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"I don't take orders from a lad wearing make-up" Zombie as Queer Metaphor in Dominic Mitchell's In the Flesh

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3 **“I don’t take orders from a lad wearing make-up” Zombie as Queer Metaphor in**
4 **Dominic Mitchell’s *In the Flesh***
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8 **Abstract**
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12 This article examines Dominic Mitchell’s drama *In the Flesh* as a metaphor for
13 contemporary lesbian and gay politics, which in recent years has followed a reformist
14 agenda on the basis that lesbians and gay men are, what Andrew Sullivan (1996)
15 has called “virtually normal” However, it has been suggested by some Queer
16 theorists that being seen as ‘virtually normal’ is not unproblematic as it is predicated
17 on a politics of toleration. Read as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay
18 politics, *In the Flesh* presents a warning of the uncritical acceptance of discourses of
19 sexual progress.
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31 **Key Words:** *In the Flesh*, zombie, queer
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Introduction

Over the last decade, the zombie has been a regular feature of popular culture appearing in a variety of media from movies (see, for example, *28 Days Later* (2002); *Dawn of the Dead* (2004); *Shaun of the Dead* (2004); *28 Weeks Later* (2007) and television programmes (perhaps the most critically acclaimed of which is AMC's adaptation of Robert Kirkman's graphic novel *Walking Dead*) through to video games (see, for example, *Resident Evil*; *Dead Rising*; *Dead Island*) and both fiction and non-fiction books (including Set Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2004) and John Austin's *So Now You're a Zombie: A Handbook for the Newly Undead* (2010). It is even possible to experience the zombie apocalypse for oneself at one of the plethora of zombie experience events designed to test your survival skills. Against this apparent 'zombification' of popular culture, a home grown BBC zombie drama should come as no surprise. However, BAFTA award-winning *In the Flesh*, which first aired on BBC Three in March 2013, is no ordinary zombie narrative.

Written by Dominic Mitchell, the drama is set in the fictional Northern England village of Roarton, four years after 'The Rising' when, across the country, thousands of re-animated corpses rose from their graves to wreak deadly havoc on the living. Roarton was the site of the first risings and, in the absence of a government response, local residents formed a militia called the Human Volunteer Force to protect the village from the undead. So far, it seems to conform to the traditional conventions and lore of the zombie genre but where it differs is that the undead of *In the Flesh* can be medicated and rehabilitated. Instead of hordes of mindless, flesh eating zombies, we are presented with conscious, sentient individuals who, in their

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3 treated state are known as Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers (PDSS) and,
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5 when successfully rehabilitated can return to their communities to exist side by side
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7 with the living. Indeed, once treated the PDSS appear almost indistinguishable from
8
9 the living. They apply foundation make-up to give the illusion of healthy skin and
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11 wear contact lenses to mask their characteristically lifeless eyes. The central
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13 protagonist is Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry), a seventeen year old PDSS who
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15 committed suicide shortly before 'The Rising' following the death of his best friend
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17 and romantic interest, Rick Macy (David Walmsley) in Afghanistan. Despite having
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19 romantic relationships with two men, Dominic Mitchell says of Keiren's sexuality
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21 "He's not gay but he's not straight. He's more in love with the person than the
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23 gender." (http://intheflesh.wikia.com/wiki/Kieren_Walker Accessed 12.10.2014)
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25 Throughout the series we follow Kieren as he attempts to come to terms with what
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27 he had to do to survive in his untreated state and grows to accept who he is, both in
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29 terms of his PDSS and his sexuality.
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35 Monsters have always played an essential role in culture because they
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37 provide "a space where society can safely represent and address anxieties of its
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39 time" (Levina and Bui, 2013: p.1). If we accept the argument that the zombie can,
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41 and should, be read as a metaphor for cultural consciousness (Bishop, 2006, 2009),
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43 the question that begs to be asked is what Dominic Mitchell's domesticated zombie,
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45 the monster next door, tells us about the cultural anxieties of 21st century Britain?
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47 The figure of the zombie has been interpreted as a metaphor for a range of social
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49 issues, including critiques of mass consumerism, the inability of medical science to
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51 respond to global pandemics, the post 9/11 war on terror and the 'Othering' and
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53 marginalisation of already disaffected groups of people. This article will argue that is
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55 possible to read *In the Flesh* as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay
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3 politics, which in recent years has been based on a reformist agenda to extend
4 heteronormatively defined sexual rights to lesbians and gay men on the basis that
5 they are, what Andrew Sullivan (1996) has called “virtually normal” However, it has
6 been suggested by some Queer theorists that being seen as ‘virtually normal’ is not
7 unproblematic as the aim of being normal is “to blend, to have no visible difference
8 and no conflict” (Warner, 1999: p.60) For them, inclusion and acceptance is
9 conditional on an adherence to heteronormative ideals, a politics of toleration that
10 limits and regulates representations of sexuality in the public sphere. This article will
11 explore how *In the Flesh* can be read as a critique of the narrow, reformist agenda of
12 contemporary lesbian and gay politics.
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29 *Zombie Evolution: From the Zombi to the Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer*

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32 Although there has been a resurgence, or what Lauro and Embry (2008)
33 playfully call a ‘resurrection’, of the zombie during the first decade of the 21st century,
34 the zombie genre has remained largely unchanged for over fifty years. Most
35 contemporary zombie narratives take as their inspiration George Romero’s *Night of*
36 *the Living Dead* (US, 1968) as it was this film that defined and, to a large extent,
37 continues to define the cinematic conventions and tropes of the zombie genre. In
38 particular, it created and established the zombie as the “shambling, cannibalistic
39 undead [and] as horror cinema’s prime harbinger of apocalyptic social breakdown”
40 (Hunt, Lockyer & Williamson, 2014: p.2). It is, of course, important to acknowledge
41 that the zombie is not a creation of George Romero, specifically, or Hollywood
42 cinema, more generally, but, rather, has a much longer history rooted in Haitian
43 voodoo practices and brought to the attention of the American public through
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3 anthropological studies such as William Seabrooks' *Magic Island* (1929). According
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5 to Haitian folklore, the zombi is a corpse that has been resurrected by a priest, or
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7 *Bocor*, and turned into a slave or servant. In other words, this zombi is a victim rather
8
9 than a monster and, for the indigenous people of Haiti, "the fear is not of being
10
11 harmed by zombis; it is fear of becoming one" (Wade Davis cited in Bishop, 2010:
12
13 p.51). This concept of the zombi as enslaved victim informed early Hollywood
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15 cinema, perhaps most notably *White Zombie* (US, 1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie*
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17 (US, 1943). Set in postcolonial Caribbean countries and portraying a largely negative
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19 and stereotypical view of indigenous populations, these films should be "considered
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21 as examples of racial exploitation and romanticization" (Bishop, 2010: p,66),
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23 evidence that, from the outset, the zombie should be read as a political and
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25 ideological figure.
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30 In order for us to recognise a text as a zombie narrative, the conventions and
31
32 principal characteristics of the zombie genre must already be in existence (Tudor,
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34 1995 [1973]) and the audience must possess sufficient knowledge of these
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36 characteristics to be able to identify the text as an example of the genre (Gelder,
37
38 2012). Further, if genre conventions exist *a priori* to a text, all genre narratives must
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40 be self-citational. Writing about vampire cinema, Gelder (2012: p.3) suggests that "all
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42 vampire films are self-citational [because] It is almost impossible for one vampire film
43
44 not to cite or invoke another vampire film or vampire novel." The same can be said
45
46 about the zombie genre as almost all zombie narratives cite or invoke *Night of the*
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48 *Living Dead*. Indeed, such is the level of self-citation within the zombie genre that, as
49
50 an audience, "We know enormous amounts about [zombies] ...- their tastes,
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52 appearance, biology, reasons for their emergence, how to neutralise them, why we
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54 should despise and fear them" (Webb & Byrmand, 2008: p.83-4).
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3 The zombie genre has a very prescriptive plot structure (Bishop, 2009).
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5 Almost all zombie narratives are set in a post-apocalyptic world where law and order
6
7 has disintegrated and the very fabric of society has collapsed. It is this backdrop of
8
9 social decay and the absence of social, cultural, economic and political structures
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11 that makes the zombie threat so frightening. With no government agencies to protect
12
13 them and no social institutions available to offer sanctuary, human beings must
14
15 develop their survival skills to protect themselves from the mass of flesh eating
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17 zombies, as well as the increasingly violent behaviour of other human survivors. In
18
19 fact, Bishop (2013) suggests that the most recent zombie narratives, such as AMC's
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21 adaptation of Robert Kirkman's graphic novel *Walking Dead*, can be seen as
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23 inversion stories, where the boundary between monster and human becomes
24
25 blurred. In their effort to survive it is the humans who become monstrous and
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27 humans are at as much, if not more, risk from other humans as they are from
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29 zombies.
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35 Of course, it is, perhaps, the zombie itself that is the most obvious identifier in
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37 the zombie genre. The zombie is a reanimated corpse that has an insatiable and
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39 indiscriminate hunger for human flesh. It is lacking in sentience and cognisance, it
40
41 has "malfunctioning motor skills, missing limbs (or in extreme cases, entire lower
42
43 torsos) and severely damaged brains" (Hunt, Lockyer & Williamson, 2014: p.8).
44
45 Given their limited functioning, an individual zombie represents little threat as their
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47 slow, shambling bodies can be evaded and they can be easily killed by severing their
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49 brain stem (Sconce, 2014). However, the zombie danger is one of "arithmetic and
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51 aggregation" (Sconce, 2014: p.99) because they only pose a threat when they
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53 achieve a critical mass and the cannibalistic instincts of the zombie horde are
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55 impossible to fight off. Unlike its monstrous counterpart, the vampire who has never
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3 died, has immortality and looks like humans, the zombie has risen from the dead, its
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5 body bears the signs and scars of its death, it inhabits a human body yet looks
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7 monstrous. As Bishop (2009) notes the notion of the undead and immortal vampire
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9 evokes a sense of romanticism that is lacking in the dead zombie, leading some
10
11 commentators to suggest that it is difficult, if not impossible, for an audience to
12
13 empathise or even sympathise with the zombie. Indeed, Bishop (2009) suggests that
14
15 whilst recent years have seen a domestication of the vampire and the portrayal of,
16
17 what Zanger (1997) calls, the vampire who experiences existentialist angst and
18
19 evokes sympathy from the audience, "Such qualities for zombies are logical
20
21 impossibilities" (Bishop, 2009: p.20). However, such qualities *are* present in Dominic
22
23 Mitchell's zombies.
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28 *In the Flesh* is a self-citational text (Gelder, 2012) in so far as, and to some
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30 extent, it conforms to the zombie genre conventions and allows us to identify it as a
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32 zombie narrative. The first episode of series one opens in an empty supermarket and
33
34 we see Lisa Webster (Riann Steele), a member of the Human Volunteer Force
35
36 (HVF) doing a food run. From the radio conversation she is having with her fellow
37
38 HVF volunteer, Jem (Harriet Cains), the post-apocalyptic scenario is established
39
40 when Jem is heard saying, "It's the end of the world, Lis, screw it. Get some biscuits
41
42 as well." As Lisa completes her mission she comes across two zombies, or 'Rotters'
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44 as they are called in the show, whose appearance conforms to all the established
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46 traits. They have dead, white eyes, decaying flesh and blood smeared around their
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48 mouth from their last feed. They are unable to speak, communicating in low grunts
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50 and they move characteristically slow. They are non-sentient, non-cognizant
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52 lumbering monsters in constant pursuit of their next meal. When Rotters, or indeed
53
54 any zombies, survey their landscape, "they see a place whose only observable
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characteristics are food” (Webb & Byrnan, 2008: p.84). The two zombies that Lisa confronts are Jem’s brother, Kieren Walker and his best friend Amy Dyer (Emily Bevan), or as Amy says, his BDIFF, his Best Dead Friend Forever.

