

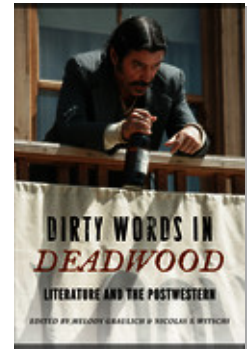


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Dirty Words in Deadwood

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9 Calamity Jane and Female Masculinity in *Deadwood*

Linda Mizejewski

While Linda Mizejewski, like other essayists in this collection, considers genre, using revisionist critics of the Western who read “this genre as a space where masculinity, far from being bulletproof and monolithic, has always been unsettled and conflicted,” she also initiates a series of essays that use recent methodologies—the construction and performance of gender, queer studies, spatial geography, disability studies—to examine the spaces and characters of the series. Assuming the concepts about the performance of gender put forth by Judith Butler, she turns to Judith Halberstam’s definition of “female masculinity” to explore “Deadwood’s dismantling of essentialist masculinity in the Western.” However, rather than revisit the familiar figures wrought by John Wayne, Gary Cooper, and Clint Eastwood, Mizejewski focuses on the representation of a woman. Offering her own revisionist reading of the genre, she argues that the figure of Calamity Jane points to “the presence of diverse bodies and sexualities within the histories and legends of the West.” Ultimately the representation of Jane serves “as a register of contemporary cultural contentions about gender and sexuality, a dynamic that began in the earliest fictionalizations of this figure.”

Mizejewski contrasts Milch’s portrayal of Jane with earlier, more sanitized versions such as Doris Day’s “heterosexual” glamorized Calamity, suggesting that the “first few episodes of Deadwood parody and replay stereotypes of Jane from earlier representations.” She situates Deadwood’s Jane in a long line of masculine women in the Western, women who “made masculinity both visible and highly privileged but also highly unstable—a description that also fits Milch’s Deadwood, where the violent crises of masculinity are unresolved.” While Tolliver, Bullock, and others might still be struggling with their masculinity, Mizejewski sees Jane’s “narrative trajectory” from “abjection” to her partnership with Joanie Stubbs and “her membership in the community” as opening up a new reading of “frontier history” by dislodging “heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual relationship.”

Early in the 1953 musical film *Calamity Jane*, Doris Day as Jane sings and dances her way from a stagecoach to a Deadwood saloon, where she shoots her gun to clear a path to the bar. When the survivors of an Indian attack stumble in, she angrily rebukes them as “white-bellied coyotes” because they didn’t stop to see if one of their party had survived. Jane stomps out and mounts her horse to undertake the rescue herself. The first episode of David Milch’s *Deadwood* makes a telling homage to the 1953 film when a tipsy and infuriated Jane, played by Robin Weigert, similarly berates a saloon full of men who balk at riding out to find a possible survivor of a road massacre. Heading out to join the rescue party, she yells, “I don’t drink where I’m the only fucking one with balls!” (1.1).

In contrast to earlier fictionalizations of this figure, *Deadwood* is fearless in citing the famously obscene language and debilitating alcoholism of Jane’s historical counterpart, Jane Canary (1856–1903). Both the 1953 musical and the series introduce Jane as a scruffy, cross-dressed figure, but whereas the Doris Day character is headed for a makeover and heterosexual romance, Jane remains filthy and masculinized throughout the Milch series. In its third season, *Deadwood* was also fearless in following the implications of Jane’s butch dress and demeanor by having her become involved with the show’s femme lesbian character, the former prostitute Joanie Stubbs.

Unlike the heavy drinking and the salty language, the lesbian attachment departs from historical documentation about Jane Canary and follows instead the path of imagination that has animated a vibrant cultural life for Calamity Jane beginning with fictionalizations in dime novels of the 1870s. Biographer James D. McLaird points out that Canary’s celebrity waned in the last years of her life, so she was largely forgotten when she died of complications from alcoholism in 1903. But the legend of Calamity Jane enjoyed a huge comeback in the 1920s as the vanishing frontier became an object of nostalgia (221–22). Since then the Jane character has been cleaned up, glamorized, or sentimentalized by a variety of actresses, including Jean Arthur, Ellen Barkin, and Angelica Huston.¹ However, no mainstream popular representation has, until *Deadwood*, scripted the

possibility that this butch, cross-dressing figure may have been attracted to women. This has not precluded a queer cultural life for Calamity Jane. The Doris Day musical has long had a gay cult following because of its butch-femme *mise-en-scène* and over-the-top performances. Also lesbian playwright Carolyn Gage wrote a one-woman one-act play about Calamity Jane in 1989 as “a celebration of the survival of the masculine woman . . . in an era when there was no lesbian or transgendered movement or culture” (vii).²

Milch’s *Deadwood* plays this card and raises the stakes by entailing the larger cultural picture of sexuality and gender in the legendary West. Critics have pointed out that Jane’s gender transgressions occur within *Deadwood*’s ongoing critique of the Western’s phallic masculinity. My argument here is that the female masculinity of Jane’s character in this series pushes that critique by insisting on the presence of diverse bodies and sexualities within the histories and legends of the West. The first few episodes of *Deadwood* parody and replay stereotypes of Jane from earlier representations, showing her in an adolescent crush on Hickok, fluttering her eyelids at him like a Victorian coquette. But although Jane’s story begins with her attachment to the legendary gunfighter, it ends with her attachment to a fictional lesbian femme. In her final appearance in season 3, Jane and her lover, Joanie, have been given Hickok’s buffalo robe, and we see the women joyfully wrapping themselves in its warmth, embracing the genre’s legends and extending the embrace to include bodies and desires not visible in traditional versions of the West. *Deadwood* gives Jane an additional story arc as well, from dissolute outsider to tentative citizen of the fledgling town, so we can see how Calamity Jane continues to work as a register of contemporary cultural contentions about gender and sexuality, a dynamic that began in the earliest fictionalizations of this figure. In fact, the Calamity Jane figure comes full circle in Milch’s *Deadwood*; her female masculinity both delineates and destabilizes masculinities as it had done in the 1870s dime novels in which she first appeared as a fictional character.

