

**Queer Temporalities, the Gothic, and Representations of Female Queer
Subjectivities and Non-Normative Desires in Late Victorian and Neo-Victorian
Literature**

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Abstract

This thesis is interested in the underexplored links between queer temporalities and the Gothic, focusing on the potential of their intersection to facilitate representations of female queer subjectivities and non-normative desires. It aims to explore various forms of queer temporality configured through the strategic use of Gothic elements in the selected Victorian and neo-Victorian literature. Recent theories about queer temporalities developed by critics, especially Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, Elizabeth Freeman, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Valerie Rohy, and Annamarie Jagose provide the frameworks for my analysis. The thesis examines the work of five female literary writers from the late nineteenth century to the present. These authors engage with and reach back to the Victorian era to depict female sexualities that are non-normative, unstable, or indeterminate. Each chapter addresses various ways in which the Gothic disrupts conventional models of linear time and creates possible queer moments in which female queer sexualities can emerge. Chapter One explores Vernon Lee's supernatural tales, focusing on the uncanny transhistorical bonds between women from different periods as a form of queer resistance to reproductive futurity. Chapter Two investigates texts by Charlotte Mew in which queer subjects struggle to accept their non-normative sexualities. Mew's short story "Passed" is read in light of both Halberstam's "queer time and space" and the idea of Victorian Urban Gothic. Her poem "The Changeling" suggests an association between queer childhood development, Victorian degeneration discourse, and the figure of the monstrous fairy. Chapter Three considers Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. It demonstrates the role of Gothic motifs involving anachronism, such as haunting

and the spectre, in Hall's negotiation of sexological identity categories of the sexual invert. Chapter Four examines Angela Carter's reimagining of Victorian sexological discourse, which constructs queer people as temporally backward. *Nights at the Circus* suggests a utopic championing of the so-called primitive using abject and carnivalesque elements. Drawing on Annamarie Jagose's theory of the logic of sexual sequence, Chapter Five considers the notion of sequence which has rendered lesbianism as second-order and belated, in Sarah Waters's *Affinity*. It demonstrates how the queer temporalities of spiritualism, alongside the use of neo-Victorian historical fiction and the Female Gothic, facilitate Waters' critical engagement with sexual sequence.

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Introduction

My project builds upon recent work on queer temporalities that seeks to find new means of thinking about sexuality and temporality in tandem. This thesis explores the relationship between the utilisation of the Gothic and queer time in a selection of late Victorian and twentieth-century neo-Victorian fiction, focusing on the literary representations of female dissident subject positions and queer desire. I chose the texts related to the Victorian period for my analysis because sexual knowledge, specifically around sexual identity categories, was unstable in the nineteenth century. The thesis seeks to examine the strange connection between Victorian Gothicism and the recent critical turn to queer temporality. Specifically, this study considers the ways that queer temporalities and the Gothic work hand in hand to help writers render queer temporalities suitable for the emergence of female queer desires and unconventional ways of being in time. The Gothic is instrumental to various ways of configuring queer temporality in the Victorian representation of female queer subjectivities and non-normative desires. To explore this argument, the thesis analyses female-authored texts by Vernon Lee, Charlotte Mew, Radclyffe Hall, Angela Carter, and Sarah Waters. The texts discussed are Lee's "Oke of Okehurst" (1886) and "Legend of Madame Krasinska" (1890), Mew's "Passed" (1894) and "The Changeling" (1916), Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), and Waters' *Affinity* (1999). The primary analysis approach combines the application of historicizing and queer theories.

The introductory chapter outlines essential aspects related to this project. The first section examines the terminology used in the thesis, and the following

section summarises important ideas from key theorists in the queer temporality field. The next section addresses the original angle of the thesis by considering the intersection between queer temporality and the Gothic. It explores existing scholarship on the dynamic relationship between the two: Gothic rhetoric in queer temporality theorisation and queer temporality in Gothic literature and criticism. The next section provides the historical contexts of the nineteenth century in terms of sexuality discourse and the Victorian era's profound link with the supernatural. The last section presents the rationale for text selection, thesis structure and chapter outlines.

Terminology and Scope of Study

First, I will define key terms and outline the scope of the research. This thesis explores female queer subjectivities and non-normative desires, including female-female desire and the identities of those who experience such desire. It is not focused on sexual identity per se. Rather, this project explores a spectrum of queer female subjectivities and non-normative sexual behaviours ranging from unclearly defined desires to non-reproductive expressions of queer heterosexuality and female same-sex practices.¹ I use the terms female queer subjectivities and non-normative desires. These terms are, at times, also limiting, but they nonetheless provide a better sense of historic specificity than the term "lesbians". This is necessitated by the fact that identity categories in the late nineteenth and

¹ The thesis draws on the concept of queer heterosexuality from Rachel Carroll's *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Contemporary Fiction* (2012). Carroll explores the topic of heterosexual queerness, arguing that some expressions of heterosexuality can be at odds with heteronormativity. She calls attention to heterosexual identities which do not comply with familial and reproductive norms.

early twentieth centuries were not as clearly defined or fully formed and are less stable than the crystallised modern sense of sexual identity. The term “lesbian”, as David Halperin comments, describes a specific twentieth-century concept (*How to Do the History of Homosexuality* 53). As such, my choice of terminology is historically contingent.

The term “female queer”, which is used together as adjectives in the title, captures both the specificity and fundamental indeterminacy investigated in this project. The term presents the conceptual assemblage of the thesis: queer theory and feminist politics intersect and coexist in the analyses. Consequently, this thesis bears in mind the complex intersections between concepts of sexuality and ideas of gender. The politics of gender are a significant factor in examining representations of “female” same-sex relations.² According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, gender and sexuality are inextricable from one another and, at the same time, distinctive (30). Critics who advocate the inclusion of gender in the consideration of the history of sexuality have situated female homoeroticism within feminist discourses.³ Another scholar who believes that there has been an alliance

² On the issue of gender-separatist and gender-liminal models, see Annamarie Jagose’s *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* 4–8.

³ For example, Bernadette Brooten links patriarchal power with female sexuality. In *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, she claims that although many things have changed since the pre-Christian era, the “long term structures of male dominance that so strongly characterise women’s experience of sexuality has remained constant” (23–24). Lesbian feminist criticism usually regards heterosexuality as a privileged position in a patriarchal society. Heterosexuality, together with the constructed concept of ideal femininity, can be used to regulate women. Female same-sex desire leads to relationships among women which do not depend on men. Therefore, the existence of such desire threatens a male-dominated society and results in cultural anxiety. In “Lesbian Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties”, Bonnie Zimmerman notes that lesbian desire exists outside patriarchal conventions and

between lesbianism and feminism is Adrienne Rich. In *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), Rich emphasises the unique gendered dimensions of lesbian experience, which differ from other marginalised sexualities: “the lesbian experience [is], like motherhood, a profoundly *female* experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities we cannot comprehend as long as we simply bracket it with other sexually stigmatized existences” (136). The thesis focuses on women while simultaneously acknowledging that queer sexualities expand and challenge conventional understandings of femininity.

Simultaneously, the term “queer” is suitable to reveal sexualities as fractured and fluid as this thesis will interrogate. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “queer” as “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character” (26). In *Tendencies* (1993), Sedgwick refers to queer as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8). This thesis views “queer” as a concept that reaches for openness and refuses to settle in a singular meaning. The term “queer” not only functions in this thesis as an adjective for sexuality but also for the rendering of peculiar temporalities. This project uses the term in its broadest possible sense to address a range of different non-normative configurations and experiences of time.

gender dualisms. Thus, lesbian desire functions as excess within the heterosexual economy, disrupting the status quo (4).

Queer Temporalities

This section reviews key concepts and debates from the burgeoning scholarly interest in queer temporalities.⁴ The foundational critical works on queer temporality discussed here also profoundly influence my analysis in this thesis and will be integrated into my textual analysis in the chapters. To begin with, critics have acknowledged queer theory's temporal turn. For example, Elizabeth Freeman argues that "temporality has inflected queer theory from its outset" (*Time Binds* xii). Nonetheless, studies of queer temporalities have evolved in multiple directions. According to David Halperin, "queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (*Saint Foucault* 62). However, what is *the normal, the legitimate, and the dominant* conception of time? The prevailing rendition of normative time is "straight time", which is linear, teleological, and progressive, and underpinned by heteronormative ideals. For example, the critic Tom Boellstorff writes that "straight time is shaped by linked discourses of heteronormativity, capitalism, modernity and apocalypse" (228). Heteronormativity, another key idea explored and challenged in this thesis, refers to the assumption that various institutions present heterosexuality as default and the only valid model of sexuality. Heteronormativity has been embedded in larger structures, including moral, social, and legal structures and institutional practices, to position non-heterosexual forms of sexuality as deviant. Heteronormativity – with its

⁴ For a comprehensive introduction to queer temporalities theories, see *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* (2011), edited by Ben Davies and Jana Funke (1-15). See also Carolyn Dinshaw's "Theorizing queer temporalities: A roundtable discussion" (177-195) and Elizabeth Freeman's Introduction in the special edition of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on queer temporality (159-176).

endorsement of reproductive heterosexuality – is intimately bound up with the temporal movement of linear progress. In other words, “straight time” that upholds heteronormativity flows towards conventional milestones, moving to the future in a linear manner through marital and familial institutions.

Jack Halberstam’s concept of queer temporalities opposes heteronormativity and develops, at least in part, “in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (*In a Queer Time and Place* 1). Halberstam, whose ideas are cited throughout this thesis, suggests an alternate timeframe for individuals’ life stories: queer time is “the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence–early adulthood–marriage–reproduction–child rearing–retirement–death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility” (182). Halberstam’s concept of a “stretched-out adolescence” is a way of retaining the possibilities of the moment before hurrying forward into futurity (153). There are, however, many other ways to achieve queer time. Halberstam suggests the possibility of different modes of living and that queer lives open up other kinds of temporalities, arguing that “queer lives exploit some potential for a difference in a form that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 70). One of the persisting concepts in queer temporality studies is that queer time rejects reproduction and longevity. As Halberstam articulates, queer time “leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (*In a Queer Time and Place* 4).

For Valerie Rohy, “straight time” is not just heterosexual, but a form of temporality that “has, in tandem with the cult of reproductive futurism, served systematically to devalue queer subjects” (*Anachronism and its Others* xiv). A few studies on queer temporalities have considered queer time as something opposed to the future and its concomitant reproduction. Lee Edelman urges resistance and rejection of the familiar linear, consequential, and reproductive futurity. Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), one of the most influential and polemical texts in queer theory, is emblematic of the anti-social turn in queer theory. Edelman proposes a radical queer politics of temporality that rejects the dominant temporality of normative “reproductive futurity” (4). The queer, for Edelman, is outside of this dominant political narrative that privileges a “viable political future” (4). Edelman encourages queers to embrace inconsequential moments of *jouissance* and death drive for their resistance. He also calls for a rejection of the figure of the Child. Edelman states that queerness “names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’” (3). Edelman asserts that the figure of the child builds the symbolic system and organises the very logic of reproductive futurity.

The figure of the child has become a crucial area of critical inquiry in the field of queer temporality studies more widely. In addition to Edelman, Katherine Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child, Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009) is a seminal work which provides an essential critical ground for the topic of the queer child. Stockton examines the figure of the queer child in various literary and film representations. She argues that “there are ways of growing that are not growing up” (11), and the queer child might not grow up but grow “sideways” (13).

The growth of the queer child is not created by moving through certain stages. Rather, the child might take on “unruly contours of growing that don’t bespeak continuance” (13). Stockton’s project is to shape this figure of the child by considering how the child does not grow up in a straight time but appears through metaphors of delay, suspension, backward birthing, and sideways growth.

Another way to resist straight time is to deviate from a chronology by being out of the present moment. According to Jeremy Tambling, “[t]hinking about anachronism means considering what is out of time, what resists chronology” (1). *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides two different definitions of the concept of anachronism. The first meaning is “an error in computing time, or fixing dates; the erroneous reference of an event, circumstance, or custom to a wrong date”. Another meaning is “anything done or existing out of date; hence, anything which was proper to a former age, but is, or if it existed, would be, out of harmony with the present” (300). Rohy explains her use of the term “anachronism” to address “a range of temporal anomalies, from backwardness to prematurity, regression to anticipation, the ‘primitive’ to the future perfect” (xiv). Rohy explores anachronism in relation to the stigmatisation of queer subjects and people of colour, proposing that categories like homosexuality or Blackness have been culturally framed as regressive and as opposed to modernity.

Turning towards the past through the body is another way of queering time. In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Freeman posits an encounter with the past through the body, viewing the body as an agent of history to demonstrate how bodily erotics forge relationships and communities across time. In her conceptualization of “temporal drag”, the past returns and disrupts the

chronological movement of time. She explains it as “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present” (“Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations” 728). In addition to the idea concerning temporal dislocation, Freeman also theorises the concept of chrononormative time as temporal regulation. Chrononormativity is a mechanism of temporal organisation for standardising a “productive” temporal scheme and naturalising power relations. Freeman discusses the concept in detail in *Time Binds*: “[i]n a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and changes” (4). Chrononormativity has reproductive implications. Freeman contends that “naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation” and the goal of this is to produce “maximum productivity” from individual human bodies (3). In this context, reproduction can be viewed as a form of productivity.

In addition to the logic of progress, reproduction, and futurity, the concept of straight time is extended to be associated with modernity. This connection is based on conventional assumptions around progress, which entail the belief that one generation will be replaced by another generation that is better, more advanced, and more modern. The link between a generational movement and progress toward modernity is thus applied to sexuality. In contrast to modernity, the queer has been depicted as temporally backwards and bound with primitive periods. Freeman proposes that sexually dissident subjects are figured as temporally backwards (“Introduction” 162). This thought also relates to the way in which queer time intersects with racial dimensions. For example, there was a fertile nexus between sexual development and the discourse of evolution and degeneration,

especially in the Victorian epoch. In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (2011), E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen state that “the understanding of homosexuality as an atavistic condition in the nineteenth-century discourses of evolution and racial sciences – a notion that haunts queers through homophobic political discourse even in this century – reinforces the sense that queerness is marked by a peculiar form of untimeliness” (7).

Rohy is another critic who explores sexuality and nineteenth-century evolutionary discourse. Rohy examines a temporal analogy between the heteronormative timelines of individual development and the timeline of human history. She argues that homosexuality has been historically labelled as regressive and premature (“Ahistorical” 67). Tracing such ideas back to the nineteenth century, Rohy notes the association between a racialised view of sexual identity and evolutionary discourses. The notion of arrested development, specifically, is crucial as queers are often conceptualized as stuck in an immature stage of development or halted growth. For example, the nineteenth-century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing employed evolutionary discourse to explain a form of arrested development in sexual inversion. He believed that sexual inversion “was troubling evidence that homosexuals were arrested at a more primitive stage of evolutionary development than normal (i.e., heterosexual people)” (Rohy 5). Theories of primitivism were used in pseudoscientific racism to represent homosexuality as an atavistic sign of evolutionary and individual regression in order to explain sexual inversion (Rohy 5). To Krafft-Ebing, “[h]omosexual inverts, because they blurred the boundaries between the sexes – either as masculine women or effeminate men were regarded as either ‘unfinished’ specimens of

stunted evolutionary growth (a status they share with savages) or as evidence of retrogression similar to inborn criminality” (Terry 46). Rohy contends that queer subjects as well as subjects of colour have all been associated with backwardness. In other words, queer people have been figured as temporally backwards in the same way as many people who were racialised as non-white.

In the diverse conceptual landscape of queer temporalities, some strands of thought are not exclusively rooted in backwardness and negativity. These critics believe queer time can also occur in positive and creative ways that lead to futurity. For instance, queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz sees beyond loss and self-destruction and proposes a politics of hope and queer utopia in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009). For Muñoz, queerness “exists as an ideality” and “is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present” (1). He encourages collectivity and idealism over realism and negativity. Similarly, Tim Dean dismisses negativity and proposes queer futures. Becoming queer is “an interminable enterprise of not negation, but invention” (140) and such resistance does not “negate futurity but, rather, unfolds incalculable futures” (128).

Queer temporalities also have a significant role in the realm of history. Some scholars argue for a kind of history that is constructed through the queer relations between times. Such a history opposes traditional historicism, which usually progresses in a single linear and sequential narrative. In *Getting Medieval* (1999), Caroline Dinshaw observes the past and present moments that fuse and touch each other. Dinshaw notes that queer history is not sequential, stating that “the absolute opposition cannot hold, the past cannot be used simply to ground the

present” (43). Similarly, Dana Luciano describes queer historiography as “what it means to think history as something other than a linear chronology, a public record of steady ‘progress’ enabled and stabilized by the domestic-familial reproduction of successive generations” (123). Carla Freccero is another critic who discusses a queer turn within historiography. According to Freccero, “the ideology critique of some kinds of history writing (the kernel of what ‘queering temporality’ is about) has been to question eschatology, the fulfilment in time of a certain forward movement tending toward revelation, or its secular counterpart, teleology, the tending of a historical narrative (or any narrative) toward a determined end that is its culmination or fulfilment” (“The Queer Time of Lesbian Literature: History and Temporality” 22). Freccero explores the queer ethics of a historical practice that eschews mastery of the past and permits the revisitation of a demand by the dead. Freccero contends that “haunting, ghostly apparition, reminds us that the past and the present are neither discrete nor sequential. The borderline between then and now wavers, wobbles and does not hold still” (196).

These blurred temporal boundaries and a non-sequential narrative of history are also found in writing about the Victorian past. One of the primary presumptions of this thesis is the notion that the Victorian possesses a haunting quality. Specifically, the Victorian era is ideal for practising queer history because of its complicated relationship with modernity and postmodernism. The relationship between the Victorian era and subsequent periods is not as simple as a succession from one to another: it does not lie in the distant past and refuses an absolute break with the present. For Cora Kaplan, the Victorian era is a complicated period as it could be “the origin of late twentieth-century modernity, its

antithesis, or both at once” (3). As such, it undoes the myth of modernism’s clean break with the immediate past. For Julian Wolfreys, the Victorian era is like a spectre that haunts modernity (3). Similarly, Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham explore the uncanny nature of the era and the understanding of Victorianism “as a revenant or a ghostly visitor from the past” (xv). Such a ghostly quality makes the Victorian period attractive to contemporary writers and results in the continual re-engagement with the era. Writing about the Victorian period from present-day points of view certainly inheres the act of queering history. “Neo-Victorian” is the term used to designate fictional rewritings of the Victorian period that have appeared since the 1960s. The fiction of the neo-Victorian genre, as Louisa Hadley argues, engages with the Victorian era either in plot, structure, or both (146-7).

The Gothic and Queer Temporalities

Acknowledging that the issue of time has contributed significantly to queer studies, this thesis asks two important questions: what does the Gothic offer to queer temporality, and what does the utilisation of a queer temporality lens offer to the Gothic? First, what is the Gothic? It is difficult to pin the term “Gothic” to a clear singular definition. Taking a historical approach and looking back to its root, the literary Gothic genre was first named for its link to “barbarous” northern tribes. In this context, the word Gothic conjures profound associations with the allegedly primitive past. David Punter and Glennis Byron argue that “Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilised” (*The Gothic* 7). The Gothic as a literary genre originated in the eighteenth century. Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was generally regarded as the first Gothic novel. Gothic fiction, however, has developed in multiple directions over time. All

works to be explored in this project contain Gothic elements to varying degrees, whether as a literary mode or Gothic sensibility.

“Gothic has, in a sense always been queer”, declared William Hughes and Andrew Smith (1). An increasing number of scholars in recent years have noted the conjunction between queer theory and the Gothic: the latter emblematises queerness in its broadest sense of being “strange”. The queer and the Gothic are also aligned in moving beyond an imposed identity category. For Edelman, queerness “can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17). One of the Gothic principles, as William Patrick Day claims, is undermining the notion of the stability of identity (7). Furthermore, transgression is often regarded as an essential component of the Gothic genre, according to critics. For example, Donna Heiland asserts that “Gothic fiction at its core is about transgressions of all sorts: across national boundaries, social boundaries, sexual boundaries, the boundaries of one’s own identity” (157). George Haggerty observes the link between Gothic and transgressive sexualities, designating transgressive social-sexual relations as “the most basic common denominator of Gothic writing” (*Queer Gothic* 2). Likewise, Paulina Palmer associates the Gothic with marginal sexualities. She notes that the eccentric style of Gothic writing is notable for portraying an unconventional and disruptive subject. This subject, Palmer argues, exists in marginality to the mainstream (*Lesbian Gothic* 1).

Gothic rhetoric has also subtly infused queer temporality theory. The imagery of ghosts and hauntings appear in some queer temporality texts. The ghost is a remnant from a previous time that should not exist in the present but does nonetheless, and this quality makes it particularly suited to discussions of

queer time and queer history. As previously mentioned, Freccero utilises ghostly imagery in her analysis of queer history. She regards “living with ghosts” as one way to conceive of an ethical relationship with history (78), suggesting an approach that would not “forget the dead” or “successfully mourn them” (78). Freccero’s “living with ghosts” acknowledges that the present is haunted by the past (80). Such affective relations also connect to pleasure and desire as, she states, “being haunted” is experienced as “profoundly erotic” (Freccero 91). In Kate Haffey’s introduction chapter of *Literary Modernism, Queer Temporality: Eddies in Time*, an important book that offers insights into the unconventional use of time in modernist literature, the author observes Gothic links in queer theoretical works. Sedgwick’s writing, Haffey notes, appears to be engaged in the type of “living with ghosts” that Freccero would later describe. In Haffey’s words, “[s]eemingly, the introduction to *Tendencies* (1993) is itself haunted, haunted by the suicides of queer teens, haunted by those who have died of AIDS, and haunted by the ghostly childhood selves of those who write queer theory” (9). Citing Sedgwick’s discussion on “the ontological crack between the living and the dead” (257), Haffey explains this idea as “a ‘queer moment’ in which multiple times come into contact: the dead adolescents remain present if only as ghosts, and the child is kept alive in the adult if only in the form of promises made across time” (9).

In addition to this indebtedness to Gothic spectrality, other Gothic-related discourses are present in queer temporality writing. For example, Freeman comments on queer temporality’s association with discourses of irrationality including the uncanny. Freeman elaborates, pointing to “the sensations that do not even count as emotions in a particular historical moment, such as the feelings of

uncanniness, untimeliness, belatedness, delay, and failure that suffuse so many queer performances” (163). The overlap of such temporal sensations and Gothic rhetoric will be illustrated in this project. Tales of the fantastic, the weird, the uncanny and the haunting will defy hegemonic constructions of time and its inflected normative heterosexual ideologies.

While the Gothic has pervaded theoretical works on queer temporalities, conversely, some fictional characters in Gothic fiction experience queer time. Time in Gothic literature manifests in the form of a relentless past that keeps haunting, multiple simultaneously present moments, or future possibilities. Haunting, specifically, is one of the vital Gothic tropes which exemplifies anachronism, and it is a component of existence that creates a discrepancy in linear chronological time. The publication of *Specters of Marx* in 1993 was a watershed moment for the study of haunting. In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida created the term “hauntology”. Hauntology provides a framework for exploring traces within a text, such as disembodied persons, history that lingers, and a past that intrudes on the present. Haunting becomes one of the most popular motifs in Gothic literature. Wolfreys’s observation exhibits how “haunting” is a term not solely restricted to the figure of spectral ghost – haunting exists in every discourse and is present in many forms. According to Wolfreys, examples of Gothic manifestation involve transgressing temporal boundaries between past and present:

At a formal level, the [Gothic] narrative drive presents the threat to space and identity, ontology or being as the arrival of that which disrupts the temporal coherence of the narrative. Something arrives, either from the past

returning and intruding into the present, or [. . .] other form of communication. (98)

He further describes that “the transgression of a present narrative moment” can occur variously through objects, memory and spectre to the formal level of a narrative structure (*Transgression* 98).

The notion of haunting is a significant strategy for literary representations of female homoeroticism. A notable example is the use of spectral imagery in relation to elusive yet persistent female homoerotic desire. The notion of invisibility has been acknowledged in lesbian scholarship.⁵ In *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993), Terry Castle traces texts from the eighteenth- to the twentieth-century Western literary canon, and she discovers the continual deployment of spectral imagery in these works. In this highly influential study, Castle argues that such spectral figures have paradoxically been employed to represent women who love women: namely, they reflect the notion of lesbian invisibility. Drawing on the quality of invisibility, Castle concludes that lesbians have been disembodied and decorporealised. She remarks that the “lesbian” is a ghostly figure who is “elusive, vaporous, and difficult to spot [. . .] in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight” (2). Although Castle acknowledges the invisible state of the apparitional lesbian, she argues that it is paradoxically powerful because lesbian ghosts and other spectral figures can haunt, return to and refuse to be banished from heteronormative society.

⁵ For instance, Adrienne Rich in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” writes that the “lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible” (26).

Few literary scholars are interested particularly in the connection between recent theories of queer temporality and Gothic fiction. George E. Haggerty's chapter entitled "Gothic Fiction and Queer Theory" in *Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion* is a rare example. Haggerty examines the ways in which Gothic fiction anticipates queer theory while also arguing that queer theory becomes helpful for considering the Gothic. Specifically, Haggerty demonstrates the potential of queer theory, especially queer temporality theories, for the textual analysis of Gothic fiction. Haggerty closely examines Gothic works ranging from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Haunting of Hill House* in relation to theoretical statements by key figures in queer temporality fields, such as Freccero, Edelman and Muñoz. For instance, Edelman's concept of the death drive is applied to a reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Haggerty explores how a dream worked as the source of this Gothic novel and applies a queer reading to Shelley's dream. Shelley dreamt of the process of making a hideous monster and its horrified creator. Haggerty argues that the figure of this creator "tormented by the monster he has created, this identification with a transgressive act (the genesis of a child without conventional sexual intercourse), the impossibility of hiding or hiding from such a monstrosity [. . .] this whole configuration could be called queer" (150-151). Haggerty makes use of Edelman's argument concerning the rejection of reproductive futurism in *No Future* to analyse the deadly creation. In making the creature from corpses, Shelley confronts life with death. This creation, thus, can be read in the context of the death drive.

Haggerty also applies a different vein of queer temporality theory to the Gothic by looking beyond negativity and destruction. Notably, Haggerty observes

Muñoz's politics of hope in some Gothic works. Referring to Muñoz's notion of queer longing that drives one onward "beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present" (1), Haggerty connects such hope to Anne Radcliffe's Gothic fiction. In Radcliffe's Gothic novels, the heroines still have a way to move forward despite the patriarchal tyranny that restrains female sexuality and sexual expression (156). Haggerty also views recent Gothic media, such as *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), as undermining reproductive futurity and constituting the spirit of liberation in the context of Muñoz's queer utopianism that looks beyond self-hatred and destruction (160).

Valerie Rohy is another academic who applies a queer temporality lens to Gothic literature. In an essay entitled "Ahistorical" (2006), Rohy discusses historical anamorphism in Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic short story "Ligeia" (1838). She uses a famous quote from Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* as an epigraph to her discussion of the problematic fear of practicing anachronism in reading the representation of female homosexuality in "Ligeia": "they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet" (176). Her reference to spectral temporality clearly indicates that readers can expect queer time to be a central topic of her discussion. Rohy raises questions about the problematic relationship between historicity and homosexuality. She argues for an anamorphic queer reading, showing that the charges of anachronism made against queer reading ignore its potentiality. Referring to Freud's theory of *Nachträglichkeit*, Rohy proposes that the strange temporality of *Nachträglichkeit* aids in the understanding of critical historicism through the obliquity of belatedness. *Nachträglichkeit*, or often translated in English as "belatedness", is important to

Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man in the case history "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis".⁶ The concept was employed by Freud to discuss experiences and memory traces from childhood that emerge later, and their significance may be revised to fit in with one's new experiences. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the original events did happen or were just strategically constructed. "Ligeia" is all about uncertainty, for both the narrator and sceptical readers. Only in hindsight, when turning back in narrative sequence and historical time, can one recognise queerness. Rohy writes that "[p]refiguring later tropes of lesbian sexuality, their relation [Ligeia and Rowena] appears as a predatory form of occult possession [. . .]" (62). She discusses the scene in which Ligeia's return from death seemingly possesses the dying Rowena and reads the scene as retroactively disclosing a queer intimacy between two women.

Haggerty's and Rohy's critical essays offer valuable studies of the intersection of Gothic and contemporary queer temporality. However, there is still a limited amount of detailed academic research on this topic. As such, this thesis argues that approaching the Gothic through the lens of queer temporality is an under-examined subject area with significant potential, especially for considering representations of nineteenth-century female queer sexualities and desires. My project is to examine (neo-)Victorian Gothicised narratives in direct relation to queer temporality. This conceptual framework provides alternative readings of the queer Victorian Gothic. Most queer temporality theories were largely influenced by political and cultural shifts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

⁶ The case is often called "The Wolf Man" because the patient had childhood dreams about wolves (Vice 70-72).

There is no question that the latter half of the twentieth century, together with occurrences like the AIDS epidemic, was an important historical juncture that prompted a reconsideration of the unfolding of life and temporality. Given its connection with death, the epidemic prompted people to reconsider “the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 2). While sustained scholarship on queer temporality has emerged over the last two decades, some of the ideas that are frequently discussed under the banner of queer time have a longer history. I believe that these contemporary theories are valuable frameworks for other contexts, including the Victorian era, a period that constituted unstable identities “which are not our modern, autonomous and self-contained senses of selfhood” (Knowles 682). Engaging queer temporality theories will lead the way towards new perspectives on queer female Victorian Gothic literature. Female writers, in the texts chosen here, undermine and/or subvert heterosexual identities by reaching back to the Victorian past (prior to the establishment of modern sexual identity categories) and using Gothicised temporalities.

History of Female Homosexuality during the Nineteenth Century

As mentioned above, the texts explored in this project go back to a time in the nineteenth century when sexological concepts were nascent, and indeterminacy surrounded the concept of sexual identity. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick argues that there is no clear-cut shift in the history of sexuality. Consequently, her theoretical intervention promotes overlapping, incoherent and contradictory forms of sexuality (44–46). The construction of knowledge and the public perception of female same-sex desire was not unitary. The

conceptualisation of women who loved women during the Victorian period was arguably complex, and social responses to such relationships varied.⁷ As this thesis shows, artistic and literary representations emerging out of this historical moment reflect the heterogeneous and fragmented ways in which female sexuality was constructed in the Victorian period. These texts engage with the sexual identity categories emerging out of Victorian sexology, but also continue to trouble sexological models.

While it is a complicated task to summarise the history of female homosexuality, providing its historical background during the nineteenth century is nonetheless necessary. The late nineteenth century saw the formation of modern sexual knowledge resulting from sexology. Michel Foucault views heterosexuality and homosexuality as modern constructs and differentiates pre-nineteenth-century sodomites from the nineteenth-century homosexual. His influential argument that modern sexual identity is a social construction emerging at the end of the nineteenth century is put forward in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1979):

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their author was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage – a past, a case history and a childhood, a character, a form of life. [. . .] Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of

⁷ See more details in Sharon Marcus's book, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2009).

the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

Foucault refers to the shifting nature of modalities of power in which medical sexological discourses took over from medieval morality and Christian laws.⁸ An epistemic break that separates the sexual regimes of earlier eras from the modern concept of sexuality, as we experience and understand it now, is arguably attributed – at least partly – to the emergence of Western sexological discourses. Problems concerning sexual behaviour were previously debated in the contexts of religion and moral failing. In the past, homosexual behaviour was viewed as a crime against nature and religion. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, sexual deviance became a concern of psychiatrists and other medical doctors.

Since its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, sexology has been recognised as an essential contributor to the development of sexual modernity.⁹ The emergence of sexological writings in the late nineteenth century was a turning point in the European history of sexuality as the medical categorisation proposed by sexology provided a new language for describing same-sex relations. Furthermore, the emergent theories of inversion mark the nascent idea of homosexuality as a discursive identity. The concept of sexual

⁸ In *How to Do History of Sexuality* (2002), David Halperin, Halperin observes that Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* has often been misread. As such, Halperin shifts the angle of inquiry from the "acts versus identities" contestation to the idea of new regulatory discourses (99-100).

⁹ For instance, Harry Oosterhuis has noted that "[t]he modern notion of sexuality took shape at the end of the nineteenth century" and "psychiatrists shifted the focus from immoral acts, a temporary deviation of the norm, to an innate morbid condition" (*Stepchildren of Nature* 143).

inversion was more specifically related to discourses of homosexuality, and gender inversion was also involved as a sign of sexual dissidence. In 1869, Karl Westphal was the first to coin the phrase “congenital invert”, which encapsulated the common belief among sexologists that inversion was a congenital condition. The Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing was one of the most influential sexologists. Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, first published in 1886, was a collection of case studies on so-called sexual deviation. The book, which establishes a typology of sexual pathology, reflects the period’s characteristic acquisition and classification of knowledge. The inversion of sexual instinct was one of the pathological categories presented here.

Krafft-Ebing’s understanding of sexual inversion incorporated Darwinian language and evolutionary frameworks. According to Krafft-Ebing, inversion was a “functional sign of degeneration” (187). He proposed a sequential progression for the evolution of human sexual behaviour, from ‘primitive’ promiscuity through matriarchy to patriarchy and monogamous marriage (64). Krafft-Ebing claimed that “[t]he propagation of the human race is not left to mere accident or the caprices of the individual, but is guaranteed by the hidden laws of nature which are enforced by a mighty, irresistible impulse” (1). He elaborates that “[s]ensual enjoyment and physical fitness are not the only conditions for the enforcement of these laws, but higher motives and aims, such as the desire to continue the species or the individuality of mental and physical qualities beyond time and space, exert a considerable influence” (1). Here, the sexual impulse is equated with the evolutionary drive for reproduction. Any sexual behaviour other than penetrative

heterosexual intercourse would fall under the unnatural and abnormal sexuality category (Karschay 64).

Sexology was a contested and dynamic discursive field that offered an array of theories. Each sexologist had different opinions, and the same sexologist might change his own views in later works. While Krafft-Ebing dealt with the pathological aspect of sexual inversion, Havelock Ellis, another key founder of sexology, thought homosexuality was neither a disease nor a crime. Ellis, who wrote the six-volume *Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), concurred with some aspects of Krafft-Ebing's argument, such as the view that homosexuals suffered from arrested development (Terry 50). Ellis suggested that sexual inversion was largely inborn: the sexual invert lacked the ability to see and feel "normal" emotional desires toward the opposite sex (Beccalossi 115). Ellis's theorisation also drew upon evolutionary models of development that associated earlier stages of development with undifferentiated sexual impulses. In *Sexual Inversion* (1897), Ellis writes that "[i]f the sexual instinct is undifferentiated in early life, then we must regard the inversion of later life, if it persists, as largely due to arrested development" (126). According to Ellis, "sexually precocious children were especially vulnerable to becoming homosexuals in adulthood because, as a result of expanding sexual energy at a young age, their development would be arrested" (Terry 52). The theorization of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis reflects Sander Gilman's observation that "[n]o realm of human experience is as closely tied to the concept of degeneration as that of sexuality. The two are inseparable in nineteenth-century thought" (191).

While male homosexuality had a visible social presence and legal punishment, female homosexuality had an obscure medico-juridical presence. As

Jagose notes in *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, female homosexuality “does not occupy the same historical position as male homosexuality in the discourses of law and medicine” (13). Even before the emergence of late nineteenth-century sexology, historians and critics had incoherent and inconsistent views of female-female relations. In *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981), Lillian Faderman proposes the model of “passionate friendship”, which implies that, prior to the rise of sexology, intimate friendships between women in nineteenth-century were idealised and considered to be asexual.¹⁰ In addition to this spiritualised model, there were non-normative sexual subjects, as reflected in Anne Lister’s diaries. Lister’s diaries, written from 1806–1840, were candid accounts of her sexual experiences and reveal her sexual preference and relationships with many women.¹¹ Lister proved that women who engage in passionate friendships could be aware of their sexual feelings, act on them, and, crucially, develop a sense of sexual consciousness and selfhood even before sexology had developed identity-based understandings of sexuality. The sense of a sexual self in Lister’s case

¹⁰ A well-known instance of idealised female friendship was the case of the Ladies of Llangollen. In 1778, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler eloped to live together in the Welsh village of Llangollen. The couple came to epitomise a sentimental and “innocent” relationship by living a quiet and blissful rural life.

¹¹ Theorists such as Martha Vicinus, Terry Castle, and Randolph Trumbach have claimed that Lister demonstrates an erotic subjectivity. Lister’s sexual behaviour in her diaries can be regarded as that of a female rake. The diaries recorded her physical sexual interactions with her lovers: “Talking, at first, much in the same style as the evening, just before but then got more loving. Kissed her, told her I had a pain in my knees—my expression to her for desire” (141). See more about Lister’s life in Helena Whitbread’s *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791–1840*. See also Anna Clark’s article, “Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity” (1996).

challenges the belief that nothing akin to a sexual identity existed before the invention of identity categories by late nineteenth-century sexologists.

At the same time, the conceptualisation of female queer sexualities and desires remained unstable even in the wake of sexological discourse in the late nineteenth century. It is noticeable that scientific work “on the lesbian is exceedingly sparse”, especially when compared with writings on male homosexuality (Gagnon and Simon 176). There were fewer case studies for female sexual inversion than those of men. Krafft-Ebing commented in 1901 that there were only fifty known case histories of lesbianism. Ellis’s 1897 *Sexual Inversion* includes a chapter called “Sexual Inversion in Women”, which also acknowledges the difficulty in finding documentation but asserts that “homosexuality is not less common in women than in men” (195). Although sexology did provide discourses for understanding and labelling desire between women, it would be many years before Britain established a sustained unitary discourse for female same-sex sexuality. Sexology emerged in the late nineteenth century but was not widely available to the public. The sexological knowledge of Ellis and Edward Carpenter became more broadly known in the late 1920s and 1930s (Hackett 8). According to Laura Doan in *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001), although over two decades had passed since sexological knowledge emerged, by 1920 female sexual inversion was still an incoherent sexological construction (200). Doan notes that “the language for what was clinically defined as ‘female sexual inversion’ was still fluid and imprecise” at the beginning of the twentieth century (196). During the mid to late twentieth century, the inconceivability of lesbianism faded away as the modern concept of lesbian identity and lesbian communities were solidified. This change

can be partly attributed to the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and gay and lesbian rights movements in the 1970s in Western Europe and North America.

The late nineteenth-century construction of sexual knowledge was not only ambiguous, but also overlapped with and was complicated by social factors such as race, gender, sexuality, and social class.¹² For instance, in Ellis's sexological exploration of the topic of female subversion, the development of sexual subjects also included factors of race and class. For him, female homosexuality primarily emerged under specific circumstances and was often associated with allegedly "lower" races, the working classes, and the criminals. In the footnotes to "Sexual Inversion in Women", Ellis cited sources who reported that homosexuality was a common practice among women in "Brazil, Bali, Zanzibar, Egypt, French Creole countries, and India" (124). Additionally, he claimed that it was discovered that working-class women were particularly prone to situational or acquired homosexuality because of their proximity to one another under stressful circumstances (118-151). It could be said that racial otherness played a significant role in sexological writing. As previously mentioned, Rohy observed that Blackness and homosexuality were often framed as primitive throwbacks; racial and sexual discourses were interwoven in nineteenth-century sciences. Robin Hackett gives an example of this intersection: "[l]ate nineteenth-century sexologists used the figure of the mulatto as an analogy in their efforts to either defend or condemn the

¹²For details about sexology and the conceptualisation of female sexual inverts, see also Chiara Beccalossi's *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, c. 1870–1920* (1997). See also Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (2000).

‘invert’ whom they believed was characterized by a sexual hybridity similar to racial hybridity” (18).

In sum, as this brief and partial sketch suggests, the nineteenth century witnessed significant changes, multiplicities, uncertainties, and even contradictions in the constructions of female homosexuality. It is also significant to examine the historical ways in which sexology narrated and constructed sexual subjectivities and identities in temporal logic. For example, a common temporal formulation, as will be seen in this thesis, was that of female homosexuality emerging out of the entangled discourses of evolution, class and race. Temporal structuring in medical and scientific writing, which often assigned the normative with linear and progressive development and the dissident with suspension or retrogression, was employed, questioned, or reworked in the fictional literary work of the writers discussed in this thesis. The thesis is mainly interested in the dialogue between queer female Gothic literature and Victorian medical and scientific constructions of sexuality. While sexology often sought to offer stable identity concepts, late Victorian writers and neo-Victorian writers frequently tried to undermine and subvert rigid sexual identities by reaching back to the Victorian era and using Gothic temporalities. The cultural uncertainties of the Victorian period provided opportunities for the writers in this thesis to exercise their imagination in creating literary representations of female same-sex desire, especially through the productive meeting between queer time and the Gothic. The language the writers used to represent sexuality was saturated with Gothic elements and metaphors of the supernatural.

The Victorian and the Gothic

The nineteenth century is distinctive in its affinity with the supernatural. In June 1853, the *Illustrated London News* observed that the nineteenth century saw “the strong innate love of the supernatural which seems implanted in the human mind” (481). Similarly, some instances of Victorian people’s obsession with the supernatural are noted in the preface of *The Victorian Supernatural*, edited by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell: “[t]he Victorians were haunted by the supernatural, by ghosts and fairies, table-rappings and telepathic encounters, occult religions and the idea of reincarnation, visions of the other world and a reality beyond the everyday”. In Alexandra Warwick’s words, the Victorian “is in many ways the Gothic period, with its elaborate cult of death and mourning, its fascination with ghosts, spiritualism and the occult” (29).

Victorian culture was vast and contradictory. Whereas the era has usually been perceived as the age of secularization and scientific progressivism, placing a strong emphasis on advancement and betterment, in reality the period was complex and occupied a liminal position. Vanessa Dickerson asserts that “spectrally announced betweenness” was “a condition with which Victorians could identify, since they found themselves between medieval god and modern machine, monarchy and democracy, religion and science, spirituality and materiality, faith and doubt, authority and liberalism [. . .]” (14). Science and the supernatural were not neatly separated during the period, and lines between natural and unnatural, science and magic, were blurred many times. For example, occult sciences such as mesmerism emerged in the 1830s. In the 1870s, there was a rise in scientific rationalism. Another significant event was the establishment of The Society for

Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882. The SPR aimed to conduct scientific inquiry and investigate inexplicable phenomena, such as spiritualism (N. Freeman 105). Its existence epitomises the claim that Victorians were “caught between belief in the old order and faith in the new one evidenced in science and technology” (Dickerson 14). The contradictory impulses and indistinct boundaries between science and the supernatural often played out in fictional writing, as we will encounter in some of the selected texts analysed here.

The supernatural craze was symptomatic of the anxiety-ridden period. The nineteenth century saw various social and cultural changes, including Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* brought the theory of evolution by natural selection to the Victorians in 1859. His theory of evolution revealed the transition from animality to humanity and suggested an ambivalent boundary between species, provoking anxieties over a possible regression to the primitive state of lower animal types or less complicated organisms. The discovery resulted in an uncertainty over altered understandings of human life and existence, which arose in response to the destabilization of formerly orthodox beliefs. The Darwinian evolution gave rise to fears of retrogression in particular. If humans derived from beasts, “the evolutionary process might be reversible: the human race might ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection” (Hurley, *The Gothic Body* 56). Darwinism left the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences with a new perspective on life. As previously mentioned, Darwinian language regarding the evolutionary timeline was employed to a great extent in sexual science. Darwinism and its ensuing anxiety thus had a significant impact on political discourses as well as

literature and cultural and artistic representations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹³ In terms of sexual discourses, Darwinian concepts also shaped sexological thought, as mentioned in the previous section.

A preoccupation with supernatural creatures is pervasive in Victorian art and literature. It was a prosperous time for supernatural elements, ghost stories, and fairy tales. Robert F. Geary explains the central motif in Victorian supernatural fiction: “the enlightened world of science, despite its contrary claims, offers an incomplete picture of reality: there is another realm – perhaps higher, certainly more encompassing, maybe more terrifying, but not restricted to the prevailing confines of what passes for truth” (105). The writing and distribution of ghost stories and other tales engaging with the supernatural flourished throughout the nineteenth century. Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas observe that “although Victorian tales of the supernatural have been stigmatized as sensational and sentimental, they embody the dominant culture of nineteenth-century Great Britain” (ix). The prevalence of ghosts in Victorian literature reflects the Victorian’s questions and concerns about the self, humans, and the world around them. Similarly, Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell argue that “the supernatural in its many forms haunted the Victorians because of its profound yet enigmatic connection with the ‘mystery of our own being’” (9).

During the late nineteenth century, supernatural and fantastic texts were ideal sites for reflecting social anxieties, including dissident sexualities. The Gothic

¹³ On the issue of literary Darwinism, see Virginia Richter’s *Literature After Darwin* (2011). See also *Evolution and Victorian Culture* (2014), edited by Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon.

mode lends itself to the representation of queer sexualities in much *fin-de-siècle* writing. The monstrous figures and bonds between male characters in Gothic works such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and *Dracula* (1897) have been read as symbolic of the repressed homosexual self.¹⁴ The Gothic mode can also help writers question dominant ideas in Victorian culture and attitudes. In “Queer Victorian Gothic”, Ardel Haefele-Thomas explores the power-wielding institutions of the Victorian period. She argues that “[i]n many cases, queer Victorian Gothic can simultaneously explore, defend and, on occasion, interrogate these overarching authoritative institutions and systems of power as they were constantly being re-invented and re-inscribed with the goal of shaping the familial, medical and legal paradigms that still constrain us today” (142). Due to the indeterminacy of sexual knowledge, Victorian writers often relied on other socially marginal groups. Significantly, Thomas notes the intersectional nature of queerness: queer “supplies room for multiple, potentially polyvalent positions, conveying gender, sexuality, race, class and familial structures beyond heteronormative (and often bourgeois) social constructs” (4). As will be demonstrated, such queer interrelationships between class, racial, and nationalist ideologies are another thread running through this thesis.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates the links between queer temporalities and the Gothic, focusing on the potential of their intersection to facilitate representations of female queer subjectivities and non-normative desires in

¹⁴ See the chapter entitled “Identity and Dissolution in Apocalyptic Gothic” in Haggerty’s *Queer Gothic* (2006). For an earlier queer interpretation of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, see the chapter “Jekyll’s Closet” in Elaine Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy* (1990).

Victorian and Neo-Victorian fiction. Late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary authors engaged with and reached back to Victorian constructions of sexuality that were, in many ways, unstable and conflicted. Drawing creatively upon these Victorian discourses made it possible to imagine and represent non-normative female sexualities. When doing so, the writers discussed in this thesis created queer temporal frameworks that reject the linear forward motion of normative temporality and its connotation of heteronormative ideologies. These experiences of queer time were often depicted through a strategic deployment of Gothic elements, which are central to the representation of female queer sexualities and desires discussed in the thesis. The Gothic qualities of the selected literary texts serve to create queer moments of possibility in which female non-normative sexualities can emerge.

Rationale for Text Selection, Thesis Structure and Chapter Outlines

The works of fiction selected for analysis in this project are literary works published from the 1890s to 1999, and their production cuts across late Victorian, modern, and twentieth-century literature. The first group of writers – Vernon Lee, Charlotte Mew, and Radclyffe Hall – are in liminal positions between the late Victorian and the modernist. The second group features twentieth-century contemporary writers who revisit the Victorian era, namely Angela Carter and Sarah Waters. Nonetheless, the selected texts from these writers are all haunted by the Victorian era. The late Victorian texts by Lee and Mew are examples of late nineteenth-century women's writing. The onset of modernism is uncertain, emerging between the *fin-de-siècle* and the First World War, and the examples of women's writing discussed here encapsulate the political complexity of the turn of

the century. Though not produced in the Victorian age, the three books by Hall, Carter, and Waters are haunted by the spectral presence of the Victorian past through literary and thematic connections. The stories appear to outline, echo, and critique Victorian concepts of sexuality and relevant gender ideologies. Hall's novel explicitly draws on Victorian literary style, while the selected novels of Carter and Waters use a Victorian setting and enter into critical dialogue with the era. The chosen works occupy dual positions within literary culture and history in that their engagement with the Victorian period is shaped by the historical moment in which they are produced. The cultural contexts of each publication influence the ways in which the writers approach the Victorian past.

