Queerness in the Neo-Victorian Empire: Sexuality, Race, and the Limits of Self-Reflexivity in *Carnival Row* and *The Terror*

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Abstract:
This article investigates the various functions of queerness, both as a marker of identity and as an interventionist strategy, in critiquing imperial hegemony in two neo-Victorian television series, *Carnival Row* (2019) and *The Terror* (2018). Drawing on *Carnival Row*'s visual ties to neo-Victorian imaginations of slavery and contemporary discourses on Britain's postimperial racist legacies, this article argues that queer identity in *Carnival Row* is rendered narratively inconsequential and remains detached from the series' foregrounded (and inherently flawed) critique of Britain's White, racist nationalism. By contrast, a queer reading of *The Terror*'s spatial semantics, its religious analogies, and the mediation of nineteenth-century *tableaux vivants* (all via José Esteban Muñoz's notion of queer disidentification) discloses the layers of neo-Victorian imperial spectacle that the series dismantles. In contrast to *Carnival Row*, *The Terror* embraces queerness as a conceptual interrogation of its own imperial representational strategies. This article concludes with the notion that neo-Victorian critique of the British Empire cannot productively represent queer identities if its critical mode is not also inherently queer.

Keywords: anti-Black racism, Black neo-Victoriana, British Empire, *Carnival Row*, disidentification, Franklin expedition, intersectionality, imperialism, queer epistemology, *The Terror*.

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In 1976, when homosexuality in the British Navy and on merchant ships had remained exempt from the overall legalisation in the 1967 Sexual Practices Act, Arthur N. Gilbert remarked that "[t]oday, as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the thought of two sailors engaging in acts of sodomy, even in the privacy of their own quarters, is considered a threat to the ongoing life of the service" (Gilbert 1976: 72). Gilbert's drastic formulation, implying the end of a functioning navy if confronted with homosexual acts, draws attention to a distinction between queerness as a

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marker of identity and queerness as an epistemological mode of 'deviance' that warrants a brief explanation. My usage of the polyvalent, contested, and arguably sometimes contradictory term 'queer', on the one hand, refers to its representational, denotative strand in which it attempts to account for a spectrum of fluid LGBTQIA+ subjectivities, and, indeed, sexualities and identities constructed as divergent from the heteronormative matrix. On the other hand, queer encapsulates a (discursive) function that harkens back to the term's historical dimension. As Judith Butler writes, before the 1930s, and thus during the height of the British Empire, queerness referred to any "deviation from normalcy which might well include the sexual. Its meanings include: of obscure origin, the state of feeling ill or bad, not straight, obscure, perverse, eccentric" (Butler 1993: 176). Genealogically 'queer' is thus a term of exclusion, and queer studies have, in turn, deployed it to dismantle of the centring, unifying pulls of hegemonic heterosexuality – and in a wider sense, those of hegemony in all its manifestations. As such, the term connotes a "discourse of resistance" (Greer 2012: 5), or, as Noreen Giffney puts it, "an attempt to resist being made a slave to the discourses one is operating within at any one moment by peeling back the multitudinous layers of meaning contained within each and every pronouncement" (Giffney 2009: 1).

Beyond Giffney's insistence on the disruptive potential of queerness in general, her choice of the term 'slave' is instructive here for three reasons: Firstly, it ties contemporary queer theory to an understanding of heterosexual male hegemony as enslavement, dating back to the eighteenth century and perhaps most prominently realised in Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (see also Ferguson 1992: 87; hooks 2015: 126-127; and Stevenson 2019: 6-8, 31-38).[1] Its conceptual genealogy is thus inseparable from historical engagements with British imperialism. Secondly, Giffney tacitly evokes the fact that queer theory can never be oblivious to its intersections with critical race theory, that "[q]ueerness is not outside racialised histories and struggles that have happened" (Cummings 2019: 279), and that "to claim that sexual difference is more fundamental than racial difference is effectively to assume that sexual difference is white sexual difference, and that whiteness is not a form of racial difference" (Butler 1993: 182). Thirdly, the metaphor of enslavement marks the internal hierarchical ordering of discourses, and thus discursivity itself, as a fundamentally imperial practice. In this light,

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Gilbert's aforementioned assumption that homosexual acts would not only subvert but effectively corrode the military, social, and implicitly racialised hierarchies on which so much of Britain's empire-making had relied for centuries speaks directly to the overlaps between historically queer identities, queer theory's genealogy, and the history of British imperialism. If, as a result, imperial practices seem particularly susceptible to the destabilising potency of queerness, this is not without precedent. In response to the general stigmatisation and outlawing of 'buggery', or 'sodomy' – a capital offence until 1861 – queer Victorian subjects developed a germane language of implicature, codes, and "circumlocutory avoidances" (White 1999: 2). These reaffirmed and evaded what Michel Foucault has called the discursive "*grids of specification*" by which a spectrum of queer desires, sexual orientations, and sexual encounters found their way into the unspoken taxonomies of imperial and military contexts (Foucault 2010: 42, original emphasis). Here in particular, the "boundaries between homosexuality, intimate friendship, male bonding and paternalistic or avuncular sentiments were extremely porous" and allowed for queer articulation (Aldrich 2003: 3).

Given that neo-Victorian scholarship has long established the value of marginalised perspectives in dismantling not only the Victorians' mythmaking but also the narrative re-projections, re-imaginations, and re-appropriations of the nineteenth century, it is only consequential that two recent neo-Victorian series heavily invested in a critique of Empire feature openly queer protagonists. In René Echevarria and Travis Beacham's *Carnival Row* (2019–), the bisexual Faerie warrior Vignette Stonemoss (Cara Delevingne) narrowly escapes from a colonial war that ravages her homeland, only to be confronted with the racism of the metropolis, while David Kajganich's *The Terror* (2018) casts the homosexual mutineer Cornelius Hickey (Adam Nagaitis) as the show's charismatic quasi-antagonist. The two series share a number of other similarities: both are direct engagements with Britain's imperial past, but where *Carnival Row* centres a Ripperesque murder mystery in an allegorical fantasy-Britain called The Burgue, *The Terror*, an adaptation of Dan Simmons's eponymous novel (2007), speculates about the fate of the famed and failed 1845 Franklin expedition to find the Northwest Passage.[2] *The Terror* is a response to the numerous critics who have interpreted the excessive focus on the Franklin expedition as "evidence of our preference for worlds in

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which all trace of the feminine (or homoerotic) has been forgotten" (Thiess 2018: 223). Furthermore, the two series are set among the imperial executive (local law enforcement and the navy, respectively) and, as such, position themselves directly in discourses of queerness and hierarchy. Last, but not least, both draw upon a gothic supernaturalism – fabled anthropomorphic creatures in *Carnival Row* and a vengeful polar bear spirit in *The Terror* – that already bespeak the possible productivity of their queer representations, as Ardel Haefele-Thomas demonstrates:

> While Gothic became a place to explore the terrain of taboo sexual desires and gender identities, […] it became a safe location in which to explore ideas about race, interracial desire, cross-class relations, ethnicity, empire, nation and 'foreignness' during the nineteenth century. (Haefele-Thomas 2012: 3)

The shared liminality of the gothic and the queer, Haefele-Thomas maintains, has long allowed both concepts to probe the limits of what is deemed social normalcy, often in alignment with one another (Haefele-Thomas 2012: 2).