However, this is where their similarity with the zombie of *Night of the Living Dead* and its successors ends because in *In the Flesh* the reanimated dead can be treated. The next scene cuts to Kieren who is nearing completion of his rehabilitation at the Norfolk Treatment Centre, a place where rabid Rotters are sent before they can be returned to their communities (1: 1). Discussing his imminent release with Doctor Shepherd (Stewart Scudamore), Kieren expresses fears that his parents may not want to see him again because he is a zombie. He is immediately stopped by Doctor Shepherd, who says:

Dr Shepherd: No, Keiren. What are you? You are...

Kieren: I am a Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer

Dr Shepherd: And?

Kieren: And what I did in my untreated state was not my fault.

Dr Shepherd: Good.

The Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer *does* have more in common with the domesticated vampire than its zombie ancestors, Dominic Mitchell’s zombies have been domesticated. Once treated, PDSS pose no threat to society. Their medication, Neurotryptaline, suppresses their cannibalistic drives and, in what is, perhaps, the most significant departure from their zombie forebears, it repairs their cognitive circuitry. Indeed, the audience is made aware that the opening scene in the supermarket is one of Kieren’s flashbacks, evidence of his improving cognition. So, in their treated state, PDSS look like the living and because of their renewed

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3 cognitive functioning they are able to experience the gamut of human emotions, from
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5 fear and anger through to joy and love. They do, however, retain the inability to
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7 experience autonomic physical sensations and responses, nor are they able to eat
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9 and process food. Although its continuity with the zombie plot structure allows us to
10
11 identify as an example of the genre, it is the expansion of the zombie trope and,
12
13 specifically, the form and character of the zombie's domestication that makes
14
15 Dominic Mitchell's *In the Flesh* so interesting and opens up new possibilities for
16
17 analysis and social commentary. With the assertion that monsters reflect the cultural
18
19 consciousness, fears and anxieties of the socio-cultural context in which they
20
21 emerge, then Dominic Mitchell's zombie is a specifically 21st century phenomenon. If
22
23 read as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay politics, the zombie reflects
24
25 current cultural anxieties regarding sexuality, sexual rights and sexual progress but,
26
27 as Elliott-Smith (2014: 149) notes, the zombie has always been the "perfect
28
29 metaphor for the homosexual within the moving image."
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38 *Queering the Zombie*

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41 Television, and cinema in particular, have a long tradition of portraying
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43 homosexuality as monstrous. Although representations of lesbians and gay men
44
45 were few and far between in mainstream film and television until relatively recently,
46
47 the few characters that were identified as gay tended to be cast as "pathological,
48
49 predatory and dangerous, villains and fools, but never heroes." (Russo, 1987:
50
51 p.122). Not only were explicitly gay characters portrayed as monstrous, the movie
52
53 monster was frequently coded as homosexual. Benschhoff (1997) has suggested that
54
55 there is a synergy between representations of the monster and the homosexual.
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3 Both exist in the shadows, or in the closet, and both elicit fear and anxiety when they
4 appear in public; “monster is to “normality” as homosexual is to heterosexual”
5 (Benshoff, 1997: p.2). Both exist within a dichotomous model predicated on
6 normality/abnormality, male/female, heterosexuality/homosexuality and within these
7 binaries both are ‘Othered’.
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15 To develop Benshoff’s argument about the synergy between the monster and
16 the homosexual further, Foucault’s concept of the ‘abnormals’ proves illuminating.
17 According to Foucault (2000), the categorisation of individuals as abnormal first
18 emerged in the Middle Ages and was completed in the late nineteenth century
19 alongside the development of the tactical polyvalence of discourses that sought to
20 identify, classify and govern those subjects considered to be abnormal. The group of
21 individuals collectively classified as the abnormals has three composite elements.
22 The first element is the human monster, an individual whose physiology
23 transgressed the laws of ‘nature’ and judicial laws and so, represented a double
24 violation. Foucault (2000: p.51) gives examples of half-human, half-animal bodies
25 and bodies with ambiguous genders as illustrations and asserts that the human
26 monster “combines the impossible with the forbidden.” The second element, the
27 abnormal individual, emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries alongside
28 the regulatory institutions and disciplinary techniques that developed during this
29 period. Those individuals who were unable, or unwilling, to submit to the disciplinary
30 regimes of these institutions were considered to be in need of correction. Foucault
31 has demonstrated how correction, in the form of confinement, was utilised on a
32 range of subjects, including criminals, the mentally ill and the ‘perverse’ and was
33 justified on the grounds that confinement was needed “to correct, to improve, to lead
34 to repentance, to restore to “better feelings”” (Foucault, 2000: p.53). The final
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3 constitutive element of the 'abnormals' is the onanist, based on concerns about the
4 physical and psychological damage caused by masturbation and aimed, almost
5 exclusively at children and young people. Although a diverse range of individuals
6 make up the group of abnormals, Puar and Rai (2002) suggest that monsters and
7 the abnormals have always been sexual deviants, whose correction has required the
8 subjugation of their bodies and the suppression of their desires. Understood in the
9 context of Foucault's concept of the abnormals, Kieren's exchange with Dr Shepherd
10 outlined above takes on a greater significance. Dr Shepherd's correction of Keiren's
11 use of the term zombie can be seen as a disciplinary technique in a wider strategy of
12 correction and as a means of restoring him to "better feelings" in order to rehabilitate
13 him.
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28 If all monsters can be coded as homosexual, why focus on the zombie or, as
29 Elliott-Smith (2014: p.151) asks "What's so queer about the zombie?" He suggests
30 that there are a number of ways in which the zombie can be queered. Unlike its
31 undead counterpart, the vampire who, at least in its most recent incarnations, looks
32 like us, the zombie is marked out as different, it is a "visibly 'outed' monster forced to
33 inhabit its decaying flesh for eternity" (Elliott-Smith, 2014: p.148). Once identified as
34 different, humans can choose whether to interact with or avoid the zombie and it can
35 be regulated and contained, something that Elliott-Smith (2014: p.149) suggests is
36 not that dissimilar from "The guardedness inherent in homosexual panic". The
37 zombie has 'unnatural' methods of reproducing itself, for example through a bite or a
38 scratch, which opens up possibilities for queer reproduction and, in so doing
39 challenges patriarchal heterosexuality (Elliott-Smith, 2014). The zombie is an
40 ambiguous figure that troubles a number of taken for granted assumptions and
41 disrupts binary categories of male/female, hetero/homo, subject /object, self/other,
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3 dead/alive. It is a disruptive and denaturalising (Jones, 2013) creature and,
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5 therefore, can be interpreted as inherently queer.
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9 As a disruptive figure that challenges these dichotomies and exposes them as
10 “constructed illusions” (Jones, 2013: p.535) the zombie is rendered unintelligible. For
11 Judith Butler, the laws that determine intelligibility are based on particular ontological
12 and epistemological assumptions about the “knowability of the human” (Butler, 2006:
13 p.183). As neither dead nor alive, the zombie defies these laws of knowability. The
14 fact that they are frequently referred to in the impersonal pronoun of ‘it’ rather than
15 ‘he’ or ‘she’ is evidence of their non-human status (Murray, 2013), a way of making
16 them intelligible by characterising them as an object. In *In the Flesh*, rabid ‘Rotters’
17 are reanimated corpses, they are dead but they appear to be alive and, therefore,
18 contravene all the ontological and epistemological assumptions of what it is to be
19 human. In this sense, they conform to Foucault’s notion of the abnormal and,
20 specifically, the human monster that transgresses both societal and so-called
21 ‘natural’ laws. Their unintelligibility posits them as abnormal, monstrous and
22 something to be feared. However, once treated the PDSS becomes intelligible
23 because they perform ‘humanness’. The application of foundation make-up to give
24 the appearance of healthy skin and their use of contact lenses to hide their dead
25 eyes gives the appearance of being human and offers reassurance that fundamental
26 belief systems about humanity are stable. In other words, the Post Deceased
27 Syndrome Sufferer achieves a “performative accomplishment which the mundane
28 social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the
29 mode of belief” (Butler, 1998: p.520).
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56 There are several occasions throughout *In the Flesh* when this performance is
57 recognised as illusory and, as a consequence, taken for granted belief systems
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3 about the knowability of the human are challenged. In one scene (1: 3) Amy Dyer is
4 reminded that her residence in the village of Roarton is conditional on her successful
5 performance of humanness. One morning, shortly after she has decided to stop
6 wearing foundation and contact lenses and go “au naturale” she is visited at her
7 home by Gary Kendal (Kevin Sutton), known to his friends as Gaz and a high
8 ranking member of the HVF, who has come to mark her home in paint to notify
9 others that she is a PDSS. She closes the door on him and returns to her bedroom.
10 A short while later, Gaz appears at her bedroom door and leans against the frame.
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21 *Gaz:* (Smiles) You're not like other girls are you?
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23 *Amy:* If you've finished defacing my property I would like you to leave now
24

