

**Western University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Steven Bruhm**

---

2013

# Serial Killing Serial Children: Dexter's Counterfeit Families

Steven Bruhm, *The University of Western Ontario*

# SERIAL KILLING SERIAL CHILDREN: *DEXTER'S* COUNTERFEIT FAMILIES

---

STEVEN BRUHM

**D**o you ever just feel like killing someone? Is that “someone” you feel like killing ever one of your own kids? Or, to frame the question the way Kathryn Bond Stockton does, is the “you” who “feels like killing” ever a child? That is, can that “you” who is so enwrapped in murderous rage ever be anything more than a child? And in that sense, is that “you” perhaps a *queer* child, a normative adult queered by its own childishness?<sup>1</sup> The frustrating feeling that we want to kill—the feeling we must always frustrate—is, for Stockton, something more enticing than the simple exasperation that parents often feel about their children, or that children often feel about everything, including their parents. Rather, this “feeling like killing,” as often child-directed as it is childish, is a nodal point around which questions of murderous motivations, infantile origins, doctrines of normative childhood and their disavowals frequently take shape. As Stockton puts it,

for better or worse, in the figure of the child, in the context of murder, we tend to take motives back to unspoiled, childlike feelings, and thus we undo murderous motives altogether, even as we seek their origins in childhood. [. . .] In this way, our sentimental view of the child makes our model of motive *more* complex, makes for a model of surreptitious sideways growth (for motive and the child) that, as a culture, we otherwise deny.<sup>2</sup>

To designate that a child is motivated by innocence—itsself a pregnant oxymoron—is either to kill the child outright through a disavowal of any subjectivity that a child might otherwise be said to claim; or, as in Stockton’s central argument in *The Queer Child*, it is to open up the possibility of a “lateral move,” a “sideways growth” in which the normative binarism of maturity-regression cedes its privilege to other possible lines of flight—sites of pleasure, modes of power, sex drives.

To return: Do you ever just feel like killing someone? Dexter Morgan sure does. The eponymous protagonist of the Showtime television series, *Dexter* (Michael C. Hall) carries a so-called “Dark Passenger” who is no passenger at all, but a drive to kill, vigilante-style, bad people in and around the city of Miami. The bad people who deserve Dexter’s dismembering knife are those who kill innocent others, for either pleasure or profit, making our hero Miami’s answer to a Dark Knight, outside justice the better to see justice done (or this is so until Season 7, when questions of justice really spiral out of control). This drive to kill was

instilled, or at least given imaginative shape, in Dexter's very early childhood, when he was forced to watch his mother's brutal murder and dismemberment at the hands of a ruthless band of men whose symbolic surrogates Dexter will kill in his adulthood. Those killings, moreover, are safely framed by Dexter's stepfather Harry (James Remar), who trains him in a strict code that will ensure he never gets caught and that he only kills those who have (repeatedly) killed innocent others. And throughout the first six seasons of the series, Dexter adheres to this code religiously, or almost. The two notable exceptions to meet the serial killer's knife are Lila (Jaime Murray), Dexter's passionate fling from Season 2, who attempts but fails to kill Dexter's step-children-to-be, Cody and Astor; and Nathan Marten (Jason Kaufman), a man who photographs and lustily gazes at computerized images of Astor in the series' third season. Marten's child-loving ocular crimes, like Lila's *attempted* child-murder, are, by Dexter's logic, the same thing as child-murder, or serial killing more generally, and such transgressions fit in—or at least *in around*—Harry's Code with sufficient snugness that those who threaten children, regardless of outcome, deservedly get the knife. In this way the series attempts to stitch a seamless tapestry from Dexter's traumatic childhood to the vulnerable childhoods of young people around him. If our hero has one unassailable virtue, it's in his quality of the lion protecting his cubs. Having strangled Marten, Dexter intones: "Nobody hurts my children."<sup>3</sup>

But beyond the hypertrophied American desire to take the law into one's own hands, and the equally hypertrophied desire to make the world a safe place for children, is a series of questions to which Stockton has made us sensitive, and upon which the Showtime series embroiders. Some of those questions are:

- What hypotheses form around Dexter's childhood desire to kill, including his pre-remembered but purportedly definitive experience of watching his mother die? His "memory" of this scene, after all, occurs only in flashbacks and from the point of view of the camera looking at the child, not from within the child himself.
- What does it mean for this killer to have been born—or rather born again—into his mother's spilled blood? We have no way of knowing whether the Dark Passenger was born into Dexter from the womb or whether it found its entry during the witnessing of his mother's death, and so we never know whether we are looking two births or one.
- What meanings get produced from Dexter's "originary" desire as it meets up with, gets fashioned, and perhaps even deformed, by the surrogate father Harry (the Dead Father par excellence) and his annoyingly omnipresent, superegoic Code, a Code that allows Dexter to kill without getting caught? Dexter's entire *raison d'être* may be to come to terms with the mother's death, but it is the father whose ghost haunts him more consistently.
- And how do such deterministic motivations mesh in a character so irreducibly *queer*?

