

Veneno (2020) and the Trans Bio-epic: Queering remembrance between trauma and joy

James Cleverley

The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

Correspondence: jcleverley@unimelb.edu.au

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-cleverley/>

ORCID: [0000-0002-5338-6563](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5338-6563)

Funding: See Acknowledgements.

This article has been subject to a double-anonymised peer-review process.



Copyright notice: This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

Veneno (Atresmedia, 2020) chronicles the life of Cristina Ortiz, a transgender woman who suddenly became a public phenomenon in 1990s Spain. The series explores queer memory, narrativizing both her story and the young journalist and writer Valeria Vegas' process of writing her biography. Veneno weaves together multiple temporalities of trans history, blending remembrance and imagination to evoke both past traumas and hopeful futures and emphasizing challenges and strengths of (gender)queer experience within cis-heteronormative reality. This paper employs an embodied, affective theoretical lens to examine Veneno's emotionally charged portrayal of traumatic experiences. It explores Veneno's epic form as a means of queering the biopic genre, asking how its aesthetic excess and affective mythology reconfigure the remembrance of trans life on screen. The show's sensorial qualities are evaluated within a consideration of the history of onscreen representations of trans lives that focus on violence. The analysis considers how the series' sensorial and mythic registers transform memory into collective, embodied experience. In an era of expanding trans visibility, it becomes crucial to understand how screen narratives of gender non-conformity might reimagine past and present, challenging normative chronologies while sustaining new modes of affective recognition.

Keywords: *Veneno*; queer television; memory; queer affect; trans biography; temporality; biopic; epic film; *los Javis*

Introduction: The Truth Machine

‘¿Es cierto que siempre te has sentido mujer?’

(‘Is it true that you have always felt like a woman?’)

- Jaime Cantizano, host, *El Precio de la Verdad*

‘Sí’.

(‘Yes’.)

- *La Veneno* (‘The Poison’)

It is 2006, and Cristina Ortiz, a.k.a. ‘La Veneno’, is attempting a comeback on Spanish television screens via an appearance on the tabloid show *En Antena*. As part of the segment called *El Precio de la Verdad* (‘The Price of Truth’), she must face a series of probing, invasive questions while wired to a polygraph. Dazzling in a flowing, bright yellow skirt and blouse, golden earrings, and dramatically high heels, Cristina takes her seat while the studio audience applauds her arrival. The lie detector’s black cables are attached to her exposed skin, resembling restraints. In her heyday (the 1990s), Cristina Ortiz Rodríguez was arguably the biggest trans icon on Spanish television (Ingenschay, 2023: 1). Now, after a fall from public grace, she is introduced by host Jaime Cantizano as television’s ‘broken toy’. However, despite her apparent nervousness, ‘la Veneno’s’ trademark sharp wit and fiery tongue have not abandoned her. Without missing a beat, she retorts, *‘Juguete roto tú. Yo soy un bombón, ¡qué valor!’* (‘Broken toy yourself! I’m a delight, what courage!’).

Cantizano indicates his desire to begin the interrogation. The questions seem framed to cast doubt on elements of Cristina’s biography, as she has previously told it:

¿Huiste de tu pueblo para venirte a Madrid, porque allí te maltrataban e insultaban? ¿Es cierto que siempre te has sentido mujer? ¿Empezaste a vender tu cuerpo como mujer porque al ser travesti no conseguías trabajo?

(Did you leave your village to go to Madrid because of being mistreated and abused? Is it true that you’ve always felt like a woman? Did you start selling your body as a woman because you were unable to get work, being a transvestite?)

When the *máquina de la verdad* ('truth machine') returns its results, Cristina is deemed to have been truthful when responding that she 'always felt like a woman'. The machine also accepts her account of childhood trauma, being driven away from the Andalusian fishing town of Adra. But things become unpleasant when the polygraph claims she lied about her need to take up sex work, about her famous clientele, about suffering abuse in prison, and much more.

Adapted from Cristina's real-life story, *Veneno* (**Atresplayer Premium, 2020**) unfolds over eight episodes in a form that broadly resembles the biopic, a feature film-length biography of a historical figure, with some key differences: it is episodic, appeared on television, and featured the unusual addition of a second protagonist, the journalist and writer Valeria Vegas (**Ingenschay 2023: 1**). Within this framework, the scene described above crystallizes the series' central aesthetic and ethical preoccupations. As viewers, we experience the cheap, sensationalizing, *telebasura* ('teletrash') show being reenacted within *Veneno's* slicker, more contemporary production. The disparate aesthetics of the two shows is highlighted technically: *Veneno's* first images replicate *En Antena* in the 4:3 aspect ratio of 1990s TV and feature a low-definition effect to appear dated, almost as if they are being played back on a VHS tape.

From here, we jump to the rich and vibrant colour palette that characterizes *Veneno's* general aesthetic. By framing the reconstructed *En Antena* segment within *Veneno's* contemporary aesthetic, the series makes clear that Cristina's mistreatment by television media is being critically restaged. A critique of spectacle itself emerges, evoking modern media's 'scopic regime', in which 'we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense' (**Jay, 1988: 3**). Multiple studio cameras, a panel of presenters casting judgement, and the artifice of the set—which features a large screen projecting Cristina's image back towards her and the public, whose affection she craves—exemplify *Veneno's* deliberate attention to exploring corporeality and spectacle. It was television which made Cristina a star, after all. Here, strapped to the polygraph and called a liar, she appears vulnerable, if still defiant.

This sequence emblemizes the scrutiny under which trans bodies are placed in cis-hetero society. The focus on 'trans issues' has sharpened dramatically over the last decade, producing a 'paradoxical simultaneity' of increased visibility and a greater threat of violence (Koch-Rein et al., 2020: 2). For trans and non-binary people, visibility does not necessarily translate to more safety, rights, or freedoms (**Keegan et al., 2018: 6**). A wider recognition within Western society has meant communities 'have also been scrutinized with growing intensity' (**Straube, 2020: 56**). Koch-Rein et al. (2020) find that '[f]or the longest time trans representations

were closely tied to narrow and problematic depictions of gender non-conforming people as either dangerous psychopaths and sexual predators ... or as victims with little agency' (2020: 2).

Analysis of these historically prevalent tropes of trans representation indicates that a (cis-hetero) dominant culture is desperate to know the trans body, to master it, and ultimately deem it worthy of either desire or rejection. Susan Stryker expands on the tense relations governing physical appearance, as trans people are perceived as inherently deceptive, societally judged to be making 'a false representation of an underlying material truth, through the wilful distortion of surface appearance' (2006: 9). Given this field of scrutiny, trans visibility can feel like, according to Malatino (2022):

...exposing the raw nerve of your self—a self that is always already interdependent, always already reliant on intercorporeal exchanges—to socialities and systems of perception that you know will respond to such exposure with reliably repetitive brutality (2022: 75).

