## JUMP CUT A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

## Ed Gein and the figure of the transgendered serial killer

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"In the world of Krafft-Ebing, there is no such thing as benign sexual variation. Everyone who departs from reproductive, monogamous, male-dominant heterosexuality is described as criminally insane." [1][open notes in new window]

In assembling video clips of transgender[2] bodies to give a presentation in a course on Transgender History, Identity and Politics, I observed that media images of male transvestites often fall into one of two categories. First, largely heterosexual male characters in film cross-dress as a means to gain access to privileges, material goods or relationships that they otherwise lack. SOME LIKE IT HOT,[3] TOOTSIE, [4] BOSOM BUDDIES,[5] and MRS. DOUBTFIRE[6] all follow this paradigm. In these representations of transvestism, the male protagonist's heterosexuality is not in question. Rather, the guise of femininity ultimately promotes both his "masculine power" and his heterosexuality,[7] and the joke of the film is on another male character who cannot read the protagonist's "true" nature.

The second version of transvestism in contemporary media also involves discovery about the "truth" of a character's body. Such revelation, however, is not comic but horrific. Here the guise of femininity does not hide or empower a clever heterosexual man but reveals a monstrous gender- and sexual-deviant: a man in "gender distress." If a character has a transgender body, this detail usually is tied to some dark and horrible secret in the narrative, and the revelation about the "truth" of the body" — that a woman has a penis or a man is a transvestite/ transsexual — typically is revealed simultaneously with the revelation of another "secret" — that the person is a killer. Indeed, monstrosity or deviance almost exclusively mark images of transgender individuals, allowing for little if any sympathy from spectators.[9]

A case in point is Jonathan Demme's 1991 academy award-winning film, THE

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS.[10] The movie and the 1988 novel[11] by the same name posit that there are good psychopathic killers and bad psychopathic killers; some are seductive, attractive and therefore, helpful, and others merely monstrous. The story revolves around a young FBI-trainee, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), the protégé of an older, male authority figure, Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn).

Part of the grooming process requires that Starling meet and interview the jailed serial killer Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins). Both Lecter and Crawford act as mentors to Starling in her quest to discover the identity of an unknown killer, Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), who kidnaps, imprisons and skins his female victims.

On the visual register, the film makes clear that virtually all male characters in the film menace, patronize, grope and sexualize Starlin. Wherever she goes, criminals, law officers, and fellow FBI trainees gaze at and harass her. Only Hannibal Lecter, convicted serial killer, treats Clarke with a modicum of respect. In this regard, he is, perhaps, the most sympathetic male character present in the film[12] despite the fact that he is also a killer.[13]

In contrast, the film presents the other serial killer as deviant, as monstrously horrific. Buffalo Bill is coded as hideously queer, a gay man who lisps and cavorts around his dungeon basement, carrying a fluffy poodle named Precious. In the pivotal scene that reveals his motivation for skinning his victims, the camera lingers on visual details which mark his body and his person as aberrant. He has a pierced nipple and several tattoos; he painstakingly applies eyeshadow and lipstick narcissistically intoning, "I'd fuck me." At the penultimate moment, he dons a wig fashioned out of the scalp of one of his victims, tucks his penis between his legs and poses for the camera: he is both killer and would-be transsexual,[14] characterized by the most enduring stereotypes about gay men. Bill's effeminacy marks him as grotesquely murderous.

The identity of the active serial killer in SILENCE[15] not at issue (we know that Bill/Ted Levine is the killer as soon as he kidnaps his last victim). The main narrative revelation, then, hinges on showing both Bill's motivation for killing (he wants to fashion a "woman suit") and the details of his transgendered body. The narrative suggests that he is monstrous not so much through his killing (after all, Lecter kills, too), but because he is a man who sews, wears makeup and desires a sex change operation. In this sense, then, the terms monster and transsexual collapse; the latter becomes a privileged signifier for the former.

Ironically, Lecter, too, is associated with the accouterments of femininity. He pays close attention to the clothing of both Starling and the final victim's mother, Senator Martin, and correctly identifies Starling's perfume as L'Air du Temps. Lecter's concern with things feminine, however, does not mark him as feminine. Instead, he is somehow genteel, a gentleman and a connoisseur. Minus Bill's transsexual desire, tattoos, lisp and poodle, Lecter stands as heterosexual, and as such, fully masculine." In HANNIBAL, the sequel to SILENCE, Lecter further "straightens out" through his romantic feelings for Clarice.[16]

Despite this rampant trans- and homophobia, the majority of the mainstream press" had nothing but praise for director Jonathan Demme and the cast of SILENCE. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, the film won five academy awards and was hailed as a "tour de force," which avoided "sensationalism,"[18] wasn't "offensive";[19] a "delicious...suspense thriller";[20] an "outstanding film";[21] and the "perfect" serial killer movie.[22] Ted Levine's performance as Bill was lauded as "spectacular."[23] One reviewer from a small press objected to Demme's "cashing in on the homophobia market,"[24] and a little over a year later Christopher Sharrett of *USA Today* chided Hollywood for its homophobia,[25] but by and large, the mainstream media[26] and a majority of the public viewed the portrayal of Buffalo Bill as business as usual, which in a manner of speaking, it was.[27]

Harris and Demme are not the first or the last to exploit the association of monster and transsexual/transvestite; their representations have merely been the most visible and lucrative. An earlier entry into this transphobic genre, Brian DePalma's DREsSED TO KILL,[28] also featured a murderous transsexual unmasked as a transsexual and a killer in the same critical scene. The most recent film in this cinematic tradition, Neil Jordan's IN DREAMS, was released in January of 1999, [29] a phenomenon which indicates that the association persists.