The 2005 McLaird biography painstakingly sorts out the facts and fictions that had been liberally mixed in histories of Calamity

Jane, including her own, for more than a century. McLaird reveals Jane Canary as a flamboyant, hard-drinking frontierswoman who often adopted men's attire. However, through most of her life, Canary was likely to wear women's clothing and engage in traditionally feminine occupations, although not always reputable ones, as a prostitute, waitress, dance-hall girl, wife, and mother. Nevertheless, she vigorously promoted and exploited her celebrity persona, embellishing or creating stories about her frontier adventures as a bull whacker and an Army scout and posing for studio photographs in her buckskin trousers, rifle in hand, her hair tucked into her hat.

Popular culture has both celebrated and rehabilitated this transgressive figure. As McLaird explains, Calamity Jane was characterized as "primarily masculine" in the nineteenth-century legends, but twentieth-century lore recast her into more-palatable gender roles by emphasizing select biographical details such as her famous nursing skills (252). Writing of this character's history, Janet McCabe points out that the foregrounding of Jane's role as a nurse during the Deadwood smallpox epidemic allowed her to conform to Victorian ideals of feminine nurturing and charity (67–68). Also, because Canary made a deathbed wish to be buried next to Bill Hickok—perhaps as a bid for attention and fame—she is often cast as the romantic partner of the famous gunfighter, despite historical evidence they were never intimate and may not even have been friends. Similarly, the 1940s claim by a Montana woman to be Jane's long-lost daughter by Hickok received warm popular response. The claim was discredited, but the false documentation quickly became the basis for the "real" Calamity Jane (McLaird 252). Jane Canary did have two children, but the story of a lost lovechild provided a way to popularize the Jane figure through the traditionally feminine narrative of maternal melodrama, as seen in Larry McMurtry's 1990 novel *Buffalo Girls* and its 1995 television adaptation. Unlike the television version the McMurtry novel reveals at the end that the lost daughter never existed except as Jane's sad fantasy, so the mother-daughter relationship is all the more melancholy as a structuring device.

Milch's *Deadwood* is distinctive not only in resisting heterosexual

romance and maternal melodrama as narratives for Jane but also in using both Hickok and the presence of children as strategies to tell alternative stories about the masculine woman in the West. *Deadwood* also resists the romanticization of Jane's dress and behavior into tomboy cuteness, camped-up sexiness, or even attractive androgyny, as seen in other film portrayals.³ Milch's Jane is a crass and unkempt figure, usually drunk, her obscene language linking her to Deadwood's foul-mouthed men and to the town prostitutes. But unlike the prostitutes she is indifferent to male opinion and desire because of her status outside the economies of both gold and heterosexuality. The narrative implies that Jane has money from her previous work as an Army scout, but until she moves in with Joanie in season 3, she lives on the streets. Jane is in fact a figure of abjection through most of the series; unwashed and ungroomed, she vomits on the sidewalks and speaks openly of wetting herself and passing gas.⁴ Jane's nursing skills during the smallpox epidemic and afterward are never sentimentalized, nor do they transform her into a Victorian ideal of nurturing womanhood. Seeing the stirring of a patient she's nursed through a surgery, she yells, "Hey, you fat fuck, you're alive!" (2.11).

As this suggests, *Deadwood's* Jane is often a comic figure, as in a few of the earlier representations (*Calamity Jane*, *The Paleface* [1948]), but the humor is darker and edgier, often pointing to her abjection, defiance, and social awkwardness with both men and women. Waking up on the floor in a puddle of her own urine, Jane abashedly tells Joanie, "Yo, a piss puddle. Must not have seen that when seating myself" (3.1). When Joanie insists Jane wear a dress and underwear for the Garret-Ellsworth wedding, Jane squirms in her finery like Huck Finn in drag, and when she spots a man who seems to be looking at her, she punches him in the face and knocks him flat (2.12). For her physical portrayal of this character, Robin Weigert said she imitated the body language of the cowboys on the set (audio commentary 1.6), stomping and swaggering, ungainly even in her gestures of affection toward Joanie. The clumsiness of her body language also conveys her marginalization, her literal discomfort with both feminine and masculine society.

Female Masculinity and the Western

The Jane of *Deadwood* is faithful to the “primarily masculine” Calamity Jane of nineteenth-century legends, raising a key question about McLaird’s summary of Jane’s changing cultural configurations. If Calamity Jane’s popularity in the twentieth century depended on her rehabilitation into femininity, what had been her appeal and function as a masculinized figure in nineteenth-century Western lore? Milch’s Jane, as an unreconstructed figure from those early legends, closely corresponds to Judith Halberstam’s description of female masculinity: “a biological female who presents as butch, passes as male in some circumstances and reads as butch in others, and considers herself not to be a woman but maintains difference from the category ‘man’” (*Female* 21). Halberstam takes great pains to emphasize that female masculinity is not the same as lesbianism, though the two histories have often overlapped, and she calls for the historicization of specific kinds of masculinities, male and female, that have been produced in various eras. Most of all, she underscores the importance of female masculinity in the development of modern masculinities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*Female* 46–47). Although the Western is not one of the sites Halberstam explores, recent scholarship on that genre suggests its salience in the production of modern United States masculinities as well as the importance of female masculinities in that development. Calamity Jane emerges very early in this genre, and the Milch version of her character captures the instability of gender identity evident in those early texts.

