus, to examine the means by which existing social gender relations are 1) reproduced and 2) contested. The discipline of critical discourse analysis (CDA) will allow me to examine both of these aspects. CDA is an approach with which to detect, analyse, and, possibly, counteract enactments of ideological power abuse. This means that, in addition to addressing the social 'wrongs' of the day by analysing their sources and cases, CDA also addresses the possibilities for overcoming them and, thereby, put into practice the social-based ambitions behind the negative critique of various social phenomena.

In conducting my analysis, I will make use of Fairclough's model for CDA, which makes visible connections between properties of texts (signifiers, features) and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts. Fairclough's model consists of three interrelated processes of analysis, which are tied to three interrelated dimensions of discourse. The three dimensions of discourse are:

1. Text (the object of analysis)
2. Discourse practice (the processes by which the object is produced and received)
3. Social practice (the social conditions that govern the processes by which the object is produced – including relations of power and domination)

Each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis:

1. Description (text analysis)
2. Interpretation (processing analysis)
3. Explanation (social analysis)
   (Fairclough 132).

In the following chapters, I will implement the processes of analysis and dimensions of discourse here presented. Together they will enable me to examine the social and ideological cognitions involved in the processes of representation and production present in my chosen media text and to discuss the social implications these representations might have on the viewer exposed to them.

The processes of analysis and dimensions of discourse presented by Fairclough will not be implemented separately or in any particular order; instead they will be interwoven, constituting for my analysis a continues methodological foundation.

The methodological structure of this paper will be as follows:

- First, I will focus on the ideological oppression evident in my chosen text, which, in this case, is the perpetuation of the Feminine within a sexually determined discourse. This I will do in reference to Barbara Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine.
- In so doing, I will seek to identify the obstacles to addressing this ideological oppression. That is, I will consider what it is about the way in which social life is structured and organised that has prevented this ideological oppression from being addressed or mitigated.
- Secondly, I will focus on a possibility within the existing social process for overcoming these obstacles. That is to say, I will seek to identify a potential way past the ideological oppression previously presented – moving my analysis from a negative to a positive critique that seeks possibilities for social transformations that, as Fairclough suggests, might overcome or mitigate limits on human well-being (14). This I will do in reference to Judith Butler and Rhona Berenstein's theories of drag and performativity.

Throughout, my analysis will be underpinned by a social constructionist orientation to knowledge, which, contrary to so-called essentialism, moves away from the ideas of the naturally given or taken for granted and questions the social and historical roots of social phenomena. Social constructionism rests on the philosophical assumption that subjects and objects are caused by social or cultural factors rather than natural factors, and the core motivation of social constructionist research is the aim of showing that, in fact, these subjects and objects could be, or might have been, constructed otherwise. Meaning that "if what we take ourselves and others to be are constructions and not objective descriptions, […] then it is (at least in principle) possible to re-construct ourselves in ways which might be more facilitating for us" (Burr 13). Such that "it becomes possible to think not only of individuals re-constructing aspects of themselves, but of re-thinking whole social categories, such as gender" (Burr 13).

Chapter 1:

Female Monstrousness

Introduction:

The Monstrous *Other* and the Monstrous *Third*

As stated in relation to the notion of the abhuman, monstrosity arises from that which threatens to dissolve the crucial binarisms that lie at the foundation of human identity. In that regard, the formulation of 'abjection' describes very well the structurations by which the threatened breakdown of human identity is caused by the loss of the distinction between self and other, and clarifies that to suffer such a loss is to suffer an intense anxiety. By virtue of being a kind of third term – something non-binary – the monster functions as a displacement for this anxiety and, as such, calls horrid attention to the border that cannot – must not – be crossed (Cohen 13). In other words, inasmuch as identity is assumed through stabilising concepts such as sex and gender, the very notion of the human is called into question by the cultural emergence of the monster. The monster exemplifies that 'incoherent' gendered being who fails to conform to the norms of cultural intelligibility by which the human is defined and whose persistence and proliferation, as Butler notes, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of the domain of intelligibility itself (1999:23). Consequently, the point where the monster emerges is always coded with an overwhelming amount of meaning: it negotiates the anxieties and desires that can be argued to accompany social and epistemological transformations concerning human identity.

However, according to cultural theorist Michael Uebel, the projection of what is repressed or disavowed onto the monstrous does not alone account for the monster's meaning. He argues that the discursive site assigned to the monster is not merely the inevitable point at which the repressed returns, but rather its ultimate inscription into the domain of the Symbolic where ideology attempts to integrate the monster, to assign it a place and make it 'bearable' (Uebel 282). In this sense, the monster not only functions as a displacement for what must be repressed and repelled for fear of self-annihilation but functions as a symbolic construct as well. The association of female sexuality with the concept of monstrosity exemplifies one of the processes by which the female monster is inscribed into the domain of the Symbolic. As Creed states, the concept of monstrous female

sexuality is an ideological construct designed to perpetuate the meaning of the Feminine within a sexually determined discourse that seeks to regulate the assumption of sex as a differential set of positions that becomes an index of the proscribed and prescribed relations by which the female subject is socially regulated and produced. Constituting the female monster in relation to her sexuality – that is, to a predetermined ontological articulation – becomes a means by which the regulatory sphere of the Symbolic is re-established and reinforced and by which the threat posed by the female monster (transgressive gender) is 'redirected' and made safe. As such, patriarchal structures invent a symbolic solution to and escape from the real social contradictions represented by the figure of the monster. Which means that "at the level of cultural formation and social reality, the monster is rejected, 'shut away,' and made safe, while at the same time it plays freely in the very realm in which it is exiled and enclosed – the shared imaginary of the dominant culture" (Uebel 266).

In *Penny Dreadful*, the inscription of the female monster into the domain of the Symbolic domain is accomplished in accordance with the stereotypical guises of the monstrous-feminine, which, by virtue of their conceptualisation, are enmeshed by an overwhelming physicality that cannot be transcended. It must be stressed, however, that as phobic objects constructed within the realm of the imaginary (the symbolic), the female stereotypes presented by Creed are not to be understood as reinstatements of some deep or primary signification of the Feminine. On the contrary, these stereotypes express the effects of the symbolic process by which the monstrous-feminine emerges as a product constituting the limits of cultural identity. Meaning that, the female monster exists in the imaginary in the special sense that Kristeva attaches to the experience of abjection: "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an Other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (Kristeva 10). In this sense, collective identity emerges through exclusionary means over and against the monster who is positioned as an abject other. Problematically, symbolic exclusion confines the monster to a self/other opposition within witch it loses the signification derived from its third-term conceptualisation. That is, the monster's inscription into the domain of the Symbolic prevents it from taking up its place in the 'in-between,' the third space that encompasses the binary and pushes against the boundaries between self and other, between male and female. Instead, the symbolically integrated monster functions to

maintain the distinction between self and other and to allay the threat of its own monstrousness. In chapter 1.1, I will examine the symbolic function of the female monster and illustrate that the narrowing down of female monstrousness to monstrous sex has to do with the success of the phallocentric (psychoanalytic) interpretation of human subjectivity as sexual subjectivity and identity as sexual identity and monstrosity as sexual pathology.

In chapter 1.2, I will examine how *Penny Dreadful*, having presented the viewer with a set of ontological presuppositions about female monsters, takes these presuppositions and rearticulates them into a non-binary gender representation. This representation presents the female monster as a figure of in-betweenness, "residing neither on the outside nor on the inside, but where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety" (Uebel 281). Thus released from its naturalised interiority and surface the monster is free to project what is repressed or disavowed onto it and, in this case, occasion a subversive play of gendered meanings by dismissing binary oppositions. The monster accomplishes this by drawing attention to the fact that alterity is never radical and that the terms of any binarism interdepend, for the self presupposes the other for its meaning and, as such, leads back to, and comes to inhabit, the intimate place of the self. The concept of the border, therefore, symbolises a space of exchange, encounter, and contestation that facilitates transformation and mutation and functions as the third space wherein monstrous identity is negotiated. As such, the monster is treated not as an excluded other but as a 'boundary phenomena,' an anomalous hybrid that constantly makes and unmakes the boundaries separating self from other, interiority from exteriority, and whose monstrousness arises from the act of blurring categorical distinctions (Uebel 266). By inhabiting the space between exclusionary positions, monsters thus pose a threat to the integrity of binary positions and question whether such positions can be delimited in the first place. According to Uebel, the ambiguity of such boundary phenomena falls under the category 'pollution behavior:' "a reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (266). In chapter 1.2, I will argue that transgressions of binary gender classifications are transcoded into the monster-body as terms of pollution behaviour. Furthermore, I will argue that such transgressions are accomplished in accordance with the concept of drag, which, as previously stated, disrupts the boundaries of human identity by dismissing the naturalised and idealised dimensions of the surface appearance of gender as well as the field of reality produced and constituted by conventional gender norms.

Chapter 1.1:

Monstrous Female Sexuality

Within the symbolic domain, *Penny Dreadful's* female monsters – Vanessa Ives and Lily Frankenstein – are represented in terms of monstrous female sexuality, which, although threatening within the realm of the symbolic, represses the real social contradictions expressed by the figure of the female monster; namely, transgressive gender. In accordance with Creed's assumption, the sexual conceptualisation of the Feminine is designed to circumvent the threat posed by the female monster and, instead, perpetuate the belief that Woman's monstrous 'nature' is bound up with her difference as Man's sexual other. Problematically, the sexual conceptualisation of the female monster not only subjugates Woman to a significance (identity) from which her sexuality cannot be separated, but also allays the third term (that which exposes the limits and regulatory aims of binary gender) by appropriating the female monster as an *other*. The allayment of the monster as 'third' is, in this case, accomplished by drawing a connection between female sexuality and abjection, which, as argued by Creed, constructs the Feminine as an abject other thought to exist in opposition to the paternal symbolic (Creed 37). In taking up the place of abjection, the Feminine is represented as that which threatens to 'perverse' the laws and rules of the Father, that which must be expelled or rejected in order for the subject to enter the symbolic order as a 'clean and proper' self. In other words, the opposition created between the Symbolic and the Feminine causes Woman to merge with what is other in relation to the ideal form and order of Man. Thus perpetuated, Woman functions as a product constituting the limits of cultural identity; an identity organised and maintained as a result of a symbolically invested separation between masculine and feminine. In accordance with Uebel's notion of symbolic inscription, the sexual conceptualisation of the female monster – that is, the association of female sexuality with the concept of monstrosity – functions as a disguise, a displacement by which the phobic object of the transgressive third-term monster is undermined for the sake of symbolic stability constituted by the notion of sexual difference. This means that, although the female monster is allowed to play freely within the realm of the Symbolic, her symbolic integration limits and perpetuates her within a binaristic system of sex-based, male-female differences that reinforces the basic underlying cultural assumption that each body has one gender and that this gender is identified by/on the body itself.