In theory, thus, both series seem well-suited for a revisionist dismantling of their neo-Victorian imperial fantasies, given not only their focus on queerness but also their overt neo-Victorian self-reflexivity. In practice, however, they differ fundamentally in their conceptualisation and functionalisation of queerness vis-à-vis empire. In *Carnival Row*, queerness remains a purely denotative marker of identity. Drawing upon its allusions to neo-Victorian revisitations of transatlantic slavery, I seek to locate *Carnival Row*'s representation of queerness as conceptually dissociated from its seemingly critical engagement with anti-Black racism. While the show's representation of its partially Black, queer cast seems to evoke intersectionality, both the defeatist narrative trajectories of the show's four openly queer characters and the series' decoupling of the critical intersections between gender and race illustrate that queerness in *Carnival Row* remains incidental and becomes disconnected from its corrosive potential. By contrast, *The Terror* not only draws direct connections between imperial ideology and the simultaneous construction and punishment of its queer Others, but its religious analogies of imperialism

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and its mediation of nineteenth-century *tableaux vivants* can be understood as a queer critique and dismantling of its very own imperial spectacle – and with it, a dismantling of the hetero-imperial politics of memorialising the Franklin expedition. In keeping with a self-reflexive and deconstructive understanding of queerness and a comparable potentiality associated with neo-Victorianism, *The Terror* offers an intervention into the relational meaning-making mechanisms of the televisual British empire. Ultimately, this article argues that queer identity in *Carnival Row* is rendered narratively inconsequential, uncoupled from the series' foregrounded (and inherently flawed) critique of Britain's White, racist nationalism, while *The Terror* embraces queerness as a conceptual interrogation of its own, imperial and decidedly neo-Victorian representational strategies. The spatial vectors of the two shows' sea voyages are already indicative of their shortcomings and strengths, respectively. While *Carnival Row*'s purportedly critical journey into the metropolis sees its own politics of representation subsumed by the very racist hegemony it attempts to counter, relegating its queer presences to plot devices to be mostly discarded, *The Terror*'s journey away from the heart of empire allows for a clearer, and queerer, apprehension of the rot beneath the imperial pomp and circumstance.

Excavating these two contrasting approaches to queerness and empire can help negotiate neo-Victorianism's essential, revisionist and "inherently presentist" potential (Kohlke 2018: 1). Debates about the definition and scope of neo-Victorianism itself have slowly shifted from the late-2000s' insistence on neo-Victorianism as being "*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis) towards a broader "cultural and academic venture to analyse the manifold overlaps and intersections, the continuities and the breaches between 'us' and 'them'", the Victorians (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 1). However, as Jessica Cox shows in great detail, Neo-Victorian Studies as a discipline – despite a nominal commitment to dismantling its own inherently post-Victorian canonisation – continues to evoke categorisations grounded in a distinctly postmodern understanding of self-reflexive narrative complexity (Cox 2017: 111-115). The shortcomings of such generic boundaries that seek to distinguish between texts that are merely set in the nineteenth century and those that are "*doing something with* the Victorian era" (Davies 2012: 2, original emphasis) may be best

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summarised in Cox's question, "[h]ow do we quantify the extent of the superficiality or otherwise of a text's engagement with the period?" (Cox 2017: 112). There is, of course, deliberate provocation at play when Cox conflates the textual mechanics by which a text knowingly situates itself vis-à-vis the Victorians with a sense its critical 'depth' (or a lack thereof). *Carnival Row*'s and *The Terror*'s differing conceptions of queerness, this article will conclude, point directly to the difficulty in fixing this particular nexus between varying neo-Victorian axes – presentism, self-reflexivity, but also the possibility of an intersectional critique. Where neo-Victorianism has deliberately foregrounded its revulsion with the British Empire since Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the intersections of such critique with the series' queer politics elucidate the ongoing necessity to rethink the categorisations within which neo-Victorian criticism operates.

1. Racial Allegories and the Incidental Queerness of *Carnival Row*

Carnival Row is set in a fictional, neo-Victorian, gothic and fable-infused universe whose very geography resembles imperial power structures of the nineteenth century. As the show's prologue and a wealth of promotional and fan-based co-texts explicate, various competing human empires – chiefly among them the Britain-inspired republic of The Burgue – have brutally vied for dominance of the Othered continent of Tirnanoc, home to fabled creatures modelled on a vast array of European mythological sources. However, the Burgue's "misbegotten adventure in Empire making", as a politician terms it (Freudenthal 2019: 16:20-16:23), is defeated by the nondescript human rivals, The Pact. As scores of former colonial subjects, mostly Faeries and Fauns, seek refuge in The Burgue, the human majority begins to curb their rights further and further, until, at the end of the season, all Fae are rounded up in the now-ghettoised district called Carnival Row. Little about this allegory of an imperial Britain is subtle, and *Carnival Row*'s critique of colonial warfare abroad and the appendant racism at home is as direct and didactic as it is occasionally superficial. Against this backdrop, the series seemingly follows the colonial romance plot so familiar to nineteenth-century audiences, albeit with a queer twist, as two lovers, Vignette Stonemoss, a Faerie, and the Burguish soldier Rycroft Philostrate (Orlando Bloom) fall in love in war-torn Tirnanoc.[3] The invader, however, turns out to be a colonial subject by birth: half-human/half-Faerie, Philo merely passes as human, having had his wings amputated in infancy.

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Vignette, however, is still pursued by her former lover, poet laureate, refugee, and now sex worker in The Burgue, Tourmaline Larou (Karla Crome) – a Fairie whose now-unrequited love marks a constant, queer counterpoint to the idealised, heterosexual romance at the heart of the series. Placed at the intersection of queer visibility and the show's overburdened racial allegories, *Carnival Row*'s depiction of neither Tourmaline nor Vignette allows for a succinct understanding of intersectional identity constructions. As the following section outlines, not only is Tourmaline's oppression only ever addressed with regards to White men, and as a result, its representation of queerness is largely uncoupled from the characters' agency; it also remains incidental to the narrative. Before I return to the show's neo-Victorian revisionist strategies of queerness (and the lack thereof), however, the show's foregrounded metaphors of and allusions to Britain's racialising and racist hegemony need unpacking.

