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## QUEERING MARIANNE: WITCHCRAFT AS A MEANS OF SEXUAL FREEDOM

Amber Guerena

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QUEERING MARIANNE: WITCHCRAFT AS A  
MEANS OF SEXUAL FREEDOM

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English and Writing Studies:  
Literature

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by  
Amber Guerena  
December 2022

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Amber Guerena  
December 2022  
Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is divided in three parts to argue that Emma in the series, *Marianne*, is homosexual. The first section explains that the witch, Marianne, embodies Emma's repressed homosexual desires and that her reintroduction to Emma's life signifies her break away from heteronormative expectations. The second section centers on how religion contributes to Emma's internal conflict regarding her sexuality. She struggles with choosing which religion to embrace: Christianity, which doesn't support homosexuality, or witchcraft, which does support homosexuality. The third section explains the strategic choices that the series took to portray Emma's acceptance of herself and witchcraft. The series uses love triangles and the act of writing to link Emma to Marianne, witchcraft, and homosexuality. The conclusion ultimately comes together to emphasize the importance of the series and this analysis to bring more attention to queer, homosexual women in horror.

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## JOURNAL ARTICLE

### QUEERING MARIANNE: WITCHCRAFT AS A MEANS OF SEXUAL FREEDOM

#### Introduction

With the increased accessibility to online streaming services, audiences have had more opportunity to engage with horror media in analytic ways. This increased access has allowed for queer interpretations of famous horror films, where horror icons like Pennywise from Stephen King's *IT* and the Babadook from the Netflix Original with the same name, have now also become queer icons. However, such interpretations are not new. Harry M. Benshoff goes into detail about the ways homosexuality is subtly represented through monsters in horror films, as well as how viewers perceive those monsters, in his book *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the horror film*. He notes that "movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these proscribed places into the sunlit world, they cause panic and fear" (Benshoff 1-2). As per Benshoff's observations, when viewed through a queer lens, horror films create a parallel where the conflict between the monster and main character reflects the real-world the tension of being a homosexual in a heteronormative society.

Darren Elliot-Smith expands on Benshoff's work in his own book, *Queer Horror Film and Television- Sexuality and Masculinity at the Margins*. Elliot-Smith agrees with Benshoff that the horror film monster can represent homosexual desires, but further argues that gay, male audience members can relate to these

monsters in both positive and negative ways. His analysis of horror film monsters serves to “identify the gay anxieties symbolised in the horror film, whilst also recognising the appeal for gay spectators” because of that representation (Elliott-Smith 17). Elliott-Smith’s work offers the opportunity to recognize and criticize heteronormative practices that villainize homosexual men in fiction and reality. While Benshoff and Elliott-Smith offer great insights as to the symbolic presence of homosexuality in horror films and the importance of recognizing that presence as a gay viewer, there is little attention directed towards the representation and experience of homosexual women. Furthermore, because the scope of their research centers on gay, male representation in the horror films, there is a gap regarding the importance of representing homosexual women in horror television shows.

In light of this gap, this thesis will argue that main character Emma’s experiences in the horror show, *Marianne*, parallels homosexual women’s anxieties about their orientation and contributes to the representation of queer women in the genre of horror. *Marianne* centers around Emma as she journeys back to her hometown to mourn the death of a childhood friend, where begins being tormented by a witch named Marianne. By analyzing *Marianne* through a queer lens, the queer viewer identify with struggles the main character, Emma, faces as she comes to terms with her homosexuality via her confrontation with the witch. The reoccurring theme of religion plays into this interpretation. The show contrasts Christianity with witchcraft, where the former villainizes gay, non-

heteronormative lifestyles while the latter supports gay, non-heteronormative lifestyles.

Stephen Hunt in his book, *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Identities*, contributes to this dialogue because of his observations regarding traditional Christianity's view on homosexuality. He explains that "gay sexual activity... is not uncommonly rendered a serious 'sin': an unnatural, abnormal deviant form of behaviour" (Hunt 2). This understanding of Christianity conveys the exclusion of gay people from the church because of their non-heterosexual orientation. The conflict stems from the fact that the heteronormative life the church promotes does not neatly align with non-heterosexual people's lifestyles, as noted by Cherríe Moraga in her article "Still Loving in the (Still) War Years." Moraga draws on her own experience as a lesbian as she elaborates how homosexuality offers "an opportunity to conjure new forms of familial structures" outside of the heteronormativity the church preaches (Moraga 176).

This Christian, heteronormative belief system works in opposition to witchcraft. In her article, "Glamorous witchcraft: gender and magic in teen film and television," Rachel Moseley traces the origins of witchcraft and links it to the empowerment of female, teen witches. Despite the scope of her analysis focusing on a different demographic than that of this thesis, the significance of witchcraft still applies. Moseley notes that early portrayals of witches can be interpreted "as representative of women who lead unconventional lives," which in this case, would refer to being queer in a heteronormative world (Moseley 409).

Unlike the discriminatory actions of the Christian church, witchcraft allows queer women to wield their sexuality freely.

