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Actually Evil: Echoes of Horror and Lesbian Desire in *Jennifer's Body* Femslash

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ATA DE DEFESA DE TCC

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Aos 24 dias do mês de março do ano de 2022, com início às 18h30min, realizou-se excepcionalmente, via interação virtual na plataforma Google Meet (no link <https://meet.google.com/vqh-vbqh-iqo>), respaldada pela Resolução Normativa Nº 140/2020/CUn, de 21 de julho de 2020, e a Portaria Normativa Nº 002/2020/PROGRAD, de 17 de abril de 2020, a sessão de defesa de Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso de Júlia Zen Dariva, intitulado “Actually Evil: Echoes of Horror and Lesbian Desire in *Jennifer’s Body* Femslash”. Após a apresentação oral da monografia pela estudante, a Banca Examinadora, composta pelos professores Dr. George Alexandre Ayres de Menezes Mousinho, (Orientador e Presidente - UFSC), Dr. André Ferreira Gomes de Carvalho (UFSC) e Ma. Paola da Cunha Nichele (UFSC), deu-se início à arguição pelos membros da Banca que aprovaram a monografia com a seguintes notas:

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ABSTRACT

Although the field of Fan Studies finds itself in constant growth since its inception in the 1980s with numerous research dedicated to comprehending the reasonings and potentials of slash fan fiction, only a relatively small portion of such research is dedicated to slash written about the complex relationships between female characters in modern media. With this in mind, the present work looks to weave together theories on femslash fan fiction and horror in order to understand how the prominence of possible subversive elements in the genre may characterize it as a fruitful inspiration for the writing of femslash. Drawing on seminal work such as Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) and Hanson's *Lesbians Who Bite* (1999), the present work focuses on how the film *Jennifer's Body* (2009) employs horror elements and the depiction of lesbian desire and the ways these are echoed by related femslash fan fiction. Once a comparative investigation between the film and *Jennifer's Body* (2009) femslash has been conducted, this study moves on to address what this may mean for further work on femslash and horror as subversive fiction.

Keywords: Fanfiction. Slash fanfiction. Horror. Fan Studies.

RESUMO

Apesar do constante crescimento em que se encontra o campo de Estudos de Fãs desde que teve início na década de 1980, com numerosas produções acadêmicas dedicadas à compreensão acerca dos motivos e potenciais da escrita de slash fan fiction, somente um número proporcionalmente pequeno tem sido dedicado à pesquisa acadêmica com foco em slash escrito sobre as complexas relações entre personagens femininas no cinema e na televisão. Com isso em mente, o presente trabalho tem objetivo entrelaçar teorias sobre femslash e horror a fim de entender como a proeminência de possíveis elementos subversivos no gênero pode o caracterizar como uma inspiração frutífera para a escrita de femslash. Baseando-se em obras seminais como *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) de Barbara Creed e *Lesbians Who Bite* (1999) de Ellis Hanson, esta obra busca explorar como o filme *Jennifer's Body* (2009) emprega elementos de horror e a representação de desejo lésbico, assim como a forma com que esses se repetem em obras de femslash escritas sobre as protagonistas do filme. Tendo conduzido uma análise comparativa entre *Jennifer's Body* (2009) e o femslash escrito sobre o filme, o atual trabalho propõe-se a discutir, então, como a compreensão acerca de tal simetria pode influenciar futuras produções acadêmicas sobre femslash e horror como ficções de potencial subversivo.

Palavras-chave: Fanfiction. Slash fanfiction. Horror. Estudos de Fãs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AO3 – Archive of Our Own

UFSC – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

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1 INTRODUCTION

Inside a dimly lit room in an empty house well on its way to becoming a model home, a teenager is ripped apart and left with his insides draped the wrong way out. Murder, blood and gore seem to be common features of the horror genre. Although filled with contradictions concerning what is behind its ability to thrill its viewers and how its form is constructed, horror is said to be "aesthetically designed to create a distinctive set of disturbing effects" (CHERRY, 2009, p. 94). Horror's defining features cannot be fixed and its boundaries seem to be everchanging, yet Cherry argues that it is possible to identify a recurrence of styles, subject matters, common plots as well as a willingness to move beyond these (p. 3-4). One obvious example of subject matter within the horror genre is that of the supernatural, which deals with ghosts, demons and other similar entities, and their interference in the world the characters live in. Because it employs motifs such as these, a film that can be regarded as a piece of supernatural horror is *Jennifer's Body* (2009), written by Diablo Cody and directed by Karyn Kusama.

The film follows characters Anita "Needy" Lesnicki (Amanda Seyfried) and her best friend Jennifer Check (Megan Fox) as Jennifer is turned into a succubus after a virgin sacrifice gone wrong. In addition to employing horror motifs, *Jennifer's Body* similarly features elements that may be characterized as queer in their apparent contrast to heterosexuality. Centered on the literal practice of man-eating and on the explicitly homoerotic friendship between the two female main characters, *Jennifer's Body* portrays male characters as disposable in both a narrative and a stylistic sense, refusing to give much importance to the men that stand on the margins of Needy and Jennifer's codependent friendship; focusing, instead, on the contradictory and complicated cravings that are forced to coexist within their relationship. The codependent notes of their dynamic are highlighted by the featuring of (accidental) blood pacts and a supernatural awareness of one another, all while their relationship is pervaded by possessive impulses and the intertwining of jealousy, competitiveness, and desire. The depiction of the complications located at the intersection between female friendship and lesbian yearning may also be said to distance the film from the heterosexual normative matrix within which mainstream film productions tend to be placed – as often even those which center homoeroticism do so only subtextually, and the specific representation of even implicit lesbian sexuality is even more rare (HARRINGTON, 2018, p. 12).