It should be noted that the selection of works by the five female writers is inevitably limited and by no means exhaustive, since there are many other literary texts that engage with indeterminate Victorian female queer desires and sexualities. By selecting texts published in different periods, this thesis adds to our understandings of a wider cultural trend that consists of both change and continuity across the century. The thesis starts by considering late Victorian literary works, which tended to tackle ambivalent queer desires with great subtlety. It also considers the early 20th century writing, which engages directly with sexological discourses. Subsequent chapters examine the later twentieth-century, in which contemporary writers were increasingly drawn to the Victorian past and creatively looked back to reimagine female same-sex desires.¹⁵ It is my hope that the

¹⁵ Vernon Lee's short story "The Doll" (1896) offers another example of late Victorian writing that uses subtle supernatural elements to encode female queer indeterminate desires. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) could be read as an instance of early 20th century writing which engages with while also critiquing nineteenth-

selection of texts in this thesis provides a representative sample of the evolving ways in which queer female literature of the last 130 years has engaged with Victorian sexual conceptualisation and representation. The thesis focuses specifically on the ways in which queer female literary texts have responded to and critiqued Victorian sexological discourses while also revealing the latter's indeterminacy.

Significantly, the thesis observes that the texts selected from each period share important characteristics in that their portrayal of non-normative female desires and sexualities is facilitated by Gothicised queer temporalities. The thesis is, however, careful not to simplify the nuanced and complex ways in which an individual writer engages with queer time through the vehicle of the Gothic. I have chosen the texts for the unique opportunities they offer to illustrate the diverse intersections between queer time and the Gothic and to explore the multiple approaches employed by the writers. The selection covers the mystic, weird, and strange phenomena that are sometimes explained away and sometimes remain suggestive or elusive. The Gothic elements within these texts are dynamic and divergent. Some will appear to be obvious choices because of their Gothic and supernatural elements, whereas other texts may seem to be unusual choices. In a few texts, there are fantastical elements. In many chapters, the Gothic also intersects with intellectual discourses such as the uncanny and the abject. Indeed,

century sexological ideas. A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999) were produced during the late twentieth century and reflect the popularity of the Neo-Victorian genre. These Neo-Victorian novels explore spectrum of sexual and gender nonconformity whether by reimagining female same-sex relations during that time or by employing Victorian sexological ideas.

concepts like the uncanny, the abject, and the haunting – usually deemed Gothic-related – are central to this thesis.¹⁶ By embracing this breadth, the spirit of the Gothic is liberated from its conventional body, and it becomes possible to support the investigation of queer temporalities in a greater variety of ways. This thesis focuses on how and why the Gothic operates (sometimes alongside other textual modes) in these Victorian and neo-Victorian writings rather than identifying what might be referred to as Gothic.

This thesis is structured around five chapters arranged chronologically according to the moments in which each text was produced and published: the late Victorian era, the early twentieth century, the 1930s, the second half of the twentieth century, and the late twentieth century. Chapter One explores two short stories authored by Lee: “Oke of Okehurst” (1886) and “The Legend of Madame Kransinska” (1892). The combination of queer desire, temporality, and aestheticism in Lee’s supernatural tales enables her texts to challenge the dominant configuration of time that imposes reproductive futurity on women. As such, the chapter examines the Gothic trope of doubling and its relation to the disruption of identities and straight time. Female characters in each tale develop empathy for and become the uncanny double of haunting women from the past. The non-normative attraction between the pairs works as Lee’s strategy to articulate repressed queer desires and formulate alternative female subjectivity. In particular, the chapter applies time-attentive reading to the doubling trope, investigates the logics of queer temporality that underpin Lee’s employment of

¹⁶ On Gothic concepts, see more in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, edited by Catherine Spooner, and Emma McEvoy (2007).

“double”, and explores its affective temporal effects on the heroine’s life. In these stories, queer sexuality, pleasure, or desires overflow and undermine binary boundaries between heterosexuals and homosexuals, the self and other, and matter and mind.

Chapter Two explores works by another turn-of-century female writer, Charlotte Mew. “Passed”, a short story published in *The Yellow Book* in 1894, and a poem titled “The Changeling” (1916) have been chosen for discussion. Both pieces are concerned with the convergence of queer space, queer temporalities and queer subjects’ struggles with their dissident sexualities. The chapter draws attention to the way in which the Gothic aesthetic and metaphor, such as the Gothic setting, fairy metaphor, and monster imagery, play crucial roles in achieving this convergence. “Passed” presents a female protagonist experiencing impressionistic time in Gothicised *fin-de-siècle* London. The queer spatiotemporal moment works in tandem with the Gothic aesthetic to convey the narrator’s experience of female homoerotic desire, as well as her self-denial. The second section of the chapter interrogates Mew’s poem “The Changeling”, which was written during the early twentieth century. Non-normative sexuality and the concomitant isolation of social ostracism are depicted in Mew’s poetry. The chapter focuses on her depiction of a queer child, non-linear development, and the temporal analogy between the monstrous fairy and primitive backwardness. In using the Victorian narrative of changeling fairies, Mew presents a child that does not grow in the “right” direction but rather in a manner that resists a development enfolded into the future.

Chapter Three considers Radclyffe Hall's early twentieth-century novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). *The Well of Loneliness* may be viewed as an atypical inclusion in this project because it is not usually considered in relation to the Gothic genre, nor was it produced in the Victorian era. However, this chapter proposes considering the anachronism in and of the text. It investigates an intriguing dynamic between Hall's anachronistic use of the Victorian literary style and sexological knowledge. For example, the protagonist is rendered anachronistic in her sexual development. The chapter thus focuses on Hall's subtle incorporation of the haunting motif and demonstrates the role of haunting in the heroine's queer development, considering the way in which it complicates the linear narrative structure of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* by incorporating the unstable concept of female sexual inversion.

The subsequent chapters are interested in the afterlives of the Victorians. Chapters Four and Five discuss late-twentieth-century novels written in the neo-Victorian genre. As neo-Victorian texts are structured around double temporalities, the novels emblematised queer time. Angela Carter and Sarah Waters set their stories in the Victorian period and reimagine the era from latter-day perspectives. Carter and Waters can access the past belatedly, writing a century after the Victorian era. Queer female sexualities in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity* are figured through a complex anachronistic positioning of the neo-Victorian form; a depiction of nineteenth-century female homosexuality is inserted into the cultural memory of the Victorian period. Although the two contemporary writers revisit the past in different ways, the Gothic is a key instrument in both texts to offer

alternative ways for women who love women to exist in their reimagined Victorian worlds.

Chapter Four examines the late-twentieth-century Gothic carnivalesque *Nights at the Circus*. This 1984 novel by Angela Carter is set in 1899 at the turn of the century when fears about change and transition were heightened. The novel presents many forms of fantastic deviance in which fictionality and reality are conflated in the carnival spirit. Women who love women are present in the text with typical characteristics of the primitive and temporal backwardness. Carter thus knits together the Victorian evolutionary order and contemporary ideas of the carnivalesque abject to subvert the established order and empower the queer primitive. The subversion of the temporal order wherein pre-history, the primitive, and the animal return encourages a spectrum of queerness suitable for the novel's female characters. Ultimately, temporal boundaries are collapsible and recalculable into a queer utopia.

Chapter Five examines Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian Gothic *Affinity* (1999), in which the narrator is drawn to the world of spiritualism. This chapter explores how Waters employs the genre of Female Gothic historical fiction to explore the construction of sexual identity. It reads the text in relation to the politics of sequential temporal norms proposed by Annamarie Jagose and argues that Waters utilises Victorian spiritualism to disrupt the normative sexual sequence and intervene in the assumed precedence of heterosexuality. Queer temporality in spiritualist spaces allows for queer expressions of female same-sex desire and other non-reproductive sexualities. The chapter also explores the authorial resort to

Female Gothic literary tactics in relation to the text's queer intertextual engagement.

The final chapter presents the conclusions of this thesis, summarising the key ideas presented throughout and asserting the potential of using the lens of queer temporality in conjunction with the Gothic to analyse representation of Victorian female queer sexualities and non-normative desires. This chapter also offers a concluding remark by considering a twentieth-first-century gothic romance drama miniseries *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020). *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is adapted from the Victorian Gothic novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James. It offers an important example of the continued engagement with the Victorian queer past through the combined use of Gothic and queer temporal moments in the present day. By incorporating the discussion of this twenty-first century adaptation, the conclusion explores both similarities and differences in the ways in which the Victorian past is mobilized in more recent history. By reading *The Haunting of Bly Manor* in relation to Jagose's work on sexual sequence, the conclusion reinstates one of the key arguments of the thesis, namely, that reading Gothic texts through the lens of queer temporalities is helpful and productive in understanding representations of female queer sexuality. The series also shows how the engagement with Victorian female queer sexualities and their indeterminacy has evolved into a more affirmative representation of female queer desires in contemporary contexts. Overall, the series and its "afterlife" reveal that Gothicised queer temporalities, in this case "haunting", continue to offer a crucial means to achieve queer female representation.

Chapter One

Vernon Lee: The Haunting Double and Uncanny Transhistorical Female

Bonds in Late Victorian Gothic Tales

The Past, the more or less remote Past, of which the prose is clean obliterated by distance – that is the place to get our ghosts from. Indeed we live ourselves, we educated folk of modern times, on the borderland of the Past [. . .] and a legion of ghosts, very vague and changeful, are perpetually to and fro, fetching and carrying for us between it and the Present.

(Lee, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* 39)

Vernon Lee (1856–1935) was a Victorian intellectual and author whose real name was Violet Paget. Lee produced a large body of literary works with around forty-three major works produced in her lifetime. Lee’s vast oeuvre encapsulates her interests in art criticism, literature, and psychology. Her supernatural tales, in particular, have gained critical attention: her treatment of the haunting past, interest in the issue of repressed queer sexual desires, and combination of the fantastic and the psychological make Lee’s stories notable. In *Female Gothic Histories* (2013), Diana Wallace writes that “Lee is fascinated by what is repressed – the feminine, the maternal, sexual desire” (103). Wallace explores how the fantastic provides Lee with a strategic cover for confronting the status quo and reclaiming repressed sexual desire. This chapter examines representations of female queer subjectivities and transgressive desires in two of Lee’s late-Victorian supernatural short stories: “Oke of Okehurst” (1886), published in *Hauntings* (1890), and “The Legend of Madame Krasinska”, published in *Vanita* (1890).

In the context of sexual discourse, Lee was writing her tales at a time when sexological constructions of sexual identity were emerging within her social circle. Lee had an ambiguous intimate relationship with London poet and aesthete Mary Robinson, who also knew John Addington Symonds, a classicist and Renaissance scholar and friend of Havelock Ellis with whom he co-authored *Sexual Inversion*. Symonds was Robinson's mentor and friend. Lee's relationship with Symonds was filled with competition, both in terms of intellectual and personal matters. Symonds commented on "Vernon's stylistic perversities" (814) and seemed to be jealous, viewing Lee as a competitor for Robinson's affection (Prins, "'Lady's Greek' (with the Accents)" 162). He consulted with Ellis about Lee and Robinson's queer friendship. Ellis questioned Symonds about using Lee and Robinson as a "possible case-history for the section on Lesbianism" in *Sexual Inversion* (Grosskurth 223). It should be noted that, despite the emergence of sexological science and its explanation and identification for dissident sexualities, Lee's writing refuses to present queer desires as fixed sexual identity labels within the scientific paradigm. As Stefano Evangelista observes in "Vernon Lee and the Gender of Aestheticism", Lee's work implies that science is inadequate as a medium to explore sexual behaviour. He asserts that Lee "presents desire as a fluid cultural category that cannot be made to fit in the narrow scientific and sexological studies current at the time" (107). More importantly, Evangelista implies that Lee achieved this by linking non-normative sexual desires with the supernatural. Evangelista notes that "the fantastic [in *Haunting*] is both a device to articulate the culturally unacceptable (in this instance perverse sexuality) and to achieve a sense of irresolution that represents a self-conscious departure from nineteenth-century realism" (106).

This chapter builds on Evangelista's contention of queer fluidity and the strategic use of the supernatural in Lee's work. This chapter considers, in particular, queer temporality and the Gothic motif of the haunting in Lee's fiction. Lee's statement in the preface of her collection *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, which forms the epigraph of this chapter, clearly indicates the importance of temporality in her writing. The word "haunting", as suggested by the title of Lee's collection, unquestionably takes shape in various ways throughout her literary writings. In "Oke of Okehurst" and "The Legend of Madame Krasinska", haunting occurs in the form of the double. This chapter seeks to elucidate the way that the double embodies a queer repudiation of the reproductive futurity attached to heterosexuality. The female protagonist in each story fervently identifies with a dead woman from the past, who is known to her through an art object. These female characters are preternaturally obsessed with women in paintings, and these obsessions make the heroines experience an uncanny disintegration of the self. This chapter will demonstrate that the extraordinary relationships between the women generate a disruptive temporal force in Lee's narratives. I suggest that the relationships disturb the present by becoming vehicles for the sexually repressed. Consequently, they disrupt the larger narrative of the female characters' life stages, which deviate from reproduction and other normative life choices. In a close reading, the chapter places Lee's late Victorian supernatural stories into conversation with theoretical frameworks from recent queer theorists including Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, and Elizabeth Freeman.

One of the distinctive features of Lee's supernatural tales is that her handling of ghostly subjects inclines towards a subtle terror rather than evoking

shocking sensations. In the preface to *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, Lee suggests that the ghost in her writing is internalised: there are “no genuine ghosts in the scientific sense; they tell of no hauntings such as could be contributed by the Society for Psychical Research” (40). Lee views her ghosts as “things of the imagination, born there, bred there, sprung from the strange confused heaps [. . .] which lie in our fancy, heaps of half-faded recollections, of fragmentary vivid impressions” (39). It could be said that Lee’s haunting double draws heavily on psychological aspects. Writing ahead of her time, Lee’s depiction of the haunting double prefigures modernist thinking as it addresses the topic of an incoherent self and unstable identity. The topic of the self is central in the discourse of modernism, which Lee anticipates. Critics such as Edwin F. Jr. Block and Angela Leighton comment on the way that Lee conceptualises the incoherent self in her fantastic writing, thus anticipating the coming of modernism. Lee’s fantastic stories “fabricated intricate identities under the imminent threat of disintegration, which was to become a major issue in modernism” (Leighton, “Ghosts, Aestheticism, and ‘Vernon Lee’” xiv).

The supernatural works of Lee discussed here also predate Freud’s seminal essay “The Uncanny”, which was published in 1919, but her handling of the haunting double motif anticipates essential aspects of the Freudian concept. In exploring the definition of the German word “*unheimlich*” (“the uncanny” in English), Freud draws on philosopher Friedrich Schelling’s definition. Freud asserts that “[u]nheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (224). The hidden and dangerous concealed and withheld from sight coincides with the familiar. The nature of the uncanny is

inextricably related to temporality as it involves the act of returning or going back to the past. The uncanny's flickering between strangeness and familiarity is associated with the return of the repressed: it is "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 124). In other words, the Freudian uncanny centres on "the return of a familiar phenomenon (image or object, person or event)" (Foster 7). The double, as Freud argues, is one manifestation of the uncanny. The doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self are "among the list of things which can cause uncanny feelings" ("Das Unheimliche" 234). The double articulates unease not only because of its ontological ambiguity but also because of its evocation of the temporal concept of haunting. As Wolfreys asserts, the double is "the figure of haunting *par excellence* [. . .] every instance of doubling being the singular instance of the 'ghostlike manifestation'" (*Victorian Hauntings* 15).

"Oke of Okehurst": Narcissistic Uncanny Doubles and Queering Intergenerational Lineage

"Oke of Okehurst", first published in 1886 under the title "The Phantom Lover", is one of four short stories in *Hauntings* (1890).¹⁷ The story is set in an ancestral manor in Kent during the nineteenth century, and it is narrated by a male speaker, an artist who is hired to paint the portraits of Alice and William Okehurst. Alice and William are a childless couple living in an English country house. The spouses are also cousins, descending "from the same old Kentish stock" (102). Strangely, the wife has the same first name and appearance as one of her

¹⁷ This chapter uses the first annotated edition of selected supernatural stories, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, published in 2006.

notorious ancestors, the deceased seventeenth-century Alice Oke. There are also portraits of their seventeenth-century predecessors in the house: Nicholas and Alice Oke. The present-day Alice is obsessed with the story of her ancestral namesake and the namesake's rumoured lover, Christopher Lovelock, who is believed to have been murdered by Alice and Nicholas. Alice continuously talks about this story and the ghost of Lovelock, causing William to feel uneasy and become paranoid. William eventually loses his mind. He seems to see a phantom, and when he tries to shoot the ghost, he inadvertently kills Alice. Ultimately, William dies by suicide.

Some compelling interpretations of this story claim that Alice's preoccupation with the legend of her ancestor has queer overtones. Patricia Pulham, one of Lee's most prominent critics, highlights several signs of the heroine's queer sexuality. In *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (2008), Pulham asserts that Alice has androgynous qualities. She supports her assertion by highlighting Alice's incorporeality, drawing on Terry Castle's well-known thesis on the apparitional lesbian. The trait of incorporeality is thought to be a typical example of lesbian representation. Pulham sees the bond between the two Alices as a confirmation of present Alice's homosexual identity. She also adopts a psychoanalytic model in her queer reading of an art object in Lee's story: when Alice looks at the portrait of the seventeenth-century Alice, she sees a maternal reflection affirming her existence and identity (131). Another critic who interprets this bond as erotically charged is Dennis Denisoff, who draws attention to the plot and reconsiders present Alice's object of desire. Denisoff claims that, at a glance, most readers would assume her object of desire is the

deceased Lovelock. However, it is possible that present-day Alice harbours unconscious erotic desire towards the seventeenth-century Alice:

The force of the same-sex bond in 'Oke of Okehurst' arises from the heroine's devotion to her namesake surpassing not only the portraitist's interest in the living Alice but also the dead Alice's dubious attachment to a lover who may have never existed and, if he did, whom she then helped murder. The incommensurability of Alice's main attraction, on the one hand, and generic and cultural conventions, on the other, causes a disjuncture that established social and textual narratives appear unable to reconcile without killing off the heroine. (256)

In other words, Alice might not re-enact an affair with the spectral lover of her predecessor, Lovelock, but with the female predecessor *herself*.

My reading of Alice's homoerotically-charged connection with her ancestor is congruous with both critics. Nevertheless, this chapter shifts attention away from Pulham's maternal psychological approach and develops Denisoff's textual interpretation further by considering the text through the lens of queer temporality. My argument is that the use of the uncanny transhistorical double offers Lee opportunities to represent queer critiques of reproductive futurity. The motif of the double or the mirror image creates a subversive queer time which causes uncanny repetition. The homoerotic connotations of the bonds between the two women from different periods thrive on this temporal queerness of the double. Specifically, the doubling could be read as a form of non-biological reproduction. Furthermore, it results in the disruption of Alice's marriage and the heterosexual intergenerational succession of the family.

According to Barry McCrea, “narrative, in its most basic, traditional form, appears to be almost mystically connected to genealogical origins and continuity, to the cyclical rhythm of childhood, marriage and reproduction” (9). Genealogical family was thematically central to nineteenth-century novel (McCrea 3).

Reproduction is frequently seen as a typical and essential component of heterosexual plotlines. In Lee’s supernatural tale, the trajectory of genealogical family is interrupted. In “Oke of Okehurst”, the deviance from traditional reproduction is hinted at in a symbolic description of the house. In the opening scenes, the painter who is the narrator of this story observes that the house is “set in the midst of the pasture-land, with no trace of garden before it, and only a few large trees indicating the possibility of one to the back; no lawn either, but on the other side of the sandy dip, which suggested a filled-up moat, a huge oak, short, hollow, with wreathing, blasted, black branches, upon which only a handful of leaves shook in the rain” (110). This description of the house symbolises the infertility of the Oke family, wherein the sandy landscape and withering trees signify barrenness. The decaying state of the house and its surroundings are also prescient of the fall of this family.

Alice, the heroine of Lee’s narrative, departs from that which is deemed a common life schedule for many Victorian women: pursuing reproductive heterosexual futurity. The heroine of “Oke of Okehurst” breaks the sequence of generational lineage by refusing to produce an heir to the Oke family. Alice says that she has no interest in having a child with William. Lee’s characterisation of Alice is also influenced by The New Woman – a significant social phenomenon in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸ Victorian attitudes towards women's power and place in society were partly shaped by an ideology of "separate spheres".¹⁹ According to this idea, a respectable woman's place was exclusively in the house where she would tend to the needs of her husband and children.²⁰ The rise of the New Woman influenced the portrayal of rebellious heroines in fiction as the archetype sparked discussions on female sexuality, autonomy, and reproduction. Although Alice always stays at home, she ignores her supposed "duty" as a wife and also makes it clear that she intends to remain childless: "You see, [the prophecy] seems to be coming true. We have no children, and I don't suppose we shall ever have any. I, at least, have never wished for them" (134). Alice's intention embodies Lee Edelman's contention of queer negativity. Queerness, which embraces negativity and, in particular, rejects the cult of the child within society, is fundamentally antisocial and prevents the possibility of reproductive futurity and a continuation of humanity. In *No Future*, Edelman explicates that "[i]f [. . .] there is no baby and in consequence, no future, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of

¹⁸ The phrase refers to the new generation of independent educated women emerging during the later years of the Victorian era.

¹⁹ The traditional view of a woman's place in Victorian society was expressed in Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House", which was originally published in 1854. The poem addresses the ideal forms of femininity such as a caring, faithful wife and a devoted mother.

²⁰ Questions and debates about women's status and roles in society occurred in Victorian England. The debates around the issue were known as "the woman question". This subject involved discussions regarding the social position of women, including their physiological nature and moral character as well as access and opportunities in terms of economics, profession, education, and politics. There were conflicting viewpoints supporting either the need for women to have more rights or the belief that women belonged in the home.

social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself” (13). In this text, Alice’s disinterest in having a child and especially her obsession with her lookalike ancestor is “the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments” leading to “the absence of futurity”.

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the double will put an end to the succession established by the logic of reproductive futurity in a progressive normative history. This accords with Nicole Fluhr’s argument that the stories in the *Hauntings* collection “call into question both the idea that history is progressive and the notion of a unified or singular subjectivity” (287). In “Oke of Okehurst”, it is implied that history does not progress into the future and Alice’s selfhood is disintegrated. The character of Alice transcends the limits of the individual subject located in time. Furthermore, there is a sort of predetermined design and inescapable doom that disrupts the temporal idea of succession and inheritance which heterosexuality values. The painter is told about the Oke family’s prophecy by Nicholas Oke, the forefather, who says that “when the head of his house and master of Okehurst should marry another Alice Oke, descended from himself and his wife, there should be an end of Okes of Okehurst” (134). The non-reproductive dead-end in this double logic parallels the larger narrative of the house. The foreboding prophecy implies that the end of this long-standing family is related to the idea of the double and the return of the familiar; the destruction and stoppage of the lineage are conditioned by the idea of “another” Alice. Alice fits this description with her ancestral history and status as William’s cousin. While the present and seventeenth-century Alices have biological ties, they have an affinity

more profound than mere kinship. Their bloodline is complicated by the ghostly double phenomenon that breaks temporal norms.

After her marriage, Alice is not interested in her life as William's wife or in the idea of having a child in the future. Alice has only "an eccentric passion in the past" (122). Her thoughts are preoccupied with the history of seventeenth-century Alice. When Alice maintains her focus on the past, she engages in a queer time that is separate from the present moment. For instance, the narrator observes Alice when he talks with her, noting "her absent manner, her look, while speaking to you, into an invisible distance, her curious irrelevant smile" (116). The word "absent" is used repeatedly in multiple scenes to describe Alice's mentally absent state. In addition to her inattentiveness to the present, Alice's obsession with haunted material objects represents her participation in queer temporality. Alice spends time in a room decorated with early seventeenth-century Tuscan furniture and other Italian artworks. Situating herself imaginatively in the past, alongside the antique Italian objects, another item that provides a material trace of the past to Alice is a portrait of her ancestor. The present-day Alice looks exactly the same as the past Alice in this old portrait, and Alice somehow develops a solid empathetic bond with her.

Lee's use of a portrait does not seem to be accidental. Among the various art forms, a portrait is particularly suited to the rhetoric of a haunting double. Portraits concern the act of mimesis, imitation, and reflection as they are expected to capture the likeness of a subject as much as possible. At the same time, this art form is slippery and generates a strange temporality in that a portrait acts as a memento of the vanished past. The departed will always be there, timeless, inside

the frame. In Catherine Maxwell's view, "the portrait has always had a special relationship with death" (253). It is "an absent presence, a shadow that lingers after the sitter is gone" ("Dionysus to 'Dionea'" 253). This uncanny lingering could be applied to the portrait of past Alice. Because it carries traces of the past, the portrait of the first Alice is haunting. However, the seventeenth-century Alice's haunting existence goes beyond the frame of the old canvas and produces haunting effects on the family, both William and Alice, in a figurative as well as literal sense. The painting clearly haunts their minds. William is bothered by its existence, as it reminds him of the scandalous history of the family secret. Seventeenth-century Alice is the past that should be contained and suppressed, the ghost that should be exorcised from the family history. William says, "I would rather have it forgotten. I can't understand how people can talk about murders in their families, and ghosts, and so forth" (120). The uncanny portrait makes what should be hidden, like their family's dirty laundry, come to light. As for Alice, the portrait not only occupies her thought but also leads to her strange idolatrous identification with her murderous ancestor.

The feeling of empathy evoked by art objects is a concept that enables Lee to play with the trope of the uncanny double. Empathy is "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Lee's stories often deal with empathy and the topic of an individual's inner response to external forms.²¹ Catherine Anne Wiley discusses

²¹ The concept of aesthetic empathy flourished in Europe from 1870–1930. Theodor Lipps's aesthetic work was notable for introducing the German term *Einfühlung* (which would later be translated as "empathy" in English) into psychology. Lee, who adopted Lipps' influences, developed her aesthetic theory in *Beauty and Ugliness*

the close relationship between the external and the internal in Lee's essays, arguing that "Lee frequently engenders a symbolic potential space between an internal, or bodily, and an external, or aesthetic, reality – a space in which a kind of radical empathy takes place" (59). The narrator comments on the strange empathy that occurs with Alice: "For Mrs. Oke, who seemed the most self-absorbed of creatures in all other matters, and utterly incapable of understanding or sympathising with the feelings of other persons, entered completely and passionately into the feelings of this woman, this Alice, who, at some moments, seemed to be not another woman, but herself" (131).

Alice's aesthetic empathy and fascination with the past cause an identity crisis. She identifies with her seventeenth-century ancestor to the point that her identity becomes blurred and mixed with hers. There are multiple examples of such identification. For instance, at a party, Alice dresses in clothes like her ancestor's. When seventeenth-century Alice ambushed and killed her lover, she was dressed as a boy. Alice copies this look: "the door opened and a strange figure entered, stranger than any of these others who were profaning the clothes of the dead: a boy, slight and tall, in a brown riding-coat, leather belt, and big buff boots, a little grey cloak over one shoulder, a large grey hat slouched over the eyes, a dagger and pistol at the waist. It was Mrs. Oke" (138). This scene is triply transgressive. By

and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics (1912). Lee's views regarding aesthetics greatly shifted over time. When she was writing her supernatural works (1890s), Lee's concept of empathy had not yet been thoroughly or stably theorised. She produced notable works in aesthetic studies, such as *Beauty and Ugliness* and *Art and Man* (1924). See also Kirsty Martin's work on rhythm and sympathy. Nevertheless, Lee's fictional works prefigure her theoretical works, as the fiction reveals her interest in psychological phenomena and the engagement between artworks and an observer.

cross-dressing as a boy like her ancestor, Alice has crossed gender, temporal, and identity boundaries. The act shocks and offends her husband as it revolts against her position as an obeying wife. Moreover, it brings back the past about the disgraceful ancestor that should be buried to breach the present and blurs the already ill-defined dividing line between the two Alices of Okehurst.

Because identification and desire are confused in the story, it is difficult to determine whether Alice identifies with and wants to be her ancestor, or whether she desires and wants to be with her. Alice's feelings towards her namesake could be read as carrying homoerotic implications when considering Lee's use of the word "perverse" to describe Alice's obsession. In the impersonation scene quoted above, it is stated that when Alice dresses up to mimic seventeenth-century Alice, her eyes are "preternaturally bright, and her whole face lit up with a bold, perverse smile" (138). The term "perverse" also appears in other scenes whenever Alice fantasises about the past. For instance, Alice often "smiled faintly and half perversely, as her eyes sought that usual distant indefinable something" (144). Lee employs an interesting adverb here. The use of the adverb "perversely" in the description of Alice's smile signals the queer nature of her identification. Specifically, the term has an association with sexological language. In the nineteenth century, "perversion" became more associated with sexual behaviour (Schaffner 3). The term refers to "sexual behaviour or preference that is different from the norm" and "which is considered to be unacceptable or socially threatening, or to constitute a mental illness" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Although Lee does not fully embrace the limiting categorical sexual identities derived from sexology, her Gothic writing partly resonates with some sexological ideas

regarding perversion and narcissism. Interestingly, sexual perversion in nineteenth-century medical discourses constituted various overlapping sexual practices and these different types of sexual perversion shared common ground in being perceived as “self-absorbed”. Masturbation, a part of autoerotic behaviours, was identified in some Victorian medical writing as the origin of all other deviations from the normative sexuality model.²² Female homosexuality was sometimes put in the same category as female masturbation in scientific discourses on perversion (Luciano, *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures* 490).²³ There were also scientific opinions that homosexual people developed their alleged perversion from sexual excess, usually masturbation (Robinson 30).

Barbara Creed noted that, like masturbation, lesbianism was seen as inextricably linked to self-absorption and narcissism. Creed argues that women in general are depicted as narcissistic but that this is further reinforced in the depiction of the lesbian, who represents “feminine narcissism and auto-eroticism par excellence” (99). In 1898, Havelock Ellis discussed the topic of narcissism in “Auto-Erotism, a Psychological Study”. The sexologist is usually credited for coining the term “narcissism”, drawing upon the mythological character to describe “the sexual emotions to be absorbed, and often entirely lost in self-admiration” (206). There are some suggestive links between narcissistic traits and female dissident sexuality. Ellis also claimed, in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2,

²² For example, Sander Gilman’s *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (1985) notes that masturbation was an indicator of perversion (191-216).

²³ See also *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism* (2020), edited by Paula Bennett and Vernon Rosario.

that an identifying trait of a female invert is her “absolute indifference toward men” (134). This can be seen in the case of Alice, who is indifferent towards men like her husband and the narrator. All she cares about is her fantasy of recreating the formidable Alice of the seventeenth century, who looks exactly like herself. The narrator’s feelings are mixed between admiration and disapproval towards Alice’s eccentricity. In the painter’s view, Alice constantly exhibits “an exorbitant and absorbing interest in herself – a Narcissus attitude – curiously complicated with a fantastic imagination” (113). Alice is repeatedly depicted as egotistical, self-involved, and obsessed with herself.

The link between narcissism and female same-sex desire often manifests in themes of the visual double or literary mirror. The theme of a woman enthralled by her own reflection, suggestive of autoerotic pleasure, appeared in cultural manifestations in the nineteenth-century popular imagination, including literature and the visual arts. In “Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil and Fascinating Women” (1986), Bram Dijkstra comments on a typical convention of *fin-de-siècle* painting in which two women having erotic contact are portrayed as mirror images of each other with identical appearances and clothes (152-9). In this way, he has explored changes of artistic exploration from the altruistic to narcissist women. Antoine Magaud’s “Kiss in the Glass” (1885), a painting of a young woman kissing her reflection in the mirror, is a typical example of this belief in a female autoerotic nature. The woman in this painting became the century’s “emblem of her enmity toward man, the iconic sign of her obstructive perversity” (Dijkstra 150). Even Ellis observed the mirror theme and used excerpts from several works of literature to support his claim in his sexological works. He mentioned a “narcissus-

like tendency, of which the normal germ in women is symbolized by the mirror” (145). Ellis includes examples of fiction, such as Juan Valera y Alcalá Galiano’s 1897 book *Génio y Figura*, as a supplement to his real-life homosexual case studies. In *Génio y Figura*, the protagonist attempts to embrace her own reflection (Latimer 88).

To depict Alice’s homoerotic narcissism, Lee does not simply adopt the trope of a narcissistic double from scientific and cultural discourses. Rather, she appropriates the trope of the female double, who visually mirrors herself, by instilling it with an implied Gothic sensibility. In an illustrative scene, the painter observes the old portrait of the past Alice and remarks on her strange uncannily identical resemblance to the present Alice:

There were the same strange lines of figure and face, the same dimples in the thin cheeks, the same wide-opened eyes, the same vague eccentricity of expression, not destroyed even by the feeble painting and conventional manner of the time. One could fancy that this woman had the same walk, the same beautiful line of nape of the neck and stooping head as her descendant. (118-119)

The relationship between the present Alice and the Alice of the past is represented through an emphasis on their visual sameness. Although they are related by blood, the precise similarity is uncanny. Throughout the story, the narrator emphasises Alice’s uniqueness, observing that she is “so completely unlike everyone else” and “a very unusual kind of woman” (113). There are indicators of Alice’s exclusionary quality; she exists without reference except for her own self – and her lookalike. The sameness underlying the female double means the double only revolves

around the pair itself. Olu Jenzen examines the “self-referencing, auto-erotic and self-sufficient economy of desire” in the narcissistic lesbian double, or twin-like couple (348).²⁴ It is the sameness of the double motif which causes an uncanny repetition. In other words, the queerness of the female double image lies in its static condition that generates circularity without progression. In “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts”, Barbara Creed suggests that “[t]he representation of the lesbian couple as mirror-images of each other constructs the lesbian body as a reflection or an echo” (99). As such, Alice and her uncanny resemblance to her ancestor as well as the cursed circular history of the Oke family can be read as a sort of echo.

The temporal logic of the narcissistic double endorses repetition and therefore stands in clear opposition to a heteronormative future time frame. Creed considers the dangerous aspect of the double in terms of its temporal effects. The double is seen as “dangerous to society and culture because it suggests that there is no way forward – only regression and circularity are possible” (Creed 100). This claim can be read in light of the triangular relationship between the dead Alice, the living Alice, and William. The present Alice’s obsession with seventeenth-century Alice not only separates her from the present reality but also excludes her husband from their erotic economy. Throughout the story, while Alice is obsessed with her lookalike from the past, she simultaneously ignores William. Her indifference towards her husband is obvious. As the narrating painter observes, “the gentleness

²⁴ See also Jenzen’s “Revolting Doubles: Radical Narcissism and the Trope of Lesbian Doppelgangers” (2013).

and affection of the poor fellow [William] had evidently not touched her – she seemed almost to recoil from it” (135).

Lynda Hart observes that narcissists are also represented as dangerous because they “[draw] away from man’s civilizing influence” (*Fatal Women* 11). Alice’s queer narcissistic desire can thus be interpreted as threatening. This threatening quality in Lee’s double is also intensified with the use of another Gothic motif: the femme fatale. By identifying with her criminal ancestor, the present-day Alice adopts her dangerous autonomy. The femme fatale is a cultural stereotype that was available in the nineteenth century and is common in Gothic fiction. The femme fatale’s sexuality is typically both enticing and repulsive at the same time. In addition to a paradoxical charm, the femme fatale is well-known for her self-reliance. As Virginia Allen describes the term:

The adjectives [describing the femme fatale] so far collected include beautiful, erotic, seductive, destructive, exotic. To these we may add self-determined and independent [. . .] The femme fatale is less human. She is immortal, queen, goddess, and therefore separated from an ordinary men and women by a vast gulf. She is not only amorous and lovely, but indulges her sexuality without concern for her lover of the moment. (13)

This description can be applied to seventeenth-century Alice: she is haunting, murderous, and self-indulgent. The original Alice is a criminal who possesses an offensive sexual presence, and her presence exemplifies sexuality that is both appealing and horrific in its active and transgressive promiscuity. The ancestor’s lack of concern for her lover also recalls a female criminal in the typology of Italian

criminologist and sexologist Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso's inverted woman in *The Female Offender* (1895) anticipates Ellis's congenital invert, with her propensity for violence (Young 30). As Ellis argues, "[u]nlike the occasional offender or the hysteric, the born female offender of criminal anthropology is also incapable of (object-directed) love. Her insatiable egotism and thus her desire presage the narcissist" (Hart 22). Lee's evocation of the femme fatale reinforces the threatening quality of the double. The narcissistic autonomy the living Alice achieves through ancestral doubling helps her to be independent and articulates queer resistance to the hetero-patriarchal social order, thus threatening the heterosexual reproductive future.

It is also worth considering another significant trait of Lee's presentation of the queer double: the double occurs in the form of aesthetic empathy between a non-living art object and a human. That Alice has a queer narcissistic desire toward a non-living object in the form of a portrait supports the non-reproductive nature of that desire. One of the principles of aesthetics lies in its indulgence in current pleasure with no concern for any purpose. As Maureen Moran asserts, "[a]esthetics was interpreted, from the start, as a rebellion against morality. Because it rejected a dogmatic function for art, it seemed a self-indulgent and perverse philosophy, devoid of serious social purpose and obliquely connected to a sexually ambiguous, possibly, homosexual, sub-culture" (121). The theme of abnormal interactions with art objects from the past is persistent in Lee's writing, which features haunted artworks or collectable objects such as ghostly paintings, sculptures, and uncanny dolls. The theme of the uncanny portrait reappears in tales such as Lee's "A Culture Ghost: Winthrop's Adventure" (1881), in which

Magnus, a male protagonist, feels an erotic allure toward the painting of a beautiful androgynous musician named Zaffirino. Although the homoeroticism between artwork and beholder in “Oke” is much more subtle, we can find its homoerotic connotations in the Alices’ relationship. The art object functions as a medium for homoerotic energies. The trope of infatuation with inanimate antique objects also correlates with the configuration of homosexuality as non-productive and non-contributing to society. A fixation with a woman who exists in the form of artwork is aligned with non-reproductive indulgence, echoing Jana Funke’s statement: “[i]n the nineteenth century, the decadent rejection of nature, reproduction and utilitarianism had found expression in the joint celebration both of art for art’s sake and of sexualities that were considered non-reproductive and unnatural” (“Modernism, Sexuality and Gender” 258). The strange interaction with art (and not another living woman) in the story expands the scope of queerness. The possibly erotically charged connection with a ghost of a woman embodied in an art form is indeed transgressive, and it also challenges reproductive futurity.

Importantly, Alice is not only fascinated by the portrait, but also figuratively transforms into a ghostly portrait herself. The painter views her as an art composition rather than a body with flesh: “I never thought about her as a body – bones, flesh, that sort of thing; but merely as a wonderful series of lines, and a wonderful strangeness of personality” (114). In Alice’s ghostly doubling process of becoming like her female ancestor, she possesses not only art-like features but also exhibits ghostly incorporeality. The present Alice has a ghostlike presence, as is evident in her spectral and insubstantial traits. The artist remarks that “the stiff white dress [brought] out but the more the exotic exquisiteness and

incorporeality of her person" (151). Given her incorporeal features, the artist encounters difficulty when he attempts to represent Alice in a material art form. Lee writes Alice as someone who is too incomprehensible, undefined, and uncontainable to take the form of a definite visual object. There is an elusive quality in her physicality and personality: "her forehead is too big and nose too short. This gives no idea of her" (106). In other words, her physical body does not define or ground her to any fixed idea. The artist struggles to capture Alice's essence and convey it in the portrait. Her uncanny elusiveness contributes to the artist's failure to create a portrait of Alice. It is difficult to give Alice a definite form, as the artist notes: "[t]hat woman would slip through my fingers like a snake if I attempted to grasp her elusive character" (147). The present Alice gradually becomes a ghostly incorporeal replica of the dead Alice as she grows "more diaphanous, strange, and faraway" (141). Using the concept of the immaterial also reinforces the apparitional quality that is often associated with female homosexuality, as Castle has argued.

This combination of artistic qualities and ghostly incorporeality is informed by Lee's paradoxical view of the supernatural in an art form. In her early essay entitled "Faustus and Helena: Note on the Supernatural in Art" (1880), Lee expresses her conflicting opinion regarding art and the supernatural. She mentions the definiteness of art, claiming that artistic power "moulds and solidifies [the phantoms of the imagination] into distinct and palpable forms" (97). Lee also observes an antithesis between art and the supernatural: "the hostility between the supernatural and the artistic is well-nigh as great as the hostility between the supernatural and the logical". Furthermore, she warns against the consequence of bringing them together: "give shape to the vague, and it ceases to exist" (97-98). In

contrast with her own view, Lee included art in her later supernatural stories and managed to retain a sense of vagueness within this paradoxical coexistence. Rather than treating artwork as a closed form with definite physical boundaries and constraints, Lee's treatment of uncanny art objects emphasises their permeability. Despite taking a distinct form, the utilisation of artwork does not impose limitations on either temporality or the queer desires it mediates in Lee's fiction. Here, the notion of uncanny doubling used in Lee's stories allows the artwork to resist definite closure.

Taking Alice's paradoxical aesthetic quality and incorporeal aspects together, her shared similarities with the ghostly art object complicate notions of embodiment, the female body, and reproduction. The incorporeal art-like form of the present Alice is significant because it defies the usual fleshly female body, which is related to the female reproductive body. Sexual reproduction inheres in the corporeality of the female body. Victorian women were often denied opportunities because they were restricted to motherhood and domesticity. Their bodies were often controlled by social norms and obstructed their ability to confirm their own identities. The spectralization of Alice means her body does not conform to this prescribed function. The spectral quality and the lack of substantiality suggest a failure in sexual reproduction that comes to mark Alice's female body. By rejecting traditional reproductive sexuality, Alice's uncanny queer doubling provides a peculiar alternative to biological reproduction. The conventional method of biological reproduction uses children as a vessel for their parent's continuous existence. It assumes that, as death is inevitable, some people choose to have children so they might figuratively live on through their offspring. In Lee's story, the

narrative unfolds differently. The doubling allows Alice to resist death through repetition. The double is both a division and a multiplication; it is a combination of the same and the different as well as a mirror image that challenges the integrity of the self. The double defies the logic of sexual difference and heterosexual reproduction by asserting that new identities can be produced through splitting and mimesis.

Furthermore, the double motif has a complicated connection with the fear of death and self-preservation as it both denies and affirms mortality. The queer reproduction through doubling presented in Lee's story exemplifies this contradiction. The double, as Freud claims, "was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of the death'" (235). Simultaneously, the double is a harbinger of death. Alice becoming art-like is also suggestive of the antisocial death drive that has been linked with the queer, as proposed by Edelman. The death drive explains what Freud saw as "the drive to return to the inanimate", because "the inanimate existed before the animate" (78). The death drive is also entwined with the uncanny. As Nicholas Royle explains, the uncanny is bound with "a compulsion to repeat" and "a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive" (2).

Overall, Lee revises the relationship between the two Alices, which would normally be understood through traditional blood-based associations, to suggest queer kinship bonds. Alice bears a non-progressive non-reproductive relationship with her double from the past; their bond is cross-temporal and circular. Repetition in the economics of the female double opposes reproductive sexuality, one of the dominating hetero-patriarchal ideals. Alice's unconventional way of living suggests

Halberstam's definition of queer time as "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family inheritance, and child rearing" (*In a Queer Time and Place 2*). This queer bond, with its subversive potential, eventually brings an end to the lineage of the house of Okehurst, as foretold by the prophecy.

The end of the Okes occurs when the jealous William can no longer bear Alice's obsession with their ancestors and kills her. Denisoff has noted that "Alice's murder is the result of her society's inability or unwillingness to accept her attachment to this woman from the past. William kills his wife not for her interest in another man but for her undying devotion to another woman" (256). If we look closely, the object of Alice's sexual fantasy is presented in a very ambiguous manner. The painter contemplates the husband's feelings:

He was simply madly in love with his wife, and madly jealous of her. Jealous – but of whom? He himself would probably have been quite unable to say [. . .] I think that Oke himself was the sort of man whose imagination would recoil from realising any definite object of jealousy, even though jealousy might be killing him inch by inch. It remained a vague, permeating, continuous feeling. (145)

Lee leaves this object of jealousy open to uncertainty. Indeed, the jealous feeling can be read in light of the figure of the threatening female double, as previously discussed. The narcissistic self-sufficiency of women and their reflections is already a cause of envy for men, and a reminder of the danger this kind of female sexuality poses to male superiority.

William speaks with the narrator, expressing his distress about Alice's indifference towards him. He laughs hysterically and then exclaims, "[d]amn it, old fellow, this is a queer world we live in!" (144). The "queer world" can be read as a world of female homoeroticism. This world uncannily resonates with Barbara Creed's assertion that when "[m]en were shut out from this world – hence they understood the threat offered by the lesbian couple" (99). William lives in a world where the queer double excludes him from the economics of desire. This exclusion of men is inimical to the heterosexual norm and thus evokes a hostile response from them. In "Oke," this includes the male narrator. Later, when Alice is killed, the narrator's cold reaction affirms how threatening she is towards the dominant male heterosexual status. Despite Alice's tragic death, the male artist admits that "she was a marvellous, weird, exquisite creature, *but one couldn't feel sorry for her*. I felt much sorrier for the wretched creature of a husband" (107; my emphasis). Throughout the story, the artist has no empathy for Alice; he is interested only in her strangeness. Such a figure is "appropriately" eradicated by the end of the story, as implied by the unsympathetic painter.

Yet, killing Alice off does not mean that Lee concludes her text with the victory of heteropatriarchy and the defeat of female sexual dissidence. The ending is somehow satisfying for the dying Alice. The narrator comments that "[it] seemed such an appropriate end for her; I fancy she would have liked it could she have known" (107). In examining Alice's death scene, it is clear that queer time governs the scene, which suggests the "expectation" of her victorious escape as well as a recollection of the past. Here, temporalities bleed into one another: "It was a warm, enervating, autumn afternoon: the kind of weather that [. . .] seems to bring on to

the surface of one's consciousness all manner of vague recollections and expectations, a something half pleasurable, half painful, that makes it impossible to do or to think" (151). Alice's implied anticipation of death echoes the work of Edelman. Her concern with death can also be perceived as a concern with the death drive, which, in the words of Edelman, "names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). An embrace of this kind of negativity and anticipation of death itself leads to an apparent end to heteronormative time, allowing Alice to occupy a space that is beyond or outside normative temporality. The narrator sees William shoot Alice and thinks "I know nothing of time. It all seemed to be one second, but a second that lasted hours" (153). That time flows differently than usual, at least in his perception, indicates that normative time has become irregular, concurring with the end of Alice's compulsory straight time as a result of her death.

It is true, as Fluhr contends, that this queer empathetic connection has "cataclysmic consequences" leading to the loss of self and a fatal ending (287–288). Nevertheless, Lee's use of fantastic empathy imbued with homoeroticism not only creates a pernicious effect but also allows the heroine to escape restrictive futurity. According to Halberstam, "we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no respect for longevity" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 4). Halberstam's argument refers to the non-normative life schedule of queer people and is applicable to Alice. Alice's empathetic transhistorical bond and her untimely death point to the renunciation of a long life. However, Alice's death is also empowering and demonstrates an alternative outside of longevity. The murder

of Alice does not destroy the haunting queer bond between the two women. Specifically, the description of her death can be read as a counterbalance to heteropatriarchal eradication. While lying dead, Alice is somehow self-enclosed as “her wide-open white eyes seemed to smile vaguely and distantly” (152). Alice still maintains her empowering elusiveness during her last moments, and her distant look signals her undestroyed attachment to the female double from the past. Ultimately, Lee portrays a female-female relationship which ends in destruction but nonetheless escapes the constricting binary frames of self and other, heterosexual and homosexual, past and present. Importantly, it permanently breaks with the reproductive futurism of heteronormative temporality.

“The Legend of Madame Krasinska”: “Unproductive” Life, Uncanny Doubling, and Traumatic History

“The Legend of Madame Krasinska” was first published in *Fortnightly Review* 53 (1890) and later in Lee’s collection *Vanitas: Polite Stories* in 1892.²⁵ Presented in a retrospective narrative, the narrator tells us about Mother Antoinette Marie’s life before joining the Little Sisters of the Poor. Before becoming a nun, she was known as Madame Krasinska, a young, beautiful, and wealthy widow. The narrative focuses on her strange interest in Sora Lena, a poor and mad old woman who wanders around the streets of Florence. One day, the heroine obtains a portrait of the beggar from the painter Cecco Bandini and dresses up as Sora Lena at a fancy-dress party. Soon afterwards, Sora Lena dies by suicide after hanging herself. Her death results in an unexplainable intersubjective connection as well as

²⁵ There are three stories in the book: “Lady Tal”, “A Worldly Woman”, and “The Legend of Madame Krasinska”.

the doubling of identities and temporalities. Krasinska suddenly suffers an identity crisis, and her routines begin to alter. In the end, Krasinska becomes religious and devotes her life to bettering the lives of elderly people experiencing poverty.