In fact, the figure of the transgender psychopath in cinema dates back to Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film, PSYCHO.[30] Hitchcock's groundbreaking film was by most accounts the first "slasher" film in U.S. cinema. Hitchcock cannily insisted that theaters refuse viewers admittance after the film had started, [31] admonishing spectators not to give away the. "secret" of the film."[32] One effect of this strategy was that many viewers did indeed keep the "secret"[33] from subsequent spectators," a phenomenon later exploited by another film involving a transgender character, THE CRYING GAME.[34]

PSYCHO presents the story of repressed, effeminate Norman Bates, who never successfully differentiates his personality from that of his mother; he kills women who arouse his "mother's" jealousy, The plot revolves around the murder of Marion Crane,[35] a woman who unfortunately stops at the wrong motel. The film does not reveal Norman's identity as murderer and cross-dresser until the denouement, when Marion's boyfriend, Sam, and sister, Lila, discover that Norman is psychotic and wears a dress. This narrative structure serves to reinforce the association between murderer/ psychopath and transvestite: Norman is not a transvestite who happens to be a killerhe is a transvestite killer who kills precisely because he is a gender- and sexual-deviant.

In addition to these mainstream films, a series of "B" movies from the 1970s and 1980s follow a similar narrative trajectory: a character is revealed to be

transgendered and murderous in the same pivotal scene, a filmic trope which capitalizes on the supposed "secret" of transsexuals, transvestites and cinematic murderers. These include:

- DEADLY BLESSING[36] which features a possibly intersexed individual who dresses as a woman but seems to have predominantly male physical characteristics and exhibits psychotic behavior;
- No WAY TO TREAT A LADY[37] a story about a serial killer who was psychologically abused by his mother and kills women to get revenge upon her. The killer is most likely based on William Hierans (The Lipstick Killer), [38] yet the narrative foregrounds cross-dressing as part of the murderer's technique, despite the fact that Hierans did not cross-dress;
- DERANGED featuring a lonely farmer whose cross-dressing involves actual female body parts;
- HOMICIDAL[40] which features Jean Arless as a transvestite killer of indeterminate gender;
- THREE ON A MEATHOOK[41] a film about a cannibalistic madman who cross-dresses;
- and RELENTLESS 3,[42] a film that features a serial killer who scalps his victims, sends pieces of their tattooed skin to the police, and is revealed to dress in women's clothing (in particular in lingerie).

All of these films owe a debt to a real-life figure, Ed Gein, whom Robert Bloch fictionalized in his novel, *Psycho*.[43] In the "real-life" case, the shy lonely boy/man, Norman, was actually a fifty-something farmer who lacked social skills, money and family connection. He had, by most accounts, an inordinately close relationship with his mother and remained unmarried after her death in 1945. In December of 1957, the disappearance of a local business owner, Bernice Worden, from her hardware store on the opening day of deer season led the county sheriff to Ed Gein's primitive farmhouse. The sheriff, peering through a window, discovered Weorden's naked, decapitated body, stung up by the heels and dressed out like a deer. The subsequent search of the grounds revealed a number of disturbing atifacts.[44] Gein would eventually be tried for the murders of two women; the rest of the body parts were apparently obtained from graves he had robbed. The common consensus was that Gein sought out women who bore a resemblance to his dead mother. Needless to say, these revelations stunned the community.

Within just a few days the national press descended on Plainfield, Wisconsin, and newspaper and magazine accounts of Gein, his crimes and the possible motivations for his deviancy, abounded. Robert Block, who was living in Wisconsin at the time of Gein's arrest and original competency trial, quickly wrote a novel based loosely on Gein's crimes.[45] Bloch took a number of liberties with the case, and many other reports were wildly inaccurate.[46] Even now it is difficult to sift fact from fiction.[47] What seems very clear, however, is that Gein and the initial fictionalization of his case in the figure of Norman Bates in PSYCHO function as larger cultural symbols which reflect contemporary concerns about masculinity, motherhood and sexual deviance. Thus, it is the figure of Gein and his fictional counterpart, Norman Bates, who have captured the imagination of filmmakers and novelists rather than other contemporary serial killers.[48] In reality, however, the two figures — Gein and Bates-are dissimilar, although they have become, if not synonymous, at least analogous in the recent past.[49] No other killer besides Gein seems to garner as much fascination.[50]

The impetus for my project, then, is to understand where this association originated and why it persists. My research on the topic initially took me to web sites in praise of Buffalo Bill and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (both of author Harris and the film). Almost all the fan sites, personal web sites as opposed to Orion's commercial site, have links to a number of web pages on Ed Gein and vice versa. About two dozen web sites all link to each other, recycle the same "facts" about Ed, and discuss the various cinematic representations of his crimes. Gein has also inspired a "Power Society,"[51] a fan club," a variety of memorabilia and two bands: *Ed Gein's Sex Change* and *Ed Gein's Car*. The time and attention paid to Gein and his crimes are quite astounding.[53]

Interesting and enlightening in both the reportage of Gein's crimes and the fictionalized accounts about him are the particular elements which these accounts highlight or repeat. Specifically, the accounts cannot offer much information to support the conclusion that Gein was a transgendered individual or gay; indeed, he was quite clearly interested in women even if none returned this interest. Nor are most transgendered persons psychopathic or murderers.[54] In fact, most serial killers are heterosexual men whose victims are women or children.[55] In all of my extensive reading on mass murderers, serial killers and sexual psychopaths, I have yet to come across a report of an actual transvestite or transsexual psychopath. Yet the cultural association persists[56] — to the detriment of differently-gendered people everywhere.

