

Sexual Encounters Between the Living and the (Un)dead in Popular Culture

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Depictions of sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead have become increasingly prominent in popular culture. Following in the footsteps of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), vampires have sex with the living in *Twilight* (2011, 2012), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) and *True Blood* (2008-2014). Zombiism is in part a virulent sexually transmitted disease in *iZombie* (2014-2019). The living are perpetrators of sexual violence against the (un)dead in *Deadgirl* (2008) and an (un)dead girlfriend returns for threesomes in *Nina Forever* (2015). A number of the examples given here are adaptations, and where a range of literary and visual genres have proved highly successful in fueling the spread of sex between the living and the (un)dead from the page to the screen, monsters – not exclusively (un)dead ones – have frequently been utilized as a way for society to “safely represent and address anxieties” (Levina and Bui 2013, 1). Many of these issues and anxieties relate explicitly to gender and sexuality. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) is famed for playing into Victorian anxieties about “female sexuality and gender roles” (Swartz-Levine 2016, 345). Kee (2014, 177) has emphasized how zombie films often “toy with fantasies of miscegenation without explicitly dealing with the subject.” In the twenty-first century, the social anxieties and concerns about sexuality and gender signaled in texts where the living have sexual encounters with the (un)dead are as varied as the texts in which they feature.

The #timetoshine advertising campaign for Orbit Chewing Gum in 2019 provides an apt example of the breadth of the living/(un)dead coupling now pervading popular culture. It proposes that rather than running from a zombie on prom night, a teenager might want to kiss one. Only fifteen seconds in length, the advert is a nod to the well documented dominance of

zombie narratives in the current cultural moment (Luckhurst 2016). It also testifies to the increasing presence of representation of sexual encounters of the living/(un)dead kind within our cultural lexicon. The advertorial vignette features a living teenage male saying to a rotting teenage female zombie “I don’t know if we should kiss. I mean, you’re a zombie.” The zombie female pops a chewing gum in her mouth and responds, “but I’m kinda hot.” Sexually suggestive music with the lyrics “do you wanna go to my bed...” plays as the two kiss. Through a critical lens, the brief depiction might prompt a range of questions about transgressive sexual encounters, femininity, masculinity, normative gender roles, liminality and bodily monstrosity. As we seek to demonstrate in this chapter, the depiction of sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead in popular culture can offer auspicious opportunities for analysis.

We focus on sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead in three television series, namely: *In the Flesh* (created by Dominic Mitchell for BBC Three and aired 2013-2014), *The Strain* (created by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan for FX and aired 2014-2017) and *American Horror Story* (created by Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy for FX and airing 2011-present). Television can be understood as a particularly apt space for social-science fiction, where issues central to lived experience can be negotiated and explored (Reed and Penfold-Mounce 2015; Penfold-Mounce, Beer, and Burrows 2011). Similarly, television may be understood to “constitute a gigantic empirical archive of human sense-making” ripe for analysis (Hartley 2003, xviii). The three texts examined here can be understood to offer spaces in which complex issues are negotiated in “safe spaces” but also as ones that are actively involved in processes of “sense making” both for and with audiences. In their complex multiplicities of meaning, the texts considered can be understood as both “subversive of and complicit in dominant culture and ideologies” (Jowett 2005, 2). Despite their immediately apparent implications of transgression and necrophilia, many of them

perpetuate a range of dominant cultural and social gender norms and heteronormative ideals. The figurative images of “monstrous males” and “fatal females” on which this collection focuses are both upheld and subverted in the sexual encounters examined.

Throughout the chapter the plural “audiences” is adopted to acknowledge the plurality of audiences in the twenty-first century and the ways in which different audiences make sense of television in different ways (Livingstone 1998). Being female or male, for example, “will mean different things to different people” (Jowett 2005, 6). Similarly, individual experiences and subject positions will shape the reception of the texts examined here. The term (un)dead has been selected for two reasons. First, to denote the breadth of the characters represented in these series who rarely conform to and often complicate established categories of the (un)dead such as zombies or vampires. Second, to emphasize that these characters, though evidently not the “real” dead, are often positioned as “dead people” who are sometimes monstrous rather than as “monsters” because they are dead. Similarly, monstrosity is figured not only of the (un)dead in these series but also of the living, typically as a consequence of monstrous actions toward either the living or the (un)dead.