In her discussion of horror, author Brigid Cherry (2009) posits that, as a genre, it is remarkably open to—and may thrive in—narratives which subvert current dominant ideology (p. 11). This is particularly relevant as it ties in to Sara Gwenllian Jones' (2002) argument that some television and cinematic genres easily lend themselves to the writing of slash fan fiction (p. 118). As a practice that is regarded as subversive, slash fan fiction writing involves reading characters and settings as queer, and rewriting them in a context in which they are portrayed as able to realize their homosexual desires (JENKINS, 1992, p. 192). While some theorists, such as Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (2002) and Willis in *Keeping Promises to Queer Children* (2006) view slash as a challenge of its heteronormative source texts, Jones' proposal is that for some genres, slash is complementary and reaffirming, rather than contradictory.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

Considering the aforementioned points of view, the objective of this study is to analyze the ways in which the film *Jennifer's Body* (2009) employs horror elements and a portrayal of lesbian desire in its audiovisual narrative and style, and how these allow femslash written about *Jennifer's Body* to reaffirm and complement the source text, rather than challenge it. The goal of this work relies on the notion of slash as an oppositional practice offered by scholars in the field along the last two decades (JENKINS, 1992; WILLIS, 2006; HAYES; BALL, 2009; RODENBIKER, 2014). It likewise rests on the assertions made by authors such as Creed (1993), Cherry (2009) and Harrington (2018) about the role of female sexuality as a subversive force within the context of horror fiction. The work here follows in the footsteps of other Fan Fiction Studies scholars that have gone against the academic grain to produce research focused on femslash, as the majority of Fan Fiction Studies works have focused on male-centered slash (NG; RUSSO, 2017). In the context of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, only one dissertation has approached the subject of fan fiction, exploring its relationship to Second Language Acquisition (AGUIAR, 2020). Much in the same vein as other English scholars, I believe fan fiction production to be relevant in both quality and number not only to the field of Communications, but in its intersections with Cultural and Literary Studies as well. Therefore, the present work also aims to connect Fan Fiction Studies to the English program within the context of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

1.2 METHOD

The research corpus consists of Jennifer Check/Needy Lesnicki¹ fan fiction posted on the *Archive of Our Own*²—a fan-created archive for fan works—as well as of film excerpts and stills that are explored and used in the text for the purpose of scene analysis. The popularity of the selected fan fiction, in the context of this work, was determined by the number of *kudos* each of them has received, as these are known to represent fandom acceptance. The selected fan fiction consists of the ten most popular works posted in the Jennifer/Needy tag at the date of the analysis. Although analyzed individually for the purpose of delineating common themes, the selected fan fiction is discussed here as a collective. The film excerpts were chosen in order to facilitate a discussion about the selected horror elements to be discussed in the upcoming section as well as about the depiction of lesbian desire. This is approached through the analysis of narrative and stylistic aspects such as story and plot as well as light, colors, sound and framing (BORDWELL; THOMPSON, 2008, p. 55).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is divided into three parts which approach, in order: genre conventions and relevant discussions on gender and sexuality in horror fiction; a brief history of slash fan fiction scholarship in recent years as well as common assumptions that guide most of recent production in the field; and, finally, the specificities of femslash in relation to other homoerotic fan fiction. The goal is to elucidate key notions that are then illustrated in the following sections.

2.1 “I HAD ONE OF MY NIGHT TERRORS AGAIN”: THE HORROR FILM

Brigid Cherry's *Horror* (2009) describes horror as a genre that is by all means particularly hard to describe. Horror, according to her, explores a multitude of themes through a number of contrasting aesthetic and narrative choices inspired by multiple sources. It "is not

¹ The slash (/) symbol placed between both characters' names is used to indicate that the relationship between said characters is romantic or sexual in nature, per the *Archive of Our Own* tagging guidelines.

² Available at: https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Jennifer%20Check*s*Anita%20%22Needy%22%20Lesnicki/works. Last accessed on: 20 feb. 2022.

one genre, but several" (p. 3), and its shifts and trends can be regarded in terms of subgenres, cycles, hybridism, and styles. These are categorized in relation to horror's subject matter, to different time periods which prioritized specific conventions, to different sets of influences, and to studio (Hollywood) trends, respectively. The author's suggestion, then, is that horror be thought of "as an umbrella term encompassing several different subcategories of horror film, all united by their capacity to horrify" (p. 4). In the same vein, Thomas Fahy (2010) asserts that feelings of anxiety and fear are an integral part of horror, and Philip Nickel (2010) proposes that "the intentional elicitation of dread, visceral disgust, fear or startlement in the spectator or reader" (p. 15) as a central element of the genre. The creation of fear in the audience is discussed by Fahy (2010) and Nickel (2010); Cherry (2009), in particular, explores this through both psychoanalytic and cultural lenses.

The main concepts explored by Cherry (2009) in her discussion on fear through the lens of psychoanalysis are the uncanny, the Other, and abjection. The uncanny is described by Cherry as a moment of perception and an emotion that are "experienced when something familiar returns to the conscious mind but is unrecognized," causing cognitive dissonance (p. 103).³ Parallel to it, Cherry describes the idea of the Other as introduced by Lacan, asserting that "the Other is that which is separated off from ourselves by subjectivity (we are only created as subjects in relation to the Other)" (p. 107). She borrows from Wood (2002) his argument regarding the monster as an embodiment of the Other, explaining that the author lists categories of Others in relation to dominant Western ideology: the monster, through this point of view, expresses social fears and anxieties of specific times and cultures (p. 107-108). Following this, Cherry explores Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection, which is "linked to an adverse reaction such as disgust, nausea or horror caused by being confronted with an object that threatens to disrupt the distinction between self and other" (p. 112). Abjection, describes Kristeva (1982), is "what disturbs identity, system, order. [...] A passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it" (p. 4). The dissolution of boundaries which configures abjection comprises, as argued by Cherry (2009), intensely repugnant bodily experiences that warn the trauma of one's death, such as blood, vomit, pus, and other disturbing secretions (p. 112).

³ Cherry (2009) describes the concept of the uncanny based on Freud's original understanding of it, as something that "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003, p. 123). He goes on: "I can say in advance that both these courses [the unheimlich and the heimlich] lead to the same conclusion – that the uncanny is that species of frightening that goes back to what once was well known and had long been familiar" (p. 124).

Regarding the cultural creation and perception of fear, Cherry argues that horror needs to be considered "historically and culturally in order to determine how the horror film reflects and addresses the anxieties of the age" (p. 167). Albeit horror can also be regarded as a genre that explores universal anxieties, it mainly explores specific and particular aspects of a socio-historical cultural moment. Cherry (2009), Nickel (2010) and Fahy (2010) claim that horror is a space of dialogue on contemporary issues; as Cherry puts it, "the ideological subtexts of films are always about the time and place in which they were made, whatever their historical or geographical setting" (p. 169). The creation of victims and monsters in horror similarly depends on socio-historical, cultural context, as it relies on notions of politics and relations of power that aim to establish a form of control, as well as identity and difference, and such notions work as discourses that maintain dominant ideology.