Let us return to *Veneno's* depiction of Cristina at the mercy of the lie detector. While the surveillance machine attaches to her 'raw nerves', purportedly measuring skin conductivity in search of an internal truth, the rationale of this objectification is plainly ocular-centric and voyeuristic. A front-on shot of the set shows a cameraman kneeling before her, camera in her face, recording every expression in close-up—all in service of spectacle.

To explore how *Veneno* seeks to elide a voyeuristic gaze, this study presumes an embodied spectator, who grasps it 'not solely by an intellectual act but by the complex perception of the body as a whole' (Marks, 2000: 145). This feels suited to the task, given *la Veneno's* fame revolved around an eroticization of the body. (Take, for example, the title of the euro-dance record she released, '*Pa' tu piel*', or 'For Your Skin'.) *Veneno* works with the audio-visual schema of the 'epic' film to evoke multiple sensorial responses, as it explores the value of queer kinship, the power of representation in a progressive politics, and how to honour the lives of queer icons or heroes—all pertinent within the fraught contemporary discourse around trans rights.

The series unfolds through an intricate structure that continually shifts between timelines and perspectives, recounting Cristina's childhood as the young Joselito—played by Guille Márquez at age eight and by Marcos Sotkovszki at age fourteen—in the 1960s fishing town of Adra on the Andalusian coast. It traces the emergence of Cristina herself, embodied successively by trans performers Jedet, Daniela Santiago, and Isabel Torres. These re-castings do more than mark different stages of her life:

they evoke an epic sense of continuity across rupture, fragmentation, and transformation. As Anamarija Horvat observes, they affirm the political and historical importance of centring trans actors and trans communities on screen, providing a ‘subversive depiction of family which counteracts hetero- and cisnormative assumptions’ (2024: 160).

Parallel to Cristina’s story runs that of Valeria Vegas (Lola Rodríguez), whose early encounters with her television idol lead her both to writing Cristina’s biography and to her own gender transition. Intercut with these threads are Cristina’s later years, marked by abusive relationships, media exploitation, imprisonment for fraud, and eventual death. Alternating between spectacle and vulnerability, these narrative strands weave a televisual biography that is as much about the making of *La Veneno* as about those who remember and reconstruct her story. In bringing these moments into dialogue, *Veneno* invites the viewer to inhabit a network of testimonies, intimacies, and conflicting gazes. As an eight-part miniseries—rather than, say, a feature-length biopic—its scale and temporal expansiveness amplify the sense of journey and myth, establishing what I term a *queer/trans bio-epic*, an act of remembrance that both questions and celebrates the making of a modern queer legend.

La Veneno’s notoriety flourished among a national television audience in the 1990s, which was thrilled by her brash, scandalous quips, the uncensored, erotic way she presented her body, and the way she combined glamour and vulgarity into an authentic, ‘exotic’ package. It follows that a biopic seeking to capture this larger-than-life icon would demand an epic format. Given the history of unrealistic and harmful onscreen representations of trans figures, there is a tension in the approach to memorializing a figure like Cristina ‘*la Veneno*’—there being an ethical imperative to avoid exploiting traumatic memories for the purposes of ‘mere’ spectacle. This consideration grows more pertinent when considering the vulnerability of a person marginalized within cis-heteropatriarchal society who suddenly finds herself a public figure.

Veneno creators Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo—two gay, cisgender men formerly in a working and romantic partnership and collectively known as ‘*los Javis*’ (‘the Javis’)—make clear they are aware of the capricious nature of the media’s spotlight. Nevertheless, they also seem convinced of the importance of representation for marginalized people and communities. Their approach has been described as ‘a kinder, less combative form of queer audio-visual representation’, and a ‘strategic way of appealing to a wide range of audiences and infiltrating the mainstream without appearing too subversive’ (García López, 2024: 257). According to Paul Julian Smith, the success of *los Javis* demonstrates ‘the emergence of a new youthful sensibility and a new gay auteurism’ (2021: 9), signalling a

new taxon in Spain's genealogy of queer screen culture that extends back to Pedro Almodóvar's negotiation between the popular and the auteurist. Smith observes that their work, beginning with the web series *Paquita Salas* (Netflix, 2016–2019), reveals a sustained preoccupation with a 'self-conscious attention to visualizing technologies', media history, and the mechanics of celebrity itself (2021: 22). While *Veneno* is critical of television's exploitation of Cristina for mere spectacle, the series' own approach counters these past abuses through spectacle itself: an epic, exaggerated, and heroic form.

Yet this epic scale also opens onto the intimate and multiple perspectives, a form that is as much embodied and multi-temporal as it is mythic. In this regard it resonates with the American streaming series *Transparent* (Amazon Studios, 2014–2019). As Horvat has argued, trans media often layers time so that 'seemingly separate temporalities exist not only at the same time, but within the same person' (Smith, 2021: 67). While *Transparent* was criticized for casting a cis actor in the trans leading role, *Veneno* achieves a similar temporal complexity through its both narrative structure and casting itself: Márquez, Sotkovszki (as 'Joselito'), Jedet, Daniela Santiago, and Isabel Torres collectively embody what Lucy Donaldson calls the biopic's epic sense of 'the whole person', for whom '[t]he actor's body is of critical importance [...] as the dramatic vehicle' (Donaldson, 2013: 105).

Through much of their previous work, *los Javis* have cultivated a 'family of actors' across theatre, cinema, and streaming (Smith, 2021: 12), establishing a community ethos that continues in *Veneno*. Cameos by Pepe Navarro, the host who first introduced Cristina to Spanish television audiences, and the real Valeria Vegas, alongside the inspired casting of Cristina's longtime friend Paca *la Piraña* as herself, reinforce this collaborative network. In *Veneno*, embodiment becomes a shared act of trans and queer authorship rather than a performance imposed upon it from the outside.

This essay seeks to explore the tension between self-directed and outwardly imposed performativity by examining the series' desire to move away from historically voyeuristic representations of trans people and their bodies through a queering of epic aesthetics and form. It asks, How does *Veneno* transform the televisual spectacle of trans visibility into an epic mode of remembrance? What forms of queer kinship, temporality, and coming-of-age narratives emerge from its dual-protagonist narrative? And how might its epic scale and affective excess contribute to imagining alternative genealogies of trans and queer life in contemporary Spain?

A Note on Language and Terminology

In writing *trans* without the common endings *–gender* or *–sexual*, I follow Wibke Straube’s emphasis on ‘the multiple factors that make it unnecessary, problematic and apolitical to differentiate between them’ (2014: 32). The term denotes ‘a movement away—an escape—from imposed categories or starting points’ (Raha and van der Drift, 2024: 2). Drawing on David Valentine’s conception of transgender as ‘a collective category of identity’ and his critique of how institutions make certain forms of gender variance intelligible, I use *trans* to signal collectivity while resisting its stabilization as a closed taxonomy (2007: 4, 14).