In the Flesh

In The Flesh is premised on the idea that being a zombie (known as Partially Deceased Syndrome in the series) can be managed with a treatment. As the treatment is not curative, the (un)dead require rehabilitation before being reintegrated into society. In principle, they are able to go about their lives in relatively similar ways to the living. However, they are visibly “other.” They have pale skin and white eyes with small, pin-prick pupils. At treatment centers, they are instructed on how to wear contact lenses and a cover-up mousse in order to appear “alive.” Philip, who is alive, and Amy, who is (un)dead, offer the most sustained

representation of a sexual relationship in the series. In season one they are seen in Amy's bed, with the implication they had a "one-night stand." The sex is heterosexual and between two cisgender characters. It is notable, however, that Amy has, as she explains, gone "*au naturale*" by not wearing cover-up mousse. Visually, it is clear she is (un)dead. Philip had, the night before, tried to segregate Amy in a part of the local pub cordoned off for the partially deceased, but it was clear Philip was sexually attracted to Amy. Amy has little interest in Philip and has spent the night with him as a consequence of being bored and lonely. As Philip leaves he insists "this, what happened last night, can't get out." Philip explains: "I'd lose my job... Oh Jesus, there'd be hell to pay."

The sex here is taboo in line with Douglas's (2002) framework of the inter-relationship between pleasure and taboo. That is, that sex is, primarily, a pleasurable experience, yet across societies globally it is mired with rules, regulations and purification rites (Douglas, 2002). Sex within Douglas's (2002) framework might also be seen to become taboo when the aim of sexual activity does not align with that of society writ large. Here, no reproduction could take place given that the (un)dead Amy could not become pregnant. More broadly, a relationship of any kind between the living and (un)dead is positioned as highly undesirable and risky in this series where members of the community's Human Volunteer Force are seen to execute the (un)dead for their "otherness."

When audiences witness the aftermath of Amy and Phillip's one-night stand Amy is quick to point out that she was not satisfied with the sexual encounter either, asking Philip: "You think I want it known I shagged someone like you?" She is signaling Philip's reputation as "uncool," officious and aligned with those against the reintegration of the (un)dead into communities. Philip, evidently offended, responds: "Good. Keep your mouth shut. People round here found out I slept with a rotter I'd be strung up." Here too, Amy's position as "rotter" and Philip's attraction to her draws on the framing of the taboo-based paradox

associated with sex. Philip's explicit reference to potentially violent community retaliation against him also echoes the series' broader concerns with "othering" and the ways in which sexual relationships deemed to be transgressive have historically been – and continue to be – met with severe repercussions. Similarly, Philip's concerns about community retaliation demonstrate how Amy can be read as a "fatal female." Any sexual contact with her poses a threat.

The sex between Amy and Philip is clearly consensual, if not necessarily highly desirable for Amy. Not only is she not particularly attracted to Philip, but we later discover that Amy and the other (un)dead characters have not been able to "feel," raising questions about whether it has been possible for Amy to experience physical sexual pleasure. Later in the episode Amy experiences what might be interpreted as an incidence of gendered violence. Gary, a local member of the Human Volunteer Force who fought the dead in their rabid zombie state, arrives at Amy's house to paint "PDS" on it in red paint. He sees that she is not wearing cover-up mousse and before leaving, grabs her from the bed, drags her to her dresser and smudges the make-up over her face. He shouts "In this village, yer cover up yer rotter face! Got it!" The risk of sexual assault by an unknown man entering her house and bedroom without permission are likely to be in audiences' minds. Gary asks Amy: "You're not like other girls are you?" This, according to Moore (2016, 306) "might refer to her rejection of constructions of femininity that require women to perform and conform to standardized notions of beauty by applying make-up." In the first season of *In The Flesh*, Amy is positioned as sexually desirable (to Philip, and potentially to Gary) but also as monstrous – failing to conform to the community's expectations of the (un)dead and of women.