It is relevant, then, to highlight the connection of the ideas of the Other and abjection to those of specific socio-historical cultural moments, in that the imagination of difference (between the subject and the Other, self and the other) is determined by the dominant ideology that pervades it. Cherry focuses on the role of women in horror to exemplify the ways in which different ideological contexts affect their placement as victims or monsters, objects or subjects (p. 107). Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) is the first to explore in depth monstrous women in horror, pointing out "the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity" (p. 2). As previously mentioned, her work draws mainly on Kristeva's idea of abjection, in particular in what pertains to what she calls 'the border' and to the feminine body in order to analyze different types of monstrous women in horror. In relation to the possessed woman, Creed argues that "the possessed or invaded being is a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed" (p. 31) and that it is the possessed woman's "body which becomes a site of struggle" (p. 41), therefore, a site of abjection.

In her discussion about what she calls gynaehorror, Harrington (2018) approaches the role of the woman within the horror genre in dialogue with Creed's seminal *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), with a focus on the transgression of borders as a pivotal element to horror. She argues that horror may be a locus for relishing "in the complexities that arise when boundaries – of taste, of bodies, of reason – are blurred and dismantled" (p. 1). According to the author, many of the boundaries blurred and confused in horror are ones that delineate female experience(s), which works to expose what she notes is the "social, political and philosophical othering of women" (p. 1). This othering, thus, called for the need of a term such as gynaehorror,

which centers the discussion around the specificities of female experiences within the overall context of the genre.

Though I do not wish to expand on the concept of gynae-horror in this particular work, plenty of Harrington's discussion regarding the role women have played in horror fiction through the years is relevant to the present exploration. Her approach to the word "feminine" itself stands out, as she critiques the way it has been historically linked, at least to some degree, to matters of biological essentialism and determinism. Harrington acknowledges such contradiction in order to move past it, suggesting a use that can recognize "the lived experiences of diverse individuals" (p. 2). Likewise, my use of the word feminine throughout this work hopes to avoid flattening "women" into the categories of cisgender individuals, even though plenty of the discussion here relies on a perception of normative female sexuality and gendered experience in—an arguably binary—opposition to normative depictions of male sexuality and experience.

Of particular relevance to this work is also the discussion concerning how the female body has been construed as monstrous in both medical and psychological discourse. It is often depicted as gooey and full of unmanageable secretions that are as mysterious to women as they are to men. This discourse, she argues, quoting Ussher's *Managing the Monstrous-Feminine* (2006) and *The Madness of Women* (2011), sets up the othering of female bodies and experiences as a baseline for the depiction and understanding of women in multiple areas.

Her discussion about the boundaries of the representation of women in various spheres leads her to highlight the existence of a "matrix of hegemonic normativity" that "sets parameters of representation, which also act as constraints" (p. 12). This matrix, argues Harrington, disavows diverse representations of the female body and renders the portrayal of female sexuality as othered and monstrous in ways that may often be contradictory. Harrington's outlook on the figure of the monster, however, is decisive in highlighting the fraught but inevitable visibility of that which is deemed monstrous. The monstrous, she argues, "is disobedient, unruly and disrespectful of borders – although this begs the question, 'who is being disobeyed and whose borders disrespected?'" (p. 28). Again, she posits the configuring of the monster as opposite to the hegemonic matrix, arguing that this problematic positioning may offer radical potentials as the monstrous woman reshapes and reframes herself in order to breach borders and disrupt normative orders.

Likewise, when discussing monstrous women, Wills and Roberts (2017) describe the monstrous body as one that "has been shaped and reshaped to articulate, in its unsettling

deficiencies, the anxieties of its time” (para. 1). They defend, then, in the same vein as Harrington (2018), that horror follows a historical correlation between the body of the woman—in “its apparent uncontrollability signaled through its points of leakage and perforation—[and] the oozing, amorphous, unreliable body of the monster” (para. 2). Their bodies, state the authors, are no less historically monstrous than their appetite; female hunger for either food or sex is as repressed and regulated as their bodies (para. 13). Wills and Roberts analyze the films *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Deadgirl* (2008), and *Jennifer’s Body* (2009)—with the 2009 film being the object of study herein as well—acknowledging how the ‘freeing’ of female and monstrous appetite coincides with the acknowledging of lesbian desire.

Artist Jenny Keane (2010) explores the impervious invisibility of lesbianism enforced by dominant modes of cultural production. She discusses her own cultural production in the form of short films through the point of view offered by scholar Terry Castle (1993), who argues that lesbianism is a known threat to hegemonic modes of living as “Western civilization has for centuries been haunted by a fear of ‘women without men’ - of women indifferent or resistant to male desire” (CASTLE, 1993, p. 5). The answer to such a threat, according to the author, is making it invisible, affording it no space in the collective imagination. This attempt to disavow a figure that nonetheless continues to exist generates a haunting, as cultural production is often haunted by the fear of lesbianism, argue both Castle (1993) and Keane (2010). Keane also quotes Rhona Berentein's (1998) discussion of homosexuality in horror in which the author ascribes to the genre the potential of being “a prime arena for depictions of sexualities and practices that fall outside the purview of patriarchal culture” (BERENSTEIN, 1998, p. 22).

The monstrous lesbian, other than being regarded as an apparition due to her somewhat failed enforced invisibility, has been most commonly seen in horror in the figure of the vampire. Ellis Hanson (1999) describes the monstrosity of lesbian desire as expressed by the hunting, seducing and subsequent eating of other women, and offers to problematize the response lesbian vampire films have gotten from critics and scholars over the years. The most common critique, he argues, is related to fetishization, as most criticism has centered either on the way heterosexual men are able to indulge in the erotic fantasy of lesbian sex often portrayed in horror, or in the negative representation the monstrosity generates for lesbians outside of fiction. Hanson, like his favored scholars, does not much care for the enjoyment of straight men, nor for the issue of negative representation. Instead, his work focuses on how the monstrous lesbian is indeed insidious, indeed hungry and often evil and frequently merciless, and how this radical monstrosity forces the reconfiguration of dominant modes of gazing. Although the author

recognizes the “demonization” of lesbian desire as a repetitive motif in both fiction and real life, similarly to the insistent correlation between lesbian desire and violence, he nonetheless doubles down on the way the lawlessness of the lesbian vampire may represent a particularly queer impulse in the rejection of normatively moralizing narratives. The monstrous appetite of the lesbian vampire in the argument put forth by Hanson is dangerous not only because female sexuality has been historically repressed and othered, but because it is often a hunger that annihilates the male victim while indulging in the conflating of violence and sexuality from women toward women. The lawless, violent lesbian vampire, he argues, may elicit a mode of rebellious identification as well (p. 195). To be a lesbian, as many have argued before him, is to submit to the othering gaze of the many forces of the hegemonic matrix. By being rearranged into a monstrous figure, the lesbian no longer needs to submit, finally able to turn her gaze toward her victims and recontextualize herself.