25 *Gaz:* It just won't do
26

27 *Amy:* What won't?
28

29 *Gaz:* You. Going around like you are.
30

31 *Amy:* I was about to get dressed before you turned up.
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33 *Gaz:* I mean that (points to his face), walking around bare. It's a slap in the
34 face to this community, to war heroes like me.
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38 Here, Gaz's disgust at Amy's decision not to wear cover up make-up appears
39 to be gendered. His comment that she is not like other girls might refer to her
40 rejection of constructions of femininity that require women to perform and conform to
41 standardised notions of beauty by applying make-up. The smile that accompanies
42 the comment might also be read as a sexual advance to her reclining position on her
43 bed. Amy responds by pulling her dressing gown together in order to cover more of
44 her body and, in so doing, she physically declines Gaz's advances. In response, Gaz
45 becomes more threatening and violent. He enters her bedroom, lunges forward and
46 grabs Amy by the hair. Forcing her to kneel on the floor at the foot of the bed he
47 grabs items from the nearby dresser and pushes them in Amy's face but the
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audience is unaware of what these items are. He tells her “In this village you cover up your Rotter face. Got it?” and walking backwards to exit the bedroom he looks at Amy and says “That’s better’. When Gaz has gone Amy looks in the mirror to see foundation mousse and lipstick crudely smeared all over her face.

Similarly, in series two PDSS are required to enter into a ‘Give Back’ scheme as a form of restorative justice for the distress they caused the community when they were rabid ‘Rotters’, we see a role-play scenario where Dean Halton (Gerrard Thompson), a member of the Human Volunteer Force, is teaching PDSS how to assimilate with the living (2: 4).

Dean: Shake hands (He shakes hand with Connie Furness (Sara Kestelman), a PDSS) I’m alarmed. Your skin is cold to the touch.

Connie: Sorry about that

Dean: Like in the brochure.

Connie: I’m sorry I have caused you anxiety. I am a fully rehabilitated Partially Deceased Syndrome sufferer. I am wearing foundation mousse and contact lenses on account of

Dean: *(interrupts)* To minimise

Connie: To minimise distress caused to the living.

Dean: I have been administered Neurotriptyline in the last twenty four hours and will not enter a rabid state. You have to have it off [pat] otherwise what are you doing? *(Looks around the room for a response)* Scaring crap out of folk. *(Turning to Connie)* You need to work on your mousse application an’ all. Long even strokes. Yeah? Sit down. I’ll give you a six and that’s being generous.

Here, the illusionary nature of performing humanness is explicit. Dean even marks Connie’s performance on how convincing it is. If we return to Benshoff’s argument about the synergy between the monster and the homosexual, it appears that, like the monster, it is only when PDSS appear in public that they elicit fear and

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3 anxiety. In Amy's case, it is her refusal to wear make-up that causes anxiety and in
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5 Connie's case it is the fact that her skin is 'cold to the touch'. In both scenes they are
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7 unintelligible as humans and either 'out' themselves as monsters because of the lack
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9 of make-up or are 'outed' so that they are intelligible to the living.
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15 *Partially Diseased Syndrome Sufferers and the closet*

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19 For much of the twentieth century, homosexuality in Britain was characterised
20
21 by invisibility and relegated to the private realm, with no or limited public recognition.
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23 In part this is a legacy of constructions of sexuality that emerged in the sixteenth
24
25 century and consolidated in the nineteenth century, which positioned sex as a private
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27 matter, something that took place behind closed doors between two consenting
28
29 adults. Homosexuality was tolerated as long as it remained hidden in the private
30
31 sphere and did not represent too much of a challenge to the heteronormatively
32
33 constituted public realm. This position was, perhaps, most clearly articulated in the
34
35 1967 Sexual Offences Act which partially decriminalised sexual activity occurring in
36
37 private between two men over the age of twenty-one not because homosexuality
38
39 was recognised as a legitimate lifestyle and identity but rather because it was
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41 determined that, unless a crime was being committed, it was not the business of the
42
43 State to intervene in the private moral conduct of its citizens. The role of the State
44
45 was to maintain the public/private divide, control "common standards of decency"
46
47 (Weeks, 1986: p.102) and contain anything that represented a threat to those
48
49 standards.
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55 However, over the last two decades, successive British governments have
56
57 introduced a raft of legislative reforms to the extent that lesbians and gay men now
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2
3 have almost full equality under the law and enjoy public recognition in most areas of
4
5 life. Despite these advances a number of commentators (Cooper, 1993, 1994;
6
7 Phelan, 2000, 2001; Warner, 1999) have suggested that visibility and acceptance in
8
9 the public sphere comes at the cost of increased regulation and surveillance and is
10
11 predicated on adherence to heteronormative values. Leo Bersani (1995) refers to
12
13 this as the gay absence, a paradox whereby successful campaigning for greater
14
15 visibility and public recognition has rendered lesbians and gay men invisible as their
16
17 difference and distinctiveness to their heterosexual counterparts becomes diluted.
18
19 Sceptics of a linear and incremental reading of sexual progress warn us against
20
21 accepting public recognition uncritically.
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26 Throughout *In the Flesh*, the public / private divide, the limits to public
27
28 recognition and the desire to keep the 'monster' hidden are recurrent themes. On his
29
30 return to Roarton following his rehabilitation, Kieren is escorted into his parents'
31
32 house under the cover of his father's coat so he is hidden from public view (1: 2).
33
34 The following day Kieren is sitting in his lounge while his father, Steve, administers
35
36 his daily dose of Neurotriptyline. The doorbell rings. Steve panics as he does not
37
38 want the visitor to see that there is a PDSS in the house. He hastily ushers Kieren to
39
40 the cupboard under the stairs. When Kieren protests that he does not like confined
41
42 spaces, Steve reassures him that "It'll only be for five minutes. I promise." Kieren is
43
44 literally forced into the closet. He experiences a flashback to his rising and his
45
46 confinement in his coffin but this flashback can also be read as symbolic of his
47
48 feelings of confinement regarding his sexuality and the disapproval that that his close
49
50 relationship with Rick engendered amongst the community.
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56 After this incident and unbeknown to his parents, Kieren leaves his house
57
58 wearing a long hooded coat tightly pulled to his face so that he cannot be recognised
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3 and walks to the graveyard. As he sits in front of his desecrated grave Amy Dyer
4 notices him and approaches. She suggests that they go on a day trip together and,
5 although he does not know where they are going, Kieren agrees. When he realises
6 that Amy has taken him to a local amusement park he expresses concern.
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13 *Kieren:* I thought we were going somewhere secluded, not
14 Grand Central Station

15
16 *Amy:* You call this Grand Central Station?

17
18 *Kieren:* I call this being out in public

19
20 *Amy:* So! We've got our contacts in, our cover up on. You wear too
21 much of that stuff by the way.

22
23 *Kieren:* You don't wear enough
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28 If we return to Benshoff's (1997) analogy that monster is to normality as
29 homosexual is to heterosexual, this scene can be read as a commentary on the
30 limits of lesbian and gay men's acceptance in public. Kieren's comment about being
31 out in public does reflect his fear about being recognised as a PDSS. However,
32 'being out' can also be understood in terms of its contemporary usage of 'coming
33 out', 'being out' and 'being outed' to refer to disclosures of sexuality, particularly as
34 this scene comes shortly after Kieren's father forced him into the cupboard/closet.
35 The panic attack that ensued can be read as his fear about having to return to the
36 closet now that he is back in the small community of Roarton, while his anxiety at the
37 amusement park seems to be concerned with being outed, a situation in which he
38 lacks control over disclosures about his status and sexuality. As it happens, Kieren is
39 right to be concerned about being outed when he is spotted by someone who
40 attended his funeral and shouts "He's a Rotter". A small crowd gather, turn on Kieren
41 and chase him out of the park. Despite advances in lesbian and gay rights, being out
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3 or outed in public can still be dangerous, with the threat of hate crime a real
4 possibility. A 2013 British crime survey reported that one in six lesbian, gay and
5 bisexual people, approximately 630,000, had experienced a homophobic hate crime
6 or incident in the previous three years, with “Insults, intimidation and harassment [...]”
7 the most common, affecting more than one in four (27 per cent) lesbian, gay and
8 bisexual people” (Guasp, Gammon & Ellison, 2013: p,6)
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16 Amy and Kieren’s exchange about the amount of cover up they use can be
17 interpreted as evidence of the different degrees of conformity and normalisation and
18 as a metaphor for their different political and ideological positions regarding their
19 undead status, with Kieren’s overuse of foundation reflecting a reformist,
20 assimilationist approach and Amy’s minimal coverage denoting a more transgressive
21 and disruptive strategy. This is analogous with what some sexuality theorists have
22 referred to as the good gay / bad queer dichotomy.
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36 *Domesticating Zombies / Domesticating Queers*