For at its center, *Dexter* the TV series is yet another queer narrative, yet another American tale of a man with a closet, inhabited only by a dark secret; a man who continually attempts

and continually fails to inhabit a normal family, and who continually fails to adjust his desires to fit that normalcy; a man who, with decades of American-style psychoanalysis at his beck and call, understands his relationship *to* and *as* The Parent to be fraught, criss-crossed, and polyvalent, yet ultimately subject to straightening out in the fullness of time—of *family* time, to be precise.

The normalized fullness of family time is both the fantasized solution to all of Dexter's problems and the bull's eye at which Season 4 of the series takes brutal aim. The preceding seasons 2 and 3, ending with Dexter's marriage to a very pregnant Rita (Julie Benz), have on the one hand witnessed his progress from an emotionally dead serial killer to a man susceptible to emotion, desire, and the reparative pleasures of living with and for other people. In this light, marriage and family have been the necessary prescription for emotional (perhaps spiritual?) salvation. But these preceding two seasons have also lulled us into forgetting why Dexter got together with Rita in the first place: as a victim of marital abuse, Rita was herself emotionally incapable of sexual relations, making her the perfect partner for a serial killer who needed to hide his own hollow interiority. Rita was Dexter's perfect beard, perfect because so closely trimmed. By Season 4 Dexter and Rita appear to have "grown" into a healthier, more "mature" sexuality—their baby Harrison is proof of this—but not without leaving some queer forensic residue behind. What Daddy Dexter discovers in this season is the degree to which the Code of Harry (the Father-Policeman) and the Code of Family are incompatible: Dexter's attempt to answer to both codes renders him a negligent father (at least by Rita's standards) and a sloppy serial killer. Due to exhaustion, he forgets things, he misplaces crucial evidence, he risks exposure. Such breach of the vigilante code, the writers suggest, is to be laid directly at the hearth: Season 4 treats us to repeated scenes in which the precise work of tracking and killing is interrupted, fatally, by phone calls from Rita who is compelled to impart to Dexter some narrative of the home life on which he is missing out. These calls result in car accidents, missed opportunities, spoiled assignments—like the scene where Dexter is in the midst of finding a perfect kill site for his next victim and Rita phones to have him sing a verse of *America the Beautiful* to a Harrison who will not fall asleep.<sup>4</sup> Or the scene where Rita calls to demand that they finally have their honeymoon over the upcoming weekend, a distracting call that results in a minor car accident where Dexter loses the season's chief villain, the Trinity Killer, whom he had prepared to murder but who slips away, and who will ultimately murder Rita herself.<sup>5</sup> All this because a girl shouldn't miss her honeymoon. An empty milk jug, an ear ache, a sky-rocketing temperature of 100.4 after baby's booster shots—no domestic crisis is too small for Rita (or for Showtime) to ignore: the Morgan family repeatedly and compulsively performs the banality of domestic life only to have that banality result in murderers escaping their just deserts. And in case we miss the point, we have the quiet exchange before father and son that perfectly summarizes parenting in the context of reconstructed masculinity and post-feminism: says Harry, "Your priorities have changed"; Dexter replies, "I'm a father now."<sup>6</sup>

The supposed distinction between Harry's Code and Rita's, the tension between the

demands of Dexter's Dark Passenger and the suburban Western dictum that "family comes first," would itself be banal if it were not so deconstructively resonant. It's not the mutual exclusivity of Daddy Harry's and Mommy Rita's Codes that makes Dexter's queer plight compelling—and that makes his compulsion so *queer*—it's the way those codes are thoroughly imbricated. For into this *mauvais foi* family as Dexter is forced to live it, enter the arch-villain Arthur Mitchell (John Lithgow), aka the Trinity Killer, who, like Dexter, is both serial killer and total family man: married, father of two, church deacon, and co-ordinator of the Four Walls project that builds homes for the homeless. Like Dexter, "Arthur has a closet," and like Dexter with Rita the bearding-lady, Arthur "doesn't need a secret apartment. He's hiding in plain sight, right in the middle of his family."<sup>7</sup> Thinks Dex: "Trinity's a husband, a father. He's like me."<sup>8</sup> Family here is not just opposed to killing, it also enables it<sup>9</sup>—as it always has for Dexter. If it has been a premise of the show all along that families can best be protected by Dexter's killing on their behalf, that is, by not leaving justice to more official systems of enforcement, it has also been a premise that performing the role of heteronormal family man can facilitate murder like no other form of enclosure.