While scholars such as Jane Tompkins and Richard Slotkin have focused on the conservative nature of gender roles in the Western, recent studies have reconsidered this genre as a space where masculinity, far from being bulletproof and monolithic, has always been unsettled and conflicted, beginning with its founding texts.⁵ Daniel Worden’s work on the nineteenth-century dime novel, for example, argues that masculinities in these texts more often evade rather than embody patriarchal politics, especially by featuring masculinity “unhinged from the demands of heterosexual coupling and re-

production" (38). Along the same lines, discussing the gender dynamics of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) and the Zane Grey novels, Lee Clark Mitchell frames these novels in the context of the cultural crisis precipitated by the first wave of feminism (*Westerns* 139). Masculinity in the Western, he argues, is most often not an assertion but rather a question of "how to be a man." The genre's essentialism about gender is thus often poised in tension against a "constructivism that grants manhood to men not by virtue of their bodies but of their behavior" (153–55)—a description that fits Jane's unruly call to action, in the Milch text, through a citation of her own phantasmatic male anatomy.⁶

Halberstam's line of inquiry about female masculinity illustrates how Milch's *Deadwood* returns to the gender instabilities on which the Western was founded. The Calamity Jane legend developed in the context of the 1870s dime novels that lionized a number of tough, cross-dressing women characters, as described by Janet Dean in her work on these pulp Westerns. Figures such as "Mustang Madge," "Hurricane Nell," "Backwoods Belle," and others who dressed, worked, and fought like men led Dean to argue that masculinity in these texts was a practical quality not necessarily attached to male bodies but rather "available to anyone in the West" (37–38). Analyzing the Calamity Jane character in Edward Wheeler's 1878 *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine of Whoop-Up*, Dean demonstrates how identities and genders shift not just for Jane but for other key characters through the use of constant disguises that elude a "true" self. This playful experimentation with gender identities suggests, for Dean, that the Western genre began as "a space where conventional identity categories are tested and contested" (48). In Halberstam's terms the masculine women of the Western made masculinity both visible and highly privileged but also highly unstable—a description that also fits Milch's *Deadwood*, where the violent crises of masculinity are unresolved.

The gender instabilities of these fictions emerged from certain real-life conditions in the West, as Susan Lee Johnson's extensive study of gender in the mid-nineteenth-century California mining camps makes clear. In these all-male communities homosocial rela-

tions included homoerotic ones, often documented by descriptions of “boys” who may or may not have been cross-dressed women (170–75). The presence of both feminized men and cross-dressed women provided heightened anxieties about “real” masculinity. It also provided the rich line of ambiguous female characters that continue to populate Westerns, from the tough pioneer women portrayed by Barbara Stanwyck and Joan Crawford to the explicit cross-dressing tale conveyed in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993).⁷ Writing of the latter, Tania Modleski remarks that the “proliferation of masquerades” beginning with the Deadwood Dick stories “verges on exposing the Western as primarily about costumes, poses, and theater” (162).

In *Deadwood* Jane’s relationships to those crises of masculinity are both structural and semiotic. Jane is not a part of any of the major plot lines; she prowls the margins of the narrative just as she prowls the streets, as McCabe puts it (65). However, her narrative trajectory, from Bill Hickok to Joanie Stubbs, delineates *Deadwood*’s narrative arc from traditional ideas and stories of the West, in which power resided in the body of the gunfighter, to the modern West, where power is decentralized, no longer phallic nor exclusively tied to the gun, the most obvious symbol of masculine power. In one of the few generic Western gunfight scenes in *Deadwood*, Bill Hickok and Seth Bullock together pull their guns on a road agent who had killed a family and made it look like an Indian massacre (1.1). But as critics have emphasized, *Deadwood* begins with Hickok’s death and the end of that era of the classic gunfighter-hero (Howard 46–47; McCabe 64–65). Jack McCall, the killer of Bill Hickok, is a sociopath and a miserable coward, illustrating that the use of a gun requires neither bravery nor masculinity.

Deadwood traces the decline of the traditional West to the rise of technology and corporations. But the Joanie Stubbs character exemplifies this movement toward modernity in other ways. Joanie is introduced as a prostitute, her work and identity tied to her body and gender. But she becomes a businesswoman, opening up her own whorehouse. When male violence shuts it down, she still has enough money to live independently, neither wife nor prostitute and thus not defined by a relationship to men. This figuration looks

toward the New Woman of the latter part of the nineteenth century and imagines her sources in the primitive communities of the West. Joanie's progress is also, in Foucauldian terms, an illustration of how resistance to power reconfigures the economy in which that power presides. Refusing masculine authority, she and Jane together produce masculinity as the butch component within a butch-femme couple, furthering *Deadwood's* dismantling of essentialist masculinity in the Western.

When *Deadwood* opens, economic and political power in the Deadwood camp is not only phallic but specific to the patriarchal power of brutal saloon keeper and entrepreneur Al Swearengen, whose dominance seems absolute. As G. Christopher Williams puts it, "Swearengen divides the world into two groups—his own cock and those who suck it" (148). But Swearengen's patriarchal supremacy is slowly eroded through the course of the series, most graphically through a bloody fistfight and a kidney stone procedure early in season 2 that shockingly demystify the all-powerful male body and especially the penis. David Scott Diffrient links these episodes to the sight of a naked penis in the second episode of the series, a move that both exposes and undermines the phallic power of the Western through "various forms of troubled corporeality" (193).