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38 If the acceptance and public recognition of lesbians and gay men is
39 predicated on adherence to heteronormatively defined norms and values, the logical
40 conclusion is that “The more you are willing to articulate political issues in a way that
41 plays to a normal [heterosexual] audience the more success you are likely to have”
42 (Warner, 1999: p..44) However, Warner (1999: p.60) suggests that this “embrace of
43 normal” is based on blending in, being invisible and denying differences on the
44 grounds of sexuality. When Kieren’s parents collect him from the Norfolk treatment
45 centre, the “embrace of normal” (Warner, 1999: p.60, the importance attached to
46 blending in and having no visible difference from the living becomes obvious (1: 1).
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3 Steve: You look well
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6 Kieren: It's the cover up mousse. It makes me look better.
7
8

9 What is not said in this exchange is the word 'normal' but the inference is
10 clear. Kieren's cover up mousse helps him blend in, pass as living, and look normal.
11 Here, normalisation equals conformity and results in domestication. In a later scene
12 in this episode, at the first Walker family dinner, Steve tells Kieren that his mum has
13 made his favourite meal. When Kieren reminds them that he cannot eat anymore, his
14 mum, Sue (Marie Critchley), replies "Just pretend" With an empty plate in front of him
15 and a knife and fork in each hand Kieren pretends to eat imaginary food just so he
16 can engage in the family mealtime food practices. Sue's request that Kieren just
17 pretends to eat food illustrates that it is more accurate to talk about 'doing normal'
18 rather than 'being normal', it is an acknowledgement that 'doing normal' is a
19 performative act.
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34 For Warner, the embrace of normal is profoundly antipolitical. When gay men
35 and lesbians blend into heteronormative society they become what Bersani (1995:
36 p.32) refers to as "Invisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere." Not only do they
37 become invisibly visible to heterosexuals they also become less visible to each
38 other, limiting the opportunities for collective action and consciousness raising. We
39 are reminded of this when Kieren meets Simon Monroe (Emmett J Scanlan) for the
40 first time (2: 1). Simon is a member of the Undead Liberation Army and is committed
41 to educating other PDSS that the requirement that they were make-up and contact
42 lenses is a cage preventing them from being free. Kieren's first encounter with
43 Simon, who does not cover up his PDS status by wearing make-up, takes place in
44 the village graveyard where he finds him sitting on his gravestone. Kieren shouts out
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3 that he is sitting on his grave, to which Simon replies “Is this you? I’m sorry. I didn’t
4
5 realise you were one of us. All that on your face”
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8 Diane Richardson (2005: p.516) has noted that assimilation into mainstream
9
10 heteronormative society relies on a neoliberal model of governance whereby
11
12 lesbians and gay men are expected to be “self-governing subjects to become
13
14 normal/responsible citizens who voluntarily comply with the interests and needs of
15
16 the state.” For Warner (1999:p.68), the ‘normal’ and responsible lesbian/gay subject
17
18 becomes de-sexualised because of a “false antinomy between dignity and sex.”
19
20 Perhaps the most recent legislative example of the de-sexualised lesbian/gay
21
22 subject in England and Wales is the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. This
23
24 piece of legislation extends marriage and most of the rights and entitlements it
25
26 confers to same-sex couples but there is a complete absence of references to
27
28 consummation or adultery, both of which are central to the way in which
29
30 heterosexual marriage is defined under the law. So, on the one hand, gay men and
31
32 lesbians have the right to have public recognition of their relationships but, on the
33
34 other, the law is notably silent on the subject of sex. It is with regards to discussions
35
36 and representations of lesbian/gay sex that the limits to their public recognition are
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38 evident.
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44 Elliott-Smith (2014: p.15) has suggested that zombie attacks are frequently
45
46 coded in sexualised ways which focus on how the zombie “tears open victims and
47
48 consumes flesh [and emphasise] the zombie’s own body as essentially
49
50 penetrable and penetrating, objectifying the corporeal in all its messy goriness.” The
51
52 sexualisation of the zombie attack and the desexualisation of the lesbian/gay subject
53
54 becomes apparent in a scene depicting a family meal. Kieren has brought Simon,
55
56 who is now his boyfriend, to his parents’ house for Sunday lunch (2: 4). Jem is late
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3 for lunch so they start without her. The meal gets off to an awkward start,
4
5 exacerbated by the fact that Kieren and Simon are expected to pretend to eat food.
6
7 To break the silence Simon asks Steve where he met Kieren's mum.
8
9

10 *Steve:* Work
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13 *Sue:* Work. What about you two?
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16 *Kieren:* The same. Work.
17
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19 *Simon:* I liked the way he gave back.
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22
23 As PDSS Kieren and Simon were both required to take part on the restorative
24 'Give Back' scheme, which is clearly what Simon is referring to here. However, it
25 could also be read as a sexually coded comment about reciprocity in a sexual act.
26
27 The ambiguity in meaning is not lost on Kieren's parents as they both look at each
28 other with embarrassment on their face. Fortunately, this embarrassment is short
29 lived as Jem arrives with Gaz, who is now her boyfriend. They are both wearing their
30 HVF uniform. When Steve asks Jem if she would like to change before lunch as he
31 recognises that this may be offensive to Kieren and Simon she replies "Not really,
32 I'm starving." Over lunch, Gaz regales the guests about a situation that he and Jem
33 had experienced during the Rising and provides explicit details of how she saved his
34 life by killing three 'Rotters'. Although Steve tries to change the subject of the
35 conversation he does not stop Gaz from telling his story and both Kieren and Simon
36 become visibly uncomfortable. Kieren becomes angry and begins to tell the story of
37 his rising. Although Steve and Sue appeal to him to stop Kieren continues to explain
38 how he felt when he rose.
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57 *Kieren:* That feeling is like what being born must be like except you've got
58 context because, honestly, everything up until then was fear.
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3 Everything, even when I was alive, just different levels of fear and then
4 it's gone and you're like 'Yeah, come on, give it to me, fill me up' and
5 do you know what, Gary? This hunger, this appetite, could not wait to
6 get started.
7

8 *Steve:* (*Bangs his hand on the table*) That's enough. Do you hear me? I will
9 not have it.
10

11 *Kieren:* What? Did I cross the line, Dad?
12

13 *Sue:* Kieren, please
14

15 *Kieren:* No, they sit around high fiving each other about killing us like it's a big
16 joke. Oh, no. That's fine with everyone. I say one thing and that is
17 indecent. I'm sorry but that is bullshit.
18
19
20

21 Sexuality is frequently described as a drive or an instinct, in both everyday
22 discourse and in some academic theories of sexuality, in particular the essentialist
23 perspectives. Here, Kieren's reference to his 'hunger' and 'appetite' might allude to
24 an essentialist understanding of sexuality and, the fact that he directs this statement
25 to Gaz can be read as an inference that Kieren's hunger/sexuality is different to Gaz.
26 It might also be read as a demand for the recognition that Kieren's hunger/sexuality
27 is as valid and worthy of discussion as Gaz's 'hunger'. It is noteworthy that it is at the
28 point that Kieren mentions his 'Rotter'/sexual drives that his dad feels compelled to
29 intervene. If the 'Rotters/Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers of *In the Flesh* are
30 taken as metaphors for homosexuality and we accept Elliott-Smith's argument about
31 the sexually coded portrayal of the zombie attack then Kieren's family's refusal to
32 hear about his pre-treated experiences of feeding on the living can be seen as
33 illustrative of the desexualisation of the 'normal' and responsible lesbian/gay subject.
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50 *Conclusion* 51 52

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54 This article has argued that, read as a persuasive metaphor for contemporary
55 lesbian and gay politics and sexual rights, *In the Flesh* acts as a warning about the
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3 limitations of the sexual freedoms and progress that have been granted to gay men
4 and lesbians in recent years. Perhaps Andrew Sullivan was right to claim that
5 lesbians and gay men are virtually normal. Dictionary definitions of 'virtual' indicate
6 that, as an adjective, it can be used to mean 'almost' or 'nearly' as described but not
7 completely so. In others words, to be seen as virtually normal, where normal is taken
8 to mean heterosexual, heteronormative and, increasingly, homonormative, is to be
9 seen as almost or nearly normal. It continues to reinforce a dichotomous model of
10 sexuality where heterosexuality is privileged and serves as the benchmark against
11 which all other sexualities are judged. As has been suggested the extent to which
12 homosexuality has been accepted and publically recognised has been shaped by the
13 extent to which it is seen to pose a threat to the heteronormative order. In *In the*
14 *Flesh*, Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers can be returned to the treatment
15 centre if they become non-compliant or a threat to themselves or the community,
16 evidence of the conditionality of their acceptance by the living. As with Foucault's
17 abnormals they are confined and required to undergo a process of correction.
18 Standing in front of the parish council, accused of breaking and entering and
19 releasing rabid 'Rotters', Kieren is presented with precisely this threat by Councillor
20 Pearl Pinder (Gillian Waugh)

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44 *Kieren:* I'm not a threat to the community

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46 *Pearl:* Are you the community?

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48 *Kieren:* Yeah, I am. (Looks confused) I don't understand the question.

49
50 *Pearl:* It's simple. I'm asking are you the community?

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52 *Kieren:* No.