Along a similar line of thought, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Ann-Sofie Lönngren explains how allegedly unconventional, homosexual desires can be portrayed through heterosexual love triangles in literature. As Kosofsky notes in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, homosocial relationships are “social bonds between persons of the same sex,” most commonly found between two men who yearn for the same woman (Kosofsky 1). In such love triangles, the woman serves as a mediator to justify sexually charged homosocial relationships between men. Lönngren applies this term to the book, *A Madman’s Manifesto*, where she analyzes the relationship between the two male main characters who desire the same woman. Through her thorough examination of the novel, she further observes that there are similarities “between the constellation consisting of two men and one woman, and two women and one man” via homosocial behaviors (Lönngren 223). She notes that in the love triangle with two women and one man, the man would then serve as a mediator for the desire between the two women, thus offering another outlet for women to explore their homosexual desires.

This thesis ultimately seeks to bring attention to a marginalized subgenre of horror. There are few examples of horror shows that center on homosexual women- and even fewer scholarly inquiries about it. Although *Marianne* doesn’t label itself as queer horror, incorporating the aforementioned scholarship into this

analysis offers a new interpretation to the series. This thesis argues that Emma's numerous conflicts in the series signifies her journey from denial to acknowledgment to acceptance of her homosexual identity. Highlighting this interpretation of the show is important because it adds to an underdeveloped scholarship and places homosexual women at the center of attention. Analyzing Emma's relationships with her loved ones, the witch Marianne, and theology provides insight into the negative and positive experiences of homosexual women.

## Breaking Away From Denial

### Revival of Homosexuality

As noted by Benshoff, the monsters in horror film can be interpreted as representative of queer people. He explains that society views monsters and queer people similarly in that society ostracizes them out of fear; however, such depictions on the big screen offer a sense of identity for queer audiences in the struggles they share with the monster. This connection is rooted in the anxiety inducing experience of a homosexual woman existing in a society that fears and mistreats them. As a result, monsters in horror films represent the repressed desires and anxieties of homosexual women. Benshoff supports this notion by reviewing the manner in which monsters are presented in the film. He observes that monsters "seem to 'pop up' like clockwork whenever the hero and heroine move into a romantic clinch" (Benshoff 8). This trope shows the monster as a threat to the couple, which symbolizes the way heterosexual society views

homosexuality as a threat to their community. Similarly, the monster interrupting heterosexual intercourse could represent any of the characters' repressed homosexual desires interrupting their attempt to assimilate to heterosexual practices. In both of these interpretations, the monster, and the homosexuality it represents, is shown in a terrifying and horrific way because it reflects the negative stigma and anxieties around homosexuality.

The show, *Marianne*, explores both interpretations of homosexual anxieties through main character Emma's struggles with the witch, Marianne, and the loved ones around her. The series does not overtly characterize Emma's character as homosexual. However, her actions and behaviors she can be interpreted as such. *Marianne* follows Emma throughout her life, from childhood to adulthood. In one particular scene when Emma is fifteen years old, Emma confides in a childhood friend, Aurore, she can't sleep with Nono, her boyfriend at the time, because she keeps wetting the bed due to her nightmares of Marianne. She explains "After three months with Nono, I still can't sleep with him. I'd like to sleep with him, but not if we wake up all wet." ("You Left Her" 7:47) The conversation between the two makes it clear that Emma's fear of Marianne is intruding on her desires to have sexual intercourse with Nono. In this scene, Marianne is indicative of Emma's repressed homosexual desires, which manifests as a threat to her attempts of heterosexual intimacy. Since Marianne embodies Emma's homosexual desires, the fact that Emma is continually haunted by the witch suggests that Emma is struggling with internalized

homophobia. She is so terrified of her own sexuality that it causes her to wet the bed. The reason cannot participate in heterosexual intimacy because she is afraid of her homosexual desires; she is afraid that those desires will manifest while she is with Nono and reveal her true orientation.

The interpretation of Marianne being indicative of Emma's repressed homosexual desires and associated anxiety is further supported through Emma's characterization in her adult life. In episode one, "Your Dreams," Emma's adult life in the show begins with her taking questions from her fans during a panel about her decision to stop writing her popular book series, *Lizzie Lark*. One of her fans asks her when she plans on marrying Pierre, who is her significant other as well as the moderator of the questions during the panel. While he insists that only questions regarding the book be asked, Emma interrupts and says that she's going to "fuck him first and marry him afterwards because that is more interesting." ("Your Dreams" 4:24) The statement is set to appear as joke, but the reality is that this is one of the first signs revealing Emma is not truly invested in her heterosexual relationship with Pierre. Rather than take a moment to acknowledge their relationship, Emma makes a dismissive joke about it. If Emma and Pierre had been together long enough for marriage to be contemplated, it is telling that Emma's comment suggests that physical intimacy comes first while emotional intimacy and commitment is an afterthought and punchline. This dispassionate scene between Emma and Pierre is juxtaposed with the following scene between Emma and Camille at a bar.