Carnival Row's menagerie of mythical creatures may borrow from a vast repository of European mythology, yet these non-humans' exclusion from Burguish society is semanticised over and over again as specifically anti-Black racism. While Norse Trolls, Greek Centaurs, Roman Fauns, Celtic Faeries, Germanic Kobolds, and Central European werewolves serve as The Burgue's Others, within the first half hour, *Carnival Row* foregrounds the continuities between neo-Victorian visual tropes of slavery and The Burgue's structural racism against the Fae. Fleeing their homeland of Tirnanoc, Vignette and other refugees are forced into the dark hold of a large merchant ship, repurposed to carry Fae refugees to The Burgue, where they pay off their passage as indentured servants. As the ship sinks in a storm, Vignette attempts to open the hold, holding on to the hatch grate, screaming as it is slowly submerged (see Freudenthal 2019: 7:23). The scene fades to black and into elegiac slow-motion shots of drowned Fae and sinking timber. Both images together, the grate and the drowning, directly invoke previous neo-Victorian imaginations of the horrors of slavery and the middle passage, particularly in the TV series *Taboo* (see Nyholm 2017: 40:21). A decade before the main events of *Taboo*, it is slowly revealed, protagonist James Delaney (Tom Hardy) was ordered to nail shut the cargo hatch of a ship illegally carrying slaves, to cover up the East India Company's involvement in the slave trade, a horrific crime that eventually functions as a catalyst for Delaney's revenge on the company. The murder of enslaved people serves as a symbolic original sin of Delaney, and, by

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implication, the East India Company and Britain in the nineteenth century. This is mirrored in the show's opening credits in which the drowned and Delaney himself float in the ocean – an indictment of Britain's attempts to submerge its cruel histories underneath its imperial (neo-Victorian) surface. The grate is also the centrepiece of 'The Drawing Room' (also known as 'The Price of Tea'), in which a shackled, Black hand reaches up through a grate on the floor. Above it, an aristocratic Lady enjoys her cup of tea, clearly undisturbed by the suffering beneath her feet (see Stein 2000). *Taboo*, 'The Drawing Room', and the scene of the ship's sinking in *Carnival Row* share the same spatial semantics of surface and submersion, of visible imperial culture and repressed, even erased, memories of imperial crime. Strikingly, in the two earlier neo-Victorian texts, the characteristic geometrical imagery of the grate becomes not only a lethal trap for enslaved African people but a metonymic symbol of the transatlantic slave trade itself. Vignette's near drowning in *Carnival Row*, cast in the same visual language of the slave trade, thus not only emphasises the show's structural comparison of her home continent Tirnanoc with Africa; as it sets into motion her journey to the imperial capital, her plight also ventriloquises the Black post-slavery experience and Black resistance.

Consequently, *Carnival Row*'s evocation of numerous tropes of racism (which it ostensibly seeks to expose) all refer to Britain's dominant, post-imperial discourse of Blackness: the Fae face police brutality and are racially profiled on the streets, while the Constabulary – all traditional, British-inspired Bobbies – draws upon the tired notion of "one bad apple" (Amiel 2019: 36:32), which in its contemporary ubiquity cannot but connote *systemic* racism. The Fae are ghettoised in the titular district, forced into menial labour (only to be shunned for stealing 'human' jobs), and barred from official duties; they are labelled drug addicts, are incarcerated into segregated jails, and some are, in an overt nod to the Windrush scandal, unlawfully deported, while riots are in the air and the Fae's cultural artefacts are looted from Tirnanoc to be displayed in colonial museums. The Burguish right-wingers echo imperial civilisation discourses – "You need only look at the godless hell these bestial shite races have made of their own fucking lands" (Freudenthal 2019: 26:08-26:14) – and directly channel Thatcherite key terms in their talk of "the tide of Critch swamping our shores" (Freudenthal 2019: 26:22-26:25).[4] In tandem with *Carnival Row*'s insistence on the Fae's foundational trauma that echoes the transatlantic

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slave trade, the show clearly purports a fictional universe in which the construction of the Fae as racially Other is modelled upon the social construction of Blackness in the anti-Black West.

The grave implications of this congruence between *Carnival Row*'s categories of 'human' and 'White', as well as 'Fae' and 'Black', respectively, resonate beyond the show's discourse on race. For *Carnival Row*'s overt criticism of colonial warfare, imperial racist ideology, and the contemporary manifestations of anti-Black racism is predicated on the biologisation of racial difference. The Fae are not only Othered by visible physical differences – the Faeries' wings, the Fauns' hooves and horns, and so on – but by their different abilities as well, as Faun and Werewolves possess a superior sense of smell. The diegesis thus depicts what John G. Russell has called (with regard to racial metaphors in fantasy film) "a curious double vision wherein non-whites are viewed as alien, primitively savage/savagely noble outsiders, while whiteness seeks refuge in redemptive normativity" (Russell 2013: 212). This double vision is all the more striking, as *Carnival Row* only features three Black characters prominently: Tourmaline, Agreus Astrayon (David Gyasi), a rich newcomer who upsets the Burgue's racist socialites, and Philo's childhood friend Darius (Ariyon Bakare). Despite a larger number of Black extras, the show attempts to separate its own representational practices – its own, meagre inclusion of main Black characters – from its diegetic critique of Britain's systemic anti-Blackness. It asks its viewers to *see* its diverse casting and thus its efforts to rectify the much-lamented exclusion of Black actors from neo-Victorian culture, to *see* the biological differences between the Fae and humans, while we are simultaneously asked to *unsee* the fact that racialised Otherness is displaced onto the Fae – and thus, onto its main protagonists, portrayed by Bloom and Delevingne.

This negotiation of their own racialisation echoes dominant Black discourses, such as Philo's reckoning of his own positionality in The Burgue, had he not been shorn of his wings and been unable to pass as human. Lying next to Vignette in the Faeries' candle-lit library, the mise-en-scène bestowing a sense of profundity, Philo confesses his heritage: "Half-bloods don't belong anywhere. To the humans you're just another Critch, to the Fae just a reminder of the boot on their throats" (Foerster 2019: 45:47-45:59). Such notions of unbelonging have long been articulated among Black communities, only recently again in Johny Pitts's *Afropean: Notes*

