

“Tombmates”

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For my thesis project I propose to create a one four-minute animatic video that explores the concepts of monstrosity, queer identity, and neurodivergent relationships through a brief fiction narrative centered around two characters preparing to be roommates in very different ways. I will use both digital illustration and motion graphics to best convey the comedic and energetic tone of *Tombmates'* premise. I am inspired to do this project because of my research on monstrosity's relationship to queerness, my background knowledge of combining anxiety with humor, and my exploration of interpersonal connections within general queer spaces and aromantic understanding. It is especially important to me because of my background as an ace-spec neurodivergent lady-person growing up around communities that were just as fascinated by playfully dark creations. With this project I am exploring the question: what role have monsters played in our history, and what does the rising sympathy for monstrous creatures reveal about contemporary culture? In addition, how do neurodivergent people present themselves and connect to other people? This approach is particularly inspired by the writing of Maurice Stevens, who said that "the denigrated and the degraded, if only to beat back the loathing, must create histories that feature themselves and their loved ones as vindicated whole beings who possess the stuff of historical merit-will, self-awareness, culture, humanity, and so on."¹

My project is connected to the greater history of queer monsters that precede it, which in itself is entangled with the Gothic genre of fiction that spawned back in the 18th century; it is also an expansion on what I have witnessed now in the 2020s as a push away from nihilistic pessimism within adult animation with works like Lisa Hanawalt's *Tuca and Bertie* as well as

¹ Laura Westengard, "Introduction: Queer Cultures and Insidious Trauma" In *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*, (Nebraska: The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2019), 17.

Zach Hadel and Michael Cusack's *Smiling Friends*. I have researched *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma* by Laura Westengard², the masters thesis "Queer Platonic Intimacy as Transformative Disruption" by Emma E. Allen-Landwehr³, and the concept of Muppet Theory proposed by Dahlia Lithwick.⁴ I am inspired by the work of Marc Davis, especially his stretching portrait works at the Haunted Mansion attraction in California's Disneyland Resort as he explores a playful approach to spooky subject matter that I seek to emulate within my thesis. Other artists that I intend to pull from for inspiration include the previously mentioned Lisa Hanawalt for her vibrant surreal art direction featured in *Tuca and Bertie* as well as Martin Hsu for his Gothic perspective of finding "the br-br-bright side of the Dark Side"⁵ through his character and series *Ruby Gloom*.

To create this work I will use a combination of Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Premiere Pro on a larger scale than I have with previous university projects. I will work digitally, saving my progress with a Thesis folder in my school hard drive so that I may have the flexibility to work on the Cintiqs on campus and my own computer at home. I chose these materials because they are what are available to me as an undergraduate student, they are familiar materials to me, and they are still considered industry standard for storyboard artists to work with. My practice includes audio-visual, written, and anecdotal research while communicating this knowledge through digital works of illustration and video. I will develop my work in three storyboard passes per panel over the course of twelve weeks. I will get feedback on my project through my family

² Laura Westengard, "Introduction: Queer Cultures and Insidious Trauma" In *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*, (Nebraska: The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2019).

³ Emma E. Allen-Landwehr, "Queer Platonic Intimacy as Transformative Disruption" (Masters Thesis. San Francisco State University, 2023), 2-55, <https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/vd66w6189>.

⁴ Dahlia Lithwick, "Chaos Theory: A Unified Theory of Muppet Types", *Low Concept*, *Slate*, June 8, 2012, <https://slate.com/life/2012/06/chaos-theory.html>.

⁵ Jeen O'Brien. "Theme Song (Ruby Gloom)." *Genius*. Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://genius.com/Jeen-obrien-theme-song-ruby-gloom-lyrics>

in addition to my peers, working alongside my chosen mentor, and collaborating with my Thesis Seminar professor. Finally, I will edit and install my work for the defense presentation.

The final project will look like a storyboard in motion rather than a fully animated video, signaling its nature as a product of pre-production. It will use digital materials for its conception and be installed to display on the wall with a projector. I chose these materials because the gallery I wanted to display in does not have a display screen by default, which means I may need to supply this part myself for my defense. I hope that this work will engage the viewer through humor and second-hand embarrassment for the roommates' first interaction. I hope to install the work in the B10 gallery for its cozier atmosphere and for the thematic consistency of storyboarding being a somewhat hidden practice within animation.