Figure 1. “Emma and Camille talking at a bar” *Your Dreams* (10:28)

The image above is from said bar scene, where Emma and Camille are drinking together while postponing Emma’s date with Pierre. Instead of Emma sharing an intimate moment with Pierre, she finds herself engaging in an intimate moment with Camille. The women’s informality with one another in this scene altogether is reminiscent of two people on a date. The framing of the shot centers the attention on their close interactions. The dim lighting and small table force the two to push their boundaries as it blurs the line between a work-related outing and personal get together. Similarly, because of the back lighting, the silhouettes of the women are emphasized, which brings attention to their body language. Camille leans forward as she gives Emma her undivided attention while Emma struggles to meet her eyes.

Emma actively engages Camille in conversation, but her posture shows she is vulnerable. She is hunched over, folding in on herself as if she is protecting herself from the conversation. Her defensive body language is a result



of confiding in Camille about the inspiration behind her book series, which is real terror she had suffered because of Marianne's torment during her teen years. Emma explains that writing about Lizzie's fictional battles against Marianne allowed Emma to fight off Marianne in reality; once Emma had started writing, Marianne had stopped haunting her. The story would sound unreal or even mentally ill to the average person, but Camille does not mock or dismiss Emma's experiences. Her willingness to believe Emma and listen without judgement shows that she genuinely cares about Emma, her emotional state, and her life experiences.

Emma's open dialogue about her struggles against Marianne and Camille's open-mindedness about her situation adds to the intimacy they share in the scene. Not only are they physically close because of their environment, but they are also emotionally close because of their conversation. Their intimate connection is the catalyst for Emma's revitalized acknowledgement of her homosexuality and the reintroduction of Marianne into her life. This interpretation is supported by the sharp editing that occurs during the conversation. As Emma and Camille speak, Camille asks about Marianne by name. When she does, there is an extremely brief moment where an indescribable, yet terrifying image presumed to be Marianne appears on the screen. Because Marianne is indicative of Emma's repressed homosexual desires, this editing and imagery suggests that Emma is starting to develop brief sparks of attraction for Camille.

Emma's scene with Camille is once again juxtaposed with the scene after between Emma and Pierre. The new scene follows Emma as she comes home late after her intimate meeting with Camille and finds Pierre already asleep in bed. She is apologetic as she settles in beside him, but he doesn't reply; whether his silence is because he is asleep or upset is unclear. Regardless, the lack of response establishes a sense of loneliness and isolation in the scene, which is bolstered by the environment. It is dark in the room with the main source of light coming from a neon sign, casting a green hue. The mix of the poorly lit room and the green lighting further gives the scene an off-putting feel and seems to foreshadow the terror that is coming. The suspense rises as Marianne's footsteps and ominous laughter echo as she approaches Emma from the hallway, out of sight. The expression of fear on Emma's face is shrouded, but the reflection of light on her eyes makes it appear that she is on the verge of tears from fear. Emma vigorously tries to wake Pierre up, but he doesn't stir and even completely disappears from her side as the vague outline of Marianne creeps into the room, hidden by the shadows. The scene ends with Emma bolting upright in bed as she realizes it was just a nightmare.

Unlike the sweet scene with Camille, Emma's scene with Pierre is terrifying. Emma's nightmare reflects that she has the same fears as an adult that she had as a teen regarding her sexuality. Marianne, who had just briefly appeared with Camille, is now overshadowing the vulnerability she is supposed to share with Pierre in their room. She is unable to engage in any sort of intimacy with him in

this scene despite her efforts. She cannot rely on him in any way for protection as Marianne approaches. Ultimately, she cannot push away her scary homosexual desires, personified as Marianne, by awakening her heterosexuality, personified as Pierre. Her inability to connect with Pierre on an emotional level shows her lessening desire to stay in an unsatisfying heterosexual relationship. By the end of the nightmare, he completely disappears from her side because the reality is that her feelings for him were simply a farce.

In this scene, Emma struggles to branch away from the heterosexual farce she had been clinging to. It is no coincidence that Marianne manifests to torment her again the moment she stops trying to repress her homosexual desires. Now that she has given up repressing herself through her writing and takes initiative to spend time with a woman rather than her boyfriend, she must confront the anxieties she has with herself. While she is taking steps to start accepting her homosexuality through these actions, she is still scared of her desires, as shown through the nightmare sequence of Marianne haunting her. This series of events conveys that Emma's attempts to stop repressing her homosexuality still scares her.

### Fear of Heterosexuality

Once Pierre breaks up with Emma and leaves, there is nothing left to hold back Emma from continuing her journey to self-acceptance. As she starts to break away from the denial she's maintained for a significant portion of her life, she can now truly address how she feels about heterosexuality and the

expectations of that lifestyle. Although it is true that she still fears her homosexuality, she is also afraid of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. One of the first examples that conveys this new fear is when Emma travels back to her hometown where she checks on her parents after spending years away from them. As she approaches the house, she sees that the doors are half open and there is an ominous totem made of skin and hair hanging from the door handle. The imagery is deeply unsettling and sets the scene up for a terrifying experience. When Emma enters, she hears pained moans echoing through the empty house. Suspense builds as Emma furthers into the house with a worried, cautious expression, particularly when she notices the discarded garments of her parents littering the staircase. The music in the background crescendos, leading the scene into what should be a scary reveal. However, as the song climaxes, the suspense evaporates as the grand reveal is not a monstrous entity; instead, Emma's parents having sexual intercourse on the staircase. Upon seeing her parents, Emma storms out of the house and tries to quickly leave the premises.