At the same time, though, the privileged status of Family as a social institution endangers the very constituents it is supposed to protect. For example, it is the impossible ideology of family unity that has turned Arthur into a murderer to begin with, just as it is the closet of family unity (violent father, passive mother, victimized children all posing as happy) that allows him to serial kill across the years. It is the names and images on an SUV decal—the boast of the Family on that most symbolically normative of vehicles, parked at a suburban shopping mall—that will give Trinity all the information he needs to seduce and capture his next victim, Scott Smith (Jake Short), by impersonating a police officer and playing on the child's fears for his parents' safety.<sup>10</sup> So too it is Rita's status as wife and mother that will secure her place alongside other wives and mothers at the end of the day: dead in a bathtub, femoral artery opened, blood drained.<sup>11</sup> She dies, that is, not just because she is Dexter's wife but because she is a mother, a Mother like young Arthur's mother who dies from grief for a dead daughter. And the implications are clear: Rita's death is not *in spite of* the bosom of family pleasures but *because of it*; she was supposed to have been enjoying herself in the Florida Keys waiting for her frisky bridegroom to arrive for their belated honeymoon, but a series of events during her departure—events that partake of the catalogue of banality I constructed earlier—force her to return to the house where she will be killed. Rita comes back to the house from the airport because she had forgotten her travel ID; she forgot her ID because she had been flustered and inattentive when leaving in the taxi; the fluster was caused by the fact that Dexter couldn't find Harrison's favorite baby toy . . . and one must not leave home without it. This conglomerate of "crises" establishes the scene for Rita's death, making the series' argument as ruthless as its murderers: while Family poses as an antidote to a culture of crime and death, Family itself is driven by death; it enables dark passengers of all sorts and directly contributes to its own destruction.

Not just driving one to distraction, then, Family drives one to death, a death drive embodied in the season's key child-in-danger, Scott Smith. Through Scott, we go to the heart of

Trinity's motivations for killing. We have already learned that Trinity's cycle of three killings (hence the nickname) displaces Father, Son, and Holy Ghost onto Arthur's sister Vera, suicidal mother, and abusive father; but through Scott we get what Kathryn Bond Stockton would call the more "living, growing, cubist form of dramatically mismatched feelings and movements from different temporalities" that the murderous child evinces.<sup>12</sup> Through Scott, we get to the "death" of the child that Arthur himself once was. In a very telling scene, the abducted Scott is forced to counterfeit Arthur-as-a-child and to live out, through the drive of a train (another death drive to which Stockton and Showtime alert us), the loved and nurtured child that Arthur never was. Arthur speaks earnestly to Scott:

ARTHUR: Don't you understand? Father drinks, and mother pays the price. I'm just trying to protect you, Arthur.

SCOTT: My name is Scott!

...

ARTHUR: You're a dear boy, Arthur . . . so innocent, kind-hearted. Promise me you'll always stay this way.<sup>13</sup>

This replacement or "counterfeit" Arthur, like the series of counterfeit Arthurs before him, is made to impersonate Trinity's desires for a happy childhood before then being killed—a pattern that Law Enforcement, including Dexter, has until this point been unable to detect. The symbolic weight of this child-murder is impossible to miss. Trinity is serial-killing not only ten-year-old boys across the United States as a prelude to three other murders in each cycle, a prelude that only Dexter has been able to identify; rather, Trinity is serial-killing *himself* as a serial child—the child he "really" was and can no longer stand to have been, and the child he wishes he had been, the child he desires to be, the child that can only present itself as the fantasized, impossible ideal. Man-as-boy, man-as-killed-boy, man-as-boy-killer, communes with boy-as-other-boy, boy who must live and boy who must die.