I have already developed the early sketches for my storyboards and over the semester I will be finalizing those storyboards and arranging them into an animatic video with regards to both sound effects and voice acting. I will be working with the casted voice actors to finalize their performances and begin timing out the animatic video with my early storyboard sketches as placeholder visuals during Winter Break. I will create the work over 100 hours and 12 weeks in the Spring semester. I plan to spend around 90 dollars to ensure my voice actors are compensated for their time and will borrow at least one Cintiq during my work sessions on-campus.

In summary, I am proposing to create a one four-minute animatic video through digital mediums in order to explore the relationship between monstrosity, queerness, and neurodivergency. I hope that the PNCA community will find themselves entertained and celebrate these two strange characters on their quest for connection and comfort.

Born in Virginia, raised in Arizona, and now situated in the comforts of rainy Oregon, Emma Sewell is a story artist influenced by her identity as an asexual creator, a love of all things musical, and a pinch of the playfully macabre. They've honed their craft since 2017, collaborating with colleagues from the Pacific Northwest College of Art and ready to explore the world beyond (or draw it, that works too).

Outside of storyboarding queer (LGBTQ+) characters and even queerer (bizarre) worlds, Emma finds themselves drawn towards cheesy musical theatre soundtracks, researching the many arts of puppetry, and figuring out how to become a haunted house.

My Animated Arts thesis project, “Tombmates”, is an approximately four-minute animatic video that explores the intersections between monstrosity, neurodivergent relationships, and queer identity. I will present this video on a projected board up in the dark space of room 611, where the room is lightly decorated to hearken back to the apartment this story is mainly set in. The animatic is influenced by my own neurodivergent genderqueer background and my lifelong fascination with playfully or humorously dark works. The project is a fiction narrative centered around Thea, a young woman with ADHD who lost her apartment complex in a fire recently and is eager to create a friendship with her brand new trial-run roommate Simone, an autistic nonbinary figure who is actively trying to blend in with the local human population. Through a timed sequence of digital illustrations, I seek to convey the comedic, energetic, and empathetic tone of Tombmates’ premise. In a turbulent time where queer and neurodivergent people both once again find themselves targets for ostracization, I create in the spirit of Maurice Stevens a narrative that features these characters as “vindicated whole beings who possess the stuff of historical merit-will, self-awareness, culture, humanity, and so on”.

My initial inquiries for my research were the following: What role have monsters played in our history, and what does the rising sympathy for monstrous creatures reveal about contemporary culture? In addition, how do neurodivergent people present themselves and connect to other people? I had some academic and personal knowledge on both questions, but I wanted to dig deeper than I had before. This led me down a rabbit hole of research on the Gothically queer through Laura Westengard’s *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*, queerplatonic relationships through the thesis “Queer Platonic Intimacy as Transformative Disruption” by Emma E. Allen-Landwehr, and even what makes an ideal dynamic for Muppets through Dahlia Lithwick’s proposed Muppet Theory article. My visual influences for this project are also consistent in theme, including Marc Davis’s humour with Haunted Mansion’s Stretching Portraits scene, Lisa Hanawalt’s exuberant characters in the animated series *Tuca and Bertie*, and Martin Hsu’s spooky optimism in his *Ruby Gloom* animated show. My creative practice as a storyboard artist will send me straight into the scene of commercial animation, so I felt it was appropriate to study the commercial artists that continue to inspire me.

Over the past four months, I have used Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Premiere Pro to create this work, operating digitally on both the school-accessible Cintiq table and home Lenovo laptop. Initially, I proposed this project would implement three passes of drawings and 100 hours of labor; due to time constraints, two passes of drawings were completed and I worked for around the time I predicted. Over this period, I directed voice actors, adjusted my visual work with feedback from my thesis mentor as well as the mid-term review panelists, and edited together a video using my own visual creations as well as the sounds of various contributors. I hope that the PNCA community will find themselves entertained by this project and relate to Thea and Simone on their quest for connection and comfort.

(The following text is a transcript of my Defense Speech, edited down for clarity.)

Hi, hello! Hello everyone, and welcome. I hope the climb up to Apartment 611 wasn't too treacherous. Anyone go up the flights of stairs? Yes? No, not a lot of elevator people. Thank you, Sarah; thank you guys. While we're here actually, I wanted to get a little bit comfortable, so I actually need to...

Can someone actually hold my coat real quick? Yes, you there! Yeah, you mind? I'm like so stuffy in that thing. It doesn't feel right or appropriate for this project. To start us off, I got a little list. We won't be following this exactly to the dot, but I like making lists.