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54 *Pearl:* That's right. You're not. *We* are the community and we have deemed
55 you a threat to it.
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28 **Filmography**

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31 *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968)
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33 *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004)
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35 *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002)
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37 *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007)
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39 *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932)
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7 **"I don't take orders from a lad wearing make-up" Zombie as Queer Metaphor in**
8 **Dominic Mitchell's *In the Flesh***
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11 **Abstract**
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15 This article examines Dominic Mitchell's drama *In the Flesh* as a metaphor for
16 contemporary lesbian and gay politics, which in recent years has followed a reformist
17 agenda on the basis that lesbians and gay men are, what Andrew Sullivan (1996)
18 has called "virtually normal" However, it has been suggested by some Queer
19 theorists that being seen as 'virtually normal' is not unproblematic as it is predicated
20 on a politics of toleration. Read as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay
21 politics, *In the Flesh* presents a warning of the uncritical acceptance of discourses of
22 sexual progress.
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31 **Key Words:** *In the Flesh*, zombie, queer
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8 *Introduction*

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10 Over the last decade, the zombie has been a regular feature of popular
11 culture appearing in a variety of media from movies (see, for example, *28 Days Later*
12 (2002); *Dawn of the Dead* (2004); *Shaun of the Dead* (2004); *28 Weeks Later* (2007)
13 and television programmes (perhaps the most critically acclaimed of which is AMC's
14 adaptation of Robert Kirkman's graphic novel *Walking Dead*) through to video games
15 (see, for example, *Resident Evil*; *Dead Rising*; *Dead Island*) and both fiction and
16 non-fiction books (including Set Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*
17 (2009), Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2004) and John Austin's *So Now*
18 *You're a Zombie: A Handbook for the Newly Undead* (2010). It is even possible to
19 experience the zombie apocalypse for oneself at one of the plethora of zombie
20 experience events designed to test your survival skills. Against this apparent
21 'zombification' of popular culture, a home grown BBC zombie drama should come as
22 no surprise. However, BAFTA award-winning *In the Flesh*, which first aired on BBC
23 Three in March 2013, is no ordinary zombie narrative.

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37 Written by Dominic Mitchell, the drama is set in the fictional Northern England
38 village of Roarton, four years after 'The Rising' when, across the country, thousands
39 of re-animated corpses rose from their graves to wreak deadly havoc on the living.
40 Roarton was the site of the first risings and, in the absence of a government
41 response, local residents formed a militia called the Human Volunteer Force to
42 protect the village from the undead. So far, it seems to conform to the traditional
43 conventions and lore of the zombie genre but where it differs is that the undead of *In*
44 *the Flesh* can be medicated and rehabilitated. Instead of hordes of mindless, flesh
45 eating zombies, we are presented with conscious, sentient individuals who, in their
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7 treated state are known as Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers (PDSS) and,
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9 when successfully rehabilitated can return to their communities to exist side by side
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11 with the living. Indeed, once treated the PDSS appear almost indistinguishable from
12
13 the living. They apply foundation make-up to give the illusion of healthy skin and
14
15 wear contact lenses to mask their characteristically lifeless eyes. The central
16
17 protagonist is Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry), a seventeen year old PDSS who
18
19 committed suicide shortly before 'The Rising' following the death of his best friend
20
21 and romantic interest, Rick Macy (David Walmsley) in Afghanistan. Despite having
22
23 romantic relationships with two men, Dominic Mitchell says of Keiren's sexuality
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25 "He's not gay but he's not straight. He's more in love with the person than the
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27 gender." (http://intheflesh.wikia.com/wiki/Kieren_Walker Accessed 12.10.2014)
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29 Throughout the series we follow Kieren as he attempts to come to terms with what
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31 he had to do to survive in his untreated state and grows to accept who he is, both in
32
33 terms of his PDSS and his sexuality.

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35 Monsters have always played an essential role in culture because they
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37 provide "a space where society can safely represent and address anxieties of its
38
39 time" (Levina and Bui, 2013: p.1). If we accept the argument that the zombie can,
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41 and should, be read as a metaphor for cultural consciousness (Bishop, 2006, 2009),
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43 the question that begs to be asked is what Dominic Mitchell's domesticated zombie,
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45 the monster next door, tells us about the cultural anxieties of 21st century Britain?
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47 The figure of the zombie has been interpreted as a metaphor for a range of social
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49 issues, including critiques of mass consumerism, the inability of medical science to
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51 respond to global pandemics, the post 9/11 war on terror and the 'Othering' and
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53 marginalisation of already disaffected groups of people. This article will argue that is
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55 possible to read *In the Flesh* as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay

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7 politics, which in recent years has been based on a reformist agenda to extend
8 heteronormatively defined sexual rights to lesbians and gay men on the basis that
9 they are, what Andrew Sullivan (1996) has called “virtually normal” However, it has
10 been suggested by some Queer theorists that being seen as ‘virtually normal’ is not
11 unproblematic as the aim of being normal is “to blend, to have no visible difference
12 and no conflict” (Warner, 1999: p.60) For them, inclusion and acceptance is
13 conditional on an adherence to heteronormative ideals, a politics of toleration that
14 limits and regulates representations of sexuality in the public sphere. This article will
15 explore how *In the Flesh* can be read as a critique of the narrow, reformist agenda of
16 contemporary lesbian and gay politics.
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29 *Zombie Evolution: From the Zombi to the Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer*

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32 Although there has been a resurgence, or what Lauro and Embry (2008)
33 playfully call a ‘resurrection’, of the zombie during the first decade of the 21st century,
34 the zombie genre has remained largely unchanged for over fifty years. Most
35 contemporary zombie narratives take as their inspiration George Romero’s *Night of*
36 *the Living Dead* (US, 1968) as it was this film that defined and, to a large extent,
37 continues to define the cinematic conventions and tropes of the zombie genre. In
38 particular, it created and established the zombie as the “shambling, cannibalistic
39 undead [and] as horror cinema’s prime harbinger of apocalyptic social breakdown”
40 (Hunt, Lockyer & Williamson, 2014: p.2). It is, of course, important to acknowledge
41 that the zombie is not a creation of George Romero, specifically, or Hollywood
42 cinema, more generally, but, rather, has a much longer history rooted in Haitian
43 voodoo practices and brought to the attention of the American public through
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7 anthropological studies such as William Seabrooks' *Magic Island* (1929). According
8 to Haitian folklore, the zombi is a corpse that has been resurrected by a priest, or
9 *Bocor*, and turned into a slave or servant. In other words, this zombi is a victim rather
10 than a monster and, for the indigenous people of Haiti, "the fear is not of being
11 harmed by zombis; it is fear of becoming one" (Wade Davis cited in Bishop, 2010:
12 p.51). This concept of the zombi as enslaved victim informed early Hollywood
13 cinema, perhaps most notably *White Zombie* (US, 1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie*
14 (US, 1943). Set in postcolonial Caribbean countries and portraying a largely negative
15 and stereotypical view of indigenous populations, these films should be "considered
16 as examples of racial exploitation and romanticization" (Bishop, 2010: p.66),
17 evidence that, from the outset, the zombie should be read as a political and
18 ideological figure. Whilst there are some differences in the way that these films
19 portray their subjects, with *I Walked with a Zombie* framed "almost in the manner of
20 an ethnographic study" (Bishop, 2010: p.65) in so far as it represents voodoo and its
21 practitioners in a non-stereotypical way, both films illustrate that the zombie is a
22 monster of the Americas. In the words of Bishop (2010: p.38), the zombie is "born
23 from imperialism, slavery, and – most importantly – voodoo magic and religion."

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41 In order for us to recognise a text as a zombie narrative, the conventions and
42 principal characteristics of the zombie genre must already be in existence (Tudor,
43 1995 [1973]) and the audience must possess sufficient knowledge of these
44 characteristics to be able to identify the text as an example of the genre (Gelder,
45 2012). Further, if genre conventions exist *a priori* to a text, all genre narratives must
46 be self-citational. Writing about vampire cinema, Gelder (2012: p.3) suggests that "all
47 vampire films are self-citational [because] It is almost impossible for one vampire film
48 not to cite or invoke another vampire film or vampire novel." The same can be said
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Comment [AM1]: Added to reflect the nuanced differences between the two films.

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7 about the zombie genre as almost all zombie narratives cite or invoke *Night of the*
8 *Living Dead*. Indeed, such is the level of self-citation within the zombie genre that, as
9 an audience, “We know enormous amounts about [zombies] ...- their tastes,
10 appearance, biology, reasons for their emergence, how to neutralise them, why we
11 should despise and fear them” (Webb & Byrnan, 2008: p.83-4).
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17 The zombie genre has a very prescriptive plot structure (Bishop, 2009).
18 Almost all zombie narratives, post Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (US, 1968) are
19 set in a post-apocalyptic world where law and order has disintegrated and the very
20 fabric of society has collapsed. It is this backdrop of social decay and the absence of
21 social, cultural, economic and political structures that makes the zombie threat so
22 frightening. With no government agencies to protect them and no social institutions
23 available to offer sanctuary, human beings must develop their survival skills to
24 protect themselves from the mass of flesh eating zombies, as well as the
25 increasingly violent behaviour of other human survivors. In fact, Bishop (2013)
26 suggests that the most recent zombie narratives, such as AMC's adaptation of
27 Robert Kirkman's graphic novel *Walking Dead*, can be seen as inversion stories,
28 where the boundary between monster and human becomes blurred. In their effort
29 to survive it is the humans who become monstrous and humans are at as much, if not
30 more, risk from other humans as they are from zombies.
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45 Of course, it is, perhaps, the zombie itself that is the most obvious identifier in
46 the zombie genre. The zombie is a reanimated corpse that has an insatiable and
47 indiscriminate hunger for human flesh. It is lacking in sentience and cognisance, it
48 has “malfunctioning motor skills, missing limbs (or in extreme cases, entire lower
49 torsos) and severely damaged brains” (Hunt, Lockyer & Williamson, 2014: p.8).
50 Given their limited functioning, an individual zombie represents little threat as their
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Comment [AM2]: Added to reflect that the contemporary zombie narrative draws on Romero's plot structure rather than the earlier incarnations of the zombie movie.