The term *queer*, meanwhile, is not (only) a synonym for ‘LGBTQIA+’ but a theoretical and aesthetic orientation that questions normativity and temporal coherence. As Alfonso Ceballos Muñoz argues, the Spanish term *rarito*—like *queer*—names ‘*una identidad imposible de clasificar*’ (‘an identity impossible to classify’) within binary systems of sexuality and gender (2005: 165–66), ‘*una identidad sin esencia*’ [‘an identity without essence’] that avoids rigidity while blurring its object of study (2005: 169). In this sense, *Veneno*’s queer and trans orientations work together as an epic mode of storytelling—one that unsettles linear-progress narratives, reimagines kinship across time, and transforms a coming-of-age / gender motif into a shared practice of survival and remembrance.

Queering the Bio-Epic: Historicizing trans memories

How does *Veneno* represent the ‘epic’? While in his seminal text on epic film, Derek Elley acknowledges the meanings ascribed to the term epic are ‘frighteningly broad’ (1984: 9), generally epics may be understood as ‘fictional tales that offer size, length, spectacle, and, above all, unusual human feats—possibly of heroic proportions’ (Santas, 2007: 1). Heroism, spectacle, and the unusual all mark *Veneno*’s depiction. True to form, reviews have often described it as epic: it is, for example, ‘*la épica historia de un icono televisivo*’ (‘the epic story of a television icon’) (Ander, 2020) and ‘*muy épica en lo emocional*’ (‘very epic emotionally’) (Ortega, 2020). Cristina’s dramatic reminiscing launches vivid flashbacks, ‘often aggrandizing her own achievements, making them more epic, more fabulous’ (Betancourt, n.d.). The scale of the ‘epic’ series has also been found to be epic, ‘spanning both characters’ lives with rich, multifaceted, and often glorious storytelling’ (Oaks, 2022).

Elizabeth Freeman’s notions of queer temporality help clarify how *Veneno* epic treatment of time unsettles conceptions of linear biography. Freeman defines chrononormativity as ‘the use of time to organize individual

human bodies toward maximum productivity' (2010: 3). In contrast, queer lives are asynchronous, being 'denizens of time out of joint' (2010: 19). *Veneno's* narrative embraces multiple timelines: memories of Cristina's past—her traumatic childhood in Adra and her fraught relationship with an abusive mother—are brought consistently into different 'present' tenses. Frequent use of techniques such as split screens and crosscuts blends present-tense action with past events, making them appear simultaneous and inflating the sense of epic scale. In this way, the series can be seen to work against chrononormativity, encouraging our emotional involvement with Valeria and Cristina throughout the epic sweep of their lives. As Katie Sutton explains:

Distinguishing the transgender gaze is a distinctly temporal element: cinematic representations of gender variance also tend to 'queer' ideas of time, history, and human milestones, working against 'chrononormative' expectations of generations, reproduction and heterosexual intimacy (Sutton 2021: 226).

Sutton draws on Jack Halberstam's conceptualization of a visual practice that resists 'the gendered binary on which the stability, the pleasure, and the purchase of mainstream cinema depend' through a 'nonfetishistic mode of seeing the transgender body—a mode that looks with, rather than at, the transgender body' (2005: 85, 92). In *Veneno*, such a look operates through the camera's oscillation between depicting performance and self-exposure, pulling the viewer into embodied modes of seeing, between complicity and resistance.

The narrative thread that binds the series together is the very act of writing, of recording memory. In 2016, Vegas published *¡Digo! Ni puta ni santa. Las memorias de la Veneno (Neither Whore nor Saint: The Memories of la Veneno)*. *Los Javis* take from the events recalled in the book, dramatically adapting them using conventions of the biopic, blending truth with fantasy often with a wild, orgiastic sense of abandon. In particular, Cristina's sexual encounters, both working and recreational, are depicted in vivid colours, loudly and unapologetically. The series explicitly questions its own veracity, opening with a frame of text declaring the validity of blending reality and fantasy to achieve an emotional authenticity:

Esta historia está basada en las memorias de Cristina Ortiz, la Veneno, y en los relatos de algunas de las personas a quienes ella cambió la vida. Como en todas las historias que provienen de la memoria, hay en ella algo de realidad y algo de ficción. Y, como en todas las historias de ficción, hay en ella algo que es profundamente verdadero.

(This story is based on the memories of Cristina Ortiz, *la Veneno*, and on the stories of some of those, whose lives she changed. As in all

histories which come from memory, there is some truth and some fiction. And, as in all fictional stories, there is something within that is fundamentally true.)

At the core of *Veneno's* dual-protagonist structure is the relationship between Cristina Ortiz and Valeria Vegas. While still a student and not yet 'out' as a trans woman, Valeria learns that her childhood idol, *La Veneno*, has been spotted in her hometown of Valencia and sets out to find her. She eventually tracks Cristina down and a friendship quickly develops—one that enables Valeria to articulate her own desire to transition. Recognizing the significance of Cristina's life, Valeria writes a short essay about her for a university assignment. When her professor encourages her to expand it, she begins recording Cristina's memories for what will become the published autobiography. As this narrative thread unfolds, the series cuts to recreated flashbacks of Cristina's childhood, where her younger self is figured, before transition, as 'Joselito'. These dramatizations, prompted by Cristina's oral recollections, move fluidly across key moments in her biography: a difficult upbringing, her early transition, and her rise to fame through *Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi* (*Tonight We Cross the Mississippi*), Telecinco's late-night *telebasura* show once so popular it was credited with changing Spanish sleeping patterns (Horvat, 2024: 158). Her time in Torremolinos—remembered as a haven for queer nightlife under Francoism—frames her first encounters with sexual freedom (Valcuende del Río et al., 2023: 54).

One of the difficulties with depicting trans history is that 'a lot of the evidence we have for gender-nonconforming lives comes from legal and medical contexts' (Heyam, 2022: 10), which risks carrying a history of pathologization into the present. Processes of normalization have 'been dominated', as Jennifer Evans explains, 'by sexology and the way medical narratives have sought to humanize the trans* subject' (2023: 87). While this 'has indelibly and productively placed gender variability in the historical register', Evans explains, '[i]n order to open up a space for a wider spectrum of bodies and experiences [...] we need to look beyond the sexological for other examples of gender enactment' (2023: 87).

Derived from memoir, *Veneno* gives voice to trans testimony. While *Veneno* has been lauded for its casting trans actors to play each trans character, there remain aspects of the series which call for further investigation, to determine whether it represents progress in onscreen portrayals of gender-diverse experience. Certain sequences are troubling to watch, including the sexual violence during Cristina's imprisonment, intimate partner abuse, and the portrayal of a violent, traumatic upbringing. We might also be concerned that the series adds to a long list of stereotypical representations of trans people as sex workers. As Shon

Faye observes, trans folk have long been confined to a narrow repertoire of images in popular culture: ‘the “trans hooker” or prostitute was a cultural archetype for trans women who appeared usually as a source of comedy (except in crime drama, where they appeared as a dead murder victim)’ (2021: 136).