Here are a few objectives of what we're going to be covering today: introduce myself, show Tombmates, discuss what brought me here, unpack why this project had to be created right now, and then our cute little awesome QnA which I'm really excited about.

I am seeing a lot of familiar faces in this crowd, which is amazing, but for people who are not familiar with me, hi! Hi, I'm Emma Sewell, a 22-year-old genderqueer storyboard artist. I might be neurodivergent; the jury's out on that one. I've been practicing storyboard art for quite a while, but I wasn't always that way.

Over my time here at the university, I have dabbled in various mediums, including zines, illustration, GIFs, this weird 2.5D piece "Hot Girl Summer" (I still really appreciate that one), and of course animation. I'm an Animated Arts major with a minor in Game; the Game minor is probably less relevant here.

Something I've really enjoyed throughout my life is animation, the illusion of motion. We have a few people to thank for that. Call me basic, but I grew up exposed to a little bit of Disneyland. I grew up with Canadian animation being randomly broadcasted on American television; that happened a lot in the 2000s, so I pull inspiration from that moment. My mom can totally attest to this as a fan of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and a lot of alternative rock: I've always been a little bit on the darker side of things. I found works such as Marc Davis' stretching portraits incredibly funny. A series I grew up with, *Ruby Gloom* by Martin Hsu, was focused on Gothic aesthetics while promoting themes of friendship in an approachable manner for children.

Over time, my interests have changed and matured. I find myself drawn towards conversational comedic works, such as *Tuca and Bertie* by Lisa Hanawalt (great show) and the newer *Smiling Friends* (very excited about the upcoming third season). I wanted to find some way to fuse all of these interests together somehow.

If you're not familiar, a storyboard is essentially a sequence of images created to convey a story, and an animatic is the video form of that, set to audio in order to envision the final product of a film or episode. These here are a few animatics that I worked on over my college career. A lot of them were derivative in origin, these examples pulling from the show *Lego Monkie Kid* and a Dungeons and Dragons campaign I was part of; they're also music focused, so I wanted to push away from that for my thesis project. Maybe, I should do my own thing for once.

That's where we go back in time to March 2021, where I initially designed the characters you'll see later... and I had no plot for them whatsoever. You ever do that? Make a guy, and then you're like "okay, that's cool; that's a guy. I don't know what their life is like, but they're cool-looking". I think these two are a neat duo. I explored them for at least a year and they slowly faded out of my memory until the good old fall of 2023. I had the chance to be part of Jason McNamara's Scripting Intensive class, and I finally revisited these characters to give them a fresh coat of paint. I wrote approximately 26 pages of a pilot episode for them; this is an earlier version of some of the pilot here on the slideshow. Sorry, spoilers. Look away, oh God!

There are a few changes that happened from script to screen, but once I made that script I felt emboldened to make this story a reality. So, a section of my *Tombmates* pilot became my junior year animated film "Tombmates in: The Fridge"; I'm still happy it's gotten a runner-up award during its ongoing festival run. It was sort of a way to prove that I could execute something within the *Tombmates* universe and take that first step. I really liked the attempt; I thought it was fun, and it's set after the events of my thesis so it will make for a fun series to binge through once both projects are made public.

Being able to translate these guys finally onto the screen was nothing short of incredible to me, so I decided to do more in the summer of 2024 for an independent study course. I created a complete animatic for the *Tombmates* title sequence, composing the tune by myself. It's...okay. I had a lot of fun with motion graphics and ensuring the tone of the show was clear. It's a great sequence, but I decided to pull back in future projects because the backgrounds ended up more illustrative than animated projects really need. Here are a few progress pictures from my work, playing with visual development and figuring out how to draw these characters without making a turnaround. That's now three projects under the *Tombmates* name, but I wasn't sick of it at all. I wanted to do more! I wanted to do so much more with these characters. I love these characters, my friends love these characters, Marilyn thought the idea was cool, and so I decided to make this world part of my thesis.

I had to find a way to draw *Tombmates* again, so I came up with a line of inquiry: what role have monsters played in queer history, and what does the rising sympathy for monstrous creatures reveal about contemporary culture? Additionally, how do neurodivergent people present themselves and connect to other people? There's this fun intersection between queer and neurodivergent experience that I've witnessed amongst my peer as well as myself; I wanted to see how that could collide.