In particular, the websites devoted to an analysis of Gein and his connection to Norman Bates, Buffalo Bill or Leatherface (a character in ThE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE), all focus on three other topics: the origins of Gein's psychopathology, which is attributed to his mother; the particulars of his gender deviance or supposed desire to be a woman; and the nature of his crimes. The sites frequently illustrate this last concern with a picture of Bernice Worden's decapitated body hanging from the rafters. Her corpse somehow serves as "proof" of Gein's gender deviance. Specifically, Gein is now characterized as a "transvestite,"[57] as someone with "a gender identity disorder"[58] and in cinematic representations as effete if not gay. *Life* magazine, which ran an 8-page pictorial sporting the headline "House of Horror Stuns the Nation" two weeks after Gein's arrest, announced that Gein "wished he were a woman."[59] This pronouncement is surprising, given that at this point in time Gein had yet to be examined by a psychiatrist (his psychiatric evaluations would begin on December 9th),[60] and those closest to him, the townspeople of Plainfield, population[62], never had any indication that Eddie longed for a sex-change. The local crime lab director, Charles Wilson, said of this proclamation, "It's news to me."[61]

Harold Schechter, author of *Deviant: The Shocking True Story of Ed Gein, the Original Psycho*,[62] chronicles how an "unidentified investigator" supplied the *Milwaukee Journal* with information on Gein. The November 21st issue of the *Journal* ran a story claiming that Gein's "unnatural attachment" to his mother caused an "Oedipus Complex" that resulted in Ed wishing

"he had been a woman instead of a man...[and wondering] whether it would be possible to change his sex. He considered inquiring about an operation to change into a woman and even thought of trying the operation upon himself, but did nothing about such plans."[63]

The obvious inconsistencies in this Freudian account are glossed over by the *Journal* and by Dr. Edward Kelleher,[64] a Chicago psychiatrist who offered a long-distance, arm-chair analysis of Ed Gein for both the *Journal* and several Chicago newspapers. Kelleher diagnosed Gein as a "schizophrenic," psychopath who presented symptoms of "acute transvestism, fetishism and necrophilia."[65] Even though Kelleher's diagnosis of schizophrenia seems apropos — Gein heard voices, complained of overpowering odors and expressed a great deal of paranoia about neighbors and friends, all symptoms of schizophrenia — the diagnoses of transvestism and necrophilia seem incorrect.[66]

The actual psychiatric evaluations of Gein by psychologist, Robert Ellsworth; a social worker, Kenneth Colwell; Dr. R. Warmington; and Dr. Edward Schubert, the head psychiatrist at the Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, suggested that Gein was most probably psychotic but not a necrophile. And although the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory indicated that Gein had a "feminine identification,"[67] none of the reports profiled him as a transvestite. In fact, Warmington maintained that Gein's desire for female body parts was a manifestation of his attempts not to be his mother but to find a "substitute for [her) in the form of a replica or body that could be kept indefinitely."[68] Further, the evaluations stressed that Gein was highly "suggestible" and had "trouble distinguishing between what he remember[ed] and what he [was] told,"[69] a potentially problematic situation for Gem's police interrogators.

Most likely, the stories about Gein's cross-dressing can be traced to one of his "confessions." In this exchange with the Wisconsin Crime Lab polygraph specialist, Joe Wilimovsky, Gein "cheerfully" admitted, according to Schechter, most everything suggested to him.[70] The police theorized that Gein dressed in body parts and was sexually aroused during his "cross-dressing," further indicating his deviance.

Q. "Do you have any recollection, Eddie, of taking any of those female

parts, the vagina specifically, and holding it over your penis to cover the penis?"

A. "I believe that's true."

Q. "You recall doing that with the vaginas of the bodies of other women?"

A. "That I believe I do remember; that's right."

- Q. "Would you ever put on a pair of women's panties over your body
- and then put some of these vaginas over your penis?"

A. "That could be."

Despite Schechter's observation that "Wilimovsky had to be careful not to put words into Gein's mouth,"[71] this seems precisely what happened. The question and answer sequence bespeaks, perhaps, as much about Wilimovsky as it communicates about what Gein actually did. This particular detail from the Gein case would become the impetus for Bloch's portrayal of Norman as a transvestite and Harris' of Buffalo Bill as a transsexual, and the basis for the cinematic conflation of transvestite/ transsexual and psychopath. Indeed, immediately following SILENCE'S revelation that Bill is a transsexual, Starling realizes that he sews and is making a woman suit. Her disturbed exclamation to Crawford reinforces the idea that what is horrible about Bill is not that he kills women but that he wants to dress up as a woman. (Lecter's cannibalism, typically a horrible prospect, in effect becomes effaced by this narrative structure.)

So entrenched is this association between psychopath/ transgendered person that Michael D. Moore (no relation to Michael Moore of ROGER AND ME) re-released DERANGED in 1981 and included a home-made "documentary" at the end of the feature, ED GEIN: AMERICAN MANIAC.[72] In the documentary, Moore travels to Plainfield, Wisconsin, to find out the "truth" about Gein's "perverse monstrosity." Once there, he purportedly interviews several local experts about the case. In the documentary, Moore claims to quote Dr. Kelleher of Chicago, saying that Gein was a "frustrated transsexual" and police investigators found books about Christine Jorgensen's sex-change operation on Gein's shelves. Moore frames his revelations about Gein with dramatic pauses, implying that Gein's reputed interest in transsexualism and desire to be a woman are horrific. Immediately after revealing this information, Moore pauses and intones, "He was one sick guy." The juxtaposition of these two statements can only reinforce the association of transsexual identity and sickness. Gein's pathology is affirmed through his curiosity about Jorgensen, and this curiosity serves as an explanation for his deviance.

Moore's claims about Gein are highly unlikely given that Jorgensen's autobiography did not come out until 1967 and Gein could hardly have had it. Further, psychiatrist Harry Benjamin's discussion of Jorgensen took the form of a series of papers in psychiatric journals, materials which Gein was unlikely to have recourse to or keep on his shelves. Gein began his grave robbing in 1948 (the first body he exhumed was buried in 1948 — the condition of the bodily artifacts found in Gem's home indicate that most were exhumed shortly after their funerals; he followed the obituaries in order to locate suitable bodies); Jorgensen's story was not in the news until four years *after* Gein's initial forays into the cemetery. Jorgensen and the possibility of a sex-change operation were clearly not the inspiration for these midnight outings.