As seen so far, horror may be a rich genre for the depiction of queer sexuality. I use queer here as an umbrella term that encompasses the word lesbian—although this use is sure to be problematized, as Queer Studies scholars have long since highlighted the caveats of uncritically equating queerness with non-heterosexuality (SULLIVAN, 2003). The studies discussed next are careful not to, as the authors make an effort to posit queer as in *opposite to the normative* rather than just as a term that accounts for a multiplicity of non-heterosexual identities. Having established that, a more comprehensive discussion about queer desire in the horror genre is found in Daniel Humphrey’s *Gender and Sexuality Haunts the Horror Film* (2014), in which he offers a rather far-reaching literature review of the research on gender and sexuality in horror until its publication. His discussion of Carol Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1992) highlights her argument that horror allows male spectators to momentarily rid themselves of misogyny and homophobia that might have otherwise hindered their emotional connection to narratives with female protagonists; her argument is that horror creates space for a queer cross-gender identification that other genres do not (HUMPHREY, 2014, p. 40). Humphrey also explores Benshoff’s *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (1997), pointing out the author’s goal of highlighting queer, non-normative modes of identification with horror. According to Humphrey, Benshoff asserts that “the narrative elements themselves demand the depiction of alien ‘Otherness,’ which is often coded (at the site of production and/or reception) as lesbian, gay, or otherwise queer” (HUMPHREY, 2014, p. 5). He offers a perspective on how queer can be read as a feature of horror since the genre’s very inception. Although Benshoff argues that queer has existed only as monster in horror,

scholars such as Carol Clover (1992) and Wills and Roberts (2017) have observed the frequent dissolution of edges within the genre; that is, the dissolution of fixed roles such as victim, monster, hero, threat, and so on. Queer, then, exists in horror occupying flexible, non-fixed roles in ways that problematize its othering.

2.2 HORRIFICALLY QUEER: SLASH AND GENRE FICTION

Genre fiction is often characterized by a separation from the mundane, argues Sara Gwenllian Jones (2002). Its logic follows a different set of rules, "their fictional geographies are alien, haunted or mythologized landscapes visually inscribed as strange and mysterious; they are full of night and strange beings" (p. 12). Though Jones' argument pertains to cult television, her description of what can allow genre fiction to reach cult status reads similarly to Cherry's (2009) demonstration of horror subgenres such as supernatural horror and monster movies. The author is mainly concerned with how fantasy and the creation of wholly fantastic worlds provide a problematization of heterosexuality, worlds which she argues are consequently already queer (p. 126). Her discussion is relevant to the present research in its dialogue with Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), in which he explores the development of queerness in mass culture. Their shared argument of genres that reject heterosexuality is exemplified in Jones' text with Doty's stating that some conventions of horror, for example, "actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry" (p. 15). The present work is not concerned with arguing that horror texts are already queer, but rather with building upon Jones' arguments to argue that because of their conventions and motifs, horror films may create space in their audiovisual narrative for the imagining of slash fan fiction that complements the source material instead of challenging it.

That slash fan fiction may work as queer literature has grown to become a given within Fan Studies, with the definitions of queer being used in both an oppositional and an identitarian sense. As opposition, queer is "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (HALPERIN, 1995, p. 62), made so because it refuses to abide by institutionalization, or to assimilate itself into dominant discourse. As an identitarian definition, on the other hand, queer works as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual sexual identities. It is important to note, though, that neither use can exist unproblematized—not all slash fan fiction opposes the dominant, as pointed out by Fazekas (2014) in her discussion of racism in slash.

Moreover, the idea of queer as an umbrella term for LGBT+ sexualities might point to an erasure of axes such as race and class, and a foregrounding of sexuality as both a unifying and unified aspect of identity (SULLIVAN, 2003, p. 45). Even with such critical qualifications in mind, slash scholarship nonetheless regards slash as a literature with queer potential.

2.3 ON FEMSLASH FAN FICTION

As seen so far, slash has been used as a term that refers to both the practice of writing stories centered around romantic and/or sexual relationships between characters of the same gender and the stories themselves. Despite this, it has mainly been used to discuss relationships between male characters, as works focusing on male slash remain the majority in both fannish⁴ and academic spaces. Green, Jenkins and Jenkins (1998) offer fan accounts on how “the majority of slash is based on characters who have a preexisting, strongly emotional relationship in the show where they appear” (p. 20), and women are still less likely to have profound, complex relationships with each other on screen. Ng and Russo (2017) argue that the comparatively smaller number of femslash fan fiction might also be the result of internalized misogyny from the fans, who might then find themselves unable to write about women, especially in relation to other female characters. In light of the differences in reasonings and motivations for the writing of male and female slash, it seems clear that slash focused on female characters needs a nomenclature of its own. Femslash, the writing of fan fiction focused on women and their romantic and sexual desires toward one another is marked, according to Ng and Russo (2017), by a synchronicity in the sexualities of the viewers and the characters. According to Ng and Russo, their research suggests, through qualitative scholarship, informal surveys, community self-definition and informal observations that the majority of femslash fans identify as queer women (2017, p. 5). Because of this, femslash “has been paradigmatically tied to a broader concern with the representation of gender and sexuality and its social impact” (2017, p. 1). Similar to slash fan fiction, femslash is regarded as literature that is queer in its connection to sexual politics, in its commitment to criticizing heteronormative media, and in making space for their own queer identities. The discussion so far may suggest that femslash, more so than slash, is concerned with the dialogue with art that offers space for their subjectivities. With this in mind, it seems clear why femslash would engage with horror, and specifically, with the film *Jennifer’s Body* (2009).

⁴ As pertaining to fans or fandom.