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from Black Europe and his assertion "I felt I wasn't black enough for my old black friends, not white enough for my old white friends" (Pitts 2020: 72). The same pattern is visible on Vignette's first day in service, where she is told that her indentured servitude is indeed a mercy – "taking in an unfortunate as yourself is the least we can do" – and has her body racialised while being fitted for a servant's uniform: "All you Fae are so slight and hollow-boned" (Freudenthal 2019: 25:05-25:09, 25:17-25:19). Her hair is also policed; asked to cut off her widow's braid – worn in the false belief that Philo had died in the war – her reply evokes distinctly Black discourses on the stigmatisation of Black (female) hair: "My braids tell me who I am" (Freudenthal 2019: 25:34-25:36). Like the first two of these examples that speak to common, colonial conceptions – the benevolence of slavery and the physical suitedness of Black enslaved people to the tasks forced upon them – braids have long been taken as an occasion to discriminate against Black women, particularly in the workplace (Banks 2000: 16-17). Originating in precolonial Africa, braids have been constitutive of Black identity and heritage for centuries (Dabiri 2020: 209-224). In their repetitions and their patterning they are structurally as well as aesthetically interwoven with Black cultural production modes, such as sampling or polyrhythmic musical expression (Gaskins 2014: n.p.). Furthermore, Vignette's shocked exclamation "Don't!" (Freudenthal 2019: 25:22), as her employer attempts to examine her braid directly, refers to the common Black female assertion 'Don't touch my hair' from which Emma Dabiri's recent monograph on the cultural politics and history of Black hair takes its title (Dabiri 2020). What emerges here is a pattern of appropriating distinctly Black experiences and representing them via the show's diegetically racialised, yet extradiegetically White protagonists. Given neo-Victorianism's prevalence of White narratives, or, if prominent Black characters are featured, their functionalisation for narratives of White redemption – as in *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) or *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015-2017) – *Carnival Row*'s insistence on engaging Britain's imperial legacies of anti-Blackness seem laudable, and yet its representational politics in effect seize and appropriate the Black experience for White, and in part heterosexual, character development: Philo's redeeming coming-to-terms with his Fae identity, Vignette's resistance to her servitude, and ultimately their love for each other.

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In the same vein, the show uses one of its four openly queer characters, Tourmaline, to foreground Faeries' sexual exoticism and to justify its mere mentioning of its queer characters (as opposed to investing their identity with an inquisitive drive). During intercourse with a client, Tourmaline engages in what the show identifies as Faeries' sexual specialty, lifting him up into the air during his orgasm (Freudenthal 2019: 44:25-44:57). Due to her racial, biological difference, she is able to literally take him higher than a human woman could. Not only is this sexual practice precisely what human men look for in Faerie-sex, it is also simultaneously shunned (because of The Burgue's Victorian fears of 'miscegenation') and tacitly accepted (as the prevalence of wealthy patrons in the brothel indicates). Unwittingly, *Carnival Row* here reproduces the imperial exoticisation and hypersexualisation of Black women, of which Sarah Baartman might well be the most prominent example in both Victorian and neo-Victorian culture (see, e.g., Holmes 2007; Gorden-Chipembere 2011; Kohlke 2013; Davies 2015: 39-41). Historically "'black' (racialised and sexualised) women were indispensable to the construction of Englishness as a new form of 'white' male subjectivity" (Brody 1998: 7), and in *Carnival Row*'s imperial society, casting its colonial Fae-subjects in the role of sexually deviant and promiscuous Others effectively reinforces The Burgue's human (read: White) supremacy.

Within these racial power structures of the brothel it is of consequence for an assessment of the show's queer politics that Tourmaline is introduced as homosexual and that her predilection for men seems wavering at best. Tourmaline is framed as an empowered sex worker for whom her occupation provides a "distraction" (Freudenthal 2019: 43:33) and who takes a certain pride in her client's gratefulness, "because you made them feel young again for the night; that they don't have to hate their own bodies" (Goddard 2019: 6:42-6:46). Yet her self-determination is often enough constricted, and in one of the series' most overtly self-reflexive and conceptually queer scenes, Tourmaline speaks about her coping mechanism to erase the "pigs" (Goddard 2019: 6:48) among her clients from memory. Drawing each of them in the morning, she ruminates that "for some reason, when you get their faces down on paper, they're easier to forget" (Goddard 2019: 6:52-6:55). Symbolically, Tourmaline performs the very act inherent in much neo-Victorian fiction, a re-presenting of a traumatic, and in this case, tellingly, heterosexual encounter in her own visual language, and from

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her own queer positionality. In so doing, she inverts the colonial logic of fixing Othered identities through imperial measurement and recording. In thus 'knowing', essentialising, and archiving her clients, Tourmaline applies an imperial epistemology to the agents of empire who violate her in their pursuit of her alleged sexual exoticism. Tourmaline's sketches are therefore best understood as a queer 'drawing back' to the detailed, allegedly medical and ethnographic visualisations that were so instrumental in constructing Black (hypersexual) Otherness, such as that of Baartman. This scene, however, stands out in *Carnival Row* precisely because of its representation of queerness not as a by-product of identity but as a mode of interrogating The Burgue's imperial ideology. It seems sadly apt in the show's logic, then, that it ends with a brief rekindling of Vignette and Tourmaline's romance – their sole onscreen kiss – before they are interrupted by the news of another killing. Fittingly, the re-emergence of queer romance is thus directly interrupted by the murder mystery, whose lynchpin is Philo's backstory.

Philo's narrative arch and his relationship with Vignette are all intertwined with the show's only other queer couple, the Constabulary's Coroner, Dr Morange (Gregory Gudgeon), and Costin Finch (John Malafronte), headmaster at the orphanage Philo grew up in. While Morange sheared Philo – borne out of an affair between a Burguish politician and a Faerie singer – to allow him to pass as human, Finch brought him up. Meeting once a week in the brothel to disguise their homosexuality, their side story implies that the stigma of homosexuality in The Burgue outweighs the stigma of engaging in one's Fae kink. Yet *Carnival Row* refrains from ever showing them together, and it is only after Finch is murdered to get information on Philo, that we learn of their love. Finch and Morange's oppression is denotated, named, but only ever shown *ex negative*: having performed the autopsy of his secret lover – Morange is the coroner, after all – Philo marvels at his lack of agitation during the operation. Only in retrospect and through the *absence* of Morange's visible emotion is the scene rendered heart-breaking. The Burgue's oppression of queer love is thus only addressed verbally, without being re-presented on screen, and remains free of any intersectional implications, as both Finch and Morange are Burguish humans portrayed by White actors. Furthermore, both Finch and Morange primarily serve Philo's story of accepting his Fae identity. Where Finch is the missing link to finding Philo's mother,

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Morange is the messenger of this puzzle-piece in Philo's investigation. Upon having his narrative function expended, Morange, too, falls prey to *Carnival Row*'s fantastic serial killer.