This story is little-known compared to Lee's other supernatural tales and has not gained much critical attention. However, Angela Leighton has acknowledged its themes of disintegrated self and non-progressive history, observing that Lee "takes us across the borderline of the present, which is also the borderline of sanity, sense and self" ("Resurrections of the Body" 238). This chapter builds on the alignment between the dissolution of self-other and temporal boundaries and suggests its link with the exploration of women's lives. Following a similar trajectory to my analysis of "Oke of Okehurst", focus will be placed on the temporal effects of the transhistorical doubling phenomena, especially its effects on a heroine's life narrative. Lee makes it clear that her collection *Vanitas* is concerned with the theme of women's "frivolous" lives. In the introduction, Lee refers to the book as "sketches of frivolous women" (5). "The Legend of Madame Krasinska" shows the way in which the unproductive life of the middle-upper-class heroine is changed by experiencing a ghostly doubling with the life of another woman from the past and a haunting history. Madame Krasinska's haunting transhistorical bond with a lower-class woman reshapes her path, removing her from a future of reproductive sexuality. Eventually, the heroine finds a way to live "productively" by helping other people without necessarily pursuing the social norms of being sexually reproductive. Considering the conjunction of Gothic motifs and queer temporality adds an additional, more nuanced layer to this moral tale.

Krasinska's life schedule shares a similar pattern to Alice in "Oke of Okehurst". Madame Krasinska enjoys her life and makes it clear that she refuses to pursue reproductive futurity. She "ha[s] never had a child and never had a lover, and never experienced the smallest desire for either" (116). Krasinska, who marries for the sake of acquiring wealth and a lavish lifestyle, is in no way affected by the death of her husband. She thinks of his death as "a happy demise" and has "no remorse of any kind" because his sudden death leaves her wealthier (115-116). This chapter argues that Krasinska enters a new life path when she begins to form a bond with Sora Lena. The haunting double does not end in death but nonetheless deviates from the normative path of sexual reproduction. Like Alice in "Oke", Madame Krasinska is intrigued by the portrait of another woman and the subject of the portrait. When Krasinska sees the painting, she realises that it represents an old lady whom she has spotted on the streets. This lady is a mad woman relentlessly wandering around and making her eccentric appearance familiar to the locals. Krasinska has seen her before but has never known her story. The painter tells her about the woman's tragic past, revealing that she lost her children in a war, which caused her to lose her mind and live as a beggar. This mad woman is known in the town for her ghostlike presence. In addition to her spatial pervasiveness, her eeriness is linked to the fact that she seems to transcend time. She is everywhere, all over the place, and figuratively "haunts" the city. The old lady appears to inhabit a strange time in a ghost-like manner. As Cecchino tells Krasinska, it seems as if Sora Lena "must always have been there" and "in all weathers" (135).

Lee once again employs the theme of the art object as a starting point for the haunting doubling. Despite their social differences, the sketched portrait of Sora Lena intrigues Madame Krasinska, and the artist calls Krasinska's interest in the portrait "a kind of rare empathy" (134). Readers are told that Krasinska "is very desirous of possessing" the sketch of Sora Lena (135). Here, the idea of possession seems to be used in both a physical (as in owning material things) and psychological sense. Wiley's discussion of Lee's book *Laurus Nobilis*, which concerns the longing for possession, may be useful in examining this line of thinking further. Wiley explains that "[in] longing, we reach out and attempt to fuse ourselves with what we love or desire by 'owning' it. We want to destroy the boundary between ourselves and what we desire; we want, in a sense, to *become* ('union, fusion') what we desire" (60). Krasinska breaks the boundaries between herself and her desired portrait by attempting to imitate the portrait. Krasinska replicates Sora Lena by fashioning a costume based on the sketch for Madame Fosca's fancy-dress ball. Madame Krasinska's entrance into the ball in her costume is described as follows:

A little gangway was cleared; and there walked into the middle of the white and gold drawing-room, a lumbering, hideous figure, with reddish, vacant face, sunk in an immense, tarnished satin bonnet; and draggled, faded, lilac silk skirts spread over a vast dislocated crinoline. The feet dabbled along in the broken prunella boots; the mangy rabbit-skin muff bobbed loosely with the shambling gait; and then, under the big chandelier, there came a sudden pause, and the thing looked slowly round, a gaping, mooning, blear-eyed stare.

It was the Sora Lena. (166)

In spite of the heroine's mocking intention, Krasinska identifies with and successfully recreates a past she has never experienced via the imitation of Sora Lena. By copying Sora Lena's appearance, Krasinska produces an uncanny double at the party and brings the sketch to life. Clothes are a crucial element facilitating this transformational process. Sora Lena is recognised by her 1860s clothing; the deceased had long been notorious throughout Florence for her eccentric habits and apparel (139). Moreover, the clothes act as physical reminders of the past: "in all weathers you might have seen that hulking old woman, with her vague, staring, reddish face, trudging through the streets or standing before shops, in her extraordinary costume of thirty years ago" (161). As such, clothes express Sora Lena's identity, and when Krasinska wears similar clothes, she engages in a queer performativity wherein one places themselves into another's context. Sora Lena's dirty old clothes reflect both her social class and her entrapment in the past. According to Catherine Spooner, "clothing is above all a means of inserting the self into social discourse, literary or otherwise" (*Fashioning Gothic Bodies* 3). Krasinska's imitation of the poor woman's old clothes implies that she is crossing both class and temporal boundaries.

Krasinska imitates not only the clothes but also the "bodily" movements of Sora Lena. Krasinska uses her body to experience the past of her double. In other words, the act of re-enactment channels another body from the past. Applying physicality to temporality, Madame Krasinska makes a hidden history visible. Both Krasinska and the audience at the party thus encounter the past represented by the mad old woman. Using her body to perform a temporal encounter with the past,

Krasinska's queer performance practices Freeman's method of "erotohistoriography". This method is an embodied mode of queering history which

admits that contact with historical material can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations (95-96).

Queer temporality is performed on the body through physical actions and bodily motions and treats the present as a hybrid existing with the past. This temporality is akin to the case of Krasinska and Sora Lena. The former's performance creates an affective history which entails "thinking that a bodily motion (a grasp, a clutch, a refusal to let go) might have something to do with knowing and making history – with continuities, contacts, and contradictions among past, present and future – through both physical sensation and emotional response" (*Time Binds* xx).

The scene in which Krasinska dresses up for the comical ball recalls the idea of "temporal drag", a concept coined by Freeman. Here, the word "drag" not only refers to dressing across genders but is also, as Freeman argues in "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations" (1992), associated "with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present" (728).²⁶ The practice of temporal drag can be used between members of the same sex to form relations, affinities, or identities

²⁶ Freeman discusses the concept of temporal drag in her analysis of *Shulie* (1997), in which she analyses the recreation of the past in Elizabeth Subrin's shot-by-shot remake of the 1967 film about radical feminist Shulamith "Shulie" Firestone.

that transcend time. In Freeman's recent interview with Amelia Groom, she mentions the issue of temporal drag and gender:

With temporal drag I was interested in drag that was not necessarily cross-gender drag, but it was still a way of saying "I do not live my gender in a normative way." What makes it drag is that it is not about passing; it has a gap, a fissure that you can see through, and sometimes the way to make that fissure is temporal. Think of somebody like Amy Sedaris, who does this 1950s housewife act. She is very cis feminine, but when she puts it on you know that it is satire – you know that she is remarking ironically both on the distance between those gender norms and her own, and also on the things that have not changed at all. That kind of drag became interesting to me, partly as someone who identifies as femme, where gender crossing is not always what's happening with my sense of my own gender, but where there is still an experience of disjuncture in the kinds of gender that I can wear on my body.²⁷

Temporal drag is a tool for historical understanding to recreate and bring back the past, and it is thereby an embodiment of anachronism. In her essay, Freeman also argues that temporal drag is the "stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceed one's own historical moment" (728). Temporal drag brings an Italy of the past into young Krasinska's present.

²⁷ The interview was conducted online in February 2022. The interview was conducted by Amelia Groom. Freeman addressed the topic of temporal drag and discussed recent video installations by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, including *(No) Time* (2020), which is part of the *No Linear Fucking Time* exhibition at the Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht.

It is significant that the story is set in Italy. Lee is well-known for her intellectual and sentimental attachment to Italy's past. She spent most of her life in Italy, and her interest in the country can be seen in many of her literary works. It is also Lee's preferred setting for her supernatural tales. Critics such as Catherine Maxwell and Alex Murray have addressed the uncanniness of Italy in Lee's works. Angela Leighton makes an interesting point about the link between Italy and the Victorians and its temporal meaning, arguing that "[t]he picture of Italy in Lee's writing works as a framed moment of the past, ghostly with absence yet hauntingly recuperable, provides the energy of much later Victorian writing" ("Resurrections of the Body" 223).²⁸

Moreover, in "Madame Krasinska" the history of Italy aligns with the personal history of female subjectivity. Krasinska's performance revives the erased history of forgotten ordinary people. Supporting Carla Freccero's concept of queer history, Sora Lena's history is a version of "histories that might have been, that could still be, discarded and forgotten, or effaced histories that might be retrieved, re-articulated, brought to bear in the interests of other futures, or not" (21). As such, this story is concerned with the haunting of cultural memory as much as the haunting of personal trauma. Sora Lena's sons seemingly died during the Italian Unification war, and she has to live in post-Risorgimento post-Unification Florence.

²⁸ In *Aestheticism in Italy: A New Sense of Place*, Stefano Evangelista writes about the significance of Italy on British aestheticism: "[a]ttention is given to how the development of English Aestheticism was shaped through encounters with Italy" (263). Italy was important because it offered the aesthetes "a respect for art and the aesthetic that they thought Britain lacked: the sense of timelessness enshrined in Italy's artistic and historical monuments seduced aesthetic writers like James into believing that the country brought them face to face with the past, in its full sensual intensity, uncorrupted by the distracting forces of modernity" (264).

This is evident when she sings Garibaldi's hymn at the train station while awaiting the return of her two sons who went to Solferino during the Second War of Italian Independence. Sora Lena and her connection to an Italy of the past brings to mind Fluhr's comment on Lee's *Hauntings* collection: "[t]he individual ghosts in *Hauntings* function as metonyms for history; they haunt men and women of the 1890s as the historical haunts modern life. Personifying the past, the charismatic figures with whom the narrators are obsessed make history personal; they concentrate its fascination on an individual who effectively stands for a historical epoch" (289). Lee connects the history of Italy during the Risorgimento era with a local figure, Sora Lena. Consequently, Sora Lena represents the history of Italy prior to its unification and its aftermath. Her story is a personal history of a broken-hearted mother that has been forgotten. Sora Lena is unable to regain her sanity after the war and return to her previous lifestyle. In other words, she has become a haunting remnant of the past. This old woman is a metaphor for the spectral presence of the past as well as a defiance of the march of time. Sora Lena refuses to live in the present, and she therefore continues to behave as though she is living in the past. As mentioned previously, her "amazing clothing from thirty years ago" are one of the most obvious signs that time has stopped moving forward for Sora Lena.

This lost history is recovered as a result of Krasinska's temporal drag, which has the unintended consequence of altering her future. The queer performance evokes what Freccero calls "queer spectrality", which is "a phantasmatic relation to historicity that could account for the affective force of the past in the present, of a desire issuing from another time and placing a demand on the present"

(“Queer/Early/Modern” 163). Freccero defines this term as “a way of understanding how trauma, mourning, and event are registered on the level of subjectivity and history and how queer subjects find themselves impelled by demands that confound the temporalities of past, present, and future” (23). The queer performance at the party allows the dead to act on the living as Sora Lena’s trauma is transposed into Krasinska’s present and changes the way she lives.

After Krasinska’s queer performance at the fancy-dress party, the separation between self and other begins to break down. However, the transhistorical doubling in this story is less sexually charged than in “Oke”. The story instead focuses on female queer subjectivity. A queer way of being does not necessarily equate to a sexual experience and can also be expressed through any ability to break from heterosexual reproductive futurity. Whereas the relationship between Madame Krasinska and Sora Lena may not be romantic or sexual, there is undoubtedly an intimate connection between them. Madame Krasinska resurrects and relives the past in her imitative performance. Queerness is here expressed in the failure or refusal to conform to normative progressive expectations; it is less clearly defined as a sexual orientation and instead more broadly understood in relation to experiences of temporality. For Madame Krasinska, this destruction of chronological temporality and stable identity changes her life forever.

Not long after the party, the painter learns that Sora Lena has taken her own life, and he believes that Madame Krasinska’s imitation may have had something to do with her suicide. Since that night, Krasinska has been subjected to a series of bizarre occurrences wherein she gradually loses her autonomy and experiences

double consciousness. She “used to wake up at night with the horror of that suspicion. And in the middle of the day [...] rush to the mirror and stare at herself, and look for every feature, and clutch for every end of silk, or bit of lace, or wisp of hair, which proved that she was really herself. For gradually, slowly, she had come to understand that she was herself no longer” (179). Krasinska’s queer perception of time coincides with her identity crisis as she is confused about “what happens and happened to whom – to herself or to Sora Lena?” (148). Krasinska’s sense of temporality is jumbled: she is confused about whether “[s]omething had happened, or was going to happen, [and] she could not remember which, but she burst into tears nonetheless. In the midst of such a state of things, if visitors or a servant entered, she would ask sometimes who they were” (175). A particular passage reveals her uncertainty of self and other: “[had] it really all happened? and to whom? Had it really happened to her, had her boys. [. . .] But Madame Krasinska had never had any boys” (148). It is difficult for her, and the reader, to determine whether the action takes place in the past or the future, as well as whose past or future it is. A stream of consciousness is used to communicate her thoughts, and incoherent thinking reflects an identity that is incoherent.

Sora Lena’s invasion of Krasinska’s life creates a sense of the uncanny. Wolfreys explains that being haunted means “repeatedly encountering intimately the uncanny sensation” (*Victorian Hauntings* 18). The ghostly merging of identities begins when the young lady experiences a familiar-but-different sensation, that is, the unfamiliar feeling of residing within “herself”. Lady Krasinska seems to lose her sanity along with her identity. That is, she loses control and realises “she really did not seem to be herself any longer” (145). The double can cause uncanny feelings

because it blurs the self and the other, thus risking a stable sense of subjectivity. Krasinska's haunted state of mind can be read in the light of supernatural phenomena. For instance, the critic Hilary Grimes interprets it as a spiritual possession: "Madame Krasinka's endeavors to represent the supernatural in art are so successful that she becomes possessed by a ghost, and her Sora Lena disguise is so convincing that she actually becomes her" (114).

The haunting effects, as shown above, occur in the form of an inexplicable possession of the old woman's memories and history. The fantastic "reliving" of the past begins with her "remembering"; Krasinska possesses the dead's memories. This strange empathy enables Krasinska to have an extraordinary shared memory that connects her with Sora Lena. In her daily life, Krasinska is distracted and removed from the present moment:

she really did not seem to be herself any longer. Once, at a grand dinner, she suddenly ceased eating and talking to her neighbour, and surprised herself wondering who the people all were and what they had come for. Her mind would become, every now and then, a blank; a blank at least full of vague images, misty and muddled, which she was unable to grasp, but of which she knew that they were painful, weighing on her as a heavy load must weigh on the head or back. (175)

This painful memory belongs to the traumatised Sora Lena and marks a moment in which Krasinska gains a much more intimate knowledge of the old woman, as well as access to her consciousness. One of the most prominent aspects of uncanny time is linked to memory. Traumatic memories are, quite possibly, the locus at which the uncanny makes its most pronounced appearance.

The dead's traumatic memories have an uncanny way of breaking into present reality. The uncanny involves a wide variety of strange occurrences, such as the sensation of flashbacks (which may be hidden aspects that arise suddenly or an involuntary engagement with traumatic memory), déjà vu, and other forms of memory that are subconsciously tied to trauma. For Krasinska, the uncanny occurs through a shared doubling memory. She remembers an old song: "[t]hen she set to singing – drumming out the tune on the screen – the soldier song of '59, *Addio, mia bella, addio*" (51). This line directly refers to the war song Sora Lena must have heard while waiting for her sons' military service to end. When Krasinska's old self is gradually subsumed, she questions whose memory this belongs to: "[w]hat of those strange forebodings of evil, those muddled fears of some dreadful calamity [. . .] something which had happened, or was going to happen [. . .] poverty, starvation, death – whose death, her own? or someone else's?" (179). Krasinska's knowledge of the other woman's past can be read in terms of hauntology. Hauntology necessitates a fresh perspective of an object of study that escapes traditional frames of knowledge and departs from conventional paradigms. Things that seem to defy logic may not exist in the world as it is currently known. They cannot be classified or defined and require one to accept that it is not possible to understand everything. This broadens our understanding of human cognitive abilities. By tearing down accepted frames of reference and interpretive frameworks and examining the mechanisms behind the collective memories of both individuals and society, hauntology also undermines claims of objectivity, certainty, and measurability.

While attending a party, Krasinska cries out, “Ah, I am she – I am she – I am mad!” Surprisingly, the voice is “so different from her own”. Krasinska recognises “the voice that should have issued from the cardboard mask she had once worn [as] the voice of Sora Lena” (152). This scene illustrates the moment of the overlap between the two women. Lee plays with the ambiguity between madness and supernatural possession in constructing an intrusion of psychic boundaries wherein the external imitation affects the internal. From the superficial imitation of the cardboard mask, Krasinska is genuinely connected with Sora Lena as she now possesses the dead woman’s voice. This corresponds to what Robert L. Katz describes in *Empathy: Its Nature and Uses* (1963): “when we empathise, we lose ourselves in the new identity we have temporarily assumed” (9). At this moment, Krasinska’s feeling for Sora Lena reaches beyond sympathy to empathy, and she loses herself in the new identity she had first assumed at the fancy dress party.

Sharing a common ground with Alice-Alice in “Oke of Okehurst”, the transhistorical bond between the women serves as the female protagonists’ diversion from heterosexual romance. Having taken or been taken by Sora Lena’s identity, Krasinska, a new widow entangled now with another life from the past, does not return to married life and thus fails to accomplish the heteronormative timeline. In the past, Krasinska “only wanted to amuse herself”, but “the day after Madame Fosca’s ball – Madame Krasinska was not amusing herself” (141). Krasinska starts losing interest in daily activities and begins to suffer from unprecedented and inexplicable depression. What I want to foreground in this ghostly doubling is the way that Krasinska’s life is changed drastically: “Madame Krasinska felt that she must live, live noisily, live scandalously, live her own life of

wealth and dissipation” (179). Krasinska adopts Sora Lena’s persona and way of living. In Lee’s essay, “On Literary Construction” (1923), she expresses her interest in “the extraordinary phenomenon of a creature being apparently invaded from within by the personality of another creature, of another creature to all intents and purposes imaginary” (288). The queer temporality generated by her act of imitation seems to trap Krasinska in the life of a working-class woman. The frivolous middle-upper-class woman moves away from her extravagant lifestyle to a very different form of unproductive life. She takes after Sora Lena’s identity and lifestyle.

One of the new activities Krasinska picks up from Sora Lena is wandering the streets. Krasinska’s walk through the streets also forges a sensory connection with Sora Lena’s history. In this tale, haunting is inextricably tied to place, so by incorporating the concept of *genus loci* or the spirit of places, Lee questions the links between space, place, and memory. The notion of *genius loci* is integral to Lee’s non-fictional and fictional texts as it is “the substance of our heart and mind, a spiritual reality. And as for visible embodiment, why that is the place itself, or the country; and the features and speech are the lie of the land, pitch of the streets, sound of bells or of weirs” (Lee, *Genius Loci* 5). Lee explains that “[t]o certain among us, undeniably, places, localities (I can find no reverent and tender enough expression for them in our practical, personal language) become objects of intense and most intimate feeling. Quite irrespective of their inhabitants, and virtually of their written history, they can touch us like living creatures” (3). Krasinska walks around the city in the same way that Sora Lena haunts the streets of Florence, “strolling around in that damp May twilight among the old, tortuous streets” and [entering] “that labyrinth of black narrow alleys [...] between the frowning tall

houses of the old Jews' quarters; houses escutcheoned and stanchioned, once the abode of Ghibelline nobles, now given over to rag pickers, scavengers and unspeakable trades" (324).

Despite its Italian setting, Lee's tale notably challenges middle-class gender and sexual ideologies similar to those of Victorian England. Krasinska's fused identities in temporal drag result in her changed life routine and broader way of living, especially with regard to aspects of gender and sexual behaviour. Krasinska and Sora Lena's intriguing relationship is transgressive in many ways, overstepping class-based, gender-based, temporal, and psychic boundaries to convey ideas of non-normative femininity. Before the fancy-dress party, Madame Krasinska lacks worldly experiences and is described as childlike:

There was something childlike in her nature which made her modest and decorous. She had never learned to talk slang, or to take up vulgar attitudes, or to tell impossible stories; and she had never lost a silly habit of blushing at expressions and anecdotes which she did not reprove other women for using and relating. Her amusements had never been flavoured with that spice of impropriety. (178)

After the party, she adopts transgressive behaviours that are assumed to be those of Sora Lena. Krasinska challenges the norms of women's propriety by suddenly behaving like a "fallen" or "disgraced" woman. She flirts with the notorious Mongibello – the sort of man that no good woman would associate with – and attempts to be sexually promiscuous, which was forbidden for high-class women in her era: "[s]he became, all of a sudden, anxious for those exotic sensations which honest women may get by studying the ways, and frequenting the haunts, of

women by no means honest" (178). Madame Krasinska's presumed superior sense of morality is thus challenged. Furthermore, along with gender expectations, Krasinska also transgresses class boundaries. The conceptualisation of social class is bound up with ideas of morality. As Cecchino remarks, "there is a transfiguring magic, almost a moralising power, in wealth and elegance and good-breeding" (166). Hence, the process of becoming Sora Lena raises questions about the construction of femininity: what defines a "good woman", what is "desirable" or "undesirable" femininity, and what separates a working-class woman from an upper middle-class woman?

The haunted Krasinska takes transgressive pleasure in performing actions that a proper lady would not. For example, she goes wandering "for evening strolls in the more dubious portions of the town", "[a]nd she [becomes] so outrageously conspicuous in her flirtations" (178). She breaks away from her usual routine and spends time unproductively with no goal and no concerns over the future. As the preceding sections have suggested, time in this story is organised in a way that structures and enforces normativity. The deviation from temporal norms accordingly correlates to a deviation from normative gender and sexuality. Krasinska's evening stroll can be read as a set of alternative social activities with the potential to turn away from narrative coherence toward marriage, reproduction, and child rearing and instead embrace, to borrow Halberstam's phrase, "immaturity in place of responsibility" ("Theorizing Queer Temporalities" 182).

One evening, when she wanders across the street, Krasinska unknowingly walks to a house that turns out to be Sora Lena's former house. At this place, Krasinska reaches the climactic turning point in her life's journey. The house itself

is a symbol of the past. Reading this short story, Emma Liggins explores the themes of the haunted house and devious female routes in Gothic spaces – a turning away from modernity that provides a rapture of the past. Old houses generate an emotional response to the past, which becomes a decadent experience (137). Liggins discusses the scene in which Krasinska enters the house. She interprets the old house as one of the haunted sites that straddle the line between homely and unhomely and which invite a disturbing interaction between person and place. Krasinska has a brush with the past while trapped inside the haunted mansion, and her time there is bent and distorted. Specifically, Krasinska experiences a form of telepathy. When she enters the old's lady house and "knows" Sora Lena's past experiences there, the reader is told that "[she] had never been inside the house over the tobacconist's, up three pairs of stairs to the left; and yet she knew exactly the pattern of the wall-paper" (150). In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon states that haunting is "a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (8). This special knowledge is significant because it implies that Krasinska's empathy has developed since she first saw the sketch of Sora Lena. To begin with, Krasinska is drawn in by Sora Lena's strange looks, and then she feels sorry for the old woman's tragic life. This time, however, Krasinska displays a more developed form of sympathy. She does not merely feel sorry *for* Sora Lena: she also feels *with* her. This empathetic process undermines the concept of individual identity and highlights the instability of self and other.

Krasinska then seems to be possessed because she attempts to kill herself in the same manner as Sora Lena. This may be the point at which the protagonist

enters into a queer supernatural scenario. She believes that she is saved by the spirit of Sora Lena. Whether or not Sora Lena's ghost comes to rescue her is a question that remains unresolved for the reader. This near-death situation in the haunted house suggests that Madame Krasinska is confronting death, and this scene may suggest the scenario that Edelman describes in *No Future*. Rather than ignoring death, Edelman's concept of queerness confronts death. In other words, the death drive is something that Edelman's notion of queerness embraces in order to resist the dominant cultural force of reproductive futurity. The incident in the house ultimately results in Krasinska gaining a new identity and a new way of life as a woman. Krasinska foregoes her previous life and becomes Mother Antoinette Marie, joining the Little Sisters of the Poor and devoting herself to altruistic acts. This slightly contrasts with Edelman, who views queerness as opposed to any form of social relationality. In entering the convent, Krasinska does not completely reject the norms that govern her society. Yet, she nonetheless enters into an alternative form of society which does not privilege reproductive heterosexuality absolutely.

Sora Lena is a maternal figure. Being a mother is one of the essential aspects of her identity, and she is constantly longing to find her lost sons, who died in the war. Through Krasinska's turn to a maternal spiritual realm, Lee grapples with the belief that women are innately maternal, which was also commonly held in the Victorian Era. The heroine achieves a compromising resolution. With her dedication to the poor, Krasinska displays a maternal instinct similar to that of her double. The haunting experience leads Krasinska to eventually gain a new sense of identity and construct an alternative femininity for herself. Consequently, Lee

offers the woman an alternate life narrative. Krasinska's altruistic choice is a complicated portrayal of moving toward futurity via maternity. Her presence is not defined by the traditional role of a wife, but she is nonetheless a mother.

Motherhood is not a natural condition; rather, it is culturally constructed. In her essay "Deconstructing Motherhood", Carol Smart explains that "[motherhood] is an institution that presents itself as a natural outcome of biologically given gender differences, as a natural consequence of (hetero)sexual activity, and as a natural manifestation of an innate female characteristic, namely the maternal instinct" (37). Through naturalisation, preconceived notions about gender, sexuality, and gender identity that are based on binary oppositions (male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual) are reaffirmed. These definitions of reproductive sexuality are embedded with such binary oppositions.

On the other hand, Krasinska is able to become a mother despite her refusal to become pregnant and her flight from the institution of marriage. The concept of motherhood, in its ideological meaning, is inextricably linked to pregnancy in Western culture; the so-called "expectant mother" is forced into her assigned role well in advance of giving birth (Carroll, *Rereading Heterosexuality* 101). Krasinska's devotion to Christianity is an instance of motherhood outside of heterosexual marriage because the heroine still complies with social norms by exhibiting maternal benevolence. As Julia Kristeva states in her essay "Stabat Mater", Christianity "is doubtless the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity [. . .] is focused on *Maternity*" (161). Kristeva contends that the maternal is the only identification that the symbolic order can give to women, an association that is most evident in Christianity. While it still adopts a conservative

position, Lee's story seems to demonstrate the idea that femininity, while socially constructed, is not entirely monolithic, but rather has varied forms. There were instances of motherhood outside marriage around this time, as seen in some literary depictions of "asexual mothers" at the end of the nineteenth century (Nelson and Holmes 3). Religious motherhood, specifically, can be regarded as a complete separation of maternity and sexuality. Becoming a sort of "social mother", Krasinska's maternal identity is queered and extricated from fertility and reproductive sexuality.

Having investigated two Gothic stories by Lee, it is clear that the author avoids emerging ideas of fixed sexual identity and reaches for a broader sense of queerness. She achieves this via the utilisation of queer temporalities and the Gothic theme of the uncanny double. The theme of female queer sexuality is mediated by Lee's employment of a fantastic aesthetic that overthrows the concept of historical development and a single unified subject. Lee's writings engage with queer fluidity in ways that challenge ideas of a temporal binary between past and present, including body and mind as well as self and other. The lack of temporal distance between past and present and self and other removes Lee's female characters from the confines of a singular linear straight time. While Lee's ghost stories demonstrate the perils of uncanny doublings, such as the risks of merged identities and loss of selfhood, they also illustrate the potential for alternative life paths for queer female subjects. In both stories, the queer female characters, with their empathetic transhistorical bonds, embrace agency rather than a mere passive state of being haunted. These ghostly experiences not only alter how one feels or acts but also change one's life path. The haunting ghosts from the past come to

the present to reveal hidden histories while also providing the haunted person with an alternative future (or no future, as is the case of Alice). Non-heterosexual desire and the queer subject are represented in Lee's ghost stories as incompatible with reproduction. Female same-sex cross-historical doubling enables queer forces that dismantle heteronormative structures of biological reproduction.

Chapter Two

Charlotte Mew: Figuring Queer Subjectivities through Gothic Spatiotemporal Analogies in “Passed” and “The Changeling”

This chapter examines another female writer whose works straddled the late Victorian and early modernist periods: Charlotte Mew (1869–1928). Born in London, Mew was admired for her poetry by writers like Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf.²⁹ Mew, albeit best known as a poet, commenced her literary career as a fiction writer. Her debut is a short story entitled “Passed”, which was published in 1894 in the second volume of *The Yellow Book*, a progressive and avant-garde art and literature journal. *The Yellow Book* significantly contributed to the 1890s aestheticist and decadent movement. Some examples of the writers who wrote for the journal are Vernon Lee, Olive Custance, and A. C. Benson. Mew’s famous work was a poetry collection, *The Farmer’s Bride* (1916). This chapter focuses on “Passed” and one of the poems in *The Farmer’s Bride* called “The Changeling”. “Passed” and “The Changeling” differ in many aspects; however, they also share common ground. Both works exhibit two distinguishing traits that can be found across Mew’s body of work: the inability to find language to explain non-normative desire and the frustration of attempting to come to terms with one’s non-normative sexuality.

Self-denial and a sense of alienation are key aspects of Mew’s literary writings. Some critics suggest Mew’s work bespeaks her personal inner conflict

²⁹ Hardy asserts that Mew is “far and away the best living woman poet, who will be read when others are forgotten”. Woolf says, “I have got Charlotte Mew’s book, and I think her very good and interesting and unlike anyone else” (419). See *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life* by Hermione Lee.

regarding queer sexuality. For instance, Jane Dowson argues that Mew's "love for women remained unresolved and is projected on her representations of mental conflicts" (186). Jessica Walsh comments on Mew's personal life and her search to address her lifelong fear of insanity, deviant queer passion, and the unruly body. When considering her biography, Mew's sexual orientation is ambiguous and complicated. It is believed that Mew had unrequited feelings for Ella D'Arcy, a writer and the assistant literary editor of *The Yellow Book*, and later fell in love with May Sinclair, a writer and suffragist. Mew's affection for the two women was not reciprocated.³⁰ Despite her queer relationships with women, it seems that Mew paradoxically distanced herself from homosexuality. One of the incidents that demonstrates Mew's aversion to same-sex sexuality is her reaction to Oscar Wilde's case. After Wilde's notorious trial in 1895, Mew no longer wanted to be associated with *The Yellow Book* as the publication was linked with Wilde's homosexuality in the public's mind.³¹ Mew then disassociated herself from *The Yellow Book*. Her poems later came to the attention of Harold Monroe, a founder of the Poetry Bookshop.³² His press published her now renowned collection, *The Farmer's Bride*, in 1916.

³⁰ For Mew's detailed biography, see Penelope Fitzgerald's *Charlotte Mew and Her Friends* (1984). For Mew's same-sex friendship, see *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to World War II*. Vol. 1., edited by Robert F. Aldrich, and Garry Wotherspoon (365).

³¹ Mew's actress friend Evelyn Millard was involved in Wilde's scandal after appearing in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Honest*, and this seemed to frighten Mew even further (Severin 18).

³² In 1912, Alida Monroe (Harold's wife) read Mew's poem "The Farmer's Bride" and was very impressed. In 1913, Alida and Harold began the Poetry Bookshop. It became a poets' meeting place and a publishing venture. In 1916, it published the 17 poems that form Charlotte Mew's first collection, *The Farmer's Bride*.

Mew's literary writing features themes of female same-sex desire and non-normative sexual subjects but also appears cautious of directly addressing the topic. The stigmatising association of non-normative sexualities with mental health issues in sexological discourse might explain the pessimistic tone and why Mew's queer characters do not subscribe to clearly defined sexual identity categories or labels. Some sexological models of sexual identity were pathologising and connected queer sexuality with "madness" and other forms of physical and mental "degeneration". Sexologists "buil[t] a science of desire, a new continent of knowledge that would reveal the hidden keys to our nature" (Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents* 63). However, "[i]n so doing they also lent support to other more dubious activities, from the pathologising of 'perverse' sexual practices to the construction of racist eugenics" (Weeks 63). A specific link was drawn between hereditary mental disease and dissident sexualities. Krafft-Ebing argued that sexual perversions, including homosexuality, were caused by hereditary or pre-existing mental illness (Zilney 19; Bennett and Rosario 85). The issue of genetic and mental disorders was one of Mew's greatest fears. She lived a tragic life because of her family's mental health problems, which were understood to be hereditary: her brother and sister had mental illnesses and were sent to asylums. Her decision not to have children may have been motivated, at least partly, by her wish not to pass on her family's hereditary propensity for mental illness.³³ It was both challenging and liberating for Mew to not use a clear language for defining homosexuality in her fictional stories. Instead of embracing a fixed sexual identity,

³³ One of her sisters, Freda, suffered from schizophrenia. Mew mostly lived with her sister Anne (Raitt, "Queer moods: The life and death of Charlotte Mew" 26).

Mew required a new lexicon for depicting conflicted sexual subjects as well as their ambiguous and frightening queer desires.

This chapter proposes that Mew found such an expression in the intersection of Gothic aesthetics and queer temporalities. Both “Passed” and “The Changeling” engage with the themes of queer sexual development and queer spatiotemporality. Both texts feature gothicised environments, like the uncanny city and the deep woods inhabited by monstrous fairies. These are spaces where time is experienced and proceeds differently, which facilitates Mew’s exploration of the struggle of her female queer subjects. Focusing on the representation of space, specifically the city of London, the following discussion of “Passed” shows that the narrator’s perception of her spatial surrounding mirrors her temporal experiences. The interconnected relationship between time and space in “Passed” allows for the depiction of unspoken queer desires. The unnamed narrator undergoes unsettling queer temporal experiences marked by the transitory, the ephemeral, the elusive, and the uncontrollable during her evening walk in the uncanny space of a London slum.

Likewise, the setting of “The Changeling” is significant for Mew, allowing her to engage with the temporality of queer childhood development. The child speaker in the poem lives in the house nearby the forest where she encounters supernatural fairies. The woods, which are both the child’s playground and the changeling’s dwelling, are a space associated with the notions of primitive and temporal backwardness. The temporal dimensions of the changeling realm and its resident are distinct from the heteronormative temporality of human realm, allowing Mew to draw an analogy between the queer child’s “abnormal” development and

the monstrous and degenerative fairy. The child, metaphorically occupying a liminal temporal position in an evolutionary timeline, moves away from normative linear vertical growth and is drawn towards degeneration. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that Mew draws on Gothic themes to depict queer spatiotemporal configurations that allow her to illustrate interiorised sexual dissidence and the struggle with negative associations assigned to same-sex sexuality as well as the sexology-inflected anxieties of mental and physical degeneration.

“Passed”: Fleeting Queer Moments and the Urban Gothic

“Passed” was published in *The Yellow Book*, a periodical that encouraged experimentation and nonconformist short fiction, printing plot-driven pieces alongside impressionistic sketches (Krueger 108). “Passed” is a richly complex story that invites multiple interpretations, and its subtlety is its dominant feature. The publisher Henry Harland described it as “priceless bits of very subtle observation, of very subtle imagining, and of very subtle wording” (Davidow 276). “Passed” describes a peculiar encounter between two women in a socially fluid space of *fin-de-siècle* London. Told from the first-person point of view, the anonymous female narrator goes for a walk in one area of London and runs into a destitute yet compelling young woman who seems to be a prostitute. Bewildered by the mysterious woman, the protagonist follows her to a dilapidated place. In this poverty-stricken room, she meets the woman’s dying sister.

Contemporary critics have read the narrative in relation to various subjects, ranging from themes of class and gender anxieties to the sexual politics of Victorian London. For some critics, “Passed” engages with the suggestion of female homoeroticism in the late nineteenth century. The short story sprang from

the cultural context of a specific historical moment at the turn of the century in which sexual identity categories were not yet fully formed. Suzanne Raitt remarks on the “magnetic, but ambivalent, attraction between women, [which] is typical of late nineteenth-century, ‘decadent’ poetry and prose” (52). In “The ‘Hour of Pink Twilight’: Lesbian Poetics and Queer Encounters on the Fin-de-siècle Street”, Kate Flint observes that the twilight moment in “Passed” is symbolic of an in-between moment with the potential of erotic encounters and uncertainties clustered around meetings, including the fluid, the uncertain, and the unnameable. Flint has read Mew’s narrative in relation to sexual ambiguity and the possibilities of female same-sex desire occurring in street meetings between women during the turn of the century. She lists three social topics in this story: suppressed sexual magnetism between women, the wandering female in the urban space, and sexual commerce (706).

Building on the exploration of ambivalent magnetism on the city streets, this chapter pays particular attention to the narrator’s strange temporal experiences in relation to the Urban Gothic. The protagonist experiences a chance encounter that generates a strong impulsive homoerotic desire. Simultaneously, this desire is counteracted by its ephemerality and uncertainty. As such, this chapter highlights the importance of the Gothic elements which accompany Mew’s portrayal of the narrator’s experiences of fleeting queer moments. This section explores the ways in which experiences of queer temporality are rendered through Mew’s masterful use of an uncanny urban setting, the metaphor of the fairy, and a nightmarish illusion in “Passed”. The Gothic serves as a strategy for engaging with the absence of definitive language and demonstrates hesitations and uncertainties surrounding

the queer subject. This section first investigates the concept of queer space and Mew's impressionistic urban portrayal. It then examines the link between spatiotemporal experience and her deployment of Gothic tropes and sexual magic vocabulary to depict anxieties about the disintegration of the self and loss of rationality. Female same-sex desire is represented as dangerous and uncontrollable attraction via a mystical magnetic force as well as the metaphor of the fairy's manipulative seduction. Last, this section investigates how transient queer intimacy is accompanied by the theme of death and disrupts linear notions of longevity and futurity. The theme of mortality is expressed in imaginative gothic scenarios, which take the forms of dreams and hallucinations infested with monstrous ghosts.

Discussion of time often turns to questions of space. The depiction of the late Victorian urban experience in "Passed" anticipates Halberstam's argument "that there is such a thing as 'queer time' and 'queer space'" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 1). A space emerges as "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (Halberstam 1). The narrator's walk during the twilight moment is suggestive of life outside regular hours. As such, "Passed" appears to appropriate Charles-Pierre Baudelaire's idea of modernism, exploiting the potential of "[t]he transient, the fleeting, [and] the contingent" (403). The narrator's wandering occurs as a spur of moment, a detour before going home on a random evening. In the opening scene of the story, the narrator strolls to feel the evening breeze: "[t]he road rung hard underfoot, and through the lonely squares woke sharp echoes from behind [. . .] But after the first delirium of enchanting motion, destination became a question" (Mew 65). Her idling is

described as a blurred moment, and delirium means an acute disturbance of the mind. This description of the walk foreshadows the overall narrative, which is imbued with a non-normative temporal dimension with some features typical of delirium, such as incoherent thinking and hallucination. The narrator's act of walking without any particular direction can be read as a metaphor for a brief moment in the narrator's life course when a productive goal is absent. In this temporary detour, what matters are her experiences and what she encounters along the way. This fleeting moment is full of unintentional possibilities. The epigraph of this short story reads, "Like souls that meeting pass, And passing never meet again" (65).

The queer space is "an activated zone made proprietary by the occupant or *flâneur*, the wanderer" (Ulrick-Désert 21). In a recent biography of Mew, Julia Corpus considers the protagonist of "Passed" as a female counterpart of Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*. The *flâneur* emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin used the concept of the *flâneur* to look into human response to the modern city life. In Keith Tester's comprehensive book, *The Flaneur (RLE Social Theory)* (2014), he argues that the *flâneur* is about freedom. Tester writes that the figure "revolves around the dialectic of self-definition and definition from outside (although this freedom is perhaps something more by way of a curse than a promise); the meaning (or lack of meaning) of existence because the figure is about the flux of life and the requirement to make its meaning for one's self" (8). The *flâneur*-like narrator of "Passed" temporarily experiences a transgressive social interaction that does not belong in her heteronormative routine as she crosses paths with other queer lives in a London

slum. The twilight London in this story is rendered as “queer space”, correlating to Jane Garrity’s definition of “nonnormative locales that are physical, social, and constituted by and through social relations” that are not “attendant upon heteronormative ideologies” (2). In her delirious walking, the narrator meets a lower-class young woman who seems to be a sex worker. By deviating from her usual routine and entering into a new liminal moment, the narrator’s time overlaps with another subject on a different life path. As Halberstam calls those who live outside the hegemonic logic “queer subjects” because of “the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity)” (10). Examples of the queer subjects are “ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers and the unemployed” (10). The meeting with the woman is, for the narrator, an eccentric way of living outside a hegemonic life narrative and results in what Halberstam would call a “potential to open up new life narratives and alternate relations to time and space” (4).

Nevertheless, the encounter is socially threatening, especially when considering its homoerotic undertone, as explored in detail below. According to Hackett, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a transitional period in which articulations of homosexual identity intersected with issues around race and class (3). The relationship between the two women in “Passed” reflects Hackett’s statement. The interaction between the two women from different social classes arguably blurs sexual, gender, and class boundaries. Moreover, the transgressive nature of the relationship triggers the narrator’s fear. As Sara Wasson argues, corruption and social transgressions in the modern nineteenth-century metropolis could evoke terror even without a supernatural presence (3). To

portray terrifying sexual transgression and queer desire, Mew does not rely on a supernatural agency but rather a Gothic atmosphere and setting. Cities with “disorienting, labyrinthine and claustrophobic” characteristics are “evocative settings for the Gothic” (Wasson 3). Subtle terror is also conveyed through other motifs commonly found in the Urban Gothic, such as psychic instability. In Gothic narratives, urban experiences are often accompanied by fear, insanity, or delirium.³⁴

Additionally, the *flâneur* figure who occupies urban space is always already a gothic figure (Wasson 167-168). Specifically, the *flâneur* attempts to exert control over his environment but is defeated by gothic terror and despair. Consciously Gothic, dark, and threatening, London intentionally obfuscates itself from the *flâneur*'s comprehension (Ridenhour 90). Poe's famous story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), an early prototype of impressionistic elements in the nineteenth-century short story, features the Gothic *flâneur*. The male narrator of “The Man of the Crowd” attempts to categorise a mysterious old man he meets in the crowd, and he follows the old man, venturing into London streets. Jamieson Ridenhour calls the narrator in Poe's story “a true Gothic flaneur, made more and more anxious by his wanderings” (87). Critics such as Sally Ledger identify some similarities between “Passed” and Edgar Allan Poe's urban Gothic tales. Ledger notes that the story is “immensely powerful [and] Edgar Poe-like” (116). Indeed, the features of metropolis terror, a Gothicised city landscape, delirious mobility, and a sense of powerlessness can all be found in “Passed”.

³⁴ For details on Gothic London, see for instance, Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (160-163).

For “Passed”, the setting and Gothic atmosphere play a significant role in bridging spatial materiality and the narrator’s interior exploration of queer subjectivity. When the nameless protagonist wanders around and meets a female stranger for the first time, the scene is described as follows:

Its forbidding exterior was hidden in the deep twilight [. . .] Within the building, darkness again forbade examination. A few lamps hanging before the altar struggled with obscurity. I tried to identify some ugly details with the great man’s complacent eccentricity, and failing, turned toward the street again. Nearly an hour’s walk lay between me and my home. This fact and the atmosphere of stuffy sanctity about the place, set me longing for space again [. . .] I sent back a final glance into the darkness as my hand prepared to strike the door. [. . .] There was no motion at the moment, and it was silent; but the magnetism of human presence reached me where I stood.

(67)

The narrator’s time spent in the place is underlined by a pervasive sense of unease, and the Gothic sensibility is made evident by her claustrophobic response. The descriptions of “stuffy sanctity” and her “longing for space” reflect her bodily responses to the enclosure in space. Mew exploits a Gothic sensibility with the narrator’s perceptual effort to tackle the engulfing material space. Looking closely at the passage, the lexicon semantics concerning light and darkness help create a Gothic air. The motif is employed to create an eerie obscure atmosphere and evokes unsettling effects. The narrator is accustomed to walking around London during the day, but after the sun goes down, the city takes on an unfamiliar quality. This evokes an image of an uncanny city. The shadowy streets make it difficult for

the narrator to be certain of her surrounding since what used to be familiar sights in daylight becomes unfamiliar. The phrases concerning visual obscurity, such as “darkness” that “forbade examination” and “struggled with obscurity”, highlight a sense of indeterminacy. The narrator’s inner world and the external physical reality are closely interrelated. As Deborah Parsons has observed, interactions between the exterior and the interior generally work “as metaphors of the urban scene [. . .] to describe the structure and workings of the consciousness” (22). The obscured space reflects the narrator’s inner life, providing a backdrop resonant with the problems she is currently experiencing. The narrator’s failed attempt to describe and determine her environment correlates with her lack of understanding regarding her mysterious attraction to the presence of the human body hidden in the dark.

Like the uncannily dimmed streets and buildings, the narrator’s perception of the object of her attraction, the “human presence” in the shadows, incorporates a mysterious Gothic tone. The following scene, in which the narrator describes her attraction after realising the human presence in the dark, enhances a sense of indeterminacy:

At first the forcible portrayal of it assailed me with the importunate strength of beauty. Then the *Thing* stretched there in *the obdurate darkness* grew personal and banished delight. Neither sympathy nor its vulgar substitute, curiosity, induced my action as I drew near. I was eager indeed to be gone. I wanted to ignore the almost *indistinguishable being*. My will cried: ‘Forsake it!—but I found myself powerless to obey. [. . .] Mine pressed towards it, but whether my limbs actually moved I do not know, for the imperious summon robbed me of any consciousness save that of necessity to comply.

(68; my emphasis)

The imagery of darkness is employed again to describe the narrator's object of attraction. She does not know how to name or acknowledge "the Thing" with "magnetism" and also wants to refuse the attraction. The abstract language Mew chooses to use here implies uncanny uncertainty. The narrator does not know how to name or categorise the body that attracts her and refers to the other girl as "Thing" and "indistinguishable". Using an indeterminate noun, "the Thing", indicates that the body denies classification. The narrator is drawn to the girl against her will, and she is unable to comprehend the meaning of the magnetic connection when it occurs. The scene also reflects Mew's lack of affirmative language to define female same-sex desire, which broadly governs her writing.

The fact that the narrator does not fully comprehend what she sees and attempts to make sense of the connection between herself and the things she observes echoes a characteristic trait of literary impressionism. Specifically, literary impressionism is characterised by attempts to capture and convey the fleeting perception of a moment. As such, Mew employs the Gothic in conjunction with impressionism. One of the most distinguishing literary characteristics of Poe's work is the vivid "air". In his essay "Philosophy of Composition" (1846), Poe emphasised the importance of the "air" and "tone" in the overall narrative (163). Such ambience is crucial to the Gothic qualities of Poe's writing: "[b]eyond the inventory of objects and the material description of the setting, the Gothic is widely felt to be a feature of the ambience of the fictional world" (Stockwell 1). According to Kate Krueger Henderson, "relying on suggestions of atmosphere and mood, it [literary

impressionism] subordinates plot, fragments form, and intensifies affective responses” (111).

Such a literary style treats narrative progress as less important than the present moment. The impressionistic narrative “is essentially a string of experiential moments that the narrator’s internal consciousness connects and makes sense of in a larger way” (Krueger 197). She further suggests that “these moments of experience are also triggered by the narrator’s interaction with and thoughts of the world passing around him or her” (111). For Nick Freeman, Mew combines “realist description (and narrative ingredients) with broader-brush impressionistic evocation and a contemplative awareness of underlying meanings” (82). The narrator attempts to understand the world surrounding her to explain the inexplicable and to understand the odd attraction. If we return to the quoted passage on the narrator’s first encounter with the woman, it is clear the claustrophobic scene precedes the narrator’s awareness of magnetism. The order of her experiences here is interesting: I interpret this Gothicised scene, the suffocating feelings in the dark room, as foreshadowing the transgressiveness and danger of this female same-sex attraction. To portray such dangerous ambivalent magnetism, Mew teases out Victorian tensions between the supernatural and the scientific. As mentioned in the introduction, the lines between science and the otherworldly were blurred during the late Victorian period. The combination of science and Gothic sensibilities is subtly integrated as Mew plays with this ambiguity.