My answer to these questions was a four-minute-long animatic video that follows a human and vampire duo rooming together in a Gothic Muppet-esque tale. That's a strange combo of words; who hears 'Gothic Muppet' on any given day? I don't think that's very common, unless you're talking about this lady here. Here's my side tangent for today! This is the one case of a Gothic muppet that I was able to learn about. Her name was Darcy, and I think she's cool.

Moving on! I had to do more research going into this project and that pushed towards Laura Westengard's *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*; it was an absolute delight to read, and I still need to finish it. The book gets into queer

culture in the United States and how gothic aesthetics are interwoven into how we understand our history. There's a really good chapter about lesbian pulp novels, so seriously look into it. I also ended up looking at a thesis entitled "Queer Platonic Intimacy as Transformative Disruption" by Emma E. Allen-Landwehr. Whoa, another Emma! That became less relevant to my thesis, but it will help inform my post-thesis project plans. What did become relevant was Dahlia Litwick's article on what she coins as 'Muppet Theory', proposing that every effective duo balances between an Order Muppet and a Chaos Muppet. I see that in Steve Purcell's Sam and Max characters especially, but I can't mention queer Muppets without bringing up the inevitable. Bert and Ernie are a clear example of this theory in action; we know this, and it's important to acknowledge before we go forward.

My initial research was planned as a self-directed curriculum. I became my own teacher, and I tried to read and watch a bunch of stuff every week during the first semester. That was a bad idea. I fell apart halfway through. Since I had a lot of time on my hands, I did some light visual development, beginning on thumbnails to vaguely get at the ideas I wanted to put in this animatic. I played with different angles to convey the oddity of the Gothic form. I also decided to open a casting call for voice actors because I wanted the animatic to have voices that were not my own. I called to Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter; surprisingly, Twitter was the most successful attempt, and I ended up with a lot of auditions to look into. The process took about two months to decide on the final voices; here's the sheet I used to organize them while I worked. As you can see, I added little notes about each person's performance to whittle down what voices felt like Thea and Simone.

Before I share my second semester's work, I'd like to share what we ended up creating together. This is my thesis "Tombmates"; I hope you all enjoy it.

(This was where I showed my animatic to the room, and then continued presenting after viewing).

Was it worth the wait? I think it was. Getting back into voice actors, Michaela Laws and Daisy Doyle were wonderful to work with. I was specifically communicating with them over email over the course of December and a little bit of January. Things get busy during the holidays, so we had a few delays, but they were really chill to work with, especially because I am someone who has very little experience in voice directing. So, I'm really thankful to have the opportunity to work with them, and I'm excited to see them maybe reappear in future *Tombmates* projects.

My estimated budget was originally 90 dollars, paying 45 dollars to each voice actor, and here is the original timeline of how things were going to play out. Yeah, so that didn't stay the same during this other semester. I ended up rescheduling a couple times over, and the whole project ended up becoming 249 dollars. Again, from 90 to 249. I asked for a line retake, which pumped up my initial voice acting fees. My budget didn't consider the cost of thesis stickers; that was \$37. I'll elaborate on the phone repair thing later, but that was a huge amount, \$117. It was kind of nuts.

To start us off in terms of process, I may have stolen a little trick from our good friend, Samuel Densmore. For those who don't know, during his thesis, he used the Sims 4 to 'mock-up' the

interior space he wanted to create for his film. I thought: “Hey, that's a great idea!” I did that as well during my winter break, and that was very helpful for figuring out my backgrounds.

I was essentially relegated to the corner Cintiq tablet in the Animation Lounge. It's basically my Cintiq now, I guess. I was mostly working there on Adobe Photoshop for the boards, Premiere Pro for my editing, Audition for my sound, and I used the free app IbisPaintX on my phone for supplemental thesis materials that I could work through on the go or at home. That was lovely.

Here's a little bit of process on how the stickers came to be. It took eight hours of work just to figure out the final design. I had an issue with perspective the first go-around, but ultimately I feel like I came to a final sticker thing that I felt happy with. This is my first time working with Sticker Ninja as well; they're a local sticker-making service here, and they were absolutely great communicators. They gave me seriously such a beautiful, glittery, gorgeous sticker product. I would totally work with them again and I recommend their service.

For the storyboards themselves, I was planning to run through three passes of drawings. As you can see, that did not happen for most of the boards, but I'll show you what it would look like if I had gone all the way through.