By casting Scott and his predecessors into the counterfeit role of Arthur—not as Arthur *was*, but as he wishes he had been—Trinity enacts the dynamic of killing what I am calling the "counterfeit child." This counterfeit, and the need for killing it, trenches upon the central insight of psychoanalyst Serge Leclaire that "There is for everyone, always, a child to kill. [. . .] Accursed and universally shared, it is part of everyone's inheritance: the object of a murder as imperative as it is impossible."<sup>14</sup> The child who must be killed, Leclaire argues, is the phantasm of the *infans*, the impossibly ideal child who exists before the rivening agencies of subjectivation, the child to whom we are ineluctably drawn yet which we can never again be. If Trinity must conduct through Scott and company a series of counterfeit Arthurs whom he must both love and kill, and if he must do so *repeatedly*, that is because "*There can be no life without killing that strange, original image in which everyone's birth is inscribed.*"<sup>15</sup> Faced with my earlier question, *Do you ever feel like killing someone?*, Trinity, having read his Leclaire, would answer, *You always feel like killing someone. And that someone is not so much you as it is the counterfeit, the fantasmatic ideal you that existed not before you but beside you, an emanation, a sideways projection (to channel Stockton one*

more time), an impossible other. The serial killing of serial children in *Dexter*, then, is not merely the killing of another's child, and it's not merely the killing of the child you once were, it is also you-as-child, you as indistinguishable from the child "born in blood" (Dexter's repeated phrase about himself and his own son) that is doing the killing.

Thus we see a motivation, a complex of feelings that take us well beyond the monochromatic palette of family values and domestic pleasures that the series repeatedly juxtaposes to the world of Dark Passengers and blood spatters. And this logic of counterfeit substitutions does not stop with Arthur and Scott, the counterfeit Arthur meant to embody/die for the child that Arthur never was. Scott is also the cypher in another chain of counterfeits: he is clearly made to figure for Cody (Preston Bailey), Dexter's step-son (and thus *not* his son, biologically speaking) who could at any moment be Trinity's next victim; he is also, by serial logic, a figure for Harrison (Luke Andrew Kruntchev), Dexter's biological son and "Harry's son," a child who, like Dexter himself, will be born into the blood of his mother's massacre in the season finale, a re-birth (and the re-birth of a re-birth) that Dexter is powerless to prevent. And in being so (re-)born, Harrison may take up the same position to Dexter that Dexter has taken to the Code-wielding Harry, whose purpose it is to allow Dexter to realize his death-drive with relative safety. And finally, Scott is also a counterfeit Jonah (Brando Eaton), Arthur Mitchell's biological son, the son who also continually faces the punitive threats of violent Oedipal daddy (and who, in Season 6, will kill his own mother for having failed to protect him and his sister from their abusive father.)<sup>16</sup> It is "this boy" — this pair of counterfeit children Jonah-and-Scott — that Dexter will choose to protect over his own children when Trinity's murderous rage threatens to lash out at his own immediate family. These "other" boys, these serial children are a dangerous supplement to Dexter's own family, but they are also the preferred and irreducible substitute to that family, the most real embodiment of physical threat, the most potent site of sympathetic energy.

And so if *Dexter* performs a devastating critique of America's family-bound ideology and its murderous Dark Passenger, it also performs a counterclaim. I've been arguing here that the counterfeit child elicits destructive acts of violence against a capital-"C" Child that can never be destroyed — and for that reason child-murders in my archive are incomplete, repetitious, symptomatic, what Lee Edelman might call *sinthomosexual*.<sup>17</sup> At that same time, though, such engagements with and against the Child of domestic ideology also fashion queer alignments, identifications, and expansive sympathies with people who are themselves haunted by the Dark Passenger of domestic purity's impossible demands. Let us read one more scene from Season 4 to get at the possibilities of such a queer alignment. As he is being forced to play with the trainset, an imprisoned Scott rises in pitying response to an Arthur who momentarily testifies to his own victimization as a queer child. While Frankie Avalon croons *Venus* on the stereo, Arthur becomes quiet and pensive, even tearful:

SCOTT: Why are you so sad?

ARTHUR: It was Vera's favorite song. . . . She was my sister.

SCOTT: What happened to her?

ARTHUR: She died. [*crying*] It wasn't my fault. It wasn't my fault.

SCOTT: Listen, I . . . I'm sorry about your sister. And . . . if it will make you feel any better, you can call me Arthur.

ARTHUR: You'd let me do that?