Shame is often apparent in the sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead in this series. Season two features an undead brothel. Philip has been visiting the brothel and

asking an (un)dead woman to dress up like Amy, opting for the full “girlfriend experience.” The sex-worker takes off her make-up, which she has used to make her look living for the other customers, so that she can look like the “*au naturale*” Amy – this again marks out Philip’s sexual desires as deviating from the norm. It emerges that a local woman has been filming those entering and leaving the brothel. The implication is that those who are caught will be doubly shamed, first for using a brothel, but also for using a brothel in which the sex-workers are (un)dead. As Seal and O’Neill (2012, 6) have explained, in the cultural history of prostitution the sex-worker often emerges as a “body-object symbolized by liminality, abjection, commodification and desire.” In this series, the (un)dead state of the sex-workers concerned furthers the ways in which these marginal characters, who are all female, can be read in terms of liminality and abjection. Yet here an interesting character development occurs for Philip, who sacrifices his role as a respected member of the local community. As the Human Volunteer Force drag the sex-workers and customers out of the brothel and line them up along the wall outside to be photographed, Philip arrives and attempts to give a rousing speech. Though received with ridicule, Philip’s speech in season two, episode four of *In the Flesh* reveals his personal growth:

I know how it feels to shout about bad things and bad people. It’s nice. It’s as if it’s making you a purer person inside. But it’s not real [...] you can only pretend for so long and then you’re back stuck with yourself [...] And all the things you’re ashamed of. That you know you’ll do again. What I’m trying to explain is that idea that you were ever a pure person just makes everything worse. It makes you so disappointing [...] People aren’t pure [...] We’re not good any more than they’re evil or they’re inhuman [...] If we could accept our real selves and live with who we really are and love ourselves then maybe we could accept... and live with...

Philip goes to stand with the other customers lined up outside the brothel, demonstrating to the community that he too has been paying to engage in sexual activity with the (un)dead. Much of his speech is cliched, awkward and poorly articulated, in line with his characterization as a young man who has never quite fitted in. Yet he is also positioned here as reflective and open to change in a speech that echoes a series of ideas about purity, “othering” and us/them rhetoric related to miscegenation and sexuality, championing both self-acceptance and the acceptance of others.

Later on in season two, episode four, Amy finds Philip alone. Impressed by his honesty at the brothel, she approaches him and jokes:

terrible news about the full disclosure on your sex-life by the way. Not going down brilliantly with the townsfolk. Your reputation’s in tatters. What with the necrophilia and fancying rotters [...] prepare yourself for some sort of lynching or social ostracism.

Amy’s explicit reference to necrophilia is positioned as comedic because Amy and the sex-workers are evidently “alive” even if they are dead. The choice of the words “townsfolk,” “lynching,” and “social ostracism,” are all indicative of the conservative, “old fashioned” views held by the community. The two go on to have a loving relationship and this development is indicative of why sex between the living and the (un)dead on television can be especially interesting, given “the seriality of TV lends itself to moral complexity” and “to a perceived sense of intimacy between audiences and TV characters as we watch their lives unfold on a daily or weekly basis” (Jowett and Abbott 2013, 202). Audiences see Philip shift from a conformist, self-righteous young man into a confident and accepting one who rebels against his community’s views. As the second season comes to a close, Amy begins to rehumanize. Amy seems to reveal her own anxieties over whether Philip loves her, or

whether he does have a specific sexual interest in the (un)dead, asking: “Are you still gonna like me? [...] Now I’m, uh, warming up?” Philip responds with: “Amy, I’d like you cold. I’d like you hot. I’d even like you tepid [...] You’re still you. Dead or alive.” Amy’s re-humanizing as a consequence of finding “true love” echoes a series of fairy-tale narratives where a young woman is “saved” by a man. As such it might be understood as equally as normative in terms of established power dynamics in sexual relationship as the depictions of (un)dead female sex-workers in the series. Yet the focus on the individual, on Philip’s love for Amy because she is Amy and not because of a constructed category into which she fits, also echoes recent cultural discourses around the dissolution of categories of gender and biological sex and the ways in which these oppositions, not without critique and dissent from varying quarters, are being “challenged in social and cultural life” (Nicholas 2014, 1).

The Strain

The Strain, an FX television series based on a trilogy of books by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan, presents a world as it enters “the end times.” Within *The Strain* sex is predominantly a non-issue for the (un)dead because the vampiric life of the series, known as the *strigoi*, experience the atrophication of their genitals during the transitory process, and gain what is known throughout the series as a “stinger,” a long, fleshy proboscis which sits under the tongue, used to consume blood and infect others striking from the yonic opening formed in the *strigois*’ throats. In this section, we draw on two story arcs across the series. The first is the transformation to *strigoi* of Gabriel Bolivar, a musician and presumed “sexual player” (season 1). The second is the kidnapping of programmer Dutch Velders by the *strigoi* Thomas Eichorst (season 2). In framing the place of the “stinger” by considering the narrative of Bolivar, we consider the way in which it is used as a form of assault by Eichorst.