Our first pass here establishes a light layout of the stage as well as the general emotions and pictures of the characters. It's very loose and really scratchy. The second pass usually adds more detail; here is where I'd stick characters more on-model, so they look a little familiar even if I'm using storyboarder shorthand. You saw this final panel before; this would be the third pass, adding tone to clarify characters from the background while shaping the lighting and mood of the scene. I had a lot of fun with this panel because I had to layer a bunch of shadows on the floor while dealing with the shadows cast by the open door's light.

I finished most of this storyboarding by the time the midterm review rolled around, and this was a tricky chapter because I had to make quite a few revisions after. For one thing, the interior and exterior of the apartment weren't clearly different spaces, so I added tone to the beginning of the sequence to establish where we are. The montage segment at the end was all originally framed by Thea scrolling through memories on her cell phone, but we didn't find a good enough reason to keep it in. I ditched most of that idea with the exception of the one phone joke alluding to Snapchat. Aside from that, the project was pretty solid.

When we moved over to sound, that wasn't unfamiliar territory to me. I worked with a lot of sound layers, careful with the timing and making sure the dialogue wasn't overtaken by the sound effects. I have two versions of the project still saved on my drive. Version one was timing every panel without any audio to base it off, so I had to retime it later when I did make the audio. Version two is where it all finally came together. As I was exporting the video, I soon realized Adobe Premiere Pro is evil, and it likes to export things at 30 frames a second even though most animators work in 24 frames per second. To solve this, I exported the sequence with the correct time code, and then meshed that the original credit sequence so the time code doesn't slip in the credits.

Otherwise, everything went smoothly, right? So, the thing about the Gothic genre is that it

focuses on fear and hauntings. While the project itself ended up more light-hearted, I spent a lot of the semester going through what haunts me and what terrifies me. Mainly, I fought through questions of self-worth. Is this a story worth telling? Is this a story that I should be telling? I had a lot of support throughout, but it's good to learn that you shouldn't set up your thesis like a science experiment to figure out what kind of neurodivergent person you are. If you know anything about Victor Frankenstein, I think we can agree it wouldn't go very well.

Oh yeah, divorce happened. That was a weird emotional undercurrent to work through as I created a narrative about a budding relationship.

Also, phone's haunted. During spring break, the phone experienced some liquid damage, and I witnessed the digital phenomenon known as 'ghost tapping'. I find it funny that such a Gothic thing would happen on a project like this, but the screen display's death was an issue because I had lost access to where I was working on supplemental thesis materials. I had to make revisions last-minute just to get everything together on time.

The promotional poster was originally inspired by the *Airplanes* piece by DeviantArt user [bluedog444](#), but I ended up disliking my attempt, so we moved to Photoshop to make the posters you've actually seen. I also had to change the design of the cardboard cutouts near my stickers, again working in Photoshop. I had to consider: what would they wear on a fancy red carpet premiere? Cutting these was...certainly a time. I used a saltine cracker box since I had it on hand.

By Monday of Focus Week, I was just really tired, but we got through it. Wednesday night, last night, was nuts because I was trying to organize the entire speech outline on top of making the sauce jar for my display table. I also had issues with my hard drive, which totally stressed me out for a second, but it started working again once I looped the wire over.

Now, we're here. We have an animatic, and what do we do with it? Like I talked about, I could have added tone if I had a little more time; I'd look to go back and fix little things about the project, but I'm still very happy with it. The timing's how I want it, and the characters emote like I planned. And-

(I noticed at this point that I forgot to put the presentation on full screen after sharing the animatic before.)

Oh God, I just realized I haven't been presenting correctly the whole time. Anyway, over the past year, I've been through some funky dark times, but I think this project has brought out a kinder side of me. I give a lot of grace to people outside me, but very often not to myself; I feel like now I've made some steady headway on the matter. I have a great support system of friends and family who have supported me, and you really can't go wrong with that.

I'm sure you have the question on your mind: looking forward, what is the future of *Tombmates*? Ahem, I said looking forward. Thank you, close enough. What is this project going to be beyond this cool thesis project? For one thing, I don't want it to stop. I really do want to make this story happen, whether that's an actual animated show, more storyboard sequences like this one, or even

a bunch of comics. I need them in the world, and I will make it happen at any cost. I am working now on updating my portfolio, so I can't make *Tombmates* all the time, but it's going to stick with me for a while.

I didn't get into the queer elements of the full picture with this project, and that's something I hope to delve into down the line. I want them to date eventually, and be cool? I simply want more of them.

There's this tagline I've been using for this project thus far, so I'll leave you with it: find your weirdos. A lot of this project in the grander scheme builds on relationship-forming and community. Finding our weirdos in a turbulent fucked up time like this feels helpful. We need to support each other, especially right now.