What is interesting about this scene is the way it was choreographed. It is natural for any child to be upset or embarrassed after witnessing their parents in the middle of copulating; however, this sentiment is usually conveyed in a more humorous way as a punchline in television productions, such in shows like *Modern Family* and *Schitt's Creek*. The scene from *Marianne* is completely different. Everything about the scene is meant to be scary, including the reveal of Emma's parents engaging in sexual intercourse. Because the show focuses on

Emma's scared and cautious behavior, this scene can be interpreted as Emma's fears regarding heterosexuality. Her feelings of unease and anger are evident, where she does not want to witness her parents' heterosexuality, nor does she want to address it afterwards. She'd rather leave without another word, even after years of no contact with them, than have to associate herself with such scary, heterosexual acts.

The scene with Emma's parents is just one example of heterosexuality being portrayed in a scary way. Another scary scene that relates to heterosexual expectations is that of family building, particularly maternity through childbirth. In episode four, "Beautiful Moment," Emma has a vivid nightmare where she gets a call inviting her to join her childhood friends in the hospital as Sophie, the wife of Emma's friend named Séby, goes into labor. Emma is nervous as she joins but only feels worse as Sophie starts to push. There are complications in her birthing, and everyone becomes horrified as black goo starts to drip from between Sophie's legs. The scene escalates when a dark, dripping adult-sized body starts to climb out of Sophie's body before Emma wakes up from the nightmare.



Figure 2. “Sophie’s horrific birthing” *Beautiful Moment* (25:19)

This image is from Emma’s nightmare about the birthing. What should be a beautiful moment is portrayed in a scary way. The dim lighting sets grim tone for the rest of the scene. Most of their faces are covered in shadows, where the fluorescent lights highlight their horrified expressions as Sophie screams about how much it hurts. Even the doctor is perturbed as she cries out in pain while losing a larger than usual amount of blood in the process. Rather than center the experience on the positivity that will come from having a child, the scene shows the horrifying side. Sophie’s screams overwhelm the audio, as she starts thrashing in the hospital bed. Thus begins her ever increasing pain and struggles, as quick edits flash between the terrified friend group and the woman’s legs, revealing a demon soaked in a thick, black goo. The horror aspects of the scene contribute to the interpretation that maternity and traditional family building

can be seen as horrific to a homosexual woman who does not want to conform to heteronormative practices.

Childbirth is often referred to as the miracle of life, yet in this moment, it is the cause of a nightmare. There is no explicit reason given that explains why Emma sees childbirth as such a terrifying prospect. While she is truly scared of Marianne, the act of childbirth is unrelated to those fears in the show. Emma sees the scene as an evil omen and further tries to keep the baby from being born once she wakes up. She is unsuccessful since her friends stop her, but it is unknown what lengths she would have done to try to prevent the child's birth. Emma's fears and actions regarding Sophie's newborn are reflective of her perspective that maternity is a terrifying prospect; they reflect the horror of heterosexuality from the perspective of a queer person who is pressured to fit in with those actions.

Emma's negative relationship with heterosexuality and its expectations are common within the queer community, as observed by Moraga. While a heterosexual couple is typically excited to marry and have children, queer people do not always share this sentiment. Moraga explains that homosexual marriage is part of an "gay marriage assimilationist agenda" (Moraga 178). By normalizing and encouraging homosexual marriage, homosexual women's relationships and love traditions are then expected to conform to heterosexual marriage practices. In doing so, these actions limit homosexual women in terms of how they want to define and expand on their own relationship practices. Moraga explains from her

own experience that homosexual relationships “seemed to require no conventions,” which explains why Emma is so uncomfortable with heterosexual relationships and the strict parameters they establish (Moraga 176).

### Rejection of Heterosexuality

Emma does not want to be defined by heterosexual standards, which results in her harshly rejecting those expectations. This interpretation explains much of Emma’s rude behavior to her friends throughout the series. She actively dismisses the boundaries her friends set regarding their heterosexual lives. Emma’s interactions with her childhood friend, Séby, and his family is a prominent example of this interpretation in episode three, “Not an Easy Person.” When Séby invites Emma to his house for dinner, she makes offensive comments about Séby’s family that make everyone around her uncomfortable. Séby has a step-son named Hugo from Sophie’s previous relationship and is now weeks away from adding a biological child to the family. Emma centers her ruthlessness on their family building practices and questions whether the incoming child is truly Séby’s. When Sophie affirms that the baby is obviously his, Emma replies with, “There’s nothing obvious. This little guy wasn’t his. Séby could have come after the fight once again. Get all the problems and no benefits” (“Not an Easy Person” 12:07).