The infected but not yet fully (un)dead, transitional Bolivar is pictured in his bathroom, where he proceeds to crush and snort medication for erectile dysfunction before returning to three women, in various states of undress, on his bed. The four parties caress one another before Bolivar takes one of them and places her on her back, standing between her parted legs. He becomes removed from the events taking place concentrating on the pulsing vein in the woman's neck before reaching down and biting her. As he is yet to transform into a *strigoi* his teeth break the skin, but this does not kill her. Audiences return to Bolivar's private bathroom in the next episode. Having just returned from a performance he stares at himself in the mirror, his eyes bloodshot red. As he removes his wig we see his hair has almost entirely gone. As he begins to remove the grey/white makeup he is shocked to find that his skin is almost the same color. Seemingly unfazed by these changes, Bolivar walks over to the toilet and begins to urinate. We hear a loud splash as his testicles and penis fall from his body into the bowl of the toilet. Still seemingly unfazed, he flushes the toilet before turning around to the camera revealing a fleshy flat surface where his genitals had once been. Later in the episode a urologist visits his apartment in order to check up on his condition at the request of his personal doctor. Bolivar sits in the dark, his body twitching. We hear a loud thud as the urologist screams. Bolivar's fleshy proboscis has attached to her and is throbbing as Bolivar screams "mine" repeatedly and drags her across the floor.

Erectile dysfunction has been recognized across many sources as having a detrimental effect on an individual's sense of self (Potts, et al. 2006; Marshall and Katz 2002). As Foucault (1978, 103) attests, sexuality and acts of sex

...appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power ... sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality ... capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.

Power, and the loss of phallic power, as such presents Bolivar with a crisis of identity in which what he has previously used as a marker of his power and competency is dwindling. Bolivar, even though positioned across the early series by his phallic power and sexual allure and competency, appears completely unphased at the loss of his penis - shrugging and flushing the toilet. In essence, it could be argued that Bolivar is in fact welcoming his transformation replacing the dysfunctional penis with the proboscis, the phallic like “stinger.” Both, per se, offer the opportunity for a form of reproduction, with the “stinger” acting as a way to transfer the viscous white fluid containing small worms that act to transfer the vampirism from the host to the victim. Bolivar's lack of virility is replaced by the strength of the “stinger,” demonstrated as being strong enough to be able to drag a human being. Sexual lust is replaced with blood lust.

Although, across some vampire television there are aspects of consensual blood consumption (cf. *Shadowhunters*, 2016-2019), Bolivar's actions against the urologist take place without consent. Blood, however, is used throughout vampire television and cinema for its tabooed, yet reproductive quality (Tenga and Zimmerman 2013). Foucault (1985, 125-127) notes that historically there was a contention that semen itself was just foaming blood, caused to foam by the vigors of sex. However, this developing relationship between blood and semen becomes particularly poignant when considering sex between the human and the (un)dead and the way in which blood is engaged with during “monstrous” intercourse. What remains consistent in Bolivar's sexual encounters regardless of whether he is alive or (un)dead is his treatment of women as sexual objects, as “his,” there to entertain him and for his own gratification with no agency or their own. In this representation of sexual contact between the living and the (un)dead, the male is monstrous both (un)dead and alive, and for the women involved this can prove fatal.

In the latter part of season two, Dutch Velders, a female hacker, is being held hostage by one of the leading antagonists, *strigoi* Thomas Eichorst. Throughout the series Eichorst's sadistic character has been well-founded, primarily via his status as the Commandant of the Treblinka Concentration Camp. Eichorst, like Bolivar, is positioned as monstrous both alive and (un)dead. Eichorst, having chained up Dutch in a padded cell, enters the room drunk (achieved by force feeding alcohol to a host before drinking their blood) and proceeds to become enraged at Dutch, stating "you enjoy being looked at" and that her clothes and hair are "all very calculated." The implication here is that Dutch "uses" her sexuality as a weapon and enjoys having "power" over men through her sexually attractive appearance. Just like with Bolivar, Eichorst's genitals have atrophied and, with that, comes a lack of identity. As the plot is unwoven, it is revealed that Dutch reminds Eichorst of a Jewish woman he once dated, to which she mockingly asks if he became a Nazi because he couldn't get laid. As Scaptura and Boyle (2019) state, "when a man's gender identity is threatened, he is more likely to endorse traditional gender roles, overcompensating to appear more masculine."