To counter this history of reductive visibility requires what Cael Keegan calls a refusal of the demand to be merely ‘good’ or ‘positive’ on screen. Keegan argues a purely ‘positive’ model of representation ‘folds transness into the visual economy of existing normative media’, thereby disciplining what can count as trans life (2022: 27–28). As Mocarski et al. (2019) note, trans visibility in mainstream media often becomes *transnormative*, privileging white, middle-class, post-operative, heterosexual subjects while excluding sex workers, migrants, and the economically precarious (2019: 419–26). *Veneno*’s critical look at television exposes this visibility paradox: its empathetic portrayal of Cristina’s life revisits the stigmatized figure of the trans sex worker while reasserting her agency and authorship.

Exploring Spanish-language queer self-writing, Alfredo Martínez-Expósito details how the genre confronts stigma through language’s own transformative flexibility:

El escritor homosexual se enfrenta, en su egoscritura, al leviatán del estigma, a su peripecia personal de resistencia o claudicación, y a las siempre maleables posibilidades expresivas del lenguaje (2022: 10).

(The homosexual writer confronts, in his ego-writing, the leviathan of stigma, his personal ordeal of resistance or surrender, and the ever-malleable expressive possibilities of language.)

Martínez-Expósito articulates a poetics of resistance that links subjectivity, affect, and form. This mode of *autoescritura* finds a striking echo in *Veneno*, where Cristina’s spoken reminiscences—later mediated through Valeria’s writing—enact a movement from orality to inscription. The process mirrors the transmission of myth in classical epic: Elley (1984) observes that ‘the spread of writing resulted in poetry as we know it today—composed on paper and imprinted with the personality of its author, and more and more expressing personal emotions rather than recording history and tradition’ (1984: 10).

In this shift, the collective transmission of myth gives way to the subjective-authorship characteristic of later narrative forms. Mikhail Bakhtin similarly describes the novel as inheriting the epic’s formal legacy while relocating it within ‘the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality’ (1981: 58). *Veneno*’s passage from Cristina’s oral storytelling to Valeria’s written memoir and its televisual re-enactment mirrors this broader cultural transformation: centring the movement from

communal myth to authored self-narration. By translating Cristina's mythic self, *los Javis* recast trans testimony as the personal, albeit epically conceived.

Cristina's messy, complex memories, first published in the memoir *iDigo!* before being transmitted to the screen, expand on rigid ideas of what is permissible. Regarding the ancient epic, Elley reminds us that 'strong literary associations arise from the fact that the earliest surviving examples are naturally in written form' (1984: 10). In terms of posterity, the writing of *La Veneno's* memoirs carries extra weight, given Cristina's own lack of literacy. Valeria's capacity to write empowers both characters: Cristina's education suffered in small-town Francoist Spain, where abuse and rejection drove her to escape at thirteen. By eschewing a single-protagonist biopic, *Veneno* centres the transfer from oral history to written word.

The 'writing' of the self is significant for both Valeria and Cristina; there is contrast between Cristina's spectacular, oral self-mythologizing and the quieter, reflective depiction of Valeria's transition. Jay Prosser situates trans autobiography as both testimony and transformation, explaining that 'autobiography [...] allows the transsexual to integrate the self after transition: to make sense of a dramatic shift in sexed plots, to produce continuity in the face of change. Narrative composes the self [...] [and] allows a self to be instated in the present' (1998: 120–121). Autobiography here is not merely descriptive but constitutive through 'narrative's intrinsic capacity to construct identity' (1998: 120). Ina Linge extends this insight from the perspective of sexological and queer life writing, proposing that such narratives perform 'both a documentation of self, and the process of writing this self into existence at the moment of composition. Here life is written into existence' (2023: 26).

Starting a story *in medias res* ('in the middle of things') means that the 'epic begins with a question mark', as Frederick Turner observes (2017: 97). This was once thought a defining characteristic in the European epic tradition. While no longer considered a 'fixed convention' following wider study of epic narrative (Paul, 2013: 8), this distinctive formal trace remains potent in storytelling, in describing a blurring of temporalities in the audience's reception: '[The] epic always, despite being usually set in the remote past, seizes a moment when the present trembles on the precipice of the future' (Turner, 2017: 97). Let us consider *Veneno's* opening in this light, which features a warm and cozy, softly lit domestic interior. A child's hand runs along a balustrade in close-up, as the camera tracks, tentatively, toward the direction of voices heard offscreen.

With a cut, we see the living room below, a television showing an episode of *Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi*. The child gazes at the television

from the stairs, clearly fascinated. The voices we are listening to belong to la Veneno and Pepe Navarro, the show's host. The hazy, distant sounds clarify into proper sound bites, as we catch Cristina's distinctive turn of phrase. We will eventually discover that this 'boy' will become Valeria. How much a toddler may sense their own gender at this age is unknown, but the show makes clear this moment is significant for Valeria's own 'crossing'. This is underscored in the sixth episode, when Cristina lies seriously ill in hospital. Valeria, about to go on an important job interview, takes a phone call and learns the gravely ill Cristina may not survive. The episode cuts to Valeria at the hospital as she enters Cristina's room, and it flashes back to the series' opening sequence, with the young child gazing at the television. We recognize, together with Valeria, the profound relationship of these women, their shared journey.

'[T]he beauty of the *in medias res* device', Turner finds, is that 'meaning is then determined by the interplay of future action with past flashbacks' (2017: 97). Traced chronologically, Cristina travels from her birthplace of Adra, first to Marbella, then Torremolinos, visiting Bangkok, moving to Madrid—her site of transition, where she works the *Parque del Oeste* (Western Park) and is thrust into celebrity. We follow her arrest and imprisonment, her release, her life in Valencia with her close friend Paca *la Piraña* ('the Piranha')—where she meets Valeria—and her final days back in Madrid before her untimely death. The series shows Valeria's journey to begin, as outlined above, 'in the middle' of Cristina's. La Veneno's appearance on *Mississippi* is portrayed as a 'turning point', which we might understand, following Sara Ahmed, as a queered directionality, a resistance against life's 'straightening devices' in both protagonists' lives (Ahmed, 2006: 92). Valeria's journey of gender identity is shaped by a new orientation made possible by Cristina's adventurous 'disorientation', a 'wayward' turn against orthodoxy (2006: 72).