In the following analysis, I will demonstrate, firstly, how the meaning of the Feminine is perpetuated within a sexually determined discourse that suggests female subjectivity to be defined in accordance with the notion of sexual difference – that is to say, that Woman is defined by virtue of her difference as Man's sexual other. Secondly, I will demonstrate how sexual representation works to (or should I say, *seeks* to) allay the threat of an undifferentiation between conventional assumptions about masculine and feminine gender (the dichotomy active/male and passive/female). The analysis is structured around three of the 'faces' of the monstrous-feminine: possessed body, castrator, and witch. These stereotypes, as presented and theorised by Creed, are all conceptualised in relation to the notion of female sexuality; particularly, to the female reproductive body, which, within the ideological structures of the Symbolic, emerges as symptomatic for the monstrous 'nature' of the Feminine.

Possessed Body

According to Creed, the stereotypical representation of the possessed female body designates Woman in relation to her material existence. Creed argues that, from a phallocentric, psychoanalytic perspective, the meaning of the Feminine is thought to derive from the female body, which, by virtue of its potential as a pregnant body, bears trace of its debt to nature, making it 'unclean' and 'improper' (Creed 76). Woman's body thus prevents her from taking up her 'proper' place in the order of the Symbolic and defines her as fundamentally opposed to the ideal form and order of Man. In accordance with Creed's theoretical assumption, Vanessa Ives' gradual possession is represented through an abject display of the female body that causes female sexuality to emerge as both causal and symptomatic of abhumanness.

From her early adulthood, when the demon of her youth secures itself as a primary figure in her life, Vanessa's possession is linked to the awakening of sexual desire and to the female reproductive system; particularly, as Creed argues, to connotations of Woman's blood (77). Indeed, it is no coincident that Vanessa's possession initiates when she is at the commencement of puberty – the time of Woman's first blood. Or that Vanessa's voyeuristic observation of Sir Malcom and her mother's sexual encounter in the hedge maze is what causes her demon to 'slip in' and manifest itself through "small acts of wickedness" (S01E05), as Vanessa puts it. These occurrences initiate the

construction of Vanessa's sexual development as an abject – that is, 'impure' – transformation through which the manifestation of female sexuality and sexual desire is given a monstrous expression. In keeping with this assumption, Vanessa's first bodily possession is represented as triggered by her loss of virginity – an enactment of sexual desire and another connotation of Woman's blood. Vanessa's first sexual experience is what opens the doors and allows the 'thing within' to manifest itself to her and, ultimately, to possess her. The manifestation occurs when Vanessa, lingering in a nearly catatonic state, is visited by a hallucination of Sir Malcolm – or rather, by something wearing his skin. The shade of Sir Malcolm calls back to what Vanessa said as a girl, that you have to name a thing in order to bring it to life, and while Vanessa accuses her visitor of being the devil there is a brilliant subtle visual here. When he refers to himself as being her "old friend" (S01E05), Malcolm's eyes become an inky black; a reference to the 'darkness' manifested in Vanessa when she, in witnessing the sexual encounter in the hedge maze, first felt the pull of sexual desire. As such, the blackness of Malcolm's eyes illustrates not a demonic entity but the darkness within Vanessa that is manifest sexuality. That Vanessa's monstrousness is linked to the manifestation of sexual desire is firmly established when, back in the time of the unfolding storyline, Vanessa has a sexual encounter with Dorian Gray that explicitly presents Vanessa's sexual desire – specifically, the *enactment* of her desire – to be the cause of her bodily possession. As Vanessa climaxes time slows (illustrated by a visual of a candle flickering) and she hears the same voice that was in her room as a child after witnessing Malcolm and her mother in the maze. "Hello, my child," the voice intones. "I've been waiting. What games we will have now" (S01E06). Hearing the voice, Vanessa snaps back to reality and, horrified at the renewed presence of this mysterious 'darkness,' quickly gathers her clothes and runs out of the room. She returns home in an unravelling state and encounters Sir Malcolm just long enough for him to take in her miserable appearance before she levitates of the floor. Clearly, the act of sexual intercourse is represented as that which 'unlocks' the darkness within Vanessa, causing her possession to escalate and causing abjection to become the condition of the 'violated' female body. Furthermore, by a third connotation to Woman's blood (as they have sex, Vanessa draws blood from Dorian's chest, creating a symbolic link between the act of sexual intercourse and blood flow) the scene binds up the notion of female monstrousness with the female reproductive body, designating the female monster as a *sexual* monster – indeed, as a sexually *differentiated* monster.

The above-mentioned representations formulate a strong sexual conceptualisation of female monstrousness. They create a discourse within which the female monster is fabricated to naturalise and stabilise a binaristic gender system of sexual differentiation. However, in accordance with Uebel's assumption about symbolic inscription, I will argue that the stereotypical representation of Vanessa Ives as possessed body (indeed, of all the monstrous guises discussed in this chapter) is constructed to disguise the phobic object of the transgressive third-term monster, who is undermined and made safe in an attempt to allay the threat of an undifferentiation between conventional assumptions about male and female gender. Specifically, I will argue that Vanessa's symbolic integration demonstrates the naturalisation and moralisation of gender acts and behaviours deployed in support of a dominant ideology that clings to the idea of sexually determined gender subjectivity and that, as a result, assigns transgressions of conventional gender classifications (the dichotomy active/male and passive/female) a monstrous representation. Indeed, in the above-mentioned scenes, Vanessa's behaviour can be said to express sexual aggressiveness and promiscuity incompatible with the social role she, as a woman, is expected to take up in accordance with the laws of patriarchal society. Witnessing her mother and Sir Malcolm in the maze, for example, should have been a traumatic incident for Vanessa. As stated by Freud, in situations where the child witnesses sexual intercourse between adults (a so-called 'primal scene') "they inevitably regard the sexual act as a sort of ill-treatment or act of subjugation: they view it, that is, in a sadistic sense" (2001:196). Vanessa, however, initially admits to have enjoyed watching them, to have enjoyed the 'sinfulness' of the act. Seducing Mina's fiancé and engaging in kinky sex with Dorian Gray is also represented as expressions of 'improper' feminine conduct. In fact, as Vanessa's possession progresses, her conduct becomes increasingly 'non-feminine,' causing her to break with her 'proper' feminine role. After her levitation at the end of episode six, Vanessa passes out, leaving Malcolm and his servant, Sembene, to change her out of her clothes. Vanessa takes a perverse sort of pleasure in this as she asks Malcolm in a childlike voice, "and you dressed me, like when I was a girl?" (S01E07). She continues to attack Malcolm, exposing his affair with her mother and the sexual exploits (rapes) that he and his son Peter took part in during his adventuring days. This causes Malcolm to call for Dr. Victor Frankenstein, who, during his examination of Vanessa, becomes deeply unsettled by Vanessa's touches and intimate revelations. Vanessa continues by gleefully exposing Ethan's sexual encounter with Mr. Gray, exclaiming, "he fucked you didn't he? God damn, did you

enjoy it?" (S01E07). Her exclamation visually upsets the men gathered in her room who, startled by Vanessa's lack of feminine propriety, rush to sedate her. Clearly, in speaking and acting out her sexual desires and, in doing so, violating culturally established denominators of 'proper' feminine conduct, Vanessa becomes monstrous in the eyes of the men gathered around her, causing them to subdue her to a passive (feminine) state of being. Arguably, Vanessa's gender transgressive behaviour is what, on the level of social reality, constitutes Vanessa as a monstrous figure. She threatens the order of the Symbolic and the dominance of the paternal by disregarding the behaviour prohibitions meant to ensure and protect a binaristic system of sex-based, male-female differences. Vanessa's transgressions highlight the inability of these behaviour prohibitions to subdue Woman to the exclusionary practice of identity formation in which active masculinity and passive femininity are instated as oppositional and distinct positions of gender subjectivity. Thus, blurring the distinction between the notions active/male and passive/female and, in doing so, demonstrating the fragility of these categories is what earns Vanessa her monstrous representation. In other words, *Penny Dreadful's* 'demonization' of the Feminine arises not from the abject female body (which only persists as a symbolic construct) but from the threat posed by the third-term monster who terrifies precisely because s/he incarnates the disruptive element that intervenes and questions the coherence of binary gender.

As stated, the fact that Vanessa's possession is represented as a result of bodily abjection illustrates the ideological compulsion to circumvent and allay the threat posed by the third-term monster. As Garber states, the tendency to appropriate the monster 'as' one of the two sexes is emblematic of a fairly consistent critical desire to look away from the monster as 'third' – that which questions binary thinking – and undermine her/him as a phobic object (10). That is why, as argued by Creed, horror films provide a graphic association of monstrosity (abjection) with the feminine body: it subjugates the female monster to a significance from which her sexuality cannot be separated. Throughout the seventh episode of season one, Vanessa's body is represented as the explicit site, or, rather, the condition, of abjection. In a montage resembling something from Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), Vanessa's appearance becomes that of half-human, half-animal as images of filth, blood, vomit, and other bodily wastes fill the screen. Her behaviour becomes increasingly violent and her speech increasingly obscene as she, contaminated by her own female body, sinks deeper and deeper into the realm of abjection. These scenes are represented as the

culmination of Vanessa's ongoing illness, which, significantly, arose with her loss of virginity – the occurrence that allowed the 'darkness' within Vanessa to manifest itself and become proximate. Significantly, Vanessa's illness is diagnosed as hysteria; a female malady associated with the female reproductive system, which, in the Victorian era, was considered the primary source of mental illness in women (Showalter 67). As described by Elaine Showalter, the sympathetic connection existing between the female nervous and reproductive systems and the brain was considered a well-established medical fact used to explain women's vulnerability toward mental derangement. Doctors even argued that secretions of Woman's blood in themselves predisposed women to insanity (Showalter 56). As such, Dr. Bannig's diagnosis not only suggests Vanessa's abject transformation to be caused by her own reproductive body; it also enforces a cultural tradition that identifies Woman as an entity defined by and trapped within her body – in contrast to Man, who, within our dualistic system of language and representation, is capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment. However, the medical conclusion reached by Dr. Frankenstein reveals the diagnosis of female madness to indicate, not a loss of reason, but deviance from socially accepted gender norms. Frankenstein announces that Vanessa must be (by means of paternal rationalisation) "manifesting a deep psycho-sexual responsiveness" out of feelings of guilt and shame (S01E07). The doctor's diagnosis demonstrates an ideological moralisation of Vanessa's 'non-feminine' conduct, which seems to violate all of Victorian culture's most deeply cherished ideals of feminine propriety.

