The Closet Cases

Written by Jacob McClain

A feature length screenplay with an accompanying creative statement that explores representations of homosexuality and homophobia in suburban spaces.

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I. Introduction

I grew up in a gay desert, so to speak. I didn't know what gay meant until middle school. I remember first seeing episodes of Glee[1] and Modern family[2] and thinking, "huh?" I can thank both of those shows for introducing on-screen queerness into my household growing up. I remember the passing of marriage equality in 2015, and the sadness of my church the day after. I spent a lot of time in movie theaters growing up, and I didn't see a movie with a gay protagonist until 2015's *The Imitation Game*[3]. However, I think of 2017's *Call Me By Your Name*[4] when I think of the first gay movie I saw in theaters. That was the first film in which I saw myself, or more specifically my gay self. I didn't process my own sexuality until late into high school, just as films like *Love, Simon*[5] and *Alex Strangelove*[6] were released. These were the first films I ever saw focus on an exlclusively teenage gay romance. Before college, my only lifeline to queerness was through media, and I have always yearned for more.

When I decided to write my thesis, I knew I wanted to write something gay. I thought about the gay movies I had seen before, and I thought about the summation of my gay experiences. I realized I have never seen anything resembling my coming out experience put to the big screen. The more I thought about the gay films I have seen, the more dissatisfied in them I became. My coming out experience was not a poppy high school romance. It was filled to the brim with anxiety, secrets, and interpersonal tension. If my coming out experience were made into a film, it would be a horror movie. Thus, I landed on writing a horror movie about a gay teenager's coming out experience.

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[1] Murphy, Ryan. "Glee." Fox, 2015 2009.
[2] Lloyd, Christopher. "Modern Family." ABC, 2020 2009.
[3] Tyldum, Morten. *The Imitation Game*, 2014.
[4] Guadagnino, Luca. *Call Me By Your Name*, 2017.
[5] Berlanti, Greg. *Love, Simon*, 2018.
[6] Johnson, Craig. *Alex Strangelove*, 2018.

I pitched this as *Love, Simon* meets *Scream,*[7] and now I present to you my first feature screenplay: *The Closet Cases*, a queer slasher script with comedic overtones about a closeted teenage boy caught in a homophobic serial killer's deadly scheme.

II. On Writing the Screenplay

A large chunk of my research consisted of me trying to figure out how to write a full feature screenplay and what it consists of. Over the summer, I read Robert McKee's 2010 book *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting.*[8] While I have read screenwriting how-to books before, I never read one so comprehensive and all-encompassing.

McKee devotes ample time to exploring the various forms of story structures, particularly focusing on three act stories. He explains the general shape of a script, then moves on to an act, then a sequence, then a scene, and lastly a beat. Each of these are story units that take different shapes, but they all generally track a change in the story. McKee describes a story beat as an exchange of behavior in action or reaction, and beats compile off of another to create a scene. Generally consisting of 2-4 pages, a scene is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a story event. In accordance with the framework laid out by Robert McKee, every script should consist of 40-60 story events, or scenes, implying every scene must be relevant to the overall narrative. McKee next explores sequences, a collection of five to seven consecutive scenes, which culminate with greater impact than any previous scene in the sequence. A sequence should coalesce into its own narrative arc while simultaneously playing into the overall narrative. My advisor and I decided to

[7] Craven, Wes. *Scream*, 1996.
[8] McKee, Robert. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, 2010.

frame my script within a three act structure containing eight sequences- two in Act I, four in Act II, and two in Act III. With eight sequences each containing around fifteen pages, I aimed for a one hundred and twenty page script.

In Neal Bell's book *How to Write a Horror Movie,*[9] he touches on all the fundamental aspects of creating a horror script: creating something scary, building an act one, changing the world with act two, bringing irreversible change with act 3, the importance of landscapes, political/social horror, horror genres, and the future of horror. In one section, Bell discusses the efficiency and precision present in the script's attempt to create multiple suspects in *Scream*. In another, he analyzes the ending of *Rosemary's Baby*[10] to discuss the straightforward logic of the scene's horror, and how the simplicity of motherly connection makes the scene so horrifying. A cult of satan worshippers try to convince Rosemary to rock the baby in her crib, and, thus, Rosemary considers mothering the spawn of satan. It's a ghoulish prospect with universal meaning behind it.