In the opening sequence, the 'transgender gaze' itself becomes *Veneno's* central message. Beginning *in medias res* foregrounds trans kinship and the idea that the represented trans body can be emancipatory for trans viewers. This embodied, affective gaze builds solidarity across audiences—offering recognition and joy for trans spectators while inviting others to share in the intimacies and sorrows of a trans-ed world. The interlacing of Cristina's and Valeria's stories visualizes a broader historical reconfiguration of trans childhood and generational relation. As Halberstam writes, '[C]ross-generational contact has been crucial for trans* people [...] but young trans* people increasingly discover information about themselves online rather than through older trans* people' (2018: 64). *Veneno* embeds this shift into its very structure: Valeria's encounter with Cristina is mediated by television, the internet,

and autobiography, dramatizing how trans knowledge circulates across time and media.

Yet, as Jules Gill-Peterson attests, '[T]he narrative that we are in the midst of the first generation of trans children [...] is repeated ad nauseam in the media, online, by doctors, and by parents' (2018: 2). By tracing Cristina's 1990s fame alongside Valeria's digitally connected transition, *Los Javis* expose the illusion of trans childhood's 'newness' and reveal, instead, an ongoing archive of lived trans experience. 'The fact that trans children have been forced [...] to fare without a history,' Gill-Peterson argues, 'may itself be a major cause of the generational tension that Halberstam identifies' (2018: 7). *Veneno's* temporal crossings thus become a form of historical repair: a televisual mode through which trans embodiment, knowledge, and care are transmitted between generations, recuperating a lineage that media once erased.

The Trans Community and Epic Distance

Veneno queers the epic not only through its structure and acts of writing but also through its communities of belonging. Elley notes that epic narratives depend on an 'all-important mythic element' that lifts them 'above mere reportage by the introduction of the irrational, the inexplicable or magical' (1984: 9). Bakhtin theorizes 'an absolute epic distance [that] separates the epic world from contemporary reality' (2005: 51). Joanna Paul further distinguishes epic from historical distance, allowing modern works to be 'epics without their necessarily originating or depicting the ancient world,' in which 'the present feels distant' (2013: 16–18). *Veneno* achieves this paradox of distance and immediacy through flashbacks that feel like journeys to another world yet collapse temporal and spatial boundaries through affect. Moving through memory and fantasy, the series embraces Cristina's self-mythologizing to evoke epic distance. A visually arresting instance of this opens episode two. As a *paella* simmers on a portable gas cooker in Paca's living room, Cristina recounts her exploits to Valeria, as her queer family from the *Parque del Oeste* look on, her vulgar remarks provoking uproarious laughter. As she serenades the group, song turns the domestic scene ritualistic, the homely and the epic merging in a shared act of remembrance.

Veneno depicts spatial and ritualistic journeys, thematizing multiple transitions. While working as an orderly in the hospital, Joselito (later Cristina) meets the woman who will initiate her transformation. On the rooftop, bathed in the amber light of sunset, a patient called Cristina Onassis offers Joselito not only access to hormones but also a fantastical lineage. Framed against the vast skyline of Madrid, their conversation

fuses confession and mythology. '*Me lo puse yo*' ('I named myself'), Cristina Onassis declares, recounting the tragedy of her namesake—the '*elegante, famosa, divina*' ('elegant, famous, divine') heiress Cristina Onassis—who died in a bathtub only days after inheriting her fortune.

By taking the name Cristina, Joselito transforms a fatal inheritance into a mode of self-fashioning. '*Me puse el nombre de una estrella*' ('I took the name of a star') she says, invoking both celebrity and the cosmic. The sequence's languid rhythm and open horizon visualize the tension between transcendence and precarity that structures *Veneno's* trans aesthetics. The rooftop becomes a threshold between genders, myth, and everyday life, one where, as Preciado writes, '*Lo que denominamos subjetividad no es sino la cicatriz que deja el corte en la multiplicidad de lo que habríamos podido ser*' ('What we call subjectivity is only the scar left by the cut in the multiplicity of what we might have been') (2019: 23). Cristina's naming enacts such a scar: a self-creation that acknowledges loss while opening to new multiplicities.

Later, this mythic lineage takes material form in the dress Cristina receives from her *madre trans* ('trans mother'): In her wardrobe, surrounded by mirrors and shimmering garments, Cristina explains that, just as Cristina Onassis had been her symbolic mother, she now becomes Valeria's. She places the dress in Valeria's hands, suggesting that one day Valeria might pass it on to her own 'daughter', along with her book on Cristina. With this gesture, *Veneno* renders trans heritage as both tactile and textual: the dress and the memoir operate as twin archives of touch and remembrance. Through this relay of name and garment, the series transforms mourning into continuity, articulating what José Esteban Muñoz calls 'a horizon imbued with potentiality', that is, 'a mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present' (2009: 1). The passing of the dress envisions a queer and trans futurity rooted in care, where affect and memory sustain collective life.

Coming midway through the series, episode four, *The Curse of the Onassis*, marks a turning point in Cristina's self-fashioning, intercutting moments of humiliation, mythmaking, and defiance to show how Cristina reworks lived experience through performance and fantasy. The episode's disorienting montage moves fluidly between timelines: Cristina, newly transitioned, receives a visit from her sister Mari Carmen; an older Cristina struggles with a televised scandal; and her mythic confrontation in the *Parque del Oeste* is staged. When Mari Carmen first sees Cristina after her transition, initial shock gives way to recognition as she remarks on her resemblance to their mother. The two then move before a dressing-room mirror, where Cristina's reflection is doubled and familial memory enters the frame. The moment visualizes Jay Prosser's (1998) 'mirror dynamic' both literally and

metaphorically, transforming autobiography into spectacle. As Prosser writes of the mirror-scene trope in trans autobiographies in particular: 'the split of the mirror captures the definitive splitting of the transsexual subject, freezes it, frames it schematically in narrative' (1998: 100). Here, the mirror becomes a site at which Cristina's self-recognition is immediately shadowed by the fear of maternal inheritance.

For Cristina, the mirror reveals a divided self-image, refracting the haunting of the past and the burden of inheritance. 'That's my biggest fear, Mari Carmen ... to be like Mama', she confides to her sister. A sudden cut transports us to the *Parque*. The song '*Dame Veneno*' by *Los Chunguitos* plays on the soundtrack as blue shadows envelop *La Veneno*. Striding in a red harem outfit, she confronts her nemesis in the hierarchy of workers, Fanny. The weather turns biblical—thunder, drenching rain—and they wrestle in the mud, kinetic handheld camerawork adding to the chaos. Cristina gains the upper hand, screaming as the camera circles them. In a flash, she is transformed into her mother as she strangles her combatant, the violence of her past erupting into the present. In a sudden shift to stylized body horror, Cristina's teeth tear off Fanny's nipple: a surreal eruption of memory into mythmaking, as *los Javis* depict the event just as she had claimed it happened earlier in the series while strapped to the lie detector.