3 FILM ANALYSIS

Written by Diablo Cody and directed by Karyn Kusama, *Jennifer's Body* (2009) was deemed “a critical and commercial failure”⁵ when it was first released. The horror comedy follows protagonists Anitta “Needy” Lesnicki (Amanda Seyfried) and Jennifer Check (Megan Fox) as they attempt to cope with Jennifer turning into a man-eating demon after she is mistaken for a virgin and sacrificed by a group of “wannabe rock stars” musicians who can never seem to get the name of their town right. Despite the initial failure—which both Cody and Fox partially fault marketing for⁶—in the thirteen years since its release *Jennifer's Body* has found its public, amassing an obsessive cult following that is not shy in lauding the film as a queer, feminist masterpiece⁷.

Despite the repetitive use of the word “queer” so far, it is not the goal of the following analysis to articulate an argument that proves *Jennifer's Body* is queer beyond a shadow of a doubt. Not only does that not seem particularly relevant here, it also seems like it runs the risk of flattening both the term and the film to an uncomfortable degree. I should stress here, then, that the usage of the term so far has worked to connect the film to the theory surrounding it, which frequently uses queer to encompass many ways of counterhegemonic representations. As previously argued, if the identitary definition of the word queer has been much problematized for its favoring of sexual identity as a more relevant axis in relation to others such as race, class, etcetera. (SULLIVAN, 2003), the oppositional use should be similarly problematized with the recognition that even the most subversive-seeming cultural objects are still constrained by hegemony, and a discussion around queer cinema must acknowledge this contradiction.

Still, the film has been deemed a queer piece of horror fiction for its explicit depiction of lesbian desire and the complicated relationship between female friendship and homoeroticism, which appear intertwined with horrific elements such as demonic possessions,

⁵ Further discussion available at <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/09/megan-fox-jennifers-body-feminist-1234589224/>.

⁶ Read more on <https://www.etonline.com/megan-fox-and-diablo-cody-interview-each-other-for-jennifers-body-10-year-anniversary-exclusive>.

⁷ Available at <https://www.thelily.com/jennifers-body-has-become-a-hallmark-of-queer-horror-these-fans-explain-why/>.

virgin sacrifices, and no small amount of blood and exposed guts. The scenes discussed next are all illustrative of horror motifs such as these, as well as of the homoerotic relationship between Needy and Jennifer.

3.1 THE MIDDLE



Figure 1 – Extreme close-up shot of Jennifer Check biting her hair (00:00:49)

The iconic opening scene which features Jennifer lying in her bed watching old fitness programs in short shorts and leg warmers feels like one straight out of a classic slasher movie. A young, beautiful woman is watched by an invisible threat which, unbeknownst to her, looms closer and closer. Rather than lean into this convention, however, *Jennifer's Body* (2009) subverts it by preceding it with extreme close-up shots of Jennifer picking at scabs and of her bloodied teeth biting her hair. Unlike the ideal horror heroine whom the viewer, like the killer, may watch in voyeuristic pleasure, Jennifer does not look beautiful, nor does she look particularly sexy. The focus on her chapped lips and dull, textured skin as she bites her own oily hair strands is far more unsettling than it is attractive, and the film leans into this sense of mundane decay to configure Jennifer as something obviously Other than the ideal victim. We are left to wonder who would dare disturb a creature as sad-seeming as her, only to get a glimpse of understanding as the scene cuts to Needy standing right outside her window. Although

obviously important plot-wise, the makings of this scene also aid in establishing the film's sense of humor, as Needy is shown in a full stereotypical serial killer get up.



Figure 2 – Needy standing outside of Jennifer’s window (00:01:28)

Having shown Needy looming outside of Jennifer’s window, the film takes us forward in time to her stuck in a psychiatry ward, wearing jail-orange scrubs that allow us to conjecture what must have followed the previous scene. The cold color palette of this scene comprises blues and greens which emphasize the simultaneous turbulence and detachment of Needy’s state of mind—as discussed by Navarro (2019), cold color palettes are often used in horror to establish an uneasy mood (para. 2). The play on light and shadow that results in Needy's tumultuous expression framed by darkness installs a foreboding eeriness that likewise sets the tone of what is to come next. On the background, Low Shoulder's “Through the Trees”—which echoes in annoying repetition throughout the film as the fictional band rises to success after sacrificing Jennifer in a particularly harrowing sequence—and its soft rock melody visibly rattle Needy and create a sense of mystery due to the combination of the romantic wallowing in the lyrics and Needy's obvious state of mental disarray. The melancholic, gloomy tension entrenched in the scene warns for a film that approaches feelings of grief and anxiety, while the hints of excessive violence that precede it may fulfill and confound the expectations of horror fans and casual viewers respectively.



Figure 3 – Needy sitting in solitary confinement after assaulting a doctor while “Through the Trees” plays in the background (00:04:35)

3.2 THE BEGINNING

Unlike the film as a whole, the story itself does not begin in too melancholic a tone. After an opening sequence that engenders a set of narrative and stylistic expectations, the film goes back in time to the start of Needy and Jennifer's downfall.



Figure 4 – Jennifer waving at Needy while “I’m Not Gonna Teach Your Boyfriend How to Dance With You” plays in the background (00:06:05)



Figure 5 – Needy smiling back at Jennifer from the bleachers (00:06:08)

"You are the girl that I've been dreaming of ever since I was a little girl," sings Black Kids as Needy and Jennifer grin and wave at each other, unselfconscious of their mutual giddiness as Jennifer performs her cheerleading routine and Needy watches her from the

bleachers. The song's yearning chorus is preceded by Needy's description of her and Jennifer's relationship, a life-long friendship that defies high school clique cliches because, according to Needy, "sandbox love never dies" (00:06:06). Their display of mutual fondness, however, is interrupted by a classmate who mocks Needy's excited waving and tells her she is "totally lesbian" (00:06:14). Needy's defensive response to the comment – "she's my best friend" – highlights the conflict between the multiple roles Needy and Jennifer play in each other's lives.

These roles are made complicated by Jennifer's competitiveness with both Needy and her good-natured boyfriend Chip. Although Jennifer contends with Needy for the attention of hotter, more interesting boys, the more curious aspect of this contest is that she seems to do it precisely so she can have Needy for herself, as made apparent by her obsession with being Needy's priority throughout the film. This odd crossroads between desire and competitiveness is highlighted by one of the more revealing shots in the first third of the film: in the concert that turns out to be the catalyst to Needy and Jennifer's demonic malediction, Needy's focus appears to be solely on Jennifer, with a collection of medium shots that allow the viewer to notice her repetitive glances at Jennifer along with her body language. As illustrated by the close-up shot above, Jennifer's enthrallment with the song leads her to taking Needy's hand in hers, and we watch closely as the close-up framing emphasizes the many facial expressions of Needy as she realizes Jennifer's focus is on the lead singer rather than on her, despite the casual intimacy of their joined hands.