Carnival Row's tally is bleak, as all queer characters are subordinated to the teleology of Philo's racialised Fae identity: half of them, Finch and Morange, are murdered because of their selfless service to Philo, while one, Tourmaline, is essential in facilitating the protagonist's survival while she wallows in her unrequited love. For Philo and Vignette, the acceptance of and pride in their identity in the series's final images seals their bond, thus superseding Vignette's and Tourmaline's ever-present but narratively inconsequential same-sex desire. In so doing, *Carnival Row* not only divests its critique of antiblackness from the representation of Black characters, but it also separates said critique from its queer potentiality. As Roderick A. Ferguson argues, "the decisive intervention of queer of color analysis is that racist practice articulates itself generally as gender and sexual regulation, and that gender and sexual differences variegate racial formations" (Ferguson 2004: 3). *Carnival Row* actively passes up the chance to draw upon queer theory's destabilising potential to unmask how the Burguish/British empire's White supremacy 'variegates' the hetero-patriarchal structures that the show ultimately reiterates: if Tourmaline is not allowed to articulate her oppression as a queer *and* racialised Fae (read: Black) woman, the character's queer identity *and* her portrayal by a Black actress amount to little more than an exercise in what Emily Ngubia Kessé (in the context of academic representations) has argued is a sense of diversity in need of decolonisation; a "[d]iversity […] that busies itself with *presence* and not *representation* while simultaneously consuming difference as a resource" (Fereidooni et al. 2020: 244, original emphasis). Apart from Tourmaline's brief performance of what I might call queerness-as-discursive-disruption, queerness remains incidental in *Carnival Row*, subordinated and appropriated for the two protagonists' character development and their idealised Hollywood romance. One caveat, however, remains: if such criticism has addressed the functionalisation of queerness – or the lack thereof – any judgement of its representation lies firmly beyond the scope of my own heterosexual, and at that, male, positionality. For the 'mere' incidence of queerness might well be regarded as an unburdening of representative necessity. Where queerness becomes less the narrative focus and an almost unregarded fact of the storyworld's composition, it may be

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irrelevant to the (failed) dismantling of imperial hetero-patriarchy, while at the same time unwittingly speaking to the normalisation of queerness in neo-Victorian culture.

2. Hickey's Ladder and *The Terror*'s Empire of Procreation

The actions and perceptions of *The Terror*'s Cornelius Hickey – a charming, insightful murderer and saboteur who has garnered an extensive and devoted fandom (see, e.g., Perkins 2018; Anon. 2019: n.p.) – are at the heart of *The Terror*'s queer politics. Throughout the series, Hickey's actions place him outside of the norms, customs, and epistemic sureties of his fellow crewmembers, allowing him poignant insight into the machinations of naval imperialism. As an imposter (we never learn his real name), he is the only crewmember who has not received training as a sailor and who is relatively uninstructed in the norms of Empire: Hickey's perception, *The Terror* implies, is unfiltered by the ideological construction of conceivable truths that inhibit the crew's conception of the supernatural. Simultaneously, Hickey's peripherality is articulated and narrated via his homosexuality, and his insight is directly linked to his queer desire. The death of Sir John Franklin (Ciarán Hinds) at the claws of the Tuunbaq in June of 1847 initiates a series of tableaux and visual linkages that establish Hickey's queer and disidentificatory perspective as authoritative: within the diegesis, Hickey's insights allow him to conceive of the Tuunbaq's spiritual nature before most of the crew.[5] Upon Franklin's death, his successor, Francis Crozier (Jared Harris), holds a funeral service just off *Erebus*'s bow. Reciting a eulogy originally written by Sir John himself for another crew member, Crozier invokes the biblical story of 'Jacob's Ladder' to emphasise the divinity of the expedition. The funeral, however, is intercut with Hickey's revenge on his former lover: during the eulogy, Hickey defecates into Gibson's bed before rummaging through the new captain's quarters and reading a secret letter of resignation that Crozier had penned before Franklin's death. In the following, I wish to unpack two central themes: the eschatological-imperial nature of narrating Franklin since his death (and by extension, his expedition), and the double-sense of Hickey's queer and 'profane' resistance that, as the term implies, must be understood both as an act of soiling and as an inherently secular counter-practice.

Adapted from the Book of Genesis, Crozier recites how Jacob, fleeing certain death, one night sought shelter in an inhospitable dwelling.

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Like the sailors trapped on the ice, Jacob "thought it a terrible place. No house, no hearth" (Mimica-Gezzan 2018: 37:34-37:39). In a dream that night, however, Jacob ascended a ladder to heaven and heard God assure him of his divine assistance. In Crozier's eulogy, Franklin, "who in the virtue and strength of his every gesture showed himself the elect of the Lord", now resides in heaven, and the crew, like Jacob, will be seen through the perils ahead in the knowledge that "[t]he invisible world of spirits, though unseen, was present for Jacob – not future, not distant, but present. And it is now, and it is here, among us if we open our eyes and see His truth amongst us" (Mimica-Gezzan 2018: 39:06-39:49).[6] Crozier's and, originally, Franklin's, sermon is a transparent attempt to convince the crew of the divinity of their mission, and, as a result, God's presence in the face of existential peril. The reference to Jacob's ladder in this key scene, however, also entails a decidedly hetero-imperial dimension that builds upon Franklin's, Crozier's, and the crew's belief in the unity of heterosexual domination and British exploration – a unity, the series has clearly established by the time we get to the eulogy.

In the preceding episode, 'Gore', flashbacks show how Crozier's marriage proposals are repeatedly rejected by Franklin's niece, Sophia Cracroft (Sian Brooke) – much to the delight of Franklin, who considers his fellow captain unworthy of his accomplished protégé. Franklin, however, scolds her for not being assertive enough towards Crozier, as her allegedly half-hearted rejections seem to spur him on: "This matter with Francis won't end until you are firm my dear. He's an explorer and you must know by now that explorers are made of hope" (Berger 2018b: 19:50-19:56). Exploration and courtship are mapped onto one another, as both originate in a proud and, here, decidedly heterosexual desire to 'conquer', to eventually, with perseverance, grind down any resistance and establish ownership of the female body. Franklin's enthusiastic tone, however, is undercut in the scene, as his wife and his niece exchange knowing glances during this speech, with Lady Jane (Greta Scacchi) resignedly sipping on her wine. Those who are subjected to heterosexual, male 'exploration', *The Terror* suggests, inhabit a level of awareness about its ideological significance for the domestic sphere as well, which escapes the proud imperialist. The show then cuts back to the men in the Arctic in 1847 to expand upon the notion of such conquest. Reminiscing about the failed William Parry expedition of 1824, Crozier and Ice Master Thomas Blanky (Ian Hart) speak of the frozen sea's resistance.

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With a wry smile, Blanky comments: "Aye, that was the ice that made me want to be a master. The way it kept moving us back. It was rough ice" (Berger 2018b: 21:16-21:26). What fascinated Blanky the most were the layers of ice, new ice piling up on top of old ice, that threatened the ship's integrity and seemed "[l]ike one whole country being squeezed into the borders of another" (Berger 2018b: 23:04-23:07). The resistance of the ice symbolically forces Britain's ever-expanding empire into an unnatural and constrained shape, if it is not traversed and smashed by the ship's reinforced hull. Here, conquest and expansion become a means of national self-expression that is both tempered and encouraged by the reluctance of the ice. Having just witnessed a silent (and possibly silenced) critique of such a conquering impetus and of the duality of male agency and female passivity by Lady Jane and Sophia, the scenes depict the seamen's investment in their own mission through a decidedly gendered lens. Both Crozier and Blanky are excessively invested in the feminised imagination of 'terra incognita' and the "symptomatic image of an explorer's penetration" engrained in the Western imagination of mapping 'pure', white, blank spaces (Shohat 1991: 45) – arguably, Erebus and Terror's sole purpose.