In season 3 phallic masculinity is even more radically displaced with the arrival of mining tycoon George Hearst, who has the capacity to buy out and destroy the entire town. Hearst understands the symbolic effects of physical power; demonstrating his ruthless authority, he cuts off Swearengen's middle finger, a humiliation with specifically phallic significance (3.2). Hearst's clout is masculine and patriarchal, as evidenced in his bullying of the wealthy mine owner Alma Garret, but this is not the phallic masculinity usually associated with the Western. Hearst is an older man with a bad back, incapable of the physical combat that Swearengen undertakes with Bullock, for example. But Hearst's power is far more ranging than brute violence; his is corporate power, institutional and economic, buoyed by the forces of industrial capitalism that presage the end of the frontier, first glimpsed in the telegraph lines that Swearengen recognizes as the end of his omnipotence.⁸

So as the series progresses, masculinity in *Deadwood* is detached not only from specific bodies but also from a privileged relationship to physical force and violence. As Diffrient points out, Swearingen and his men are “increasingly willing to put down their weapons long enough to talk” (196). This is the context for a major strand of the Calamity Jane narrative in *Deadwood*. In an incident that haunts her throughout the series, Jane fails to stand up to Swearingen in a suspenseful encounter involving Sofia Metz, the little girl who survives the road massacre by Swearingen’s agents. Jane is standing guard at Sofia’s bedside when Swearingen menacingly appears to find out for himself if the child will survive to tell the truth about what happened to her family. Instead of confronting him, Jane collapses in terror and is unable to act. Diffrient sees this as Jane’s lack of “phallic drive necessary to stand up against Al Swearingen,” an act of “feminine subordination” (195). But in *Deadwood*’s gender/power structure, the feminine/masculine divide is not so neatly parceled out. If subordination to Swearingen is “feminine,” then Swearingen’s cohort of thugs could be considered feminine, too. Conversely, Sofia’s would-be killer, dispatched by Swearingen, is stopped by Doc Cochran not through the use of force but through the doctor’s ability to shame him about such a low deed. *Deadwood* gives us no evidence that Jane’s cowardice is due to an essential femininity or a lack of phallic power, but it gives us ample evidence that her cowardice is related to the self-destructive fear that keeps her drunk most of the time.⁹

This is not to suggest that violent masculinity, misogyny, and patriarchy are dispelled in *Deadwood*. Its major dynamic remains the Oedipal story of fathers and sons: Bullock versus Swearingen, then Swearingen and Bullock versus Hearst. Bad and abusive fathers haunt the backstories of Bullock, Alma, and Joanie. But this series is more self-conscious about its masculinist dynamic than most Westerns. When the town leaders meet in Swearingen’s saloon to strategize about Hearst in season 3, one of the prostitutes in the back room notes that Alma Garret, founder of the town’s bank, was not invited. “Guess if you got a pussy, even owning a bank don’t get you to that table,” she remarks to her fellow whores (3.7).

In this milieu Jane's butch presence is unsettling as someone who has "got a pussy" but has rejected its conventional meanings, revealing the arbitrary status of those meanings and in turn the arbitrary nature of sex and gender categories. The hotelier E. B. Farnum refers to her as "Hickok's half-woman friend." This ambiguity about her body is encapsulated by an anecdote she tells after returning from a journey at the beginning of season 2. Jane talks about an "immigrant fella" who "went sweet on [her]." He brought her flowers and gifts and eventually told her, "I wanna suck your cock" (2.2), a punch line that she singularly enjoys but which reduces her listeners—Bullock and Hickok's friend Charlie Utter—to uncomfortable silence. Given that "cocksucker" is the most widely used epithet of contempt in *Deadwood*, Jane's story resounds with unnerving resonances. Was Jane passing as male and being courted as a "boy" who would receive flowers—like the "boys" Johnson documents in the mining camps? Or was her admirer expressing a fetishized desire, both knowledge and denial of Jane's female body?

The anecdote foregrounds what it means to "pass" as male and thus what masculinity entails in the Western, as seen in the capitulation of the macho Swearengen to the elderly Hearst. It also raises the question of male desire in Westerns, a site of intensive male bonding.¹⁰ Homophobic anxiety permeates the dialogue in *Deadwood*, reflecting the homosocial/homoerotic culture that Johnson describes in the mining camps. The men's language in particular resounds with threats and disavowals of male homosexuality, as would be expected in frontier mining communities, where women were not always available. The most common denigration is "cock-sucking," and the metaphors for political, territorial, economic, and physical threats or submission focus on sodomy: "ass fucking," "bending over," "taking it up the ass," "grabbing ankle." At one point Hearst calls attention to his own inviolate power by taunting Commissioner Hugo Jarry, who proposes a Socrates-like relationship with him. Hearst pretends to take the Greek reference literally, demanding, "Are you saying you want to fuck me?" The commissioner meekly admits he "forgot that part of the story" (3.10).

What *Deadwood* never forgets is the fluidity of homosociality and

its exposure of the range of affections entailed in male bonding in the Western. While homophobic language dominates the dialogue, actual male homosexuals in *Deadwood* are scarce. In season 1 Cy Tolliver makes an accusation of his employee Eddie, but the text never verifies it. In season 3 the proclivities of the flamboyant Jack Langrishe and Gustave the tailor are suggested without visible follow-up. But emotional male responses to other men often challenge conventional notions of a monolithic cowboy masculinity in *Deadwood*. We see Swearengen cry at the sight of Reverend Smith, the minister dying of a brain tumor, and we see Bullock's grief at the death of Hickok. Hickok's killer, McCall, taunts Bullock when he sees tears in Bullock's eyes: "Are you crying?" he sneers. "Did he [Hickok] stick his dick up your ass?" (1.5). Jack McCall is one of the show's most contemptible villains, so his snickering questions about men weeping and loving other men only reinforces the way *Deadwood* valorizes those emotions as part of its challenges to the stoic, monolithic masculinity of the traditional Western.