Castrator

As argued by Creed, the phantasy of Woman as castrator implies abjection to inhere in Woman's body by designating the monstrous aspect of the Feminine as the ever-ravenous *vagina dentata* (the toothed vagina). This stereotypical representation is constructed in accordance with the idea that Woman, by virtue of her 'devouring' genitals, actively castrates (Creed 105). In this sense, Creed argues, it is the suggested presence of the all-devouring womb of the Feminine, given form by the figure of the *femme castratrice* (the female castrator), that generates the horror associated with the female reproductive body (27). In *Penny Dreadful*, the character of Lily Frankenstein, a prostitute resurrected by Dr. Frankenstein in the first episode of the second season, embodies the figure of the femme castratrice to a tee. In the seventh episode of season two, the

series provides an explicit representation of Lily as the deathly vagina dentata as she, after an evening out with Dorian Gray, encounters a stranger in a pub and, later that night, kills him during sex. After bidding Mr. Gray goodnight, Lily strays from her neighbourhood and ends up in a pub, where an older man greets her and looks her over approvingly. In return, Lily sends him an inviting smile. The scene cuts to the man leading Lily by the hand to his bedroom. As they start to have sex, Lily is passive, simply staring up at him. Then, suddenly, she pushes him on to his back, climbs on top of him, puts her hands around his neck, and strangles him to death. The implication of the scene is clear: Lily is monstrous because she, by killing the man while taking him inside her, 'devours' and 'swallows up' the male to the extent that he ceases to be (the ultimate castration of the male ego). Here, the connection drawn between female genitalia and death constructs the Feminine as "the voracious maw," the mysterious, cannibalising black hole that threatens to incorporate everything in its path (Creed 27). The female body is represented as a loathsome mixture of material horrors, constituting the archetypal construction of Woman as monster through an abject representation of the female reproductive body – specifically, of Woman's all-devouring womb.

Significantly, aligning Lily with the myth of the vagina dentata mediates a narrative (constructed within the symbolic domain) about female monstrousness as a monstrousness grounded in the difference of female sexuality; that is, in Woman's difference as Man's sexual other. By virtue of this differentiation, Man's fear of Woman is constructed as a fear of that which is unknown to him, that which transcends male experience and, as a result, leads him to unconsciously equate the feminine body with monstrosity (or at least with the unknown, which is presumed to be monstrous). The specific nature of Woman's presumed otherness, and the threat it, supposedly, embodies, can be explained by Freud's notion of the 'uncanny.'[3] According to Freud, the uncanny is that which should have remained repressed, that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (1955:225). It is a return of an earlier state of mind, a resurfacing of long familiar anxieties and desires that, for the sake of cultural continuity, has become subject to cultural taboo. As such, "the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 1955:241). In his *The Taboo of Virginity* (1918), Freud binds up the notion of the

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[3] Presented by Freud in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche*) as part of his account of the modern human condition.

uncanny with male castration anxiety and with the fear of the female genitals by declaring the act of sexual intercourse with a woman an old-established cultural taboo as well as a source of inescapable dread. He proposes that "this dread is based on the fact that woman is different from man, for ever incomprehensible and mysterious, strange and therefore apparently hostile" (1957:198). In this sense, Woman emerges as the site of the uncanny by virtue of her sexual otherness; an otherness conceptualised by the myth of the vagina dentata, which, problematically, reproduces the meaning of the Feminine within a sexually determined discourse.

However, the monstrous construction of the Feminine reveals itself to be invoked not by unconscious fears of castration or toothed vaginas but by the cultural (patriarchal) fear of losing the integrity of binary (that is, sexually determined) gender positions. Such that, "no longer believable as an interior 'truth' of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performatively enacted signification (and hence not 'to be'), one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings" (Butler 1999:44). In *Penny Dreadful*, the attempt to naturalise assumptions about binary gender as well as sexually determined gender behaviours manifests itself as an idealisation of 'proper' femininity and the condemnation of 'improper' femininity. The ideal of 'proper' femininity is exemplified by Victor's attempt to 'groom' Lily, to beautify her and make her into an "angel" (S02E02). And later, when Lily's role of sweet, docile, submissive woman is disrupted by anger, violence and manifest sexuality, the ideal is revealed by his plans to (medically) tame her rage and turn her into "a proper woman," a "healthy" woman, relived of "anger and pain" and, instead, full of "calm, poise and serenity" (S03E07). As such, the series demonstrates how Woman is sought governed by patriarchal laws attempting to enforce a stable production of 'appropriate' and 'moral' feminine behaviour, while, at the same time, revealing anxieties about its opposite, namely, the monstrous figure of the non-compliant gendered subject. This figure is embodied by Lily, whose violent and sexually aggressive behaviour (illustrated by her murderous act in episode seven) causes her to become monstrous in the eyes of patriarchy.

Witch

The secret behind Vanessa's clairvoyant powers is concealed throughout the first season of the series. However, the second season reveals that Vanessa is, in fact, a witch, specifically a daywalker, having learned the arts of tarot and herbalism and taught the *Verbis Diablo* (the 'Words of the Devil') by the witch Joan Clayton, also known as the Cut-Wife of Ballentree Moor. Historically, the archetype of the witch has been inextricably bound up with the subject of female sexuality – both in relation to 'carnal lust' and in relation to the association of Woman's creative, reproductive powers with the manipulation of vast, unseen, and unknown forces (Jong 69). According to Creed, the horror film adopts this representation of the witch by continuously foregrounding her essentially sexual nature; especially, Creed argues, her imaginary powers of castration, which, as previously stated, is represented by the myth of the vagina dentata (75). Through implication and symbolism, Vanessa's status as witch is represented in terms of the vagina dentata when, in the seventh episode of season two, the memory of the tragic death of Joan Clayton causes Vanessa to do the unthinkable and, by use of the Verbis Diablo, murder Sir Geoffrey Hawkes by commanding his hunting hounds to maul him to death. Here, the 'toothed vagina' is represented quite literally through the maws of the hounds, which, through images of gaping jaws and sharp teeth, create a graphic association with the terrible female genitals. As such, the scene of Sir Geoffrey's death presents an abject construction of the Feminine, whose all-devouring womb links the witch's supernatural powers with the female reproductive body. The connection drawn between Vanessa and the myth of the vagina dentata is also established during her sexual encounter with Dorian Gray. As Vanessa and Dorian start to have sex, Vanessa cuts his chest with a knife, smears around the blood, and licks it of him. As the sex continues, Vanessa scratches Dorian in the face and bites him viciously in the shoulder. In this scene, knife and teeth function as symbolic representations of the cutting and tearing qualities of the vagina dentata, the presence of which constructs the monstrous-feminine in terms of bodily abjection.

The notion of 'carnal lust,' however, suggest the archetypal conceptualisation of the witch to be governed by a strong moralisation of feminine behaviour – of female sexual activity – that renders the representations of the vagina dentata monstrous not as a result of bodily abjection but of cultural ideas about what constitutes 'positive' feminine behavior and what does not. In other

words, deviating from the 'feminine ideal' (intended to naturalise and stabilise the field of bodies within the terms of cultural conventions) is what earns Vanessa her representation as witch – a stereotype that, according to sociologist Christina Larner, has been set by males as a negative standard for women throughout history (62). Larner states that, as a stereotype, the witch represents the inverse of the positive values of any given society and that women who deviate too far from the ideal, who exhibit characteristics normally appropriated to men by men and who fail to fulfil functions thought appropriate to women, are often characterised in accordance with this stereotype (62). In this regard, the figure of the witch (like the figures of the possessed female body and the femme castratrice) is invoked in order to produce a 'virtuous' female body for a patriarchal moral order with an interest in transforming social prohibitions into culturally accepted structures.

Problematically, *Penny Dreadful's* representation of the witch places the moralisation and naturalisation of gender acts and behaviour within a religious discourse that conditions the 'non-virtuous' woman as a diabolic otherness in relation to the divine (symbolic) order. The connection drawn between the figure of the witch and the concept of religious evil is enforced by virtue of the idea of the 'demonic pact,' a personal arrangement with the devil from which the witch's supernatural powers is thought to spring (Larner 3-4). In *Penny Dreadful*, the demonic pact is what empowers the evil nightcomers; women who were once daywalkers but have since become devoted servants of the devil, who, in return for their services, grants them eternal youth and beauty. The pact is what enables Madame Poole, the leader of the witch coven hunting Vanessa, to have lived for hundreds of years, enjoying the pleasures of the flesh and the shedding of innocent blood. Significantly, Creed argues, the witch's pact with the devil often assumes a sexual nature, linking the concept of demonic evil with the female reproductive body (75). In Vanessa's case, the connection between demonic evil and the figure of the witch is established by the fact that Vanessa uses the Verbis Diablo (the 'Words of the Devil') in the act of killing Sir Geoffrey, which, as previous stated, functions as a metaphorical representation of the vagina dentata. This representation binds up the concept of demonic evil with the female body, which, within religious discourse, becomes a filthy, defiling element that must be prohibited against. Consequently, religious prohibitions apply to a specific type of body, namely that of the female, which, by virtue of these prohibitions, is inscribed with a potential for demonic depravation. Thus, religious discourse establishes a mythology about the monstrous nature of female sexuality, through which "abjection is constructed as a rebellion of

filthy, lustful, carnal, female flesh" (Creed 38). However, the moral directive invoked by religious prohibitions reveals itself to be concerned with female sexual behaviour rather than bodily abjection as it moves the threat of the Feminine away from the reproductive register and, instead, conceptualises female monstrousness in accordance with a doctrine of non-conformity and sin (a concept defined as that which wilfully disregards the laws of the divine (the Symbolic)) (Kristeva 104). In this case, sin is conceptualised in accordance with the notion of carnal lust: "this I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (The Holy Bible, Galatians 5:16-17). 'Lust' indicates a moral regulation of what, in the collective cultural unconscious, must and must not be in relation to the Feminine. It demonstrates that, in conventional society, Woman must express no sexual desire – if she does, she runs the risk of being branded a witch.

