Murder Most Queer

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Published by University of Michigan Press

Afterword

*Ghost:* Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
*Hamlet:* Murder!
*Ghost:* Murder most foul, as in the best it is;
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

*Hamlet*, I.v.25–28

When considering the variety of factors that have inspired both the creators of and audiences for homicidal homosexual characters, it seems likely that such characters will continue to be created and find a home in the theater. The fears and desires grounded in the personal, social, and political realities of queer people are not, of course, universally shared or unchanging. Yet consider the many factors that persist in shaping the lives of many queer people, and therefore shape our understanding of the homicidal homosexual character: the imagined link between sexual deviance and criminal deviance, the fantasy of empowering queer people by shedding the role of victim in favor of the role of perpetrator, the desire to legitimize same-sex love, the fear that same-sex love cannot exist in a homophobic society, an identification and fascination with other queers (including real life killers), the secrecy and shame of the closet, the urge to express rage and other repressed emotions, the devastation of AIDS and its symbolic meanings, and the need to confront accusations of queer evil. Even as the political and social status of LGBT people shows signs of improvement, it seems to me that all of the above-mentioned factors maintain a powerful influence over queer lives.

Indeed, I expect that homicidal homosexual characters will continue to flourish as long as queer people must wrestle with their own status as “criminals” within our society. Clearly it is not enough that the US Su-
supreme Court has legally decriminalized homosexuality or that same-sex marriage is recognized in some states. For many, queer people continue to pose a “threat” against which some Americans feel they must “protect” and “defend” themselves. If one can imagine a world where queer people are not treated as criminals—and do not have to struggle with their own sense of themselves as criminals—then perhaps the dramatic narrative of the homicidal homosexual will have less power. If the status of queerness changes to become simply a variation of human existence that carries no stigma, no shame or fear, no social or psychological repression, no victimization or criminalization, and no association with disease or evil—then perhaps the character of the homicidal homosexual will fade from the stage.

In her influential book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Jasbir K. Puar writes about this time of transition for LGBT American citizens, warning that acceptance and full citizenship “is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity.” Those who do not fit within these narrow parameters, then, are still vilified as deviant and deadly. Is it possible that the American theater will increasingly see murderous characters who represent those queer people still criminalized or pathologized in the popular imagination, including (but certainly not limited to) people who are poor, youths of color, immigrants, and persons who are transgender or nonmonogamous? If, as Puar argues, homonormativity relies on removing the deviant deadliness from the queer and placing it on the Arab or Muslim “monster-terrorist-fag,” then this vilified conflation of religious, racial, national, and sexual difference will, inevitably, find its way to the stage in the figure of a queer killer. The archetype of the homicidal homosexual thrives not when queers are fully accepted or rejected but when we as a society are navigating the turbulent waters of uncertainty. Despite the rise of homonormativity, those struggles continue, and the theater remains a key venue for enacting and debating the uncertainties.

Yet, even as I hope for and work toward that world free of homophobia and other criminalizing prejudices, I do not desire the disappearance of the homicidal homosexual. I have argued that these characters wrestle with some of the most complex and often difficult aspects of queer existence. In doing so, they expand the discourse surrounding queer issues and themes. They may reiterate homophobic paradigms, and they may confront and challenge those paradigms—often they do both. My goal in
this book has been to expose and explore the diverse and often contradictory readings that these representations can provoke. I have also tried to enrich our understanding of homicidal homosexuals as compelling characters who appear in an entertaining variety of theatrical forms and genres. Plays with homicidal homosexuals often defy easy categorization since they incorporate the realistic and the fantastic, the optimistic and the nihilistic, the reactionary and the progressive, the serious and the frivolous. The complexities and contradictions of homicidal homosexuals, simultaneously reflecting realities and realizing fantasies, make them exciting theatrical figures, and plays featuring them constitute a portion of our theatrical culture that I consider vibrant, challenging, and insightful in a manner rarely found in other representations of queer lives. They deserve a place on our stages, in our scholarship, and in the discourse that shapes our understandings of ourselves, our relationships, and our society.