Jane's inclusion in this proliferation of masculinities in *Deadwood* calls to mind Halberstam's claim for the role of female masculinity in the articulation of male masculinities. Jane's anecdote about her suitor is positioned in the same episode as a revealing incident concerning Dan Dority, Swearengen's hulking lieutenant, a massive brute who regularly carries out Al's orders for murder. We see the depth of Dority's emotional attachment to the saloon owner when Dority pouts and weeps because Swearengen publicly sided with another man, Silas Adams, against Dority in a dispute, indicating Adams to be his new lieutenant. When Swearengen soothes Dority's hurt feelings, the latter's joy is so overwhelming he reaches out for an embrace, which his boss deftly avoids. A few episodes later, when Swearengen regains consciousness after the kidney stone incident, Dority is beaming at him with so much affection that Swearengen says, "Did you fuck me while I was out? Then quit lookin' at me like that" (2.5). This is similar to Jane's line, in the last episode of that season, when she slugs the man she thinks is eyeing her in her female clothes at the Garret-Ellsworth wedding: "What the fuck you lookin' at?" she hollers. The incorporation of Jane in these chal-

lenges to gender norms in the Western serves to widen the spectrum of what masculinity can entail.

Citizenship and the Butch-Femme Couple

Jane's relationship to Joanie in *Deadwood* contests the monolithic heterosexuality of the frontier West and adds another dimension to McCabe's argument that Jane is positioned as the "formal nexus point" of competing histories, legends, and myths about the frontier (61). Discarding the heteronormative version of the legend that would make Bill Hickok her lover, the Milch series treats the relationship as a friendship based on Hickok's kindness and ability to see past her awkwardness to her core decency and generosity. McCabe emphasizes that in the first two seasons the Hickok-Jane story in *Deadwood* focuses on her grief at his loss (74–75). In the third season this grief becomes the connection to Joanie, linking "official" stories of the West, such as the Hickok legend, to illicit or submerged histories.

We learn about Joanie's sexuality in the first season, when she is introduced as the head prostitute at the upscale saloon run by the malicious Cy Toller. Refusing Tolliver's attentions, Joanie stares back at him defiantly while she bathes and kisses a young woman who works for him (1.5). The three seasons of *Deadwood* reveal the gradual liberation of Joanie from Tolliver's grip. He both supports and subverts her independence when she opens up her own bordello. But when her fellow businesswoman and two prostitutes are murdered, Joanie sinks into a despair so profound she contemplates suicide at the beginning of season 3 (3.1).

Jane, too, has despaired after Hickok's death, leaving *Deadwood* for a while but returning to die there, she tells Doc Cochran, apparently through alcoholism (2.2). Bill's friend Charlie Utter, alarmed to see Jane "a drunken, fuckin' mess," as he says at Bill's graveside, urges her to befriend Joanie because she has also suffered the loss of friends (2.8). Clearly, these women save each other's lives. By the end of season 3, Joanie is no longer a prostitute and has begun a more respectable life—which ironically, includes loving and living with Jane. "Some happiness has come into my life now," she tells Tolliver in the final episode (3.12).

To represent this outlaw sexual history, *Deadwood* draws Joanie as an amalgam of various historical and fictional figures. McCabe identifies her as a version of the feminine character who befriends Jane in the Doris Day movie and undertakes her makeover (76). In that film their friendship creates, wittingly or not, the butch-femme couple celebrated in gay culture. Joanie is also certainly an allusion to the Black Hills brothel madam Dora DuFran, for whom Jane Canary worked at various times in her life. After Jane's death DuFran wrote a short book claiming she plucked a dead-drunk Jane from the streets in 1886, an event that was "the beginning of [their] friendship, which lasted until death came to her" (8).¹¹ In McMurtry's *Buffalo Girls* Dora is portrayed as the only person whom Jane loved. "I loved her the minute I saw her," Jane says of Dora. "We're buffalo girls, we'll always be friends, [Dora] said. Many a time we danced together, I'd pretend to be a cowboy in those dances" (114). Later separated from her friend, Jane reports, "I have been crying for her almost every night" (157), and dreams of growing old with her "in a snug house" (289). In the HBO adaptation of this novel, the friendship is heavily sentimentalized, with Dora dying in childbirth and Jane ending up as the foster mother of Dora's child. Alluding to this textual history, *Deadwood* cast Kim Darby as Joanie; Darby bears a strong resemblance, in face and voice, to Melanie Griffith, who played Dora in *Buffalo Girls*. By rereading the Dora DuFran figure as a femme lesbian who would be attracted to a butch Jane, *Deadwood* also draws on the traditional connection of the prostitute and the lesbian, often conflated in nineteenth-century culture as women outside reputable heterosexuality (Halberstam, *Female* 51).

While male homosexuality is thoroughly abjected in *Deadwood*, the status of lesbianism, until season 3, had been more liminal. Until her sexual connection to Joanie, Jane's obviously butch character was not easily categorized; her attachment to Hickok could be read as a queer boy-to-man attraction, and there was no indication that she was attracted to women. Lesbianism, on the other hand, was legible through the femme body of Joanie, a sympathetically drawn character who could "pass" as straight and who resembled the glam-

orous femmes on *The L Word* (Showtime 2004–9), which was launched the same year as *Deadwood*. Joanie embodied the ready-for-prime-time lesbian, feminine and attractive, with typically limited representations of her sexual life. Aside from her kiss of the prostitute to signify her orientation, the only other indication of her lesbianism is her wary relationship with the young con woman Flora, who unsuccessfully attempts to seduce her (1.7–1.8). So Joanie's lesbianism could be read as a titillating backstory for an attractive character.¹² But when the Joanie-Jane relationship is eroticized, lesbianism becomes legible through the more recognizable sign of the butch-femme couple and is validated through the narrative as part of Joanie's gradual liberation from male-defined roles. In this narrative turn Jane's butch presentation comes into focus as not just queer but specifically lesbian. As a critic for *AfterEllen* pointed out at the time, this was a radical departure from lesbian representation on television, where butch characters are rarely seen (Helberg).