Conclusion

Within the domain of the Symbolic, the female monster is confined to her dialectical function in the self/other opposition, which means that rather than threatening to dissolve the crucial binarisms that lie at the foundation of human identity the sexually differentiated female monster comes to constitute the border that secures the symbolically constituted subject in its ostensible reality. As illustrated throughout the above-written analysis, the production of sexuality as identity as well as the production of sexuality as the inversion of identity (a turning away from identity) consolidate a technology of subjectivity conditioned by and restricted to the notion of sexuality itself. Which means that the image generated by the sexually constituted guises of the monstrous-feminine is one of ontological fortification. It perpetuates the belief that Woman must always be defined as a sexual other. As such, identity becomes inextricably bound up with the notion of sexual difference, which, as illustrated throughout my analysis, is thought to provide for the individual a stable locus of agency from which gender acts and behaviours are meant to follow. In *Penny Dreadful*, the notion of sexually determined agency creates a discourse that constructs gender behaviour as 'good' or 'bad' according to patriarchal rules and strengthens the ritualised iterations of 'proper' gender behavior. Within the discourse produced by *Penny Dreadful*, these iterations are sought naturalised and stabilised by identifying the woman who does not comply with symbolically

established gender norms as deviant, immoral, and impure. This means that 'normal' (that is, symbolically sanctioned) gender identity is defined in contrast to its monstrous manifestations, which, in this case, are constituted by Vanessa and Lily's sexually active and aggressive behaviours. As such, my analysis suggests that the value of a sex-based gender system is the value of containing elements that are disturbing to the dominant ideological order, and that the reason why the binary gender system is actively and tenaciously held in place is to ensure and maintain that order.

Chapter 1.2:

Monstrous Female Agency

Contrary to the concept of monstrous sexuality, the concept of monstrous agency releases the female monster from her naturalised interiority and surface, making her free to project what is disavowed onto her and, thus, to reveal the ideological constraints from which the figure of the monster is generated and against which it protests. In this case, I will argue, the representation of the agentic female monster attempts to compensate for the lack resulting from the representations of the sexually constituted guises of the monstrous-feminine by occasioning a subversive play of gendered meanings and dismissing the symbolically instituted dichotomy of active/male and passive/female. In *Penny Dreadful*, this subversion is accomplished in accordance with Berenstein's theory in which monstrous agency is constituted by the act of looking, which, she argues, provides possibilities for plural, shifting gazes and multivalent spectatorial/subject positions unrestrained by the binary male/female. According to Berenstein, theories of the gaze that reduce spectatorship to the either/or binary of male/female do not respond to the full range of viewing positions available and utilised in the context of the horror film, which provides opportunities for the viewer to identify against everyday behaviors and to play with the masks that Western culture treats as core identities (59). When looks are exchanged in the horror film, vision is equated with possession and acts of seeing and being seen play out flip sides of a monstrous power dynamic that opens up a field of cross-gendered agency (Berenstein 91). As such, it is not simply a case of deciding whether the subject/spectator occupies the male or the female gaze but, rather, to note how alterations in the viewing position change profoundly the form of gender itself. Thus, Berenstein argues, the act of looking provides a first step in extricating film studies from favoured binaries and enabling

behavioural transgressions of conventional gender classifications that, in alignment with Garber's notion of transvestism, take shape as the creation of a third term – a rearticulation that exceeds even the category of the 'human' (Berenstein 51).

In the following analysis, I seek to demonstrate how, at the level of cultural formation and social reality, Vanessa Ives' monstrous identity is negotiated as that which cuts across gender identification boundaries and opens up to disorder by threatening to unmake the boundaries separating self from other, male from female. This is accomplished by means of a performativity that, in dismissing the dichotomy active/male and passive/female, operates as a challenge to the (easy) notion of binarity. I will argue that behavioural transgressions of conventional gender classifications are transcoded into the monster-body as terms of a pollution behaviour that disrupts the surface appearance of gender and the field of reality produced and constituted by symbolically inscribed gender norms.

Vanessa's Gaze

The series, throughout, accentuates Vanessa's proclivity for gazing and inspecting. Already as part of the audience of the Wild West Show, Vanessa's eyes do notably not follow the bullets, but instead focus on Ethan Chandler. Unlike the rest of the audiences who move their heads quickly from side to side to catch the action of the show, Vanessa's eyes are fixed and undisturbed, her face and body composed and completely still. Her look is one of critical assessment and slight amusements as she watches Ethan's performance, estimating his qualities and the possible usefulness of his abilities in her own future endeavours. The way she looks down at Ethan is repeated during the encounter in the tavern; her firm and upright posture ensures a sense of equality among the two and illustrates that his looks on her are matched by an equally objectifying gaze. Even his comment "oh honey, don't we all" (S01E01) after Vanessa announces that she has a need for some 'night work' is easily countered by her unrelenting gaze, which accentuates her ability to turn men into objects instead of becoming one herself.

In her 1975 essay, Mulvey argues that the act of seeing always signifies a masculine sense of power derived from psychoanalytically established interpretations that perpetuate male characters as 'bearer of the look' and female characters as 'image.' According to Mulvey, Woman's 'lack'

prevents her from entering the world of the symbolic, of language, which means that she cannot be the creator of meaning but, instead, is subjected to an object position which she cannot transcend (2008:203). The status of image, Mulvey argues, deprives female characters of their subjectivity, reducing them to a 'to-be-looked-at-ness' that provides pleasure for the male spectator and his on-screen counterpart. However, as illustrated in the scenes described above, Vanessa actively refuses the status of image and, instead, assumes the (male) position as bearer of the look. Her ability to cut across sexually determined subject positions is firmly established when, in the sixth episode of season one, Dorian Gray takes Vanessa to have her photograph taken. In a brilliantly framed scene, the photographer explains to Vanessa how the process works and that she could, "look at the camera, or look away. It's up to you." Dorian chips in with, "It's for eternity, after all… your choice" (S01E06). Not only does Vanessa decide to look into the camera taking her picture, she turns her head fully and stares directly at the audience. Noticeably, she does not smile; in fact, her face betrays no emotions except for the strong, authoritative expression in her eyes. As such, her look opposes the sexual objectification – the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' – implied by the photographer's camera, which, according to Mulvey's theory, functions as an assertion of the objectifying male gaze. As the frame cuts to a close-up shot of the camera lens reflecting Vanessa's face, a look is exchanged between Vanessa and the symbolically represented male that asserts a power dynamic in which, as stated by Berenstein, acts of seeing and being seen are equated with possession and control. However, rather than being split between positions of active/male and passive/female – by means of which the determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female – the male gaze is equally matched by Vanessa's. As a result, Vanessa avoids being perpetuated as silent, passive image despite her clear status as woman. Instead, she reasserts a more complex and multifaceted femininity that radically redefines the concept of desire and, by subverting the power of the male gaze, blurs the boundaries of spectatorial gender identification.

Vanessa's gender transgressive behaviour continues as she and her male party venture into the London underworld in search of Sir Malcolm's daughter, Mina. Vanessa's inspecting and emotionless look, the signifier of her agency, remains constant during her search among the bloodied and dismembered bodies in the vampire lair. Fright, then, appears on her face when the vampire master rises, but not for long. As the vampire approaches Sir Malcolm, Vanessa steps between them and gazes directly at the vampire. In this shot, Vanessa's stare is rendered in full view;

her eyes are stern, her brows frowned. The high-angle position of the camera imitates the position of the vampire and ensures that the spectator encounters Vanessa's objectification of the vampire via her stern and angry expression head on. Instead of now being punished within the narrative for the "autonomous act of looking" (Williams 33), the vampire master himself is taken aback. Now seen from a low-angle shot that allows the spectator to assume Vanessa's position, the vampire hesitates as she easily defies and defeats his gaze. Here, Vanessa contradicts the assumption that close-ups of the monster's terrifying gaze is meet with reverse shots of the heroine's wide-eyed response: "From a traditional perspective, the heroine's vacant stare is a physical sign of her plunge into a nether world of monstrous control. It signifies her victimization at the hands, or in this case the eyes, of a powerful creature" (Berenstein 90). Neither does Vanessa display what Williams refers to as 'the woman's look of horror,' which paralyses her in such a way that her originally curious and investigative look is held in a trancelike passivity by the male monster, allowing him to master her through *her* look (Williams 18). While the vampire's gaze constitutes a terrifying experience for sure it is easily countered by Vanessa, who, anything but vapid, is not the passive heroine of the classic horror film but, instead, a powerful monster in her own right. To this point, Vanessa also contradicts the assumption that Woman's gaze is punished by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire (the exercise of an active gaze) into masochistic fantasy. As stated by Williams, "the horror film may be a rare example of a genre that permits the expression of women's sexual potency and desire and that associates this desire with the autonomous act of looking, but it does so in these more recent examples only to punish her for this very act" (33). Contrary to Williams' suggestion, however, Vanessa's gaze ensures the vampire master's destruction without any notion of victimisation.

Linda Williams also suggests that the sight of the male monster offers the female subject a distorted reflection of her own image. She writes that when the female subject looks at the monster an affinity is revealed between them in the sense that her look recognises their similar status within patriarchal society: "The female look […] shares the male fear of the monster's freakishness, but also recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference" (Williams 21). In other words, Williams sees the monster as a 'double' for Woman, whose status as sexually differentiated other is assumed to create a "sympathetic identification" between her and the monster who is also designated as a 'biological freak' in the eyes of the traumatised male (21).

According to Williams' assumption, the look exchanged between Vanessa and the vampire should be constructed to reveal a kind of sympathy and recognition between the two. If that were the case, then the representation would align with Creed's description of the figure of the vampire, which, she argues is conceptualised (like several of the other 'faces' of the monstrous-feminine) through the myth of the vagina dentata. She argues that the image of the vampire mouth constitutes a symbolic representation of the toothed vagina in its most horrifying aspect: that of the bleeding female genitals (Creed 72). By virtue of this association, the idea that a sexual affinity exists between the female subject and the male monster, an affinity that expresses their similar status as sexually differentiated others, must be considered a symbolic construct (like that of the stereotypical guises of the monstrous-feminine) that seeks to perpetuate the female subject within a sexually determined discourse. However, the look exchanged between Vanessa and the vampire master does not correlate with Williams' notion of affinity as their look does not signify any form of sympathetic identification. On the contrary, their look is a power struggle, an assertion of dominance and control that, rather than revealing a secret affinity between the two, expresses a state of objectification and disassociation. A similar representation can be found at the end of season two, where Vanessa exchanges looks with the devil – this time manifested as a doll in Vanessa's likeness. The devil tempts Vanessa with the promise of a 'normal' life and grants her a vision of being married to Ethan and having two adorable children. "Know yourself," the doll tells her. Vanessa, however, looks her doll self in the eyes and states that she does not want a normal life anymore and with a stealthy stare declares, "I know what I am. Do you?" With this, the doll's eyes shifts uncertainly and Vanessa, now in control, starts chanting the Verbis Diablo. As Vanessa locks her opponent in a both powerful and terrifying gaze, the camera circles the two, alternately assuming the vantage points of Vanessa and the devil doll. Ultimately, Vanessa's gaze outduels her doll self, and she finishes it off by cracking open its face and releasing the scorpions within. "Beloved," she says, "know your master" (S02E10). In this scene, the sight of the monster *does*, as Williams suggests, offer Vanessa a literal reflection of her own image; however the act of facing herself in the image of the monster is, again, constructed as a power struggle in which Vanessa rejects the identification offered to her by patriarchal structures. More than anything, the scene establishes Vanessa's unwillingness to comply with the concept of heterosexual, patriarchal universality forced upon her by the 'devil's' manipulations.