SCOTT: Sure. . . . Now, how about we play trains a little bit more, and then you can take me home?<sup>18</sup>

Scott sees Arthur's pain as an escape clause, to be sure, but he also answers the call to be, even momentarily, the child Arthur that Arthur needs him to be. So too Dexter, who quickly identifies with the Trinity Killer as a family man and father who has, like Dexter, been born into blood and whom he understands precisely because he is, in many ways, Trinity.<sup>19</sup> This is the same Dexter who will enact a *sympathetic* logic of the counterfeit by continually abandoning his own family to attend to a surrogate one—the Mitchells—whose domestic ruptures teach him more about emotional complexity than the platitudes and false promises of his own homelife could ever hope to. In other words, if serial displacement and counterfeit surrogacy enable child-murder in Season 4 of *Dexter*, they also enable unexpected queer affiliations of emotion. Like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of the avuncular in which the queer uncle as *surrogate parent* allows for affects unpermitted by the Law of the Symbolic Father,<sup>20</sup> Dexter, Scott, even Arthur Mitchell perform for us the reparative moves that have been foreclosed by home and family as the series imagines it.

The impulse to murder children, to murder for the sake of children, even to become a child and to murder as a child, may take us some distance to answering the question on a lot of people's minds these days, "What is Queer Theory Doing With the Child?"<sup>21</sup> According to Kenneth Kidd, this question has brought us to an impasse. On the one hand, says Kidd, we have Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Moon, and others<sup>22</sup> proffering the "protogay" child as a nostalgic and sentimental subject who resists any attempt to "interrogate" its ego complexities or self-rivening desires.<sup>23</sup> In such work we have queer adults attempting "to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood,"<sup>24</sup> as Sedgwick puts it, to make this world a better place for queer children; so too Dexter, who promises his baby son Harrison after his booster shot that he'll never let anyone hurt the child again.<sup>25</sup> But against this protective gesture and its premise of the non-deconstructive, anti-psychoanalyzable child we have the Child in Lee Edelman, the Symbolic figure of heteronormative fantasy and reproductive futurism who bullies us into disavowing—both psychically and politically—the very negativity that queerness may be called upon to figure.<sup>26</sup> This Child can only and always be a figure for death, since its continual deferral into the future undoes the very premise of fulfillment that it is so tantalizingly made to proffer. While Kidd ultimately endorses more generous models of queer childhood embodiment, like Bond Stockton's "growing sideways,"<sup>27</sup> I am as interested in the ways in which such sideways growth might model for queer adults some alternatives—some enabling counterfeits—to the problematic idea of the "queer family." As the kind of queer adult who finds the concept of normalized family life stultifyingly deadly, I can only meet the devastation of bourgeois suburban fam-



ilies in *Dexter* with a sense of *schadenfreude*—the *schadenfreude* that I believe the series is manipulating me into feeling; yet, as the kind of queer adult who finds expansive pleasure in the community of other queers, I find the network of Dexter-Arthur-Scott to be moving, reparative, partaking of the form of the sentimental that Eve Sedgwick suggested might be useful for thinking about the queer, provided we could think such sentimentalism beyond the usual sticky-sweet qualities.<sup>28</sup> It is itself something of a trinity—inviting precisely because it is neither Holy nor Oedipal. Not fathers and sons to be sure, but some counter that fits in surprising, non-coercive fashion.

Steven Bruhm  
Western University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, "Feeling Like Killing? Murderous Motives of the Queer Child," in *The Queer Child, or Sideways Growth in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. Indeed it's worth remembering that the first murderer-murder of the series, the one that initiates our identifications with Dexter, is of the director of the youth choir whom Dexter learns has killed children. From the get-go, the series establishes the serial killer as a justifiable psychopath so long as he is in the service of the child. See John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "Dexter," *Dexter*, season 1, episode 3, directed by Michael Cuesta, aired October 1, 2006 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2007), DVD.

<sup>3</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," *Dexter*, season 3, episode 3, directed by John Dahl, aired October 12, 2008 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2009), DVD.

<sup>4</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "Living the Dream," *Dexter*, season 4, episode 1, directed by Marcos Siega, aired September 27, 2009 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2010), DVD.

<sup>5</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "The Getaway," *Dexter*, season 4, episode 12, directed by Steve Shill, aired December 13, 2009 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2010), DVD.

<sup>6</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "Lost Boys," *Dexter*, season 4, episode 10, directed by Keith Gordon, aired November 29, 2009 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2010), DVD.