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7 slow, shambling bodies can be evaded and they can be easily killed by severing their
8 brain stem (Sconce, 2014). However, the zombie danger is one of “arithmetic and
9 aggregation” (Sconce, 2014: p.99) because they only pose a threat when they
10 achieve a critical mass and the cannibalistic instincts of the zombie horde are
11 impossible to fight off. Unlike its monstrous counterpart, the vampire who has never
12 died, has immortality and looks like humans, the zombie has risen from the dead, its
13 body bears the signs and scars of its death, it inhabits a human body yet looks
14 monstrous. As Bishop (2009) notes the notion of the undead and immortal vampire
15 evokes a sense of romanticism that is lacking in the dead zombie, leading some
16 commentators to suggest that it is difficult, if not impossible, for an audience to
17 empathise or even sympathise with the zombie. Indeed, Bishop (2009) suggests that
18 whilst recent years have seen a domestication of the vampire and the portrayal of,
19 what Zanger (1997) calls, the vampire who experiences existentialist angst and
20 evokes sympathy from the audience, “Such qualities for zombies are logical
21 impossibilities” (Bishop, 2009: p.20). However, such qualities *are* present in Dominic
22 Mitchell’s zombies.
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38 *In the Flesh* is a self-citational text (Gelder, 2012) in so far as, and to some
39 extent, it conforms to the zombie genre conventions and allows us to identify it as a
40 zombie narrative. The first episode of series one opens in an empty supermarket and
41 we see Lisa Webster (Riann Steele), a member of the Human Volunteer Force
42 (HVF) doing a food run. From the radio conversation she is having with her fellow
43 HVF volunteer, Jem (Harriet Cains), the post-apocalyptic scenario is established
44 when Jem is heard saying, “It’s the end of the world, Lis, screw it. Get some biscuits
45 as well.” As Lisa completes her mission she comes across two zombies, or ‘Rotters’
46 as they are called in the show, whose appearance conforms to all the established
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7 traits. They have dead, white eyes, decaying flesh and blood smeared around their
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9 mouth from their last feed. They are unable to speak, communicating in low grunts
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11 and they move characteristically slow. They are non-sentient, non-cognizant
12
13 lumbering monsters in constant pursuit of their next meal. When Rotters, or indeed
14
15 any zombies, survey their landscape, “they see a place whose only observable
16
17 characteristics are food” (Webb & Byrmand, 2008: p.84). The two zombies that Lisa
18
19 confronts are Jem’s brother, Kieren Walker and his best friend Amy Dyer (Emily
20
21 Bevan), or as Amy says, his BDFF, his Best Dead Friend Forever.

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23 However, this is where their similarity with the zombie of *Night of the Living*
24
25 *Dead* and its successors ends because in *In the Flesh* the reanimated dead can be
26
27 treated. The next scene cuts to Kieren who is nearing completion of his rehabilitation
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29 at the Norfolk Treatment Centre, a place where rabid Rotters are sent before they
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31 can be returned to their communities (1: 1). Discussing his imminent release with
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33 Doctor Shepherd (Stewart Scudamore), Kieren expresses fears that his parents may
34
35 not want to see him again because he is a zombie. He is immediately stopped by
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37 Doctor Shepherd, who says:

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39 *Dr Shepherd:* No, Keiren. What are you? You are...

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41 *Kieren:* I am a Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer

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43 *Dr Shepherd:* And?

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45 *Kieren:* And what I did in my untreated state was not my fault.

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47 *Dr Shepherd:* Good.

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49 The Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferer *does* have more in common with
50
51 the domesticated vampire than its zombie ancestors, Dominic Mitchell’s zombies
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53 have been domesticated. Once treated, PDSS pose no threat to society. Their
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6 medication, Neurotryptaline, suppresses their cannibalistic drives and, in what is,
7 perhaps, the most significant departure from their zombie forebears, it repairs their
8 cognitive circuitry. Indeed, the audience is made aware that the opening scene in the
9 supermarket is one of Kieren's flashbacks, evidence of his improving cognition. So,
10 in their treated state, PDSS look like the living and because of their renewed
11 cognitive functioning they are able to experience the gamut of human emotions, from
12 fear and anger through to joy and love. They do, however, retain the inability to
13 experience autonomic physical sensations and responses, nor are they able to eat
14 and process food. Although its continuity with the zombie plot structure allows us to
15 identify as an example of the genre, it is the expansion of the zombie trope and,
16 specifically, the form and character of the zombie's domestication that makes
17 Dominic Mitchell's *In the Flesh* so interesting and opens up new possibilities for
18 analysis and social commentary. With the assertion that monsters reflect the cultural
19 consciousness, fears and anxieties of the socio-cultural context in which they
20 emerge, then Dominic Mitchell's zombie is a specifically 21st century phenomenon. If
21 read as a metaphor for contemporary lesbian and gay politics, the zombie reflects
22 current cultural anxieties regarding sexuality, sexual rights and sexual progress but,
23 as Elliott-Smith (2014: 149) notes, the zombie has always been the "perfect
24 metaphor for the homosexual within the moving image."
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46 *Queering the Zombie*

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49 Television, and cinema in particular, have a long tradition of portraying
50 homosexuality as monstrous. Although representations of lesbians and gay men
51 were few and far between in mainstream film and television until relatively recently,
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7 the few characters that were identified as gay tended to be cast as “pathological,
8 predatory and dangerous, villains and fools, but never heroes.” (Russo, 1987:
9 p.122). Not only were explicitly gay characters portrayed as monstrous, the movie
10 monster was frequently coded as homosexual. Benschhoff (1997) has suggested that
11 there is a synergy between representations of the monster and the homosexual.
12 Both exist in the shadows, or in the closet, and both elicit fear and anxiety when they
13 appear in public; “monster is to “normality” as homosexual is to heterosexual”
14 (Benschhoff, 1997: p.2). Both exist within a dichotomous model predicated on
15 normality/abnormality, male/female, heterosexuality/homosexuality and within these
16 binaries both are ‘Othered’.

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27 To develop Benschhoff’s argument about the synergy between the monster and
28 the homosexual further, Foucault’s concept of the ‘abnormals’ proves illuminating.
29 According to Foucault (2000), the categorisation of individuals as abnormal first
30 emerged in the Middle Ages and was completed in the late nineteenth century
31 alongside the development of the tactical polyvalence of discourses that sought to
32 identify, classify and govern those subjects considered to be abnormal. The group of
33 individuals collectively classified as the abnormals has three composite elements.
34 The first element is the human monster, an individual whose physiology
35 transgressed the laws of ‘nature’ and judicial laws and so, represented a double
36 violation. Foucault (2000: p.51) gives examples of half-human, half-animal bodies
37 and bodies with ambiguous genders as illustrations and asserts that the human
38 monster “combines the impossible with the forbidden.” The second element, the
39 abnormal individual, emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries alongside
40 the regulatory institutions and disciplinary techniques that developed during this
41 period. Those individuals who were unable, or unwilling, to submit to the disciplinary
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7 regimes of these institutions were considered to be in need of correction. Foucault
8 has demonstrated how correction, in the form of confinement, was utilised on a
9 range of subjects, including criminals, the mentally ill and the 'perverse' and was
10 justified on the grounds that confinement was needed "to correct, to improve, to lead
11 to repentance, to restore to "better feelings"" (Foucault, 2000: p.53). The final
12 constitutive element of the 'abnormals' is the onanist, based on concerns about the
13 physical and psychological damage caused by masturbation and aimed, almost
14 exclusively at children and young people. Although a diverse range of individuals
15 make up the group of abnormals, Puar and Rai (2002) suggest that monsters and
16 the abnormals have always been sexual deviants, whose correction has required the
17 subjugation of their bodies and the suppression of their desires. Understood in the
18 context of Foucault's concept of the abnormals, Kieren's exchange with Dr Shepherd
19 outlined above takes on a greater significance. Dr Shepherd's correction of Keiren's
20 use of the term zombie can be seen as a disciplinary technique in a wider strategy of
21 correction and as a means of restoring him to "better feelings" in order to rehabilitate
22 him.
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38 If all monsters can be coded as homosexual, why focus on the zombie or, as
39 Elliott-Smith (2014: p.151) asks "What's so queer about the zombie?" He suggests
40 that there are a number of ways in which the zombie can be queered. Unlike its
41 undead counterpart, the vampire who, at least in its most recent incarnations, looks
42 like us, the zombie is marked out as different, it is a "visibly 'outed' monster forced to
43 inhabit its decaying flesh for eternity" (Elliott-Smith, 2014: p.148). Once identified as
44 different, humans can choose whether to interact with or avoid the zombie and it can
45 be regulated and contained, something that Elliott-Smith (2014: p.149) suggests is
46 not that dissimilar from "The guardedness inherent in homosexual panic". The
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7 zombie has 'unnatural' methods of reproducing itself, for example through a bite or a
8 scratch, which opens up possibilities for queer reproduction and, in so doing
9 challenges patriarchal heterosexuality (Elliott-Smith, 2014). The zombie is an
10 ambiguous figure that troubles a number of taken for granted assumptions and
11 disrupts binary categories of male/female, hetero/homo, subject /object, self/other,
12 dead/alive. It is a disruptive and denaturalising (Jones, 2013) creature and,
13 therefore, can be interpreted as inherently queer.
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21 As a disruptive figure that challenges these dichotomies and exposes them as
22 "constructed illusions" (Jones, 2013: p.535) the zombie is rendered unintelligible. For
23 Judith Butler, the laws that determine intelligibility are based on particular ontological
24 and epistemological assumptions about the "knowability of the human" (Butler, 2006:
25 p.183). As neither dead nor alive, the zombie defies these laws of knowability. The
26 fact that they are frequently referred to in the impersonal pronoun of 'it' rather than
27 'he' or 'she' is evidence of their non-human status (Murray, 2013), a way of making
28 them intelligible by characterising them as an object. In *In the Flesh*, rabid 'Rotters'
29 are reanimated corpses, they are dead but they appear to be alive and, therefore,
30 contravene all the ontological and epistemological assumptions of what it is to be
31 human. In this sense, they conform to Foucault's notion of the abnormal and,
32 specifically, the human monster that transgresses both societal and so-called
33 'natural' laws. Their unintelligibility posits them as abnormal, monstrous and
34 something to be feared. However, once treated the PDSS becomes intelligible
35 because they perform 'humanness'. The application of foundation make-up to give
36 the appearance of healthy skin and their use of contact lenses to hide their dead
37 eyes gives the appearance of being human and offers reassurance that fundamental
38 belief systems about humanity are stable. In other words, the Post Deceased
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Syndrome Sufferer achieves a “performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief” (Butler, 1998: p.520).