Nonetheless, it is understandable that the popular media representations in 1957 of the Gein crime would portray him as transsexual (and that the police would necessarily understand his crimes in this fashion). Transvestism and transsexuality provided hot topics for discussion in the legal and psychiatric circles in the late 1950s. Christine Jorgensen's sex-change operation was dealt with in major newspapers in 1952 and 1953;[73] Harry Benjamin held a symposium on transsexuality in December of 1953, which was subsequently summarized in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*;[74] Ed Wood released GLEN OR GLENDA[75] in 1953, a film that examined transvestism; and the television show CONFESSION—which featured "criminals" and police experts and showcased reenactments of sensational crimes — ran an episode featuring a 22-year old male transvestite-prostitute living as a woman.[76]

It is questionable whether Gem himself would have had access to much of this media; his farmhouse lacked both electricity and running water, and Gein did not possess much discretionary income which would allow for the purchase of magazines such as *Life, Time* or *Newsweek*. Jorgensen's story, however, probably ran in local papers, too. It is not possible to know for certain whether or not Gem had curiosity about transsexuality, nor, perhaps, is it that essential to know. Most significant is how Gem is represented and how these representations paradoxically function to construct him as monstrous *and* to pathologize transgender identity.

All of the accounts of Gein I have read focus on his relationship with his mother, highlighting more or less, the pathological nature of their connection. *Time* magazine called Gein "a mama's boy" who hated "other women as mama had willed."[77] He is characterized as "a Casper Milquetoast"[78] "enslaved to the woman who had tyrannized his life,"[79] a "castrating"[80] and "domineering"[81] mother. Thus, in part, Gein's pathology resided in an indication that he was not fully masculine in an era obsessed with proper forms of masculinity.[82] For instance, popular magazines featured articles that warned mothers against emasculating their sons,[83] and parents were cautioned about the corrupting influence of comic books, which were blamed for juvenile delinquency, a falling literacy rate and tempting boys into homosexual behaviors via the seductive figures of Batman and Robin.[84]

Robert Bloch capitalizes on descriptions of Gein's effeminacy and portrays Norman as an impotent "mama's boy," a "secret transvestite" who is not masculine enough to be accepted into the army.[85] Indeed, the film version of PSYCHO, starring Anthony Perkins as Norman, codes him as not just effete but also as queer,[86] a boy whose "best friend is his mother." Perkins plays Bates as a giggling, gamboling young man who nervously snacks on candy and becomes offended when Sam Loomis suggests that Norman might have been taken in by Marion Crane, a comment Norman reads as a slight on his manhood.

Indeed, 1950's United States was rife with fear about homosexuality, mothers and male effeminacy. Like effeminacy, homosexuality and transsexuality/ transvestism typically became attributed to improper mothering — either too much affection or too little.[87] The following commentary, taken from the television show, *Confession*, illustrates this general tendency to attribute all "deviations" to a mother's influence:

"Khaler [a 22-year old transvestite] had never known his father, that he came under the strong influence of his mother, 'who had a lot of marriages'...He's been trying to be like his mother all his life. Physically, organically, there's no reason in the world why this should be...The psychiatrist agreed with Wyatt that the 'problem can be laid at the parent's doorstep.'"[88]

It is difficult to discern whether Augusta Gein was as overbearing as accounts indicate, or if the representations of her merely dovetail with 1950's attitudes about bad mothers? At any rate, Augusta as a castrating, harpy mother figure both reflects and "explains" Ed's deviance.[90] She is, according to popular accounts, in many ways the monster behind the monster. Ironically, Gein described his father not his mother as abusive, indicating that George Gein was an alcoholic who drank excessively and abused both Ed and his brother.[91] Given the era's paranoia about the improper influence of mothers on sons, it is not difficult to understand the lack of attention paid to the role of Ed's father in the formulation of Gem's psychosis.

In any case, the 1950's fear that homosexuality existed everywhere and posed a threat to everyone is apparent in the media's representation of Ed Gein as effeminate, a transvestite or transsexual[93] (and the narrative trope that these conditions "explain" his psychosis) and the subsequent fictionalizations of his crimes which stress one or the other of these diagnoses. Likewise, improper mothering not only provided an explanation for the etiology of sexual deviance[94] but also for the origins of anti-social behavior or psychosis.[95] Mid-century United States, reeling from the effects of the Kinsey report, obsessed not only about proper masculinity and the threat of homosexuality but also about the relation of failed mothering and homosexuality to crime. Augusta Gein as overbearing mother and religious moralist is depicted as the ultimate cause of Ed's deviant sexual behavior and criminality. Likewise, the narrative of PSYCHO constructs "Mother" as the cause of Norman's sexual psychopathology.

According to Estelle B. Freedman, the relatively new category of "sexual

psychopath" (created by psychiatrists, journalists and politicians) crystallized by the end of the 1950s.[96] The discussions about sexual psychopathology "heightened public awareness of sexuality in general, and sexual abnormality in particular between 1935 and 1960," a phenomenon which is reflected in the cinematic representation of Gein's story.[97] These discussions also solidified the collapse of any non-heteronormative sexuality into the class of criminal or psychotic behavior. In part, interpreting Gein as a murderous transvestite or transsexual reflects the emergent category of "sexual psychopath." Freedman chronicles the rise in legislation which targeted specific identities, not behaviors and points out how

"the frequent overlap in use of the terms *sex criminal, pervert, psychopath* and *homosexual* raises the question of whether *psychopath* served in part as a code for *homosexual* at a time of heightened public consciousness about homosexuality."[98]

In the case of Ed Gein and the characters of Norman Bates and Buffalo Bill,[99] it seems quite clear that the categories-homosexual/transsexual and psychopath-are synonymous.[100]

Martha A. Schmidt catalogues a related phenomenon in her analysis of the media coverage of Jeffrey Dahmer's crimes and trial.[101] According to Schmidt, County Medical examiner Jeffrey M. Jentzen coined the phrase "homosexual overkill" to explain an earlier murder case in Racine County, Wisconsin. (Neither the victim nor the killer were actually gay — the ME was simply speculating about motive.) This phrase entered Milwaukee's legal vernacular and was used to diagnose and explain Dahmer's violence. Subsequently, the media used and popularized the term, even though it is not part of psychiatric terminology. "Homosexual overkill" served to reduce Dahmer's murderousness to his sexuality, a conflation that simplifies and distorts the facts of the case. In particular, "homosexual overkill" suggests that violence is the outcome of homosexual desire run rampant instead of partially the result of Dahmer's virulent homophobia.