On the one hand, Mew seems to draw on nineteenth-century scientific theories of electricity, connective ability, and magnetism to depict female same-sex

erotic attraction. Magnetism was prevalent in the second half of the century, popularised by scientific works such as James Clerk Maxwell's *A Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism* (1873). In Maxwell's study, the physicist described electromagnetic phenomena and the theory of the electromagnetic wave. The study of the interaction of natural forces extended to social sciences as well. Magnetism bridged natural forces with the human realm, given that magnetic attraction could be used as an analogy for one's erotic life. Late nineteenth-century sexologists tended to uphold a system in which differences were expressed as positive (or masculine) and negative (or feminine) polarities that are drawn to one another like magnets, thus reinforcing heteronormativity (Vetter 47). However, in this story, attraction does not operate through this system of sexual difference but occurs between the same sexes.

On the other hand, Mew incorporates ideas of the otherworldly and magic into scientific theories of magnetism. The narrator's strong attraction is rendered in an irresistible hypnotic spell: "I wanted to ignore the almost *indistinguishable being*. My will cried: 'Forsake it!—but I found myself powerless to obey. [. . .] Mine pressed towards it, but whether my limbs actually moved I do not know, for the imperious summon robbed me of any consciousness save that of necessity to comply" (68). Mysteriously drawn toward the woman, the narrator walks with her to the woman's place. While moving through the city, the narrator is depicted as not fully conscious. Indeed, she seems to be in a delirious and distracted state. The motif of the erotic trance can be contextualised through nineteenth-century hypnotism and mesmerism discourses. Mesmerists believed trance-states and healing resulted from a "magnetic" influence passing along "a universally distributed and continuous

fluid [. . .] of an incomparably rarefied nature” (Mesmer 808). Pamela Thurschwell considers hypnotism and other alternate states as a “trope and ground” for sexuality (Kahan 68). Furthermore, connections between science and sexuality relate to the concept of “*magia sexualis*”. In Benjamin Kahan’s words, *magia sexualis* concerns the influence of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and the occult on constructions of sexuality and their crucial roles in “forging the grammars of sexual attraction and the formation of sexual subjectivity” (69). Through language similar to *magia sexualis*, Mew’s portrayal of ambivalent attraction achieves a sense of inexplicability and eschews the rigidness of scientific discourse. The magnetic attraction is interiorised, analogised to desires and sexual subjectivity. Pseudo-scientific thought about magnetism is appropriated in the Gothic tone of the story to symbolise the narrator’s inability to both articulate her attraction with straightforward language and control the intense desire she experiences when encountering the woman.

This Gothicised spell-like magnetism facilitates the narrator’s experience of queer time. As mentioned earlier, a trance-like state of mind is characterised by incoherent thought, disoriented feelings, and ecstasy. The narrator experiences queer disorientation of time while attracted (and pulled) by the woman. As the narrator makes her way through the streets to the woman’s location, she loses track of time. In the scene, she feels temporal slippage: “[w]e must have journeyed thus for more than half an hour and walked far. I did not detect it. In the eternity of supreme moments time is not. Thought, too, fears to be obtrusive and stand aside” (68). The impressionist style of “Passed”, expressed through Gothic delirium, suits the story’s emphasis on the here and now. Time here is subjective, relational, and

independent from the traditional concept. The significance of queer time is that it represents the body of the queer subject in motion as they move through subjective time without any meaning or capital goal. No goal-oriented imperative drives the narrator as she simply gravitates toward the woman. The scene illustrates the forces that take over one's willpower, which are powerful enough to deviate her from her usual way of life. It is significant that her movement is not driven by her own will: "[o]n and on she took me, breathless and without explanation. We said nothing. I had no care or impulse to ask our goal" (68). This scene reinstates the appreciation of transient moments and dismissal of reproductive futurity hinted from the beginning of the text.

The strong attraction in "Passed" parallels the fleeting but frenzied moment of urban exploring in Baudelaire's work. Tester notes the *flâneur's* "frenzied romantic love with the spectacle of the public", arguing that "the high point of love is to lose one's self in the beloved" (7) and citing Baudelaire's words "[i]t is an ego athirst for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting" (Baudelaire 400). In Mew's story, the queer attraction is so powerful that it is threatening; it generates a fear of being manipulated and a risk of losing control over one's mind. The narrator wants to refuse the attraction but fails: she attempts to "[f]orsake it!" but turns "powerless". The narrator's helplessness relates to the state of delirium. Foucault, who explored the etymology of the word, notes that delirium is derived "from lira, a furrow; so that delirio actually means to move out of the furrow, away from the proper path of reason" ("Madness and Civilization" 99–100). He also suggests "the suspension of the will (or 'abulia') defines states such as dream and distraction, which are

manifestations of delirium. In the narrator's case, this powerful magnetic appeal goes against her rational thoughts. It is possible to view the narrator as occupying a realist position before starting her twilight stroll. The journey can be read as entering the realm of "fantasy", which leads her into a moment of disintegration. Her concern with social hierarchy is present but dissolved when the mysterious woman takes her through the labyrinthine streets.

In a mesmeric trance, her reasoning disappears, which makes losing control frightening. Reading "Passed", Lisa Hager sees magnetism as a "metonym for the aesthetic experience and, by extension, for forces of connection between self and the irreducibly other" (64). The connection between self and other in this story manifests in terms of the sexual and social other. When this idea of social otherness is applied to the narrator and the woman, the woman's Otherness as a working-class sex worker is suggested in two senses. One is her socioeconomic status, and the second lies in her gender and sexuality. During the nineteenth century, the figure of the sex worker was often considered one of the emblems of "a fallen woman". Most Victorian middle-class women would have been expected to set strict boundaries with a working-class prostitute because it was believed that for Victorians "to identify too closely with a prostitute [was] to threaten one's own moral identity" (Krueger 121). The protagonist is supposed to maintain a distance from the woman, but she does not. Therefore, she experiences internal conflict and consternation. The scene in which the narrator attempts to battle the force of magnetic attraction alludes to her sexual awakening as well as her reluctance to accept it. The conflict the female subject experiences is depicted through their simultaneous attraction and repulsion.

Mew's presentation of magnetism is marked by transience and fluctuates between opposite feelings, and accordingly the narrator's feeling towards the woman is a mysterious mixture of sensuality and repulsion. When the characters stop at the woman's place, the attraction fades away, and the narrator disengages from the desire she formerly felt. While the woman falls into the narrator's arms and they are momentarily close to each other, she realises the following: "[t]he magnetism of our meeting was already passing; and, reason asserting itself, I reviewed the incident dispassionately, as she lay like a broken piece of mechanism in my arms. Her dark hair had come unfastened and fell about my shoulder" (69). The attraction does not last. Magnetism's concept of polarized forces serves as the inspiration for Mew. Specifically, a body could have a repulsing force that pushes one away. The narrator sees the woman's body as an alien presence that repels her: "I tried to raise her, and kneeling, pulled her reluctantly towards me. The proximity was distasteful. An alien presence has ever repelled me. I should have pitied the girl keenly, perhaps a few more feet away" (69). The girl's body is deemed alien, which once again highlights the queer irreducible other and reinstates the dynamics of self-denial found in Mew's writing.

Desire and repulsion are switched back and forth. The narrator once again feels drawn to the woman. While viewing her body, the narrator suddenly smells a fragrance from the girl: "[a] faint white streak of it stole through the brown. A gleam of moonlight strays thus through a dusky room. I remember noticing, as it was swept with her involuntary motions across my face, *a faint fragrance which kept recurring like a subtle and seductive sprite, hiding itself with fairy cunning in the tangled maze*" (69; my emphasis). It is interesting to examine these lines more

closely and consider not only why vocabulary related to the supernatural and magic appears but also the function of the fairy metaphor. My interpretation is that the mention of this supernatural entity functions as a significant medium for expressing female homoeroticism.

The metaphorical sprite can be read as containing homoerotic implications of the narrator's same-sex attraction for several reasons. First, fairies entail sensuality, and critics have remarked on the sexual aspects of this supernatural being. For example, Richard Firth Green has noted the ways that fairies interact with humans, including through sexual relations: "[t]hrough several other kinds of interaction are possible [. . .] fairies most often impinge on the human life world in two ways: by copulating with mortals or by abducting them" (14). Diane Purkiss examines the sexual nature of Victorian fairies. She states that "one could be forgiven for simply equating fairies with the false and the bogus. And, of course, the sexual" (*Troublesome Things* 231). The sexualisation of fairies in fairy pantomimes is an excellent example. Accordingly, fairy discourse has often been applied to the theme of transgressive sexualities in literary and popular culture. In Sarah Wakefield's research, the author observes that some Gothic novelists have used fairy references to articulate subversion in their texts, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality. Wakefield traces the word "fairy" back to eighteenth-century Gothic works, such as Ann Radcliffe's classic *The Mystery of Udolpho*. She argues that fairies provide the written lexicon "to project potentially dangerous female longings onto imaginary beings in unreal stories" (42).

Furthermore, Kahan asserts "the magical properties inherent in past vocabularies of sex and sexuality" and uses the figure of the "fairie" as an example

(67). The term “fairies” has a historical connotation related to homosexuality, which is another factor supporting the appropriateness of its appearance in “Passed”. While the word “fairies” refers to enchanted lands and supernatural creatures inhabiting magical lands, the term was also a slang word for effeminate male homosexual men who performed elements of feminine roles, such as wearing glamorous feminine clothes and having feminine posture. This meaning was first noted in 1895 in the *American Journal of Psychology*, which included a description of the gatherings of cross-dressing men who self-identified as fairies. This slang was well-established by the interwar period and later became a familiar term throughout the twentieth century (Haggerty, *Encyclopedia of Gay Histories and Cultures* 641). The term’s historical use suggests that fairies were capable of disturbing dominant gender and sexual ideologies. Being “fairies” meant stepping outside traditional gender roles and sexual boundaries.

Moreover, a connection between fairies and class politics might support Mew’s specific appropriation of the fairy in “Passed”. Historically, the term “fairy” had connotations with working-class culture. According to Scott Herring, fairy was a term for working-class male cross-dressers in the turn-of-the-century Anglo-American urban underworld. These fairies often defined themselves as distinct from the middle-class.³⁵ It is difficult to know the extent to which Mew was conscious of this US-based vernacular term. However, she might have appropriated this usage of “fairy”, as it pertains to male homosexuals, to express

³⁵ There was queer antagonism between different classes: “[m]any middle-class queers blamed anti-gay hostility on the failure of fairies to abide by straight middle-class convention of decorum in their dress and style” (Herring xxiv). For more details on fairies and male gay subculture, see the introduction chapter of *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (ix-1).

cross-class homoerotic relations between women, for which she had no descriptive discourse. Considering these factors, the fairy in Mew's simile appears to be a good choice for representing the narrator's attraction to a working-class woman.

Parallels between fairies and spirits are sometimes drawn out in scholarship. Alex Owen claims there are some indirect links between spirits and fairies, noting that "one of the persistent themes to emerge from their [the folklorists] studies is the clear association of fairies with the world of the dead. The distinction between fairies, spirits, and ghosts was often confused or blurred ("Borderland Forms" 53-54). As a non-human being, the fairy figure blurs boundaries. In Purkiss's words, the fairy is a "boundaries walker" (84), blurring the line between the dead and the living. I argue that Mew's employment of fairy metaphors works much like Terry Castle's argument concerning the apparitional lesbian, the theory which views the ghost as a liminal figure often used to symbolise lesbianism. To summarise, the most critical aspects of ghostly figures are their liminal presence, their ability to be simultaneously invisible and visible, and their capacity to linger for an extended period. Castle interprets ghosts as an image epitomizing the haunting presence of "lesbians", who have been made to seem invisible by culture itself. Consequently, Castle links the almost invisible state of ghosts to the issue of lesbian invisibility.

The fairy figure in the text discussed here arguably functions as a crucial part of Mew's queer strategy to articulate the absent presence of female homoeroticism. The invisible fairy metaphor holds two paradoxical concepts together: creating appearance through disappearance. The fairy in this story is presented in the figurative device of a metaphor instead of an actual material

presence. The fact that Mew does not rely on fixed or determinate physical bodies in evoking queer desire resonates with Castle's idea of the invisible lesbian. Instead of visual stimuli, the narrator does not perceive the desire by sight but rather by smell. When the poor woman lies close to the narrator, her body does not visually attract the narrator. Instead, there is "a faint fragrance which [keeps] recurring like a subtle and seductive sprite". The smell is pervasive but cannot be fully materialised. The olfactory imagery expunges the materiality of same-sex desire while invisibly asserting its presence. The use of sensory figurative imagery also contributes to the overall impressionist style. Throughout, Mew depends significantly on tone and atmosphere, instead of identity terms, as vehicles of queer expression. As previously noted, there are numerous instances of impressionistic phrases, such as the airless building at the story's opening or, in this instance, an atmosphere of alluring aroma. In this way, Mew modifies the invisible fairy metaphor to tackle the problem of having no exact language to convey female queer desire.

Moreover, the term "hiding" highlights a sense of invisibility and the haunting connotations of the fairy. The sprite "hiding itself with fairy cunning in the tangled maze (69)" is metaphorical of the hidden unnameable desire. There is no visibility, but "the unknown" presence also haunts the room. Mew's portrayal of the sprite figure is surrounded by a sense of mystery and, by extension, uncanniness. Desire is hidden and repressed – it has been inside the narrator since the beginning, waiting to come to light. As will soon be demonstrated, the rhetorical mechanism at play in this scene has queer temporal connotations because it suggests a symbolic sensual presence of the re-emerging repressed women's same-sex desire.

The queer metaphor of the alluring invisible fairy intersects with the concept of queer space. Returning to the passage previously quoted, the particular line “hiding itself with fairy cunning in the tangled maze” (69) can be read as mirroring the narrative’s broader scale: the female protagonist is mesmerized by a mysterious woman and pulled across a labyrinthine London. The ability to invoke attraction is evident in the use of the adjective “seductive”: “like a subtle and seductive sprite”. Furthermore, the adjective “cunning” is suggestive of the fairy’s trickery. The cunning fairy in the tangled maze evokes the notion of being “pixie-led”. There is an incident of fairy danger called “pixie-led”, which means being led astray by pixies and getting lost. A pixie-led incident exemplifies the intersection of spatial transgression, and the fairy’s mischievous, harmful, and luring side. As such, it is used to represent hidden desire in queer time and space. Sabrina Magliocco writes that “in European folk tradition, fairies, even when friendly, were always viewed as potentially dangerous” (343). Similarly, Silver asserts that “to be pixie-led was to experience the ‘uncanny’; it was to be taken across the border between the civilized and the wilderness, to have the familiar and the known become ‘other’” (152). Although “Passed” does not represent a real fairy, Mew creates a chimerical liminal textual space that constitutes some features like those in the fairy tale narrative. The narrator’s queer mobility in the uncanny city parallels an uncanny fairy-led journey.³⁶

³⁶ For example, Kahan uses the pornographic novel *Teleny* (1893) as an example since the novel conventionally describes an all-male orgy (a “symposium” in which “women are never admitted”) as transporting its participants “into the magic realms of fairy-land” (67).

The notion of uncanny topography can be found in the briefly mentioned metaphor of the “tangled maze”, which evokes twilight London and its intricate passageways. Anxiety could stem from the unfamiliarity of the place, as Freud notes when discussing city wandering in his essay on the uncanny. He refers to his experience of losing his way in a maze of streets in Italy, which caused an unsettling feeling (365). It is possible to interpret the metaphor as the topography of the psyche and the narrator’s exploration of London. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, the historian Judith Walkowitz notes the mysterious and sexual aspects of Victorian London, describing it as a “dark, powerful, and seductive labyrinth” (17). The description of a pixie seduction in the maze during the moment of attraction reflects the narrative of sexual danger, much like the spell-bound narrator who follows the mysterious woman around labyrinthine London.

The narrator has a complex response to the dangerous queer seduction. In a fleeting moment of the strange queer encounter, she hesitates about what to do with the two women in the room. The narrator already has a vacation plan to go to Scotland, which is disrupted by this unexpected event of getting distracted by the woman. She thinks, “[T]his was Saturday, and two days later I was bound for Scotland; a practical recollection of empty trunks was not lost in my survey of the situation” (70). She contemplates staying with the woman to help and considers what would happen “were [her] anxious friends to learn [her] whereabouts and understand the eccentricity of the scheme?” (70). Witnessing the body of the dead sister affects the narrator’s decision, and she is frightened:

Conclusion was hastening to impatient thought, when my eyes let fall a fatal glance upon the dead girl’s face. I do not think it had changed its first aspect

of dignified repose, and yet now it woke in me a sensation of cold dread. The dark eyes unwillingly open reached mine in an insistent stare. One hand lying out upon the coverlid, I could never again mistake for that of temporarily suspended life. My watch ticked loudly, but I dared not examine it, nor could I wrench my sight from the figure on the bed. For the first time the empty shell of being assailed my senses. To-day, as memory summons it, I cannot dwell without reluctance on this hour of my realisation of the thing called Death. (130-131)

In a former draft, the theme of death was even more evident as Mew graphically described the dead body: Henry Harland asked Mew to remove phrases such as “starring eyeballs” and “stiffening limbs” before publication.³⁷ The theme of death is used to illustrate the queer transient moment because death equates to the notion of mortality and the urgency of a human being. The theme of mortality in “Passed” also resonates with Halberstam’s discussion of queer time in relation to death and in reference to the AIDS crisis. Halberstam reads Thom Gunn’s poem entitled “In the Time of Plague” as an example of queer time and the coalescence of sexuality and death. As Gunn wrote, “My thoughts are crowded with death/ and it draws so oddly on the sexual/ that I am confused/ confused to be attracted/ by, in effect my own annihilation” (59). The poem thus reflects an “erotic of compressed time and impending mortality” (2). Nevertheless, while Mew’s text does not encourage the notion of longevity, it also does not express a positive aesthetic. The conflicted sexual subject is afraid of death and denies her queer desire. Mew’s character

³⁷ See the details in the introduction to Charlotte Mew in Kostas Boyiopoulos’s anthology, *Decadent Short Story* (2014).

finds possibilities outside of the normative time at hand but fails to expand the queer potential of the moment.

The mortality of life evokes complex adverse reactions as the narrator does not focus on queer potentiality. Her dread is underlined in the following scene through the deployment of prominent Gothic elements. Shortly after, she realises “the thing called death”, “[a] hundred fancies, clothed in mad intolerable terrors, possessed me” (131). The monstrous spirits appear in the narrator’s vision when she is standing in the room with the woman and the corpse of her sister. Mew portrays the nightmarish scene as a phantasmagoria. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines phantasmagoria as “a shifting series of succession of phantasms or imaginary figures, as seen in a dream or fevered condition, as called up by the imagination, or as created by the literary description” (27).³⁸ In the nightmarish scene, the narrator imagines seeing people whom she knew in “the shapes of monsters of ever varying and increasing dreadfulness flit[ting] through one’s dreams” (71).

The monstrous nightmare underscores the narrator’s realisation of her sexuality. In this immersive scene, the narrator has an out-of-body experience which removes her from the present moment. The Gothic hallucination occurs in a queered scenario in which past, present, and future are mixed. Specifically, the hallucinatory moment, wherein the appearance of what the narrator calls monsters replicates her lover and family, reflects the narrator’s fear of ostracization. She is surrounded by people whom she is familiar with: “the images of those I love crept

³⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is quoted by Terry Castle in “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphoric of Modern Reverie,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol.15 ,1988.

around me, with stark yet well-known features, their limbs borrowing death's rigid outline" (71). Something familiar, like family members, turn into something foreign, whereas something unfamiliar, like the monsters, are in fact familiar. For Rosi Braidotti, "the monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar" (41). Margrit Shildrick explains that the monstrous are disturbing because they have the capacity to "produce alien forms within" (10). Likewise, the uncanny is associated with the feeling of strangeness and something familiar that unexpectedly arises (Royle 1). In this respect, the ghostly familiar faces elicit a sense of uncanniness in the narrator. This moment suggests a pessimistic scenario of experiencing a transgressive desire for the same sex.

In this scene, the uncanny as deployed in the depiction of the monstrous plays a significant role in conveying queer indeterminacy. Some of the deep ambivalence concerning such attraction and repulsion lies within the Gothic hallucination and monster imagery. As such, the scene emphasises the unresolved sexuality of both Mew and the narrator. Specifically, the monster supports a reading of the uncanny repressed self. According to David Punter, "the 'monsters' we place in the outer world are reflections, sometimes distorted, of objects of our inner world" (*The Gothic Condition* 158). The narrator is troubled after her encounter with the sex worker and moment of sexual self-revelation, as evidenced by her nightmare encounter with the people she loves. Queer desire coexists with intense fear about the potential repercussions of the rejection of heterosexual norms.

Near the end of the story, the Gothic elements become more palpable. The Gothic impressionist aesthetic manifests itself through distorted perception and

hypersensitivity. A close reading of the ghostly vision reflects the theme of heightened perception: “[t]hey began to wind their arms about me in fierce embraces of burning and supernatural life. Gradually the contact froze. They bound me in an icy prison” (71). The shift from a burning sensation to a cold sensation is symbolic and represents the narrator wrestling with transgressive desire. The “burning” seems to signify burning passion, whereas the “froz[en]” contact represents the rejection of that passion. It is clear that “an icy prison” conveys a sense of confinement. As a result, the encounter conceptualizes a gothic moment of increased temporal sensory overload. The narrator cannot hold and grasp all that she sees and feels.

In the following scene, the narrator suddenly dreams about returning home. This home is portrayed as a quiet desolate place, which evokes the Gothic theme of a haunted house:

My heart went home. The dear place was desolate. No echo of its many voices on the threshold or stair. My footsteps made no sound as I went rapidly up to a *well-known* room. Here I besought the mirror for the reassurance of *my own reflection*. It denied me human portraiture and threw back *cold glare*. (71; my emphasis)

Mew continues to play with the issue of internal disturbance and queer subjectivity through the uncanny. The narrator experiences the *unheimliche* in its literal sense: her home becomes unhomely. The scene is further laden with symbolic connotations. That the protagonist eventually moves from urban space to domestic interior is significant as it enacts the exploration of uncertain boundaries between self and others. The psychoanalytic orientation of the story manifests itself in the

theme of a haunted home, which has unmistakable resonance with Freud's theory of the uncanny. Home is deeply intertwined with the Freudian uncanny as evident in the concept's semantic origin. As discussed in the previous chapter, the uncanny comes from *unheimlich*, which is the negation of *heimlich*. *Heimlich* has two meanings. The first sense of the term is "belonging to the house", "domestic", and "familiar". The second meaning is "hidden from sight", "secret", and "private". For Royle, the uncanny is "the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" (1). When the narrator goes to her "well-known" room, it is revealed that her reflection has become unfamiliar. The "cold glare" staring back at her suggests the theme of the uncanny double. It also raises the question of whether the self can be fully known, further highlighting the uncertainty of the whole experience. She is afraid to lose her place in a social context the way she has lost her own identity and home. In Mew's nightmarish reckoning, the protagonist cannot determine her own identity. Ultimately, the narrator's consciousness fails to handle the overwhelming stimuli of this Gothic vision. The monstrous dream aggravates the narrator's fear, and after waking up from the dreadful dream, she is frightened and rushes out of the room to leave the woman.

"Passed" concludes on an ambiguous note with no proper fixity of identity formation and neither spiritual nor sexual relief for the protagonist. Mew nonetheless retains a sense of uneasiness until the end. The protagonist accidentally meets the poor woman on the street again months afterwards. Her walk once again occurs at the queer temporal moment of twilight evening: "I had almost forgotten my strange experience, when, some months afterwards, in late spring, the wraith of that winter meeting appeared to me. It was past six o'clock,

and I had reached, ignorant of the ill-chosen hour, a notorious thoroughfare in the western part of this glorious and guilty city” (76). When she meets the woman again, it is a smell that makes the narrator aware of her presence: “[a] timidly protesting fragrance stole strangely by. I started at its approach. It summoned a stinging memory. I stepped forward to escape it, but stopped, confronted by the being [. . .]” (76). The narrator feels intense guilt and maybe longing. She holds her hands out and begs for mercy. However, the woman meets her gaze “with a void incorporate stare” (77). It can be said that, by the end of this story, the narrator has experienced queer desire but never enacted and satisfied it. Despite the protagonist’s failure to accept her queerness, “Passed” proves that gothic components are vital to Mew’s rendering of transgressive queer desires.

“The Changeling”: The Queer Child’s Development and Monstrous Fairies

The notion of fairies constantly appears throughout Mew’s literary works, with various applications and ranges from brief mentions to a complete discussion in different forms and styles. As previously discussed in relation to “Passed”, “fairy” was a slang term for homosexual men that first emerged in the late nineteenth century. Mew appropriates this language to articulate female homoeroticism in her short story. This section will demonstrate that in her poem “The Changeling”, Mew makes use of the fairy figure again and utilises the changeling tale as a queer strategy for symbolizing the protagonist’s queer sexuality. Mew draws on the notion of the evil fairy to demonstrate the ways in which a girl with non-normative sexuality experiences a sense of alienation. The poem was published in 1916 in *The Farmer’s Bride*, Mew’s renowned poetry collection. “The Changeling” tells the story of an outcast child kidnapped by the changelings in a wood. While the gender

of the child speaker is not revealed in the poem, most critics tend to read the child as a girl and interpret her as a non-heterosexual subject. Walsh recognizes the influence of Mew's sexual orientation in the poem, noting that "[j]ust beneath the surface of Mew's work, the struggle between thinly veiled homosexual desire and self-loathing rages on, as seen in 'The Changeling'" (229). Laura Severin believes that "The Changeling" is one of Mew's poems that "indirectly reveals Mew's lesbian sexuality" and demonstrates Mew's "estrangement from a culture that offered no recognizable description of her desires" (23).

Written in the 1910s, "The Changeling" supports the assertion that Mew was still unable to find an affirmative language for her sexuality even in her early-twentieth-century literary work. Victorian socio-political culture and some of its dominant ideologies continue to inform her approach to the representation of queer sexualities. Angela Leighton considers Mew a stalwart Victorian, arguing that, while Mew lived until 1928, "in spirit Charlotte Mew is one of the last Victorians. Untouched, in life, by the sexual and political emancipations of the twentieth century, or in her art, by the obvious thematic freedoms of modernism, she remained imaginatively tied to the symbols of a past age" (266). Severin has claimed that Mew found herself bereft of a descriptive tradition for her sexuality as female homosexuality was still a relatively new cultural phenomenon (23). Significantly, Severin notes that Mew's writing entails an attempt to exist as a homosexual without descriptive language to acknowledge that existence (23). She also recognises that Mew's depiction of the troubled dissident sexual subject and lesbian desire are coded through the employment of fairy discourse.

Mew navigates the language of the fairy world to explore allegorical possibilities for female same-sex sexuality. "Passed" is indebted to preceding Victorian writers who employed the fairy theme. The profusion of fairies in the nineteenth century is evidenced by numerous works of literature that feature the theme or its references (Bown et al. 2). Indeed, Carole Silver calls Victorian society a "burgeoning Folk-Lore Society" (149). Likewise, in *Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture*, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas remarks that "the Victorians used, exhibited and delighted in giants and dwarfs, freaks and monstrous creatures extracted from the bowels of the earth" (1). A few critics believe Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), in particular, to be a precursor that influenced the sensibility and imagery of Mew's "The Changeling" to some extent (Severin 24; Janik and Nelson 241; Walsh 229). Rossetti's fairy world constitutes a homoerotic desire and features a threatening animalistic grotesque kind of fairies.

Building on existing scholarship, my discussion explores these Victorian legacies but takes a unique approach by concentrating on the temporal aspects of this type of fairy. It examines the fairy as a vehicle for depicting an estranged non-heterosexual child, and shows that the fairy realm, associated with the primitive woods, offers an alternative queer space outside of the heteronormative life patterns of human beings. Thinking of the changeling in terms of time, such a fairy arguably embraces the queer time of backwardness. The poem reflects a sense of ambiguity around the way that the child speaker searches for a language for her queer sexuality. Discourse on the fairy world is oblique but useful for addressing queer subjectivity. Simultaneously, the poem suggests that Mew's implementation

of the fairy world as an encoded language is still inflected by the pejorative sexological concept of retrogressive temporal order.

In my analysis, the figure of the monstrous fairy is interpreted in conjunction with the context of Victorian degeneration and is connected to the topic of queer childhood development. My analysis is indebted to scholarly works from theorists such as Jack Halberstam, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Lee Edelman, and Valerie Rohy. Applying modern critical childhood studies and theories of queer time as a framework adds nuances to the understanding of the poem. This discussion argues that the speaker can be read as a queer child who deals with non-normative sexual development and growing “sideways”, to use Stockton’s terminology. The speaker of the poem experiences the feeling of being both out of sync and out of place in the world, encountering uncertain sexual development, and denies the societal expectation to grow up “straight”. Stockton has argued that “[t]here are ways of growing that are not growing up” for varying versions of the queer child (11). The “ghostly gay child”, “the child queered by Freud”, “the grown homosexual”, and “the child queered by innocence” are listed as ways to grow defiantly from cultural expectations and norms. As such, the section shows that the relationship between the changeling figure and the child in Mew’s poem provides an alternative form of sideways growth.

Western civilization has the propensity to depict temporality in terms of spatial movements, which has been seen throughout this thesis. Stockton contends that the process of growing up typically occurs in a vertical movement upward. To obtain adulthood, children are usually expected to move along the traditional heterosexual life narrative toward “full stature, marriage, work,

reproduction, and the loss of childishness” (Stockton 4). The child in Mew’s poem acknowledges that her wildness differentiates her from the other members in her family. She strongly connects with the primitive, as indicated by the adjective “wild”: “[b]ut I, so wild” (ll. 6). In Halberstam’s recent work *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (2020), there is an in-depth exploration of the wild and its connection with queerness. The wild is “a challenge to an assumed order of things from, by, and on behalf of things that refuse and resist order itself” (Halberstam 3). Halberstam argues that “[w]ildness names simultaneously a chaotic force of nature, the outside of categorization, unrestrained forms of embodiment, the refusal to submit to social regulation, loss of control, the unpredictable” (3).

The wild child in the poem is demanded to grow up and leave the primitive queer state. That is, the child is supposed to progress ineluctably toward maturity and triumph over their initial primitive wildness. Halberstam explains that in Western cultures adults are expected to emerge “from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation” (5). Like Edelman’s argument, Halberstam proposes that the child is “converted to a proto-heterosexual by being pushed through a series of maturational models of growth that project the child as the future and the future as heterosexual” (73). The queer child in the poem is expected to “straighten out” perversity by growing up according to the normative sequence of development. Furthermore, her individual development and cultural development are mapped onto each other. The child speaker in the poem fails to “develop” and become “cultured” according to social norms. Development, evolution, and progress undergird normative growth, and education is usually part of the process. However, the child prefers staying in the wood to attending school.

A failure to grow up is evident when comparing the child's alienation in this cultured space. While the woods represent a space available for queerness, the nursery is a microcosm of society in which there are rules and constraints. The nursery is a place that exists in opposition to the natural primitive state. To be in the nursery and learn things is to tame and eradicate frightening aspects of the primitive child.

The child loves to spend time in the woods rather than in a nursery, and the scene in the woods provides a hint of the child's queer sexuality. Specifically, the child's silence and love for nature indicate her defiance of development:

Sometimes I wouldn't speak, you see,
 Or answer when you spoke to me,
 Because in the long, still dusks of Spring
 You can hear the whole world whispering;
 The shy green grasses making love, (ll. 34-38)

That she sometimes does not speak can be read as unarticulated queer subjectivity in a heterosexual-dominated society. In the woods, however, there are plenty of voices allowed. The sounds of animals and plants "[h]umming and hammering at your ear,/ Everything there is to hear" (ll. 46-47), might be interpreted as unrestrained expressions of queerness. Her queer subjectivity cannot be expressed at school. The voices are heard in the heart of the woods "[b]ut not in the midst of the nursery riot" (ll.49). Mew's word choice implies queer sexuality; the sounds occur "[i]n the heart of hidden things" (ll.48). The phrase "hidden" is suggestive of secrets and "things", like its use in "Passed", is a vague word suggestive of queer indeterminacy. Additionally, the fact that queer sexuality

is socially unacceptable and, therefore, must be concealed is commonly reflected in queer sexuality. Her queer desire is unspeakable. It is also possible to read the woods as symbolising an androgynous state – a time before identity categories had been developed. In the wood, the child enjoys the state of being “not yet straight” as she has not yet been demanded to grow up into the heterosexual subject society would impose on her.

The woods are symbolic of the past and are the location of the fairy realm. Mew was always fascinated with the woods. In her non-fictional “Men and Trees” (1913), Mew mentions fairies and nature spirits and explains their significance to the twentieth century. In Mew’s words, “the inspiration of the woods, the forest voices, the fairy dancers, the mystery of things that stand against the sky” coming “of old time” are the lure of the past (399). The wood thus illustrates the child’s affinity with the primitive past. Her affiliation with the primitive is strengthened by encountering the monstrous changeling fairy. One day, the child meets the changelings who come outside the windows: “[o]ne evening, too, by the nursery fire/ We snuggled close and sat round so still,/ When suddenly as the wind blew higher,/ Something scratched on the window-sill,/ A pinched brown face peered in – I shivered;” (ll. 48).

Fairies in folk and fairy tales may be morally “good”, “bad”, or even ambivalent. The changelings were often presented as frightening in the Victorian imagination. In newspapers, they were usually portrayed as evil baby-snatchers.³⁹

³⁹ There were reports of people claiming to see changelings and news of missing children with references to changelings, such as an account of Peter Flanagan, found in “West Ham Disappearances”, in the 1880s. In addition, newspaper and

Particularly, the changeling motif has often been employed in Gothic fiction or novels with supernatural sensibilities to create frightening scenes or uncanny characters. The changeling motif can be found in Samuel Lover's "The Fairy Boy" (the 1840s) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and goblins appear in Charles Dicken's "The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton" (1836). For example, there is a reference to the changeling in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the novel written by Mew's favourite writer Emily Brontë. When Mr. Lockwood accuses Catherine of being the changeling, he says that she "must have been a *changeling-wicked* little soul" (13; my emphasis). This Gothic aspect of the changelings is also evident in Mew's poem. Notably, this type of fairy is associated with the primitive and the savage. David Punter contends in *Literature of Terror* that the Gothic has "connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed" (5) and is "the product of the wild and the uncivilised" (6). The changelings have the aggressive behaviour of wild animals and live in the deep forest. The child perceives some of the changelings as malevolent creatures as she thinks that "[s]ome are as bad as bad can be!" (ll 35). The child is frightened by the changelings. They "[t]ried to make me scream and shout" (ll 35).

Significantly, the narrative of this monstrous fairy is located in the nexus of Victorian degeneration discourse. The changeling symbolises a throwback to a primitive time. The construction of the changelings resonates with other monsters in some Victorian Gothic fiction as they are closely associated with traits of the primitive and degeneration. For instance, *Dracula* and "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"

journals reported cases of death and injury caused by the practices employed in order to exorcise changelings (Silver 60).

exemplify texts that represent villains with hybrid bodies. The bodies of both Dracula and Mr. Hyde are portrayed as animalistic: Count Dracula can climb like a reptile and transform into a bat, whereas Hyde is described as ape-like with his hairy hand. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in *Monster Culture*, describes monsters as “harbingers of category crisis” (4). Changelings were generally constructed as a hybrid, neither entirely human nor entirely animal, thus destabilising the ontological boundaries. As such, fairies are relatable to humans and, at the same time, regarded as something foreign. Some fairies, such as goblins, exhibit animalistic traits, conflating the categories of human and animal. Mew’s changeling, for example, has wings and bird-like features: “[t]he arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered” (26). Additionally, the sound of birds is constantly mentioned throughout the poem. The birdlike changelings living deep in the woods are a supernatural entity that draws on the Gothic tradition and are consequently bound to primitive wildness. The changeling in the poem demonstrates an “account of wildness within which it functions as a form of disorder that will not submit to rule, a mode of unknowing, a resistant ontology, and a fantasy of life beyond the human” (Halberstam, *Wild Things* 8).

When one of the changelings appears, it is described as having a “brown face”: “[w]hen suddenly as the wind blew higher,/ Something scratched on the window-sill,/ A pinched brown face peered in – -I shivered;” (ll.24). The changelings in the poem can be read in relation to the influence of Victorian scientific racism. The fact that the changelings have a brown complexion reaffirms their connection to degeneration, and it also implies homosexuality. The primitive was a Western construct often associated with racialised groups according to racist sexual

ideologies. Rohy observes that “sexologists working from evolutionary models assigned homosexuals the abject place of the past, attributing to them the racialized attributes of degeneracy, arrested development, regression and primitivism” (5). In *Man and Woman*, for instance, Ellis drew from Patrick Geddes and John Arthur Thomson’s theories and suggested that “more marked sexual differences in physical development seem (we cannot speak definitely) to have developed than are usually to be found in savage societies” (13).⁴⁰ Black was associated with homosexuality in sexology partly due to theories about the role of sexual differences in evolution. Steven Angelides explains that “the underlying assumption was that black races were less sexually differentiated and less evolved than the superior white races; they were closer, that is, to the primitive ancestry of humanity” (32). An example of this racist and homophobic framework is lesbians’ or Black women’s bodies being deemed less sexually differentiated than normative white heterosexual female bodies. Sexologists drew upon “notions of natural selection to dismiss these bodies as anomalous ‘throwbacks’ within a scheme of cultural and anatomical progress” (Somerville 256). It seems that while Mew resorts to circumventing sexological discourse of sexual identity by adopting the figurative language of fairy analogy, sexological racist beliefs nonetheless influenced her fictional representation.

Employing the correlation between racial ambiguity and sexual fluidity was common, especially in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic writings. According to Ardel Haefele-

⁴⁰ In their influential work *The Evolution of Sex* (1889), Geddes and Thomson state that “hermaphroditism is primitive; the unisexual state is a subsequent differentiation. The present cases of normal hermaphroditism imply either persistence or reversion” (80).

Thomas, monsters could unify a British reading public at the time “through a nationalist insistence on heterosexuality, gender binaries, [and] racial and national ‘purity’” (98). The racialization of sexual dissidence is seen in many instances of non-white monsters with homosexual connotations in various Gothic works. Books such as Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) feature monsters which are non-British and androgynous. The analogy of the Gothicised racial other and homosexuality was also applied to the discourse of female homosexuality, as in Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872).

In the context of Victorian culture, the size, shape, and colour of a changeling were signs of drifting back down the developmental evolutionary timescale. Carole Silver, for instance, describes the changeling taking the form of a child as “an old, distorted face, a small or wizened body, and dark or sallow skin, [who] was often backward in learning to walk or speak” (60). However, “[t]he degenerate, on the other hand, was easily identified by his deformed body. Thus the concept of degeneration lent greater authority to forensic medicine in pointing to the outward signs of abnormality, and in making private vice a public matter” (Mosse 34). The folkloric idea of the changeling was explained through the notion of “non-normative” child development, serving as a metaphor for unwanted children with developmental problems during the Victorian time. As some scholars have claimed, a “rational” explanation behind the changeling tales came from the belief that the changeling child actually represents children who failed to thrive (Munroe 258; Silver 75). These children were “the results of abnormal physical or mental development” (Eberly 75). As such, the descriptions of changeling children corresponded to congenital hereditary disorders.

The fairy with atavistic features shares some parallels with the queer child in the poem. Specifically, there is a similarity between the conflicted queer child and the changeling, considering their shared outsider characteristics. For example, the changelings and the child share the same skin colour. Colour is brought to the fore when the child describes her difference and an accompanying sense of alienation. The child tells us in the first stanza that she has a “queer brown” face and later highlights this fact as she describes how her skin is different from her “little pale brother”. The child’s difference creates an uneasy feeling in her family as the child laments: “[y]our disgrace, with the queer brown face, was never/ Never, I know, but half your child” (ll. 7-8). As such, the brown-skinned child and the changeling have a shared sense of foreignness. The colour signifies “outsider” status for both the fairy and the child. The child does not belong to the family: “[t]here are my sisters, there is my little brother/ Who plays in the place called Paradise,/ Your children all, your children for ever” (ll. 3-5). One way to explain her “disgrace” is that she has a non-normative sexuality that violates societal norms and brings shame to her family. She wants new parents who want her and accept her queer differences: “[t]imes I pleased you, dear Father, dear Mother,/ Learned all my lessons” (ll. 58-59). The changeling, in contrast, can be read as a metaphorical parent that accepts the child’s queerness.

The changeling eventually becomes a queer model that the child with nonconforming sexuality can relate to. Later, there is a scene in which the child considers herself as one of the changelings: “I *did* kneel down to say my prayers; But the King who sits on your high church steeple/ Has nothing to do with us fairy people!” (ll. 55-56). Fairies have been associated with paganism, and some

theories even associate the fairies with the devil. For instance, Katharine Mary Briggs observes in “The English Fairies” that “[t]he popular traits of the Devil, the horns and cloven hoof and shaggy hide, do not spring from Christian theology, but belong to folk gods or nature spirits” (285). The child unwillingly accepts that she belongs to the group of changelings as a creature that is outcast and unorthodox.

Having identified with the atavistic changeling, the queer child embraces Halberstam’s “queer form of antidevelopment” by “step[ping] out of the assembly line of the heterosexual production” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 73). My reading of the child narrator also approximates Stockton’s description of “sexual immaturity” wherein queer subjects “remain children in part by failing to have their own” (22). The child’s brown skin and her identification with the racially-other changeling raises issues of biopolitics because the child’s body does not conform to the stereotype of one expected to reproduce. Only certain bodies are encouraged to reproduce, and others are advised against or even prohibited from reproducing. The poem is shaped by the cultural background of its production and engages with a dominant early-twentieth-century idea: eugenics. “Eugenics”, a term that was coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, means “well born”. The term encourages the idea of ideal reproductivity or thoughtful selective reproduction (Richardson 3). The science of eugenics was very influential from the beginning of the twentieth century to the Second World War (Wachman 49). Eugenic thinking encourages people with desirable traits to have children while those with undesirable traits are discouraged from doing so. Mew’s personal view seems to concur with eugenic thinking. Her decision to not get married was significantly based on her belief in eugenics, as she did not want to pass on a hereditary taint to her future children (Walsh 219-

220). Additionally, Mew knew Marie Stopes, a sexological author and campaigner for birth control and eugenics. Although it is not known how close they were, Mew and Stopes moved in the same friendship circle (Copus 157).⁴¹ As a result, it is not too farfetched to suggest that, to some extent, the author's personal ties to the subject of eugenics had some influences on her portrayal of the brown queer child in the poem.

According to eugenic thought, the sick, the disabled, and the racially "impure" were regarded as "undesired" by the nation. What determined good or bad eugenic traits was imbued with racist and classist implications. According to eugenics, the traits that make some groups of people superior and others inferior are composed of health, class, and sexuality as well as race and nationality. Gay Wachman observed that eugenics shared a conceptual link with older ideas of primitivism and degeneracy as it also advocated class, gender, and racial prejudices (50). This early twentieth-century scientific concept of eugenics was an ideological legacy of Darwin's theory, racial prejudice, and the Victorian obsession with evolutionary progression. Walsh states that "eugenics found some of its strongest supporters among racist, nationalist, and imperialist factions who wished to create a global hegemony of Englishness" (219).

Some Victorian euhemerists established a racist association, linking the small, dwarfish, physical forms of changelings with a "pygmy race" (Silver 50). This ethnic group was allegedly linked to insufficient physical and mental strength and was associated with the primitive. There was also a related belief that, due to

⁴¹ Mew and Stopes both knew Edith Chick and attended her wedding. Harriette, Edith's sister, wrote about the wedding in her diary.

allegedly degenerate racial characteristics, the changelings stole children to improve their deficient elfin breed. Carole Silver writes about the reason for changeling abductions, noting that “the Brothers Grimm had remarked that fairies stole human offspring to improve their breed. Victorian euhemerists richly elaborated upon this idea (of ‘kidnap theory’ in which Celtic and Saxon were kidnapped by dwarfish primitive clans to increase their population)” (74). Due to scientific racism during this time, non-European, non-white, or racially mixed bodies were considered inferior “lower races”, not fully evolved like white people (Silver 83-85).

Given that Mew’s child might be a fairy changeling, she is deemed unsuitable for reproduction and the creation of a future lineage. Reading the child in relation to eugenics sheds light on the notion of an ideal citizen. The changeling-like child, with her racial and sexual ambiguities, is deemed unfit for eugenically “fit” reproduction. If she produces children in the future, they might also have brown skin and be queer. The expectation of the child to become an ideal citizen is countered by the aforementioned implications of degeneration: backwardness, racial “impurity”, and dissident sexuality. As such, the child narrator disrupts the narrative of futurity; she resists embodying growth and futurity. As discussed in the introduction, the image of the child in general is embedded with the notion of an ideal future, which goes hand-in-hand with heterosexuality. Edelman has explored how children are politically potent and contends that the figure of the Child embodies the futurity upon which society is built, implying that the notion of the ideal citizen is indissociable from regulative heteronormativity. In other words, the ultimate purpose of the normative figure of the Child is to secure heterosexuality.

Given this politics of reproductive futurism and their abandonment by adults, the “queer” child in the poem does not fit the cultural ideal. In this sense, Mew’s queer child is positioned “out of synch with state-sponsored narratives of belonging and becoming” (E. Freeman xv). The child is excluded from the discursive regimes of eugenic selection and future-oriented temporality that organise community and provide a feeling of being and belonging.

Near the end of the poem, the changelings come to the house and take the child to the woods with them: “[t]he arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered, Whoo—I knew it had come for me!” (ll. 58). Moving to a fairyland thwarts the child’s supposed development and defies fixed progressive patterns of becoming a “good” healthy citizen. Going to the changeling land offers the child an alternative temporality from the normative heterosexual model. Consequently, the act circumvents and interrupts heteronormative temporal development. As Stockton remarks, growing up causes confusion and uncertainty: it involves “a frightening, heightened sense of growing toward a question mark. Or growing up in haze. Or hanging in suspense – even wishing time would stop, or just twist sideways, so that one wouldn’t have to advance to new or further scenes of trouble” (3). For the child speaker in Mew’s poem, this question mark can be seen in the failure to “settle down to anything” (ll. 52). Despite trying to satisfy her parents by following the norm, the child fails. Her failure “to settle down” can be interpreted as failing to grow up and embrace heterosexual identity. The realm of the fairy, set “elsewhere” from human society, is supposed to be a consolation for the marginalized confused child who “grows” up differently. The fairyland occupies a liminal position between reality and fantasy, thus unsettling restrictive social orders. Diane Purkiss explains

that “[t]he way fairies hover between belief and disbelief is what makes them natural symbols for other things that cannot be said, or cannot be acknowledged, or cannot be believed” (86). Purkiss contends that an ability to transcend reality allows the suspension of norms in the fairy world. Therefore, a world where fairies exist is free from the societal constraints that determine “what is likely or acceptable or sayable in the everyday” (83). This quality speaks to the repressed and makes it easier to project what is not allowed to be articulated or experienced in realistic realms.

Moving to fairyland also disrupts the narrative progression of heteronormative time. The changeling proposes a queer perspective, providing the queer child with an alternative futurity. The child speaker grows sideways instead of assuming a rigid identity and moving forward to certain expected states. Life with changelings is a way of living that “allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods” (Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* 3). Such movement disavows development towards maturation. This queer child in the poem remains a child in part by failing to have one of their own. This results in her “step[ping] out of the assembly line of heterosexual production and turns toward a new project” (73). Time stops in fairyland, and the queer child will not grow up according to the restrictive norm. Like monstrous beings in other Gothic works, the changeling figure does not age. For instance, Count Dracula is constructed as an eternal child who is “eternally old and young at the same time, a child who is born from the tomb to delay and protract his victims’ entrance into the world of adult sexuality” (Berthin 68).

Likewise, in the last stanza, the child realises that she will not grow up in a normative way: “[b]lack and chill are Their nights on the world;/ And They live so long and They feel no pain:/ I shall grow up, but never grow old,/ I shall always, always be very cold,/ I shall never come back again!” (ll. 71-76). According to the changeling’s temporal logic of ageing, the child will never grow into an adult whose sexual identity is categorized, and she is thus able to evade the pain of heteronormative repression. Fairyland offers a space wherein the child has an alternative to adulthood. In this “wet wild wood”, she can retain her queerness.