There are several occasions throughout *In the Flesh* when this performance is recognised as illusory and, as a consequence, taken for granted belief systems about the knowability of the human are challenged. In one scene (1: 3) Amy Dyer is reminded that her residence in the village of Roarton is conditional on her successful performance of humanness. One morning, shortly after she has decided to stop wearing foundation and contact lenses and go “au naturale” she is visited at her home by Gary Kendal (Kevin Sutton), known to his friends as Gaz and a high ranking member of the HVF, who has come to mark her home in paint to notify others that she is a PDSS. She closes the door on him and returns to her bedroom. A short while later, Gaz, appears at her bedroom door and leans against the frame.

Not only has he let himself into Amy’s home without invitation but his sudden appearance at the door of her bedroom, arguably one of the most private spaces in a house, sets the sinister and threatening tone of the following exchange between Gaz and Amy,

Gaz: (Smiles) You’re not like other girls are you?

Amy: If you’ve finished defacing my property I would like you to leave now

Gaz: It just won’t do

Amy: What won’t?

Gaz: You. Going around like you are.

Amy: I was about to get dressed before you turned up.

Gaz: I mean that (points to his face), walking around bare. It’s a slap in the face to this community, to war heroes like me.

Comment [AM3]: Added to reinforce the inherently threatening nature of this scene

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7 Here, Gaz's disgust at Amy's decision not to wear cover up make-up appears
8 to be gendered. His comment that she is not like other girls might refer to her
9 rejection of constructions of femininity that require women to perform and conform to
10 standardised notions of beauty by applying make-up. The smile that accompanies
11 the comment might also be read as a sexual advance to her reclining position on her
12 bed. Amy responds by pulling her dressing gown together in order to cover more of
13 her body and, in so doing, she physically declines Gaz's advances. In response, Gaz
14 becomes more threatening and violent. He enters her bedroom, lunges forward and
15 grabs Amy by the hair. Forcing her to kneel on the floor at the foot of the bed he
16 grabs items from the nearby dresser and pushes them in Amy's face but the
17 audience is unaware of what these items are. He tells her "In this village you cover
18 up your Rotter face. Got it?" and walking backwards to exit the bedroom he looks at
19 Amy and says "That's better'. When Gaz has gone Amy looks in the mirror to see
20 foundation mousse and lipstick crudely smeared all over her face.
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34 Similarly, in series two PDSS are required to enter into a 'Give Back' scheme
35 as a form of restorative justice for the distress they caused the community when they
36 were rabid 'Rotters', we see a role-play scenario where Dean Halton (Gerrard
37 Thompson), a member of the Human Volunteer Force, is teaching PDSS how to
38 assimilate with the living (2: 4).
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45 *Dean:* Shake hands (He shakes hand with Connie Furness (Sara Kestelman),
46 a PDSS) I'm alarmed. Your skin is cold to the touch.

47 *Connie:* Sorry about that

48 *Dean:* Like in the brochure.

49 *Connie:* I'm sorry I have caused you anxiety. I am a fully rehabilitated Partially
50 Deceased Syndrome sufferer. I am wearing foundation mousse and
51 contact lenses on account of
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54 *Dean:* (*interrupts*) To minimise
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7 *Connie:* To minimise distress caused to the living.

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9 *Dean:* I have been administered Neuroleptanal in the last twenty four hours
10 and will not enter a rabid state. You have to have it off [pat] otherwise
11 what are you doing? (*Looks around the room for a response*) Scaring
12 crap out of folk. (*Turning to Connie*) You need to work on your mouse
13 application an' all. Long even strokes. Yeah? Sit down. I'll give you a
14 six and that's being generous.

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17 Here, the illusionary nature of performing humanness is explicit. Dean even
18 marks Connie's performance on how convincing it is. If we return to Benshoff's
19 argument about the synergy between the monster and the homosexual, it appears
20 that, like the monster, it is only when PDSS appear in public that they elicit fear and
21 anxiety. In Amy's case, it is her refusal to wear make-up that causes anxiety and in
22 Connie's case it is the fact that her skin is 'cold to the touch'. In both scenes they are
23 unintelligible as humans and either 'out' themselves as monsters because of the lack
24 of make-up or are 'outed' so that they are intelligible to the living.
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36 *Partially Diseased Syndrome Sufferers and the closet*

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38 For much of the twentieth century, homosexuality in Britain was characterised
39 by invisibility and relegated to the private realm, with no or limited public recognition.
40 In part this is a legacy of constructions of sexuality that emerged in the sixteenth
41 century and consolidated in the nineteenth century, which positioned sex as a private
42 matter, something that took place behind closed doors between two consenting
43 adults. Homosexuality was tolerated as long as it remained hidden in the private
44 sphere and did not represent too much of a challenge to the heteronormatively
45 constituted public realm. This position was, perhaps, most clearly articulated in the
46 1967 Sexual Offences Act which partially decriminalised sexual activity occurring in
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7 private between two men over the age of twenty-one not because homosexuality
8 was recognised as a legitimate lifestyle and identity but rather because it was
9 determined that, unless a crime was being committed, it was not the business of the
10 State to intervene in the private moral conduct of its citizens. The role of the State
11 was to maintain the public/private divide, control “common standards of decency”
12 (Weeks, 1986: p.102) and contain anything that represented a threat to those
13 standards.
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21 However, over the last two decades, successive British governments have
22 introduced a raft of legislative reforms to the extent that lesbians and gay men now
23 have almost full equality under the law and enjoy public recognition in most areas of
24 life. Despite these advances a number of commentators (Cooper, 1993, 1994;
25 Phelan, 2000, 2001; Warner, 1999) have suggested that visibility and acceptance in
26 the public sphere comes at the cost of increased regulation and surveillance and is
27 predicated on adherence to heteronormative values. Leo Bersani (1995) refers to
28 this as the gay absence, a paradox whereby successful campaigning for greater
29 visibility and public recognition has rendered lesbians and gay men invisible as their
30 difference and distinctiveness to their heterosexual counterparts becomes diluted.
31 Sceptics of a linear and incremental reading of sexual progress warn us against
32 accepting public recognition uncritically.
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45 Throughout *In the Flesh*, the public / private divide, the limits to public
46 recognition and the desire to keep the ‘monster’ hidden are recurrent themes. On his
47 return to Roarton following his rehabilitation, Kieren is escorted into his parents’
48 house under the cover of his father’s coat so he is hidden from public view (1: 2).
49 The following day Kieren is sitting in his lounge while his father, Steve, administers
50 his daily dose of Neurotriptyline. The doorbell rings. Steve panics as he does not
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7 want the visitor to see that there is a PDSS in the house. He hastily ushers Kieren to
8 the cupboard under the stairs. When Kieren protests that he does not like confined
9 spaces, Steve reassures him that "It'll only be for five minutes. I promise." Kieren is
10 literally forced into the closet. He experiences a flashback to his rising and his
11 confinement in his coffin but this flashback can also be read as symbolic of his
12 feelings of confinement regarding his sexuality and the disapproval that that his close
13 relationship with Rick engendered amongst the community.
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21 After this incident and unbeknown to his parents, Kieren leaves his house
22 wearing a long hooded coat tightly pulled to his face so that he cannot be recognised
23 and walks to the graveyard. As he sits in front of his desecrated grave Amy Dyer
24 notices him and approaches. She suggests that they go on a day trip together and,
25 although he does not know where they are going, Kieren agrees. When he realises
26 that Amy has taken him to a local amusement park he expresses concern.
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33 *Kieren:* I thought we were going somewhere secluded, not
34 Grand Central Station

35 *Amy:* You call this Grand Central Station?

36 *Kieren:* I call this being out in public

37 *Amy:* So! We've got our contacts in, our cover up on. You wear too
38 much of that stuff by the way.

39 *Kieren:* You don't wear enough
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46 If we return to Benshoff's (1997) analogy that monster is to normality as
47 homosexual is to heterosexual, this scene can be read as a commentary on the
48 limits of lesbian and gay men's acceptance in public. Kieren's comment about being
49 out in public does reflect his fear about being recognised as a PDSS. However,
50 'being out' can also be understood in terms of its contemporary usage of 'coming
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7 out', 'being out' and 'being outed' to refer to disclosures of sexuality, particularly as
8 this scene comes shortly after Kieren's father forced him into the cupboard/closet.
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10 The panic attack that ensued can be read as his fear about having to return to the
11 closet now that he is back in the small community of Roarton, while his anxiety at the
12 amusement park seems to be concerned with being outed, a situation in which he
13 lacks control over disclosures about his status and sexuality. As it happens, Kieren is
14 right to be concerned about being outed when he is spotted by someone who
15 attended his funeral and shouts "He's a Rotter". A small crowd gather, turn on Kieren
16 and chase him out of the park. Despite advances in lesbian and gay rights, being out
17 or outed in public can still be dangerous, with the threat of hate crime a real
18 possibility. A 2013 British crime survey reported that one in six lesbian, gay and
19 bisexual people, approximately 630,000, had experienced a homophobic hate crime
20 or incident in the previous three years, with "Insults, intimidation and harassment [...]
21 the most common, affecting more than one in four (27 per cent) lesbian, gay and
22 bisexual people" (Guasp, Gammon & Ellison, 2013: p,6)

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Amy and Kieren's exchange about the amount of cover up they use can be interpreted as evidence of the different degrees of conformity and normalisation and as a metaphor for their different political and ideological positions regarding their undead status, with Kieren's overuse of foundation reflecting a reformist, assimilationist approach and Amy's minimal coverage denoting a more transgressive and disruptive strategy. This is analogous with what some sexuality theorists have referred to as the good gay / bad queer dichotomy.