As this scene unfolds, the series intersperses a scene of Valeria struggling to contain her mentor's volatility after the polygraph scandal, their relationship fracturing under the weight of Cristina's trauma and addiction. This overblown, mythic battle is thus juxtaposed with Cristina's ongoing despair in the present: drunk, erratic, and haunted by visions of her abusive partner, she lashes out at Valeria before retreating into solitude. Across these events, *los Javis* deploy their most 'epic' storytelling strategies—the emotional excess and sensory intensity of melodrama—to stage the coexistence of trauma and transcendence. These sequences are governed less by factual realism than by affective truth. They privilege emotional force over strict reconstruction, retelling experience with greater fidelity to feeling than to fact.

As Prosser observes, '[L]ike two mirrors, autobiography and transsexuality are themselves caught up in an interreflective dynamic, resembling, reassembling, and articulating each other' (1998: 103). In the *Parque*, Cristina and Fanny's fight is interrupted by the arrival of a group of neo-Nazis attacking the community of sex workers. Blood glistening on her lips, scythe raised high as neo-Nazis flee, her cry—'From now on, all of you will call me Cristina!'—marks her self-naming as both battle cry and rebirth. This convergence of autobiography, fantasy, and violence epitomizes *Veneno's* bio-epic form: it transforms the trans life story into a legend and

legacy of endurance, where memory itself becomes the stage of historical and mythical reclamation.

For trans folk, 'Sexuality can be thought of as deeply related to beauty, since the evaluation of a person's seductive power often lies in self-confidence, which derives from a reassuring way of thinking about one's body' (Mauriello, 2017: 58). This is more than personal; it is political. At the *Parque del Oeste*, *la Veneno* wears her beauty like armour. Throughout the series she repeatedly affirms the importance of being and feeling attractive. Financially crucial for her sex work, appearance becomes central to her self-conception. She recollects, 'Back then, there were four thousand prostitutes working in the *Parque del Oeste*'. The episode cuts to the park, and we see the image of a seemingly endless throng of women set to Bizet's 'Toreador March'. We hear Paca exclaim in voice over, 'Four thousand prostitutes? Tell the truth, it was thirty or forty!' Cristina shakes this off, taking full '*La Veneno*' flight, and resumes her tale. Key figures from her past are introduced onscreen, cat-walking through the misty night towards the camera like goddesses in lingerie. Of course, *la Veneno*'s turn is the sexiest. Suddenly, the *paella*, the sofa, and the whole gathering are present in the park, surrounded by the past. The domestic and the epic combine, as if we are invited to share in the communal meal and sharing of memories.

In episode six, *La sonrisa del pelicano* (*The Pelican's Smile*), Pepe Navarro's short-lived 1997 talk show, is cancelled. As the camera pulls back, the set is dismantled around Cristina: bright lights flicker and panels collapse while Leiva's *Nunca debiste cruzar el Mississippi* plays over the scene, its mournful arpeggios accompanying television's self-destruction. At the centre stands Cristina, clutching a live lamb, an emblem of both sacrifice and redemption. Philosopher Elizabeth Duval critiques this symbolism: '*El plató se derrumba y la Veneno sujeta al Agnus Dei... La misma televisión fue responsable de su dolor*' ('The set collapses and *la Veneno* holds the *Agnus Dei* [...] The very television that made her a symbol was responsible for her pain') (2021: 108–109). Here, the televisual world that made Cristina famous collapses around her. Earlier, singer Juan Antonio Canta had warned Cristina, '*La tele te va a pedir estribillo. Y si les das estribillo, te quedas en eso*' ('Television will ask you for a refrain; and if you give it to them, that's all you'll ever be'). *Estribillo*—the refrain—suggests here the repeated hook or catchphrase to which television reduces her. By the episode's end, that warning returns as a requiem, with splendour and collapse held in the same frame.

Beyond Trauma: Trans joy and the dance scape

At the height of its mythmaking, *Veneno* turns inward once more, converting the grand gesture of the epic into an intimate choreography of touch. This section examines two key sequences, exposing the contrasting negative and positive affect each arouses and considering the (dis)orientations produced in each case. To do this, I draw on two concepts theorised by Wibke Straube (2014): the naked-body-shot and the ‘exit scape’. Straube defines ‘exit scapes’ as ‘moments of intense filmic engagement that temporarily allow an escape from the cinematic dominance of the negative affects of constraining scenes’ (2014: 48). In these sequences, trans characters experience an uplifting, freeing break from the oppression of the threat of violence that seeps in and out of the mediated world. Such moments of affective identification allow the viewer not only to enter this realm, but also to ‘be temporarily constructed as trans—they become transing subjects in their feelings for and with the character’ (2014: 49).

The third episode of *Veneno* closes with a sequence that demonstrates the utopic pleasure of trans joy through a form of ‘exit scape’, the *dance scape*. The dancer is Cristina, in a glittery red dress, with a boa and lipstick to match her dramatic outfit. The phenomenology of dance, both on and off the screen, ‘draws on issues of contact between bodies and spaces as well as movement and links them to an understanding of becoming embodied through space and through temporalities’ (2014: 79). Typically for the series, multiple timelines and characters merge. We see a younger Cristina (played by Jedet), walking on stage in the Torremolinos nightclub to lip-sync in drag as ‘*la Coneja*’ (‘The Doe Rabbit’). With frequent cuts, we slip into the present, where an older Cristina (Isabel Torres) is reenacting the show for her friends in Paca’s lounge, looking fabulous in the same outfit and supported by cries of admiration from her trans kin.

The carnal thrill of the sensual dance performance enfolds the present-day Cristina with her past self during a turning point in her transition, touching, at the same time, on Valeria’s own transition. The song on the soundtrack—which lends the episode’s title, ‘*Acaríciame*’ (‘Caress Me’), its name—is a sensual disco-pop ‘sexadelic’ record from 1980 by Susana Estrada, a provocative sex symbol during the period of transition to democracy post-Franco. The lyrics conjure the intimacy and eroticism of touch, ‘*Tú me has hecho vibrar sintiendo tu piel / Me has sabido dar lo que yo esperé*’ (‘You’ve made me vibrate feeling your skin / You’ve given me what I’ve been waiting for’). As the song reaches its instrumental break, which provocatively features Estrada’s orgiastic moans, we are thrust into two new settings, interrupting the dance sequence. One portrays Valeria in the present, while the other features Cristina in the past, both

experiencing sexual bliss with respective partners. A rapid succession of images appear in split-screen—horizontal, vertical, and diagonal—confusing the coherent sense of where one body begins and another ends.

Ahmed writes, 'Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy' (2006: 107). The disorientation produced by the temporal and carnal confusion of this scene continually shifts the dramatic focus between the two protagonists' lives. We might understand this as a necessary precondition for the (gender)queer *orientation* that follows. This dance scape reveals the sensorial techniques enabling positive identification between Cristina and Valeria through an erotics of movement and touch, which allows us access as viewers to the exit scape: '[T]he characters create worlds together in their dance movements, the affirmation of being in touch and open towards each other allows me as an entrant to feel utopian possibilities of different worlding in these scenes, of how things could be different' (Straube, 2014: 117).