<sup>7</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "If I Had a Hammer," *Dexter*, season 4, episode 6, directed by Romeo Tirone, aired November 1, 2009 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2010), DVD.

<sup>8</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "Dirty Harry," *Dexter*, season 4, episode 5, directed by Keith Gordon, aired October 25, 2009 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2010), DVD.

<sup>9</sup> And it does so a lot. Dexter learns from Trinity to relocate, at least momentarily, his killing tools from his former apartment to a shed in his and Rita's backyard, because it is safer than trying to keep secrets from his sensitive wife. The logic is straight out of "The Purloined Letter": hide things in plain sight.

<sup>10</sup> *Dexter*, "Lost Boys."

<sup>11</sup> *Dexter*, "The Getaway."

<sup>12</sup> Stockton, "Feeling Like Killing?" 157.

<sup>13</sup> Dexter, "Lost Boys."

<sup>14</sup> Serge Leclair, *A Child is Being Killed: On Primary Narcissism and the Death Drive*, trans. Marie-Claude Hays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 3, 10. Readers of Gothic criticism will also recognize in my term "the counterfeit child" a debt to Jerrold Hogle, who has written extensively on the degree to which the "authenticity" of the past haunts us through counterfeit signifiers, signifiers that are crucial not just to the tradition of gothic fiction, but to modernity itself. Hogle suggests that "[t]here is really no major work in the gothic tradition since [Horace] Walpole that is not in some way 'grounded' in the counterfeiting of aging artifacts or bodies and [what is more important for him] of the present conflicts that often hide behind them" (105). "The past" comes to us, he says, through demonstrably artificial or counterfeit symbols (relics, suits of armor, body parts, family legacies), which produce ghosts that then haunt the present with a spurious nostalgia. Those "ghosts" Hogle calls "ghosts of the counterfeit," since they denote the afterlife of something that never really existed with any real legitimacy in the first place. See Jerrold E. Hogle, *The Undergrounds of the Phantom of the Opera: Sublimation and the Gothic in Leroux's Novel and Its Progeny* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Leclair, *A Child is Being Killed*, 2, emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> John Goldwyn, Sara Colleton, Clyde Phillips, et. al., Executive Producers, "Nebraska," *Dexter*, season 6, episode 7, directed by Romeo Tirone, aired November 13, 2011 (Hollywood, CA: CBS DVD, 2012), DVD.

<sup>17</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). In chapter 2 of *No Future*, Edelman constructs the neologism "sinthomosexuality" from Lacan's concept of the "sinthome" and "homosexuality" to theorize its implications for queer critique. Edelman means his term to signify the way in which homosexuality, so deployed, may come to figure the repetitious function of the death drive that refuses assimilation to the norm—that is, to the "future" as an idealized state, to the "child" as the symbolic guarantor of that future, and to the idealizing closures upon which such a future depends. Edelman provocatively locates *sinthomosexuality* in the character of Leonard (Martin Balsam) in Hitchcock's *North By Northwest* as the figure who might stand for this refusal; I'm suggesting that Dexter, or at least his Dark Passenger, is another such figuration.

<sup>18</sup> Dexter, "Lost Boys."

<sup>19</sup> Here is another reference to "The Purloined Letter," as August Dupin must identify with the blackmailer in order to foil him.

<sup>20</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Tales of the Avunculate: The Importance of Being Earnest," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 52–72.

<sup>21</sup> See Karin Lesnik-Oberstein and Stephen Thomson, "What is Queer Theory Doing with the Child?" *parallax* 8.1 (2002): 35–46.

<sup>22</sup> See Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 1–20, and Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). I would also add to what is admittedly a partial list Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Sexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. pages 21–27, titled "First Ed"); Michael Warner, "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood," in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 215–24; Kathryn R. Kent, "'No Trespassing': Girl Scout Camp and the Limits of the Counterpublic Sphere," in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 173–89; Judith Halberstam, "Oh Bondage Up Yours!: Female Masculinity and the Tomboy," in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 191–214; and José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Kidd, "Queer Theory's Child and Children's Literature Studies," *PMLA* 126.1 (2011): 182.

<sup>24</sup> Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Dexter*, "Lost Boys."

<sup>26</sup> Edelman, *No Future*.

<sup>27</sup> Kidd, "Queer Theory's Child," 186–87.

<sup>28</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Some Binarisms (II): Wilde, Nietzsche, and the Sentimental Relations of the Male Body," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 131–81.

Copyright of English Language Notes is the property of English Language Notes and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.