In part, the collapse of these categories may be explained by the fact that *sexual psychopath* and *transvestite/transsexual* are figures whose appearance belies a hidden truth. This neat analogy, however, does not tell the entire story, and constructing serial killers as transgender is a form of projection and denial. According to Richard Tithecott, author of *Men and Monsters: Jefrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer*, "We fail to read the serial killer" accurately because he is an embodiment of "society's dominant values."[102] Specifically, Tithecott indicates that serial killers are enacting/performing the logic of straight masculinity: the violent expulsion of the feminine from the masculine. However, as a culture we are so unable to admit or recognize the connection between our dominant forms of masculinity and "violent misogynistic crimes" that we must attribute some other kind of motive to them besides masculinity.[103] Instead,

motive is attributed to perceived gender deviance, in particular, to men coveting or assuming the mantle of femininity through gender identification or homosexual object choice. Thus, murderous rage is queered, and queerness becomes the privileged signifier for psychotic violence.

In the cyber and cinematic imagination, this collapse is further solidified through the obsessive recycling of the Ed Gein/ Norman Bates/ Buffalo Bill mythology. Gein as an historic figure does not offer one stable interpretation but remains multiply interpretable as cannibal, transvestite, fetishist, necrophile, mama's boy, transsexual, and like Lecter, as cult hero. That all of these identities and the historic record which has been problematized in their construction are so fraught with contradiction, indicates, I think, how much Gein still reflects/ embodies our cultural anxieties about proper masculinity, motherhood, and nonheteronormative sexuality.

## NOTES

1. Pat Califia, *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1997) 13.

2. I am using the word "transgender" as an umbrella term to encompass transsexual, transvestite and intersex bodies, in part, because cinematic representations do not delineate between these categories, and in part, because the term problematizes the two-gender system.

My use of the term is inflected by Susan Stryker's admonition that "trans gender" can represent "all types of normative expressions of gender or sexed embodiment" (152). Introduction to "The Transgender Issue," *GLQ* 4.2 (1998): 145-158

It's clear that in mystery/horror cinema, "transgender" and "gay male" are fairly interchangeable terms and indicate monstrous forms of sexual deviance.

3. SOME LIKE IT HOT, Billy Wilder, 1959.

4. TOOTSIE, Sydney Polack, 1982. Dustin Hoffman plays an out-of-work actor, Michael Dorsey, who dresses as a woman in order to gain employment.

5. BOSOM BUDDIES was broadcast on Thursday nights on ABC between 1980-1982. Tom Ranks plays one of two men who dress as women in order to live in a women's hotel and pay inexpensive rent.

6. MRS. DOUBFIRE, Chris Columbus, 1993. Robin Williams cross-dresses so that he can act as a nanny to his children, to whom he has been denied access in a custody fight.

7. Elaine Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of

the Year," *Men in Feminism*, Eds. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1988) 116-132. Showalter argues that putting on femininity is an avenue to power for men. She compares the case of Michael Dorsey (TOOTSIE) to that of male academics who use feminist theory to re-center the male subject (123).

8. This phrase is Carol Clover's. She indicates that the motivation supplied for violent killing in mainstream cinema is the "psychosexual fury" of a man in distress about his failed masculinity (27). *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Slasher Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992).

9. Even films such as THE CRYING GAME (Neil Jordan, 1993), which ostensibly are sympathetic towards transgender characters, reveal that the sight of a transgender body causes revulsion and elicits nausea. Kate Bornstein argues that "fear and loathing" are common reactions to the transgender body, as is violence (73). *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

10. THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, Jonathan Demme, Orion Films. 1991. SILENCE won best actor (Anthony Hopkins), best actress (Jodie Foster), best director (Demme), best adapted screenplay (Ted Tally) and best picture.

11. Thomas Harris, THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

12. One reviewer notes that Lecter is constructed as "saint, guru, seer, and soothsayer rolled into one." See Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader* webpage, <<u>http://onfilm.chireader.com/Mov...11098 SILENCE OF THE LAMBS.html</u>>.

13. Lecter's popularity is evidenced through the number of web sites devoted to praise of Hopkins' performance and Harris' character (see <a href="http://people.unt.edu/~rkm0001/lektor.html">http://people.unt.edu/~rkm0001/lektor.html</a>) and the fact that audiences cheered at the closing scene of the film when the newly-escaped Lecter announces that he will be "having an old friend for dinner," a genteel way of saying he will be killing and eating his rival, Dr. Chilton.

14. Although the aural level of the film explicitly disclaims Bill's transsexuality, indicating that he is "not a true transsexual, but something far worse," the visual register codes him as both gay and transgender if not transsexual. In the novel Bill is more clearly transitional: he takes Premarin, has breasts and hates his male genitals. He longs to be woman like his mother and obsessively watches home movies of her. See Harris, 135-137.

15. Some critics read Lecter as gay, too. See for instance. Douglas Crimp who argues that SILENCE is guilty of "homosexualizing the psychopaths" (309). "Right on Girlfriend!" *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 1993) 300-320.

16. Thomas Harris, Hannibal (New York: Delacorte Press, 1999).

17. Academic and alternative journals, however, decried both the homophobia and transphobia of the film. See for instance, Diana Fuss, "Monsters of Perversion: Jeffrey Dahmer and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS," *Media Spectacles*, Eds. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York Routledge, 1993) 181-205; or, James Ryan and G. Luther Whitington, "Homophobia in Hollywood: A Disturbing Tale of Fear and Greed in a Town Where Studio Heads and Office Boys Jostle for Closet Space and Where Celluloid Images Encourage Hatred and Violence," *The Advocate*, no. 573 (March 1991): 32-40.