Certainly lesbian sex on *Deadwood* is never visible in the way that heterosexual acts are regularly and graphically represented. Nevertheless, the emergence of Jane and Joanie as a couple pulls homosexuality, or at least lesbianism, from its marginal status to make it visible as a dynamic in this series. The crossover occurs in a scene of Jane bathing, suggesting the movement of both Jane and homosexuality from abjection. This scene parallels the one in which Joanie bathes and caresses the prostitute in season 1, which established bathing as a site of lesbian eroticism. It also parallels two other scenes of Jane bathing, which are significant because a major element in Jane's characterization is filth, physical and linguistic. In fact we see no other *Deadwood* character so often in a bath. The implication is that because Jane bathes so rarely, the occasions are notable, but these scenes also mark Jane's passage from alienation to participation in the community. Both baths are precipitated by events involving children, a motif that is also important in Jane's movement toward citizenship: she bathes in order to attend the funeral of little William Bullock (2.11) and again when Martha Bullock asks her to speak to the schoolchildren about General

Custer (3.2). Also, by exposing Jane's nude body—her breasts and buttocks—these scenes both sexualize this character and reveal how a female body can, even in the nude, maintain its masculinity; pouting, yelling, and scowling in the water, Jane remains butch in these bath scenes.

When Joanie insists on Jane bathing in preparation for the William Bullock funeral, the atmosphere of the scene is tense, with Jane irritably ordering Joanie to turn away as she undresses and plunges into a tub of hot water, loudly complaining that it “burned [her] fuckin’ snatch” (2.11). The camera emphasizes the distance between the two women in the room, just as their bickering reveals their frustrated inability to express their sorrow about the death of the child. In contrast the bath scene that changes their relationship is set in a much more intimate atmosphere, framed in close-up as Joanie gives Jane a sponge bath by lamplight (3.7). The scene takes place in Joanie's boardinghouse room, where she has taken Jane after finding her intoxicated and vomiting in the street. Sitting by the washbasin, Jane at first protests when she thinks Joanie's hand has gone too far up her sleeve, but then she expansively and drunkenly takes off her shirt, proclaiming that she can't put on “airs” of modesty because she's “been disrobed in front of every barnyard creature that hunts, pecks, or rolls in the fuckin’ mud”—a comic reference to her own status as a creature skulking the streets of Deadwood. But Joanie's gentle soaping of her neck and shoulders immediately changes the tone of the scene, and it becomes clear that Jane knows that Joanie is a lover of women, just as Joanie knows of Jane's emotional vulnerability. “I would never hurt you, Jane, or touch you if you didn't want,” Joanie tells her. Jane awkwardly indicates that she indeed wants to be touched and specifically wants her breasts to be touched. Eyes clenched tight, she says, “I won't open my eyes, but you can go ahead and kiss me if that's what you fuckin' do.” As the women draw closer for the kiss, we can see Jane trembling with emotion.

Their relationship becomes public almost immediately, as indicated in the follow-up incident when, as Jane and Joanie leave the boardinghouse the next morning, they are rebuked by the angry

landlord with a protest sign quoting the biblical book of Romans to condemn their “vile affections”: “For this cause God gave them into vile affections: for their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.’ Romans 1” (3.8). The incident is delivered as dark humor. “Fuck yourself up your ass,” Jane shouts angrily, as she pretends to write that directive over the protest sign. The irony is that in *Deadwood* moments of genuine affection are rare, while much of life is vile. Murder victims are fed to the pigs; mine laborers are abused; Chinese prostitutes are kept in cages; road agents are hired to massacre a family and make it look like the work of Indians. “Vile affection” is the attitude of this series toward the entire genre of the Western.

However, the protest indicates that, in a town as small as Deadwood, portrayed as buzzing with spies, gossips, and informants, Jane and Joanie’s relationship is no secret. The public nature and function of their relationship are revealed in the following episode (3.9) when, as a couple, they lead the schoolchildren through the town, an act that both asserts their membership in the community and dislodges heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual relationship in frontier history. Joanie and Jane become involved with the children because Joanie’s former bordello was being used as the schoolhouse, but she has sold the building and made certain a new building would be designated as the permanent school. The town’s schoolchildren need to be walked to their new schoolhouse, a trek through the muddy and often dangerous main thoroughfare, full of bucking horses, whores, drunks, and gold miners lining up for whiskey shots sold at wooden stands. Also, as Robin Weigert points out in her audio commentary on this episode, the town is “in grave danger” because of the increasingly menacing presence of Hearst’s men. The children act as a “lens,” she says, through which we see the town’s vulnerability (audio commentary 3.9). The safe passage of the children also signifies a major theme in *Deadwood*: the messy emergence of community and order out of vice and violence. So the town’s—and the show’s—most prominent couple, Sheriff Bullcock and his schoolteacher wife, protectively follow the procession to the new school. However, the group is led by Jane and Joanie,



19. Jane and Joanie. "Amateur Night" (*Deadwood* 3.9).

holding hands, Jane intoxicated and holding onto Joanie for support, but clearly walking in public as a couple. Bookending the procession, the two couples become the public signifiers of community-building and the future of the West. While these two pairs, heterosexual and homosexual, are traditionally designated as legitimate/illegitimate, this is a binary dynamic of the Western that *Deadwood* continually exposes and erodes.¹³ The breakdown of this particular binary begins in season 3, episode 4, which concludes with the parallel scenes of three couples: Jane and Joanie awkwardly shaking hands as they agree to live together; the Bullocks holding hands and conversing in bed; and Swearengen getting fellated by the young prostitute Dolly, whose humanity he suddenly realizes through a touching conversation about his childhood memory of being forcibly restrained.