I also collected a heap of information from the Youtube channel *Lesson From The Screenplay*. In each LFTS video, creator and narrator Michael Tucker examines a film or two as a case study into how the film's screenwriter executes a successful story. In *Jurassic Park - Using Theme to Craft Character,*[11] Tucker explores how the thematic ideas of story are inherent in the character designs and the character relationships. In *Collateral - Midpoint Collision,*[12] Tucker explains the gravity of the midpoint as the center of the story, the collision between the protagonist's inner self and their facade, and its contrasting relationship with the turning point into Act II. In *The Last Jedi- Forcing Change,*[13] Tucker details how the screenwriters continually

[9] Bell, Neal. *How to Write a Horror Movie*, 2020.
[10] Polanski, Roman. *Rosemary's Baby*, n.d.
[11] Tucker, Michael. *Jurassic Park - Using Theme to Craft Character*, 2018.
[12] Tucker, Michael. *Collateral - Midpoint Collision*, 2018.
[13] Tucker, Michael. *The Last Jedi - Forcing Change*, 2018.

push the protagonist to confront their emotional struggles, and in increasing intensity. Truly, every single one of these videos gave me a screenwriting tip, but the process of exemplifying it through looking at the script and watching scenes from the movie was incredibly helpful.

III. On the Horror Genre

In his book *Horror: A Critical Introduction*[14], Murray Leeder explores the roots of the horror genre in other older mediums, its entrance into film, its history, conventions, critical approaches, aesthetics, and technical aspects. She opens the book with a quote from Phantasmagoria pioneer Étienne-Gaspard Robert: "I am only satisfied if my spectators, shivering and shuddering, raise their hands or cover their eyes out of fear of ghosts and devils dashing toward them."[15] Popularized during the turn into the 20th century, Phantasmagoria "mixed lantern imagery, spooky music, and layers of smoke, and favored images of demons, skeletons, and ghosts."[16] I believe she begins here to establish the human compulsion to create and perceive horrific imagery as a form of cultural entertainment. For over a century, audiences have entered movie theaters in search of catharsis, and many people find it in horror movies, whether they be ghost stories, slasher flicks, or monster movies. Still, while people flock to horror movies for the horror, laughing at a horror movie is not an infrequent reaction. Leeder explores laughter at straightforward horror, not at something like a horror comedy. He writes:

> "But why do they laugh? Ebert offers two explanations: '(1) laughter is a common reaction among those too touched or embarrassed to reveal true emotion, and (2) unsophisticated audiences consider any sign that a movie is dated (period dialog, references, clothes) to be a laugh cue' (n.p.). Both explanations construe the

[14] Leeder, Murray. *Horror Film: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
[15] Leeder.
[16] Leeder.

> laughing audience members as 'bad spectators' whose reactions are illegitimate, symptomatic of their own inadequacies."[17]

While Roger Ebert's explanation leans pessimistic, I think Leeder uses this to point to the impurity of audience reaction. There is no standard audience, no way to forecast the emotional, cultural, or cinematic competency of the audience. Thus, making the line of what scares an audience and what breaks the tension even finer. This becomes even more complicated in the case of the horror comedy, which must properly balance scaring the audience with comedic catharsis that doesn't invalidate the horror.

Much like the Romance and Comedy genres, the Horror genre has endured decades of cycles and takes many shapes and forms. However, in his book *The Philosophy of Horror,*[18] Noel Carroll details how horror stories tend to differ in surface variations rather than in deep, structural changes. He points to the Complex Discovery Plot as a standard master plot structure for horror stories. The Complex Discovery Plot includes four movements: the Onset, the Discovery, the Confirmation, and the Confrontation.

The Onset tracks the establishment of the Monstrous Other and the establishment of the primary characters for the audience. The Discovery, usually about a third or a quarter into the story, follows the primary characters as they learn of the Monstrous Other's existence. This discovery is often resisted by the powers that be, leading to the Confirmation. In this movement, the primary characters must deal with the threat of the Monstrous Other while also finding a way to prove its existence, and its potential mortal danger, to others. The inclusion of the Confirmation movement upgrades a Discovery Plot to a Complex Discovery Plot. Often in Complex Discovery Plots, the necessity of confirmation burdens much of the story with the

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[17] Leeder.
[18] Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror*. Routledge, 1990.

drama of proof- with what evidence/how does one confirm the existence of a ghost or a vampire? Lastly, the Confrontation movement sees humanity and the Monstrous Other meeting in climactic conflict. After slowly building up the characterization and capabilities of the Monstrous Other over the course of the story, the monster unleashes its full capabilities. There can be multiple confrontations in this movement, which can escalate in intensity or complexity, or both, and they often take the form of a repeated problem/solution format.

While many horror stories are easily encompassed in the monikers of Discovery Plot and Complex Discovery Plot, any horror can be a combination of any of these three, but they must follow sequential order. For example, Carroll categorizes *Alien*[19] as Onset / Confrontation. What I've taken away from this plot outline is a focus on presentation. While many horror stories may possess similar trajectories, characters, and plot points, the context in which they are presented determines the success of the horror. The timing, quality, and escalation of scares are crucial to keeping a horror movie's engine running.