Figure 6 – Close shot of Needy watching Jennifer watch the band's vocalist (00:16:11)



Figure 7 – Needy letting go of Jennifer’s hand (00:16:13)

This second shot, along with many others throughout the film which linger on the touching of hands and lips, foregrounds their bodies as expressive of their repressed and confused desire for one another. The often mean articulation of their craving for each other is interspersed with a looming sense of resentment that warns of horrific events. Needy’s growing bitterness is only interrupted by the start of a deathly fire that kills most of the surrounding characters in this setting, an event which forces her to move past the immediacy of her disappointment to rescue Jennifer from the fire, even if she cannot rescue her from what comes next.

The depiction of gruesome, bone-crunching death featured in the fire sequence marks the starting point of the many horrors to be experienced by the protagonists. We follow Needy as she goes home to a dark, empty home, and watch with growing apprehension as the film follows a rather formulaic horror sequence of a stranger in the house. The cold color palette returns to create a sense of tension, and shadow is used to set up a feeling of impending catastrophe along with a haunting, whistling soundtrack and alternating long and close-up shots that forebode a jump scare.



Figure 8 – Needy opening the door while shifting shadows appear behind her (00:21:22)



Figure 9 – Close-up shot of Needy's hand opening the basement door (00:22:04)

When it does come, the jump scare reveals Jennifer in a mangled, terrifying state. Here I return to Kristeva's notion of abjection as a horror element, in order to explore how Jennifer's body becomes a site of struggle as it rearranges itself to fight its dissolution.



Figure 10 – Jennifer’s haunted face after projectile vomiting black goo all over Needy and her kitchen (00:24:06)

Although at this point in the film Needy is not yet aware of what has happened to Jennifer, we—the viewers—easily recognize the black oil-like goo dripping past Jennifer’s open mouth and the deranged, empty look in her eyes as signs of a body possessed. The blood drenching her clothes, hair and face violently evoke the hysteria of death, rearranging the order of the living as Needy is forced to confront the view of Jennifer’s revolting body. As Kristeva (1982) describes it, “the time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth” (p. 9). Likewise, this sequence, in which Jennifer and Needy face the first coalescing between Jennifer and a strange other that imposes its hunger and violence upon her, stretches on in stuttering gasps of nausea and alertness as both characters seem repulsed and shocked by her gory excretions.

The notion of the uncanny comes into play here as well, although less in Jennifer’s body than in her behavior toward Needy when she shoves her into the wall, a display of untamed violence which is followed by Jennifer’s hungry groping of Needy’s body—another instance in which their hands disclose their yearning; a closeness which we later find is known to both of them but never in ways so unabashed and out of control. This familiar repressed craving returns, like Jennifer herself, fraught and terrifying, confusing the boundaries of their usual dynamic.



Figure 11 – Jennifer pressing Needy against the wall with her hands on Needy’s breast (00:24:48)

Following this sequence, the film goes back in time to feature yet another close-up shot that further ascribes meaning to their hands and mouths as the channels through which their closeness is actualized.



Figure 12 – Needy and Jennifer as kids, with Needy holding Jennifer’s hand after she prickles herself with a pin (00:26:12)

The flashback of Needy and Jennifer as children playing in a sandbox reaffirms what the viewer has seen of their dynamic until then: Needy is given the ugly doll to play with, while Jennifer gets to be the pretty one, a motif that has followed them into adolescence and that complicates their relationship as it places them in established roles they are each expected to maintain in order to keep their status as is. Nonetheless, despite Jennifer's apparent selfishness, childhood Needy still sucks the blood off of Jennifer's palm without second thought, a kid-like impulse that seems to lack forethought regarding their interdependence but that is also repeated as they grow older and the film flashes forward again. The promise to always keep Jennifer's secrets (00:26:21) remains true as well as the murders begin, and as her victims become more and more entwined with Needy in a complicated interplay of sex and death. After her first conscious murder, in which Jennifer weaponizes her beauty and ostentatious sexuality against teenage boys who cannot help but fall victim to the thrill of her attention, Jennifer's man-eating relies on the very thing that turned her existence into an abject one, constantly occupying the liminal space between life and death, beauty and decay, violence and sex. With how Jennifer's survival must depend on a game of seduction that reveals her regard of men as means to an end both before and after her transformation, the film makes an interesting point concerning the trap of female sexuality; it both saves and condemns her, keeping her from death but cursing her with a monstrous existence which simultaneously relishes on and constrains her sexual freedom as her sexuality no longer exists in an autotelic manner. The play between Jennifer's murderous hunger and her craving for her best friend becomes clearer as the film goes on and Jennifer's choice of victims is revealed as a way to connect with Needy through the ravishing of people who, like Jennifer herself, desire her. A double-edged expression of both petty cruelty and enthralled hunger as she isolates Needy more and more, trapping her to Jennifer just as Jennifer is trapped to her gory survival.



Figure 13 – Jennifer feasting on Needy’s friend after killing him (00:55:22)

The full effect of their closeness is realized, in fact, in the interspersing between shots of Needy’s awkward first sexual experience with her boyfriend Chip and Jennifer’s murder of a friend of Needy’s. Their childhood blood bond which so far in the film had manifested only through a supernatural awareness of one another drags Needy along for the violence and brutality of Jennifer’s appetite in ways that force the interweaving of such viciousness with her own sexuality. Needy’s relationship to hunger in the film is also of interest here; despite explicit sexual interactions between her and Chip, none of the scenes are ever construed as erotic through framing or sound, and while the camera lingers on close-up shots of Chip’s hands—and here I repeat how the close-up shots of hands and lips are used throughout to embody the experience and flow of desire—it does not linger on Needy’s. The blatant dryness of their sexual interaction is next juxtaposed with her interaction with Jennifer, which relies on the absence of background sounds and foregrounds the rustling of their bodies touching to create a sense of anticipation and isolation from the outside world.