Her interactions with Séby and Sophie show that she has no respect for their personal boundaries and family dynamics. She mocks heterosexual relationships for being so fragile as to be broken by seeds of doubt, and she truly



tries to sow those seeds. Rather than respecting Séby's and Sophie's relationship, she questions the validity and genuineness of their affection. Although Emma laughs and says she's simply "getting to know [Sophie]," her actions show that she is actively trying to break up the family ("Not an Easy Person" 12:47). Her rejection of Séby's relationships with Sophie and Hugo continues to convey her radicalization away from heterosexuality. She tries to get Séby and Sophie to lose trust in each other in order to sabotage their relationship and further reject heterosexuality, both in herself and the people around her.

Emma's mistreatment of Séby and his family is not an isolated incident. Her dismissal and rejection of heterosexuality via disrespectful behaviors continues with other heterosexual relationships around her. Throughout the show, Emma shares moments of platonic intimacy with her childhood friend, Aurore, but she ruins these moments by teasing Aurore about having a crush on another childhood friend, Nono. Aurore clearly communicates that she is uncomfortable with the topic and insists that she only sees Nono as a friend. However, Emma ignores the boundaries Aurore sets. In episode six, "Memories," even though she knows her actions will put her friends' platonic relationship at risk, Emma orchestrates a meeting between the two that pressures Aurore to confess her romantic feelings. Nono feels betrayed by Aurore's hidden feelings and questions, "Every time we were together, you were waiting for something? You weren't just the Aurore I could see? You always had something in mind? I was just normal, and you pretended to be... just a friend" ("Memories" 28:06).

Aurore and Nono were not even in a relationship when Emma started meddling. Just knowing that Aurore wanted to build a heterosexual relationship with Nono was enough to motivate Emma to sabotage their potential relationship as well as their current friendship. There are no boundaries that will keep Emma from bringing attention to the toxic and fragile nature of heterosexuality. No relationship, romantic or platonic, is free from the threat of heterosexuality. Just as Sophie had been with an unreliable man who left her with a kid before meeting Séby, Aurore and Nono's friendship was also on the brink of destruction because of a simple crush. All it takes is one wrong move. Every example of Emma's disrespectful behavior towards heterosexual people continues to portray her strong homosexual identity through the dismissal of heterosexual relationship dynamics.

### Navigating Internal Conflict of Religion

#### Horror of Christianity

Following Emma's rejection of heterosexuality and heteronormative practices comes Emma's direct confrontation with herself. She struggles to navigate her homosexual feelings with the heteronormativity that is still expected of her. This internal battle with her sexuality is linked to her battle with ideology. Marianne comes back into Emma's life because Emma wants to accept herself through the freedom witchcraft grants, but she was taught by her Christian upbringing that she should not have these desires. As a result, she struggles to decide whether she should accept her desires with "evil" witchcraft or repress

them through “good” Christianity. Conservative, traditional Christian beliefs oppose homosexuality and is exclusive to certain people, those who are heterosexual. These characteristics place Christianity in direct conflict with witchcraft, which is accepting of everyone.

Emma’s first experience using Christianity to cope with her struggles against Marianne, who embodies her homosexual desires, occurs when she is a teenager in episode five, “You Left Her.” She visits the local priest to confess and looks terrified as she enters the confessional. She presses herself up against the furthest corner in the tiny space, eyes wide with fear. She begins to cry as she begs the priest to listen to her plight, where she sums up her nightmares and experiences with Marianne. He informs her that this witch has attached itself to her and seeks to “offend God and break his rules” (“You Left Her” 28:40). He continues to explain that the only way to protect her loved ones from Marianne is to personally hurt them so much that they cast her far away where the witch cannot reach them.

The lack of support and exile Emma receives from the priest is similar to the way Christianity excludes homosexual women from its fold. Rather than work together with Emma to guide her through her predicament, the priest tells her to isolate herself and keep the real reason for her actions to herself. The pressure she faces to stay silent to protect her loved ones is reminiscent of the way some homosexual women feel the need to “stay in the closet” to avoid potentially causing issues with them. This line of reasoning aligns itself with Hunt’s research

of Christian views on homosexuality. His research reflects that Christian theology sees homosexual acts as “contrary to natural law and sinful,” worthy of excommunication (Hunt 11). Because Marianne is implied to be Emma’s homosexual desires, the priest’s subsequent advice for Emma to leave is indicative of her excommunication from Christianity.



Figure 3. “Marianne’s appearance during confessional” *You Left Her* (28:38)

Emma’s and the priest’s scary and evil notions of Marianne is understandable given this context. Since Marianne is indicative of Emma’s homosexual desires, she appears as scary because Emma is in fear of accepting this aspect of herself due to her religious, heteronormative environment. Her desires are then seen as evil by the priest and to the others because of that same religious, heteronormative background. Thus, when the priest tells her to leave, it’s him acknowledging that she does not deserve to be with the rest of the town because of her evil, sinful desires.