IV. On Contemporary Horror

To explore contemporary horror trends, I started by looking at the most critically acclaimed horror film from the past decade- *Get Out*[20]- and reading Stephanie Graves's essay *Jordan Peele's Get Out - Smart Horror*.[21] Evident from the title, Graves classifies *Get Out* as "smart" horror and defines the term: "The designation of 'smart' or 'elevated' horror arose as a shorthand to describe this recent spate of horror films exemplified by Get Out- box office high performers that have been lauded by critics for their cerebral narratives and pointed social

[19] Scott, Ridley. *Alien*, 1979.
[20] Peele, Jordan. *Get Out*, 2017.
[21] Graves, Stephanie A. "Jordan Peele's Get Out - Smart Horror." In *Horror: A Companion*, 127–34. Peter Land LTD, n.d.

criticisms."[22] Graves includes other films such as *The Babadook*[23], *It Follows*[24], *The Witch*[25], and *Split*[26] in this group; she goes on to explain *Get Out*'s achievements, its carefully constructed critique of race in modern America, and how Peele labels the film a social thriller. Peele elects not to include horror in his label of the film's genre, indicative of a larger pattern of directors and studios actively putting distance between their works and the horror genre. Graves mentions descriptors such as "thriller, suspense, mystery, or psychological drama."[27] While terms like social thriller and smart cinema have been around since the 70s, there has clearly been a recent influx of these films which possess elements of horror, which leads into a discussion on the growing hybridity of horror.

In his essay *The Purge: Anarchy - Post-Millennial Horror*[28], James DeMonaco explores the horror hybrids created by Blumhouse- the production company behind films such as *Get Out, Paranormal Activity*[29], *and Insidious*[30]- and the Blumhouse model micro-budget film. To sum up the main points of the essay, this quote encapsulates it:

> "*The Purge: Anarchy* is one of Blumhouse's model micro-budget films, made for $9 million but bringing in a global box office of over $111 million- a model that is proving extremely lucrative for the company. Largely shot at night and on the streets of Los Angeles, it features a small cast, contains no-major stars, and is slickly produced with polished visual imagery and dynamic action set-pieces. *Anarchy*, builds upon the success of twenty-first century slasher film variations

[22] Graves.
[23] Kent, Jennifer. *The Babadook*, 2014.
[24] Mitchell, David Robert. *It Follows*, 2015.
[25] Eggers, Robert. *The Witch*, 2015.
[26] Shyamalan, M. Night. *Split*, 2016.
[27] Graves.
[28] "James DeMonaco's The Purge: Anarchy - Post-Millenial Horror." In *Horror: A Companion*, 119–26. Peter Land LTD, 2019.
[29] Peli, Oren. *Paranormal Activity*, 2009.
[30] Wan, James. *Insidious*, 2011.

> such as *Final Destination* and *Saw*, which Ian Conrich describes as representing a hybrid genre, merging the slasher with action and disaster film set pieces."[31]

Even though *The Purge: Anarchy*[32] isn't often classified under the umbrella of smart horror, it embraces the trends previously discussed. The film embraces social critique and horror hybridity in such a successful way that it technically outperformed the action and disaster films it competed with. This brings me back to Grave's essay, because she discusses the insinuation of the term smart horror. For smart horror to exist, must stupid horror exist? The moniker of smart horror possesses an implicit belittlement of the genre itself, yet films like *The Purge: Anarchy* regularly perform well at the box-office. In summation, directors and studios are recently embracing elements of horror in greater numbers and to greater success, yet the horror genre remains stuck with an uncouth reputation.

V. On Homosexuality & Homophobia

In the scholarship I explored, I found varying definitions of the term homophobia, and I learned how complicated it is to attempt to put a label to the phenomena generally assumed to be included under the term. To understand the definition of homophobia, in his book *One of the Boys*[33] David Plummer first explores the definition of homosexuality. He first questions whether the term homosexual applies universally, or if it exclusively applies to modern Westernized cultures; he notes that the word homosexual first appeared in the English and German languages in the latter half of the 19th century.

Throughout most of the book, Plummer primarily analyzes homophobia in relation to the modern, Westernized conception of the homosexual, so, since my creative thesis aims to explore

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[31] Land.
[32] DeMonaco, James. *The Purge: Anarchy*, 2014.
[33] Plummer, PhD, David. *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

the situation of the homosexual in modern American suburbs, I will adopt this conception generally as well. This conception enforces a number of tendencies and binaries, but Plummer introduces these with the primary binary of being in or out of the closet:

> "'Coming out' is often described as part of gay identity formation. The 'coming out' process is relevant to this research because it appears to be constituted because of homophobia and, as such, testifies to the pervasiveness and power of homophobia. As Garnets and colleagues wrote, 'coming out' becomes a process of reclaiming disowned or devalued parts of the self, and developing an identity into which one's sexuality is well-integrated."[34]