The procession with the schoolchildren is not the first occasion in which Jane functions as part of a public stand. After her return to Deadwood at the beginning of season 2, she joins Bullock, Utter, and Sol Star when they band together, guns at the ready, to demand Bullock's badge and gun back from Swearengen, crucial items left behind after the Bullock-Swearengen fistfight (2.2). This stand allies Jane with the group that *Deadwood* positions as its moral center, an

alliance emphatically associated with Bill Hickok, who had brought them together before he died. In contrast the third-season alliance with the common good is associated not with Hickok but with Joanie, because of the latter's key role in securing the schoolhouse.

The use of children to signal citizenship for Jane and Joanie is a remix of the maternal melodrama narrative, which in earlier fictionalizations serves to draw Calamity Jane into the normative gender role of motherhood. *Deadwood* steers away from this narrative altogether and instead posits Jane's maternal instincts as part of her fierce protectiveness. We see this in her attitude toward Joanie, too: "Who will look out for you?" she demands as she realizes Joanie's demoralized state at the beginning of season 3 (3.1). *Deadwood* also associates Jane with children to invoke her own childlike nature, seen when she entertains the schoolchildren with stories and later plays with them as if she were among her peers (3.11). In Jane's introductory scene, in fact, she both curses the travelers who are blocking the trail ("Ignorant fucking cunts!") and peeps playfully at a little girl with her family in a wagon (1.1).

This turns out to be Sofia, the child who survives the road massacre of her family and who is the center of Jane's crisis when she cowers in front of Swaengen, allowing him to approach Sofia to check her condition. Despite this failure Jane participates in a second rescue of Sofia later in the same episode, when she and Charlie sneak the child off to their wagon outside town to make certain she's safe. Trying to soothe the child to sleep, she and Utter are comically inept parent figures, arguing and swearing about the right way to sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" (1.2). Generally, *Deadwood* deploys Jane's maternal instincts not to assert a traditional gender role but rather to align her with the forces that eventually form a community out of the unruliness of Deadwood: Bullock and Utter, who symbolize the stability of both law and enterprise; Doc Cochran, whose compassion is matched by his considerable knowledge; Martha Bullock, who organizes a school; and Joanie, who establishes a permanent schoolhouse.

Deadwood ended after three seasons, before it could resolve any of its story lines. However, Jane sums up the trajectory of her nar-

rative in a monologue late in season 3, when she tells Joanie about a dream that poignantly weaves together her anxieties about loss and shame as well as the possibilities of healing and redemption. The two women are undressing for bed, and Joanie responds emotionally as she listens and understands the importance of what Jane is saying. The dream reveals that for Jane the trauma of losing Bill Hickok is conflated with her shame in not defending Sofia from Swearingen. Charlie is the messenger in this dream, who tells her they're in the place and time where Hickok will be murdered: "Don't you know this is the night you couldn't look out for that little girl, when you was at Cochran's and Swearingen come in and scared you and you went down to the creek to weep." But in the dream Charlie also reminds her that together, she and he "spirited that child from Cochran's to where [their] stock was outside of camp and [they] watched out on that little girl and sung to her." He instructs her to remember, during the times when she is "most ashamed," that "the middle of the dream"—her act of cowardice—is not the whole story (3.10).

In a moment of self-reflection not often seen in Jane, she then interprets the dream's origins. If she wondered why she dreamed that dream, she tells Joanie, it's because she had been in a similar shameful situation on the day she was supposed to help lead the children to the school. She was drunk in the street and had to be roused to help Joanie make that march; later that night, she says, she also ran to get help when Joanie was threatened by Tolliver. "And you and me walked those kids to school, and before I went to sleep, you kissed me," Jane concludes. "And Charlie helped me find that little girl, the very night I got scared and run, and the both of us sung a round to her, and then you went ahead and kissed me" (3.10). In response Joanie gently takes Jane's face in her hands for a kiss.

Jane realizes that the dream is an instruction to push past her shame by remembering the moments of redemption. She also realizes that she can do this because of Joanie's love. This is a significant turn for Jane as a character whose self-contempt has kept her in an abject state for most of the series. Also, because this redemptive

memory is enabled by a lesbian relationship, Jane's status as "nexus" of contested frontier histories takes on additional meanings. Jane's character in *Deadwood*, McCabe reminds us, is "involved in contested debates over what is remembered and forgotten in the tangled memories of frontier history and legend" (68). Lesbian history on the frontier, which may or may not have included Jane Canary's own experience, is imagined in *Deadwood* as one more enrichment and complication of what we think of as "the West."

This updating of the Calamity Jane legend is as much about contemporary politics as about possible alternative histories of the West. McCabe points out that Jane's story is "a changeable script" that "resurfaces within our cultural imagination every now and then" with different meanings (76).¹⁴ These meanings are often tied to changing ideas and contentions about gender. Jean Arthur, who played Jane in the 1937 DeMille film *The Plainsman*, cited her as an American woman "who blazed the trail toward emancipation" because she took up male privileges such as smoking, drinking, and wearing trousers (McLaird 231). Similarly reading Jane as a register of social concerns, Tamar McDonald notes that the Doris Day version of Calamity Jane is not about nineteenth-century Deadwood but about "1953 Everywhere USA: the pressure to comply with mid-twentieth-century gender norms" (180). In *Deadwood* the story line that positions Jane and Joanie as citizens emerges in the decade when contentions about gay rights and gay citizenship came to the forefront because of debates about marriage. Many states passed marriage laws to prevent same-sex marriage, while other states passed legislation allowing it. The first state to approve same-sex marriage was Massachusetts, which made this move in 2004, the year *Deadwood* debuted. The objectionable nature of the butch-femme couple is suggested in the final episode of season 3, when Joanie goes to Cy Tolliver to make amends and wish him well. His reaction to her announcement about her "happiness" is bitter and homophobic. "Does a girl have to drive cattle for you to eat her pussy?" he snarls (3.12). Tolliver is one of *Deadwood's* least sympathetic characters, but his vicious remark reminds us that this version of Calamity Jane is a deeply contentious one.