Figure 14 – Extreme close-up shot of Needy and Jennifer’s lips as they inch closer and closer (00:58:56)

Made up of numerous extreme close-up shots focused on their hands, lips and tongues, the scene creates an atmosphere of discovery as well, as it begins with Needy confused and surprised until she gives in to Jennifer. That this scene feels secluded and insulated in comparison to the rest of the film is relevant because its construction mirrors the interaction itself, which is revealed to have happened before but only in the private confines of their bedrooms, tucked away from ordinary social life. An expression of curiosity and appetite of which the requirement was a refusal that it was even happening in the first place, shrouded in pretenses that could align them closer to normative heterosexuality, a practice for the execution of the role they would be forced to play and unveiled by Jennifer saying they could “play boyfriend and girlfriend” (01:08:37) like they used to. For Needy and Jennifer, the actualization of their mutual desire is allowed to happen without the looming shadow of straight motivation only once they have both already been othered and made monstrous by Jennifer's killings. Although the scene is not entirely without pretense—as Jennifer is leveraging their mutual hunger for one another as a way of keeping Needy on her side—it relies on Jennifer and Needy finally confronting the underlying nature of their relationship, admitting to the secret that has shaped the nuances of their dynamic throughout the film.

Their revealing interaction in the aforementioned scene is this time contrasted with the unveiling of what caused Jennifer’s transformation. The scene, which centers Jennifer alone in

a van with multiple men, hints at what perhaps in any other movie the viewer would have recognized as an impending rape scene, but the expectations are flipped because the horror to unfold depends on notions of purity and virginity.



Figure 15 – Jennifer screaming as she realizes she is about to repeatedly stabbed to death as a sacrifice
(01:04:21)

A sacrificial victim who is murdered but does not die, Jennifer survives the trauma of death only because she is not virginal. The viewer is thus forced to grapple with the moral ramifications of her killings after she herself is subjected through the brutality of murder. It is perhaps not surprising that Needy can sympathize but not forgive, and it is her rejection of Jennifer's gruesome existence that propels the film toward its climax.

3.3 THE ENDING

The film's climax is propelled by the rupture of Needy and Jennifer's relationship once Needy rejects Jennifer and her murderous spree. Once again highlighting how *Jennifer's Body's* moving force is the contradictory dynamic between Needy and Jennifer, Needy's rejection sends Jennifer toward her most obviously revealing victim; by manipulating, kissing and murdering Chip, Jennifer punishes Needy for failing to choose her. The showdown between them unveils the numerous intersecting conflicts of their dynamic, shedding light into their mutual

resentment and the strain caused by the unfulfilled expectations born out of their repressed, misunderstood desire and the pressure put on female friendships by outer constraints.



Figure 16 – Jennifer saying she “goes both ways” after threatening to murder and eat Needy (01:26:32)

While Chip's murder ends up leading Needy to kill Jennifer, this decision is not uncomplicated; in no way is Jennifer shown to be the evil to be defeated—she is found in her bedroom bored and decaying between meals when Needy reaches her. Though they are still mad at each other and Needy is heartbroken for Chip, she is also heartbroken for Jennifer, a feeling expressed by the slow-motion close-up shots of their heart-shaped friendship necklace flying away stained with blood after Needy rips it off of Jennifer, metaphorically severing their bond before she stabs her in the chest and kills her.



Figure 17 – Needy and Jennifer’s bloodied friendship necklace falling to the floor (01:31:33)

As the film circles back to its starting frames and we watch as Needy escapes and goes on to take revenge on the group that sacrificed Jennifer in the first place, it seems as though the tragedy of the film is that their relationship was too complicated for either of them to ever fully choose each other.

4 JENNIFER’S BODY (2009) FEMSLASH: UNTANGLING FEMALE-CENTERED CONFLICT

As previously discussed, the selected body of work to be discussed here consists of femslash fan fiction written about the film *Jennifer’s Body* (2009); more specifically, about romantic and/or sexual relationships between protagonists Jennifer Check and Anitta “Needy” Lesnicki. Although the selected work is discussed as a collective, their titles are, in order: “A Teenage Girl’s Guide To Not Being Possessed By A Demon”⁸; “Needy’s Body”⁹; “I’m Your Baby Tonight”¹⁰; “A Girl’s Guide to Open Heart Surgery”¹¹; “She Walks on Me”¹², “honey,

⁸ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/298413>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

⁹ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/20859491>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/263019>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹¹ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/221329>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹² Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/10912560>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

don't feed me"¹³; "The Car Won't Start"¹⁴; "lesbian much"¹⁵; "Love on the Run"¹⁶; and "Like We Used to Do"¹⁷. In a congruent manner to the film itself, these all feature mature content, although more focus on portraying sexual interactions than they do violence.

As a whole, the selected fan fiction relies on suppressing some of the moral and personal conflicts, which are repeatedly foregrounded in the film, in order to allow for easy resolutions. Still, it does not necessarily erase much else of the narrative, accounting and often featuring the violence and brutality both Jennifer and her victims are subjected to in the film. The difference is that whereas in the film the violence toward Jennifer's victims cannot be understood or justified, fan fiction easily moves past the concern with the men she victimizes, mirroring the character's canonical attitude and disavowing the place of men in the narrative as anything other than disposable. The characterizations change as well, with Needy becoming more lenient in her morals while Jennifer's harshness is dulled considerably, suggesting that if femslash suppresses the arguable motives behind each of the characters' constructions then it may stand to reason that the consequences would be suppressed as well.

Like the film, the selected femslash revolves around their relationship, though lingering less on the complications between them and on the assumptions the film may seem to argue are inherent to female and teenage friendships in general, and more on the homoeroticism between them. The mature and often explicit content featured in the body of work is concerned with depicting lesbian sexual experience and discovery—like the movie itself, it repeatedly lends protagonism to the imagery of hands and lips as the vessels through which lesbian desire is expressed. Even in the stories which feature descriptions of violence and gore—such as "Needy's Body" and "honey, don't feed me"—though, hands and the mouth are still prominent motifs. The focus on specific body parts points both to a possible mirroring of the film and to a repetition of the writing style that is argued to be characteristic of fan fiction (COPPA, 2014), which heavily relies on descriptions of physical bodies in relation to the space around them, mimicking a screenplay more so than a typical novel due to the fact that the majority of media fandom is organized around cinema and television.

¹³ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/18465907>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹⁴ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/963579>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹⁵ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/1173405>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹⁶ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/263015/chapters/412500>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

¹⁷ Available at: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/23251786>. Last accessed on: 22 feb. 2022.

Another common thread between film and femslash is that the selected femslash stories, like the film, provide insights into Needy's perspective, but not into Jennifer's. While in the film Jennifer's desires are made visible to the viewer—but not to Needy—through framing, sound, and specific acting choices, in the stories they are visible to the reader because they are first visible to Needy. Because plenty of the conflict in the film stems from the repressed and confusing relationship between the protagonists, the dissolution of this particular layer in the stories results in the dissolution of conflict as well.