Nonetheless, this new path does not offer a form of complete escapism. Mew refuses to adopt the happily ever after for her fairy tale. In a non-utopian fashion, the child still feels that she does not belong. The mood at the end of the poem is nostalgic and melancholic. The child wistfully looks at the house: “[n]ow, every night I shall see the windows shining,/ The gold lamp’s glow, and the fire’s red gleam,/ While the best of us are twining twigs and the rest of us are whining/ In the hollow by the stream” (ll. 67-70). This window scene indicates that the child still longs for the human realm. As such, Mew does not fully embrace the potential of the fairy realm. As implied at the end of the poem, a sense of alienation cannot be eliminated even in the fairy kingdom. Ultimately, the queer child has been left in-between. Mew refuses to put her queer character safely within the identifiable model, and the liminal changeling-like child is never fully reconciled in the fantastic fairy discourse. The changeling child’s feeling epitomises the queer child’s “desperately feeling there was simply nowhere to grow” (Stockton 3).

Throughout this chapter, it is evident that the vital principle behind Mew’s queer aesthetic is the difficulty in finding a language for female queer identification,

subjectivity, and desire. Sexological models of identity that Mew might have drawn upon were often linked to pathological frameworks and notions of mental and physical disease that would not have been affirmative. While refusing to embrace identificatory sexual categories, this chapter has demonstrated that Mew's works do not straightforwardly reject sexual scientific theories. Mew engages creatively with scientific ideas around individual sexual development and eugenics to depict queer subjectivities. The sexual experiences and sexual development of queer subjects in "Passed" and "The Changeling" are explored through temporal schemes like the fleeting experiential moment of sexual awakening accompanied by psychological disturbances and the queer child's sideways growth. The utilisation of Gothic spaces alongside Gothic-related notions such as the uncanny and the monstrous as well as supernatural figures like fairies help to allegorise certain subject positions through queer temporal schemes. Additionally, the incorporation of the Gothic in Mew's unique representation of queer female sexualities simultaneously reflects wider social anxieties interwoven with sexual dissidence, such as class and race.

Chapter Three

Radclyffe Hall: Anachronism, the Rhetoric of Haunting, and the Gothicised *Bildungsroman* in *The Well of Loneliness*

Radclyffe Hall was a British novelist who lived through the transition from Victorian culture to the twentieth century (1880-1943). Her most famous work is *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Despite being produced in the twentieth century, at the height of the modernist period, *The Well* has been regarded as haunted by Victorian influences. The novel is built on Hall's reading of late nineteenth-century sexologists, especially Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter. The protagonist, Stephen Gordon, is presented as a female invert born in the late Victorian era to an upper-class family. The novel directly engages with sexological constructions of inversion and openly discusses female same-sex relationships between Stephen and some of the other female characters. After being published in July 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* caused a public stir when there was a call for censorship of the book. Six weeks after the novel's publication, James Douglas, an editor of the *Sunday Express*, wrote in an editorial, "many things that discuss in scientific text-books cannot decently be discussed in a work of fiction offered to general reader" and compared the book to "prussic acid" and "moral poison" (10). He linked Hall's work with the late Victorian trial of Oscar Wilde, stating that "[l]iterature has not yet recovered from the harm done to it by the Oscar Wilde scandal. It should keep its house in order" (10). Paradoxically, Douglas's condemnation, which aimed to silence discussion of the subject of sexual inversion instead brought the topics of female same-sex desire and sexual inversion to public notice. Sexological thought was not widespread

among the public, nor had it reached broader non-academic audiences during the first decades of the twentieth century (Funke 258). The trial brought increasing visibility to a debate organised through sexological discourses (“of which very little was known publicly”) in British culture (Winning 110).

As one of the most influential novels in the history of lesbians, Hall’s novel has gained classic status and inspired countless academic studies. This chapter takes readings of the novel’s engagement with sexological discourse in a new direction. I argue that *The Well of Loneliness* illustrates queer temporality through its engagement with anachronism. This sense of anachronism operates on many levels, including the thematic and textual. This chapter examines these varied forms of anachronism and their queer functions in depicting the female invert by considering the rarely explored Gothic imagery and language that subtly permeates the text. This lens facilitates a better understanding of what many critics have believed to be a straightforward scientifically-informed narrative with an old-fashioned Victorian realist writing style.

My analysis primarily involves one definition of “anachronism” meaning “a person, a custom or an idea that seems old-fashioned and does not belong to the present” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Hall’s deployment of late nineteenth-century sexological knowledge to construct gender and sexuality in a novel published in the late 1920s is in itself anachronistic and untimely. Hall chose to use sexological ideas about female inversion that were starting to be seen as outdated and were challenged by ascending psychoanalytic approaches to homosexuality. Instead of engaging with Freudian ideas that had emerged in response to earlier sexological writings, Hall reached back to sexological concepts in which the individual’s sexual

disposition was understood as congenital and physical rather than acquired and psychological. Freud's psychoanalytical theories disputed the hegemony of the congenital theory to some extent, placing more emphasis on the idea that sexual behaviours were shaped by social and environmental influences. Freud posed the development of heterosexuality and homosexuality alike as a problem that required investigation, since both involved the suppression of libido (Chauncey 136-37).

While Hall mainly turns back to the late nineteenth century to adopt older sexological understandings of sexuality, her configuration of sexual identities was also influenced by Freud to some extent. Laura Green notes that *The Well* occupies a complicated liminal position in this regard. Green considers Stephen as "emblematic of a more general confusion, during the period, of how to conceptualize and represent identities" (279). Citing Jeanette Foster, Green argues that Hall comments on Stephen's hereditary physical masculinity while also acknowledging the effects of child rearing and socialisation in encouraging Stephen's masculinity. Hall's conceptualisation of Stephen's identity in *The Well* is anachronistic in that the novel combines different views of sexuality that cannot easily be placed within a single intellectual and historical period.

In addition, anachronism is central to both the sexological and psychoanalytic frameworks upon which Hall draws. Freud mobilised the concept of arrested psychosexual development to explain the emergence of homosexuality (Garnets and Kimmel 87). Sexologists also explained the causation of homosexuality and sexual inversion through language related to anachronism, since it was claimed that the homosexual or invert had fallen behind in the process of sexual development. As previously discussed in the introduction, sexologists like

Richard Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis explained homosexuality and sexual inversion in terms of arrested development or developmental delay. In this sense, the sexual invert, for instance, was out of synch with an expected developmental timeline and associated with backwardness. Rohy examines the interrelatedness between anachronism and sexuality in *Anachronism and Its Others*. Rohy explores anachronism and how it is defined and articulated in relation to racialised sexological constructions of sexuality. She argues that homosexuality's "archaic inclinations" violate the timelines of both individual development and historical chronology (ix). Subjects such as the racial Other and sexual Other are deemed to experience arrested development and are thus opposed to progress and associated with anachronism, backwardness and the primitive.

Prior to the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, both the anachronistic use of late nineteenth-century sexological discourse and the theme of anachronistic queer characters who are "out of time" and unable to catch up to modernity and progressive development can be found in Hall's short story "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself". This story was written in 1926 and published later in 1934. The titular character, Miss Ogilvy, is a female invert with masculine characteristics. She volunteered in the First World War, but after the war ends finds it difficult to reintegrate into a domestic life. Consequently, she leaves her house and travels to an island. There, she undergoes a fantastic anachronistic moment of temporal dislocation: Ogilvy mysteriously travels back to a primitive time in pre-history. Miss Ogilvy is known for being a predecessor of *The Well's* Stephen Gordon in its rendering of a masculine heroine experiencing war (Kelley 116). In the author's forenote to "Miss Ogilvy", Hall herself writes that although the title character is a

different person from Stephen Gordon, readers of *The Well of Loneliness* “will find in the earlier part of this story the nucleus of those sections of my novel which deal with Stephen Gordon’s childhood and girlhood, and with the noble and selfless work done by hundreds of sexually inverted women during the Great War”.

The nineteenth-century sexological models that shape Hall’s depiction of Miss Ogilvy and Stephen Gordon combined sexual and gender deviance. As Jay Prosser notes, “[n]ineteenth-century sexology represents a particularly entangled moment in the history of sexual and gender subjects” (167). In the second half of the nineteenth century, sexologists Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and von Krafft-Ebing claimed that the typical female homosexual had a “masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom” (Krafft-Ebing 264). Krafft-Ebing argued that “[u]ranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men” (263). Ellis describes female inverts as exhibiting their masculinity through their “brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, [and] the masculine straightforwardness” as well as their “capacity for athletics” and “sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations” (250). Miss Ogilvy’s sense of loneliness, her estrangement from society and her disengagement from her family, are presented as stemming from her gender nonconformity, which is, within this framework, also suggestive of a non-normative sexual orientation. Hall’s depiction of Miss Ogilvy is thus open to more than one reading. Her story can be read as being about either homosexuality, stone butch or trans identity.⁴²

⁴² See Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* (2019) and Jay Prosser’s transgender reading in *Palatable Poison* (2001).

However, one certainty in the reading of this story is the crucial role the fantastic literary mode plays in representing Miss Ogilvy's inversion, specifically by working alongside the idea of anachronism. The fantastic queer moment of time travel is a turning point of the story in which queer outcast Ogilvy is taken back in time and is able to express her non-normative gender/sexual identity and desire. In the final scene, Miss Ogilvy experiences a dreamlike moment in which she returns to prehistoric times as a caveman and finds a female lover there. Before entering trance-like into the primordial Bronze Age, Miss Ogilvy "thought she lay there struggling to reason, that her eyes were closed in the painful effort, and that as she closed them, she continued to puff the inevitable cigarette. At least that was what she thought at one moment – the next, she was out in a sunset evening" (23-24). Jennifer Mitchell investigates the way that Hall employs the fantastic as a means of codifying queer desire in anachronistic or transhistorical ways (152-166). This anachronistic moment unsettles definable historical periods and brings Miss Ogilvy back to a primitive time where Miss Ogilvy's queer sexual expression is allowed. This fantastic moment "out of time" serves as a narrative tool for codifying the queer potential of the protagonist and enables queer relations with a female partner. Embracing anachronism and temporal dislocation serves as a strategy to move the protagonist out of rigid societal structures. To escape from the social constraints of her twentieth-century existence, Miss Ogilvy requires a supernatural, transformative, and transcendental event as a pivotal point to take her far back in time.

Moreover, this return to a primitive pre-historic period also corresponds to the concept of arrested development. According to Claire Buck, the prehistoric

episode grounds Ogilvy's dissident gender identity and sexuality in a "natural, primitive sexuality determined by instinct" (182). Ogilvy's retrogression into the past feeds the cultural perception of female inversion as primitive or degenerate (Buck 186). Ogilvy, when she becomes a caveman, is described as having "sad brown eyes like those of a monkey" and a "bestial" mouth, which makes Ogilvy seem "a little sub-human" (24). This manifestation of anachronism resonates with Rohy's argument that the configuration of arrested sexual development was associated with racialised discourses of degeneration and the primitive.

The Well of Loneliness also features an inverted protagonist who is an anachronistic sexual subject. However, *The Well of Loneliness* cannot be labelled fantastic or supernatural in the same way as "Miss Ogilvy" as it does not contain an obvious fantastic transformative moment. In the forenote of "Miss Ogilvy", Hall remarks on her shifts from the fantastic to "serious study" in *The Well*: "[t]his story, which is now being published for the first time, and in which I have permitted myself a brief excursion into the realms of the fantastic, was written in July 1926, shortly before I definitely decided to write my serious study of congenital sexual inversion, *The Well of Loneliness*". Hall wrote *The Well of Loneliness* in the style of a Victorian *Bildungsroman* (Bauer 118). The novel is about Stephen's development of gender and sexual identities from her childhood to adulthood. The *Bildungsroman* is a literary genre known as "the novel of development"; the term was first popularised by Wilhelm Dilthey in the second half of the nineteenth century. Victorian *Bildungsroman* style relies on realism, while the modernist *Bildungsroman* commonly employs writing techniques that disturb the flow of chronological time and narrative coherence. For instance, H. D., an important

modernist author, incorporates “an allusive and creative free-indirect style that works by resemblance and analogy rather than imitative mimesis to convey non-linear, fragmented and citational strands of thought” in her autobiographical Bildungsroman *HERmione-Asphodel* (G. Castle 163).

The Well's style and adherence to the Victorian *Bildungsroman* structure have often been perceived as outdated compared to the high modernist literary moment in which the book was written. This anachronistic literary choice makes Hall different from other modernist writers who developed more experimental styles. Produced around the same time and similarly concerned with the topic of female queer sexuality, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) has often been read in conjunction with *The Well of Loneliness*.⁴³ Although *Orlando* was influenced by sexological discourse to some extent, Woolf presents the story by focusing on “sexual indeterminacy” and criticizing gendered assumptions underpinning sexological theories of inversion.⁴⁴ The deployment of fantastic non-linear temporality in *Orlando* is often seen to offer queer fluidity that undermines the concept of fixed sexological identity categories seemingly embraced by Hall.

⁴³ On the differences between Woolf and Hall's writing, see “Hall of Mirrors: Radclyffe Hall's ‘The Well of Loneliness’ and Modernist Fictions of Identity” (277-294). See also Joanne Winning's “Writing by the Light of The Well: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Modernists.” (372-93).

⁴⁴ Edward Carpenter. Ellis and Hirschfeld were interested in “sexual indeterminacy”, forms of experiences and subjectivity that worked across gender and sexual binaries (Funke 254).

When *The Well of Loneliness* went to trial, Woolf agreed to testify on Hall's behalf.⁴⁵ However, the reason she decided to help was not because of the book's literary merits: Woolf mainly cared about its content, admitting that her thoughts "centre upon Sapphism" (556). She explained this reason in a letter to her nephew Quentin Bell in 1928 (555) but called *The Well* "stagnant and lukewarm and neither one thing or the other" and criticised that "the dulness [sic] of the book is such that any indecency may lurk there – one simply can't keep one's eyes on the passage" (556).

However, some critics have noted that beneath a seemingly old-fashioned and tedious surface, *The Well* is more complex in both its presentation and engagement with sexological models. Laura Doan is one critic who looks past *The Well's* putatively simple exterior and acknowledges that Hall was "far more sophisticated and astute in [her] literary deployment of social science than critics have yet suggested" (*Fashioning Sapphism* 130). Green remarks on not only Hall's complicated and varied use of sexual concepts, as discussed above, but also the literary complexity of *The Well of Loneliness*. She argues that the novel's "generic and psychological instability, as a Victorian novel written in the Modernist period" results in "continuity, and controversy, of textual constructions of identity across generic/literary-historical boundaries" (293).

⁴⁵ An impressive number of well-known people wrote opposing its suppression, amongst them E.M. Forster, Julian Huxley, Storm Jameson, Rose Macaulay, Vita Sackville-West, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf. However, Woolf did not have to testify, since the magistrate for the case did not allow the assembled witnesses to speak (Marshik 112-113).

Conventional thinking on periodisation that fosters a neat and compartmentalised notion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries obscures important continuities that cut across period boundaries. Hall's book is located in an "in-between" space where the Victorian and the modernist overlap and interact, and this liminal position between periods also complicates Hall's narrative of sexual identity. Some critics have identified modernist characteristics in Hall's writing. In "Engendering Modernism", Dellamora calls Hall "a vernacular modernist" who "splits and mixes genres" (86). In Hannah Roche's view, "Hall may well be the most conservative of modernists and the most embarrassing of lesbians, but the fact remains that modernist scholars and lesbian communities are keen to claim her for one of our own" (*The Outside Thing* 71).⁴⁶ Green points out the modernist interest in interiority in *The Well*: the novel features "a Victorian narrative concern with the social and material milieus and, on the other hand, a modernist concern with interior consciousness" (278). This chapter builds on these critical observations and proposes that the anachronistic qualities of Hall's novel in terms of its engagement with sexual sciences and literary history contribute significantly to the text's complexity and instability.

Queer anachronism and the Gothic in *The Well of Loneliness* are interrelated, which is seldom recognised and has yet to receive scholarly attention. I argue that focusing on its Gothic elements advances an understanding of the

⁴⁶ Roche argues that Stephen's move to the queer metropolis of Paris makes *The Well* similar to other key lesbian modernist texts (86-87). Other critics who have commented on the modernist qualities of Hall's writing include Joanne Winning. Winning notes that "*The Well* and lesbian modernism are populated by the same key figures. Natalie Barney, for instance, appears as Valérie Seymour in Hall's text and as Dame Evangeline Musset in Djuna Barnes's satirical *Ladies Almanack*" (374).

varied forms of anachronism in the text. First, the chapter investigates the way that *The Well* embraces an anachronistic position of “in-betweenness” as it spans the late Victorian and early-twenty-century eras. Hall’s rendering of the sexual invert features various forms of knowledge. This chapter explores the introductory part of the novel that anticipates mystic, spectral, and haunting discourses alongside sexological discourses. It reads *The Well of Loneliness’s* preface as a textually liminal space, focusing on the spiritualist background of Hall’s love life which was haunted by her old lover. Next, the chapter explores the way that Stephen is depicted as an anachronistic subject experiencing arrested development. I suggest that the linear narrative of the Victorian Bildungsroman is disrupted by untimeliness and a queer temporality articulated by the haunting presence of Stephen in the narrative. Stephen is depicted as a figurative ghostly child in her own house and develops sideways instead of along a linear temporal trajectory toward heterosexual marriage and reproduction. Finally, the chapter explores correlations between non-realist elements, modernist concerns with incoherent subjectivity, and the fragmentation of the category of the female invert. Hall utilises haunting to generate asynchronous moments in the final scene of the novel in which Stephen encounters an army of spectral inverts. By deploying the rhetoric of spectrality and haunting, the novel complicates narrative teleology and figures Stephen as an incoherent and unstable self. Furthermore, the Gothicised scenes illustrate that sexology itself was a diverse, conflicting, and incoherent body of knowledge. This chapter argues that Hall consciously employs Gothic elements within the increasingly outdated genre of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* to subvert and embrace the flaws and failures of sexual inversion in providing a fixed identity.

The Haunted Preface

In the introduction of the novel, the boundaries between science and spirituality are muddled. I call attention to the prefatory remark written by sexologist Havelock Ellis and the dedication that Hall made to her lovers. I read the pages before the story as paratexts. Gérard Genette defines paratexts as “those elements which help to direct and control the reception of a text, for example, titles, subtitles, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, forwards” (3). Paratexts are transitional between the text and the non-text. Consequently, paratexts allow readers to determine what kind of text they are given and how to read it. In these pages before the story of Stephen Gordon begins, nineteenth-century sexological science and the Gothic coexist to introduce readers to the novel. Whereas the book seems to promise a linear narrative of identity formation, its paratexts introduce the rhetoric of the supernatural, haunting, and queer ambiguity.

Hall invited Ellis to write a preface and placed it as an introductory note to *The Well*:

I have read *The Well of Loneliness* with great interest because – apart from its fine qualities as a novel by a writer of accomplished art – it possesses a notable psychological and sociological significance. So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today. The relation of certain people, who, while different from their fellow human beings, are sometimes of the highest character and the finest aptitudes – to the often hostile society in which they move, presents difficult and still unresolved problems.

The inclusion of the sexologist's comment confirms Hall's investment in sexology and the influence of Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* on the book. Furthermore, Ellis directly mentioned sexual inversion in his original commentary before it was edited by Jonathan Cape, a publisher. Cape changed Ellis's phrase "various aspects of sexual inversion" to "one particular aspect of sexual life", the latter appearing in the preface for the book's first edition and subsequent others.⁴⁷ Additionally, the phrase "completely faithful and uncompromising" reveals that the book was written in a realist style in Ellis's view. In this respect, Ellis's introduction to *The Well* prepares readers for a book that is written as a *Bildungsroman* in a realist mode, drawing on the explanatory frameworks of sexology.

However, sharing the introductory space of the novel is Hall's dedication: "Our Three Selves". This refers to herself, her present lover, and her dead lover, and therefore embraces the otherworldly and spiritual. In 1907, Hall became involved in a long-term relationship with Mabel Batten ("Ladye"), a married woman, singer, and London socialite, that lasted until Hall met and began an affair with Una Troubridge in 1915. Hall's sapphic love triangle and participation in spiritualism provide the historical context for the ghostliness surrounding this dedication. Hall had converted to Catholicism in 1912 and was also interested in spiritualism. This belief in spiritualism intensified when Batten passed away.⁴⁸ The spiritualist movement was flourishing at that time, and one of the reasons behind its popularity

⁴⁷ For more details of Ellis's interaction with Hall about the writing of this introductory comment, see Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (pp.126-128).

⁴⁸ On Hall, Troubridge, and Batten's relationship in connection to spiritualism, see, for instance, Sarah Parker's "'The Darkness is the Closet in Which Your Lover Roosts Her Heart': Lesbians, Desire and the Gothic Genre" (2006).

was its ability to give solace to people coping with the loss of a loved one, especially during and after the First World War. Hall experienced extreme feelings of guilt after Batten's death in 1916, which occurred shortly after she had begun her affair with Troubridge. This led Hall and Troubridge to attempt to contact Batten through a medium to ask for forgiveness. Jodie Medd has also observed that spiritualism not only allowed Hall to contact her dead lover, but also offered her the medium to develop her relationship with Troubridge (81). Medd writes that "believing in lesbian ghosts also allows for Hall to declare and maintain a bigamy that evades the law" (93). In other words, through spiritualism, the three partners developed strange queer bonds in which Batten became the "haunted" presence in Hall's life and allowed Hall to live a non-normative life path other than heteronormative monogamous marriage. Having incorporated this queer and ghostly dedication, the novel's opening is charged with the notion of haunting and transgressive sexualities beyond social norms and beyond the temporal limits of mortal life. Paying attention to Hall's dedication reveals the non-normative temporality and the vocabulary of haunting present in the novel.

Beliefs and practices such as spiritualism, mysticism, and ideas of reincarnation can also be found in Hall's other works. For example, Hall's interest in occult matters manifests in her short story named "Upon the Mountains" (from the *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* collection [1934]). The ideas of reincarnation and past lives also appear in her novels *A Saturday Life* (1925) and *The Master of the House* (1932), and in the short story "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself". The spiritualist component in Hall's work can be interpreted as a modernist feature. Helen Sword

notes the affinity between spiritualism and the transition into literary modernism.⁴⁹

She writes that:

the persistence of popular spiritualism, that credulous Victorian fad, may seem a curious anomaly in the cynical age of literary modernism. Yet spiritualism anticipates and thereby could be said to validate, many of literary modernism's central principles, mirroring modernist writers' attempts to establish a dialectic that might embrace both authority and iconoclasm, both tradition and innovation, both continuity and fragmentation. (65)

The complex interplay between the sexological and the spiritual, as well as the linear and the ghostly in *The Well*, is already represented by these paratexts and anticipates the way in which elements of the occult and sexological science blend in the book. The dedication hints at the fact that a haunting and spectral quality exists beneath the apparently realist façade of the novel.

The spiritualist elements of the book break social codes, including gender ideals and sexuality. In *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (1989), Alex Owen regards spiritualism as a language of ambivalence and resistance (3-5). Similarly, Elizabeth English observes that

[o]ccult discourses – by which I refer to a variety of supernatural beliefs and practices such as spiritualism, mysticism and ideas of reincarnation, operating on the premise that the nature and boundaries of human

⁴⁹ The topic of spiritualism and female homoeroticism is also discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

existence and reality are not fully accounted for by rationalist or materialist modes of thinking – offered a compelling relevance for lesbian women’s lives and proved to be apt motifs for their fictions. (60)

The languages of haunting and spiritualism and their inherent anachronistic qualities function as a device that allows Hall to engage with the complexity of sexual identity formation.

Queering the *Bildungsroman* and the Ghostly Queer Child

Having explored the paratexts of the book, this section examines the narrative itself. To depict the life of a sexual invert, Hall adhered to the traditional nineteenth-century novel format with an omniscient narrator, linear plot, and detailed descriptions of characters and settings in time and space (Brown, *The Poison at the Source* 52). Yet, looking closely, the Gothic is embedded in the realist presentation of *The Well*. The Gothic and realism are not antithetical, as has often been suggested, but rather interact and complement each other in Hall’s novel. In her lecture “The Writing of Novels”, Hall discusses the topic of incorporating the mystical into realist narratives, explaining that the mystical element:

must be almost tenuous, and yet so strong that the introduction of mundane events never for one moment dispels or breaks it. I want plenty of good, solid mundane events, otherwise I incline to feel that the book could not apply to my everyday life [. . .] But all the other elements as well – quietly

present, quietly persistent [. . .] the mystical element must be interpenetrating.⁵⁰

Critics like Jana Funke have noted Hall's choice to balance the supernatural or the fantastic and realism in her writings, including *A Saturday Life* (1925) and *The Master of the House* (1932) as well as her unpublished short fiction "Miles", "The Scarecrow", and "The Legend of Saint Ethelflaeda".⁵¹ In *The Well*, Gothic elements are woven throughout the fabric of everyday life in Morton, Stephen's family home. Gothic realism offers a means to move beyond material concerns, and it is in this shadowy realm between the realist and the supernatural that the queer development of Stephen's identity is depicted.

The Gothic elements featured in the story become an effective device in undermining the normative pattern of a traditional *Bildungsroman*, which deals with a particular teleological direction and temporal movement of linear growth. *The Well's* plot proceeds in the predictable linear movement of a Victorian *Bildungsroman*, as Stephen grows up and formulates an understanding of her gender-nonconforming and sexually dissident self. The march of time from childhood through adolescence to adult sexuality is depicted in the *Bildungsroman* framework, wherein normative stages of life are usually figured. Life, as Halberstam has noted, is usually expected to proceed from adolescence to early adulthood, marriage, reproduction, child rearing, retirement, and death (*In a Queer*

⁵⁰ "The Writing of Novels" (delivered at the English Club, Oxford, February 24th 1933, and the Literary Society, University College, University of London, March 2nd 1933).

⁵¹ See more details in Jana Funke's "Introduction" to "*The World' and Other Unpublished Works of Radclyffe Hall* (2016).

Time and Place 182). Such life schedules create a *Bildungsroman*-like structure in service of heteronormativity. However, the Gothic aids Hall in intervening in this temporal structure. The Gothic plays a significant role in Hall's exploration of the queer subject, from Stephen being arrested along the heteronormative developmental timeline, her attempted subversion of the socially dominant temporal trajectory of heterosexuality, to her failure to achieve the stable identity of the sexual invert at the end.

This chapter shows Hall's sustained interest in the topic of the queer child and non-normative growth. Stephen is called "a queer kid" by Collins, her maid and her first crush (14). Collins comments on Stephen's non-normative gender expression: dressing herself in male clothes and acting like a boy. When Stephen is seven years old, she already feels queer in the sense of being different. She hates female clothes like "dresses and sashes, and ribbons, and small coral beads, and open work stockings" (14). Young Stephen not only adopts the performance of masculinity but also experiences same-sex attraction. In young Stephen's journey to formulate her sexual identity, she does not have access to nineteenth-century sexological concepts. Stephen only discovers sexology as an adult at a later point in the narrative. Before that, however, Gothic rhetoric plays a vital role in expressing Stephen's queer growth. Before she discovered her father's sexological book, Stephen finds expressions for her same-sex desire in available material embedded in Gothic language. As such, the mystical can be considered a part of Stephen's journey of sexual discovery and her queer development.

For instance, the seven-year-old Stephen falls in love with her maid Collins. When Collins leaves Morton with her male lover, Stephen is heartbroken. The

memory of Collins is fading, so the child tries to recall her image with prayers and spells. In her attempt to revive the memory, Stephen uses her childish imagination to reach back to the past. She looks to supernatural and superstitious texts like fairy tales, magical spells, and biblical lore in one of her attempts to articulate her queer desire:

Thoroughly disgruntled, she [Stephen] bethought her of books, books of fairy tales, hitherto not much in favour, especially of those that treated of spells, incantations and other unlawful proceedings. She even requested the surprised Mrs Bingham to read from the Bible: "You know where," coaxed Stephen, "it's the place they were reading in church last Sunday, about Saul and a witch with a name like Edna – the place where she makes some person come up, 'cause the king had forgotten what he looked like". (31)

Stephen employs discourses outside of sexology, which is not yet available to her as a framework, to express female same-sex desire. Stephen draws on fantastic ideas by referring to the mystical communication between the witch and the spirit in the Bible.⁵² The Bible typically serves as an epistemological anchor for the English *Bildungsroman* (Breen 187). The fact that Hall relies on Catholic rhetoric in figuring sexual dissidence has been widely acknowledged. Some critics call *The Well* a

⁵² The Witch of Endor appears in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 28:3-25). The story concerns a witch who was visited by the first king of Israel. Saul asked her to conjure up the spirit of the prophet Samuel to tell his fortunes. The witch conjured up the spirit, who told Saul that he and his three sons would die in battle and that the Israelites would lose to the Philistines.

new gospel (DelleMora 182; Roden 124).⁵³ However, I argue that the cultural material referenced here also includes other beliefs. The reference to the Witch of Endor in young Stephen's queer articulation suggests that the ways in which she expresses queerness are complex and multifaceted. Similar to the Gothic, fairy tales are interested in the marvellous or the supernatural. Stephen's thoughts about the supernatural can be read in relation to her queer childhood development. The beliefs in the fantastic and otherworldly, such as fairy tales and witchcraft, exist outside scientific realms and are often associated with the allegedly primitive past. As the word "unlawful" in the quote above suggests, this type of discourse is deemed illegitimate. Occult practices, such as witchcraft, are also forbidden within many Christian belief systems. Still, these discourses help supply an important vocabulary for Stephen.

The non-normative growth of young Stephen is expressed in fantastic language. It is helpful to return to Kathryn Bond Stockton's work on sideways growth and child development, which has been explored in the previous chapter's analysis of Charlotte Mew's "The Changeling". After Stephen's imaginary spells fail in recalling Collins, the spell seems to bring another love into her life: a pony her father gives her. Stephen compares the horse with Collins. Her spells "behaved as spells do when said backwards, making her see not the person she wished to, but a creature entirely different. For Collins now had a most serious rival, one who had lately appeared at the stables" (31). One morning, Stephen whispers to the horse, "[y]ou're not you anymore, you're Collins!" (31). Then, the omniscient narrator

⁵³ See, for example, *Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives. Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture* (Gallagher et al.).

concludes the paragraph with “[s]o Collins was conformably transmigrated. It was Stephen’s last effort to remember” (31). The language of magic and the fantastic in this figurative “transmigration” of her love demonstrates the significance of the fantastic and spirituality in Stephen’s process of queer growth.

My reading considers the functions of Gothic elements further, especially the spectral and haunting, in relation to the idea of arrested development. Stephen is figured through the Gothic metaphor of a ghostly child. As presented in the introduction of this thesis, haunting is a prime example of anachronism. Stephen is portrayed as a haunting figure in her house: she is the lurking undefined presence in Morton. For example, in one scene, while her upset mother, Lady Anna, seeks comfort from her husband, “[t]he spectre that was Stephen would seem to be watching” (71). Stephen’s queerness causes an unspoken rift between her parents. Anna has an unsettling feeling about her daughter and feels uncomfortable with her different gender expressions. As such, when Anna clings to Sir Phillip, Stephen’s queer spectral presence haunts her parent. It is not a terrifying scene, but it is interesting to examine Hall’s choice of comparison. In depicting the lonely queer child, Hall employs the temporal economies of the ghost to signal that Stephen does not fit within the heterosexual life in Morton.

Reading Stephen’s “ghostly” presence in her family house in relation to the dominant temporal models that structure Morton helps us to understand her queer growth. Two temporal components are constitutive of Morton: a heteronormative daily routine and heteronormative inheritance. These temporal models correspond to Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity. The term “chrononormativity” signifies “the interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent

and for the mundane workings of domestic life” (xxii). The spectral Stephen is unassimilable to the world of Morton and unable to participate in a model of progressive maturation that includes the heterosexual lineage Morton projects and expects. The notion of domestic time is also a factor in maintaining the heterosexual order in Morton. The sight of the parents talking to each other while Stephen stands nearby and watches demonstrates how out of place she is in this everyday setting:

But after a little he and Anna must get talking, amusing themselves irrespective of Stephen, inventing absurd little games, like two children, which games did not always include the real child. Stephen would sit there silently watching, but her heart would be a prey to the strangest emotions – emotions that seven-years-old could not cope with, and for which it could find no adequate names. All she would know that seeing her parents together in this mood, would fill her with longings for something that she wanted yet could not define – a something that would make her happy as they were. And this something would be mixed up with Morton, with grave, stately rooms like her father’s study. (29)

Morton’s interior structure is a salient spatial metaphor for consolidating the heterosexual temporal order. Stephen’s parents have a domestic routine in this space, living according to gendered time and subsequently maintaining the traditional image of a heterosexual family. The house of Morton is compartmentalised in terms of gender (Rosner 112-113). The interior design of Morton features allocated rooms with clear borderlines connoting ascribed gender roles. The mother’s drawing room has connotations of emotion and intuition as well

as the natural world. This contrasts with the domain of Stephen's father study room, which is imbued with rationality and learning. Morton is thus a space where the parents can perform certain activities according to gender. Stephen identifies with her father's study and thus feels misaligned with her mother's feminine space. Being in "the no-man's-land of sex", Stephen fits uneasily in Morton's heteronormative space. She also realises that Collins would not fit "into these pictures" (29), as she knows that her same-sex desire for the female maid does not have a place in this heteronormative routine of the Morton family. Stephen cannot participate in straight adult time but rather silently watches like an invisible spectre; she sits silently, watching with a yearning for something she wants but cannot define. This suggests the peculiar temporality of anachronism in the queer child figure.

Returning to the scene quoted earlier, the image of the spectre also serves to illustrate her as being not only out of place but also out of time in the domestic. The spectre that is Stephen seems to be watching her parents interacting with each other. As such, when the child hovers over the gendered spatial divide and its assigned sexual temporal scheme, she is presented as unable to assimilate to Morton and its heterosexual temporal order. Hall modifies the imagery of the spectre and makes Stephen a spectral stranger "out of place" in her own house and time. Anachronism is a distinguishing characteristic of ghosts, as its haunting implies a distortion of linear time. Avery Gordon also reads the ghost figure in relation to spatiality: "the ghost imports a charged strangeness into the place or sphere it is haunting, thus unsettling the propriety and property lines that delimit a

zone of activity or knowledge" (63). Consequently, Morton is a place that is haunted, and the gendered and sexual zone of activity in the house is unsettled.

To quote Whitney Monaghan, queer time is both "asynchronous – in the sense of being out-of-sync with the normative" and "untimely – in the sense of being outside of normative time" (14). The lurking spectre-like Stephen cannot assimilate to Morton's space and its heterosexual temporal order and therefore exists outside of normative straight temporality. Stephen is developing her identity in tension with the conventional heterosexual model shown by her parents. Morton is linked to the idea of family and related to the logic of intergenerational transmission; it has been built and is supposed to be passed on through biological inheritance. Morton's association with heterosexual time is thus enhanced by its link with reproduction. Like Vernon Lee's "Oke of Okehurst", the common tactic of using an evocative landscape as a symbol for reproduction appears in Hall's novel as well. The description of Morton's landscape is figuratively linked with the pregnant female body. When Anna was pregnant and expecting "a man-child", she would often survey the landscape surrounding the house: "[f]rom her favourite seat underneath an old cedar, she would see these Malvern Hills in their beauty, and their swelling slopes seemed to hold a new meaning. They were like pregnant women, full-bosomed, courageous, great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons!" (8-9). The image of nature is associated with the notion of the "natural" female trait of reproduction.

Morton can be read as a declining institution that struggles to survive. Morton is tied to the straight path of family tradition and lineage that Stephen, as an heir, is expected to follow. The spectral Stephen resonates with Gordon's

statement: “the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken” (63). Stephen’s ghostly presence in Morton can be interpreted as a loss of her life as a heterosexual heir of her family’s estate. Stuck in time, the haunting Stephen exists outside of a developmental path leading towards heterosexual adulthood and the reproductive future of her family lineage.

Even when Stephen has grown older, she is still presented as a haunting presence in Morton. Stephen does not belong in the house, but she always has a nostalgic yearning and deep attachment to it. This can be seen in the passage below in which Stephen is thinking about Morton:

For the spirit of Morton would be part of her then, and would always remain somewhere deep down within her, aloof and untouched by the years that must follow, by the stress and the ugliness of life. In those after-years certain scents would evoke it – the scent of damp rushes growing by water; the kind, slightly milky odour of cattle, the smell of dried rose-leaves and orris-root and violets, that together with a vague suggestion of beeswax always hung about Anna’s rooms. Then the part of Stephen that she still shared with Morton would know what it was to feel terribly lonely, like a soul that wakes up to find itself wandering, unwanted, between the spheres. (28)

Significantly, a closer examination of the last line in the quoted passage – the reference to a wandering soul between spheres – reinforces the analogy of Stephen as always having been a ghostly child. This image corresponds to what Ruth Parkin-Gounelas argues in *Ghost*: “[g]hosts are untimely/anachronous (with

the Greek prefix 'ana' carrying the idea of repetition) in their disturbance of the distinction between beginnings and returns as well as between death and life" (130). Unable to move forward, Stephen's spectral presence relates to Stockton's notion of sideways growth. The metaphor of a wandering soul expresses Stephen's queer growth as it corresponds to Stockton's observation that metaphors are one of the ways a child may use "to grow itself, in hiding, in delay" (4). The ghost metaphor disturbs the supposed ordered succession to maturity in the classical linear development of the *Bildungsroman*. The verb "wandering" and the modifying preposition "between spheres" imply the in-between liminal state between life and death. The recurring metaphor of the spirit emphasises Stephen's haunting presence and her occupation of such a liminal position in her old house even after she reaches adulthood. As such, Stephen displays another temporal attribute that is deviant from a normative life schedule, as she is metaphorically trapped in her childhood memories of Morton.

The Gothicised depiction of Stephen's presence is also utilised to convey her untimely and latent queerness. Funke discusses in *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* the paradoxical understanding of latent sexuality as something always present and yet delayed or suspended in its realisation. In other words, the notion of latency suggests that the sexual instinct is present but delayed until a moment of expression. Ellis's description of inversion as "an inborn impulse, developing about the time of puberty" is an example of this paradoxical construction (201). In *The Well*, Stephen's queerness is always present even before it has been defined or labelled by herself or others. From a young age, Stephen's difference evokes uncanny feelings in her mother. Anna experiences a

deep-seated unease when looking at her daughter and cannot define her “queer antagonism” towards her daughter (9). She feels “the thing had crept on her like a foe in the dark – it had been slow, insidious, deadly; it had waxed strong as Stephen herself had waxed strong, being part, in some way of Stephen” (9). This feeling is queer in the sense of strangeness and irregularity, since it goes against the assumed nature of a mother to feel this way about her own child. This antagonism is also queer in its indeterminacy. Using “the thing” to describe Anna’s feeling suggests the undefined quality of her inexplicable resentment. Furthermore, Hall employs the imagery of darkness to illustrate Anna’s disquiet. The figure of speech the mother employs to describe her feelings implies an unsettling sinister inborn characteristic of Stephen, and Anna seems to sense this inborn sexual instinct in her queer child. Yet, it is only in retrospect that Anna is able to link her uncanny sentiment regarding Stephen’s ghostly queerness with her daughter’s homosexuality.

At another point in the text, this dynamic between the mother’s queer antagonism and Stephen’s latent queerness is implied when Anna confronts Stephen about her affair with Angela, Stephen’s first lover. Stephen writes Angela a love letter but Angela, who fears exposure of her same-sex affair, gives the letter to her husband. The husband sends the letter to Stephen’s mother. The letter gives a belated explanation for the mother’s hostility. In the act of looking back, Anna realises “[a]ll your life I’ve felt very strangely towards you [. . .] I’ve often felt that I was being unjust, unnatural – but now I know that my instinct was right; it is you who are unnatural, not I [. . .]” (182). It is noticeable that the line “all your life I’ve felt very strangely towards you” uses the present perfect tense. The present perfect

designates a situation that began in the past and continues in the present. Using this verb tense implies the haunting presence of the queer child is “pre-existent” even before confirmation. Stephen has been queer before her sexuality is confirmed by the letter. Moreover, Stephen’s queerness occupies a strange temporality: it cannot be knowingly acknowledged or entirely denied. It is challenging to locate Stephen’s ghostly queerness in a fixed point on a sexual developmental timeline. Stephen’s spectrality implies her haunting presence in the narrative. This spectral presence leaves gaps for interpretation and introduces uncertainties. As such, Stephen’s queerness cannot be pinned down.

Even though Anna does not fully understand Stephen’s queer sexuality, she somehow feels familiar with the hidden truth. Her uncanny suspicion regarding Stephen’s queerness resonates with Stockton’s discussion of a family’s belated discovery of their gay child. In the context of Stockton’s discussion of educational texts like *A Stranger in the Family: How to Cope if Your Child Is Gay* (1996), Stockton mentions a family which “picks up a hint of retrospection, implying the family’s subliminal awareness of something (some child) ‘always lurking there in the back of our minds,’ says one parent” (17). Stockton’s argument applies to the way in which Stephen is depicted as lurking in a spectre-like manner at Morton in *The Well*.

Stephen is forced to move away from Morton when Anna discovers her affair with Angela. Before leaving her home, Stephen discovers Krafft-Ebing’s sexological book in her father’s library and is thus enlightened by her exposure to the theory of sexual inversion. Fashioned in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, the discovery of the sexological book is supposed to be a milestone in Stephen’s

gender and sexual development as she can find a language to identify herself. In *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory*, Rohy explores Stephen's reading of Krafft-Ebing's book as a queer scene of reading. The book has a "queer influence" on Stephen, and by reading it, Rohy argues, Stephen "comes to be what she will thereafter always have been" (106). Interestingly, there is hidden mysticism and queer temporality operating in this crucial scene. Despite its scientific nature, the sexological text hidden in the library seems to have an uncanny agency in almost calling upon Stephen to discover it. As she collects her belongings before leaving the house, Stephen wants to take some of her father's books with her. There is a mysterious force that makes her open the bookcase: "[s]he had never examined this special bookcase, and she could not have told why she suddenly did so" (185). Moreover, when she opens it, "she slipped the key into the lock and turned it, [and] the action seemed curiously automatic" (185). The way it is "curiously automatic" makes this moment unusual. Then, "she noticed that on a shelf near the bottom was a row of books standing behind the others; the next moment she had one of these in her hand, and was looking at the name of the author: Krafft Ebing" (186). The use of punctuation and the swift discovery of the book in this passage highlight the strangeness of the moment. The scene is facilitated by the Gothic undercurrent of the object with its strange and uncanny agency. As Botting notes in "Dark Materialism: Gothic Objects, Commodities and Things", the Gothic is permeated with "darkly material disturbances, traces of unformed things operating beyond the reach of reason, rule and sense" (240). The Gothic-inflected scene merges sexology and an implied mystical omnipotent force in the spiritual realm, which suggests Hall's ambiguous conflicting theorisation

between congenital inversion and acquired homosexuality. The reading scene can be analysed in relation to the complex aetiologies of Stephen's sexual identity as both congenital as well as socially influenced. Finding the sexological text certainly illustrates that external influences are a crucial factor in shaping Stephen's identity formation. At the same time, presenting the discovery scene as something fated, and the book as an item destined to be acquired and "already there" from the beginning, suggests that Stephen's sexuality is predetermined.

After discovering the sexological book in her father's study, Stephen leaves Morton and moves to London. There, she becomes a novelist. Later, Stephen serves her country by acting as a volunteer during the First World War. In this volunteer unit, Stephen meets Mary, who becomes her lover. After the war, they move to Paris together. This geographical movement in the novel results in Stephen's relocation to the queer metropolis of Paris. In Paris, Stephen has access to a community of non-heterosexual subjects, including other sexual inverts. The sexual dissidents have places to meet and enjoy a degree of sexual liberty, and Stephen and Mary encounter other queer people, such as Valérie Seymour. In the novel, Seymour often hosts parties and gatherings, offering a social space for non-heterosexual networking. This part of the novel contains autobiographical elements, such as Hall's friendship with Natalie Clifford Barney and other members of her salon in Paris in the 1920s. Hall and Troubridge were among the salon's visitors. Other salon attendees included famous queer women of the cultural avant-garde, such as Djuna Barnes, Janet Flanner, and Gertrude Stein (Collecott 45).

In Paris, Valérie and her friends also introduce Stephen to a bar known as Alec's, which is a queer meeting place for inverts. In *a Queer Time and Place*

(2005), Halberstam uses nightclubs as one of his examples of queer time and argues that a mode of temporality arises out of queer club culture (174). Haffey points out that Halberstam views the bar as embodying a particular temporality, a space where time flows independently from conventional milestones seemingly outside the institutions of marriage and the family (4). For Halberstam, queer time “is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-child rearing-retirement-death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility” (182). The bars in Hall’s story are the spaces occupied by queer individuals who eschew the idea that one must develop into a specific kind of mature adult. Interestingly Stephen’s first impression of this queer place is described using Gothic language. She observes the despairing people in this bar, calling them the “death-dealing haunt to which flocked the battered remnants of men whom their fellow men had at last stamped under; who, despised of the world” and thinks that she will “never forgot their eyes, those haunted, tormented eyes of the invert” (352). These haunted people anticipate the ghostly crowd she encounters in the concluding scene of the novel, as will be discussed in detail later.

Despite having found a group of inverts in Paris, Stephen fails to blend in. Valérie says to Stephen, “I really know very little about you, but this I do know – you’re a bird of passage, you don’t belong to the life here in Paris” (407). Stephen is presented as an anachronistic outsider to the modern queer life of Paris. The family home of Morton represents ancient English traditions, old values, and a normative way of life. As Gillian Whitlock remarks, “Stephen’s home, the country seat of Morton, is quintessentially English” (563). Similarly, Roche notes that “[i]n

the move from Morton, the archetypal English country house, to London to Paris, *The Well* progresses from the Victorian to the modern" (10). For the *Bildungsroman* genre, the emergence of the individual is aligned with historical development. The *Bildungsroman*, in Mikhail Bakhtin's view, presents the individual "no longer within an epoch, but between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other" ("The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism" 22). Stephen is thus a continuous subject positioned at the threshold between two epochs. However, Stephen is also stuck between these two periods. Despite a developing consciousness of her sexual identity through sexological texts and personal growth as a successful writer, Stephen is unable to find a stable location to ground her new life. She is torn between the traditional values of the Victorian era and the more progressive attitudes of modernity. Heather Love, in "Spoiled Identity": Stephen Gordon's Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History", interprets the resulting sense of loneliness as a queer structure of feeling in Stephen's failure to fit within both aristocratic English society and queer communities in Paris.

Gothic Culmination

Living in Paris leads to a stormy relationship between Stephen and Mary. Stephen returns to her writing, to which she dedicates all her time, whereas Mary is lonely and immerses herself into the Parisian nightlife. Stephen continues to struggle with social disapproval. At the end of the story, Stephen tricks Mary into breaking up with her, so that Mary can marry her male friend, Martin Hallam. Stephen wants Mary to live happily, and she believes that only heterosexual marriage can provide this outcome. In this way, Stephen sacrifices her love for social conformity. The way that Hall organises the conclusion of the novel is

intriguing. Right after Mary leaves, Stephen sits alone in a room and has a vision of ghostly inverts:

She turned and saw him [Stephen's dog], but only for a moment, for now the room seemed to be thronging with people. Who were they, these strangers with the miserable eyes? And yet, were they all strangers? Surely that was Wanda? And someone with a neat little hole in her side – Jamie clasping Barbara by the hand; Barbara with the white flowers of death on her bosom Oh, but they were many, these unbidden guests and they called very softly at first and then louder. (398)

Conventionally, the chronological progression of time, ordering of events, progression through standard narrative stages, and the sense of closure produced by an ending are all structural elements that make a story cohesive. The Gothic scene of a room filled with the haunting presence of the dead follows Stephen and Mary's breakup. In this passage, Hall's arrangement of the events complicates the conventional ending of the realist Bildungsroman and undermines a sense of closure.

Interestingly, the act of looking at her dog is positioned between her ending the relationship with Mary and her confrontation with the spectral army of queer people. Drawing on Stockton's reading, the dog scene implies the lateral growth of the queer child. The child is traditionally seen as moving "upwards" towards adulthood. Building on this, Stockton connects "queer" formation to a stunted form of heterosexual growth, arguing that delay is a space for all kinds of queer growing, including lateral relations. Stockton explores the relationship between dogs and girls in queer narratives, reading Stephen's connection with her dog as a "lateral

community that understands, affirms, and offers sorrow for unsupported choices” (101). This reading is more convincing when looking back to the role of the horse when Stephen is coping with the loss of her first love. The incorporation of the lateral connection into the narrative is important for conveying Stephen’s queer development as it deviates from the teleological goal of achieving a stable sexual identity.