However, the last episode of the series also gives Jane and Joanie a final scene affirming the power of both legend and a new kind of story. Jane gets drunk because she's upset over a miscommunication with Joanie, who finds her sulking and petulant in bed. In his audio commentary on this episode, Milch remarks that Jane has never been in love before and is puzzled that lovers can misunderstand each other (3.12). To draw Jane out of her bad mood, Joanie announces that Charlie has sent them Hickok's buffalo robe, and when Jane happily snuggles into it, Joanie embraces her in the robe. "Warm," Jane murmurs contentedly, in a comment that seems to describe the embrace of Joanie as well as the robe and memory of Hickok. The iconography of this final embrace—Bill's robe around Jane, Joanie's arms around the robe—includes the traditional, legendary past but frames it differently with the suggestion that the West included stories of women loving women.

Significantly, the Jane-Joanie narrative is entirely separate from the Hearst narrative; they are the only characters who do not seem threatened by the changes that are sweeping through Deadwood, perhaps because they are imagined as part of a different fiction and history, one that is primarily about women and intersects with, but is not the same as, Milch's story of fathers and sons.

Notes

1. McLaird describes and analyzes these popular representations in detail, mapping out how the treatments of this legend have varied through media conventions and changing attitudes toward the frontier and the Western (221–36).
2. Taking another approach to Jane's sexuality, Larry McMurtry suggests at the end of his 1990 novel *Buffalo Girls* that Jane was a hermaphrodite: "It was a disappointment, the Docs didn't really know what to make of me either, they used names that I won't repeat—I can't spell them anyway—to refer to my condition" (342).
3. Jane is cute and perky in the Doris Day film and is tomboyish but attractive as played by Ellen Barkin in *Wild Bill* (1995). Jane Russell plays the character for over-the-top laughs in *The Paleface* (1948). The only film version that visualizes Jane as a homely, ungainly figure is *Buffalo Girls*,

- although Angelica Huston's portrayal of Jane is far more restrained and even more respectable than the Jane of *Deadwood*.
4. Jane's abject status gives her racial mobility as someone who identifies with the "low other." She has no qualms about sharing a bottle with Nigger General Samuel Fields, despite his own uneasiness about this (2.5). When she offers to help him bury his black friend Hostetler, she mocks his caution to her about how this will affect her "popularity with [her] fellow white people" (3.6).
 5. Tompkins, for example, sees masculinity and femininity as the distinct poles across which Westerns structure their anxieties and their stories (40–41), as does Slotkin. See Slotkin on the ideology of "virility" and the vigilante in *The Virginian*, for instance (*Gunfighter Nation* 156–83), compared to Mitchell's take on that novel (*Westerns* 95–119), which emphasizes its context of the turn-of-the-century women's movement. Also see Michael Johnson (98–146) on the performance of gender in early Western novels and the "uncertainty about gender roles, sparked in part by women's activism in the public sphere" (129).
 6. I am drawing here on Judith Butler's concept of sexual identities as phantasmatic (93–119). Especially useful in regard to female masculinity is her insight that the stories we tell about bodies are "necessary fictions" (98) or "spectres" produced by the symbolic order "to safeguard its continuing hegemony" (104).
 7. In her essay on the generic contexts of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Halberstam comments on the film history that delivered the tough cowgirls played by Stanwyck, Crawford, and Mercedes McCambridge, among others ("Not So Lonesome" 198–200).
 8. O'Sullivan describes the threat to Swearingen's power made by the new telegraph lines (122–23).
 9. Jane shows a similar terror when Cy Tolliver makes a threatening appearance at Joanie's place one night, and Jane runs for help rather than confront him (3.9). In her audio commentary on that episode, Robin Weigert remarks that Jane seems to have an "instinctive terror" about confrontations with evil, an instinct "beyond the rational" (audio commentary 3.9).
 10. See Halberstam's description of this tradition in "Not So Lonesome."
 11. DuFran emphasizes Jane's charity and generosity. "The only way to sober her up," she writes, "was to tell her someone was sick and needed her services" (7). In *Deadwood* Joanie first appears to fall in love with Jane when she sees Jane nursing back to life a man she does not even like (2.11).
 12. The representation of lesbian characters as femmes who can "pass" is discussed by Holmlund as part of the larger problem of lesbian representation in mainstream visual culture.

13. In his widely cited text on Hollywood genres, Schatz describes the traditional Western as structured by the basic conflict of “civilization vs. savagery,” expressed in a variety of sets of oppositions: “East versus West, garden versus desert, America versus Europe, social order versus anarchy, individual versus community, town versus wilderness, cowboy versus Indian” and so on (48). An example of *Deadwood*'s erosion of those binaries is the character of the sheriff, Seth Bullock, who struggles to maintain moral and civic order but also struggles with his own inclination for violence and his illicit passion for the town's wealthy widow.
14. McCabe's own interpretation of Jane in *Deadwood* posits that in the first two seasons, Jane is specifically a configuration of post-9/11 America; she locates Jane at the nexus of contested memories and histories revolving around her traumatic loss of Hickok.