With the expedition's overt hetero-imperialism in mind, I will approach Crozier's funeral sermon from an alternative angle. The original lines in the Bible – a staple of any Naval library, two copies of which were recovered from the Franklin expedition (Potter 2009) – detail that God bequeathed Jacob the very territory he traversed in his flight: "the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south" (Genesis 28.13-14, KJV). Even if Crozier's abridged version skips over the imagery of total, unrestricted expansion in all cardinal directions, its mapping of the sailor's experience onto that of Jacob intertextually evokes the figuration of the explorer as the embodiment of his 'seed', and exploration and empire-making as procreation. The choice of sermon indicates that the Arctic space where the crew experience dream-like perils akin to Jacob's – the imperial Gothic of a vengeful spirit – is theirs by divine right. In fact, Queer Theology has long registered that within the book of Genesis "that fundamental colonial motion of patriarchy persists in a relation which makes of the Other a permanent minor in need of mastery and control" (Althaus-Reid 2003: 7-8), carrying on from Adam and Eve through to Jacob's ladder.

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However, while such an understanding of the Franklin expedition may be congruent with imperial ideology and the characters' conviction, it is at the same time undermined in *The Terror*'s funeral scene, particularly in Crozier's elegiac, broken voice and the way it literally carries across shots. Edited side-by-side, the (cinematic) subject of Crozier's sermon is not only his crew of Jacobs, assembled around Franklin's remains to dream of a better world. As Crozier's voice-over speaks about Sir John, "who in the virtue and strength of his every gesture showed himself the elect of the Lord, destined to reign with Christ forever" (Mimica-Gezzan 2018: 39:06-39:15), Hickey almost ritualistically dons a white glove (presumably to wipe himself). Visually, the series implies that the sermon is just as much about Hickey and his actions as it is about the deceased Franklin, that in Hickey an alternative embodiment of Jacob, another 'elect of the Lord', is spoken into being. If Jacob, in the words of Crozier, is made privy to an "invisible world, companion to the known one we perceive" (Mimica-Gezzan 2018: 38:08-38:10), the show's editing implies that so is Hickey. Here, *The Terror* can be understood to self-reflexively bring about another, parallel sphere of interpretation and knowledge that is, as we shall see, directly tied to Hickey's perception and his experience and marginalisation as a queer sailor. The literal soiling of the ship here inverts the imperial notions of heteronormative 'purity' and homosexual 'impurity', of the religious and the profane, and implicitly, of hegemonic and subjugated perspectives. In the precise moment that Franklin's life is transferred into the realm of remembrance and narrative – where it is inevitably couched in the mythology of empire – *The Terror* marks as authoritative a queer perspective that challenges such an understanding.

In keeping with such a reading, the episode is ambivalently titled 'The Ladder' – as opposed to Jacob's Ladder – and indeed, on his way to Gibson's cabin, Hickey descends a ladder into the bowels of the ship. The spatial inversion of upside and downside is mirrored in the scene's idiosyncratic use of outside and inside: where the funeral procession is left vulnerable out on the Arctic shelf ice, the symbolic outsider Hickey's location is inside the ship's cabin (which also grants him access to the new Captain's dire secrets in the form of Crozier's now obsolete resignation letter). His ascension (or his descent) thus signals not the coddling mythmaking of a quasi-religious imperialism, but the unmasking of its structures. Such distinctly queer dissociation from the hegemonic structures

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and rituals of naval exploration echoes what José Esteban Muñoz has termed

> identities-in-difference [that] emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere. (Muñoz 1999: 7)[7]

Indeed, as much as *The Terror* invests in its protagonist Crozier and its sympathies for his loyal crew, as much as it seeks to render his decisions and those of Captain Fitzjames (Tobias Menzies) palpable and understandable, from this point onwards the series always provides a distinct counterpoint. This queer "counterpublic sphere" may be rooted in Hickey's own perception but slowly turns into a queer inquisitive mode by which *The Terror* scrutinises its own, often benevolent representation of the Franklin expedition and its agents.

3. *The Terror*'s Queer Epistemologies

The consequences of this shift are immediately palpable. Placed at the margins of colonial Victorian strictures, and in that sense unburdened with imperial epistemic grasp of his surroundings, Hickey begins to accept Netsilik knowledge and swiftly recognises the Tuunbaq as the vengeful spirit that it is. Alone among his fellow sailors, Hickey is therefore aware that the crew's nightmarish encounters are the result of their own violent intrusion and the accidental, even if ideologically sanctioned, killing of an unnamed Netsilik shaman. In stark contrast to the expedition's high command, he therefore accepts the expedition's intrusion as the root of the show's titular terror. His insight, however, goes unvalued. Instead, he is morally chastised for his sexual transgressions with another crewmember, and physically punished for capturing the woman he falsely believes is now controlling the Tuunbaq, Silna (Nive Nielsen). Stripped naked and lashed on his buttocks, Hickey may not be punished for his queerness in the eyes of the crew, but via his insubordination he is certainly punished for acting upon his decidedly queer, alternative understanding of the situation, in which the imperial character of exploration precipitates the condition of the crew's

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own demise – manifest in the Tuunbaq's revenge.[8] This is evident in the punishment method, for the naval tradition of lashing was always more than a response to the perceived atrocities and insubordinations of seafarers as it actively constructed the perpetrators as sexually deviant – "[t]he lash implied sodomy, and vice versa" (Land 2006: 94), not least in this scene because it physically violates Hickey's buttocks. Just like the funeral sequence, the lashing from which the episode in question, 'Punished as a Boy', takes its title, visually endows him once more with Christian imagery when his outstretched arms are bound in a Christ-like pose. It is here, in the moment that Hickey is permanently antagonised, that *The Terror* begins to undergo a fundamental structural shift. Hickey's queer critique (i.e. that the imperial project carries the means of its own unmaking) can be understood as a subcutaneous structuring device for both *The Terror*'s form – mainly its editing and its visual symbolism – as well as its content, such as the expedition's ultimate failure.[9] We see a conceptual shift from Hickey's personal queer critique of the exploration's imperial underpinnings towards queerness as a conceptual interrogation and discursive resistance. In the following section, I will briefly turn towards two expressions of such queer – in the sense of counterhegemonic – epistemic inquiry: the notions of euthanasia and cannibalism, and *The Terror*'s climactic *tableau vivant*.