Occasions of potential disorientation for (trans) spectators in *Veneno* are those featuring what Straube has termed the 'naked-body-shot', where 'the trans character is shown as partly naked, exposing breasts, a flat chest, or genitals that are in "discrepancy" with the gender identity of the character' (2014: 46). The *Acaríciame* dance sequence is immediately preceded by a portrayal of a powerful, re-orienting turning point for Cristina during a trip to Bangkok, which she won by participating in a reality dating show. At this stage, presenting as a gay man, she visits a bar and is stunned by the trans performer singing on stage. Cristina finds her way backstage, and we catch a glimpse of the remarkably beautiful singer loosening their silken robes to reveal their naked body.

This naked-body-shot differs from stereotypical onscreen nudity, identified by Straube, which conventionally 'conceptualize[s] the trans characters as untruthful, deceptive and fake' (2014: 46). Here, Cristina's nudity is self-authored, rather than punitive. We are encouraged through the accompanying uplifting music, softly erotic red lighting, and our perceived knowledge of what Cristina feels in this moment, to sense the image of the naked body as revealing of an authentic truth. The disorientation that has marked Cristina's life so far is stilled, as sexual desire, sexuality, and gender identity now blur in a transformation of her subjectivity. In voice-over, Cristina explains her realization that her previous infatuation with a boy named Tomas had proven to be just a distraction: the key to her identity and happiness was not to be found in another, but in herself. 'I was so obsessed with Tomas, I was unable to see beyond that,' she says.

La Veneno's notoriety rested in part on the scandalous way she would expose her body. While her appearances on *Mississippi*, flashing her breasts at host Pepe Navarro while delivering iconic catchphrases, portray an agency and self-ownership over the presentation of her body, the series depicts moments where that control is lost. One of these involves being cajoled into performing in a cheap and degrading pornographic film, by her abusive and exploitative partner, Angelo. According to Cristina, it was Angelo's actions that also led to her imprisonment for insurance fraud after he set fire to her apartment—being illiterate, she had signed an insurance form without knowing what she was purchasing.

Episode eight, the series' penultimate, tells the story of Cristina's imprisonment and depicts transphobic violence at its harshest—it is the heaviest, most sombre episode in tone. The gender euphoria of the dance scape scene feels a lifetime away from the harshness of incarceration, as she is violently misgendered and forced into a male prison—Cristina's transition is not legally recognized by the state. (On arrival, the guards shave off her long hair.) The emotional intensity of the episode is heightened as these traumatic memories are interspersed with flash forwards in which we see Cristina and Paca's relationship deteriorating. Cristina is unhappy, unstable, and self-destructively renounces her friendship with Paca. This is especially devastating with the knowledge that Paca is playing herself and must relive these traumatic memories through her performance. The episode again foregrounds Cristina's body, but this time it strips her of control over it. Where the earlier naked-body shot stages exposure as self-authored and affirming, prison renders it coercive and disciplinary: Cristina is forced to strip for the guards, and she is sexually assaulted by both guards and fellow inmates.

Straube finds that the touch longed for by trans characters which is 'achieved in dance' is 'always connected with the actuality of violent touch, or of neglect, or of not being touched at all' (2014: 117). This precise proximity of a haptics of pleasure juxtaposed with pain is demonstrated in *Veneno*, especially in the contrasting deployment of the naked-body-shot with this scene of involuntarily nakedness. In the latter, we could find a repetition of the kind of scopical violence that the series itself has critiqued in the polygraph sequence at the beginning of the series. However, when considered in conjunction with the joyful haptics of the dance scape, together with the emancipatory potential embodied by Valeria's transgender gaze as a young child, the series' overarching narrative aims not to reduce trans experience to violence but to combine the stark reality of Cristina's life with more hopeful, even utopic visions of queer kinship.

Conclusion

In *Veneno*, Cristina's path-breaking visibility extends through Valeria, who learns to see her body differently. Their connection stages a relay of generations: Cristina's life, marked by solitude and spectacle, creates the necessary conditions for Valeria's supported transition. The series thus locates trans becoming within relation and community—between mothers and daughters, mentors and protégées, myth and memory. As Evans reminds us, '[W]e fall into the trap of telling stories of competing experience instead of commonalities and difference [...] we fail to see queer and trans* lives as associative, as part of elaborate histories of relationality, of kinships bad as well as good' (2023: 7). *Veneno's* power lies in this associative texture. Its heroine is 'neither whore nor saint'; she is a figure through whom viewers experience the bodily and affective intensities of (a) trans life.

Duval claims that *Veneno* canonizes Cristina in its final moments: '*La Veneno acaba en un sofá, llena de sangre, para redimirnos de nuestros pecados*' ('*La Veneno* ends on a sofa, covered in blood, to redeem us of our sins'), turning her into both icon and martyr (2021: 103). Yet the series' mythic form converts this sacrifice into an *exit scape*. Its affective excess refuses the demand, noted by Rage (2023), that trans images be either tragic or exemplary. As Rage writes, '[A]n instance of joy does not negate the violence [...] but it does evidence that trans* joy is beyond the reach of these same systems' (2023: 56). In *Veneno*, that joy is produced formally and affectively rather than offered as a moral corrective, a way of feeling history through spectacle.

Read as both a queer and trans bio-epic, *Veneno* expands what history the biopic can reenvision. It transforms the televisual archive into an affective one, where memory, myth, and community intertwine. In this light, *Veneno* offers a historical correction: Just as Vegas' book sought to rescue Cristina's legacy from infamy or (worse?) oblivion, the show's creators have crafted an audio-visual record of Cristina *la Veneno* that is both historical and fantastic, ensuring her enduring place in trans history, one as abrupt, in-your-face, strident—and fabulous—as the original, both hardened by unspeakable trauma and softened by beautifully flawed human relationships.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) through a Short-Term Research Grant.

James Cleverley is Lecturer in European Studies at the University of Melbourne. Their research focuses on queer and trans screen cultures, memory, and contemporary European film and television. They have published work on post-unification German cinema, queer temporality, and trans representation in audiovisual media. Their current research examines trans cultural memory, genre, and affect across European screen texts.



References

Ahmed, S., 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ander, Á., 2020. 'Así es 'Veneno', la épica historia de un icono televisivo y ejemplo de visibilidad trans' ['Such is 'Veneno': The Epic Story of a Television Icon and a Model of Trans Visibility']. *Cinemanía*. [online] 30 Mar. Available at: <https://www.20minutos.es/cinemanía/series/veneno-atresmedia-javis-trans-148146/> (last accessed 17 April 2026).

Bakhtin, M.M., 2005. 'Epic and Novel' in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. M.J. Hoffman and P.D. Murphy, eds. [online] Duke University Press, pp. 43–60. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822386599-006> (last accessed 17 April 2026).