As the episode progresses Eichorst's treatment of Dutch becomes more traumatic. Eichorst enters the room demanding that Dutch remove her pants, before screaming "now" in her face. The defensive Dutch, making explicit the threat of rape implied here, retorts "I know you lost your dick seventy years ago, so what're you gonna do?" She resentfully complies and Eichorst exclaims that it is a "night for trying new things" before grabbing Dutch's face and crudely applying red lipstick to her mouth as she struggles. The parallel here with *In The Flesh* is notable, as in both series a scene in which a male forces a female to wear make-up in a gendered act of violence emphasizes the ways in which women's visual appearance can be interpreted as both a threat to, and something to be controlled within, patriarchal hierarchies. Eichorst congratulates himself on his application of the lipstick before laying down on the ground and forcing Dutch to spread her legs and bend over. As she does,

Eichorst licks his lips before his “stinger” emerges from his mouth and begins to strike across Dutch’s inner thighs. Just before he begins to actively sexually assault Dutch with his “stinger,” she reaches round and hits him in the eyes with a can of pepper spray. Bauman (1998) may regard this interaction with the “stinger” as being an example of a “sex-substitute,” that is where sex is stripped of its reproductive purposes, to be defined around male pleasure. What is evident in these sexual encounters between the living, always female, and the (un)dead, always male, in *The Strain* is the ways in which male power is constructed as dependent on power over a woman. Eichorst in particular is positioned as both emasculated and threatened by Dutch and more broadly by women, whose emancipation over his extended life course troubles him. His attitudes toward Dutch can be understood in terms of the anxieties of Men’s Rights Activists around shifting gender norms and standards of consent (Gotell and Dutton 2016). Though women including Dutch are positioned as powerful in *The Strain*, the threats and physical and sexual violence women are subject to from the “monstrous” living men in the extra-textual world in which *The Strain* is situated remain consistent when the threat is from an (un)dead male within this text.

American Horror Story

American Horror Story (AHS) is an anthology horror series developed by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, the first season of which premiered in 2011. In this section we consider *AHS: Coven*, the third season of the series. The series, set in contemporary New Orleans, explores the relationship between a group of witches in their search for their next leader, known as the Supreme. The series centers, at least initially, on the initiate to the coven Zoe Benson who discovers her abilities during her first penetrative sexual encounter, which is entirely consensual, sweet and even loving. The pair kiss gently and as he penetrates her, asking if she

is ok. His nose begins to bleed. He violently falls back onto the bed, his body convulsing and begins to hemorrhage before dying. Benson is sent to the coven in an attempt to learn how to control her powers, where she forms a connection with a boy named Kyle Spencer who she meets while attending a fraternity house party with fellow witch Madison Montgomery. At the house party, Madison is raped. As the fraternity leave the party in a bus, Madison uses her powers to flip it, killing all of them bar one. Zoe visits the hospital in hope of seeing if Kyle was the one who lived. She finds Madison's rapist, comatose but alive in a small hospital ward. She closes the door of the room and proceeds to straddle and have sex with his lifeless body, intentionally killing him in the same way that her boyfriend had previously died.

Zoe, in these scenes, underpins the literality of the fatal female. Histories of female sexuality tend to associate women with both power as well as submission. Within *AHS: Coven* what we find is that sex is initially inverted and used as a tool for Zoe in order enact revenge against Madison's rapist. Across the AHS narrative women tend to be placed into positions of sexual dominance and empowerment. Relationships are formed between sex, power and revenge. As Henry (2013) explains, "the rape-revenge genre has had a surge of popularity and prolificacy in the post-2000 period." Zoe and Madison's rape-revenge is enabled by their supernatural powers as witches, complicating Zoe's relationship to the power that has been both burden and opportunity for her. Zoe's first and loving sexual encounter is traumatic given her powers violently kill her partner during sex. In enacting rape-revenge on Madison's behalf, Zoe literally weaponizes her sexuality by raping and killing the unconscious attacker. Zoe is simultaneously victim (she has not asked for her destructive magical powers and cannot control them) and perpetrator (of sexual violence and murder). She is "fatal" and "monstrous." According to Broedel (2003, 183) witches have historically been constructed in certain texts as "the personification of deviant or "bad" female sexuality." Here, Zoe's use of deadly sex to enact rape-revenge seems to play

explicitly into current cultural discourses around women who supposedly use sex and sexuality as a weapon, just as her magical powers being “triggered” by penetrative sex seem suggestive of long-established ideas about the dangers and risks of sexual activity for young women.