Speaking of, could I have my jacket back please? Thank you. No, thank you so much for holding onto it; I'm sure it was so weird to hold onto that for 30 minutes straight, but it's proof to me that our community is strong already, and I appreciate your support.

So, I have a few thank yous to give. First of all, I want to thank Terry, my mentor, who's worked so hard during this project as well and kept me balanced. I felt less assured of my skills at a lot of points, so it was nice to have a guiding light that saw outside my head and believed the work was good. Now, I think it's pretty great!

Jason McNamara, Mya Katz, Soren Spina, and Sean Semick (Sean could not make it unfortunately)...these are some of my friends and people who were part of that script class. I love them dearly, and I'm so happy that y'all have been able to be here since the very beginning of the project.

Izzy Duval! You've literally been my lifeline all year, and I really appreciate it so much.

I want to thank my friends, family, the PNCA community, and everybody for attending today. Thank you so much! With that, I shall be turning us over to the QnA, thank you.

Addams, Charles, Jameson Brewer, and David Levy, writers. *The Addams Family*. Season 1, episode 3, "Fester's Punctured Romance." Directed by Sidney Lanfield, featuring Carolyn Jones, John Astin, and Jackie Coogan. Aired October 2, 1964, in broadcast syndication. <https://pluto.tv/us/on-demand/series/5d7ffa69f3cdcd162e7fd500/season/1/episode/5d7ffa6f3cdcd162e7fdd0f>.

This episode follows Uncle Fester mistaking a woman in the newspaper as someone responding to his dating advertisement and shenanigans ensue. While I haven't had much time in my research to delve too deeply into *The Addams Family*, this episode seemed like an interesting point of reference for my thesis project that is also focused on some miscommunication with spooky elements sprinkled in.

Allen-Landwehr, Emma E. "Queer Platonic Intimacy as Transformative Disruption" Masters Thesis. San Francisco State University, 2023.

This thesis writing focuses on queerplatonic relationships and how they can disrupt the boundaries between different types of relationships and dynamics found in heteronormative colonialist culture. Queer-platonic relationships are something I wish to examine further in the animated space as this project expands, so this serves as foundational knowledge to pull from.

Babbit, Jamie, dir. *But I'm a Cheerleader*. 1999.

<https://tubitv.com/movies/447913/but-i-m-a-cheerleader>.

This film follows a sapphic cheerleader finding friendship and romance within the restrictive walls of a queer rehab camp. It's a real queer cult classic with a straightforward story, so I felt like it was good for understanding queer representation of the past.

Bmud angel. "How I Want Aromantic Asexual Characters To Be Written." YouTube Video, 6:34. June 24, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--BsX0FRTyg>.

This video is an opinion-focused monologue about aromantic asexual representation, where it's currently at, and where this aro-ace creator wants representation to go moving forward. They share my interest in exploring queer-platonic relationships in media, and it was a good reference for what tropes have been exhausted or done to death in terms of aromantic characters.

O'Brien, Jeen. "Theme Song (Ruby Gloom)." Genius. Accessed October 28, 2024.

<https://genius.com/Jeen-obrien-theme-song-ruby-gloom-lyrics>

While the larger series connected to this theme song does also inspire me, I have found that the theme song of *Ruby Gloom* inspires my own approach to spooky subjects to this day. This work holds a very Gothic motivation through its concept, as finding the beauty in darkness or suffering is an incredibly Gothic value, at least in the contemporary sense of how this word is used.

Westengard, Laura. *Gothic Queer Culture: Marginalized Communities and the Ghosts of Insidious Trauma*. Nebraska: The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2019.

I am still actively reading through this book during the development of my thesis project, and I find its insights on the Gothic and how it connects to the hidden traumas within US queer culture deeply fascinating; this work is what convinced that the story I wish to tell here during thesis and beyond graduation is in fact a very Gothic story.

Williams, Zelda, dir. Lisa Frankenstein. 2024.

<https://ww3.tinyzone.org/movie/lisa-frankenstein-1630856592/>.

This contemporary film follows the development of a relationship between its protagonists, one of which is a sympathetic reanimated Victorian corpse based on the story of Frankenstein's monster. After watching it, I felt more assured that my thesis project can exist within the horror-comedy genre instead of just dark comedy. Sometimes, youth is terrifying, maybe even more terrifying than actual vampires.