It is clear that Emma's efforts to repress her homosexual desires in her teen years continued into adulthood, and Christian ideology was just as unhelpful in her adult life as it was in her childhood. Once her homosexual desires as an adult were revived, so did the fears she had experienced in her youth as well as the conflict with her faith. During the climax of the series in episode eight "Tuesday," the priest tries to exorcise Emma as an adult, in a final attempt to cleanse Emma of Marianne. The exorcism is choreographed to simulate a fight scene. The priest shoves a cross in Emma's face, and Emma responds by smacking it away as if deflecting punches from an assailant. When the cross doesn't have the effect the priest hoped it would, he splashes holy water on Emma's face, which appears as if he had backhanded her and sends her crashing to the floor. She crawls away with blood dripping from her nose to escape the physical pain that comes out of this intangible altercation.

This scene further highlights the harmful nature of Christianity. When Emma was a child, Christianity caused her emotional harm by isolating her from her family; now Christianity is causing her physical harm because of the exorcism. Despite these two different attempts to reap Marianne from Emma's and everyone else's lives, the results of these efforts are the same: failure. The priest's inability to banish Marianne once and for all parallels the way Christianity tries to banish homosexuality from society and its constituents. However, Emma's homosexuality is not something that can be exorcised or banished through any means, which is why none of the priest's efforts are successful. By the time

that the exorcism occurs, not only had Emma acknowledged her homosexuality but she had also begun accepting it into her life.

### Horror of Witchcraft

From a Christian perspective, Emma's path to self-acceptance is because it pushes her towards "wicked" witchcraft instead of "righteous" Christianity. One of the characters named Pat is an expert on the occult and explains that Marianne uses a "forbidden" language that is "an insult to God" to execute her witchcraft ("Beautiful Moment" 16:22). No one can decipher her spells to undo them or use it against her because of its sacrilegious nature. This explanation supports the notion that witchcraft is against Christianity and that the ideologies clash with each other. Witchcraft supports Emma's acceptance of her homosexuality while Christianity does not; hence, the altercation between the priest and Emma can be seen as Emma's internal conflict contemplating how both ideologies will impact her life and sexuality. Although she is starting to break away from her denial, her internal conflict ultimately stems from Emma's struggles to conform to Christian, heteronormative expectations when her identity relates more to the freedom of witchcraft. As Emma's bond with witchcraft strengthens over time, her life choices begin to parallel Marianne's choices during her own transition from average person to witch.

This series associates witchcraft, rather than Christianity, with self-empowerment and growth. Out of all the characters, Marianne is the one with the most power. She has the ability to possess people, shapeshift, and travel through

the power of written word. However, she can only accomplish these feats because witchcraft granted her the personal power to forge her own path regardless of societal expectations. Episode four, "Beautiful Moment," shows that before she was a witch, Marianne lived a normal but devastating life. She experienced many tragedies throughout her life, with the death of her parents in a fire when she was seven, the death of the nuns who raised her afterwards because of a plague, and the death of her first child after she wed at sixteen years old. Her transition into a witch began years later with the mysterious disappearance of her two later children and the act of murdering her husband. After these events, she completed the contract to become a witch and married the demon, Beleth.

It is evident that Marianne did not have positive nor successful experiences living a Christian, heteronormative life. Despite being surrounded by several examples of the ideal life, there was always a sense of distance between her and that lifestyle. The death of her parents at a young age dissolved any association with a heterosexual, nuclear family. Similarly, the destruction of the nunnery she lived in afterwards shows that she also did not have the support of her faith through such disasters. Her inability to conform to societal expectations culminates in her own unsuccessful attempts of Christian, heteronormative marriage. Without the security and satisfaction she is supposed to have through religion and heterosexuality, Marianne finds freedom in witchcraft. When she loses her children and murders her husband, she officially cleaves herself from

the expectations previously imposed on her and embraces her newfound freedom and power through demon-granted witchcraft. The fall from grace Marianne welcomed is the exact experience Emma's religious, heteronormative society is trying to keep her from following. Marianne was able to reject heterosexuality, gender roles, and Christian influence and grow stronger through witchcraft, and as Emma starts to draw closer to witchcraft, the closer she draws to ideological and sexual freedom.

Moseley's research supports this interpretation of witchcraft and the power it grants. She asserts that witchcraft marks the meeting of personal milestones in maturity, capturing "the potential attainment of adult femininity and (sexual) power" (Moseley 406). As Marianne grows into a young lady and mother, she finds herself distancing from her religious community and their heteronormative expectations of her. Her rejection of that lifestyle serves as the transition she needs to become a witch, which allows her to accept her new, powerful lifestyle. Emma goes through similar development when she leaves her own heterosexual relationship and Christian faith. While Marianne uses witchcraft to live independently of heteronormative practices, Emma uses witchcraft to accept her homosexuality. The power and sexual freedom that witchcraft grants allows both women to encounter personal growth in ways that would have never been acceptable by Christian standards.



### Temptation of Witchcraft

Because Emma views Marianne as scary throughout most of the show because her Christian faith taught her that witchcraft was evil, a majority of the portrayals of Marianne were terrifying. However, during the final confrontation in episode eight, "Tuesday," there is a big reveal. Emma is compelled by Marianne to drag her up from her grave to free her. As Emma pulls back the hood that covers Marianne's face, it is revealed that Marianne is not a scary monster after all; she is just a woman. She's not the evil hag or haunting ghoul as was expected. This is significant because all the previous images of Marianne were absolutely terrifying. She was ghostly, manipulative, uncanny, but those images were just Christian-influenced perceptions of her. Now that her true image is revealed, she does not appear to be any of those things. This shift in perspective suggests that although homosexuality can seem scary and monstrous through a Christian lens, once those preconceptions are released, homosexuality is normal and inviting.