Pollution Behaviour

By virtue of an active viewing position, Vanessa Ives dismisses the dichotomy active/male and passive/female and, instead, renders the act of gazing an act of cross-gendered performativity that, as illustrated throughout the above-written analysis, occasions behavioural transgressions of conventional gender classifications. In doing so, Vanessa introduces what Marjorie Garber refers to as 'category crisis,' defined as "a failure of definitional distinction," and as "a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits border crossing from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (Garber 16). By transgressing the implicit standards of normative gender, Vanessa disrupts the sexual conceptualisation of her body with a performativity that, in blurring categorical distinctions, results in a rearticulation/crisis of the notions femininity and masculinity. Here, the concept of drag offers a useful framework for explaining the category crisis implemented by Vanessa as drag effectively disrupts the notion of a 'true' (ontological) gender identity by playing upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. Indeed, drag opens up a rearticulation of the ontology of gender, which, according to Butler, is put into crisis by the performance of gender in such a way that judgements about gender normativity (our received notions of gender reality) are undermined or become impossible to make (2004:214). As a result, gender reality cannot to be conceived merely as social relations that pre-exits the individual and is predicated on the conceptual opposition of two biological sexes. Instead, the postulation of a normative gender that is 'before' or 'outside' discourse must be considered an ideological construct that seeks to prevent the task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity by re-establishing the presumption of a binary gender system where gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. Drag, however, by emphasising the dissonance between sex and gender acts, possesses the ability to challenge the discursive apparatus of gender production whereby 'sexed natures' or 'natural sexes' are produced and established as pre-fixed indicators of gender identity. As such, the concept of drag allows us to make theoretical room for alternative perspectives beyond conventional, sexually constituted gender classifications.

The concept of drag is transcoded into the monster-body as terms of pollution behaviour. As illustrated, Vanessa's monstrousness is constructed around representations of 'abnormal' and

'deviant' gender behaviours that undermine accepted social conventions surrounding the female experience and contradict the assertion that the Feminine must take up a predesignated point of reference. As such, her transgressive behaviour presents an alternative perspective to normative femininity, generating new possibilities of gender subjectivity by releasing the Feminine from the demand to be one thing and to comply with the norms devised for it by phallocentric means. In other words, by disrupting the sexual conceptualisation of the Feminine with an active (male) performativity, Vanessa presents a rearticulation (a crisis) of conventional (that is, symbolically constituted) femininity. This pollution behaviour, I will argue, culminates when Vanessa, at the end of season two, rejects the notion of a so-called 'normal' (family) life structured within the heterosexual paradigm. In doing so, Vanessa rejects the institution of motherhood, which, within patriarchal structures, is inscribed on the female body as a natural necessity, perpetuating female subjectivity within a symbolically constituted frame of reproduction. As stated by Butler, the paternal law that sanctions and requires the female body to be characterised primarily in terms of its reproductive functions underwrites our 'formal' conception of universality in relation to the female subject whose sexual freedom thus becomes a challenge to the social forms (such as the patriarchal heterosexual family) supporting this universality (2004:191). Kristeva herself fuels the ideology that restricts female subjectivity to procreation by describing the maternal body as bearer of a set of pre-cultural meanings. In fact, through her naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body, Kristeva delimits maternity as a pre-cultural reality, a secret and primary condition of the Feminine prior to paternal signification – indeed, prior to signification itself. Problematically, the idea of a maternal body transvaluated as pre-paternal and pre-cultural gains the institution of motherhood a permanent legitimation in the invariant structures of the female body that aids in the systematic production of its invisibility and, consequently, the illusion of its inevitability (Butler 1999:118). Hence, it becomes impossible within Kristeva's framework to consider the maternal or the Feminine as a signification open to cultural variability. Instead, her teleology enforces the regulatory discourse perpetuating female subjectivity within the obligatory frame of reproduction, which restricts Woman to a sexually constituted self/other opposition. As a figure of in-betweenness, however, Vanessa rejects the maternal identification offered to her. She rejects the structures of sexual determinacy within which subjectivity is produced as the foundation of life in procreation. In other

words, Vanessa rejects the belief that Woman is required to take up a sexual point of reference in order to 'be.'

Female Masculinity

Specifically, the category crisis occasioned by Vanessa's rearticulation of femininity can be explained by Judith Halberstam's notion of 'female masculinity,' which, she argues, upends the categories male/masculinity and female/femininity and, as a result, possesses the potential to operate as a challenge to heteronormativity. Arguing from a performative perspective on gender and sexuality, Halberstam suggests that masculinity is not a style owned by, or essentially tied to, men; neither are the notions of masculinity and femininity linked directly to genitals. Rather, masculinity is, and has been, produced by and across both male and female bodies (Halberstam 241). Therefore, Halberstam argues, female masculinity should be considered a specific gender with its own cultural history rather than simply a derivative of male masculinity. The tendency to reduce female masculinity to a mere imitation of male masculinity is, Halberstam notes, sustained by the psychoanalytic system, which is ultimately hostile to truly enriched understandings of female masculinity; in fact, it outright refuses to admit masculine female subjects into social reality by insisting upon male masculinity as the source of *all* masculinity (Halberstam 77). The refusal to admit female masculinity to exist as something other than a derivative of male masculinity is illustrated in Mulvey's *Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* in which she states that representations of female masculine behaviour can be explained in accordance with Freud's theory of femininity; the idea that feminine development is an oscillation between 'passive' femininity and 'regressive' masculinity (Mulvey 226:2010). Through an analysis of King Vidor's 1947 Western *Duel in the Sun*, Mulvey argues that a shifting between passive femininity and regressive masculinity allows the female protagonist to adopt a 'metaphor' of masculinity, enabling her to shift between the metaphoric opposition 'active' and 'passive.' This shifting process, Mulvey argues, correlates with the language used by Freud, who states that, as a result of the castration complex – the point in the girls development when she for the first time "acknowledges the fact of her castration [her missing penis], and with it, too, the superiority of the male and her own inferiority" (Freud 1961:229) – the girl sometimes rebels against her own feminine passivity by 'regressing' to the pre-Oedipal

stage; an emotional place in which the female is allowed to assumed a predominantly masculine character.[4] According to Freud, the girl's pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother (the girl's original object of desire) enables the girl to assume a masculine impersonation of desire by which to 'escape' her passivity (2001:219). Such regression, Freud states, marks in the girl a powerful 'masculinity complex' that causes her to fluctuate between masculine and feminine, active and passive expressions (disrupting her development of 'proper' (passive) femininity). This means that, according to psychoanalytic theory, the girl/woman's regression to the 'phallic stage' (the stage of masculine childhood sexuality) provides for her an opportunity to adopt, as Mulvey puts it, a metaphor of masculinity, to impersonate male masculinity without possessing it for herself. As such, the activity that the girl/woman attains through masculine identification remains, within psychoanalytic discourses, a 'phantasy' of action, an impersonation of male experience, which, paradoxically, becomes itself an indicator of the assumed female experience.

The tendency within psychoanalytic discourse to regard the active woman as a pseudo man leads to the concept of the 'phallic woman,' which, within the genre of cinematic horror, has been used to explain the 'uncharacteristic' power and resourcefulness of the horror film heroine. From a critical psychoanalytic perspective, Carol Clover argues that, in modern horror films, the heroine undergoes a kind of symbolic phallicization (219); that is, she is reconstituted as masculine in order for her to activate the gaze and exercise what Kaplan refers to as the 'power of action.' In this sense, the horror film heroine is read as a figurative male, a male surrogate functioning as a channel for the male gaze and male exercise (Clover 213). Clover's formulation of the phallic woman (the so-called 'final girl') clearly implies that if a woman expresses allegedly masculine character-traits her power is 'borrowed,' 'mimicked.' As such, psychoanalytic interpretations of female masculinity do not allow Woman a genuine masculine identification. Rather, psychoanalytic theories occupied with the topic of female masculinity tend to regard female masculine manifestation as a means by which to conceal or repress a pregiven femininity – a way for the female subject to 'transition' out of her own sex into the male and, thus, to 'masquerade' as another kind of self. Of course, from a performative perspective, the concept of masquerade[5] underlines the idea that the gendered body is performative rather than being a logical and natural result of biological sex. By positioning female

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[4] An argument put forth in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).
[5] A Concept introduced by Joan Riviere in her 1929 essay *Womanliness as a Masquerade*.

masculinity as a masquerade, a mimicry, psychoanalytic theory unintentionally suggests masculinity to be something superficial that can be manipulated, worn as a mask and put on and off again at will. Therefore, the practice of the masquerade can be understood as the performative production of masculinity, which, as it follows, can be assumed by both male and female bodies. In other words, the subject position defined as masculine (the position that, according to psychoanalytically inflicted theories of spectatorship, possesses the ability to own and activate the gaze (Kaplan 216)) is unconditioned by genital sex. Thus, like drag, the concept of masquerade implies gender to be performative; meaning that, ultimately, the notions of masculinity and femininity do not exist separately from the performances that realise them. As stated by Joan Riviere, there is no difference between gender and the masquerade – they are, in truth, the same thing (28). This means that Vanessa's production of female masculinity can be said to constitute a queer (non-binary) subject position that, contrary to psychoanalytic interpretations, represents an alternative to conventional (ontologically defined) femininity by illustrating that the notion of masculinity does not begin and end with Man. In this sense, female masculinity, as theorised by Halberstam, expresses neither manliness nor womanliness but a third gender, a monstrous gender, a gender that rips at the seams and manifests into something beyond male and female.