Betancourt, M., 2021. 'Veneno' Creators on Bringing Queer Icons to the Screen' [online]. *Vulture*, 19 August. Available at: <https://www.vulture.com/article/javier-ambrossi-javier-calvo-veneno-interview.html> (last accessed 17 April 2026).

Donaldson, L.F., 2013. 'Performing Performers: Embodiment and intertextuality in the Contemporary Biopic' in B. Vidal and T. Brown, eds. *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, Routledge, pp. 103–117.

Duval, E., 2021. *Después de lo trans: sexo y género entre la izquierda y lo identitario [After Trans: Sex and Gender between the Left and Identity Politics]*. La Caja Books.

Elley, D., 1984. *The Epic Film: Myth and History*. London: Routledge.

Evans, J.V., 2023. 'The Queer Art of History: Queer Kinship after Fascism' in *The Queer Art of History*. [online] Duke University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478024361> (last accessed 17 April 2026).

Faye, S., 2021. *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*. Penguin Books.

- Freeman, E., 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* [online]. Duke University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822393184> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- García López, M., 2024. 'Millennial Screen Cultures in Spain: Queering the Mainstream*'. *Bulletin of Spanish Visual Studies*, 8(2), pp. 257–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24741604.2024.2392416>.
- Gill-Peterson, J., 2018. *Histories of the Transgender Child*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Halberstam, J., 2018. *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*. University of California Press.
- Halberstam, J.J., 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* [online]. New York University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814790892.001.0001> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Heyam, D.K., 2022. *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender*. Basic Books.
- Horvat, A., 2024. "I say! Neither a Whore nor a Saint": Transgender memory, Spanish popular television, and media histories in *Veneno*'. *NECSUS*, 13(1), pp. 157–179. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/22808> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Horvat, A., 2021. *Screening Queer Memory: LGBTQ Pasts in Contemporary Film and Television*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Ingenschay, D., 2023. 'Temática trans* en la pantalla actual: La *Veneno*, de Javier Ambrossi y Javier Calvo, *Una mujer fantástica*, de Sebastián Lelio' ['Trans Themes on the Contemporary Screen: 'La *Veneno*' by Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo, 'A *Fantastic Woman*', by Sebastián Lelio']. *EU-topías*, 25(0), pp. 5–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7203/eutopias.25.27119> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Jay, M., 1988. 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*. H. Foster, ed. Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 3–23.
- Keegan, C.M., 2022. 'On the Necessity of Bad Trans Objects'. *Film Quarterly*, 75(3), pp. 26–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2022.75.3.26> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Keegan, C.M., Horak, L. and Steinbock, E., 2018. 'Cinematic/Trans*/Bodies Now (and Then, and to Come)'. *Somatechnics*, 8(1), pp.1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2018.0233> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Koch-Rein, A., Haschemi Yekani, E. and Verlinden, J.J., 2020. 'Representing trans: visibility and its discontents'. *European Journal of English Studies*, 24(1), pp. 1–12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2020.1730040> (last accessed 17 April 2026).

- Linge, I., 2023. *Queer Liveability: German Sexual Sciences and Life Writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Malatino, H., 2022. *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Marks, L.U., 2000. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Martínez-Expósito, A., 2022. *La vida iba en serio: autobiografías hispánicas de la diversidad sexual [Life Was No Joke: Hispanic Autobiographies of Sexual Diversity]*. University of Lleida.
- Mauriello, M., 2017. 'What the Body Tells Us: Transgender Strategies, Beauty, and Self-consciousness' in *Talking Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Embodiment, Gender and Identity* [online]. E. Rees, ed. Springer International Publishing, pp. 55–73. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63778-5_4 (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Mocarski, R. et al., 2019. 'The Rise of Transgender and Gender Diverse Representation in the Media: Impacts on the Population'. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 12(3), pp. 416–433. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz031> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Oaks, J., 2022. 'HBO Max's Veneno & 9 Other Great TV Shows with Trans Main Characters' [online]. *ScreenRant*, 5 Mar. Available at: <https://screenrant.com/hbo-max-veneno-other-tv-shows-trans-characters/> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Ortega, A., 2020. "'Veneno" de los Javis será "muy épica en lo emocional", adelanta el director Álex Rodrigo'. *eCartelera* [online], 23 Feb. Available at: <https://www.ecartelera.com/noticias/veneno-los-javis-muy-epica-emocional-director-alex-rodrigo-59841/> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Paul, J., 2013. *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Preciado, P.B., 2019. *Un apartamento en Urano: Crónicas del cruce [An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing]*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Prosser, J., 1998. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. Columbia University Press.
- Rage, S.S., 2023. 'Trans* Joy as Resistance: Possessor, Tangerine, and Affective Trans* Embodiment under Capitalism'. *Screen Bodies*, 8(2), pp. 42–59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/screen.2023.080205> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Raha, N. and van der Drift, M. 2024. *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds*. London: Pluto Press.
- Santas, C., 2007. *The Epic in Film: From Myth to Blockbuster*. Rowman & Littlefield.

- Smith, P.J., 2021. 'The Javis: Theater, Cinema, Television, Streaming' in *Reimagining History in Contemporary Spanish Media: Theater, Cinema, Television, Streaming*, Vol. 1, NED edition [online]. Modern Humanities Research Association. pp. 9–28. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2dzr28.5> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Straube, W., 2014. *Trans Cinema and Its Exit Scapes: A Transfeminist Reading of Utopian Sensibility and Gender Dissidence in Contemporary Film*. Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies.
- Straube, W., 2020. 'Introduction: Visibility and Screen Politics after the Transgender Tipping Point'. *Screen Bodies*, 5(1), pp. 56–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/screen.2020.050105> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Stryker, S., 2006. '(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies' in *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. pp. 1–17.
- Sutton, K., 2021. 'Standing Outside Oneself: Transgender Gazing in Antje Rávik Strubel's *Kältere Schichten der Luft* (2007) and in *Den Wäldern des Menschlichen Herzens* (2016)'. *German Life and Letters*, 74(2), pp. 224–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glal.12300> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Turner, F., 2017. *Epic: Form, Content, and History*. New York: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351296847> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Transparent*, 2014. Amazon Studios [online]. Available from: Amazon Prime.
- Valcuende del Río, J.M., et al., 2023. 'Places of recreation, places of memory: tourism in the heritagisation of LGBT+ identities'. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 29(1–2), pp. 49–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2169331> (last accessed 17 April 2026).
- Vegas, V., 2016. *iDigo! Ni puta ni santa. Las memorias de La Veneno [I Say! Neither a Whore nor a Saint: The Memoirs of La Veneno]*. Self-published.
- Veneno*, 2020. Dir. Javier A. and Javier C., Atresplayer Premium [online].

To cite this article:

Cleverley, J., 2026. 'Veneno (2020) and the trans bio-epic: Queering remembrance between trauma and joy'. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 13(2), 1–24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v13i2.1656>.

ⁱ All Spanish-to-English translations are the author's own.