Figure 4. "Marianne's true face is revealed" *Tuesday* (15:09)

Not only is Marianne's appearance significant to the scene, but Emma's reaction is also important. When Emma sees Marianne, she smiles and apologizes for taking so long to free Marianne. Marianne responds that there is no need to apologize, and the two share an intimate hug. Their expressions are relaxed and calm. Their embrace truly does seem like a relieving moment, rather than a terrifying one. Emma's joy at meeting and embracing Marianne conveys her joy at finally coming to terms with her sexuality directly and accepting it. No longer are her desires buried six feet under the ground; they are alive and comforting. The entire scene depicts the realization that Marianne, along with the homosexuality and witchcraft associated with her, are not to be feared but embraced. While Emma has finally accepted witchcraft and homosexuality in her life, she still cannot fully let go of her Christian beliefs, and as a result, she goes through a significant internal battle to navigate her feelings and faith.



Figure 5. "Emma hugging Marianne" *Tuesday* (15:44)

This conflict of ideology and relationship to her sexuality leads to the climax of the show. When she realizes that she has been possessed by Marianne, Emma uses her Christian faith to try to fend off Marianne from her subconscious. The reason she tries to rid herself of Marianne despite the joy she feels with her is because she has not fully released her grasp on Christianity. She had always known witchcraft to be evil because of her Christian roots. Her acceptance of witchcraft, however amazing it may feel, is sinful. Thus, she must rid herself of this pleasurable temptation. The only way to truly rid herself of the witch, of her homosexuality, of those temptations is through death.

Within her subconscious on a spiritual plane, Emma draws strength from a protective necklace to eradicate Marianne from her life. At the same time on the physical plane, Emma grabs a gun and prepares to kill herself. She knows that the only real way to get rid of Marianne, spiritually and physically, is to kill herself. These parallel actions link Emma's ideological battle of witchcraft against Christianity with Emma's personal battle with her internalized homophobia. She must choose whether she wants to die as a Christian or live as a witch.

Ultimately, she fails at committing suicide thanks to Aurore's well-timed interference. Because Emma was unable to kill herself, she was also unable to kill Marianne. As a result, she stays who she is, and Emma's link to Marianne is never cleaved. This indicates that Emma has accepted herself as a homosexual. She goes from relying on Christianity to repress her desires to embracing and fighting for witchcraft the sexual freedom associated with it. Rather than give into

her Christian upbringing, she is finally able to live an honest and satisfying life. The priest, on the other hand, ends up losing his life. The timing of his death aligns with the completion of Emma's battle against Marianne. It seems that when he dies, Emma's life, in turn, is spared. This sequence of events reveals that Emma has killed off the part of her ideology that kept her from living freely. With the death of her past, thus begins her path to acceptance.

### Liberation Through Witchcraft

The series ends on episode eight, "Tuesday," with Emma finally acknowledging and accepting her homosexuality. Her journey to acceptance is most notably linked to her struggles against Marianne, but the ultimate transition to acceptance occurs through the act of writing. Throughout the series, Marianne pressures Emma to write a continuation of the Lizzie Lark series that she had just she had just completed. Emma avoids doing this throughout the series because it would grant Marianne power. However, at the end of the show, Emma gives into her demands, which allows Marianne to possess her. During Emma's conversation with Camille in the bar, Emma establishes that writing Lizzie Lark was her way of coping with and repressing her homosexual desires. If this is the case, then why does Marianne want Emma to start writing again? The answer is that Emma is undergoing a metamorphosis. Although Emma had started writing as a means to fight off Marianne, her new writings are a way to accept herself. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Emma titles her new work *renaissance*, which translates to rebirth. This new rebirth of her writing is also a

rebirth of herself, her understanding of her sexuality, and her commitment to witchcraft. By writing for Marianne, she is really writing for herself. It is no longer for her fans, and it is no longer to maintain her heterosexual relationship. It is to revive and empower herself.

This assertion is supported by the narration that occurs while the last of the episode plays out in a montage of Emma and Camille leaving the town. The narration is a quote from Emma's new chronicles about Lizzie Lark after she started writing for herself.