This queer growth symbolised through the lateral relation with her dog is succeeded by a nightmarish Gothic hallucination. This scene can be read as a transition from a realist to a Gothic mode of writing. Hall uses Gothic elements to shift from the conventions of realism towards a haunting rendering of Stephen’s inner consciousness and fragmented sense of self. The function of the gothic is to “open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions [. . .] It became then a great liberator of feeling. It acknowledged the non-rational” (R. Heilman 131). The haunting theme that runs throughout the novel is more prominent than ever in the final pages. The episode can be read as Stephen’s mental breakdown or as an actual spiritual experience. Either way, the scene features ghosts more prominently than the brief metaphors of spectre that previously appear in the text. The dead are returning in this scene. Among the ghosts are Jamie and Barbara, Stephen’s dead friends who she met at Seymour’s party, the two having recently died from sickness and by suicide. The spectral vision escalates queer time in Stephen’s development narrative. The ghosts bring to the fore the haunting nature of the arrested and anachronistic sexually dissident subject in the narrative of development. Stephen, as a female invert, does not follow a linear timeline of growth and is outside the vertical growth

of a heterosexual adult. The spectres highlight that the narrative of this non-heterosexual subject ultimately grows sideways when a legion of ghosts (an epitome of anachronistic temporality) appears.

This ending also challenges the idea that the linear and teleological narrative of the novel affirms a stable notion of sexual identity that aligns with sexological frameworks. The sense of a disintegrated incoherent self is represented in the hallucinatory dreamlike scene in which Stephen encounters a ghostly army of inverts. The scene illustrates the collapse of boundaries between the rational and non-rational and epitomises the cross-contamination of reality and fantasy. Rosemary Jackson defines the fantastic by comparing it to the ghost, claiming that “[l]ike the ghost which is neither dead nor alive, the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness it takes reality and it breaks it” (20). The fantastic is an inherent part of the literary text (Berthin 61). Jackson contends that “[a] dialogue between a fantastic and realistic narrative mode often operates within individual texts, as the second attempts to repress and defuse the subversive thrust of the first [. . .] to establishing a normative bourgeois realism” (124). She observes that “an uneasy assimilation of Gothic in many Victorian novels suggests that within the main, realistic text, there exists another non-realistic one, camouflaged and concealed, but constantly present” and similar to Freudian theory of the workings of the unconscious, “this inner text reveals itself at those moments of tension when the work threatens to collapse under the weight of its own repression” (124). *The Well's* fusion of a realist framework and subtle integration of the haunting spectre acts as a source of tension throughout. The final Gothic scene of the book reveals the moment of collapse, destroying boundaries

between the realist Victorian external event and the non-rational modernist interior consciousness.

On the one hand, realism is necessary for the queer *Bildungsroman* as the realist form provides the temporal structure that promises a sense of progress and closure. The realist temporality organises both the individual narrative of development (Stephen as invert) and the unfolding of historical time (the transition from the Victorian age to the modernist period). Meredith Miller explains the importance of the temporal structure of the realist nineteenth-century for the queer *Bildungsroman*:

[i]f the queer *Bildungsroman* needed the realist type, it also needed those structures of time, both narrative and historical, which characterise the nineteenth-century novel. In order to pose an essential subject as progressively emergent, a novel needs a sense of historical landscape. In order to pose that subject as pre-eminent, stable and radically opposed to its context, it needs narrative time, the sense of progress and closure as well the sense of expansive, subjective time. (243)

On the other hand, the Gothic undercurrent woven into Hall's queer *Bildungsroman* has a crucial function in unsettling the sense of progress and stability for Stephen as an individual and historical subject suspended between the two periods. Incorporating haunting into the queer *Bildungsroman* facilitates and complicates this temporal structure of development. Even though the novel draws upon the sexological model of sexual inversion, which promises to offer a fixed identity, Stephen struggles to grow into a stable and clearly delineated identity. Stephen ends up being a dynamic and fluid subject, who is decidedly out-of-time.

The Gothic imagery in the closing scenes supports the reading of Stephen's failure to attain a clearly established sexual identity at the end of the narrative. The disintegration of identity is implied in the scene in which the ghosts populate and terrorise Stephen: "[t]he quick, the dead, and the yet unborn" and "those lost and terrible brothers from Alec's" call Stephen, pointing at her with "effeminate fingers" (398-399). The scene suggests the diversity of concepts of inversion as shown in the various "types" of "invert" in the crowd. The scene shows the disintegration of a stable unified identity for Stephen, as she cannot identify with many of the inverted spectres. The scene situates queer intervention "at the site of ontology" rather than focusing on identity politics hinged on representation. Haunting is, after all, "a disjointed, non-foundational alternative ontology" (Blanco and Peeren 14). One of the most important characteristics of the spectre is that its liminality is open to confusing and even opposing interpretations. The paradoxical quality of the ghost figure has been used to explore underlying feelings of instability and uncertainty that were common in many facets of the queer subject. Developing Parkin-Gounelas's idea, Christine Berthin argues in *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* that the ghost figure has an attribute that can destroy binary boundaries. The ghost figure speaks of the limits of determination and deconstruction: "[i]t is in the nature of ghosts to stand in defiance of the binary oppositions (life or death, inside or outside as well as present or past) that constitute our symbolic system, and as such they are intimately linked with deconstruction" (3). The Gothic deconstructive quality conveys a failure to assign definite or coherent meanings to these ghostly inverts. In this respect, the Gothic brings out the hidden modernist aspect of *The Well*. The modernist period is

generally characterised by the loss of coherence, unity, and, meaning. For many modernist writers, “[t]he self, confronted with its darker, unintelligible, and uncontrollable side, lost its confidence, became multiple, fragmentary” (Reijen and Weststeijn 1). These modernist characteristics are reflected in the representation of Stephen’s permeable and fragmented self.

The conclusion of the novel also stages a tension between belonging to the group of sexual inverts and being a disintegrated self during this moment of possession. The hordes of spectral inverts “were tearing her [Stephen] into pieces, getting her under” and “cutting off her retreat” (399). Stephen is both a part of the group and yet feels different from and is frightened by the ghostly inverts. Jill Ehnenn argues that the goal of the *Bildungsroman* “is development for societal assimilation and to that end, often the reader observes the hero reaching the happy ending by ultimately settling in love and/or vocation” (154). The scene of Stephen being possessed by the diverse group of inverts contrasts with the expected ending and suggests that Stephen cannot achieve any straightforward assimilation into a stable and coherent identity category. In this regard, Hall’s ending embraces modernist characteristics. In nineteenth-century novels, subjects often long for a solid subject position in an ever more complex social world (Sotirova 545). In modernist novels, this search frequently “results in a staging of isolated and even disintegrated or fragmented subjects” (Sotirova 545). Stephen does not develop into a complete or fully integrated self in the world, since the collective category of the invert is itself shown to be incoherent. The final scene featuring the ghosts highlights Stephen’s fragmented sense of self, rendering her the ever-haunted subject.

The Gothic ending matches Stephen's sense of displacement. The intervention of the troubling spectres of inverts into the text's realist mode corresponds to its refusal of closure and rejection of a fixed meaning of sexual identity. The unsettling moment of Stephen's vision shows the disintegration of a stable, unified identity and its dissent from the narrative of closure associated with the conventional *Bildungsroman*. While it seems that Stephen's identity may have been predetermined by sexology, the Gothicised scene suggests the way that the integrity of the self begins to collapse. As such, the possession scene challenges the idea that Stephen's sexual identity has a stable and singular truth grounded in sexological discourse. The Gothicised disintegration also correlates to Stephen's failure to move into modernity and to immerse herself in the community of inverts, as previously discussed. Stephen's failure to embrace a clearly defined and stable sexual identity parallels her indeterminate placement in the broader history of sexuality. The sexological frameworks Hall mobilised were by no means totalizing. Moreover, nineteenth-century sexological concepts were in flux at the time Hall was writing *The Well*. As Laura Doan argues, "Hall grasped that sexology itself was not a unified and coherent body of knowledge but was comprised of diverse and at times awkwardly conflicting theoretical positions" (130).

The Gothicised scene of the invading ghosts also suggests that Stephen grows towards a strange kind of queer futurity. Notably, the spectral attack is followed by reproductive imagery: "the quick, the dead, and the yet unborn [. . .] possessed her. Her barren womb became fruitful – it ached with its fearful and sterile burden. It ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation" (506). Hall appropriates this moment of ghostly

pregnancy to address the themes of queer subjectivity and maturation. Given that Stephen, as an invert, is failing to grow up and achieve a heterosexual identity, she refuses the traditional reproduction of heterosexuality. The spectrally possessed womb reflects the way that Stephen's queerly "reproductive" body differs from a normative heterosexual body organised through "chrononormative" temporality. Freeman investigates the ways in which time can organise bodies in "chrononormative" ways. Queer individuals, according to Freeman, fail to have "properly temporalized bodies" that follow normative narratives of movement and change (35). The sterility of Stephen's body contradicts chrononormative time, which is "the use of time to organise individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (Freeman 3).

Throughout the novel, Stephen's body has played a key role in her struggles with queer subjectivity. For example, Stephen laments that "[a]ll her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration" (187-88). The book often stresses the unfruitful or unproductive nature of female-female relationships. While kissing Angela, Stephen "would be utterly undone by those painful and terribly *sterile* kisses" (164; my emphasis). The relationship between Stephen and Mary is similarly described as unproductive, and the book suggests that her inability to conceive a child with Mary is a contributing factor in the breakdown of their relationship. Nevertheless, in the final scene, Stephen's sterile body transforms from a "monstrous fetter" that restrains her to a metaphorical site where queer reproduction becomes possible.

Stephen's womb is depicted as a ghostly site harbouring inverts across time: "the quick, the dead, and the yet unborn [. . .] possessed her. Her barren womb became fruitful – it ached with its fearful and sterile burden. It ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation" (506). This Gothicised scene of spectral reproduction reimagines bodily arrangements and suggests the affective and erotic potential of alternate temporal reproduction. Pregnancy is frequently used as a plot element to create a sense of trajectory into the future. At the same time, in a temporal respect, it encapsulates the process of becoming as something not yet complete. The ghostly children of Stephen who possess her womb are in a liminal state in terms of embodiment. It is possible to place the scene alongside Derrida's reading of the uncanny body of the spectre. Derrida states that the figure of the spectre is "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other" (5). This paradoxical quality of the phenomenology of the inverted children emphasises the complex temporality of this alternate form of reproduction, which is both spectral and material, both being in the world and absent from it.

Stephen's ghostly pregnancy provides a space for complex queer futurity. Hall rethinks the female invert's procreation through the temporal mode of an anachronistic body and haunting possession. The spectral inverts inside Stephen's womb do not follow a reproductive model of producing the normative Child that represents the future. Rather, her inverted children who converge together are out of joint with time. The line "the quick, the dead, and the yet unborn" shows the

jumbled boundaries between a triad of temporal phases: the past, present, and future. The group of ghosts consist of both her living acquaintances, such as the inverts she meets at Alec's bar, and her dead friends, such as Jamie, who committed suicide. The unborn are the inverts of the future. This limbo of anachronism in "the yet unborn" encapsulates Derrida's argument concerning spectres as figures that "are always there [. . .] even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet" (176).⁵⁴ As a collective, these inverts from the past, present and future require and demand a form of articulation.

The ghosts possessing Stephen's womb serve as a mode of expression for her subversive way of achieving reproduction outside the symbolic order of heterosexuality. In this moment of disintegration, Stephen experiences a fantasy of the grotesque image of inverts who are powerfully tearing her to pieces and demand to live and be articulated. As queer tragedy and loneliness envelop the novel, these sentiments call for expression. Treating Stephen as their martyr, the ghostly inverts ask her to "speak with your God and ask Him why He has left us forsaken!" (399). The imagery of queer reproduction is indicative of the collective tussle for language, visibility and embodiment as Stephen takes on the role of mediator between the group of inverts and God. The ghostly womb thus becomes a container for queer existence that blurs the boundaries between self and other, the individual and the collective.

⁵⁴ This chapter uses "anachronism" as nearly synonymous with "asynchrony". In her introduction to the special edition of GLQ on queer temporality, Elizabeth Freeman acknowledges the queerness of asynchrony as something related to body (159).

The possession of Stephen's body and the ghosts' collective demand to be voiced is metaphorical. Stephen will not reproduce physically, but she can be queerly productive in her role as an author and through her books. It might not be accidental that the description of Stephen's work as an author compares writing to being possessed. While rewriting her pre-war novel, "Stephen was working like someone possessed" (309). The language of the occult in this writing scene parallels the possession of Stephen's womb at the end of the novel. The possession of her womb turns Stephen into a metaphorical and queer maternal figure of the ghostly inverted children. Likewise, through the act of writing, an author can achieve a similar parental role. In the text, Stephen directly compares the relationship between writers and their characters with that of a mother and infant: "[t]hese people had drawn life and strength from their creator. Like infants they had sucked at her breasts of inspiration, and drawn from them blood, waxing wonderfully strong [. . .] For surely thus only are fine books written, they must somehow partake of the miracle of blood" (242).

Stephen's literary talent seems to be appropriated from the characteristics of the invert found in sexological writing. Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Carpenter commented on strong artistic abilities in case studies of (male) inversion.⁵⁵ Additionally, Stephen's career as a novelist accords with one of the narrative patterns of the *Bildungsroman*. In a conventional *Bildungsroman* narrative, a young protagonist undergoes an education process in the ways of the world and reconciles their own needs with social expectations. There are some variations in

⁵⁵ See Jago Morrison and Susan Watkins's *Scandalous Fictions: The Twentieth-Century Novel in the Public Sphere* (2006). See also Heike Bauer's "Stephen Gordon Super-Invert: The Sexology of Radclyffe Hall" (2009).

the way that the characters reconcile with their destiny. In addition to marriage, being a writer is one of the common tropes. As John Frow, Melissa Hardie, and Vanessa Smith observe, “a young woman undergoes a process of worldly or sentimental education and becomes reconciled to her destiny, sometimes in the form of marriage; or a young man or woman undergoes a process of aesthetic or worldly or sentimental education (sometimes all three together) and achieves success as a writer or an artist” (1905). Significantly, Stephen’s profession has the potential to help her “reconcile” with her destiny as a sexual dissident subject. She can employ the act of writing as creative reproductivity to reconcile with heterosexual reproduction. As an invert, Stephen might use her experience and knowledge about inversion to write a book. Puddle, her former governess, encourages her to write, observing that “because you are what you are, you may actually find that you’ve got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight – write both men and women from a personal knowledge” (205). Writing and other forms of aesthetic creation are not biological means of reproduction but rather cultural ones that can bring the invert into the future. In Rohy’s words, “writing begets a queer child” (125). In *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology and Queer Theory*, she explains that the method of writing is not a linear transmission of genetic material to future generations but the lateral sharing of queer identity and resources across social and discursive networks that can be described as a form of queer reproduction (128).

Writing, as a form of queer reproduction, is inherently linked to queer time and the Gothic and therefore differs from linear temporalities. As Wolfreys states, “to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which

something other returns, although never as presences or to the present” (*Victorian Hauntings* 3). In this way, texts always straddle and complicate the borders of presence and absence, and present and past. In *The Well*, Hall specifically foregrounds this spectral temporality by incorporating the figure of ghosts in the narrative’s ending. Hall suggests that the ghostly inverts can claim a future through Stephen’s storytelling. Yet, storytelling, through the act of writing, also troubles temporalities of lineage and progress. The ghostly children find a mode of expression in the Gothic. As Berthin writes, “[a] word out of place, a word out of time, a being out of place (like a monster) or out of time (like a vampire or a ghost) provoke the unexpected gaping of the Symbolic where the Real, like a gash, comes to find a mode of expression rather than a signification” (36). Stephen’s future writing is haunted by the anachronistic ghostly children that will always exist “out of time”.

It should also be acknowledged that Stephen becoming a writer and possibly taking on the responsibility of writing a diverse and fragmented queer experience on behalf of the spectral army of inverts is, in and of itself, modernist. While queer reproduction through the written word can possibly materialise Stephen’s clamouring spectral children into a narrative, the modernist textuality foregrounded here remains fragmented and does not fully encompass the diverse and incoherent voices of the spectral inverts. Although Stephen accepts the challenge of writing as an invert on behalf of other inverts, the novel acknowledges that writing, as a form of queer reproduction, cannot pass on any complete and definitive knowledge.

Moreover, *The Well's* narrative form is itself imbued with haunting shadows of the Victorian period. Hall turns to the Victorian past for stylistic influences and sexual ideologies while also grappling with the transition from the nineteenth century to modernism. Hall's narrative breaks with realist traditions and opposes the illusory coherence assumed by the conventional Victorian *Bildungsroman*; instead, she presents a stylistically complex text that depicts a fragmented and unstable identity, which resonates with modernist interests. While Hall is fascinated with the categories of the invert, and sets it as the goal of Stephen's development, the category of the sexual invert does not offer Stephen stability or fixity and ultimately disrupts her identity rather than securing it. Ultimately, Stephen cannot find her place in the world and remains out of time; she cannot reach a complete and self-sufficient state or fully arrive in a present where she is wholly legible with a clear-cut identity. To illustrate the nature of queer subjectivity, temporality, and complex sexual identity, the vocabulary of the Gothic and motifs of haunting and the spectre are indispensable.

Chapter Four

Angela Carter: Primitive Gothic Time and Neo-Victorian Queer World-Making in *Nights at the Circus*

The thesis has so far focused on late Victorian and modernist writers. In this chapter and the next chapter, the focus will shift to contemporary twentieth-century female writers who engage with the Victorian era in their writing. This chapter examines *Nights at the Circus* (1984) by Angela Carter (1940-1991), a prominent figure in British feminist literature. The story is set in 1899, poised between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of a new era, and this transitional moment encapsulates Carter's approach to reimagining the Victorian past. According to Dana Shiller, two strategies which are common in neo-Victorian writing consist of texts that either "imitate Victorian literary conventions, either by creating altogether new stories or by reimagining specific Victorian from a new angle" or are "more overtly 'postmodern' in style and tone, but concern themselves with Victorian subjects" (1). Carter's novel uses prominent postmodernist strategies to engage with the Victorian *fin-de-siècle*. Carter playfully crafts a new fictionalised version of the Victorian period for her colourful and lavish characters.

The temporality of this neo-Victorian text is set in "the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth-century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history [. . .] a new era about to take off" (11). The setting constitutes both the sense of apocalypse and the hopeful expectation of the new. *Nights at the Circus* displays a mixture of history and fictionality by rendering a different version of the Victorian epoch. Carter makes use of apocalyptic time to "represent marginalized voices [and] new histories of sexuality" (Heilmann and

Llewellyn 165). Carter reaches back to the late Victorian era and utilises its anxious post-Darwinian mood and the collapsing binary divisions that upheld static and stable identity categories. The Victorian climate at this time witnessed crumbling evolutionary, cultural, national, and sexual boundaries. The *fin-de-siècle* is full of anxiety, but it is also in a process of becoming, as “a new era about to take off” (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 11). Carter uses her imagination to envision a new history about to begin. She adopts an imaginary approach to the Victorian past to represent queer marginalised voices.

While academic studies on the theme of female liberation and the protagonist Fevvers abound,⁵⁶ some minor female characters in the text are also thought-provoking and worthy of discussion. These characters are depicted as women who openly love women. The queer female characters in question are a marginal group of women who cannot be assimilated into society and include female prisoners appearing in the subplot when the setting changes from London to Russia. The private Siberian panopticon prison, known as the House of Correction and located in a wilderness, is ruled by the Countess, and the convicts are women who have murdered their husbands. The prisoners and the guards (all female) form romantic relationships and cause an uprising. The wardresses are trapped in the wilderness and cannot bear it either, so they escape and set off to search for the republic of free women. Moreover, the chapter examines Mignon and the Princess of Abyssinia, whom Carter portrays as a same-sex couple. Both

⁵⁶ Many scholars have acknowledged Fevvers as a symbol of female emancipation and a new symbol of femininity, reading her in the context of the New Woman ideology. See, for example, Magali Cornier Michael's “Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*: An Engaged Feminism via Postmodern Strategies”.

the Princess and Mignon are circus members. The Abyssinian Princess is a dark-skinned pianist-tiger tamer, and Mignon is a German girl who was a victim of male abuse. She has a childlike personality and is usually taken advantage of by men. In Rachel Carroll's words, the child-woman Mignon is "beaten back into infancy by abuse" ("Return of the Century" 199). The two women openly display affectionate gestures, and people around them acknowledge their romantic relationship. For instance, Fevvers calls them "the love-birds" (196).

Carter's portrayal of these queer female characters is influenced by political and cultural movements of the 1970s-1980s. The feminist activism of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), second-wave feminism and lesbian feminism have significantly shaped the subversive Utopian characteristics of Carter's depiction of female queer sexualities in their Victorian setting. Amy Kesselman points out the connections between female same-sex relations and WLM when argues in "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s" conference (2014): "[d]iscussions within the women's movement illuminated for them the limits they had placed on their relationships with women, which were often more emotionally intimate than their relationships with men" (6). The idea of love between women emerged in the women's movement, an environment that nurtured personal and political changes (6).

Although lesbian politics were present in the WLM, they were also dismissed and criticized by heterosexual feminists in the same movement. For example, Betty Friedan, the leader of the National Organization for Women,

famously called lesbian feminists “the lavender menace” (Friedan 10).⁵⁷ Lesbian feminist groups and organizations thus emerged in response to homophobia within the women’s movements at the time. One of the American lesbian feminist groups, the Radicalesbians, wrote “The Woman Identified Woman” (1970) as a manifesto to assert that lesbianism is necessary to women’s liberation. “The Woman Identified Woman” argued: “It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women’s liberation and the basis for cultural revolution” (4). Ten years later, Adrienne Rich released her highly influential essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980). Rich’s conceptualization of “compulsory heterosexuality” refers to the idea that heterosexuality is imposed upon women by a range of institutions and social practices. She discusses how heterosexuality is made compulsory by “the constraints and sanctions which historically have enforced or ensured the coupling of women with men” (16). Rich believes that lesbian existence is the model for resistance to compulsory heterosexuality.⁵⁸

Building on these arguments, some lesbian feminists encouraged temporary or total separatism from relationships with men and mainstream patriarchal society (Smith and Serovich 363). They believed that women-only communities could

⁵⁷ For more details, see Sara Warner’s *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (ix-xii).

⁵⁸ Rich argues for a broader understanding of lesbianism since her notion of the “lesbian continuum” incorporates a range of women-identified relationships that extend beyond sexually-based experiences, such as social bonding, networks, friendship, woman’s institutions. Rich’s expansive definition of lesbianism created controversial debates, as some argued that such a broad understanding desexualised lesbianism. See more details on the debates in Bonnie Zimmerman’s *Encyclopedia of Lesbian Histories and Cultures* (456).

represent a society that advocates the strong connections between women and promises an end to female subjugation. For instance, in 1971, a New York lesbian group calling themselves “The Furies” formed a commune for lesbians that consisted of twelve women who sought to develop a way of living that was entirely independent from men. Womyn’s Lands was a set of women-only separatist communities created by lesbians in the US, Australia, New Zealand and western Europe in the mid-1970s. Through rural self-sufficiency, the inhabitants sought to live away from patriarchal oppression.

The influences of the ideas about spatial isolation and women-centred communities can be seen in Carter’s fictional portrayal of queer utopia, as discussed later in this chapter. In general, the contemporary anti-heteropatriarchal sentiments and the utopian hope of a sexual, feminist and queer revolution are appropriated in Carter’s Neo-Victorian narrative. It could be said that among the scarce scholarship focusing on the minor characters in question, existing discussions mostly read them in the context of lesbian feminism. Critics often interpret the same-sex relationships between the prisoners and wardresses and between the Princess and Mignon as a form of solidarity between oppressed women eager to escape Victorian patriarchal structures. For example, Miriam Wallraven has pointed out that the prisoners’ plan of a women-only utopia in the story counters patriarchy (400). She argues that “[t]he escape from the panopticon becomes possible because of lesbian love, thus, the escape from the controlling gaze and non-normative forms of relationships are connected” (400). Wendy O’Brien has noted that Mignon, who suffers from patriarchal oppression, is reborn “through friendship and lesbian love attachment to the Princess of Abyssinia” (9).

Similarly, Elaine Jordan argues that the mutual passion between the Princess and Mignon empowers them to find an anti-patriarchal voice (128).

This chapter expands this critical investigation of women who love women and their resistance to normative heteropatriarchy to a more dynamic and wider spectrum of queerness. This chapter offers a new reading of the representation of the romantic relationships between women in the novel by linking it with Carter's imaginative construction of Gothic time in which margins, limits, borders, and boundaries are challenged in many different ways. In Gothic time, the transgressive and the marginal prevail. I borrow Carter's term "Gothic times" and draw on critic Fred Botting's subsequent discussion of the term to foreground a sense of subversive temporality in *Nights at the Circus*. In an afterword to *Fireworks* (1974), Carter declared that "[w]e live in Gothic times" (122). In Carter's fiction, Botting contends that "[i]n Gothic times, margins may become the norm and occupy a more central cultural place" (286). Botting has noted the sexual dimension, alongside other forms of the marginal, of this Gothic time. He argues that "[i]n her late twentieth-century fiction, Carter powerfully, and often critically, demonstrates the reversal of values and identifications that occurs via the Gothic Genre. Otherness takes centre stage: sexual transgression, dark desire, and fantastic deviance wonderfully subvert the restrictive orders of reason, utility and paternal morality" ("Aftergothic" 286). *Nights at the Circus* exemplifies his observation as the novel creates temporal moments of turbulence and chaos that foster the triumph of sexually marginalized female characters with various instances of fantastic deviance.

The novel is in line with Botting's statement that "Gothic productions were considered unnatural in the undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events" (*Gothic* 6). Carter creates a world filled with imaginative liberty. While prevalent social norms form a reality accepted by the majority, Gothic time is a deliberate manipulation of expectations that subverts such reality. This chapter will show how Carter's depiction of Gothic time and its revolutionary possibilities to subvert regulative order is characterised by the primitive. Temporal chaos arguably destroys (b)orders, enabling the primitive past and prehistory to supersede while larger narratives, such as progressive order, lose their regulative power. Carroll argues that the novel returns to the origin/past, specifically "to the 'prehistory' of the modern, as constructed by modernism, represented by such motifs as animals, folk and peasant, culture, childhood, the wilderness of Siberia, and the colonial 'others' of empire" ("Return of the Century" 187). Building on this argument, I suggest that Carter returns to the Victorian era to engage with the dominant figuration of queer as primitive and backward. The return of the primitive is particularly suited to Carter's representation of female same-sex sexuality due to the sexological nineteenth-century association between the primitive and homosexuality. In degeneration theory and sexology, queers were characterised as bestial: they were depicted as atavistic throwbacks to a primitive stage of evolutionary development (Powell 154). Female same-sex love in *Nights at the Circus* is produced through a turn towards the wild, the savage, and the primitive past. The portrayal of this primitive state is sexually charged and used to map individual sexuality. Carter creates a world where the primitive states reign

supreme in many forms, including queer human bonds and connections between savage animals and humans and the return to the Utopic primitive society.

The Gothic time in the novel problematises fixed identity categories; what used to be codified in strict binary taxonomies in the former world grounded in reality is changed in the fantastic carnivalesque space of the primitive. To articulate this primitive time, Carter draws on various discourses from different literary areas and eras. Specifically, she reappropriates Victorian anxieties about degeneration and makes use of the concept of the abject, which has Gothic connotations. Carter utilises Gothic-related concepts, especially Victorian evolutionary degeneration discourse, the carnivalesque, and the abject.

Nights at the Circus is a multi-layered narrative that masterfully blends literary genres. As Dani Cavallaro states, *Nights at the Circus* is “the most joyfully unclassifiable of Carter’s novels” mixing “Picaresque, Gothic, Decadent, Satirical, Baroque, Postmodern and Metafictional” (13). Carter’s unconventional use of the Gothic in *Nights at the Circus* moves toward a light-hearted and fantastic tone. The Gothic, as shown in this thesis thus far, might often be presented as threatening and unpleasant; however, *Nights at the Circus* is somewhat more optimistic. Gina Wisker argues that Carter’s take on the Gothic leans toward carnivalesque excess and offers criticism, rich imagery, and potential (48). The carnivalesque becomes Carter’s crucial ingredient in *Nights at the Circus*. The carnivalesque is a term used by Bakhtin to mean a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” (*Rabelais and His World* 10). For Linden Peach, “[t]he appeal of the carnivalesque for Bakhtin, Brecht and Angela Carter is that it valorises the subordinate, the anti-authoritarian and the marginal” (141). This chapter asserts

that the exuberance of the carnivalesque is what gives Carter's novel its distinctive flavour and that it is instrumental in engaging with the notion of queer utopia.

Carter revisits Victorian *fin-de-siècle* anxieties regarding degeneration and humans' place in nature wherein the boundary between the animal and the human was unstable. The fear of degeneration dominated the second half of the nineteenth century and its Gothic literary writing. As Patrick Brantlinger notes, "[o]ne finds its traces everywhere in late-Victorian and Edwardian literature; in examples of imperial Gothic fiction, a standard Darwinian motif is that of atavism or degeneration – the regression to some earlier, more primitive, more monstrous evolutionary stage" (161). According to Jeannette King, "in terms of its plot, *Nights at the Circus* appears to confirm the worst fears of the degeneration theorists about the catastrophes that will follow any breakdown of the hierarchies that have emerged through millennia of evolution" (143). Carter, however, balances a factual and imaginative approach to these *fin-de-siècle* anxieties. Carter utilises the breakdown of evolutionary hierarchies during the *fin-de-siècle* as an opportunity to reject normative divisions and offer newly constructed realities instead. Reaching back to the Victorian breaking down of animal and human boundaries grants Carter freedom from constraining identity politics, including politics of sexual identity.

Neo-Victorian texts re-imagine Victorian degeneration anxieties and produce Gothic time through later twentieth-century discourses and insights. Not only are they a product of their time, reflecting particular cultural fears of the age in which they are written, but such texts are also considered to include flexibility and the ability to cross historical or literary periods. Carter, not confined to historical and aesthetic boundaries, and from the position of having twentieth-century knowledge,

exploits the neo-Victorian genre to incorporate another contemporary Gothic-related concept: the abject. Carter combines aspects of the carnivalesque with some elements of the abject as a conceptual tool. The theme of abjection stemmed from the late-twentieth-century theory developed by French theorist Julia Kristeva in her influential book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). The concept of abjection builds on traditional psychoanalytic theories. Reworking Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the process of individuation, Kristeva proposes that in subject formation the individual requires a break from the maternal in order to enter the symbolic order and become an autonomous subject. The subject's entry into the symbolic order is conditional upon repression and renunciation of imagery associated with the maternal, including animality.⁵⁹ The most valuable aspect of the abject concept, however, lies in its ambiguities. As Kristeva contends, "[w]e may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it" (9). The borders between the symbolic order and the abject cannot be maintained. This instability is temporal as what is supposed to be the Other always haunts and returns to threaten boundaries. Such characteristics of the abject lend themselves to the dynamics of Gothic literature. In Carter's work, the abject helps to undermine established authoritative orders and facilitates a playful engagement with the topic of sexual instability.

Nights at the Circus engages with queer temporalities, especially the notion of queerness as temporally backwards, alongside the concept of queer utopia. This

⁵⁹ For the role of the animal in Kristeva's theory of abjection, see also Ruth Lipchitz's chapter "Abjection" in *Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (13-30).

chapter explores the various ways in which the carnivalesque and the abject allow the haunting primitive to take precedence in the narrative and enable expressions of the queer desires of the prisoners, the Princess, and Mignon. I use the phrase “haunting primitive” to refer to earlier stages or periods in developmental frameworks (psychological, sexual, and cultural) and to foreground their inevitable return. The chapter first explores the use of non-normative forms of language to express female queer subjectivity and socially transgressive desires. The characters in question derive queer expressions from the fantastic and the realms of the primitive and the abject past. For the women who love women in this novel, language marked by the haunting primitive is a site of queer resistance and a communicative tool. The primitive manifests as a non-verbal language dependent on the abject body instead of an advanced state of verbal language. Then, the chapter investigates the deployment of carnivalesque-inflected interspecies relations between tigers and the Princess-Mignon’s same-sex love. The chapter explores the connections between female queer desires, subverted evolutionary hierarchies, and carnivalesque temporality in the circus performance. Muñoz’s theory is used to support the queer reading of the relations between the couple and tigers. The last section is concerned with Carter’s complicated construction of a queer primitive utopia, which is located in the Gothic time of ontological, cultural, and sexual liberation.

The Abject Body and Primitive Forms of Language

The abject is conceptually linked with the uncanny since both call into question the boundaries of the self. The abject has been influential in many fields,

especially Gothic writing and criticism.⁶⁰ The process of abjection is frequently explored in gothic literature (Wisker 122). The female characters discussed in this chapter are social outsiders, being excluded from the dominant culture, and include female criminals, racialised subjects, disabled people, and women who love women. The marginality of the female characters is intersectional, involving other social categories such as class, disability and race. The inmates, as well as the Princess and Mignon, are oppressed by society and are open to a Kristevan reading of the socially abjected. Kristeva's psychoanalytic focus on abjection also covers socio-political aspects. The social abject is the individual or group that cannot be represented and continues to be unintelligible inside an existing hegemonic field. Lesbian women are one of these groups. Judith Butler views the notion of abjection as the mechanism of division, arguing that the lesbian is relegated to the domain of abjection as they threaten the normative identification of the sexed subject (*Bodies That Matter* 4). In accordance with Butler's thought, Palmer has noted that the abject position is traditionally assigned to the homosexual ("Queer Transformations" 66). Palmer explains why the lesbian is considered abject in socio-political contexts: "[i]n addition to refusing to take up the position that the phallogocentric system assigns to a woman by rejecting the role of man's specular other and object of exchange between men, she also poses a threat to the Symbolic Order in that she usurps man's role by taking a woman as a

⁶⁰ Kristeva mentions "the uncanny" in the opening of *Powers of Horror*, "[t]here looms within the abjection [. . .] A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome" (1-2).

lover" (50). As such, the lesbian undermines gender boundaries and codes of sexual difference.

Queer theory makes this abjection a key feature of queer subjectivity, but also seeks to change it into something more positive (Haggerty 154). In his analysis of the Gothic novels of Anne Radcliffe, George E. Haggerty contends that queer theory affirms that being placed in a position of abjection can be empowering. Haggerty reads the abject in relation to Halberstam's concept of queer failure and claims that Halberstam regards abjection as providing outlets for creativity ("Gothic Fiction and Queer Theory" 154). Queer theory, in fact, teaches us that being placed in a position of abjection can be a source of strength (Haggerty 154). This is certainly the case with Carter's socially abjected characters. In Carter's work, the socially abject group of women who love women communicate through expressions characterised by backwards temporality. Specifically, the interactions between women who love other women are mediated through bodily expressions and exist outside normative language systems.

The women refuse to use the normative language that underpins the symbolic order and patriarchal society. During their nomadic time after escaping the panopticon, the women agree to discard patronymic language. Vera implores Olga to "forbear from the use of the patronymic when she addressed her" (261). Their abandonment of patronymic language stems from their need to be liberated from patriarchal restraint. As Vera announces, "wherever we go, we'll need no more fathers" (261). The patronymic exposes the linguistical construction of reality as hetero-patriarchal. The language's capacity to trace a legitimate paternal line represents authority, and the tradition of using patronymics, together with the

vertical transmission of titles and rights inherited from one's father, reflects patriarchal control.⁶¹ The women regain their authority by ending the normative authorial act of naming.

These women's unconventional use of language is suggestive of a refusal to conform to paternal law. According to Anne McClintock, "the name of the father is equivalent to the entirely symbolic realm, to culture itself" (197). Carter draws on Kristeva's abject theory. In her theorisation of the abject, language is the entry into the world of the symbolic. Kristeva explains, "[i]f language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order, it does so precisely by repressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts them" (72). The semiotic and the symbolic are two aspects of language. The symbolic order is a male-centred and patriarchal construct. The semiotic is associated with the feminine and is the precondition of language, whereas the symbolic is connected with the masculine. The rejection of symbolic language implies female subversiveness in which the subject is liberated from the Law of the Father and the heteronormativity of symbolic language.

In addition to the abolition of patriarchal language, the women also seek alternative ways to communicate among themselves by using the abject substances. Before they escape, the condition of prison life prohibits them from using ordinary language. The panopticon is a prison created to elicit repentance and is governed by silence. The women are kept apart and are not permitted to

⁶¹ See more details about the name of the father in relation to the patriarchal power in Debra Shosta's *Fictive Fathers in the Contemporary American Novel* (4).

communicate or gaze at one another: “there was perfect silence within this place, except for the muffled footfalls of the wardress, who were forbidden to speak” (250). It should be noted that silence is accompanied by the sound of the bell and clock: “[s]ilence, but for these sounds [of the bell]; and that of the ticking of the clock” (251). The silence symbolises the forbidding of communication. In this panopticon, the residents are forced to have clock-based existence. The bell signifies the way in which these women are restrained in a strict repressive schedule under a specific temporal rhythm. The daily life of the prisoners and wardresses is strictly scheduled. The prisoners’ daily schedule is determined by the clock, which indicates when they should perform certain tasks, and daily repetition has the effect of circularity. The participants are subjected to this repetitive time as a means of control. For example, the bell reminds the prisoners of an exercise hour. Thus, in this temporal structure the female prisoners’ bodies are forced to adhere to the temporal tyranny symbolised by the bell and the forced silence.

Given the deprivation of speech, Carter’s portrayal of female homosexuality in the prison is achieved through the configuration of language through the abject body. Carter’s literary depiction of the abject body might be influenced by contemporary second-wave feminist thought. As Wendy Kline states, “[i]n the 1970s, many women—some with activist backgrounds, but some with none at all—turned to the body along with the mind as inspiration for feminist thought. They used their own bodies and individual experiences to interpret reproductive function” (x). Rich, for example, argued in *Of Woman Born* (1976) that women could achieve authority through the corporeal body: “We need to imagine a world in which every

woman is the presiding genius of her own body” (285). Whereas patriarchal ideologies and practices tried to control women by asserting biological differences between men and women, Rich believed that the feminist vision would “come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny” (96). In her novel, Carter seems to work towards a similar vision. Carter’s queer female characters are not trapped by the constraints of their bodies; on the contrary, the women embrace the abject and primitive dimension of their bodies for queer purposes.

The female body is empowering in nature because it is an abject phenomenon: a “woman’s body signifies the human potential to return to a more primitive state of being, her image is accordingly manipulated, shaped, altered, stereotyped to the point to the dangers that threaten civilization from all sides” (Creed 87). One day, an inmate chooses to revolt. Olga contacts a wardress through “illicit touch and glance, and then by illicit notes” (254). Olga and the wardress hold hands, have a “surreptitious exchange of looks” and exchange a note with “love-words” (254). Olga writes a note back with her menstrual blood: “[t]here was not a pencil nor pen in the cell, of course, but as it happened, her courses were upon her and – ingenious stratagem only a woman could execute – she dipped her finger in the flow wrote a brief answer on the back of the note” (254). Linden Peach comments on this method of communication, noting that “her ‘love words’ to another woman are outside of the male tradition of ‘love words’ because they are written to another woman and because they are written, literally and metaphorically, in the womb’s blood” (146). The menstrual blood serves as a language operating without any references to men. As such, the permeable bleeding body represents the maternal abject. After Olga and Vera’s secret

communication, relationships between other inmates and wardresses blossom throughout the prison. They adopt a method of communication similar to that of Olga:

Contact was effected, first, by, or, if either guard or inmate turned out to be illiterate, by drawings made in and on all manner of substances, on rags of clothing if paper was not available, in blood, both menstrual and venous, even in excrement, for none of the juices of the bodies that had been so long denied were alien to them, in their extremity – drawings, as it turned out, crude as graffiti, yet with the effect of clarion calls. (254-255)

Excrement is one of the abject substances, according to Kristeva's theory. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva reveals that abjection occurs "when even the claim between inside and outside becomes uncertain" (141). The prisoner's blood and excrement are abject in this sense. For a subject to join the socio-symbolic order, it is necessary for that subject to obtain language as a marker. The blood that is shed during menstruation allows a re-entering into the so-called maternal body. Such a tactic of using what is outside the normative language is apt to convey socially abjected desire like female homoeroticism. The use of this image is suitable as the lesbian has been culturally coded as abject. The women use menstrual blood as an alternative form of communication for homosocial and homoerotic purposes. As a result, the hierarchical boundary between the guards and the prisoners is shattered.

Communication between the Princess and Mignon is comparable to that which occurred in the prison. The Princess and Mignon, who are described in the novel as exiles (179), are characterised as animalistic and close to nature. The

Princess and Mignon use a non-normative form of language as a medium to articulate their queer bonds. They make use of body language and carnivalesque music, which is characterised by a primitive non-speech manner and abject animality. Their means of communication correlate with their primitive position in psychosexual-social development. Carter draws on the ideas of subject formation from the dual frameworks of the Victorian Darwinian evolutionary and the abject discourses. When seen within the context of a chronological framework, the Princess and Mignon both exhibit characteristics consistent with the Victorian concept of arrested development, whether in a biological or cultural sense.

In depicting the Princess of Abyssinia, Carter addresses stereotypical characteristics of the racialized primitive. Her skin colour is her defining feature and is often emphasized in the story. Whenever characters discuss the Princess, they always include words such as “dark skinned” (189). The princess’s allegedly primitive image is vividly rendered in another scene when Walser, a journalist who joins the circus, muses on the Princess’s appearance. The description of the Princess features her racially marked body, her affinity with animals, and the implication of primitive uncivilization:

In the ring, she looked like a child as she sat at the white Bechstein grand, big enough for two of her, and played for her roaring familiars, but, close to, her face, though neither lined nor wrinkled, was ancient as granite, with the blunt, introspective features of Gauguin’s women, and a soft, matte, bitter brown in colour. (123)

The Princess’s features, her “ancient as granite” face and “features of Gauguin’s women”, are racially marked (123). Paul Gauguin was a nineteenth-century French

painter renowned for his distinctive primitivist style. The usual subjects of his paintings were women of colour associated with cultures constructed as primitive within the Western racist and colonialist imagination.⁶² When considered alongside the reference to Gauguin, the Princess's skin colour indicates an affiliation with an allegedly primitive race and an image of a prehistoric society. In the lines quoted above, the "roaring familiars" refer to the Princess's tigers. The Princess's intimacy with tigers highlights the imagery of the primitive past. The elusive Princess detaches herself from human society but finds familiarity in the company of beasts; she is unfamiliar with humans. The Princess shares a close bond with wild tigers. She does not speak with anyone in the circus but spends her time with the tigers. The Princess's affinity with wild animals indicates prehistory – a falling back to an archaic period prior to the cultured modern industrial society. The description of the Abyssinian Princess's characteristics elucidates her links to the period of the primitive, which is in opposition to the progress of modernity. It was believed that European culture was "the preferred and inevitable outcome of natural human progression" (Weaver-Hightower 362).

In fact, the Princess does not come from Abyssinia. Her mother comes from Guadeloupe and her father comes from Rio de Janeiro. There is also a rumour that she is a tigress's foster child. She never speaks and thus never denies the rumour. The circus owner exploits this image of the exotic Other to promote her performance. Her racial positioning is significant in the sense that it reflects the

⁶² For more details about this art style, see, for instance, Ruud Welten's "Paul Gauguin and the complexity of the primitivist gaze" in *Journal of Art Historiography* (2015).

way that African heritage was often associated with the primitive according to some racist clichés and colonialist ideas in the nineteenth century. Carter's work both perpetuates and challenges these racist ideas. On the one hand, the politics of the text is problematic in linking queer and non-white people with a lack of development and the primitive. The Princess's staged profile and her stereotypical image establish a connection with the concept of "temporal backwardness" that was assigned to homosexuality in late nineteenth-century sexology. According to Victorian scientific racism, the racial other and the homosexual shared a position on the evolutionary scale; both were placed as "undeveloped" subjects associated with the primitive past. On the other hand, the Princess benefits from staging her Otherness and embracing her primitiveness. It is out of that abject position that she finds a way to proceed. Additionally, while the text risks reinforcing these queerphobic and racist tropes, I argue that the racialised queer subject is also re-configured in a more affirmative way. In *Imperial Gothic*, the national or racial other is made monstrous (Lott 20). However, Carter's writing displaces racist ideologies with regenerating and liberating potentials. The Princess's body hints at the potential of being primitive and animalistic rather than these traits causing negative effects.

The Princess employs animality and the body as her forms of expression and communication instead of using conventional spoken language. It is not accidental that the Princess's speech is compared to an animal's "growl". The enigmatic, elusive Abyssinian Princess rarely talks with anyone in the circus. There is a time when Fevvers hears the Princess speaking French: "I'd never heard the Princess say so much as 'good morning,' before, so it comes as a shock, the real,

rough French of Marseilles and, as one might have expected, a low voice, like a growl” (293). Comparing the Princess’s voice to a “growl” strengthens the link between the Princess and primitive animality. The ability to use language is typically associated with ideas of development and progress. Both Darwin’s theory of human evolution and Kristeva’s thesis about the development of subjects place significant emphasis on the topic of language. In the Victorian context, speech was deemed to be a necessary feature of moving upward in the evolutionary parameter. Darwinian evolutionary theory sparked Victorian concerns over the connections between language, animals, and humans. Christine Ferguson notes that, for the Victorians, “[t]o speak is to be human, and to be silent or inarticulate is to be something else entirely – an animal, a savage, an infant, or an evolutionary throwback” (119).⁶³

Another interesting observation is that the Princess does not use English often. Neither the Princess nor Mignon speak English as their primary language, and although the German girl can speak, she does not understand English. When Mignon sings, she does not understand the meaning of the songs. By not speaking

⁶³ If we look into the history of the Victorian circus and freak show, the famous case of the “Elephant Man” is an example of the notion of speech in evolutionary discourse. The Elephant Man, or Joseph Merrick, was a man with physical differences and disabilities, having unusual facial growth and enlarged limbs. He was exhibited in the Victorian freak show. Merrick’s speech was also impeded. Later, he was treated by young surgeon Fredrick Treves in the London Hospital. When Treves visited him, he brought along reading materials and engaged Merrick in conversation. According to Christine Ferguson in “Elephant Talk: Language and Enfranchisement in the Merrick Case”, Treves’s memoir suggests that the improvement of Merrick’s speech is related to the process of his becoming ‘human’ in Trevis’s opinion (114–33). The Elephant Man case thus shows the Victorian belief that speaking ability was a marker separating the human and the non-human animal. See also Peter W. Graham and Fritz Oehlschlaeger’s *Articulating the Elephant Man: Joseph Merrick and His Interpreters* (1992).

the English language, both characters exist outside the frame of reference of Carter's (English) readers. This rejection of the mainstream language cements their outsider status. The Princess and Mignon's position outside the English language system make them socially abjected, or cast away from society, which further fortifies the abjection process that sexual and racial minorities already endure. Furthermore, their use of animalistic language instead of English reflects a resistance to a colonial tool. Western colonizers rationalised their invasions as a desire to civilize and eradicate an allegedly barbaric or animalistic state. This logic in the rhetoric of European colonialism is challenged here. The Gothic furnishes postcolonial writers with a means to articulate repressed histories through a language of haunting (Lott 21). The haunting animality and the denial of speaking English in Carter's novel are thus useful for voicing marginalized discourses.

The Princess's racialized body has been rendered with qualities of the abject; it is heavily linked with excess, savagery, and animality. For instance, her body exhibits signs of abject animality through wounds and defilement on the skin. The Princess's body is scarred with "claw marks as if tattooed" on her brown skin (174). For Linda Badley, a wound is representative of the maternal pre-symbolic: "the body is also, of course, gendered female through woman's designation as the sex, the flesh (versus Word), *the wound that never heals*" (9). The body with a wound or a not fully intact body can be regarded as abject as it evokes the notion of the dissolution of borders between inner and outer. The fact that savage tigers are the ones that have wounded the surface of the Princess's body, and that the faeces on her body is from them, reinforces the character's association with primitive animality. The Princess's body is also "unclean" with animalistic products

like blood and excrement. Her body is portrayed as stained with a tiger's excrement; it is opposite to a "clean and proper body". In one instance, the Princess's petticoat and chemise are stained: "hem of one stained with the excrement of the cages and waist of the other with bloody prints from absent-minded wiping off her hands" (189). Animal fluids and wastes, which come across as troubling leftovers from the primitive past, illustrate the disruption of spatial and temporal order. These elements partly contribute to the reading of the Princess as being in the pre-symbolic phase in the subject individuation process. Faeces, which emblematises Kristeva's concept of the abject (65-67), should be wiped off and excluded from the self to regain order. The displacement of the animal product on the human body suggests the idea that the matter is out of place. Mary Douglas observes that "if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through the order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained [. . .]" (50). The scene concerning the human body smeared with the tiger's excrement demonstrates identities in disarray and the subject outside normative order.