18. *Chronicle of the Cinema*, Ed. Robert Karney (London: Dorling Kindersley. 1995) 813.

19. Brian D. Johnson, *Maclean*'s, vol 104.7(2/18/1991): 51-52. 51.

20. Rita Kempley, *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1991 <chttp://www.washingtonpost.com/w...ceofthelambsrkempley\_a)a158.htm>.

21. Roger Ebeit, *The Chicago Sun Times*, February 14, 1991 <a href="http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebertreviews/1991/02/6350114.html">http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebertreviews/1991/02/6350114.html</a>.

22. Nathaniel R Atcheson, *Film Review Archives* (on line), chttp//www.pyramid.net/natesmovies/silenceofthelambs.htm>.

23. Ibid.

24. Jonathan Rosenbaum, <<u>http://onfilm.chireader.com/Mov...</u> <u>11098\_SILENCE\_OF\_THE\_LAMBS.html</u>>.

25. Christopher Sharrett, "Hollywood Homophobia." *USA Today*, vol. 121.2566 (July 1992): 93.

26. See for instance, *People Weekly*, vol. 35.6 (2/18/1991): 17; *Cosmopolitan*, vol. 210.3 (March 1991): 32; Newsweek, vol. 117.7 (2/18/1991): 64; or Terrence Rafferty, *The New Yorker*, vol 67.1 (2/25/1991): 87-89. *People* and *Cosmo* read the film as feminist; *Newsweek* and *The New Yorker* praise Demme's brilliant direction.

27. The queer community, however, was divided over the question of the film's merit. Lesbian viewers frequently elected to praise the film for Foster's role as independent and heroic woman, while gay male viewers voiced their dismay at the representation of Bill, ultimately "outing" Jodie Foster as a form of retribution against the film's homophobia. Janet Staiger argues that this conflict is representative of an historic moment in which anxiety about proper gender and sexual roles extends beyond the frame of the film to extra-textually include suspect

actresses. See "Taboos and Totems: Cultural Meanings of THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, Ed. Jim Collins, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 142-154.

I am offering a more unified reading of Gein and SILENCE than Staiger, perhaps, would. In part, this is due to the fact that the fan base for the trio - Gein, Bill and Lecter - appears to be fairly homogenous.

For another reading of the divide in queer criticism, see Michèle Aina Bank, "When LAMBS and ALIENS Meet: Girl-faggots and Boy-dykes Go to the Movies," in *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists and the Limits of Alliance* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 95-106.

28. DRESSED To KILL, Brian DePalma, 1981

29. IN DREAMS, Neil Jordan, 1999.

30. PSYCHO, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960.

31. Francois Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) 205.

32. According to one review, Hitchcock pleaded with audiences not to give away the ending, because, "It's the only one we've got." Quoted in *Variety*, June 22, 1960. Compiled in *Variety Film Reviews: 1907-1980*, volume 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983).

33. Truffaut 205.

34. THE CRYING GAME, Neil Jordan, 1993.

15. Julie Tharp notes that in SILENCE, Harris pays homage to Hitchcock and novelist Robert Bloch in the choice of the heroine's name: "Starling" is an echo of "Crane." "The Transvestite as Monster: Gender Horror in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS and PSYCHO," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 19.3 (Fall 1991): 106113.

36. DEADLY BLESSING, Wes Craven, 1984

37. NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY, Jack Smight, 1968.

38. NO WAY quotes an earlier film based on Hierans' life, Fritz Lang's WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS (1956). Lang's film features an over-dominant mother who produces a serial-killer son.

39. DERANGED, Jeff Gillen and Alan Ormsby, 1974.

40. HOMICIDAL, William Castle, 1961.

41. THREE ON A MEATHOOK, William Girdler, 1973.

42. RENTLESS 3, James Lemmo, 1993.

43. Robert Bloch, Psycho (New York: Random House, 1958).

44. Gein had a collection of body parts that included a belt decorated with nipples, a box of nine vaginas, several face masks replete with hair, chair seats composed of human flesh, several bowls made from skulls, a torso "vest" with a cord either for hanging as a decoration or donning as apparel, a box of noses, and Bernice Worden's entrails rapped in a suit jacket and her heart in a bag on the floor.

45. In Bloch's novel, Norman has a triple personality: Norman, the boy-child who couldn't grow up; Norma, the overbearing mother; and Normal, the adult man who dealt with the external world, concealing Norman and Norm.

46. For instance, Gein has been labeled a taxidermist (he was not), a hobby later attributed to Norman Bates; Gein was also described as having a sweetheart (he did not) and as responsible for the unsolved murders of a teenage girl and two hunters (this is unlikely because Eddie seemed to prefer the bodies of middle-aged women, not teenage girls or men). See Harold Schechter, *Deviant* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989), 111-120; and The Crime Library website: <<u>http://www.crimelibrary.com/gein/geinvanish.htm</u>>

47. One oft-repeated but erroneous claim about Ed is that he kept his mother's corpse in his basement (he didn't). So entrenched is the mythology about Gem, though, that even well-researched materials such as John McCarty's *Movie Psychos and Madmen: Film Psychopaths from Jekyll and Hyde to Hannibal Lecter* (New York: Citadel Press. 1993) repeat these "facts."

48. There was (and is) no shortage of serial killers to fictionalize. At the time of Gein's arrest, there were several other sensationalistic murders. In January of 1958, Charles Starkweather, for one, had gone a 3-state killing spree, murdering 7 people. Dick Hickock and Perry Smith killed a farm family in November 1959. Melvin Davis Rees, a jazz musician and roadside killer terrorized Maryland in 1958 and 1959. Starkweather's exploits were dramatized in BADLANDS (Terrence Malick, 1973). Hickock and Smith's exploits yielded Truman Capote's IN COLD BLOOD (New York: Random House, 1965) and a film of the same name (Richard Brooks, 1967). Rees may have been the inspiration for Flannery O'Connor's short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." None of these has inspired the re-tellings that Gein has.