Arguably the Franklin expedition's most controversial aspect has always been the now well-documented cannibalism among the survivors, an issue firmly disputed by Franklin's widow when John Rae first returned from a rescue expedition to Britain in 1854 with first-hand Inuit accounts. In *The Terror*, cannibalism seems equally scandalised, despite the fact that well into the nineteenth century shipwreck and cannibalism were tacitly understood to be a common aspect of seafaring (Land 2006: 92, 96). Yet anthropophagy itself is not the sole source of horror, since Hickey's 'sacrifice' of his fellow crewmember and former lover, William Gibson also contributes to viewers' unease. As the rations dwindle on their trek South, Hickey enquires about Gibson's well-being with Harry Goodsir (Paul Ready), the only remaining doctor, and seeing Gibson in pain, dying of lead poisoning and unable to continue any further, he stabs him. Goodsir has been established as a compassionate, caring character; therefore his failed attempt to stop Hickey carries moral weight, signalling an inhumane cruelty on the part of Hickey. The dense scene is tightly framed, dominated by close-ups of the knife sliding through Gibson's white woollen clothing and

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of the three men's contorted faces. The camera shakes as synthesisers brood in the background, mirroring the intensity of Gibson's quiet death throes (Mielants 2018b: 13:24–15:29). Effectively, *The Terror* invites shock and disgust here, particularly as Hickey then orders Goodsir to prepare the body to be eaten. However, seven minutes later, in a parallel scene, Captain Fitzjames's dies, expressing the final wish that his body be put to good use, to "feed the men", before Crozier reluctantly administers a poison to rid him of his painful existence (Mielants 2018b: 20:38). Lowly lit, without any music, and, like Gibson's death, shot almost exclusively in close-ups, the scene's teary farewells and a promise of posterity – "There will be poems" (Mielants 2018b: 21:50-22:01) – evoke military honour, duty, and homosocial intimacy. In editing these two scenes so closely together, *The Terror* can be understood as retrospectively redeeming Hickey. Despite being developed as the show's antagonist, his approach to life and death in the Arctic only differs from the idealised narrative of the benevolent conforming explorers in its lack of decorum, not in its structure. Certainly, Hickey by now firmly inhabits a queer 'companion world', to paraphrase Crozier's funeral sermon, in which he understands and acts out the imperial impulses that permeate the entire expedition, but which are for the most part masked by the project's self-stylisation as heroic endeavour.[10]

Likewise, the show's climactic confrontation with the Tuunbaq is aestheticised as a counterpoint to the memorialisation of exploration both in the nineteenth century and in neo-Victorian culture. In *The Terror*'s first episode, a flashback takes us to performances of *tableaux vivants* in a London theatre, among them a recreation of James Ross's Antarctic expedition from 1839 to 1843, of which Crozier was second in command (see Berger 2018a: 18:24). Ross, Crozier, and Franklin are all in attendance and are asked to stand up for a round of applause, and the act of staging becomes a marker for the public reception of Britain's exploratory missions and, as Anita Lam writes, it "highlights the notion that exploration in the nineteenth century was itself a theatrical performance" (Lam 2020: 194). From this intradiegetic staging onwards, however, *The Terror* extradiegetically adapts the aesthetic structure of the tableau in a number of scenes, such as Hickey's would-be execution (see Mielants 2018a: 53:55-36:12) or the final image of Crozier 'going native' (see Mielants 2018c: 52:17-53:36). These are self-reflexive acknowledgements of the Franklin expedition's reception history, signalling the show's self-awareness that its

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own status as an adaptation cannot but comment on, sanction, or intervene into our understanding of the previous 'Franklins'. An exception, however, is Hickey's own tableau as he and the remaining men encounter the Tuunbaq: his arms outstretched in Christ-like pose, Hickey dies a poisoned, deluded mutineer on a row boat miles away from any water, croaking 'God Save the Queen' in his underwear, holding out for a polar bear spirit (see Mielants 2018c: 28:11-28:28). The mise-en-scène's aestheticised symmetry and the shot's hyperstructured, artificial composition clash violently with the sheer absurdity of the scene. The tableau – queer in its counterhegemonic deviation from the established paradigm – poignantly unmasks the ludicrousness of the glitzy memorialisation of the Franklin expedition not just within *The Terror* itself, but in British and North American (popular) culture as a whole. In such a queer interrogation lies the central function of *The Terror*'s "counterpublic sphere": it is not simply grounded in an idealisation of Hickey as a religiously coded idol but utilises his queer epistemology to strip the Empire of its idealised self-representation that relies on imperial mythmaking.

Furthermore, *The Terror* here takes care to separate Hickey's queer marginalisation from the racialised violence that the Inuit suffer, emphasising his participation in White settler colonialism: cutting off his tongue to soothe the Tuunbaq in a crude attempt to mimic *The Terror*'s Inuit ritualism, he is devoured alive. Where "the Inuit presence in *The Terror* deviates from their monstrous representation in historical recountings of the lost Franklin expedition" (Lam 2020: 196), Hickey's attempt to co-opt an indigenous perspectivity (and indeed an indigenous spirit), must end in failure. In her introduction to John Geiger and Owen Beattie's seminal history of the Franklin expedition, *Frozen in Time*, Margaret Atwood writes: "Ever since Franklin's disappearance, each age has created a Franklin suitable to its needs" (Atwood 2014: 4). As *The Terror*'s relational *discours* sharpens the view towards the layers and layers of (neo-Victorian) imperial spectacle, this most recent Franklin bodes well, as it strips the act of exploration from its pretence to be anything but a Eurocentric euphemism that territorialises Western knowledge production and colonial violence. The direct comparison between Gibson's and Fitzjames's deaths and Hickey's own tableau in particular disavow the circumstantial pomp and the serenity that seeks to bestow meaning to unfolding failure within the context of empire-building.

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4. Conclusion: Empire and Queer Critique

After 1815, Peter Pigott has argued, having vanquished the navies of its closest seafaring rivals France and Spain, "the Royal Navy looked for ways to expend its energy, stressing that "[i]n lieu of fighting a war, exploration was an alternative" (Pigott 2011: 15). Pigott's terminology of "alternative" and "expend" is telling, for it attests to a constructed surplus of energy, an insatiable catalyst at the core of imperial expansion. *Carnival Row* and *The Terror* both explore the dynamics of empires whose expansion has ground to a halt, and whose energy is symbolically turned inwards – in the case of *The Terror*, even cannibalising itself. In *Carnival Row*, it is the retreat from their colonies in Tirnanoc that cannot be separated from The Burgue's violent racism, by which the white-coded society narrates its own superiority in the face of military humiliation. Yet, despite its overt, often heavy-handed criticism of the deferment of imperial violence, the series fails to establish a visual or conceptual queer language that successfully mediates its concerns. *The Terror*, by contrast, slowly widens its focus from a representation of queer identities to a queer representation of empire. As such, it is not only keenly aware that gendered dimensions constitute imperial conquest, but also of the potency of queer (self-)interrogation and, to draw on Muñoz again, individual, structural, and aesthetic "disidentification" (Muñoz 1999: x). Both series' diverging approaches allow for a revised understanding of the interplay between queerness and neo-Victorian empire imaginations. Without an engagement of the polyvalence and the inherent contradictions and productive tensions that have marked queer studies since their inception, even the grittiest Hollywood surface of the re-envisioned nineteenth century runs the risk of reproducing not so much an indulgence in imperial splendour and squalor alike, but to unwittingly reproduce, reaffirm, and visually reify *in their critique* a decidedly imperial as well as hetero-patriarchal ideology. In other words, critique of the British Empire cannot attempt to represent queer identities unless it employs a distinctly queer critical mode.