The body dirtied by animal defilement is rendered in the light of the carnivalesque and is thus figured as full of productive potential. There is a link between elements of the abject and the carnivalesque. As Mary Russo notes, Kristeva's theory owes "archaic debt" to Bakhtin (10). She argues that Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* "effects a compelling synthesis of Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Lacan's theory of subjectivity in her account of transgression and abjection" (10). Spooner has observed that in contemporary Gothic, the "original" spirit of carnival appears to return, and such fiction is preoccupied with themes such as

the grotesque circus and “celebration of bodily excess” (*Contemporary Gothic* 31). As Kelly Hurley notes, “during carnival, ritual defilement – being rolled in the mud, smeared with excrement – was experienced as regenerative rather than degrading [. . .] the boisterous celebration of the body in all its gross animality” (“Abject and the Grotesque” 142). Carnival meant reconnecting with the earth (Hurley, “Abject and Grotesque” 142). As such, despite returning to the material bodily principle, the carnivalesque has a regenerating and liberating aspect (Bakhtin 39). Carter utilises the carnivalesque unclean body to assert the Princess’s position as a queer subject that does not belong to a normative pattern. The Princess embraces her primitive animalistic past and the abject homosexuality attached to the notion of the abject body.

In portraying an alternative communication that rejects normative verbal speech, *Nights at the Circus* draws on the notion of the abolition of boundaries between humans and animals. Carter makes use of this Victorian post-Darwinian climate and recasts it within the framework of the abject. One strand of evolutionist thinking identified “savages”, women, and children as three types of inferior humanity, evincing certain moral and mental inadequacies that signalled their incomplete state of evolution (Hurley 83). When the childlike Mignon is around the Princess, she acts like an animal. For example, while clinging to the Princess, Mignon behaves like a tiger: “Mignon was cuddling the Princess in her arms. Now and then, tiger-fashion herself, she licked the forehead next to her shoulder” (242). In nineteenth-century thought, the child, compared to the adult, was considered closer to animals on the evolutionary scale because of their supposedly less complex organism. For instance, Havelock Ellis claims in *The Criminal* (1890) that

“[t]he child is naturally, by his organisation, nearer to the animal, to the savage” (258). Significantly, Mignon’s animalistic gesture co-occurs with homoeroticism; the moment she acts like a primitive animal is the moment when she shows her love and support towards the Princess.

Mignon is a grown-up woman, but her body and personality resemble that of a child. She is portrayed as a great singer with a beautiful voice, and her voice is described as an “artless soprano” that matches “her immature body” (153). Her manner is similar to that of a child as she cannot communicate well or take care of herself in society. Mignon rarely communicates with anyone in the circus due to her lack of English language skills and her child-like syntax. Carolyn Steedman makes an astute observation about Mignon’s depiction, noting “her author’s insistence that in spite of all, she is still a child” (112). The child, in the *fin-de-siècle* context, equates to the notion of the primitive. As Stephan Karschay notes, “by the time of the *fin de siècle*, it came to be commonplace to regard children as less developed and hence more primitive human beings than grown-ups” (92). Mignon’s language development reveals her unsophisticated primitive nature. Steedman notices that the description of Mignon in the novel is written differently from the scenes describing other characters (133). Mignon’s scene is told with a child-like syntactic structure: “for the first time in her life [. . .] got enough to eat; but she [Mignon] did not put on any weight, it was as though something inside her ate it all up before she could get at it but she didn’t have worms” (Carter 154). The subjects with impaired speaking contain implications of exclusion from the narrative of a fully developed, civilised, proper human. In Kristeva’s schema, language binds one with the social world. Becoming a speaking being offers the individual separation from

the maternal body by breaking away from the animal primitive and entering the symbolic order. This is illustrated in one particular episode in the novel, in which Walser is injured in a train crash and loses memories as well as linguistic knowledge. The scene can be read as an allegory for regression to prehistory: he returns to an infantile primitive state and forgets how to use language. During this time, he lives in a precultural history. Whereas the future-oriented progression to language acquisition correlates with the acquisition of normative cultural ideologies, a linguistic regression is linked with the primitive savage state before the formation of identity. Walser's loss of language represents "the primordial and pre-symbolic self, open to re-signification" (O'Brien 20).

The abject animal has become a familiar trope in the representation of the lesbian cultural imagination. Among various forms of abject images assigned to the lesbian, Barbara Creed remarks that the lesbian has sometimes been depicted as animalistic, such as taking a form of vampires or hares (96-99). Creed connects this observation with the deployment of animal imagery. The lesbian and animality share a similarity in that both threaten the symbolic order. In Kristeva's concept of the abject, the maternal body is aligned with animality and animal bodies (Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* 293). In an arranged set of imagery that reflects the human/animal binary, animality is linked with the primitive, the undeveloped, and the unruly and is placed prior to achieving the full development and order of humanity.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, primitive leftovers from the past, including animality, disrupt these borders. Animality, which is synonymous

⁶⁴ Animal imagery is used in the othering and normalisation process. See, for example, Peter Heymans's *Animality in British Romanticism: The Aesthetics of Species* and *Gothic Animals: Uncanny Otherness and the Animal With-Out* (2020).

with the maternal body, is not subjected to the symbolic law, and the presence of animality thrusts aside the normative established by the symbolic.

Many Gothic literary texts have played with the unstable border between human and non-human animals. Timothy Clark observes the Gothic rhetoric hidden in the configuration of the haunting animal in the literary imagination, claiming that “the animal, like the ghost or good or evil spirit with which it is often associated, has been a manifestation of the uncanny” (185). In other words, the animal always returns. The Victorian evolutionary rhetoric and abjection process share temporal logic in a typical development pattern that (attempts to) dismiss the animality of the past. However, as mentioned previously, Carter’s neo-Victorian work does not portray the animal, the savage, and the primitive in a monstrous light. Carter’s Gothic times celebrate the primitive return rather than denigrate it as an undesirable past to be dismissed.

The Music “of Blood, of Flesh, of Sinew, of the Heart”

The language of queer desire between the female lovers is a language that returns to the body and animality. In addition to animalistic body language, the Princess and Mignon’s same-sex love is also portrayed through carnivalesque music that transgresses lingual borders between animals and humans. Mignon’s voice is compared to a magical spell. When Mignon sings for the first time, the listeners in the room, consisting of Fevvers, Walser, and Lizzie, are fascinated: the three audiences “felt the hairs rise on the napes of their neck, as if that lovely voice were something uncanny, its possessor either herself a sorceress or under some spell” (153). Her voice not only generates a comforting pleasure but, to some degree, evokes a deep unease from the audience. The voice contains an uncanny

quality that might connect to the return of animality. Specifically, the music attracts and enchants tigers.

The figure of Mignon has been associated with youth and musicality. It should be noted that Mignon is a figure that has appeared in various cultural forms, such as novels, poems, plays, operas, and films, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁵ In Carter's novel, the character of Mignon was influenced by the characters in operas. As stated in one of Carter's interviews, Mignon "carries such a weight of literary and musical references on her frail shoulder" (Haffenden 87). The well-known Mignon derives from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796). However, in *Nights at the Circus*, Carolyn Steedman sees more influence from other Mignons than from Goethe's child figure. She proposes that Carter's Mignon was probably written "out of Henry Matthew's Little Watercress Girl of 1850, taking in Trilby along the way, via Larkin's drugged and raped child of 'Deception' (*The Less Deceived*, 1995)" (111). Carter reveals that the origin of her Mignon is Alan Berg's 1925 opera *Wozzeck* (Haffenden 82). In *Nights at the Circus*, Mignon has singing talent and is later asked to join the Princess's performance, where she becomes the Princess's partner. Together, they create fantastic dancing tiger shows in which the Princess plays the piano and Mignon sings. The music produced by the Princess and Mignon has extraordinary power to make ferocious tigers docile. This circus act revolves around bonds, trust, and dangerous savagery. The Princess wants a partner in the ring because of the carnivorous tigers she has to perform with: "somebody she trusted, somebody who

⁶⁵ See Terence Cave's *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (2011).

could keep an eye on the cats during the tense moment when she played the invitation to the waltz whilst she asked herself, if, today of all days, this might be the day when they decided they would not take up her invitation” (174). Mignon succeeds in this and becomes her partner.

The carnivalesque music creates a supernatural cross-species bond between humans and animals. The couple plays the music while the “savage audience” is listening (327). Such a musical performance can be viewed as a carnival moment that, as Bakhtin claims, enables “a special type of communication impossible in everyday life” (10). When the Princess talks to her tigers with human speech, there is a division between them: “early in her career, she discovered how they grumbled at the back of their throats and laid their ears flat when she used that medium of human speech which nature denied them” (174). Typically, speech has been viewed as exclusively human, a belief that was also found in the nineteenth century. For example, Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin’s notable supporter, explained human’s position in nature in relation to an unshared possession of speech. The following is an excerpt from Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature* (1863):

for, he alone possesses the marvelous endowment of intelligible and rational speech, whereby, in the secular period of his existence, he has slowly accumulated and organized the experience which is almost wholly lost with the cessation of every individual life in other animals; so that he now stands raised upon it as on a mountain top, far above the level of his humble fellows, and transfigured from his grosser nature by reflecting, here and there, a ray from the infinite source of truth. (112)

When Mignon sings, the distinction between the human and the animal is dissolved: "If they [the tigers] hate speech because it divides us from them, to sing is to rob speech of its function and render it divine" (179).

This music the two women produce is described as the music "of blood, of flesh, of sinew, of the heart" (327). The diction in this line asserts the connection between music and the body, the drives, and the primitive instead of words. In other words, the music in Carter's novel resembles the semiotic. The semiotic realm involves the flesh, while the symbolic involves words. In this semiotic phase, the maternal body furnishes movements, rhythm, and sounds for the child, and the sounds have not been given any fixed meaning. The uncanny music in the novel might be interpreted as the return of the archaic bodily chora. In Kristeva's theory, the semiotic state constitutes a "chora", which is "a nonexpressive totality [that] formed the drives and their stases in a mortality that is full of movement as it is regulated" (25). Fevvers's observation of Mignon's singing suggests that her music contains words, but these words have not undergone the signification process: "Mignon sang her foreign song without meaning, without feeling, as if the song shone through her, as though she were glass, without the knowledge she was heard" (155). She knows the words but does not understand them. The music is congruous with Kristeva's remark on the abject that describes it as drawing one "toward the place where meaning collapses" (*Powers of Horror 2*). Citing Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Peach argues that, while not typically present in public utterance, joy and physical sensation can be found in the music of language. This joy originates in an infantile language that is associated with the

maternal (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 135). Mignon's music resembles the semiotic since it is meaningless and infantile-like.

The Princess and Mignon make use of a particular kind of music to mediate their female homoeroticism. The music they produce is inflected with the abject as it is liberated from paternal authority and transgresses the symbolic order. Every time they perform together, the couple expresses their affection toward each other. The music is described as "their language, in which they'd found their way to one another" (168). After the first collaborative music performance, the Princess and Mignon kiss each other: "[w]hen the song was over, the tranced cats sighed and shifted a little on their haunches but the cue for the dance never came; the Princess was kissing Mignon" (181). Another instance of affectionate displays is when they finish the show. The Princess kisses Walser on both cheeks but she kisses Mignon "on the mouth and the two girls clung together for a little longer, only a moment longer, than propriety allowed although, such was the vigour of the ovation, nobody noticed except those to whom it came as no surprise" (192-3). The music helps the women to transcend individual differences and social boundaries, including interracial relationships. After performing the uncanny music, "they smiled at one another and one white hand and one brown reached out and clasped together" (196). The image of their hands with different skin colours clasping together highlights interracial bonding. Palmer has noted the empowering function of the music motif in *Women Reading Women's Writing*, arguing that music serves as a tool for the women to create female collectivity against patriarchy. For Palmer, in the representation of Mignon and the Princess, music is their communication as well as the transformation of the subject and the subversion of the individual ego

(201). They are depicted not as individual “subject[s]” but as “beings who seemed, as a pair, to transcend their individualities” (200).

The carnivalesque music overthrows an existing order of a past societal structure in which people were classified according to their outward physical characteristics. This music is distinctive as it articulates anti-identitarian impulses. The carnivalesque music also blurs the lines between different species as well as different social groups. The music shatters boundaries (of biology and social hierarchy) and, at the same time, bonds the women together and strengthens their relationship. The carnivalesque abject music has contradictory effects and suggests both disruptive and connective potentialities. The music brings the animal into the matrix of female desire and extends the queer spectrum. Queerness features in the Princess and Mignon’s music through this slippage, creating an in-between state of exclusion and inclusion as humans and animals are close to each other. The music that erases the human/animal divide is intertwined with the female homoeroticism between the Princess and Mignon. This scene, which appears near the end of the story, suggests a conclusion of the Princess and Mignon’s relationship when they decide to form a musical community in the wilderness and live together with tigers: the primitive music is for “the savage audience” and they “had been brought together, here, as women and as lovers, solely to make – music that was at the same time a taming and a not-taming; music that sealed the pact of tranquillity between humankind and their wild brethren, their wild sistren, yet left them free” (327). The music that shatters animal boundaries is derived from the love between the Princess and Mignon and, in turn, the music with liberating characteristics strengthens female homoeroticism.

Interspecies Eroticism and the Dancing Tiger

The boundary between the couple and the animals is increasingly blurred in a circus act in which the Princess, Mignon, and a tiger perform together. Mignon dances with a tiger while the Princess plays music. In describing this performance, Carter uses the carnivalesque to offer a creative chaos of playful possibilities in conveying queer desire and sexualities. These performances serve as a means for the Princess and Mignon to produce new queer bonds. The cross-species erotics is seen as bestial, a return to one's animal past, which is usually figured as transgressive in Gothic fiction. However, the carnivalesque cross-species connections between the couple and the tigers harness the liberating potential to create a new future for queer excess. This section will demonstrate that the carnivalesque worldview is indispensable in rearranging time and space and foregrounds queer excessive desires in the circus space.

The circus dancing performance between the Princess, Mignon, and a tiger invokes Bakhtin's "a carnival sense of the world" (122). Carter creates a moment that offers a new version of reality which deviates from heteronormative reality and in which an outlandish romantic relationship between the couple and tigers is imaginable and promising. The relationship between the couple and the tigers is ambiguous and sometimes contains an erotic dimension. Their interspecies interaction with the tigers is displayed in various acts. Sometimes the women show intimacy and affection by playing with or taking care of the tigers. In the show, the interaction is charged with romantic meanings. For instance, Mignon replaces the tigress bride as the dancing partner of the tiger groom. Mignon and the tiger's interaction makes the tigress jealous: "the tiger's bride was sad to be cut out and,

perhaps, even jealous at losing her partner to the pretty girl" (190). The male tiger and Mignon manifest their intimacy through physical contact during the dance. When performing in the ring in front of the audience, Mignon expresses an affectionate gesture by kissing the tiger after the dance: "Mignon led her partner back to his pedestal and dropped a kiss on his plush forehead before courteously handling him up" (191). Dancing, in general, is considered by some critics as an action that can express sexuality and desire. Judith Lynne Hanna has noted that "much social dancing is a purveyor of fantasy that permits sexual expression" (134).

By enacting this questionable interaction with the tiger, Mignon does not conform to traditional female sexuality. The theme of the primitive cross-species erotic relation arguably serves as a Gothic strategy to liberate female characters from the restrictive structures of sexual and gender norms. Suzette Henke, discussing Carter's previous Gothic work *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), contends that "a carnivalesque riot of bestial jouissance" reflects "revolutionary strategies of erotic bonding". Consequently, Carter re-scripts the politics of shame. Such bonding dismantles taboos surrounding female sexuality and renounces the politics of shame by which women are constrained (56-59). The female characters in this collection of reworked fables choose bestiality over traditional heterosexual relationships. The stories with a prominent theme of bestiality include "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", "Puss-in-Boots", and "The Werewolf". For example, "The Tiger's Bride" tells the story of Beauty and the Beast and involves romantic feelings between the heroine and a tiger. Another example of unregulated female sexuality is a "return to the savage libidinal company of wolves" (Henke 56).

For Freud, bestiality is one of the temptations that breaks the taboos that separate man from animals (Oliver 328). Given that taboos exist to maintain borders between prohibition and laws, this violation of the bestiality taboo emancipates female characters and allows them to practice other sexualities which are deemed abject by society. According to Robert Miles, “the abject is a “border” between a prohibition and its transgression, between desire and law” (85-86). Bestiality raises a question regarding human moral degeneracy. Hurley has pointed out that the anxiety over degeneration also covers anthropocentric concerns about human morality: “the human race might ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection” (56). In Colleen Glenney Boggs’s view, bestiality is “a mode of embodied animality” and “bestiality and its criminalization offer a model for the emergence of human subjectivity” (101). That bestiality transgresses cultural laws can be seen in its criminalisation during the Victorian period. Human-animal sexual relations were listed under the broader term of sodomy in the Buggery Act of 1533. It should also be noted that bestiality historically coalesced with homosexuality in British legal discourse. In nineteenth-century Britain, there was a section entitled “Sodomy and Bestiality” in the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861.⁶⁶

The carnivalesque, by nature, breaks taboos. It offers an alternative world order which encourages a complete disregard for all taboos and cultural restraints. People who are ordinarily divided from one another due to social class or other social factors are brought into a one-of-a-kind interaction during carnival time in

⁶⁶ For details of bestiality’s legal history, see A. D. Harvey’s “Bestiality in Late-Victorian England” in *Journal of Legal History*.

which all hierarchies are temporarily suspended (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 7). Importantly, the carnivalesque goes beyond bringing people with differences together as it can be applicable to “values, thoughts, phenomena and things” (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 123), which it draws together despite their differences and without constraints. The carnivalesque encourages another kind of reality with “different laws than normal life” (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 122). Here, in the circus, the abject taboo of cross-species desire is possible. The performance features the carnivalesque to create a moment unburdened from restrictive orders. Cross-species erotics are ambivalent, exciting, and celebrated.

The circus provides a fantastic setting that generates temporary dislocation and categorical mutability. The carnivalesque world has a fluid temporal structure that differs from the linear progression in a traditional concept of time in reality. This non-linear temporality is reflected in the dance between the tiger and Mignon because the dance implicates both progression and regression within the evolutionary trajectory. The description of their dance consists of the notions of primitive regression and cultural development. Within the topsy-turvy carnival world, where the law is different from everyday life, the animal's primitive world and the human's social event collide. I draw attention to the ways that Carter plays with temporality in her depiction of this circus performance scene. The configuration of bestial relations in the circus show is facilitated by a sense of fluid time and consists of hybrid temporalities. The border between primitive and culture is destroyed, and the demarcation between evolution and devolution is erased. The various instances of ambiguous states where boundaries can be transgressed

occur in the circus. An example is “a chimp in suit that makes one wonder what was human and what was not” (128).

Mignon makes a comparison between dancing with the beast and dancing in a ball: “[r]ound and round they went, Mignon humming along with the tune in an absent-minded, ensorcellating voice, as pleased with herself and the effect she made as any girl at her first ball” (190). Mignon approaches the tiger and curtsies:

‘One, two, three, Mignon waltzed with the tiger. One, two, three’. The tall beast, a little stiff and grandfatherly, tenderly bent over the debutante, fully six feet tall on his hind legs and, it would seem, somewhat discommoded by the leather gauntlets secured to his forepaws with string lest, in the excitement of the moment, he let out his retracted claws with disastrous consequences to Mignon’s bare shoulders, which had only the appearance of marble. (189-190)

In this new version of reality, Carter confounds the polarity between primitive savagery and civilization, as seen in the way that the dancing tiger is presented as both wild and anthropomorphic. As such, the carnivalesque dismantles rational logic and provides possibilities for what is usually unimagined. Carter’s depiction of the bestial dance between Mignon and the tiger presents the dance as an ordinary occurrence.

The dance indicates a progressive movement toward a cultured state. Tiger’s ability to dance displays culture, an exclusively human characteristic. Herbert Spencer, in an essay titled “On the Origin and Function of Music” (1857), considers the notion of dance as a biological evolutionary aspect of humanity and

as being closely allied to the other arts (176). In the quoted scene, the transition from four legs to two legs during the dance indicates the tiger's human-like features. To dance requires a learning process as well as social etiquette. Furthermore, the polite gesture of bowing can be perceived as evidence of the tiger's social behaviour and humanization. Such a phenomenon is made possible only in the carnival world. The cultured two-legged dancing tiger blurs the line between humans and animals. Therefore, it is seen as queer and unnatural in the ordinary world outside the circus ring. After the train crash, Fevvers observes the death of the performing tigers and comments that it is "as if Nature disapproved of them for their unnatural dancing" (242).

At the same time, the dance also evokes the abject state of the threatening primitive world. Despite being able to dance, the tigers retain the animalistic fierceness pertinent to their primitive nature. Before the dance starts, the tiger shows an animalistic reaction to Mignon: "the tiger's tail twitched and the tunnels of his nostrils tingled in response to the tasty civet in her perfume" (189). Tigers, being carnivores, are well known for their ferocious characteristics and are much different from domesticated animals. The tiger's tail that "twitched and the tunnels of his [that] nostrils tingled" are suggestive of the primitive instinctive reaction of the beast. The savage animal is perceived as intimidating because it forces Mignon to face what should be left in the past when Mignon is "dancing with the fearful living", her "hand in the tiger's paw" (190). The mention of the claw in this description of the dance suggests the bestial nature of Mignon's dance partner. As such, the beast's claw is a metonym of primitive savagery. The dance heralds an uncanny

encounter with the threatening primitive past; the savage beast implies the threat of possible death.

As demonstrated, the carnivalesque destroys both the logic of hierarchy and the rules of time. Another form of queer temporality this queer space of the circus produces is the synchronous overlapping presence of multiple non-normative desires. Undercutting the sequence logic that secures heterosexual temporality, Mignon has multiple relationships at the same time. During the performance, the female-animal romantic interaction coincides with the same-sex desire between women. Each activity does not unfold chronologically in the performance. The sound of the piano functions as the background music for Mignon and the tiger's romantic dance. While the Princess's piano music serves as a communicative way to generate a homoerotic bond with Mignon, the Princess's music is simultaneously a significant part of the bestial bonding between Mignon and the male tiger. The love between the Princess and Mignon and the Mignon-tiger romance is coetaneous. While "homosexuality [w]as the exemplary sexual degeneracy" at this Victorian time, racial and sexual others were often grouped together as bestial degenerates, such that "human sexuality was portrayed as white, monogamous heteroeroticism" (154). The queer relationship in the circus performance is the opposite; it suggests non-white, queer, polygamous, and emblematic of excessive non-heterosexual desires.

It is through the touring circus that radical ideas and artistic experiments are enabled and disseminated. The carnivalesque performance can be read as a queer aesthetic inflected with utopic visions, a particular aesthetic that might create optimistic queer political possibilities. The show endorses the idea of queer excess

and a new egalitarian world. Specifically, the circus show between the couple and the tiger reflects Muñoz's concept of utopia to some degree. Utopia has not yet arrived, but it will provide hope and drive us forward. The circus can thus be read in line with Muñoz's idea of a "queer aesthetic" that offers a "schemata of a forward-dawning futurity" (1). Muñoz suggests that "queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (1). He explains that "[u]topian performativity is often fueled by the past. The past, or at least narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and past to critique presentness" (106). It is through queer aesthetic practice that the "queer utopian is disclosed and enables individuals to imagine other potential ways of being that challenge heteronormative discourse" (Balfour 440).

Muñoz uses a drag performance as an example. In Carter's novel, the circus performance between the women and the tiger is an act of queer world-making as it shows a possible way of becoming – constantly forming and dissolving otherness. The spectacle provides opportunities for novelty and changes instead of the stigmatisation of cross-species romance. In this way, the performance enacts Muñoz's "other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (1). The carnivalesque and abject animality are integrated in artistic expressions in the form of music. The Princess and Mignon later turn the queer show into a queer space by forming a musical community in the middle of the wood, where the lovers live together with tigers.

The Princess and Mignon's performance offers a glimpse of queer utopia, and this is reified in the scene near the end of the novel when the Princess and

Mignon establish a queer community in the wilderness. The queer utopia moves from the spectacle to actuality in a non-theatre space. The space is figured as a queer musical community. After the railway accident, the circus crew gets lost in the forest. The Princess and Mignon eventually decide to settle in the wilderness, living together with tigers and forming a musical community where the lovers play music for themselves and for the beasts. The text ends with the image of an abject space for the couple that allows fantastic possibilities and accommodates excessive desires. It could be said that this space within a non-linear vision of the world provides a fluid sense of time that departs from heteronormative progression, providing a glimpse of a setting in which queer lives can be led outside the demands of reproductive futurism.

Queer Primitive Utopia

Celebratory and utopian tones are crucial aspects of the novel, as equally as the novel's engagement with Victorian degeneration anxieties. Despite the background of an uncertain and volatile *fin-de-siècle*, the novel is filled with idealistic hope. The utopian notion is noticeably adopted by the women who love women in the story: all search for a space that is utopic and is not socially regulated. They hope for a way forward from their present suffering. Their current reality is built on a patriarchal power structure that confines and stifles their sexuality and sexual expression. The female inmates want to find "a primitive Utopia in the vastness round them, where none might find them" (218). This desire and search springs from the feeling "that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (Muñoz 1). Jenni Millbank makes the useful observation that the two lesbian storylines of the prisoners and Princess-Mignon

parallel each other as well as that of Fevvers. She argues that “[a]ll of these plots coalesce around Carter’s theme of women writing their own impossible futures” (162). The scene in which the prisoners leave the prison is described as follows: “[t]he white world around them looked newly made, a blank sheet of fresh paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished” (Carter 218).

Nevertheless, Carter’s treatment of utopia raises questions concerning the unfeasibility of queer utopia for women. For example, Fevvers, who has an optimistic outlook on what lies ahead, claims that she hears “the dawn chorus of the new, the transformed–” (285), but Lizzie disagrees and points out that it is not that easy. Lizzie’s caution about utopia is evident when she discusses the lesbian utopia of the former prisoners. Lizzie makes a sarcastic remark about the future in the republic of free women: “[w]hat’ll they do with the boy babies. Feed’em to the polar bears? To the *female* polar bears?” (284). Her cynical statement reflects a caution concerning the impracticable and ephemeral nature of this utopia. She doubts the future of an all-female utopia in a world without heterosexuality as it is built on transient temporality. The queer utopia of these women relies on reproductive futurity, and this dependence becomes the limits of this community. The dependence on reproductive futurity implies the dilemma of assimilation and subversion. This is the question to which Carter does not provide a definite answer. However, the utopic vision seems to be rendered more optimistic and feasible in the case of the Princess and Mignon.

The Princess and Mignon’s situation creates a new path through the primitive past, which lies outside the existing society and reproductive scheme. The location of the Princess and Mignon’s community in an uncharted territory of

wildness is significant. It creates a tension between their status as societal outsiders and their promising possible future. Alienated from society, they lead an aloof life on their estate in the middle of the wilderness. The threatening primitive community accords with David Punter's interpretation of the Gothic's connection with the primitive: the Gothic is "what is and is not acceptable, what is to be allowed to come to the warm hearth of society and what is to be consigned to the outer wilderness" (4). This queer primitive community is also in line with Valerie Rohy's statement that "it is not just that time stops for the other but that the other – the 'primitive,' savage or homosexual – wields the power to stop time for all the world" (*Anachronism* x). The primitive society for the homosexual couple and their queer relationship with the savages contains a Gothic quality. Rohy discusses the fear of the primitive that encroaches on the present. The couple's transgressive desires are only permissible in the wilderness but not in Victorian society. When the circus's owner attempts to persuade the Princess and Mignon to return with him to the bright lights of the circus, the couple rejects him. Both women, who are socially abjected by being non-British, female, and homosexual, are not supposed to be in the warm hearth of society. They realise they must find queer spaces which demonstrate potentiality and hope for their queer desires.

Their queer utopia threatens the boundaries of the established system and it possesses a power to subvert hegemonic structures. Their queer utopia is relegated to the position of the abject Other. The abject Other is not only a danger to the boundaries of the self but is also to the stable social systems. This argument bears some similarities with the abject placement of lesbians. Bonnie Zimmerman identifies the lesbian figure as uncontainable within hetero-patriarchal logic, stating

that [h]er desire functions as excess within the heterosexual economy. Hence, she positions herself outside these [heteropatriarchal] institutions, or creates space within them” (4). The queer community is positioned in a primitive space outside all heteropatriarchal institutions. The isolated location of this community accommodates female same-sex love and cross-species eroticism – relationships that are consigned to the past.

It also suggests that lesbian characters are required to withdraw from the social setting and build something new rather than attempting to alter what already exists. The critic Jennie Milbank proposes that queer women must step out of pre-existing structures. In “It’s about *This: Lesbians, Prison, Desire*”, Milbank explores *Nights at the Circus*, *Affinity* and *Bad Girls* TV series (1999-2006). In Millbank’s words, *Nights at the Circus* is “the most utopian of the three tales and the most openly symbolic in its alignment of lesbian desire with freedom and transformation”; however, “the union of the escaped prisoners with their guards, and of Mignon and the Princess, is made possible only through their exit from family, community and society; they cannot stay within the place that has built the prison or caged the tigers, and survive intact” (176).

The unsustainable nature of a utopian organisation is acknowledged in the former prisoners’ case, which suggests reliance on reproductive futurity is not an effective option. The community exemplifies a temporal complexity as it seems to exist outside the traditionally tripartite timeframe of past, present, and future. The queer utopia is constructed around the notion of a primitive past. When they were still at the circus, Mignon expressed her wish for a prehistoric primitive time. This longing can be seen in Mignon’s nostalgic moment while singing for the tigers.

Mignon thinks about a primitive land that she describes as “the Eden of our first beginnings, where innocent beasts and wise children play together under the lovely lemon trees” (181). It is the pre-historical time when children and animals are not yet separated. Mignon has “nostalgic yearning”, the feeling Lowenthal defined as “a simple and stable past as a refuge from the turbulent and chaotic present” (21). Carter sees optimism in creating an alternative location engulfed in the primitive. The fact that the establishment of the Princess-Mignon’s primitive utopia happens after the train on which the circus performers are travelling crashes has significance in terms of temporality. The train is a symbol of modernity. Setting the tone of progress in the nineteenth century, modern technological advances like the railway led to the reconsideration of time, distance, and space. The train’s forward movement thus represents the concept of historical progress (91). The couple attempts to recreate pre-historic time, the period in which no regulation or boundaries between humans and animals yet existed.

The portrayal of Gothic time is marked by the discourse of the primitive, with which the regression to animality intersects fruitfully in the novel’s colourful resistance to straight time. The Gothic time of the primitive, with its reversal of values and identifications, is the return to a time of sexual liberation. This kind of temporality opens up space for new relationships in a world that encourages queer excess. The Princess and Mignon discover new possibilities in the past. While this past revolves around the primitive, the deployment of the primitive in Carter’s writing is nonetheless accompanied by a consciousness of the future. The community with the tiger enables a mode of queer becoming, echoing Muñoz’s concept of a kind of spatio-temporality (a utopia – that nowhere that finds its place

in some alternative temporality).⁶⁷ The community can be read in relation to Muñoz's concept of queer time: "[q]ueerness's ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world" (25). Muñoz adds that "[i]t is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and now is transcended by a then and there that could be and indeed should be" (97). It might seem contradictory that this queer community could provide futurity as it is so firmly situated in the past. However, Carter's depiction of this community does not embrace anti-futurity politics.

The primitive community paradoxically encourages a queer future, not a tragic dead end. For Muñoz, queerness's utopian potential "can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (1). The same-sex couple and the animals live as a collective full of vitality rather than as individuals. This queer "family" embodies multiplicity by turning away from the nuclear family ideal of heterosexual marriage. There is power in the collective of queer community formation. This large family endorses a queer structure in which sameness and difference spill over each other's boundaries and the primitive and cultured move back and forth in an unruly manner. The community negates the conventional mandate of futurism and invents a non-reproductive family consisting of women who love women and tigers. As such, the notion of reproductive heterosexual futurism is reconfigured in cross-species queer desire. This strange musical community is like a pre-history utopia as it is located in a primitive time without any law or social norms about family. In other words, it is Gothic time when the return to the primitive in this queer utopia

⁶⁷ See also Carla Freccero's "The Queer Time of Lesbian Literature: History and Temporality" (22).

defies the hegemonic family concept of white monogamous heteroeroticism. Familial continuity was one of the primary strands of Victorian social ideology (Shuttleworth 268). However, this community with bestial companions is an alternative to the reproductive family unit. The couple is childless, but tigers have an ambiguous role in this family. Their presence has unsettled sexual boundaries, as shown in the circus dance. In this queer community, the tigers might have a romantic role, but it is also possible to view the intimacy as filial. By treating these wild but cultured tigers with love and respect regardless of species, the tigers can fit within the same-sex couple's life as their children. The strange relationships in Carter's primitive utopia illuminate alternative kinship arrangements which serve to reveal a queer resistance. The tigers can be considered queer kin, suggesting the couple's desire for forms of kinship that do not reinforce the normative logic of a heterosexual reproductive family. Together, same-sex desire and ambiguous interspecies relations provide an imagery of a peaceful, optimistic primitive utopia.

Ultimately, Carter's treatment of the Victorian past in this text demonstrates her claims in "Notes from the Front Line" (1983) about a specific feature of her writing: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (69). *Nights at the Circus* has proven to be more than a symptomatic response to social anxieties but provides rewritten Victorian fears and reclaims the primitive. Carter reinvigorates the longstanding Gothic motif concerning degeneration, which is accompanied by the Gothic carnival spirit and the concept of the abject. Delving deep into disordered temporality, Carter liberates her queer female characters by converting an old time into a new time. The story addresses topics regarding futurity like the creation of

new worlds with a new temporal order. Carter's tales reach back to the Victorian era to depict elastic variations of female sexuality unrestrained by fixed sexual identity-based conceptualisations or any other identity categories. Her use of the fantastic and Gothic-related concepts to construct the primitive creates possibilities to expand her exploration of the fluidity and diversity of queer desires. This is a complex strategy for facilitating the reclaiming of outsider status. With embodied forces and energies that signal novelty and invention, Carter offers us a conception of queerness that is open to otherness and uses a reinvented view of primitive time as a means to reconceive power and politics. Carter presents a queer utopic space in defiance of the norms of futurist reproduction and temporality.

Chapter Five

Sarah Waters: Neo-Victorian Female Gothic, Historical Fiction and The Queering of Sequence in *Affinity*

The final chapter of this thesis continues to explore neo-Victorian fiction written by a contemporary female writer. It examines *Affinity* (1999) by Sarah Waters, a prominent writer of lesbian historical fiction. Similar to Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Waters's work is set in the Victorian era; in fact, Waters has acknowledged that Carter's fiction has influenced her writing. In the introduction she wrote for a new publication of *Nights at the Circus*, Waters revealed that, "[r]ereading *Nights at the Circus* for this reissue, in fact, I could see, in a rich, original form, many of the themes and preoccupations that have surfaced in my own work. I could never have written the novels that I have without having read the fiction of Angela Carter first" (xi). Furthermore, in an interview with Abigail Dennis, Waters again talked about Angela Carter's influence on her work. She said:

It's funny, because I recently wrote an introduction for *Nights at the Circus* (1984), and of course I had to reread it [. . .] I loved it all over again, but also, I could see all the kind of stuff that had seeped through into my own writing: the interest in performance, in a sort of musical burlesque; there's even a women's prison in there – in my second book [*Affinity*] there's a women's prison. All sorts of things –London, obviously, late nineteenth century London... (42)

The novel focuses on the romantic relationship between Margaret Prior, a new lady visitor at Millbank Prison and the mysterious convict Selina Dawes, who

used to be a spirit medium. *Affinity* is set in a specific historical period of the Victorian era between 1872 and 1875, amid the particular craze of spiritualism. Spiritualism is a religious movement that started in the United States and spread to the United Kingdom in the 1860s. The spiritualist movement is considered to have begun in 1848, when two sisters from New York, named Kate and Margaret Fox, asserted that they were able to connect with the spirits of the dead.

This chapter explores spiritualist phenomena and Waters's mixing of genres, specifically her use of the Neo-Victorian, Gothic historical fiction, sensation fiction, and the Female Gothic in relation to the notion of sexual sequence. The chapter establishes a dialogue with Annamarie Jagose's theorisation of the politics of sexual sequence in the representation of lesbianism. In *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence*, Jagose examines the sexual sequence and normative order promoted by heteronormative culture. She claims that normative cultural reproduction designates female homosexuality as being backward, belated and inconsequential. Her book explores two main topics: chronological/second-order and retrospective history. She critically examines the reparative project of constructing lesbian history, and shows how this is connected to the concept of the lesbian as belated. She also considers how the cultural production of lesbianism tends to present it as second-order to heterosexuality and to male homosexuality. A social sequence frequently places heterosexuality first and homosexuality second, viewing the lesbian as always derivative of either the female heterosexual or the male homosexual (xi). Jagose thus considers constructions of lesbianism to be problems of sequence and derivation. She asserts that this belatedness of female homosexuality is "less an empirical fact

concerning the date of their historical emergence than a constituent characterisation of the masculinist and heteronormative representational strategies that secure the definitional of female homosexuality” (8). The first order of heterosexuality and the second order of the lesbian have different implications regarding the ranking of sexual hierarchies. Specifically, I am interested in how Waters’s fusion of various literary genres and elements of Victorian spiritualism is utilised to reflect these characteristics assigned to female same-sex sexuality and simultaneously challenges such a normative sequence. *Affinity* undermines the cultural weighing of the sexual sequence on thematic, narrative and meta-narrative levels.

To date, little scholarly attention has been paid to the employment of Jagose’s theory in the reading of *Affinity*. Although the topic of sexual sequence politics has been studied by some critics, most tend to discuss Waters’s recent historical novel, *The Night Watch* (2006). For instance, Kaye Mitchell pays attention to both “the treatment of time as a topic *within* the novel and the nature and effects of the backward narration *of* the novel” (13). Emma Parker reads *The Night Watch* in relation to Jagose’s sexual sequence theory. Listing *The Night Watch* as one of the contemporary lesbian novels that interrogate normative sexual sequence, Parker briefly notes the way in which the texts disrupt chronology by using unconventional narrative structures such as the backward narration and the collapse between past and present (215-216).

This chapter proposes a new reading which addresses this gap in the scholarship. The discussion first considers the methodological issue of history writing and the belated representation of lesbians. An exploration of the way in

which Waters approaches the discourse of Victorian spiritualism then follows. It examines various forms of queer time operating in Waters's portrayal of spiritualist rituals and their transgressive capacities for disrupting the normative sexual sequence that upholds the hegemonic social structure of heteronormative culture. Furthermore, it investigates the conception of female agency in relation to temporal sequence. The potentials of the sexual-social passivity of the female medium are examined in relation to an analysis of the sadomasochism dynamic present in the spiritualist ritual scenes. The next part of this chapter scrutinises the narrative's intertextual queering of *The Turn of The Screw*, a Victorian Gothic novella written by Henry James. In *Affinity*, the narrative order of the plot is a vehicle for a queer twist that embraces a queer departure from the source text, which does not concern female same-sex desire. In the context of such a queer departure, this chapter focuses on the narrative sequence of the novel. It examines the way in which Waters manipulates sexual sequence through literary devices from the Female Gothic subgenre, such as 'the explained supernatural', and the literary conventions of sensation fiction, such as the trope of secrets. Taken together, Waters reveals the performative nature of sexual identity and challenges the regulatory ability of normative sequence that organises heterosexuality as first in order and, therefore, more "natural".

(Re)Writing the Lesbian Past

Different creative avenues can be taken to locate queer female sexualities in the past. For example, Waters tackles the topic of female same-sex sexuality in the Victorian Age through the judicious use of literary genres. Kate Mitchell raises an interesting question: "What would the Victorian novel have looked like had it

represented other voices?" ("Making It Seem Like It's Authentic" 117). In Mitchell's view, Waters mapped a genealogy of female homoeroticism onto our sense of Victorian literary and cultural history through the use of female-associated genres such as Victorian Gothic and sensation fiction. She explained that these literary styles were typically seen as feminine since both were associated with women as readers, writers, and protagonists and are linked with the representation of transgressive women and the depiction of female sexuality. Other critics also agree that women have had strong ties to the Gothic from the beginning. Citing Juliann Fleenor and Tania Modleski, Richard Dyer has claimed that the Gothic is generally a "female" genre. The Gothic "was first developed by women, centred on female protagonists, and exhibited an appreciable sense of being addressed to women" (72). Given this tie with women, Mitchell proposes that these genres are perhaps the most likely sites in which a lesbian tradition could have been voiced or may have been voiced in displaced ways. She does this by utilising the readily recognisable tropes of Gothic and sensation fiction and expanding their field of representation to include representations of female homosexuality (118).

In addition to the Victorian Gothic, Waters's utilisation of the historical novel genre is at the heart of her engagement with female queer desires. Waters acknowledges that she is "a writer for whom lesbian issues are at the forefront of what I'm doing" (qtd. in Palmer 72). Her engagement with "lesbian issues" in *Affinity* both restores the lost voices of the marginal who were not present in the history records and reinvents them. Considering the historical timeframe of the novel, the modern identity category of the lesbian was unavailable to the characters in the late-nineteenth century setting. For Claire O'Callaghan, "*Affinity's*

Victorian setting looks back to an arena in which identification as a homosexual – in the modern sense of the term – was emerging, but (contemporary) terminology to describe female homosexuality was yet unavailable” (47). Comparing *Affinity* with her early work *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Waters reveals that “while the first novel had a wide range of models for lesbian communities, I wrote *Affinity* with characters who for the most part didn’t have any lesbian models at all” (Hogan 173). Waters incorporates the reimagination of voices lost in the past through Gothic and historical fiction modes.

Contemporary lesbian historical fiction emerged as a literary subgenre in the 1980s and, in the 1990s, became increasingly popular and well-defined (Wallace 7; Oram 4-5). One of the main reasons why lesbian historical fiction was so attractive for both writers and readers is that it is able to offer a partial connection to the past. The nostalgic yearning for a queer past was particularly strong at the end of the twentieth century in the wake of the AIDS crisis, which had led to increased prejudice surrounding LGBTQ+ lives and increased censorship. The 1988 UK Act containing Section 28, which banned the promotion of homosexuality in local councils and schools, offers one example. This legislation was introduced under the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. The law made it difficult to access affirmative LGBTQ+ materials and banned them from being taught in schools. Section 28 stated that schools must not “promote [...] the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”. This suppression and the hostile climate it created caused a sense of loss and alienation. One way in which queer people dealt with this absence of affirmative representation was by looking back to the queer past to forge connections across time. As Waters herself

acknowledges in “Making Up Lost Time”, a chapter co-authored with literary scholar and historian Laura Doan, the engagement with and recreation of history can offer a crucial means of homosexual self-definition.

Waters and Doan further explain that the lesbian “quest for historical precedent” is more difficult compared to the search for a gay male past, since it is even harder to trace lesbian lives within existing historical archives (12-13). The growing popularity of lesbian historical fiction in the last two decades of the twentieth allowed for a more creative and imaginative construction of a lesbian genealogy: “historical fiction has been rehabilitated for queer consumption [...] lesbians may now indulge the serious pleasure of repossessing their own lost histories” (13). Many writers such as Jeanette Winterson, Ellen Galford, and Waters herself, used historical fiction to reach back to the eras before modern identity categories were firmly established in order to create a lesbian past. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that writing historical fiction about “lesbianism” is always complicated, since the modern sexual identity category of the lesbian was not available to people in the Victorian and pre-Victorian past. In this sense, lesbian historical fiction is structured by a sense of belatedness. This prompts Waters and Doan to ask: “how is the past negotiated in lesbian literary production?” and “Should we read lesbian historical fiction as performative or descriptive” (13)?

Critical studies on historical fiction have long been interested in the tensions between restoration and innovation in the process of history writing. The genre is predicated on past-present hybridity – with history in service of the present. Historical novels raise questions about sequential genealogy, including the

possibilities of grasping the past in its totality, or the question of whether it can reveal something in the past or satisfactorily negotiate the representation of the past. Likewise, for the “lesbian” historical novel, there is the question of whether to unearth hidden histories or to imaginatively insert the stories instead. Critics – including Jagose – have noted the dilemma in a restorative project of lesbian genealogy. Jagose warns against an overdetermined search for genealogy, referring to history’s “apparent promise of recuperation” that relies on the historicizing gesture” (9). As such, Jagose discourages a restorative impulse to reimpose the integrity of the lesbian figure (a “reparative project of constructing lesbian history”), contending that this does not offer a solution of lesbian representation but amounts to a tautological endeavour. Doan in *Disturbing Practices* (2013) identifies differing modes of historical writing (ancestral genealogy versus queer genealogy). For Doan, ancestral genealogy is based on “its confidence in – and political commitment to – the possibility of finding family resemblances to (dissimilarities from) a largely stable modern homosexual” (58). Queer genealogy, as Doan remarks, “ultimately dismisses [ancestral efforts] as theoretically naïve, untenable, and even mired in transhistorical ‘nostalgia’” (59). The two methodological strategies of restorative and performative history merge in Waters’s treatment of historical fiction. The combination of these strategies in *Affinity* also needs to be read as a response to tensions between lesbian studies and queer theory, which emerged during the 1990s when the novel was written. Queer theory encouraged anti-normativity, anti-binarism and the unsettling of

identity categories, which differed fundamentally from the more essentialist paradigms commonly found in lesbian and gay studies.⁶⁸

In *Affinity*, Waters navigates these debates by using the historical novel genre to yoke together the real and the imaginary. On the one hand, nineteenth-century spiritualist discourse is employed to gain access to the past, enabling her to restore the “lesbian” who was not present in official histories. On the other hand, the Victorian past Waters returns to does not provide fixed sexual identities. Waters reimagines various flexible forms of queer desire and relationality through her engagement with spiritualist practices. Waters attends to Victorian spiritualist discourses and examines non-normative genders and sexualities that resist being read according to fixed homosexual-heterosexual binaries.

Historically, spiritualism often provided expression for marginal social groups. The spiritualist movement was female-dominated, as women played a vital role in the spiritualist movement as believers or professional mediums. Some spiritualist women were also part of the marginalised social group in Victorian England in terms of class. Spiritualism was most popular among women and the working classes in the North of England, and its practices gave them more access to power and validation. The nineteenth-century world of spiritualism emerged contemporaneously with the rising issues of sexual inequality and women's rights. While spiritualism was shaped by the dominant Victorian gender and sexuality ideologies such as female passivity, it also challenged them, as I will discuss in more detail in the following section. According to Sarah Willburn, through highly

⁶⁸ See, for example, Annamarie Jagose's *Queer theory: An introduction* (1996).

sexualised membership in a mystical, female-dominated community, women were bestowed newfound freedom – the freedom that challenges worldly authority (86). Spiritualist communities offered freedom unavailable to Victorian women in most other situations.

Waters's portrayal of spiritualism was influenced by historical figures of nineteenth-century spiritualism. In Alex Owen's research, there were other historical accounts of erotic interactions via spiritualism, such as Florence Marryat and Florence Cook's materialised spirit (Katie King) and Nellie Theobold's relationship with her family's cook. In the interaction between Selina and the maid, Ruth Vigers, Waters makes the erotic evident (Wallace 169). By drawing on historical accounts of spiritualists, Waters brings the past to light and asserts the existence of queer women during that time. The historically grounded novel recreates a realistic Victorian era by paying attention to historical detail and the specificity of place and culture of the nineteenth century.

Carter's and Waters's works are often grouped together in the same category of Neo-Victorian fiction; however, aside from some of their similar subject matter, Carter and Waters approach the Victorian era in distinct ways. Contrary to Carter's carnivalesque, playful text with its foregrounded fantastic fictionality, Waters employs an "authenticating strategy" in engaging with the Victorian past. Some critics opt to compare their strategies and modalities to recreate the Victorian past. For example, Marie-Luise Kohlke states, "[i]f in *Nights at the Circus* history begins to resemble fiction, then in *Affinity* fiction comes to resemble history" (155). The faux-Victorian novel "silently imitates: it never draws attention to its status as 'fake'. Rather, it anchors the text in the Victorian present rather than

establishing distance and difference” (Mitchell, “Making It Seem Like It’s Authentic” 118). The faux-Victorian style of Waters’s novel is achieved by its inclusion of factual and historical information.