These differences are not surprising – despite being inspired by a common source text, each individual work of fan fiction is also its own piece, comprising its own plot and writing style. The most relevant difference delineated in the study of fan fiction is not one of form, but rather one of ideology. The presumed ideological asymmetry between mass media creator and slash writer has been foundational for the scholarship in the field since its very inception, as Jenkins' (1992) understanding of fannish activity heavily relies on Stuart Hall's (2007) encoding and decoding model; this model points to the existence of two determining moments in process of communication, one that happens in the creator's end in the encoding of the message, and another in the audience's end in the decoding of the message. Both moments, he argues, are informed, among other things, by frameworks of knowledge (p. 388). The active role of the audience presumed in the argument that reception is also a determining moment of meaning-making in the process of media consumption has grown to be taken as a given since the publication of Hall's work, and plenty of scholarship in the intersection between Cultural and Queer Studies has focused on how heterosexuality—or heteronormativity—works as a dominant ideological framework for mass cultural production. Because it centers on depictions of homosexual interactions, slash fan fiction is considered to exist in opposition to its source texts, which are often mass media objects and thus believed to be informed and constrained by heteronormativity.

Although this is often the case, the discussion so far suggests that the relationship between *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and the femslash fan fiction inspired by it cannot be explained in such simple terms. As showcased until this point, the explicit depiction of lesbian sex featured in the selected fan fiction is not at odds with the film; instead, even its repetitive focus on how lesbian hunger is expressed through hands and through the mouth works as an extension of the film's own style. *Jennifer's Body* (2009) relies on the exploration of lesbian desire and the contradictions which arise from its repression for the construction of its conventional horror

narrative, and such a depiction must complicate the film's placement in relation to a presumed heterosexual ideological framework.

5 FINAL REMARKS

Throughout this work, I have attempted to illustrate how the film *Jennifer's Body* (2009) employs horror motifs as well as depictions which undermine heterosexuality. These may work in tandem with one another, as argued by the authors I have borrowed from, who posit that horror as a genre often thrives in the liminal space between normativity and subversion (CHERRY, 2009; HARRINGTON, 2018). The intertwining of horror elements with the depiction of lesbian desire makes *Jennifer's Body* a prime locus of discussion on how horror can lend itself to the writing of slash fan fiction, allowing me to establish a connection between the subversive potentials of horror and Jones's argument that certain genre conventions—most frequently found in works of fantasy but, as I have argued, also found in horror—rely on the problematization of the heteronormative matrix and thus relate to the writing of slash fan fiction in more complicated ways than previously believed by most of slash scholarship. Although slash writing is marked by an asymmetrical relationship between the ideological frameworks of the fan fiction writers and the source text (JENKINS, 1992), my goal with this work has been to illustrate how that may not be the case for *Jennifer's Body* (2009) slash, much more because of the framework informing the production of the film than due to the framework informing the writing of the fan fiction.

I expect that this conclusion may bring forth a number of questions, perhaps the first of which being: if slash is characterized by most of the foundational scholarship as ideologically asymmetrical from the source text, and *Jennifer's Body* (2009) slash is not, how is it slash? The answer is that, as pointed out by Jenkins (1992), slash—and most of fan studies—scholarship works descriptively rather than prescriptively, thus the description of new modes of interaction between fan production and source text contributes to a wider range of understandings regarding what slash may be and what may be slash. This is also a matter of nomenclature and popular use: although the term slash is still more often used by both fans and scholars to refer to homoerotic fan fiction written about canonically straight male characters, the term femslash is used to refer to homoerotic fan fiction written about female characters be them canonically straight or not. This use is illustrated by volume 24 of the *Transformative Works and Cultures*

journal (RUSSO; NG, 2017) in which art created about canonical lesbian pairings from shows such as ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005) and The CW's *The 100* (2014) is considered femslash by both fans and scholars, for example.

Another point I wish to address are my arguments concerning how the lesbianism in *Jennifer's Body* (2009) is configured in its audiovisual narrative and style rather than solely in the interpretive field of the viewer. While arguing that this may be the case, it is not my point that the depiction of lesbian desire makes the film a queer piece. Nor is it relevant to this work whether the film can or should be considered queer by whichever standards one chooses. This work has been a constant negotiation regarding the use of "queer" as a descriptor; both horror and slash scholarship seem fond of the term, using it both to refer to non-heterosexual identities and to characterize cultural objects and modes of organization which either feature or make space for non-heterosexuality. Although the use of "queer" as an umbrella term to encompass all LGBTQIA+ identities has been widely criticized for flattening identity politics in often racist, classist ways (SULLIVAN, 2003, p. 45), the use of "queer" as "oppositional" has not faced critique as frequently, despite how the equating of depictions of non-heterosexuality to counterhegemonic efforts seems to work for hegemony much more than it does against it. With this in mind, I have tried my best to reach for the word *lesbian* as a descriptor throughout my analysis of *Jennifer's Body* and related fan fiction, using it to describe not the characters themselves in terms of sexual identity, but rather the way they relate to one another. While it is argued throughout that the depiction of lesbian sexuality works in opposition to heteronormativity, I do not wish to argue that this opposition likewise represents a challenge to hegemonic modes of being and creating, nor do I hope to position heteronormativity as the only axis of hegemony, despite it remaining at the center of my work here.

What I hope to have accomplished so far is the placing of femslash fan fiction as a relevant object of study, highlighting, through a multidisciplinary view, that it allows for multiple research possibilities. Seeing as research on slash fan fiction remains comparatively small in Brazil, it was also the goal of this work to bring this topic into the fold at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), where scholarship on fan fiction has been scarce. While the focus on horror as a genre which may have subversive potentials due to its reliance on the shattering of regular order, and on slash fan fiction as writing that rejects heterosexuality suggests an interest in further exploring radical potentials, I leave this work proposing just the opposite: that future research commits to complicating the relationship

between the potential of art and media as political, radical tools and the constraints of hegemonic modes of being and creating. This dynamic reconfiguring should allow for the development of critical research which revolves around contemporary mass media objects and the fannish production surrounding them not in order to prove their worth based on measurements of quality that set up progressiveness as the highest standard, but rather to acknowledge their prominence and role in the field of cultural meaning-making with the goal of exploring their ever-adapting relationship to the dominant order.

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