There is also discussion within the gay and queer communities about dropping the concept of coming out from the standard process of living a gay or queer life, as it enforces the binary of being either in or out of the closet.[35] Modern Westernized cultures, particularly America, have cultivated a social structure obsessed with binaries: male or female, democrat or republican, etc. Out of this social order, the oppositional terms queer and nonbinary, which prioritze breaking the binaries and living in the in-between-ness, have arisen.[36] They've grown in popular adoption in the 21st century, but they're doing so primarily in urban, academic, and online spaces. Suburban and rural spaces, especially in America, strongly tend to enforce the binary. Plummer speaks to the power of homophobia in this passage: "In the modern Western world, anti-homosexual bias seems to be resilient and persistent and it permeates the 'social fabric.' The common thread in these diverse twentieth-cenutry cases is that 'the homosexual' is readily and credibly portrayed as the common enemy."[37] This frequent portrayal of the

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[34] Plummer, PhD.
[35] Tobia, "InQueery: The History of the Word 'Genderqueer' As We Know It."
[36] Tobia.
[37] Plummer, PhD.

homosexual as the common enemy finds cinematic roots in the Motion Picture Production Code, which I will expound upon later.

Moving onto the definition of homophobia, the reigning simplest definition in my findings is "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals."[38] While this aptly describes the feeling homophobes frequently experience, this definition doesn't encompass everything it could. Plummer elaborates on this definition by categorizing anti-homosexual behavior into four groups: explicit homophobia, implicit homophobia, silence, and heterosexist expectations. "Explicit homophobia is articulated unambiguously. Implicit homophobia occurs when other components of 'the homophobia complex" are exploited such as 'sissy,' 'crybaby,' 'wuss,' 'soft,' and so on."[39] Each of these can put heavy pressure on developing males, influencing how men view, express, and conceal themselves.

One aspect of homophobia that resonates with my thesis is the tendency for anti-gay murders to display extreme violence. Based on studies and evidence from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, homophobic violence is often characterized by young males, usually a group, beating, cutting, or mutilating gay or feminine men, and often the perpetrators do not know the victim personally. Interestingly, though, I've found substantial deliberation on the confusing nature of the purpose and extent of homophobia. Gay men make up a small portion of the general population. They're a scattered minority group who are stereotypically portrayed as weak and feminine, making the utter intensity of homophobia seem disproportionate.

Returning to the idea of growing up in homophobic spaces, Martin Dines opens his thesis *Homecoming Queens*[40] with Andy Medhurst's view that homosexuality and suburbia are utterly antithetical: "It is perhaps sexual dissidents who are the most rigorously policed victims of the

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[38] Plummer, PhD.
[39] Plummer, PhD.
[40] Dines, Martin. *Homecoming Queens: Gay Suburban Narrative in British and American Film and Fiction*. Kingston, UK: Kingston University, 2006.

suburban cult of conformity. Of all the hegemonies of suburbia, it is the hegemony of heterosexuality that cuts deepest and bites hardest."[41] Heterosexuality is even ingrained into the physical structure of suburbia: the common layouts of suburban homes maintain a hierarchy of space with normative family relationships, and the street design facilitates the surveillance of deviant activity. Surburban spaces are constructed in way that removes privacy, meaning homosexuality cannot be kept a secret. In many gay narratives, the usual story trajectory begins in homophobic suburbia and ends in the freedom of the city, further promoting a binary. Interestingly, as Dines notes, "the rise of the industrial city has been acknowledged as the most important socio-economic process facilliting the emergence of distinctly homosexual identities in the 19th and 20th centuries."[42] While gay suburuban narratives often try to guide the way into urban spaces, gay narratives aslo tend to remember and negotiate with the suburbs, attempting to recover positive experiences from suburban youth. Coming out stories often work in these two opposing ways: trying to fit in suburban spaces and getting to urban spaces.

VI. On Gay Representation in American Fiction & Film

To begin, I am limiting my discusson to homosexual and bisexual men in this section. I read essays from *Murder in the Closet: Essays on Queer Clues in Crime Fiction Before Stonewall* in preparation to get a better sense of how homosexual attraction and relationships manifest in these stories. I wasn't surprised to learn that characters in these stories are often closeted, or their homosexual attraction is limited exclusively to implicit cues, but I was intrigued by how often homosexuality or effeminancy is used to cast doubt or suspicion. In his essay *Man-to-Man: The Two-Men Theme in the Novels of Patricia Highsmith*, Nick Jones

[41] Dines.
[42] Dines.

explores Highsmith's frequent depictions of male-on-male relationships, whatever kind that be. While she includes friendships, Jones notes that Highsmith's male characters often venture past heterosexuality, with the line, "Her men come to life when they abandon their masculine posturing" being demonstrative of how Highsmith depicts these relationships.[43] He also discusses Highsmith's tendency to have good looks make someone appear suspicious to the reader or characters, yet her fiction is filled with attractive characters. I'm most interested in the point about men coming to life when they can drop the facade they create for themselves by the expectations and restrictions of masculinity.