Conclusion

By inhabiting the space between the symbolically inscribed positions active/male and passive/female, the agentic third-term monster brings into view the forces of disorder and non-meaning against which the binary gender system is constituted. By disrupting the meaning system of binary gender, the female monster suggests a radical refusal of the structures, the 'syntax,' of cultural order, and, in doing so, offers a challenge to hegemonic models of gender conformity. Thus, the image generated by Vanessa is one of the abject having become proximate. She upsets what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality by crossing over the border of male/female subjectivity, suspending, for a moment, the culturally established differences between self and other by taking up the peripheral and the marginal part of the center – creating for the subject a space of in-betweenness beyond binary structures. In taking up the 'in-between,' Vanessa provides audiences with an opportunity for a spectatorial identification that encompasses the binary and

posits possibilities beyond the norm, beyond what is merely actual and present. As a point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is (or as it is perceived to be), Vanessa is instated as a metaphor. Not a metaphor of 'female masculinisation' as argued by Mulvey, who states that in order to escape her passivity the female adopts a metaphor of masculinity (a male personification of desire), which eases a transition out of her own sex into the male as a kind of "last-ditch resistance, in which the power of masculinity can be used as postponement against the power of patriarchy" (2010:228); and not as that for which a literal meaning must be found; but rather, as stated by Butler, for a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone (2004:29).

Chapter 2:

Analytical Reflections

Introduction:

Ambiguous Monsters

As argued throughout this paper, monsters, as third-term entities, extend the possibilities for spectatorial identification and, thus, of human experience, demonstrating behaviours that disrupt the established social order and ask us, the viewers, to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality, about our perception of difference, and our tolerance toward its expression (Cohen 20). Simultaneously, the uncanny intervention of the third-term monster reveals and comes to signify, indeed to overdetermine, a space of anxiety about fixed and changing identities and about the anticipation or recognition of 'otherness' as loss (Garber 32). Kelly Hurley's description of the abhuman functions as a useful definition of the monster in terms of its ambiguous function of simultaneously promoting cross-gendered potential and revealing anxiety about such possibilities. As a metamorphosis toward a condition yet unknowable and unrecognisable, the abhuman is an ambiguous being, a being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life. Abhumans are those who exist outside the structure of binary oppositions governing our basic concepts and modes of self-definition and who occupy that impossible middle ground which enables them to explore alternative possibilities for the formulation of the human subject. As such, the abhuman signifies both a threat and a promise: it imperils the very definitions we rely on to classify human identity, our most fundamental categories of self-definition – such as sex and gender – and, at the same time, points toward new modes of reality beyond the conventional limits of the human (Hurley 4). In other words, the abhuman causes categories and limitations on what it means to be human (to be male and female) to potentially collapse, but with this collapse new possibilities arise.

The ambiguity associated with the abhuman demonstrates the ambivalent status of the human subject who is both drawn to and repelled by the prospect of an abhuman (monstrous) becoming. On one hand, "the human subject labours to maintain (the illusion of) an autonomous and discrete self-identity, responding to any threat to that self-conception with emphatic, sometimes violent, denial," and, on the other hand "welcomes the event or confrontation that

breaches the boundaries of the ego and casts the self down into the vertiginous pleasures of indifferentiation" (Hurley 4). This means that, in the cultural sphere, the abhuman stands as an object of simultaneous horror and desire, where both feelings are associated with an existence outside cultural norms, outside the field of intelligible human identity. In the following sections, I will discuss how the uncertain grounding generated by *Penny Dreadful's* representation of the third-term monster (the abhuman) reveals cultural anxiety about the confusion or disruption of conventional notions of the sexed/gendered human subject while, simultaneously, inventing and promoting new representational strategies by which to 'liberate' the gendered human subject.

The Fear of Becoming 'Undone'

The anxiety signified by the abhuman/the monster can be said to arise from the fear of becoming 'unreal,' to signify that which is regarded as non-human or less than human. As stated by Butler, recognition is at once the norm toward which we invariably strive. If we are not recognisable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognisable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being; instead, we become impossible beings, foreclosed from reality, from the human (2004:31). As such, norms of recognition function to produce a common standard for existence that the human subject relies on in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what gender to have and how to maintain it. In other words, one only determines one's own sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable its recognition:

> We come into the world on the condition that the social world is already there, laying the groundwork for us. The sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself. My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted. I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me. In this sense, I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter the realm of the possible (Butler 2004:32).

Agency and self-determination, thus, become plausible concepts only to the extent that the social world allows. Problematically, the norms of recognition constituting the realm of paternal reality creates a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of Man and Woman, masculinity

and femininity as the exclusive way to understand the field of gender subjectivity. Such a discourse not only performs a regulatory operation of hegemonic heterosexualisation but effectively forecloses possibilities of existence outside of its own regulatory framework. What the example of drag seeks to do, however, is to make us question this realm of reality – or, more precisely, the means by which this reality is produced and reproduced – and to consider possibilities of existence not regulated by a strategy of binary exclusion. As such, drag becomes a means (both social and theoretical) by which to free the human subject constrained by social norms – norms that do violence to us in the sense that they hold sway over embodied life, providing coercive criteria for normal 'men' and 'woman,' and which, for that reason, must be opposed. Consequently, by dismissing the field of reality produced and constituted by conventional gender, drag entails the danger/possibility for the human subject to become 'undone,' to become unrecognisable within the realm of paternal reality, and, thus, to become the 'third' against which the human is made – to become monstrous.

The anxiety about the 'dissolution' of human identity that is disavowed onto the figure of the monster can be argued to be the result of political and/or philosophical discourses seeking to challenge and, ultimately, redefine the premise upon which gender identity is produced. The 1995 *International Bill of Gender Rights*, for example, suggests that it is fundamental that individuals have the right to define, and to redefine as their lives unfold, their own gender identities and that, as a result, gender identity cannot be circumscribed by what society deems to be masculine or feminine gender. The first right the bill proclaims is, precisely, that "the individual's sense of self is not determined by chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role" and that, consequently, "all human beings have the right to define their own gender identity regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role" (Frye 212). The bill continuous be stating that "given the right to define one's own gender identity, all human beings have the corresponding right to free expression of their self-defined gender identity" (Frye 212). Continuously, it states that given the right to define one's own gender identity and the corresponding right to free expression of a self-defined gender identity, "no individual should be denied access to a space or denied participation in an activity by virtue of a self-defined gender identity which is not in accord with chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role" (Frye 213). Significantly, the bill also addresses 'the right to control and change one's own body'

(which includes the rights to change one's body cosmetically, chemically, or surgically) so as to express one's self-defined gender identity (Frye 213). Together, these rights serve to dismantle conventional notions of the gendered human subject by suggesting that it has no ontological status apart from the one created through public and social discourse and that, consequently, the subject should be free to invent new self-representational strategies by which to define one's own sense of self – regardless of appearance or bodily qualities. In continuation of the interpretation forwarded by the 1995 bill, a coalition of international human rights organisations presented a document entitled *The Yogyakarta Principles* formalised in November 2007. The Principles define gender identity very broadly, challenging the idea that gender is binary and, in doing so, encourage "sexually and gender non-conforming people" to live and express themselves freely outside the obligatory frame of heterosexualisation (Ettelbrick 9). I mention these political documents in order to illustrate the ideological 'breeding ground' for the anxiety permeating contemporary Western culture – an anxiety generated by philosophical ideas that unsettle what, throughout history, has been constructed to be perceived as natural, as human. From an essentialist point of view, such initiatives might be said to constitute a 'slippery slope towards meaninglessness,' a realm of non-signification where 'normal' perceptions of gendered life are discarded and replaced with a state of undifferentiation (a state embodied by the third-term monster).

The profound fear of undifferentiation (non-binary gender) and the compulsion to keep the order of binary gender natural and necessary might explain why *Penny Dreadful*, after providing representations of empowered cross-gendered agency, betrays its heroine with an unsatisfactory, to say the least, narrative conclusion. It is not that Vanessa dies; it has been understood since she stared down her first vampire that Vanessa's journey is hazardous and that death lurks around every corner. It is the fact that what happens to her at the end of season three seems cut from a different story; it is that, in a show that has been so fixed on the idea of female agency, patriarchy wins in overtime. In the seventh episode of season three, Dracula, finally, seduces Vanessa and makes a perfect speech about her accepting herself, about not being whom society (notably the doctors) tries to force her to be:

> We have been shunned in our time Vanessa. The world turns away in horror, why? Because
> we're different, ugly. Exceptional. I don't want to make you good. I don't want you to be normal.
> I don't want you to be anything but who you truly are. You have tried for so long to be what

everyone wants you to be. What you thought you ought to be. What your church and your family and your doctors said you must be. Why not be who you are instead? (S03E07).

The conclusion to Vanessa's inner struggle, which, throughout the series, has been disguised as a struggle of faith, a struggle between good and evil, between two male forces (Dracula and the devil) thus culminates in the declaration "I accept…myself" (S03E07). In theory, this is an approvable message: rather than rejecting what is characterised as monstrous about herself, Vanessa embraces it. However, the victory imbedded in Vanessa's declaration does not belong to her; it belongs to patriarchy, to the Symbolic. For Vanessa's act of 'accepting herself' apparently entails letting Dracula bite her and becoming the mother of his evil vampire spawn, which, again, conceptualises the female monster in terms of sexuality, in terms of her reproductive and mothering functions. In accepting her prophesised fate and becoming the Mother of Evil, Vanessa gives in to sexual subjugation (which she has successfully countered up until this point) and assumes the status of symbolically integrated monster whose function is to maintain the distinction between self and other, between male and female and to allay the threat of her own agentic monstrousness. The series' narrative resolution further resolves the boundary disputes caused by Vanessa by representing her death as a holy sacrifice that pulls back the End of Days and effectively restores law and order to the London community. Arguably, her death is a defeat for the sake of an archetypal narrative in which, despite her integrity and courage, Vanessa is unable to preserve her body from contamination by her own abject sexuality and, as a consequence, must be 'restored' (by Ethan, of course) to a state of blissful passivity. A passivity thoroughly established as Vanessa disappears from the two episodes leading up to her finale moments, leaving others to fight the battles while she waits in an actual ivory tower for her saintly end. As such, the circumstances surrounding Vanessa's death illustrate how the embodied opposition of binary gender is countered and circumvented by narrative structures that seek, or rather *demand*, to undo the third-term monster, to deny its possibility by rendering it unreal and impossible. As stated by Butler, "to counter that embodied opposition is to say, effectively, that this body, this challenge to an accepted version of the world is and shall be unthinkable" (2004:35). Thus, as the final shots linger on Vanessa's resting place, bedecked with lilies and surrounded by those who loved her, the men left to contemplate her loss, the series leaves the viewer with an amount of unfulfilled potential buried

and repressed in an effort to restore order and to renew the social world on the basis of intelligible, binary gender.