As a way of thanking Zoe for her support, Madison agrees to help Zoe bring Kyle back to life. They visit the morgue in an attempt to uncover his body and find that the bodies of the fraternity are all in separate pieces. Madison convinces Zoe that they should take various “boy parts” in order to craft Kyle into the “perfect boyfriend.” Kyle returns and lives alongside the coven where Madison and him bond over the fact that they are both, in essence, returned from the dead, Madison having recently been brought back to life after having been murdered. Their bond grows stronger with Zoe walking in to find them having rough sex against a wardrobe. Later, in a confrontation between Madison and Zoe, they agree that the two of them would effectively share Kyle, sealing the agreement by engaging in a threesome. This is made possible by both Kyle and Madison effectively being undead, meaning that Zoe’s power has no effect on them. As with Jones’s (2013) writing on the film *Deadgirl*, the zombie, or (un)dead, becomes an object for sex. In *Deadgirl* the rape of a female zombie by young men is portrayed as necrophilic and monstrous. Kyle, however, consents to the extent that his (un)dead self can. He has been “made” from “boy parts” by the two witches, rendering Kyle’s body an object crafted and to be used for pleasure in a way that is suggestive of a “gender reversal,” signaling the ways in which women’s bodies have so often been constructed, altered and decorated to adhere to socially and culturally specific sexual ideals.

Complicating matters further, the parts from which he has been made include those of the dead men deemed culpable in Madison’s rape and as such can be understood in terms of ideas about reclamation, consent and revenge. As Weedon (1997, 120) argues, “the failure to

understand the multiplicity of power relations focused in sexuality will render an analysis blind to the range of points of resistance inherent in the network of power relations, a blindness which impedes political resistance.” Though in some ways *AHS: Coven* might be understood as normative and to perpetuate problematic depictions in its representation of a threesome including two stereotypically sexually attractive (slim, young, white) women as well as its portrayal of vengeful women “weaponizing” their sexuality, it might also be read as a subversive text that critiques and complicates ideas about women’s agency, sexual desire, consent, and the ways in which female sexuality can simultaneously be experienced and depicted as a burden and as empowering. Zoe’s (un)dead sexual partners become, in this context, a “safe space” in which Zoe might discover and experiment with her own sexuality without fear of fatal consequences. Given that *AHS: Coven* is set within an all-girls school, Miss Robichaux’s Academy for Exceptional Young Ladies, the parallel being drawn with homosexual female encounters seems clear. The popular motif of young women in same sex contexts such as girls’ schools or sororities engaging in sexual activity with each other, without fear of the repercussions of unwanted pregnancy or of male perpetrator rape, seems to be being signaled in Zoe’s sexual activity with the (un)dead.

Conclusion

If television can operate as an imaginative space in which the unpicking of complex societal issues can occur within a frame of relative safety (Livingstone 1998; Penfold-Mounce 2018), the sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead in the three series examined here suggest that it might be a space for negotiating both shifting and enduring ideas about gender and sexuality in popular culture more broadly. A commonality of distinctive power dynamics and social stigma prevail throughout each of the examples, where

ideas about “fatal females” and “monstrous males” apply to both the living and the (un)dead, all positioned as capable of violence for different reasons. Despite the necrophilic underpinnings and the transgressive persuasion of the sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead examined here, they are often portrayed in a highly normative manner; both in terms of gender and sexuality. The sexual encounters examined across this chapter take place almost exclusively between cis-gendered individuals and almost exclusively in the context of heterosexual sexual interaction. As Jowett (2005) has argued, television can open up possibilities for alternative sexualities whilst simultaneously continuing to present heterosexuality as the “norm.” Although in some of the cases the sex discussed above is consensual in nature, it is still portrayed as being tabooed. This is not solely because one partner is (un)dead and therefore suggestive of transgression, necrophilia and miscegenation. Taboos around sex-work and ideas about the “weaponization” of women’s sexuality and male violence and misogyny all feature heavily in these series in the sexual encounters between the living and the (un)dead. Arguably, these texts both reflect and serve as commentary on some of the key debates about gender and sexuality within the wider social context in which they operate.

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