Turning to cinematic representation, American films have long stereotyped the gay man. In the 20's and 30's, the homosexual was portrayed as a sissy figure: a shorter, weaker, feminine man, often draped in lavender or dressed in silks. As I mentioned before, the Motion Picture Production Code was a set of stern guidelines in effect from 1934 to 1968 that classified homosexuality, among many other things, as taboo, meaning any instances of queerness were rejected or carefully coded. Movies like *The Maltese Falcon*[44]*, Rope*[45]*, and Rebel Without A Cause*[46] exemplify these guidelines, as they portray the homosexual as a villain. Whether a villainous character is queercoded or a queercoded character is destroyed by the story, these characters do not meet a happy ending. Further, the Lavender Scare of the 1950s exacerbated feelings of the homosexual as the common enemy.[47] In the movies of this era, homosexuals were often depicted as unstable, delicate, caniving, and obsessed, and being gay was practically an on-screen death sentence.

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[43] Jones, Nick. "Man to Man: The Two-Men Theme in the Novels of Patricia Highsmith." In *Murdern in the Closet*, 249–58. McFarland & Co Inc., n.d.
[44] Huston, John. *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941.
[45] Hitchcock, Alfred. *Rope*, 1948.
[46] Ray, Nicholas. *Rebel Without A Cause*, 1955.
[47] Hyden, Sage. *History of Homosexuality on Film*. Just Write, 2015.

The scale tipped in the other direction as films such as *The Boys in the Band,*[48] *Cabaret,*[49] and *Midnight Cowboy*[50] released in the 70's. Once the AIDS crisis hit America in the 80s, media portrayals of gay men as villanous or lethal flourished again. However, in the early 90s, a cinematic movement known as the New Queer Cinema arrived with movies like *Paris is Burning,*[51] *Rock Hudson's Home Movies,*[52] *The Watermelon Woman,*[53] and *My Own Private Idaho*.[54] These movie recontextualized cinematic representations of queerness, following outsiders who embrace their nontraditional lifestyles. Building upon various alternative forms of queer existence, this crescendo in positive representation culminated with a most popular 2005 gay drama: *Brokeback Mountain*.[55] Although *Brokeback Mountain* didn't nab Best Picture at the Oscars that year, its impact on gay representation in film, and even on America's perception of gay men, is incalcuable. This is an extremely brief overview of the history of gay representation in American cinema and the movies involved, but my takeaway from all of this is the importance of representation. It took decades for gay people to achieve accurate representation, let alone respectful representation. In those decades of misrepresentation, society internalized these stereotypes, creating lingering consequences for gay people. Representation matters. It reflects how society views us, and it affects how society treats us. I'll talk about more recent gay films in a later section.

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[48] Friedkin, William. *The Boys in the Band*, 1970.
[49] Fosse, Bob. *Cabaret*, 1972.
[50] Schlesinger, John. *Midnight Cowboy*, 1969.
[51] Livingston, Jennie. *Paris Is Burning*, 1991.
[52] Rappaport, Mark. *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*, 1992.
[53] Dunye, Cheryl. *The Watermelon Woman*, 1996.
[54] Van Sant, Gus. *My Own Private Idaho*, 1991.
[55] Lee, Ang. *Brokeback Mountain*, 2005.

VII. On the Slasher Flick

To me, the Slasher flick is a standout of all the horror subgenres, as the conventions and tropes offer so many directions, references, and meanings. This subgenre is notorious for two distinct archetypes: the Slasher and the Final Girl. The moniker Slasher comes from the colloquiziation of the terror a man with a blade can create. The moniker of the Final Girl originates from Carol Clover's formation of the character, which draws from psychoanalytic concepts. Leeder succinctly characterizes the final girl: "the prototypical Final Girl is Laurie Strode in *Halloween*, the shy virgin who is smart and resourceful enough to battle Michael Myers to a standstill (if not necessarily kill him)."[56] With Michael Myers conceptually representing terror incarnate, Laurie Strode represents abject terror, thus gendering abject terror as female. Yet, Laurie Strode wins. While the Final Girl may endure fits of hysteria, she is ultimately the character who fights the hardest and survives. The canonization of the Final Girl is made even more complex by the primary audience of slasher films being young males. Carol Clover elaborates on this complexity in her argument for the Final Girl as "a phallicized female, a congenial double for the adolescent male- she is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way… the terrors and masochistic pleasure of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality."[57] For these viewers, the Final Girl exists as a comforting figure, a character who navigates the assumed femininity of vulnerability and the assumed masculinity of surviving antagonism.

[56] Leeder.
[57] Leeder.