Gendered Possibilities

That a satisfactory conclusion to the social challenges posed by *Penny Dreadful* might be amiss does not render these challenges pointless. On the contrary, the discourse produced by the series' representations of cross-gendered performativity formulates for the social subject conditions of spectatorial identification that extent beyond the conceptual frame of sexual difference and that open up modes of gender rearticulation. In other words, the series opens up possibilities for agency and self-determination unrestrained by the dichotomy active/male and passive/female, illustrating that agency lies not in some body or gendered identity outside of or before patriarchal structures, but in the possibility for change implicit in the relationship between gender categories and their limits. In binding up the notion of individual agency with social transformation, *Penny Dreadful* challenges the institution by which conventional gender is established and maintained as a prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination and stresses the necessity of keeping our notion of the human open to a future articulation. So that, the notion of the gendered subject – no longer a given – refrains from being a building block on which we rely to constitute the cultural domain of intelligibility, but, instead, becomes a site of gendered possibility.

Specifically, the series illustrates that the possibility for gender transformation is to be found in relation to performative practices, which, according to Butler, constitute the micropolitical level of everyday life. Thus, it is on the level of micropolitics that *Penny Dreadful's* representations of cross-gendered performativity can be argues to influence the construction of gender subjectivity. By providing a set of counter-practices that, through the viewing experience, can be argued to cause a change in the spectator's consciousness and in his/hers modes of (self)knowledge, the series effects the subjective construction of gender. And, in doing so, the series also offers the possibility for social change in the sense that the subjective construction of gender – that is, our self-presentation – can be argued to effect its social construction. As stated by De Lauretis in *Technologies of Gender*, criticism has shown that cinematic readings emerging out of a politically radical or oppositional consciousness may contribute to changing the social meanings of the

cinematic representations themselves (96). The social construction of gender can thus be argued to be implicated in the viewing experience, which, in this case, provides possibilities for plural, shifting gazes and multivalent spectatorial/subject positions that cut across gender identification boundaries and, to various extents, challenge the hegemonic practice by which the human subject is named and defined.

However, as illustrated by *Penny Dreadful's* narrative conclusion, change in gender representation is hard-won. The series demonstrates how cinematic counter-productions are, sometimes, limited in their deconstructive potential because representations involving cases of transgressive gender are 'disciplined' in accordance with assumptions about gender-appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Sloop 12). As noted by Bornstein, in revealing the ultimate instability of seemingly natural and normal gender expectations, one (in this case, Vanessa) poses an implicit threat to stability and is hence met with resistance and discipline. As such, when any given individual does not match the expected alignment of body and practice, that person is threatened with 'gender terrorism' – action against those who trouble categories held to be central to human identity (Bornstein 94). In this way, Bornstein argues, gender transgressions are disciplined in advance by being interpreted and understood through particular heteronormative understandings of the human condition. In a cinematic context, such interpretation is enforced by what De Lauretis refers to as 'the heterosexual cinematic contract, which is designed to bind spectators within a phallocentric social technology of gender (the dichotomy active/male and passive/female) (105). This technology, De Lauretis notes, is expressive of the resistance toward recognising the limitations inherent in a static (ontological) gender identification and wary of the liberatory possibility of a non-binary sense of self. Thus, the heterosexual cinematic contract constitutes the cultural apparatus by which representations of transgressive gender is disciplined ('normalised') in an attempt to maintain the chimera of binary gender.

In *Penny Dreadful*, the 'normalisation' of Vanessa's gender transgressive behaviour is implemented by the (disappointing) circumstances surrounding her death, which, as previously mentioned, are meant to undo the boundary disputes caused by Vanessa and reinstate the Feminine within patriarchal structures of binary gender. However, the normalisation of Vanessa's gender transgressive behaviour is not only implemented by narrative means but also by the fact that female agency – the female adaptation of an active (male) gaze – is given a monstrous expression. As a

cinematic representation of cross-gendered spectatorial identification, Vanessa's power lies in the activity of the gaze, that is, in the successful and continuous defunctionalisation of a former instrument of suppression. However, the idea that power of action renders a woman monstrous is, of course, utterly problematic. It undermines the success of the agentic woman, who, rather than acting as an example of 'gender trouble,' is positioned (and perceived) as an 'aberration,' as an improperly or inadequate gendered body working to reify dominant assumptions about 'proper' feminine gender. This represents the ways in which gender categories, naturalised by a heterosexual contract, become entrenched in law and regulations to such a degree that when potentially destabilising representations arise everyone is under pressure to interpret the actors involved in specific heteronormative, stabilising ways. Consequently, representations of transgressive gender are in danger of becoming marginalised simply because, as humans, we have to rely on pre-existing meanings and the power of the institutions we have put in place in order to create our own understandings of the present (Sloop 141).

In this sense, we (the viewers) all act as ideological agents simply by making interpretations through frames and interests developed within the context of existing cultural ideologies. By making interpretations in accordance with phallocentric ideology, one subscribes to the value system that holds the categories male/masculinity and female/femininity as exclusive alternatives for the subject's self-realisation. And, in choosing one or the other, the subject buys into a system that perpetuates the binary and that forecloses any opportunity for an individual to freely proclaim themselves to be non-binary. What this means is that, as ideological agents, "we must all take greater responsibility for the fact that the performance of gender continues to be both tightly constrained and morally suspect, and [as a remedy] we must continue to find ways to complicate those constraints" (Sloop 49). This, of course, is not an easy task. As I have already discussed, there proves to be a heavy cultural investment in maintaining genders within a binary system. Consequently, the cultural subject very often finds him/herself embedded in binary gender relations to the point where binary identification and binary self-articulation feels inescapable (Halberstam 1998:119). Thus, in order for the subject to attain the ability to image him/herself *outside* of binary structures (to imagine him/herself otherwise) representations allowing for a non-binary gender identification must be provided. As stated by Butler, it is precisely through challenges to its existing formulation that normativity is made disputable, opened up for reinterpretation. Given this

assumption, the best one can hope for is a representation – such as the one presented in *Penny Dreadful* – that, despite its limitations, allows for the development of a critical awareness about social norms by offering at least a troubling of conventional gender. The ability to develop a critical relation to the norms presupposes a capacity to articulate an alternative version of sustaining social practices that enable the subject to act and, thus, construct a reality different from the one produced through the dominant discourse (Butler 2004:3). And, through its exploration of female agency, *Penny Dreadful* accomplishes exactly that. Through a display of 'female masculinity,' the series makes us (the spectators) question what is real and what must be in relation to the Feminine by showing us how contemporary notions of gender reality can be questioned and new modes of reality instituted. Thus, *Penny Dreadful* challenges the heterosexual cinematic contract, which, despite its efforts, is unable to subvert the threat posed by the third-term monster. For, although narrative resolutions seek to resolve the boundary disputes caused by the monster by killing it off and restoring law and order, fear lingers on. The series' representation of female masculinity can be argued to signify a return to a state of undifferentiation, a state in which the subject experiences no discrepancy between self and other, between male and female and, as a result, exists in what Lacan refers to as an 'ideal' form prior to social (symbolic) determination (Lacan 58). What this means is that, through the viewing experience, the spectator is invited to return, metaphorically, to the far side of the mirror, to a state of non-division that points toward new modes of reality beyond the conventional limits of the human. The possibility that the spectator in this state of undifferentiation might attain a sense of self unrestrained by binary structures is, exactly, what, threatens to disrupt the cultural politics that construct and maintain a distinction between male and female. As a result, the counter-discourse produced by *Penny Dreadful* asserts its destabilising potential through the viewing experience itself, which threatens/promises to draw the viewing subject to a place where symbolic meaning collapses, where sexual categorisation is dissolved and replaced with an opportunity for cross-gendered identification. Thus, I will argue that, despite the attempts to repress the gender transgressions evoked by the female monster, *Penny Dreadful's* central thematic achievement will not go unnoted, and neither will its reconceptualisation of the female monster and the fear and desire it embodies for the 21st century. For, now, it is no longer a question of keeping the monstrous other at bay, but of how we should all strive to become monsters in the eyes of patriarchy.

Chapter 3:

Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

As discussed, *Penny Dreadful's* narrative conclusion illustrates the difficulties involved in trying to challenge prevailing discursive practices. The attempt to repress and contain elements that are disturbing to the dominant ideological order by folding the discourse back into a traditional iteration of heterosexual normativity demonstrates the continued perseverance of conservative patriarchy, heavily invested in maintaining its genders and the binary system that defines its own boundaries, self-definitions, and ideologies. In the light of this situation, one has to consider to what extent the discursive deconstruction of gender categories can or might be progressive outside of viewing practices and, if so, whether the awareness raised by the discursive deconstruction of gender might lead to 'real-life' transformation in a society wary of social change. Of course, I do not claim the ability to answer this question; indeed a definitive answer to this question lies far beyond the scope of critical discourse analysis, which disclaims political responsibility for social intervention. Instead, what discourse analysis offers is recommendations for change by producing interpretations and explanations of areas of social life that *could* (in the right conditions) contribute to righting or mitigating social wrongs (Fairclough 8). As such, the power of discourse analysis is in showing that 'things could be different.' And all we can do is to adopt those practices or perspectives which appear to create possibilities for increasing freedom, choice, and quality of life for those who seem to need it (Burr 16). By doing so, social practice *can* be challenged or changed and the well-being of the human improved, freed from the barriers of assumed beliefs legitimised and sustained by dominant systems of power.