This poses pertinent questions to neo-Victorianism and neo-Victorian criticism itself, particularly to the latter's multitudinous attempts at somehow drawing the former's generic boundaries in accordance with textual complexity. Even by the narrowest standards of neo-Victorianism, it is obvious that both series transparently flaunt their self-reflexivity – think of *Carnival Row*'s mashup of mythical creatures, its ironic Dickensian

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allusions via a constable called Dombey or a Tattersby Hotel, or, indeed its presentist tropes that appropriate and exploit contemporary anti-Black racism. Likewise, *The Terror*'s visual emphasis on the ship's library of empire narratives or its use of overly stylised cinematic *tableaux vivants*, as well as its critique of Britain's Franklin-reverence, must be read as self-conscious engagements (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). Susanne Gruss and Nadine Boehm-Schnitker have argued that "neo-Victorianism calls for newly calibrated tools of analysis which enable us to approach it as a symptom of a contemporary literature and culture which more strongly integrates questions of ethics" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2014: 2). In the same vein, Marie-Luise Kohlke argues that "Neo-Victorianism's typical self-reflexivity *would also appear* to resist any blithely naïve projections onto the past" (Kohlke 2018: 5, emphasis added). Kohlke insists upon Phillip Barrish's distinction between "blithe or *uncritical* presentism" and "critical presentism" (Barrish qtd. in Kohlke 2018: 6, original emphasis) to mark the necessity of qualifying self-reflexivity as a necessary, but not a sufficient criterion to judge a text's politics. At this junction, queerness as a critical, interventionist category can facilitate such distinctions, as it has over the course of this article; for *Carnival Row*'s and *The Terror*'s differing understandings of queerness imply that the always-lingering question of textual complexity reveals less about the state of neo-Victorianism than the question to what ethical ends such textual complexity is, or should be, deployed.

Notes

1. bell hooks's assertion remains authoritative in this respect: "When white reformers made synonymous the impact of sexism on their lives, they were not revealing an awareness of or sensitivity to the slave's lot; they were simply appropriating the horror of the slave experience to enhance their own cause" (hooks 2015: 126).
2. Countless imaginations of the Franklin expedition have followed Charles Dickens's and Wilkie Collins's hagiographic 1856 play, *The Frozen Deep*, that was performed for Queen Victoria. Among them are the brief mention of the expedition in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), or paintings such as Edwin Landseer's 1864 *Man Proposes, God Disposes* and Francois-

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Etienne Musin's *HMS Erebus in the Ice, 1846*. Whether in Stan Rogers's song 'Northwest Passage' (1981), or the traditional 'Lady Franklin's Lament' that appeared shortly after the expedition had been understood to be in peril, the expedition has been reinterpreted numerous times – not least by Bob Dylan in 'Bob Dylan's Dream' (1963). In fact, multiple 'Franklins' have wound their ways through popular and less popular culture since the 1850s. As a general tendency, the early adaptations are certainly celebratory, but particularly the late twentieth century and twenty-first century have seen more critical variations emerge, among them Rudy Wiebe's novel *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994) and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) (see Knopf 2015). The latter, for instance, "resort[ing] to dubious appropriation, sensationalism, and historical misrepresentation […] depicts Sir John Franklin as a paedophile rapist of his Aboriginal foster-daughter Mathinna to condemn British imperialism's metaphorical 'rape' of Tasmania" (Kohlke 2018: 2).

3. The colonial romance, predicated on what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has termed the myth of "[w]hite men […] saving brown women from brown men" with regards to India (Spivak 1994: 92), undergirds the "fantasy of liberal colonial rule" (Kapila 2010: 2). Such narratives derived from (and, in turn, constructed) historical cases such as the much-publicised and scandalised marriage between Major James Kirkpatrick and the Hyderabadi aristocrat Khair-un-Nissa at the close of the eighteenth century, or novels in the vein of Philip Meadows Taylor's *Seeta* (1872) for the Indian subcontinent and those modelled on H. Rider Haggard's South Africa-set *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), to name but a few prominent examples.
4. Thatcher infamously warned in 1978 that Britain was being "rather swamped by people with a different culture" and expressed her understanding that "people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in" (Thatcher 1978: 2).
5. The imperial epistemology of the Arctic consistently drew upon the supernatural: "[i]ndeed, almost every nineteenth-century polar narrator touched on the subjects of mirages and illusions, whether referring to the shifting shapes of the ice or the strange way that sound travelled, or how small things in the distance seemed enormous" (McCorristine 2018: 13).
6. *The Terror* here of course draws attention to the dominant construction of Franklin as the glorious discoverer of the Northwest passage that would dominate the expedition's reception long into the twentieth century, in part because a sense of "British national pride prevented most contemporaries

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from critiquing the mission's imperial hubris, poor planning, and other inadequacies" (Cracuin 2016: 446).

7. Despite his focus on queer of colour practices, Muñoz explicitly factors in the possibilities of more majoritarian disidentifications. Certainly, I argue for an interpretation Hickey's disidentification as "formed in response to the cultural logic of heteronormativity" but not to the same degree as Muñoz foregrounds responses to "white supremacy, and misogyny – cultural logics that […] work to undergird state power" (Muñoz 1999: 5).
8. It is highly symbolic that the men are slowly poisoned by tin cans, reifying Hickey's notion that the origin of the expedition's violent failure is engrained in the structure of their mission. *The Terror* here alludes to the Victorian obsession with consuming and gestation, which insinuated that what was 'consumed' – eaten, read, seen, perceived – would influence the body. Soaking up the ideology of empire throughout the journey – on the stage and in the books of the prominently depicted ship's library of colonial literature – and eating from lethal cans thus becomes synonymous (also see Lam 2020: 196, 198). Consequently, the series visually also likens the men to these cans: it spends much time on scenes of dressing and undressing decaying bodies of the men underneath the at times absurd decorum of stately uniforms. It is particularly the re-opening, or the rotting, of Captain James Fitzjames's wound that is given attention: sustained in a much earlier colonial campaign to China, the scarred wound locates the physical decay as an intrinsic condition of a history of colonial conquest. As the secret of the spoiled tins is revealed, Fitzjames's wound bleeds through the surface of his uniform. Underneath their hardened surfaces, the Empire's symbolic tin soldiers bring the conditions for their failure to the Arctic.
9. Such a notion is engrained in the Tuunbaq that "has been appropriated and repackaged by these Eurocentric authors and critics as a monster that intertwines the horrors of cannibalism with the suspicion that we are all potential monsters" (Lam 2020: 197). As such, Lam argues, the monstrous imagination represents "the beast within (the imperial project)" (Lam 2020: 196).
10. Exploration in the mid-nineteenth century was valued not necessarily by its achievements, but by the perils a particular expedition overcame. Therefore, even the most disastrous of expeditions had the potential for 'imperial greatness'.

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