49. See for instance, the webpage, "The Psycho Connection," which is dedicated to pointing out the similarities between Gem and Bates. <u>http://peoplc.unt.edul/~rkm1000/gein/psycho.html</u>

50. The cinematic interest in Gem is evidenced through films like TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (Tobe Hooper, 1974), which is based on Gein's supposed cannibalism; MANIAC (William Lustig, 1980), which emphasizes a killer's scalping of his victims, a practice similar to Gein's; and NEKROMANTIK and NEKROMANTI K 2 (Jorg Buttgereit, 1989 and 1991), two films that involve necrophilia.

51. <<u>http://home.epix.net/~Nnf/index.htm</u>>.

**52**. Gein's fan club is basically a merchandising project through Foxx Entertainment in Tempe, AZ.

53. See <<u>http://www.angelfire.com/ms/lucy4ever/psycho.html</u>>; or <<u>http://members.xoom.piperm/</u>>; or <<u>http://va.crimeibrary.com/gein/geinmain.htm</u>>; or <<u>http:members.tripod.com/westbrook/sk/Ed\_Gein.html</u>>.

54. Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian press, 1966). Benjamin's study of transsexuals led him to conclude that "As a general rule...transsexuals are nonpsychotic." Quoted in Califia 56. In addition, neither transsexuals nor transvestites make the profile list for serial killers established by the FBI. See John Douglas with Mark Olshaker, *Mind Hunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995).

55. John Douglas, the model for the character of Jack Crawford in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, further indicates that the majority of serial killers are Caucasian men between the ages of 25 and 35. John Douglas with Mark Olshaker, *Mind Hunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995).

56. One positive sign of an abatement of trannsphobic cinema is present in the remake of PSYCHO(Gus VanSant, 1998). In the 1961 version, the psychiatric explanation at the end of the film included a transphobic exchange between Sam, the boyfriend of the slain Marion Crane, and the psychiatrist. Sam asks disgustedly, "Why was he [Norman] wearing those [women's] clothes?" To which a policeman replies, "He was a transvestite." The psychiatrist responds, "Not exactly," and goes on to explain that Norman was, in fact, a split personality. The effect of this exchange is to pathologize transvestitism simultaneous with its disavowal. In the 1998 version of PSYCHO, these few lines of dialogue significantly are missing.

57. See Bloch's PSYCHO.

58. "Ed Gein" page of the Serial Killers Website, <<u>http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~bakerm/edgein.htm</u>>.

59. *Life*, 43.23 (December 2, 1957): 24-32. 27.

60. See Schechter. I will be drawing extensively from Schechter on the chronology of events involving Gein and on the transcripts of the psychiatric evaluations and court records that Schechter includes in his book. *Deviant* is the most comprehensively researched material I could find on the subject, and I will be using the documents included in Schechter as primary sources.

61. Quoted in Schechter, 132.

62. Schechter indicates that much of the media coverage of Gein was erroneous and sensationalized. He doesn't, however, draw any conclusions about the possible misrepresentation about Gem's gender identity or the implications of such a misrepresentation.

63. Quoted in Schechter, 132.

64. Kelleher is most likely the model for the psychiatrist in PSYCHO. Kelleher's pronouncement that Gein suffered from schizophrenia due to a "conflict set up by his mother" is echoed almost verbatim in the denouement of Hitchcock's film. Quoted in Schechter, 134.

65. Quoted in Schechter, 134.

66. Schechter concurs with Kelleher that Gein was a necrophile and devotes a chapter of his book to cataloguing earlier famous necrophiles. It is less clear what Schechter thinks of the diagnosis of transvestism.

67. Quoted in Schechter, 183.

68. Ibid., 188-189.

69. Ibid., 183.

70. Ibid., 122.

71. Ibid., 122.

72. This low-budget home video features newspaper clippings from the trial and pictures of Gein and his victim, Bernice Worden. Moore's "documentary" includes a number of inaccuracies. For instance, Moore claims that Worden's entrails were in Gem's refrigerator and her heart was in a pan on top of the stove. Gein, however, did not have electricity nor a refrigerator, and the forensic evidence did not bear out the claim that he engaged in cannibalism.

73. See, for instance, *The New York Daily News* story "Ex-G.I. Becomes Blonde Beauty" (Dec 1, 1952), or the *Newsweek* feature on Jorgensen's Las Vegas nightclub act (May 4. 1953), both cited in Califia.

74. Califia 63. Benjamin's journal was April of 1954.

75. GLEN OR GLENDA, Ed Wood, Jr., Screen Classics, 1953.

76. CONFESSION, which ran from June 1957-January 1959, was hosted by Jack Wyatt and broadcast on ABC. This particular episode ran the week of December 22-29, 1957, and was described in an issue of *Time* 70.27 (December 30, 1957): 37-38.

77. *Time*, 70.23 (December 2,1957): 32-33.

78. Schechter 38.

79. *Ed Gein: American Psycho* website. <<u>http://www.houseofhorrors.com/gein.htm</u>>

80. Jim and Debbie Goad, Answer Me! (San Francisco: AK Press, 1991)59.

81. Douglas and Olshaker 87.

82. One characteristic of this obsession with proper masculinity was the conflation of different categories of "deviance." Despite the assertions of Harry Benjamin in *The Transsexual Phenomenon* that the categories transvestite and transsexual may embody different behaviors and identities and that male transvestites are not necessarily gay, any man not properly masculine, was/is by default, gay. Transvestites, then, as men who voluntarily took on feminine attributes through makeup and clothing, were necessarily homosexual. In addition, the 1952 edition of the *DSM* indicates that sexual deviations such as transvestitism and homosexuality are a form of sexual deviance which indicates a sociopathic personality disturbance, Quoted in *The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, Eds. Alfred M. Freedman and Harold I. Kaplan (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1967) 977.