In my research of the Slasher Flick, the most important movies I watched are *Scream, Halloween,*[58] *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,*[59] *Prom Night,*[60] *Carrie,*[61] *Candyman,*[62] *It Follows, Jennifer's Body,*[63] *the Final Girls,*[64] and *Freaky*.[65] My favorite of these, and the film most in conversation with my script, is *Scream*, for it's tightly constructed plot, the design of the characters, the queer subtext behind the killers, and- most importantly- its self-reflexivity. To varying degrees, the characters in *Scream* know, watch, and discuss horror movies. Part of the fun of the film is watching these characters realize they're in a horror film and try to survive it. However, Leeder points out that the characters most entertained by horror movies are Billy and Stu, saying "Even the killers are horror movie junkies, scheming to actualize the conventions they have internalized from fiction. These 'neo-slashers' followed many of the marketing cues of the original slasher cycle, including having a killer whose highly distinctive costuming lends itself to advertising."[66]

I consider the design of Ghostface as camp: it's a stupid halloween costume that becomes truly terrifying, and even the sequels revel in the iconography of the mask. Further, the importance of Slasher masks cannot be understated. The ghastly paleness of Michael Myers' mask hides the specificity of his monstrous humanity. Leatherface's skin-made mask hides a traumatized personality that embraces cannibalism. Even in *Get Out,* Rose's family masks as sufferable neo-liberals until they're scheme takes effect. The Monstrous Other revels in the unknown, and the use of masks exemplifies this in the slasher genre.

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[58] Carpenter, John. *Halloween*, 1978.
[59] Hooper, Tobe. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974.
[60] Lynch, Paul. *Prom Night*, 1980.
[61] De Palma, Brian. *Carrie*, 1976.
[62] Rose, Bernard. *Candyman*, 1992.
[63] Kusama, Karyn. *Jennifer's Body*, 2009.
[64] Strauss-Schulson, Todd. *The Final Girls*, 2015.
[65] Landon, Christopher. *Freaky*, 2020.
[66] Leeder.

Another aspect of the Slasher that is crucial, yet varies in surprising ways, is the killer's motivation. In *Scream*, Billy boasts to Sidney about their lack of a motive, until he reveals how Sidney's mom caused his parents' divorce. In *Prom Night*, the killer gets revenge on the classmates who caused his sister's death. In *Carrie*, the titular character exacts revenge on the classmates and people who torment her, until she takes it too far. While the methods of exacting their goals are extremely violent, these killers have personal motivations. However, many slashers' motives are left for the audience to speculate over. Michael Myers seems to simply have a compulsion for terror and murder. The monster in *It Follows* targets people who contract its curse from sexual intercourse with a person who already has it, mimicking an STI. When a group of lost college kids wander onto a far-off Texas farm in search of gasoline, Leatherface seems to take the opportunity to collect fresh meat. Some killers have deeply personal motives, and others enact terror and violence as a part of their nature.

VIII. On the Twink Flick

There is a collection of recent movies that depict various aspects of the gay coming-of-age experience that always leave me unsatisfied in some form. I have come to label this collection the Twink Flick. The term twink is queer slang for any homosexual male with attractive, boyish qualities; they are usually 18-25 years olds, slimmer, shorter, fashionable, and white. I'm particularly referencing movies such as *Love, Simon, Call Me By Your Name, Alex Strangelove, Perks of Being a Wallflower,*[67] *Geography Club,*[68] and *Closet Monster*.[69] These films never stray out of the gay teen, coming-of-age, dramatic romcom genre, yet they are one of the more popular, current types of LGBTQIA+ films. There are a number of traits that are common

[67] Chbosky, Stephen. *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 2012.
[68] Entin, Gary. *Geography Club*, 2013.
[69] Dunn, Stephen. *Closet Monster*, 2015.

in these movies. First, the protagonist is always an attractive, sometimes shy, white, teenage boy with short, dark brown hair. In almost all of the movies I listed, the protagonists have the same haircut; I include this point to assert the generic image of a young gay male which all of these characters fit. These teenage boys always struggle with accepting their queer identity, and they usually have to come out of the closet at some point in the story. They find support in a best friend/sidekick character, who is usually a teenage girl they share romantic tension with or a teenage guy they do not share romantic tension with. The protagonist finds actual romance with the always-present love interest, yet the love interest is the most flexible in terms of character design and presentation. Ranging from older tutors to closeted quarterbacks to anonymous penpals, the love interest typically serves as a marker to indicate where the protagonist is in their coming-out journey. All of these movies are set in and around family homes and schools, typically in a suburban setting, and the protagonist's family and friends make up the cast.

While I- as someone who fits under the Twink umbrella- do appreciate that these films exist and more like them are being made, the Twink Flick certainly has issues. These films revel in standard teenage melodrama. They heavily skew towards depicting a niche, romanticized, privileged subdemographic of the queer community. They uphold the notion that every queer person has to come out to successfully achieve their identity, a notion that centers homophobia and the binary in the pursuit of queer existence. Further, they uphold the notion that the only way to find success and happiness in queer existence is to find a monogamous relationship. They also tend to peddal images of young, skinny, attractive, white, American, gay men being the only gay people to find success and fulfillment in their gayness. These depications are very Hollywood forms of gay representation, yet it is progress in terms of representation.