In this case, however, the distance between discursive deconstruction and social transformation can seem vast. A language-based approach such as Butler's theory of performativity might appear impractical for solving real-life inequalities as it can be argued to be too abstracted to be socially implemented. This means that, although one succeeds in deconstructing the sex-gender differentiation with Butler on a theoretical level, an essentialist understanding of the human might hold social deconstruction back. Arguably, the greatest obstacle in implementing Butler's theory of performativity on a social level is that it focuses solely on language and not the material body. On

that account, Peter Digeser argues that Butler's idea of performativity is too pure to account for identity (662). Digeser doubts that pure performativity is possible, and argues that in viewing the gendered individual as purely performed, Butler ignores the gendered body, which, he argues, possesses a cultural significance that cannot be ignored. Digeser also questions whether understanding ourselves as performative is necessarily a less harmful (or dangerous) alternative than understanding ourselves as essential beings (667). A concern also voiced by Dennis Schep in his essay *The Limits of Performativity: A Critique of Hegemony in Gender Theory* (2011) in which he discusses the limitations within the geography of Butler's concept of performativity. For Butler, the idea of the performative subject is meant to respond to the naturalisation or essentialism of gender and sex. She argues that domination, oppression, and exclusion are linked to understanding ourselves in these ways, and she believes that by coming to see ourselves in a different way, our politics may be improved and the harms associated with essentialism will be alleviated. However, Schep notes that while the idea of a performatively produced identity may be liberatory for some, it may pose an insurmountable conflict for others, particularly those who perceive their identity to be structured by some form of essentialist determination. For those who rely on the binary as a set of stable reference points for the coherence of their gendered and/or sexual identity, the performativity paradigm may be seen as a fundamental threat to the coordinates that allow these individuals to understand their bodies and identities. From Butler's perspective, individuals who understand themselves in reference to a biologically determined notion of the binary are victims of essentialist delusions, unable to unmask the categories that underlie their experiences as performatively established (Schep 868). That is to say, the belief in a prior (ontological) interiority is regarded by Butler as a lack of insight into the ways gender and its constitutive norms are and have been performatively constructed. As Butler states, gender norms may acquire an apparent naturalness but this naturalness is never more than an appearance. The norm has no independent ontological status; it is itself (re)produced through the acts that strive to approximate and reinstitute it through the daily social rituals of bodily life (Butler 2004:48). Problematically, the irreconcilability between Butler's theory and the ideas about gender and gender norms that underlie and validate biologically determined identities may provoke the perception of a de-legitimation of such identities. Meaning that,

paradoxically, by clearing the ground, denaturalizing reiterated and essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, and advocating a paradigm that allows for a progressive increase of the range of possible gender identities, Butler made certain gender expressions impossible. In this context, the idea that the essentialist matrix upon which many rely is merely the result of the sedimentation of iterated gender norms seems highly patronizing, and performativity may turn out to be merely another false form of universalism that services a tacit cultural imperialism (Schep 869).

Thus, despite the liberatory potential of an identity that is no longer predetermined by an inner gender core, the hegemony of the performativity paradigm can become problematic in the sense that it presents itself as universal and thereby forecloses other possible positions. In that regard, perhaps the only weakness of Butler's theory lies exactly in its strength: in its presumed universality (Schep 874). Although I credit and agree with Schep's critique of Butler's theory of performativity, I must stress the point that this critique should in no way be understood as a valorisation of essentialism over constructivism. It is my belief (a belief shared by Schep) that the biologically determined notion of the binary represents a much more exclusionary and restrictive paradigm for the articulation of gender and gender identity than Butler's theory of performativity.

The concept of drag also brings with it certain theoretical considerations. As stated, drag possesses the ability to displace heteronormative assumptions about gender by revealing that gender identities are performatively constructed. As Butler argues, drag draws attention to the constructedness of identities that may have a vested interest in presenting themselves as 'essential' and 'natural,' so that it would be true to say that all gender is, in fact, a form of parody. However, the implementation of drag as a 'resource' for subversive ends poses a paradox for thinking: if gender is produced through discourse then it follows that the tool with which to deconstruct gender (the concept of drag) is also conditioned by discourse. And if subversion itself is conditioned and constrained by discourse, then how can we tell that it is subversion at all? (Salih 58). That is to say, how does one determine to what extent 'denaturalisations' of the heterosexual norm function subversively and to what extent they actually function to enforce the heterosexual norm? The problem, of course, is that one cannot know in advance whether performative recitations will be interpreted subversively or not. Which means that subversive recitation will always involve a certain amount of risk in that they might prove to have the opposite effect; namely, to fortify existing norms

instead of deconstructing them. As Sara Salih states, some citations will continue to work in the service of oppressive heterosexual norms (and this is something we already know from my analysis in chapter 1.1, which presented a description of femininity as a forcible citation of the heterosexual norm) while others might initiate a deconstruction of the norms. The task will necessarily be to distinguish between those performatives which consolidate the heterosexual norm (forced citations) and those that work to reveal its contingency and instability (subversive citations) – which is not always easy (Salih 65). "It is difficult to disentangle subversive citations and performatives from the power structures they oppose, since subversion is necessarily and inevitably implicated in discourse and the law" (Salih 66). However, this consideration constitutes the promise as well as the problematic of performativity: the opportunity to make use of existing social 'resources' (gender relations) for subversive ends.

Conclusion

I began this paper by stating that it would be a critique of the gender categories structured in accordance with the notion of sexual difference – a critique motivated by the fact that within binary systems of sex-based, male-female differences there is no opportunity for individuals to freely proclaim themselves to be non-binary. Anchored in essentialism, naturalism, and universalism, binary sex-gender systems foreclose any questioning of gender and gender identity. In doing so, these systems force the individual to identify with prescribed names and categories that no one has thought about – that we are not encouraged to think about – and that do not necessarily express the lived multiple gendered experience of contemporary society. With CDA as my methodological approach, I have sought to bring increased understanding of the social and ideological processes through which notions of binary gender are reproduced and, significantly, of how binary gender can be deconstructed.

As demonstrated by my analysis in chapter 1.1, sexual differences are/has been used to actively construct and maintain social norms that, in defining what society considers male and female gender roles, seek to provide for the subject a stable locus of agency from which gender acts and behaviours are meant to follow. Problematically, the stereotypical guises of the monstrous-feminine presented by Barbara Creed illustrate that society's understanding of what is possible, proper, and perverse in relation to gender and gender linked behaviour is bound up with values and assumptions established in accordance with ideological structures that seek to reinforce the notion of sexual difference. As it follows, the technology of subjectivity conditioned by and restricted to the notion of sexual difference becomes a venue for maintaining oppressive social power relations made all the more dangerous by the belief that it is an entirely natural state of affairs. Throughout chapter 1.2, I have sought to contradict binary gender definitions by adopting Judith Butler and Rhona Berenstein's theories of gender performativity and drag, which lean toward underlining the ways in which gender ambiguity can work to subversively de-literalise. Their theories promote the idea that a first step toward queering an essentialist sexual dimorphism is to question the 'common sense' assumption that the world is naturally divided into male and female, masculine and feminine, and to realise that these positions produce for the subject a schema of exclusionary and confining gender identifications. This, I argue, is clearly a vital task: to encourage a de-literalisation and de-

naturalisation of gender and sexual categories, to encourage each of us to think of gender and sexualities as 'styles' and to highlight how conventional gender perceptions can be disputed through subversive displays of gender performativity. These assumptions allow us to challenge the naturalism of sexual dimorphism and to make theoretical room for alternative perspectives. To this point, the concept of drag has proven to be a useful tool with which to draw attention to the discontinuities between gender and anatomy – allowing for the disruption of even flows between sexuality and identity. In the discourse produced by *Penny Dreadful*, gender is put into play through the plural, shifting gender positions afforded by the gaze, which, in this case, offers numerous spectatorial identifications within a single sitting, creating a site for creative reinvention of gender. The multiplicity of the gaze is what enables Vanessa to evade cultural expectations of gendered behavior and gender signifiers and to pioneer a form of female masculinity that, according to Halberstam, changes the meaning of modern gender identity by challenging once and for all the stability and accuracy of binary sex-gender systems (139). Thus, in accordance with the concept of drag, *Penny Dreadful's* representations of monstrous female agency encourage the production of new taxonomies that intervene in the hegemonic practice of gender categorisation, and, in doing so, create a site of gender creativity. The incongruence between gender and anatomy created by Vanessa opens up a third space of gender possibility where, as Bornstein states, the subject attains "the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change" (63). Drag encourages and explores a state of gender fluidity where we might be able to follow our own destabilising urges and desires, finding our movement in life more comfortable and that of others more acceptable.

To summarise, the argument here presented is that, while we must acknowledge that culturally and historically constituted values and norms hold sway over gendered life, we are nevertheless able to examine them critically and to make an informed judgement about the appropriateness of such values and norms based upon our knowledge (obtained through critical analysis and interpretation) of the 'reality' that lies behind social phenomena. A judgement that could, under the right circumstances, lead to social transformation. However, although there is clearly a critical need to highlight transgression and alteration, the fact that ideological structures work to stabilise binary gender and to reiterate social norms rather than to encourage and explore gender fluidity shows that there is also a vital need to note discipline and containment. What we

see in the discourse produced by *Penny Dreadful* is an attempt to erase or diminish the gender transgressions evoked by the third-term monster. As discussed, the cultural frame for understanding the resistance toward articulations of non-binary gender is constituted by the need for a recognisable identity and the need to be able to identify and categorise others within binary structures. A binary gender system, exclusionary as it may be, gives its members a sense of themselves as individuals (or subjectivities) by suppressing elements or contradictions which might threaten their sense of themselves as unitary or coherent identities. Arguably, the views of social constructionism can seem to lead down a road to social and personal 'paralysis.' "If we must abandon any notion of a reality which bears some relation to our constructions, then we are left with a multiplicity of perspectives which become a bewildering array of alternative realities" (Burr 14). Abandoning the idea of an essential self brings with it the question of how one is then to decide between alternative perspectives, which, for some, might seem overwhelming, or, indeed, impossible. Other reasons why individuals subscribe to the value system that holds the two presented choices Man and Woman as oppositional alternatives for gender subjectivity are the need for security and the desire to avoid punishment for not being 'correctly' gendered (that is, for being un-recognisable in relation to binary structures). As illustrated by Vanessa's demise, people transgressing assumptions about gender-appropriate and inappropriate behaviour are often met with resistance and discipline; a practice sustained by a conservative and protectionist attitude by patriarchy toward its own ideological structures. Fear of punishment, however, does not seem an appropriate reason for maintaining binary social structures. On the contrary, on this point, the binary system reveals itself to be not only oppressive but silly. As Bornstein argues, gender expression ought not to be punitively regulated; gender should be – indeed, *needs* to be – both safe and consensual. Safe gender, Bornstein explains, is being who and what we want to be when we want to be that, and expressing ourselves with no threat of censure or violence. Consensual gender is respecting one another's definitions of gender – whether binary or non-binary (Bornstein 159). Consequently, the fight for gender expression must include the fight to dismantle the binary – not by discarding it but by questioning its universality and by reformulating it so that identity (what is social, constructed, and historical) is not made to appear natural and inherent. Through the practice of drag (transgressive gender performance), we grasp one of the mechanisms by which the dismantlement of the binary can be accomplished, and by which 'reality' can be rearticulated. Drag

presents an opportunity for us to it to critically evaluate the norms governing gendered life. In this way, the concept of drag offers a challenge to the notion of binarity, providing for the spectator possibilities for the production of non-conventional, non-binary gender subjectivities.

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