Riding a black wave, carried by nothingness, Lizzie and the witch swim, drowning in the torments. But suddenly Lizzie sees an island, a peak, a roof. She clings to it, tears herself from the dark current. All is calm here. It's a rock, softness surrounded by black water. Sea spray sticks to the hair and sea spray sticks to the cheeks. Lizzie kept a piece of the darkness with her. It is cold. It is calm in her hands. She speaks to it. There can be no horror without solace. Nor fight without truce. Lizzie can rest a bit. We'll stay on the rock for a while. She'll keep the piece of darkness with her. She will warm it up within her. In her lap, she will transform it. Meanwhile, Marianne too is reborn. Somewhere in the new world to procreate in, somewhere to inflict harm, to torment and destroy. And after that? After what? After, we shall see. The ocean will say. Come what may. ("Tuesday" 48:26)

This narration is significant because, as established earlier, Lizzie Lark is an extension of Emma. At first, Lizzie was her attempt at ignoring her homosexuality. Now, Lizzie embodies her acknowledgement and acceptance of her homosexuality. The first line of narration explains how both Lizzie and Marianne are suffering the same experience, "drowning in the torments" together until Lizzie finds shelter on an island. This description parallels Emma's early struggles against Marianne at the beginning of the series and the subsequent

development stability with Marianne, herself, and her sexuality. The lines following explain how Lizzie keeps “a piece of the darkness with her” amid the chaos of navigating dichotomies of chaos and calm. Lizzie’s actions parallel Emma’s acceptance of her homosexuality, which Christian, heteronormative society still views as dark. The following dichotomies explain the bittersweet lessons Emma learned amid her physical and spiritual struggles. Emma is able to understand that solace from personal growth can only truly be appreciated after successfully navigating through her horrific experiences and internal battles.

The narration further notes that Lizzie will nurture and “warm [this piece of the darkness] up within her” while Marianne will rise again to cause more torment in other ways. These statements are phrased to make it sound like Lizzie is engaging in prenatal care. This excerpt of the narrations can be interpreted Emma not only accepting her homosexuality but also nurturing and properly caring for that aspect of her identity. This narration highlights Emma’s character development, and also brings attention to the pregnancy that literally comes to term in Emma’s life. Previously to Emma’s acceptance of Marianne, there is a scene where Emma has sex with Séby, who unbeknownst to her is possessed by Marianne. Although their scene appears to show heterosexual intimacy, the fact that Marianne is possessing Séby’s body changes the dynamics.

Sedgwick explains that “in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links men two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (Sedgwick 21). This quote explains that love triangle relationships give

more commentary regarding the rivals rather than the person that the two are fighting over. They spend more time thinking about each other with passion, whether negatively, seems to mean there is a significant bond there. This line of reasoning can be applied to the relationship between Emma and Marianne even though their rivalry for Séby is not overt. Leading up to the sex scene, Emma shows interest in engaging in sexual intercourse with Séby to forget about Marianne, and Marianne shows interest in using Séby to get to Emma. Both of their reasons for pursuing Séby set up a love triangle of sorts. Thus, when they both interact via Séby, although it appears like heterosexual intercourse, is actual an intimate moment between Marianne and Emma.

Lönngren notes that in romantic entanglements with two men and one woman, “the woman who is the product of an exchange between two or more men is not given an identity of her own: she is only the hyphen between the men” (Lönngren 214). In Marianne’s and Emma’s situation, Séby would be the hyphen. Similar to the musings of Sedgwick, Lönngren comes to the same conclusion that love triangles focus more of the rivals that the person they are courting. However, she clarifies further that the reason this dynamic can exist is because the person of interest themselves begins to lose their individuality. In the case of the example above, Séby has literally lose his individuality. He is merely a vessel for Marianne to use to get closer to Emma.

Circling back the significance of the narration, the result of that intimate night between Marianne and Emma is Emma’s pregnancy. “Marianne too gets

reborn” alongside Emma because of her newfound happiness and acceptance from that intimacy. However, the narration explains that Marianne will still seek “to inflict harm, to torment and destroy.” This violence is not meant to be directed at Emma; rather, it is directed at Christian, heteronormative society. Although Emma has come to accept herself, conservative communities will continue to view homosexuality as a sin. As a result, Marianne is bound to cause trouble because there will still be a stigma. Regardless, the narration ends by acknowledging Emma will have to find new solutions as issues arise, “come what may.”

#### Significance of *Marianne* and This Analysis

This essay has explored the way *Marianne* can be interpreted as a queer series through the development of main character Emma as she navigates relationships with her loved ones, the witch, and finally herself. While the show for the most part depicts homosexuality as negative, the conclusion shows that accepting one’s sexuality is more liberating than it is frightening. Elliott-Smith explains that this understanding of homosexuality in media offers “celebratory pleasures” to queer viewers’ “oppositional identification with the very same monsters that threaten the norm” (Elliott-Smith<sup>2</sup>). Homosexual women may fear their sexuality because of external factors that teach them to feel this way, so they relate to the sentiment of being scared of the monster. However, they may also find pride in knowing that other people experience similar sentiments, as represented through that monster.



This understanding of queer representation in horror helps subvert previous interpretations that the queer monster “abnormal, predatory and evil;” rather, the monster offers visibility and freedom from social constructs and restrictions (Elliot-Smith 1). No longer does Emma feel like she has to run away from her homosexuality, and neither does the homosexual woman watching the show. Similarly for the homosexual women who had already confronted their anxieties, they can find pleasure in seeing the positive and satisfying conclusion to the series. Altogether, *Marianne* praises homosexual women who have grown stronger in the face of adversity and offer hope to the ones who are still working on themselves.

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