Comment [AM4]: Thank you for your suggestions regarding Amy's dress and the analogy with Goth. I do think this is an interesting point but I feel that, to do it justice, I would need to include a more detailed discussion of Goth and violence towards Goths that the remit of the article does not allow.

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7 *Domesticating Zombies / Domesticating Queers*
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10 If the acceptance and public recognition of lesbians and gay men is
11 predicated on adherence to heteronormatively defined norms and values, the logical
12 conclusion is that “The more you are willing to articulate political issues in a way that
13 plays to a normal [heterosexual] audience the more success you are likely to have”
14 (Warner, 1999: p.44) However, Warner (1999: p.60) suggests that this “embrace of
15 normal” is based on blending in, being invisible and denying differences on the
16 grounds of sexuality. When Kieren’s parents collect him from the Norfolk treatment
17 centre, the “embrace of normal” (Warner, 1999: p.60, the importance attached to
18 blending in and having no visible difference from the living becomes obvious (1: 1).
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27 Steve: You look well
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30 Kieren: It’s the cover up mousse. It makes me look better.
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33 What is not said in this exchange is the word ‘normal’ but the inference is
34 clear. Kieren’s cover up mousse helps him blend in, pass as living, and look normal.
35 Here, normalisation equals conformity and results in domestication. In a later scene
36 in this episode, at the first Walker family dinner, Steve tells Kieren that his mum has
37 made his favourite meal. When Kieren reminds them that he cannot eat anymore, his
38 mum, Sue (Marie Critchley), replies “Just pretend” With an empty plate in front of him
39 and a knife and fork in each hand Kieren pretends to eat imaginary food just so he
40 can engage in the family mealtime food practices. Sue’s request that Kieren just
41 pretends to eat food illustrates that it is more accurate to talk about ‘doing normal’
42 rather than ‘being normal’, it is an acknowledgement that ‘doing normal’ is a
43 performative act.
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7 For Warner, the embrace of normal is profoundly antipolitical. When gay men
8 and lesbians blend into heteronormative society they become what Bersani (1995:
9 p.32) refers to as “Invisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere.” Not only do they
10 become invisibly visible to heterosexuals they also become less visible to each
11 other, limiting the opportunities for collective action and consciousness raising. We
12 are reminded of this when Kieren meets Simon Monroe (Emmett J Scanlan) for the
13 first time (2: 1). Simon is a member of the Undead Liberation Army and is committed
14 to educating other PDSS that the requirement that they were make-up and contact
15 lenses is a cage preventing them from being free. Kieren’s first encounter with
16 Simon, who does not cover up his PDS status by wearing make-up, takes place in
17 the village graveyard where he finds him sitting on his gravestone. Kieren shouts out
18 that he is sitting on his grave, to which Simon replies “Is this you? I’m sorry. I didn’t
19 realise you were one of us. All that on your face”
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32 Diane Richardson (2005: p.516) has noted that assimilation into mainstream
33 heteronormative society relies on a neoliberal model of governance whereby
34 lesbians and gay men are expected to be “self-governing subjects to become
35 normal/responsible citizens who voluntarily comply with the interests and needs of
36 the state.” For Warner (1999:p.68), the ‘normal’ and responsible lesbian/gay subject
37 becomes de-sexualised because of a “false antinomy between dignity and sex.”
38 Perhaps the most recent legislative example of the de-sexualised lesbian/gay
39 subject in England and Wales is the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. This
40 piece of legislation extends marriage and most of the rights and entitlements it
41 confers to same-sex couples but there is a complete absence of references to
42 consummation or adultery, both of which are central to the way in which
43 heterosexual marriage is defined under the law. So, on the one hand, gay men and
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7 lesbians have the right to have public recognition of their relationships but, on the
8 other, the law is notably silent on the subject of sex. It is with regards to discussions
9 and representations of lesbian/gay sex that the limits to their public recognition are
10 evident.
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15 Elliott-Smith (2014: p.15) has suggested that zombie attacks are frequently
16 coded in sexualised ways which focus on how the zombie “tears open victims and
17 consumes flesh [and emphasise] the zombie’s own body as essentially
18 penetrable and penetrating, objectifying the corporeal in all its messy goriness.” The
19 sexualisation of the zombie attack and the desexualisation of the lesbian/gay subject
20 becomes apparent in a scene depicting a family meal. Kieren has brought Simon,
21 who is now his boyfriend, to his parents’ house for Sunday lunch (2: 4). Jem is late
22 for lunch so they start without her. The meal gets off to an awkward start,
23 exacerbated by the fact that Kieren and Simon are expected to pretend to eat food.
24 To break the silence Simon asks Steve where he met Kieren’s mum.
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35 *Steve:* Work
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37 *Sue:* Work. What about you two?
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40 *Kieren:* The same. Work.
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43 *Simon:* I liked the way he gave back.
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46 As PDSS Kieren and Simon were both required to take part on the restorative
47 ‘Give Back’ scheme, which is clearly what Simon is referring to here. However, it
48 could also be read as a sexually coded comment about reciprocity in a sexual act.
49 The ambiguity in meaning is not lost on Kieren’s parents as they both look at each
50 other with embarrassment on their face. Fortunately, this embarrassment is short
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7 lived as Jem arrives with Gaz, who is now her boyfriend. They are both wearing their
8 HVF uniform. When Steve asks Jem if she would like to change before lunch as he
9 recognises that this may be offensive to Kieren and Simon she replies "Not really,
10 I'm starving." Over lunch, Gaz regales the guests about a situation that he and Jem
11 had experienced during the Rising and provides explicit details of how she saved his
12 life by killing three 'Rotters'. Although Steve tries to change the subject of the
13 conversation he does not stop Gaz from telling his story and both Kieren and Simon
14 become visibly uncomfortable. Kieren becomes angry and begins to tell the story of
15 his rising. Although Steve and Sue appeal to him to stop Kieren continues to explain
16 how he felt when he rose.
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27 *Kieren:* That feeling is like what being born must be like except you've got
28 context because, honestly, everything up until then was fear.
29 Everything, even when I was alive, just different levels of fear and then
30 it's gone and you're like 'Yeah, come on, give it to me, fill me up' and
31 do you know what, Gary? This hunger, this appetite, could not wait to
32 get started.

33
34 *Steve:* *(Bangs his hand on the table)* That's enough. Do you hear me? I will
35 not have it.

36
37 *Kieren:* What? Did I cross the line, Dad?

38
39 *Sue:* Kieren, please

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41 *Kieren:* No, they sit around high fiving each other about killing us like it's a big
42 joke. Oh, no. That's fine with everyone. I say one thing and that is
43 indecent. I'm sorry but that is bullshit.
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46 Sexuality is frequently described as a drive or an instinct, in both everyday
47 discourse and in some academic theories of sexuality, in particular the essentialist
48 perspectives. Here, Kieren's reference to his 'hunger' and 'appetite' might allude to
49 an essentialist understanding of sexuality and, the fact that he directs this statement
50 to Gaz can be read as an inference that Kieren's hunger/sexuality is different to Gaz.
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52 It might also be read as a demand for the recognition that Kieren's hunger/sexuality
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7 is as valid and worthy of discussion as Gaz's 'hunger'. It is noteworthy that it is at the
8 point that Kieren mentions his 'Rotter'/sexual drives that his dad feels compelled to
9 intervene. If the 'Rotters/Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers of *In the Flesh* are
10 taken as metaphors for homosexuality and we accept Elliott-Smith's argument about
11 the sexually coded portrayal of the zombie attack then Kieren's family's refusal to
12 hear about his pre-treated experiences of feeding on the living can be seen as
13 illustrative of the desexualisation of the 'normal' and responsible lesbian/gay subject.
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20 21 *Conclusion*

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23 This article has argued that, read as a persuasive metaphor for contemporary
24 lesbian and gay politics and sexual rights, *In the Flesh* acts as a warning about the
25 limitations of the sexual freedoms and progress that have been granted to gay men
26 and lesbians in recent years. Perhaps Andrew Sullivan was right to claim that
27 lesbians and gay men are virtually normal. Dictionary definitions of 'virtual' indicate
28 that, as an adjective, it can be used to mean 'almost' or 'nearly' as described but not
29 completely so. In others words, to be seen as virtually normal, where normal is taken
30 to mean heterosexual, heteronormative and, increasingly, homonormative, is to be
31 seen as almost or nearly normal. It continues to reinforce a dichotomous model of
32 sexuality where heterosexuality is privileged and serves as the benchmark against
33 which all other sexualities are judged. As has been suggested the extent to which
34 homosexuality has been accepted and publically recognised has been shaped by the
35 extent to which it is seen to pose a threat to the heteronormative order. In *In the*
36 *Flesh*, Partially Deceased Syndrome Sufferers can be returned to the treatment
37 centre if they become non-compliant or a threat to themselves or the community,
38 evidence of the conditionality of their acceptance by the living. As with Foucault's
39 abnormalists they are confined and required to undergo a process of correction.
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7 Standing in front of the parish council, accused of breaking and entering and
8 releasing rabid 'Rotters', Kieren is presented with precisely this threat by Councillor
9 Pearl Pinder (Gillian Waugh)
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13 *Kieren:* I'm not a threat to the community

14
15 *Pearl:* Are you the community?

16
17 *Kieren:* Yeah, I am. (Looks confused) I don't understand the question.

18
19 *Pearl:* It's simple. I'm asking are you the community?

20
21 *Kieren:* No.

22
23 *Pearl:* That's right. You're not. We are the community and we have deemed
24 you a threat to it.
25
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I Walked with a Zombie (JacquesTorneur, 1943)

Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1968)

Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004)

28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002)

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White Zombie (Victor Halperin, 1932)

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