Although I've pointed out the problems within Twink Flicks, my script certainly fits under the moniker. When looking at the protagonists of Twink Flicks, I couldn't help but find similarities between them and Final Girls. The themes of sexual repression and growing into one's own against direct antagonistic forces matched too well for me. By plunging a twink into the center of a Slasher Flick, I hoped I could turn the Twink Flick on its head and directly play off of the tropes and problems I associate with the subgenre.

I toyed around with the idea of revealing my protagonist's love interest as the Slasher, but I didn't want to reference films suchs as *Scream* so pointedly with my killer reveal. I ultimately decided to keep my slasher as a closeted character, allowing me to use my protagonist's love interest as a red herring. This decision also allowed me to juxtapose my protagonist's journey out of the closet with my antagonist's journey out from under the mask. Joey starts off closeted and insecure in himself, but he grows to realize he must fight for himself. Andrew starts off entirely repressing himself so he can blend in, and he only descends further into a closeted spiral. Andrew fits the moniker of Masc DL, a gay slang term used to describe masculine, straight-passing men who seek sex with men on the down low. I couldn't help but associate the similarities between Masc DL men hunting for sexualized bodies on Grindr with masked killers hunting for brutalized bodies in horror movies.

IX. On Queering Horror

I read sections of *Make America Hate Again: Trump Era Horror and the Politics of Fear.*[70] In his essay *An End to Monstrosity: Horror, Queer Representation, and the Trump Kakistrocracy*,[71] Marshall Moore explores the recent rise of queer horror on television shows like

[70] McCollum, Victoria. *Make America Hate Again: Trump-Era Horror and the Politics of Fear*. Washington State University, 2019.
[71] Moore, Marshall. "An End to Monstrosity: Horror, Queer Representation, and the Trump Kakistocracy." In *Make America Hate Again: Trump-Era Horror and the Politics of Fear*, 82–94. Washington State University, n.d.

American Horror Story,[72] *The Walking Dead,*[73] *and The Exorcist*.[74] He explains how it is most important that the association often made between queerness and the Monstrous Other is finally being severed in these shows. For decades in horror, any depictions of queerness were associated with the Monstrous Other, again contextualizing homosexuality as characteristic of the common enemy. Replacing this low baseline of representation for queer characters, there is a growing pattern of queer characters in horror showing resilience and capability, and Moore elaborates on this:

> "Indeed, throughout much of the 1990s, gay men were often depicted as having HIV, almost as if impending death were the only acceptable gay storyline. While resilience may be new as a descriptor when it comes to queer characters in film and on TV, there is nothing particularly new about it within the LGBTQ community."[75]

He goes onto explore resilient queer characters in the shows previously mentioned, explaining how some of these characters are made so queer, or so monstrously queer, that queerness becomes the antidote to the story's conflict. He also explains how shows should actively strive to make their queer characters' deaths not feel homophobic. Obviously, homophobia might be involved in the actual story, yet writers often, but should try to avoid to, create harsher fates for their queer characters because they're queer. This last point I found particularly tricky to navigate. My killer targets gay people because of their gayness, so each kill is motivated by some level of homophobia. I accentuated this by having my killer stab his victims in butt, an action that hits a distinctly queer fear for me. I tried to remedy the

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[72] Murphy, Ryan. "American Horror Story," 2011.
[73] Darabont, Frank. "The Walking Dead," 2010.
[74] Slater, Jeremy. "The Exorcist," 2016.
[75] Moore.

homophobia of these deaths by celebrating the characters for their gayness or creating a sense of justice after their deaths. I wanted my protagonist to struggle with accepting their sexuality, and I wanted my antagonist to increase his struggle by perfectly representing the toxically masculine, self-hating, homophobic, straight-passing, closeted gay man the protagonist could never be.

In my Fall 2021 semester, I took Film 285: Queer Aesthetics with Prof. Nathan Lee, in which he took us through various films, concepts, and patterns that fall under the umbrella of Queer film aesthetics. This class was an invaluable tour through a collection of cinematic depictions of queerness and the meanings behind those depictions. There are two pieces from the class that I feel are particularly relevant to my thesis.