93 See for instance, J. Robert Moskin's article "The American Male: Why Do Women Dominate Him?" in *Look* 23.3 (February 4,1958): 76-80.

94. Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocents* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1953):

"Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a "socialite" and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred...It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together...The Batman type of story may stimulate children to homosexual fantasies, of the nature of which they may be unconscious." (190-191)

85. Bloch 17 and 213.

86. Bosely Crowther's review in *The New York Times* describes Norman as a "queer duck, given to smirks and giggles." June 17, 1960.37:1.

87 The following passage from Richard Green's *The "Sissy Boy Syndrome" and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987) is a case in point. Green began his 24-year study in 1953 for the express purpose of predicting and identifying effeminate boys likely to grow up gay or transsexual. He writes,

"Mothers bear a paradoxical burden. They must by 'good enough' but not 'too good.' Like fathers, they should not be remote. But unlike fathers, their involvement and investment with sons must be only temperate. It must be finely tuned to provide the son with security and emotional warmth. There must be just enough of mother to round off the hard edges carved by father; she must not smother, stifle, or feminize." (47)

88. Time, 70.23, 37-38.

89. One earlier work that laid the blame for almost all of society's woes at the feet of the country's mothers was Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942). Wylie argued that "momism," a combination of mother-worship and socially- and economically-empowered women were ruining the country:

"Thus the women of America raped the men, not sexually, unfortunately, but morally, since neuters come bard by morals...Mom got herself out of the nursery and the kitchen. She then got out of the house...No longer either hesitant or reverent, because there was no cause for either attitude after her purge, she swung the church by the tail as she swung everything else. In a preliminary test of strength, she also got herself the vote...Mom's first gracious presence at the ballotbox was roughly concomitant with the start toward a new all-time low in political scurviness, hoodlumism, gangsterism, labor strife, monopolistic thuggery, moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, *theft, murder, homosexuality*, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos and war." (188-189) [emphasis mine]

90. Schechter looks to the obituaries of Ed's parents to indicate their respective personalities. lie argues that Ed's father, George, was well-liked in the community, and Augusta, loathed. In part, he reaches this conclusion because of the length of George's obituary and the brevity of Augusta's.

91. See for instance, R. Muster and Louis Distler's "Masculinity, Identification, and Father-Son Relationships," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59 (1959): 350-356. Muster and Distler argue that the absence of a father or the presence of a clinging mother can result in improper gender identification and possibly, homosexuality.

92. See for instance, Barbara Epstein's "Anti-Communism and Homophobia in the Postwar U.S.," *Critical Sociology* 20.3 (1994): 21-44. Epstein analyzes pulp magazines like *Whisper* and *Dare*, indicating that their obsession with homosexuality and the cold war reflects an attempt to identify all unseen "threats," as similar to the threat of communism. Essays such as Wally Levine's "Ten Ways to Spot a Homosexual" foreground the way that communists and homosexuals "were alien and monstrous, and at same time all too familiar" (38-39).

93. This emphasis on the mother as the locus/ cause of either gender-identity disorders and/or homosexuality continued into the 1980S (some would argue it persists today), in the guise of the *DSM*, which claims,

"Transsexualism seems always to develop in the context of a disturbed parent-child relationship...Extreme, excessive, and prolonged physical and emotional closeness between the infant and the mother and a relative absence of the father during the earliest years may contribute to the development of this disorder in the male."

*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd Edition (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1980) 263 and 265.

94. See for instance, Hale Champion's "The Nice Murderer: Search for a Motive" in *TheNation* 186.9 (March 1,1958): 255-257 This article about Thomas Wallace Cordry III's murder of a neighbor girl hints that the mother's sexual mores were "too rigid," noting that the father of the boy "hasn't said much...[leaving] it to his wife to speak for the family" (257)

95. Harris' novel also assigns blame to Bill's mother. In this case, however, it is her absence not her overbearing presence which makes him a killer.

96. Estelle B. Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desire': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960," *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Eds. Kathy Reis and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989) 199-224.

97. Ibid., 213.

98. Ibid., 214.

99. Interestingly, even critics who note the homophobia in SILENCE conflate transsexuality and homosexuality. Both Stuart Klawans and Marcia Ian indicate

that Lecter says Bill is not gay but still pathological. The actual dialogue in SILENCE indicates that Bill is not *transsexual* but has a "pathology a thousand times more savage."

This conflation suggests that any non-heteronormative gender identity or sexuality is read as homosexuality, that as a culture we cannot distinguish between the two. See Klawans, *The Nation*, vol. 252.7 (2/25/1991): 246-8; or Ian, "How Do You Wear Your Body? Bodybuilding and the Sublimity of Drag," *Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects*, Eds. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (New York: Routledge, 1995) 71-90.

100. The cinematic representation of an earlier crime, the 1924 Leopold and Loeb murder of Bobby Franks, similarly stressed the deviant sexual character of the murderers. In both the 1948 fictionalized account of the incident (ROPE, Alfred Hitchcock) and the 1959 adaptation (COMPULSION, Richard Fleischer), the lust to commit murder becomes synonymous with homosexual desire. The trailer for COMPULSION describes the characters as "abnormal" and of a "diseased mentality," an assertion which conflates homosexual desire with criminal behavior and mental instability.

Curiously, one of the killers in COMPULSION is an ornithologist who also stuffs birds. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that one year later Hitchcock chooses to have Norman interested in the taxidermy of birds (he stuffs mammals in the novel). In any case, the cinematic precedent for representing homosexuality as murderous was firmly in place by the time PSYCHO was released.

101. Martha A. Schmidt, "Dahmer Discourse and Gay Identity: The Paradox of Queer Politics," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 20.3(1994): 81-105.

102. Richard Tithecott, *Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey DahmEr and the Construction of the Serial Killer* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997) 6.

103. Tithecott 96-91

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