The first being how Queer aesthetics are a form of looking. There is an emphasis on mise-en-scene, particularly costumes, hair, and settings. Aesthetic objects- such as white high socks, comic book figurines, posters of athletes- can function as symbols of queer desire.[76] This also touches on the concept of bell hooks' the oppositional gaze- a type of looking that involves the political resistance against the oppression of a marginalized person's right to look.[77] When looking at a man yields either pleasure or danger, the act of looking becomes one with stakes for a gay man; stakes that gay men often choose to live with. This connects to my second takeaway, which was the combination of gay desire and gay horror I felt from S*tranger By the Lake*.[78] We watched the 2013 European romance thriller in conjunction with the text *Cruising As A Way Of Life*,[79] from Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*.[80] Both the film and the text explore the act of cruising- the act of exploring public spaces in search of anonymous gay sex- and the complexities cruising creates for gay men. Dean discusses the

[76] Isherwood, Matthew. "Toward a Queer Aesthetic Sensibility: Orientation, Disposition, and Desire." *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research* 61, no. 3 (n.d.): 230–40.
[77] Hooks, Bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 151–132. Routledge, 2014.
[78] Guiraudie, Alain. *Stranger By the Lake*, 2013.
[79] Dean, Tim. "Cruising As A Way of Life." In *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, 176–212. University of Chicago Press, 2009.
[80] Dean, Tim. *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections of the Subculture of Barebacking*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

conundrum that faces every man who cruises: can one make love to a stranger? The text confirms that one indeed can. Dean even argues that cruising is an ethically exemplary form of connecting with strangers, as it embraces the otherness of the stranger rather than trying to demonize or tame that otherness. Dean also explores the differing structures of romantic encounters when he explains the difference between finding sex through contact versus through networking. Deans considers contact as a more physical, literal method, as far less prescribed, and as crossing class boundaries. In contrast, sex through networking abides by structures based on class and status. I found this text and movie combo incredibly helpful for me as I situated my own understanding of gay romance, cruising, and connection into a place where I could adapt that into a script.

X. On Writing & Rewriting

I can confidently say this script was the most difficult thing I've ever written. Prof. Barba advised me to first create a full outline of my script before I started to write. This outline consisted of scene numbers, scene titles, settings, scene descriptions, POVs, character lists, and whether the scene relied on dialogue or action. I structured my outline by sequences, so eight sequences, each with seven scenes. I can also confidently say that outlining was more difficult than straight up writing, because in the outlining process is where I decided what my script would be. We started by figuring out the general arc for my main characters and some major plot points. I went through many iterations of particular scenes and modified the support characters more times than I can count. The most difficult aspect of outlining was balancing the goal of making every scene contribute to my protagonist's goal and arc, while also trying to include moments for every character that play into a whodunit slasher. When I came into my thesis, I

thought I had what I wanted to say firmly in my head, and the outlining process made me realize I still had to figure out what I wanted to say and how I would convey that through the structure and style of my script. I really have to commend Prof. Barba for helping me nail down my outline, as it took me many long conversations, revisions, and critiques to get to the outline my script is based off of. Once I had an outline, which I submitted October 31st, 2021, I was able to dive into the actual writing, my favorite part. Translating my outline into a screenplay did prove to be a challenge, but I will never write a feature screenplay in the future without having a full outline. It functioned as my north star during the writing process. I turned in my first two sequences on December 17, 2021, and then my third and fourth sequences on January 11th, 2022. On February 8th, I turned in sequences one through six, and I submitted a full draft to Prof. Barba on March 2nd. I've been working on the actual script for around four months, and I did have a similar takeaway from the script writing process as I did the outlining process. No matter how much work or thought I put into a piece, I make real progress when I show it to someone and discuss it with them. I'm not invalidating the work I put into my script; I'm the one who finished it. However, open dialogue and honest critiques from another person are critical to my progress, and thankfully I had a fantastic advisor.

I am beyond thrilled to hear feedback about my script. I do believe the script needs work, but I am proud of what I produced. Once I get all the feedback I possibly can on this draft, I plan to rewrite my script. As I stated before, critique and dialogue are critical to my writing process, so I think all of the critiques I am about to receive will go a long way in helping me improve my script. I'm eager to see how far I can take The Closet Cases.

XI. Conclusion

In writing my thesis, I wanted to create the gay teen movie I never got to see in high school: a queer, dark, campy romp. I've often found that recent Hollywood gay movies either strike me as sickeningly saccrine or straight-up depressing, so I aimed for a roller coaster of a horror comedy. I found the horror genre to be an appropriate place to play with young mens' issues of balancing growing into their gender, sexuality, family, and place in society. Further, the archetypes of the masked killer and the final girl offered me a method of comparing gay men who respectively do or do not embrace a closeted, repressed lifestyle. I saw the similarities between Masc DL men searching for sex on Grindr and masked killers hunting for victims in movies, and I likened them to create a queer form of body horror. In conjunction, the decision to cast my final girl as a Twink Flick protagonist allowed me to directly challenge horror tropes of feminine vulnerability and masculine strength. I hoped to accomplish a lot within my thesis, and I still hope to accomplish more with it. It was a long, difficult process, filled with doubt and second-guessing myself. Yet, I am so glad I wrote this story, as I hope it can entertain and shock readers with dramatized slice of queer life.

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