Waters employs the authenticating approach but, at the same time, she is aware of the illusionary nature of recreating the past: “to write from a perspective that felt like it belonged to my characters, rather than something of my own. I know it’s an illusion, obviously, but I think the whole point of writing a historical novel is to make the leap into a slightly different mentality and a different cultural landscape” (Dennis 48). Waters does not simply try to restore female homosexuality in the past. Carroll’s reading of *Affinity* views Waters’ novel as a critique of recuperative history. As she remarks, *Affinity* “refuses to satisfy the desire of the contemporary readers for the retrospective materialisation into late Victorian existence of lesbian identity” (*Rereading Heterosexuality* 25). Waters’s utilisation of the historical novel genre creates a platform for the muted voices of women who love women and for the introduction of other forms of queer indeterminate desires into the past. In doing so, the historical novel makes use of – and also re-imagines and extends – the Victorian past.

While Waters reproduces the sexual/cultural landscape of the Victorian era, the past is reimagined from her point of view. As previously mentioned, Waters said in her interview that she wrote *Affinity* with characters who for the most part did not have any lesbian models, and this statement implies the re-invention of the lesbian. Waters mobilises the instability of Victorian sexual discourse by looking back to nineteenth-century spiritualism to appropriate some aspects of the sexual past and reimagine the marginal voice in her narrative. Spiritualism embraces

ambivalence and transgression in many ways and thus was one of the most likely arenas in which female homosexuality could have been voiced. In Waters's essay, "Ghosting the Interface", she describes the queer and same-sex relationships during spiritualist practices, listing various historical figures:

As we have seen, this transgression of sexual and gender boundaries is basic to the spiritualist project, as it has become central to the cyberist one; and it is perhaps not surprising that many supernatural encounters – from the spiritualist intimacies of Eva Carriere and Juliette Bisson, of D. D. Home and Lord Adare, to Charlotte Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain's strange adventure with Marie Antoinette in 1901, Mary Gordon's similar experience with the Ladies of Llangollen in the 1930s and the post-mortem communings of Edith Somerville and 'Martin Ros', of Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, and Mabel Batten – have, like many virtual relationships, been homoerotic. (432)

It is true, as Waters states in the interview, that there was no lesbian subculture or community for her characters to draw on in this novel. However, spiritualist communities help her to reimagine the lost history of queer women. Waters reimagines the possibilities that women who loved women, at that time, could find female same-sex desire available in spiritualism's beliefs and rituals.

Moreover, Waters reimagines the dark circle as a space in which many layers of queer desire are at work in spiritualist activities. The séances emerge as a transgressive space of heterosexual boundaries or, more specifically, they exist as spaces in-between heteronormative behaviour and its unnamed other (Mitchell 130). Activities in the spiritualist circle undermined conventional gender and sexual

boundaries in Victorian culture. In Julian Holloway's view, the semi-light or darkened room of the séance was one of the "liminal spaces wherein sensuous impulses could flourish and where normative codifications of identity and practice could be suspended" (183). In a similar vein, Wolfreys argues, the temporary suspension of normative identities was achieved through the forces that were performed and realised in this space [of séance] (*Victorian Hauntings* 185). This site is the scene of the breach of social norms as well as the transgression of existing societal and cultural discourses. In Waters's work, spiritualism is utilised to portray a broad, indeterminate range of queerness beyond the modern categorisation of "lesbian" identity.

The next section will explore non-sequential queerness in Waters's depiction of spiritualist rituals. As Jagose encourages scholars to focus on sequence instead of recuperative history and identifying lesbianism in the past, I argue that focusing on sequence in relation to Waters's engagement with queer indeterminacy and the project of lesbian history writing is useful. The opening pages of *Affinity* suggest the constructed nature of historiography and the significance of sequence in history writing. In the first pages of Margaret's journal, she recalls what her father, a historian scholar, told her: "Pa used to say that any piece of history might be made into a tale: it was only a question of deciding where the tale began, and where it ended" (7). The novel's opening scene suggests the constructed nature of history; history is the outcome of a manipulated and manufactured writing process. If we revisit Waters's interview with Abigail Dennis, we can see in one part of the interview that she asserts a sense of provisionality in history:

And if you take a longer view, and just remind people that these things are always in process, they're not fixed, and gender's never fixed, and how we feel about women changes all the time, and how we feel about sex and sexuality and class, these things change all the time [. . .] it's a fundamental thing of mine that history is a process, and in a sense a good historical novel is a celebration of that. (48)

In *Affinity*, the novel's opening scene also encapsulates Waters's attitude regarding history being a process, or a constructed narrative.

The notion of sequence is very crucial in the selective process of history writing. As Margaret's father asserts, it is "a question of deciding where the tale began, and where it ended" (7). The quoted passage of Pa's statement indicates the importance of linear sequence in history writing. As Carroll notes, the scene shows that "the essence of narrative is attached to its linear form" (*Rereading Heterosexuality* 33). Margaret's father continues, "That, he said, was all his skill. And perhaps, after all, the histories he dealt with were rather easy to sift like that, to divide up and classify – the great lives, the great works, each of them neat and gleaming and complete, like metal letters in a box of type" (7). This kind of sequential, organised history that her father wrote differs from the history of female queerness that Waters presents; it is placed within a taxonomised, ordered system, whereas Waters's work is slippery and difficult to categorise or organise according to a precise linear sequence of origin and development. The phrase "histories he dealt with" refers to public history. What about the history of those on the periphery, those who could not have their voices heard, such as women who loved other women, like Margaret and Selina? Their histories are not selected in the narrative

of public history and, as a result, they are not presented in official mainstream history. Margaret's and Selina's personal writing counters such a mainstream history; their history is not linear or sequential. The story takes the form of discontinuous narration.

Gothic writing sought to formally disrupt conventional narrative structure while also serving a more overarching thematic goal of questioning how narration typically follows patterns of temporality. The narration switches back and forth between two points of time from the two protagonists' points of view. The history of female homosexuality is complicated and not easily written as a single, coherent narrative. Waters focuses on the hidden stories but presents them as non-sequential narrative. In their journal, the women manipulate the narrative sequence, choosing where to begin and where to end their story in order to document their female same-sex love and desire. In Waters's PhD thesis, she noted that "the plundering and selective rewriting of historical narrative is something at which lesbians and gays have always been particularly adept" (249). Thus, "[u]tilised for a specifically gay agenda, historiographic metafictional techniques expose the provisionality of (historical) representation" (249).

Building on Jagose's observation, the chapter focuses on the particular temporal incoherences that govern various forms of desires. In *Affinity*, Waters constructs a history of female sexuality and lesbianism by appropriating elements of Victorian spiritualism, applying generic conventions and tinkering with narrative strategies. By doing these, Waters creates a framework in which history can be remembered, rewritten and reinvented. They serve as creative avenues for Waters to introduce female same-sex sexuality and other forms of queerness into the past.

Queer[ing] Sequence in Spiritualist Space

I propose that spiritualism, both its belief and its practice, can function as a non-linear space-time that breaks the conventional pattern of chronological events. Mitchell's thesis on the use of wartime to disrupt normative life schedules is helpful for this discussion. When people were thrown into extreme circumstances, such as war, their ordinary life paths were temporarily put on hold. Highlighting the utilisation of the historical setting of wartime London, Mitchell examines the way that the atemporal ennui during a war challenges the view of lesbianism as backwardness. The temporal oddness of wartime takes the queer characters in *The Night Watch* out of the regulative sequence of birth, marriage, and death. Citing Jagose and Freeman, Mitchell argues that the protagonist's ghostliness places her outside the sequence (86). The spiritualist practices operate in a similar way to wartime. The séance provides a queer period that facilitates the disruption of sexual sequence in its interplay between ideologies and rituals. Each spiritualist participant, whether a medium or a sitter, participates in a queer temporal moment, a moment out of the familiar timeline of the human world. Applying Jagose's sequence focus to a book like *Affinity* is intriguing because its plot revolves around spiritualism, a subject that is automatically related to spectrality and the visual field. However, employing Jagose's *Inconsequence* helps to shift the focus from Terry Castle's much-studied argument on spectrality and lesbian representation, the dominant strand in lesbian studies, to the politics of sequence. Jagose explicates the ways in which sequence is ideologically charged, and "regulatory technologies of sequence" (xiv) enforce a linear, chronological progression that secures heterosexuality.

The novel contains the concept of a normative sexual sequence that aligns the evolutionary order with heterosexual reproductive futurity. Margaret's spinster status places her at odds with heteronormative time, denying her the brighter future promised by heterosexual temporality. She regards her time as suspended and does not embrace the movement of going forward toward marriage and childbearing. Carroll's "Becoming My Own Ghost" provides an insightful reading of a spinster in relation to reproductive logic. Spinsters were seen by society as having developmentally stalled. Margaret laments, "women are *bred* to do more of the same – that is their function. It is only ladies like me that throw the system out, make it stagger" (209). Measuring her married sister's progress through a domestic-familial life, Margaret compares their lives: She "has *evolved*. She has moved on. And I am left, more firmly *unevolved* than ever" (208). Instead of going straight toward marriage, Margaret turns sideways by having romantic relationships with women (Helen and Selina). Without following the path of marriage to achieve a maternal role, Margaret occupies a position outside the accepted norms of reproductive sexuality. In her reading of Margaret, Carroll considers Margaret as a "spectre of discontinuity" within the "heterosexual matrix"; Margaret manifests a kind of "blindspot" which is the effect of the conflation of heterosexuality with reproductive sexuality (a conflation arguably mimicked by the equation of spinster and lesbian). Carroll cites Judith Roof to support her argument: "there are really only two sexualities: reproductive sexuality, which is associated with a difference and becomes metaphorically heterosexual, and non-reproductive sexuality associated with sameness, which becomes metaphorically homosexual" (39).

During the Victorian era, women were expected to be married and have children by a certain age. Spinsterhood's non-reproductive nature was considered a social threat and associated with degeneration discourse. Jeannette King explains in "Degeneration and Sexual Anarchy" that "the second category of 'New Woman' chose her single life in preference to marriage, and therefore constituted an even greater threat to society. She was also likely to contribute to degeneration by her 'unhealthy' tendency to feed her brain, with inevitable consequences for both her reproductive system and her nerves". She emphasises, "[w]hether wilfully or not, all these women who deviated from the natural laws which dictated that maternity was woman's destiny constituted a danger to the health of society" (131).

Indeed, there were concerns over the increasing number of spinsters in society at that time. For instance, W. R. Greg's provocative article "Why are Women Redundant?" (1862) notoriously addressed the issue, calling the situation "quite abnormal" and "indicative of an unwholesome social state" (436).⁶⁹ Over the course of the following three decades, unmarried women were re-categorised in many forms. As Yopie Prins points out, "a working woman, a suffragette, a single woman living outside the sphere of the family, a woman living with other women, a celibate woman, a mannish woman, a sexually autonomous woman, an 'odd'

⁶⁹ Greg reasoned that a large number of women have to earn their own livings in "artificial" and "abnormal" existences. His appeal to Nature as the source of wisdom can be seen in his use of the language of illness and unnaturalness, and this relates to the more general Woman's question. In 1862, Francis Power Cobb's feminist writing "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" in *Fraser's Magazine* countered Greg's article. Her writing encouraged greater independence for unmarried women, addressing topics such as women's education and employment. Susan Hamilton notes that Cobbe's idea of "an economically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally productive single woman" counterpoints Greg's sexist claim (26).

woman not to be paired with a man” (“Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters” 47). Spinsterhood was thus linked to women with queer sexuality. In 1891, Eliza Lynn Linton wrote “The Wild Women as Social Insurgents”, in which she criticised the rise in spinsterhood and viewed it as “an odd social phenomenon” producing “other queer inversions” (599).

Like Margaret, Selina, as a spirit medium, does not fit within traditional modes of femininity based on the reproductive heterosexual timeline. Spiritualism allows women to step outside of straight time, whether through liberal belief or through participating in transgressive rituals. In a general spiritualist belief, the medium is not placed in the present and cannot move to the next world in the sequential timeline. Spiritualist beliefs provided a different life narrative. Selina’s journal tells the story of her life as a spiritualist medium prior to her imprisonment at Milbank and, in one account, she mentions the medium’s place: “[t]he spirit-medium’s proper home is neither this world nor the next, but that vague & debatable land which lies between them” (73). Mediums remained in the liminal terrain where categories of time became nebulous. They pushed the limits of temporalities, separating two worlds.

Moreover, the fundamental tenets and practices of spiritualism that encourage “spiritual affinity” are portrayed as being incompatible with the progression toward reproductive futurity. Spiritualism promotes a different kind of relationship outside heterosexual marriage. As seen in *Affinity*, Selina tells Margaret about the spiritual notion of affinity between souls, which has no “‘boundary’ of sex” (210). Spiritual affinity exceeds beyond gendered bodies and offers a chance for same-sex love. Selina asks Margaret “Did you think there is

only the kind of love your sister knows of her husband?" (210). When Selina says to Margaret, "You were seeking me, your own affinity," she is using the term "affinity" as a metaphor for same-sex desire (275). Waters has suggested in an interview that nineteenth-century spiritualism was "[a] fantastically alternative movement, attracting people who had slightly different political, cultural takes on life. Particularly, the emphasis on the spirit over the body offered gay members a different discourse of gender and sexuality" (Parker 10). In terms of spiritualism, "freedom from the physical body was linked inextricably to freedom of agency in a wider sense" (Bann 668). Given its liberating beliefs, spiritualism arguably provided an alternative for people with different sexual preferences. The idea of spiritual affinity, shown in the novel's title, is linked to free love, the belief that an attraction is based not on such social arrangements as marriage but on a deep, spiritual level. Hugh Urban points out that spiritual affinity superseded the marital bond and provided an escape from the brutality and dullness of marriage (62).

In addition to its doctrines, on a micro level, the rituals that had to be undertaken by spiritualists serve as another vehicle through which Waters could play with the politics of sexual sequence. A ritual, in general, is a "stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actor's goals and interest" (Turner 110). Sequence is usually bound with chronological linearity and evokes the typical image of heteronormative straight time. However, within this unique space of the séance, chronology does not necessarily accommodate heterosexuality. The spiritualist ritual is constructed via a sequence of activities not accompanied by heteronormativity. I will explore

Waters's portrayal of spiritualist practices, assuming that the spiritualist practices are queer situations in which temporal anomalies, such as suspense and delay, prevail and challenge the normative ideologically-charged sequence. Accordingly, these forms of queer time facilitate the emergence of queer erotic relations and female homoerotic desire in the spiritualist space.

Women who participated in spiritualism had access to new forms of experience and power that were not available to them in regular Victorian life. Among the various activities contained within the ritual, some acts allowed non-normative desires to emerge. Queer transgressive intimacy was possible during a test condition, a procedure to confirm the veracity of the full-form materialisation. Historically, mediums in the nineteenth century were sometimes secured in a cabinet during full-form spirit materialisation in order to convince spiritual sceptics that the medium, unable to leave the cabinet, could not pretend to be the spirit. The tests could involve tying, chaining or strapping the medium's body to restrict any movement (Tromp 89-90). This process appears more than once in *Affinity*. Selina recounts the incident in which Peter Quick, her boisterous spirit guide, demands bondage as the stipulation of materialisation to prove to doubtful sitters: "it will make a test. You must open the drawer in the table & bring me what you find there & the voice says 'There are ropes here' & Peter said 'Yes bring them to me'. Then he bound me to the seat [. . .] He tied me at the wrists & at the ankles & he put a band across my eyes" (231). Peter states the necessity of testing and commands Selina: "You must do this now at each dark circle. If you do not do this, I will not come" (232).

While spirit materialisation is a ritualised sequential ordering of events, female homoerotic desire is allowed to be part of that very order. Sometimes, instead of Peter, a lady sitter is chosen from the spirit circle to participate in the test and confirm that the medium's binding is sufficiently secure. Despite the mingling of male and female sitters in the circle, the participant in this test condition process is female. As Margaret is told, Selina "never had a gentleman do it; it was always a lady that tightened the ropes – always a lady that took her and searched her, and always a lady that tied her [. . .]" (152). Due to social codes of decency, male sitters were not chosen to do this test as it involved "examining" the female medium's body. Thus, the fear of transgression of social codes allows female-female eroticism (Tromp 99). This act also enables class transgression; a medium is removed from her class status – at least temporarily – during the ritual. The test condition allowed erotic interactions between a working-class female medium and an upper-class female participant.

Waters utilises historical accounts of test conditions as source materials and re-imagines them as discursive practices wherein female homosocial and homoerotic bonding is permitted. Women could engage with the passive female body in an erotic way. Another scene shows a detailed description of this sexual ritual step, when a lady Margaret meets at the library recounts her experience as a witness of this process:

She said that Selina's wrists and ankles would be bound to her chair, and the knots then sealed with wax; or else, her arms would be folded behind her, and her sleeves sewn to her gown. A band of silk would be placed across her eyes and another put over her mouth, and sometimes a length of cotton might

be threaded through the hole in her ear and fixed to the floor outside the curtain –more usually, though, she would have them put a ‘little velvet collar’ about her throat, and a rope would be attached to the buckle of that and *held by a lady* that was seated in the circle. (153; my emphasis)

The female homoerotic implication of the scene is even more evident when looking at the reactions of both Margaret and the lady. Hearing about this part of the ritual, Margaret exclaims, “*untie her?*” The italic font implies that Margaret realises the erotic implication of tying the medium. The lady is also embarrassed, and “her cheeks grew flushed” hinting at her realisation of the sexual nature of tying the medium (152).

The description of a bound woman in the ritual might also evoke the imagery of sexual practices involving bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism (BDSM), for some contemporary readers. The present influences the representation of the past, while the past also haunts the present and affects it. Waters’s anachronistic engagement with the Victorian erotic is inevitably mixed with the infusion of present-day sexualities. While Waters appears to feature this Victorian theme, a contemporary perspective emerges, as readers might also be aware of the current uses of the imagery in the BDSM context, especially as they have already comprehended the sexual tension implicit in the test condition. The tension between restorative authenticity and inventive plausibility in Waters’s novel relates to the notion of presentism, or the idea that the work depicts an ideology characteristic of the present (Hintz and Tribunella 289). Similar to the repetitive use of the term “queer” that evokes its meaning as homosexual, the bondage imagery in the materialisation scene might have a similar effect, intentionally or not. For

example, the term “queer” constantly appears throughout the novel and takes on the modern connotation of homosexuality. In her review of Waters’ recent novel, *The Little Stranger* (2009), Lucie Armitt points out that by playing around with the word “queer”, Waters conjures up the shadow presence of the lesbian (164). For *Affinity*, it appears that the semantic overlap of the word “queer” has been utilised as a tool to articulate dissident sexualities. The repetition of the term “queer” in the novel illustrates the muddy borders between continuity and alterity and the queer time of the double nature in the Neo-Victorian genre’s belated return.

Waters knowingly reaches back to a moment in which her characters have no knowledge about modern identity categories, but she is also writing for an audience that has contemporary sexual knowledge. The erotic connotation of the test condition between women is also endorsed by a subtle evocation of the sadomasochism aesthetic. The spiritualist ritual of the test condition, as presented in the novel, entails both similarities and differences between the nineteenth-century and the late twentieth-century concepts of sadomasochism. The pain and the binding suggest a continuum of the concept. The bondage involves a physical infliction of pain, which has been a typical aspect of sadomasochism. After a test condition in the dark circle, it is revealed that the ropes have chafed Selina’s wrists and ankles, making them bleed (232). We can see erotic power dynamics resembling dominance and submission in the test condition. Looking back to the nineteenth century, the concept of sadomasochism saturated Victorian literary culture. Nineteenth-century literature containing S/M themes grew increasingly popular (Sisson 14). The terms “sadism” and “masochism” were popularised by Krafft-Ebing in an 1890 edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. “Sadism” was derived

from the name of the eighteenth-century French aristocrat and writer Marquis de Sade, while “masochism” was taken from the nineteenth-century Austrian author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, although these terms were already in limited use before they were redefined to signify psychopathologies in Krafft-Ebing’s work.⁷⁰ However, female masochism was deemed by Krafft-Ebing as common, due to the allegedly submissive nature of women, while male masochism was considered a pathological degeneration of sexual desire. In this respect, Waters’s portrayal of sadomasochism between women differs from this sexological thought but is more common in the contemporary context. In contemporary BDSM sexual practice, there is a variety of participants, including lesbians. In BDSM communities, bondage refers to a sexual practice that involves restraining or binding one partner with items such as a rope or handcuffs.

Waters also makes use of this erotic bondage imagery to convey Margaret’s queer identification with Selina. The sexual S/M aesthetics appears in Margaret’s fantasy. When Selina is confined to the “darks”, Margaret climbs into her own closet. There she seems to merge with Selina in a scene which collapses the dark cell into the spirit-medium’s cabinet: “I was with her, and close to her, so close – what did she say once? *closer than wax*. I felt the cell about me, the jacket upon me – And yet, I seemed to feel my eyes bound, too, with bands of silk. And at my throat there was a velvet collar” (257). It is noticeable that the scene description also combines non-sequential queer temporality and spiritualist practices. The past

⁷⁰ Sade’s literary works are notorious for their depictions of a libertine sexuality and sexual cruelty. The word “masochism” derived from Sacher-Masoch, the writer of *Venus in Furs*, a novella published in 1870. Krafft-Ebing did not invent the term, but appropriated it from a literary text.

and present merge into one another to form an imaginary sensual future in a Gothic manner, surrounded by darkness. This quotation exemplifies the transformative potential in a liminal space such as the cabinet. This scenario demonstrates the way that the two women were figuratively tied together in hazy, contradictory temporalities. They also share similarities in their imprisonment. Margaret is in her house, the place representing a space of confinement. She fantasises about being in the cell, which is the space where she bonds with Selina, and then to the séance scene, where she seems to exchange places with Selina in the testing condition ritual.

In addition to dismantling temporal sequence, the erotic bondage imagery is used in the spiritualist ritual scene to highlight the queer excess beyond sexual binarism in the spiritualist space. The act of the test condition allows for an unconventional queer sexual scenario, with erotic overindulgence taking place at the same time. During the practice, that which is supposed to be heterosexuality coincides with homoeroticism. Peter, a spirit which assumes a “male” form, might be the one who binds the medium, but a female sitter would also be asked to monitor and search Selina’s body. For instance, after Peter binds Selina’s wrists and ankles, a lady sitter called Miss d’Esterre is brought to check the fastening. He commands Miss d’Esterre, “put your hand upon her [Selina] & tell me those bonds are tight. Take off your glove. I heard her glove drawn off & then her fingers came upon me, with Peter’s fingers pressing them & making them hot” (232). The three of them engage in erotically-charged gestures; the motif of touch highlights their erotic relationships. Sexual titillation ensues from such an act. The test conditions

articulate a queer situation in which socially transgressive sexual relations with women can emerge and coincide with a queer version of heterosexuality.

Moreover, this sensual scene could be read in the light of sadomasochism dynamics to highlight the temporary moment of queer pleasure. Foucault sees sadomasochism as “a strategic game, a political practice of queer pleasure that functions to denaturalise sexuality” (384). David Halperin explains that the S/M practice is not fixated on genitals and does not reaffirm sexual categorisations based on sexual object choices (*Saint Foucault* 95). Such a practice emphasises other dimensions of eroticism that are not genital-based; rather, S/M practices focus on “certain acts, certain zones or sensations” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 8). In this scene, it suggests a sexual practice of pleasure and not an expression of innate essence of identity.

The private meeting between Peter, Selina and another female sitter is even more sexual and involves another form of queer temporal sequence through the concept of “spirit matter development”. Having brought Peter to help “develop” the sitter, Selina convinces Miss Isherwood to attend the practice, claiming that “You are like me, Miss Isherwood & don’t know it! You have power” and “You are so full of spirit-matter it is seeping from you” (260). Selina further asserts that she needs “*development*” (260). The term refers to the spiritualist power to grow. The development scene is also a euphemism for their homoerotic acts, as the so-called practice leads to a sexually intimate session between the three. The lady herself admits, “I think I have a nature that is very like hers, or could be made like it” (261). The similarity shared by both women refers to the potential to be a medium, but it also suggests Miss Isherwood’s possible lesbian nature. More broadly, the

development of spirit matter harks back to a larger narrative of life schedule. The connotation of the activity is already signalled in Peter's question before the beginning of the meeting. When Peter came out of the cabinet, he asked, "Why have you brought me at this queer time?" (261). This does not only signify an odd or late hour; it has another, more profound meaning. It is a queer time because the woman is about to participate in an activity that will make her deviate from the typical course of her life path.

As shown in the above-quoted scene, the temporal significance of this erotic activity is its emphasis on sensuality and the present moment. The practice consists of the sitter's physical contact with the spirit and the medium. The same dynamics of power in which Peter is a commander and Selina is a receiver still operate. Peter's actions imply sexual dominance; the fact that Peter exerts power over Selina and that Selina is submissive to Peter's command implies the S/M dynamics. Peter commands Miss Isherwood to tell Selina to kiss her and to kiss Peter, and to make Selina take off her gown. Next, he commands her to put her hand upon Selina: "That is good, but you are not hot enough for development to happen, you must let my medium make you hotter. You must take off your gown now & you must grasp Miss Dawes' 'He put his arms around her about her & I felt his hands on me, now we had her hard between us" (262). The description of a burning touch is vivid and highlights erotic sensations. Erotic bodily pleasure is thereby derived not through the possibility of sexual consummation in marriage but through seduction and transient intimacy. These three participants are not defined by any sexual identity; they merely enjoy erotic pleasure. Their activity rejects the straight time of courtship, as well as the heteronormative romance plot, and thus

resists the normative reproductive time. Their supposedly spiritualist practice encourages immediate erotic satisfaction, as opposed to the delayed gratification found in marriage. Both Selina and Miss Isherwood are more preoccupied with the sensations of extreme pleasure than with the biological sex or gendered performance of the bodies involved in the situation. This strange pleasure, derived from the excessively sensuous and pleasurable nature of the practice, could be interpreted as a sterile form of pleasure. It resonates with Edelman's non-generative sexual enjoyment under the imperative of reproductive futurism.

Next, I will focus on Selina's erotic relationship with Peter in particular. Regardless of the seemingly heterosexual framework, the erotic relationship between a female medium and a spirit that manifests itself in the form of a male does not comply with heteronormative sequential logic. Within the vexing space of séance, Selina's interaction with the "male" spirit is unorthodox in many senses and can be understood as a queer take on heterosexuality (as shown in part above). Carroll's insightful work, *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction*, provides a useful argument. She writes, "[h]eterosexuality as an institution continues to have immense normative power; while this power impacts most explicitly on non-heterosexual identities it also extends to heterosexual identities which do not conform to familial, marital or reproductive norms" (1). Crossing the temporal boundaries separating the living from the dead, spiritualist experiences already defy ordinary temporal rules. The spirit represents the past haunting the present and does not move forward chronologically. The erotic bond between them does not identify with a future-oriented temporality and does not lead to fulfilment or familial lineage. Such a

relationship thus undercuts the bastion of heteronormativity that promotes lineage and reproduction. As a ghost, Peter could not contribute to reproduction. When Peter flirts with the women who join the séances, they often laugh as “they think that kisses from Peter Quick *don't count*” (emphasis mine 218). Another instance is when Selina describes the way that the spirit interacts with her: “a spirit sometimes came to her – came and put its lips to hers, then melted away before the kiss was done, and left her, with the very darkness darker than before?” (49). Similarly, his relationship with Selina is marked by the notions of futility and incompleteness. Selina and Peter’s queer erotic relationship during spirit materialisations arguably foregrounds non-normative modes of experiences characterised by a non-reproductive, incomplete, suspended desire.

The spirit-medium relationship is also analogous to Halberstam’s definition of a departure from the heterosexual timeline: “some potential for a difference in a form that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 70). The erotic connection between Selina and Peter embodies queerness, suggesting that not all heterosexual relationships are complicit in heteronormativity. Berlant and Warner observe that “contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative” (548). The realisation that forms of heterosexual desire and practice might conflict with heteronormativity “starts to tease apart the potentially reductive conflation of heterosexual identity with heterosexual power” (Carroll 8).

Another aspect of the spirit-medium bond that is queering heterosexuality and sequence is the passive mediumistic state. It is possible to read Selina's "passivity" as containing the potential to halt sequential time. Waters utilises the figure of the medium to explore the generative politics of queer failure as a way to delay heteronormative sexual sequence. The life of a spiritualist medium can present an opportunity because – to borrow Halberstam's statement in *The Queer Art of Failure*: "the maps of desire that render the subject incoherent, disorganised and passive provide a better escape route [for sexual minorities and queer subjectivities] than those that lead inexorably to fulfilment, recognition and achievement" (179). Arguably, this is true in the context of spiritualist mediumship. Instead of an active engagement with the time of lineage, Selina embraces temporal undoing in the act of spirit mediumship, an alternative form of resistance grounded in female passivity, unbecoming and unbeing. Thus, Selina is passive in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Being bound and blindfolded during some events of materialisation, she adopts a passive posture. Applying Halberstam's concept of queer negativity will shed light on Waters's portrayal of queer time and passivity in spiritualist practices. As Halberstam has pointed out, passivity is not necessarily antithetical to feminism and queer theory, and failure may undo narratives of hetero-success and progress. Selina's mediumship reflects Halberstam's idea that "under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2). The figure of the spiritualist medium creates alternate modes of identity and queer becoming for her. The practice of spiritualist mediumship and the way in which it constructs the

passage of time are distinctive. It is the (un)becoming process wherein a passive medium loses herself and evolves into something different from herself for a brief moment.

According to Halberstam, “subjects who cannot speak, who refuse to speak; subjects who unravel, who refuse to cohere; subjects who refuse ‘being’ where being has already been defined in terms of a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject” (“Unbecoming” 175). The medium’s subjectivity is congruous with Halberstam’s line of thought. Selina describes the moment of spirit mediumship: “What was it like when he came to you?’ ‘It was like losing herself, like having her own self pulled from her, as if could be a gown, or gloves, or stockings [. . .]” (166). She describes her relationship with Peter as “terrible” but at the same time “marvellous” (166). Losing oneself in mediumship is aligned with the idea of ‘undoing and unbecoming’. During the spiritualist practices, she rejects being a woman while turning herself into an instrument for the spirit. Her absent state of mind is close to self-annihilation.

Considering the medium as a masochistic-like subject might cement her state of unbecoming and the incoherency of self. The loss of self in ecstatic states in contemporary BDSM sexual practice could be seen as connected to spiritual exercise. Using social-psychology theories, Roy Baumeister interprets sexual masochism as an escape for the self. Masochism is seen as a form of self-forgetting, an escape route to “get rid of the burden of the modern ‘self’ through an escape from identity into the body” (Beckmann 43). The masochism in mediumship is more complicated than in normal situations, as it is not a simple escape through bodily sensation. In mediumship, there is a loss of the current self, but the medium

does not escape into her own body; the mediumistic subject exists in a liminal state of unconsciousness and her body is intended to operate as a vessel for another subjectivity. The performing medium cannot be considered a stable or independent subject. The medium and the spirit are inextricably linked to one another, constituting a single entity. Existing as a fragmentary kind of subjectivity, the figure of the spirit medium raises problems regarding agency. The medium subject is queer in the sense of its ambiguous agency and dependence/interdependence dynamics.

A state of surrender is required from the medium. For example, to let a spirit avail itself on her life force so it can materialise, Selina “must give her spirit-matter up, for him to use, and it was painful to her; and I think in his eagerness, he was rough with her” (151). This scene indicates “ectoplasm”, the substance or spiritual energy that a medium exudes, used to describe the process through which spiritual beings manifest. The process consists of pain and submission. Furthermore, Selina’s willingness to be bound also suggests the psychology of masochism: “Miss Dawes would have it. I think we should never have minded had she been kept quiet at her liberty – or, perhaps with a simple ribbon about her waist, to fix her chair. But, she said it was her task to show proofs to the faithful and the doubting both alike, and would have herself perfectly tied at the start of each showing” (152). Selina’s submissiveness raises questions about complicity, and a counterintuitive form of queer resistance. The submissive nature of female mediums can be located within Halberstam’s “shadow feminism” – feminist resistance taking the form of not becoming nor being a woman, as stipulated by society (*The Queer Art of Failure* 124). During this ritual time, Selina is in a passive

state. Within spiritualist contexts, the adoption of “passivity”, which was a “feminine” quality imposed by the gender politics of her time, could paradoxically render Selina as “unbecoming”. Also paradoxically, the societal preconception of the “feminine” trait plays a crucial role in empowering Selina.

Due to assumptions about intrinsic feminine passivity in mind, body and personality, women made ideal mediums in the Victorian culture. Shaped by Victorian ideology, the allegedly delicate nature of women supported their spiritualist receptivity, enabling them to serve as passive instruments. Male Victorian scientists linked emotional sensitivity to delicate female nervous systems. Jill Galvan explains that it was believed that the medium is “well attuned to the subtle cues, sometimes described as vibrations, by which the spirits expressed themselves” (30). She elaborates that the perceptive responses involved fine nerves, which many Victorian people believed characterised female constitutions. Therefore, they believed that “successful occult communication – spiritualistic as well as mesmeric/hypnotic and telepathic – resided in the idiosyncrasies of female neural biology” (30). The process relegates Selina to a position of seeming passivity; however, a female medium could translate society’s constraining narratives placed around the ideal of femininity into power.

The remarkable element of spiritualist mediumship is negotiating power “within” the restrictive social norm regarding female passivity. For Owen, female spiritualism encodes the subversion of power from within: spiritualism “was capable of sabotaging the mechanics of power inherent in the Victorian codification of gender difference” (11). Indeed, Owen observes that spiritualist culture, in some circumstances, “could provide a means of circumventing rigid nineteenth-century

class and gender norms. More importantly, it did so without mounting a direct attack on the status quo” (4). Female spirit mediumship is an example of women’s negotiation with their structural powerlessness, as they are given authority in the spirit circle. Selina indirectly benefits from exploiting feminine passivity to achieve the queer state of unbecoming. Through spiritualist mediumship, Selina calls into question Victorian concepts of femininity that confine the female and uses them to turn away from a straight timeline. As a passive subject in the spiritualist ritual, Selina contains subversive feminine qualities that bestow a queer escaping state of the temporal undoing. Without relying on any active, subversive, complete action, she can pause and not contribute to an erotic temporal model promoting reproductive linearity. Selina’s mediumship temporarily opens up an escape route from the linear reproductive experience of heteronormative temporality.

This passive state in the spiritualist moment also invites further thought. Selina’s passivity not only encourages temporal undoing but also creates queer temporality, characterised by delay and suspense. It is possible to rethink Selina’s passivity and consider the medium as a masochistic subject capable of producing a masochistic time, which encourages non-reproductive erotic relations. According to Deleuze, one of the characteristics of masochism is “the waiting, the delay, expressing the way in which anxiety affects sexual tension and inhibits its discharge” (75). Masochism is “temporal, requiring long durations of suspense between painful strikes” (Rivera 151). Therefore, the suspended, incomplete, and delayed temporality of a masochistic subject undercuts heteronormative reproductive time. The logic of masochism temporality, in turn, conditions Peter’s presence and manifestation as stretching out time articulates the

haunting state for Peter. Masochistic time does not rush toward a determined end or prioritised fulfilment. Lynda Hart views S/M as interrupted, suspended and endless. For Hart, “the dynamic [of masochists] is not to arrive at an endpoint, or goal, but rather a means to reproduce the conditions that guarantee the necessity for endless returns” (*Between the Body and the Flesh* 79). The S/M practice works against the logic of heteronormative sex, which ultimately functions to reproduce selves (Sullivan 156). As Halperin explains, bondage is not a means to an end in terms of orgasm and reproduction (*Saint Foucault* 103). By applying Hart’s statement to Selina, lying there restrained, we can see the connection. The delayed gratification correlates with the interaction between Selina and Peter. Although the desire between Peter and Selina is not fulfilled, it endures for the period of the spiritualist practice. The S/M practice and its deferral capacity create a transformative moment in which the haunting desire can remain. Underlying such temporality is a sense of incompleteness, which aligns with the mechanism of Peter’s emergence. The sexually charged tension between Peter and Selina is not fully consummated in the spirit manifestation; the incomplete erotic attraction haunts the séance.

Queering Narrative and Deconstructing Sexual Sequence

In addition to queer temporalities in the séance, queer sequence occurs at the plot level through the theme of deceit and trickery. The changing point occurs near the end of the story. It is revealed that Selina and her secret lover, Ruth, who is also Margaret’s servant, are working together to deceive Margaret. Peter Quick is actually Ruth in disguise. This revelation completely upends the reality that both Margaret and the readers have believed to exist until that moment. In particular,

the deception about Peter is twofold and interrelated: first, Peter is not a spirit and, secondly, not a man. The belated disclosure of spirit entity and sexual identity put the normative logic of the sexual sequence out of order. This belated revelation complicates the gendered and sexual self, especially in terms of the temporal sequence, confusing the first-order heterosexuality in the relationship with Selina. The entire construction of Peter's identity relies on the first-order heterosexual logic. In this way, the novel embraces the cultural tendency to configure lesbianism as secondary. At the same time, however, the text also subverts this so-called secondariness. This confuses the "narrative mechanisms of numerical order or chronological progression" (Jagose ix) and results in the undoing of the claim of natural heterosexual precedence. According to Jagose, heterosexuality has been identified as holding precedence due to its assumed first order. Jagose explicates, "one of the strategic effects of the representation of homosexuality as derivative is to secure the originality and primacy of a heterosexual culture from whose entitlements the former is debarred" (35).

The chapter reads Waters's treatment of sexual sequence through the novel's Neo-Victorian status and Female Gothic literary conventions. The reworking of famous Victorian source texts is significant for understanding the plot twist in *Affinity*. Waters's "ghost", Peter Quick, embraces dual temporalities as the character's origin derives from another fictional character in a Gothic precedent. *Affinity* can be regarded as a type of Neo-Victorian literature that pays respect to the Victorian era and its texts. Waters has said that her novels are, in part, "a celebration of the Victorian novel itself" (Dennis 46). Peter Quick is an intertextual reference to Peter Quint, the well-known ghost in Henry James's *The Turn of the*

Screw (1898). The text, however, achieves much more than merely imitating the historical background of Victorian events. Rather, this novel is in conversation with the preceding Victorian text. Waters exploits the well-known acknowledgement of Peter's erotically dominant character but appropriates it to create a switching point, turning this character into a female human instead. The Neo-Victorian text allows writers and readers to engage with the literary past. In a sense, the novel is a phantom text. Invoking Derrida, Palmer observes that a recast motif from earlier texts in some queer fiction creates a dialogue with the precursor texts, including exploring and revising their ideological perspectives (*The Queer Uncanny* 78). Ann Heilmann considers the intertextual reference to this Victorian Gothic novella as a means by which Waters "adopts Peter Quint's deviant libidinousness in a novel about a hysteric lesbian awakening and in her own twists of the screw subverts contemporary readerly expectations and interpretations" (112).

Waters's text creates a constant negotiation with the reader regarding the originality and the fictionality of the text. Readers of Waters's narrative, seeing the novel from a contemporary standpoint, might be aware of the similarity between the two Peters; Peter Quick and Peter Quint share the same personality. While we can see salacious Peter Quick in Waters's novel, James's Peter Quint is described by Mrs. Grose as "much too free" and "Too free with everyone" (196). Peter Quint has often been critically interpreted as having a promiscuous and aggressive sexuality. He is a seducer tarnishing a respectable lady. By depending on the reader's own reading experience to notice the association, the mere presence of the intertextual character offers a way in which to remember the Victorian past while Waters departs to delve into queer desire between women.

The right timing is imperative for the sequencing of the story as the “truth” about Peter is suspended and the supernatural is explained near the end of the story. In doing so, Waters toys with the notion of sexual sequence. First, she allows the appearance of heterosexuality and then situates the emergence of the truth of Peter’s actual sex at the right time, near the end of the story. Utilising the stylistic characteristics of the Female Gothic helps Waters to produce the queer twist, turning Peter from the dead into a cross-dressing living woman. The deployment of suspense and the use of a rational framework to explain “supernatural” phenomena are characteristics often found in the Female Gothic, and I contend that they are integral to Waters’s queering of order and sequence.

The term “Female Gothic” was coined by Ellen Moers in 1976. Moers defined it as “the work that women have done in the literary mode that since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). However, the definition of this subgenre is contentious, and many believe that it goes beyond having female authors. Female Gothic plots typically concern the theme of female powerlessness and confined woman. Furthermore, the Female Gothic subgenre arguably provides a voice for women as marginalised and oppressed subjects. For Brabon and Genz, it is a “mode par excellence that female writers have employed to give voice to deep-rooted fears about their powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy” (5). A remarkable feature of the Female Gothic also involves aesthetics and forms. Whereas the male Gothic uses multiple points of view to generate dramatic irony, the Female Gothic centralises the female point of view, and generates suspense through its limitation (Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories* 17). Anne Williams made an insightful observation regarding the difference between male and female Gothic

formulae by highlighting their different uses of narrative technique, plot, and assumptions about the supernatural and horror/terror framework. *Affinity* appears to be in line with this in terms of its suspense and a particular narrative technique. The influence governs the thematic and writing relations. *Affinity* reworks some of the Female Gothic conventions, especially the stylistic features of this sub-genre; the Female Gothic tends to emphasise suspense rather than horror and to explain mysterious phenomena (Punter and Byron 279).

The plot twist, secrets and mysteries are fundamental ingredients in Victorian sensation novels, a genre that shares the closest affinities with the Gothic (Cox 41). Kate Mitchell also views sensation fiction as suitable for addressing the topic of female same-sex sexuality in the Victorian Age. Mitchell further proposes that the genres of Victorian Gothic and sensation fiction are female-associated genres and perhaps “the most likely sites where a lesbian tradition could have been voiced or may have been voiced in muted, displaced ways” (118). She does this by utilising the readily recognisable tropes of Gothic and sensation fiction and expanding their field of representation to include representations of female homosexuality (118). She explains that literary styles such as Victorian Gothic and sensation fiction were typically seen as feminine, since both linked with women as readers, writers, and protagonists and are linked with the representation of transgressive women and the depiction of female sexuality.

Suspense and delay are the two factors that determine the unfolding of Peter’s true identity as Ruth. Considering aesthetics and form, terror is one of the most defining characteristics of Female Gothic. The literary trope of unreliable narrators plays a key part in the deception that is perpetrated on the reader

regarding the actual sexual sequence. The story is told from the first-person perspective and shifts between two narrators. The truth is concealed from Margaret within her limited comprehension of the situation. Margaret's words are affected by her mental illness. Margaret's story is heavily influenced by her delusions and the eerie surroundings of the Gothicised prison. Her limited point of view convinces readers that there are supernatural entities. While Margaret is an unreliable narrator, Selina is also untrustworthy in a different way. Selina's diary is a deliberate fabrication to mislead readers about her psychic gift. As a result, we (as readers) initially believe that we know what has happened through these two women's points of view and believe that Peter is male. Peter Quick derives from Margaret's delusion alongside Ruth's pretence. The entire construction of Peter's identity relies on the logic of first-order heterosexuality. In this way, the novel embraces the cultural tendency to configure lesbianism as second in order.

The revelation of Peter's true gender is prolonged to occur late in the narrative. If we consider it plot-wise, the purpose is clearly to generate surprise. The timing of this sequential arrangement also reflects and exposes typical cultural representations whereby heterosexuality comes first. In keeping with the conventional notion of first-order heterosexuality, Waters makes readers believe that Selina's spirit guide is male. Waters frames this deceit within spiritualist contexts. In one scene, Selina tells Margaret about Peter, "He, she, you ought to know that in the spheres there are no differences like that. But this spirit was a gentleman on earth & is now obliged to visit me in that form" (191). Selina claims that while spirits are supposedly sexless, they need to be gendered in the human world. During Peter's first appearance, he tells Selina to call him Peter Quick: "My

spirit-name is *Irresistible*, but my earth-name was Peter Quick. You mortals must call me by my earth-name, since it is as a man that I shall come to you” (193). The spirit manifests as a gendered subject with a masculine appearance such as whiskers and a dominant gesture. The gendering of Peter makes the interactions between Peter and the female medium and other female sitters appear “heterosexual”. It is essential that Peter be assigned a gender before he can have any romantic or sexual encounters with females; this will ensure that heterosexuality is firmly established as coming first. Waters’s decision to make Peter a woman in disguise demonstrates that the eroticism between women in the novel is depicted as second-order. The desire between women cannot be expressed independently but rather depends on heterosexuality as a reference to its existence. Female homosexuality, as Jagose puts it, has been constructed as being unable to be defined in its own terms, always requiring heterosexuality as a reference point (23).

We are only able to recognise Ruth’s existence in retrospection. As Wallace notes, “the clues are there but it is only on a second reading that we can see them” (172). When Ruth used to serve Selina in Mrs Brink’s house, Ruth usually walked around quietly and almost invisibly. For instance, when Selina is in Mrs. Brink’s home, she turns, half-expecting to see the deceased woman, and indeed sees a woman: “But it was only Mrs Brink’s maid Ruth. She had come quietly [. . .] like a real lady’s maid, *like a ghost*” (119; my emphasis). The retrospection also explains Margaret’s uncanny feeling because Peter is always there with her but in a different appearance. That is why, when Margaret sees the picture of Peter’s eyes, she thinks that the stranger’s eyes “seemed familiar to me, as if I might have gazed

at them already – perhaps, in my dreams” (154). The feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity are the core sentiment of the uncanny concept. Secret and belated disclosure have uncanny significance. The female same-sex relationship is something that ought to remain secret and hidden, but it has eventually come to light.

Waters employs a rational approach to provide an explanation for the mysterious occurrences, which results in the discovery that the spirit entity is a hoax and is, in reality, a woman dressed as a man. The narrative technique is called ‘explained supernatural’. Alison Milbank contends that “[i]t evokes a spiritual world through unexplained ghostly vision and sounds, yet provides a natural origin for all the effects. Sometimes the explanation is awkward or belated” (157). The closing pages explain almost everything. Margaret discovers that Selina has lied about leaving the prison with the spirit’s help. Mrs Jelf, a wardress who seeks comfort in spiritualism, was manipulated to help Selina escape. More shockingly, Margaret learns that her servant, Vigers, was Selina’s previous maid and her current lover, and that both have planned for the deception and absconded with Margaret’s money. The flashback in the final scene shows the past event of a secret crime, with Selina and Ruth’s discussion on swindling female spiritualist participants. Accordingly, the explained supernatural technique found in earlier works of the Female Gothic allows Waters to disrupt sequential order and the text’s surface appearances. Waters utilises the Gothic trope of the double to construct Peter as having two identities.

Female Gothic elements are incorporated into the novel’s narrative in the service of explaining the spirit as human and gendered. It is notable that

supernatural elements are handled differently in Female Gothic writing. Critics such as Alison Milbank view the use of the explained supernatural as one element of Female Gothic writing. Ann Radcliffe, a novelist of the Gothic classic, popularised the explained supernatural. By using this technique, the supernatural agency is rejected. Supernatural manifestations such as the suspicion of a ghost, fairy, or other supernatural figures are naturalised and explained as misapprehension (Sandner 91). Waters's treatment of spiritualism attests to this convention. In constructing Peter as a fluid sexual subject, the Female Gothic generic convention is coupled with spiritualism. Waters plays with the doubt surrounding spiritualism. While spiritualism was popular, the phenomenon was heavily countered with scepticism of hoaxes and investigation of its supernatural claim.⁷¹ As seen in the story, the testing condition is required to prove the truth of spiritualism. Even for believers, the conceptualisation of spiritualism still contains the dilemma of interpreting the phenomena; this can be seen in the "naturalisation of the supernatural".

Additionally, the novel expresses the underlying cultural tensions between science and the occult. The Victorians connected spiritualism with the supernatural but also problematised this association by identifying the Victorian quest for order as being behind this phenomenon that purported to come from the other world (Noakes 23). Many Victorian scientists sought to explain spiritualist phenomena rationally. The Society of Physical Research explored the concept of spirit matter and spirit materialisation, investigating whether scientific proof of the spiritual world

⁷¹ A few Victorian scientists and scholars, such as William James, William Crookes, and Alfred Russel Wallace, tried to investigate spiritualism phenomena.

could be found (King 95). The dilemma of scientific frameworks is evidenced in *Affinity*. One instance of the attempt to naturalise spiritualism is provided in Margaret's conversation with her brother Stephen: "[Stephen] answered that he thought what rational man should think, given all the evidence: that most spirit mediums undoubtedly were simple conjurors; that some were perhaps the victims of an illness or a mania – and Dawes might be one of those" (100). He rationalises it as a form of communication having its own specific mechanism, like telegraph machines: "[p]erhaps there are wires in nature – little filaments – [. . .] Perhaps it is only delicate girls, like your friend Dawes, who can sense these wires and hear the messages that pass along them" (101). His statement reflects an effort by the Victorians to find epistemological proof of the unknown. The ghost can be explained away by something other than supernatural causes.

The 'explained supernatural' tactic in the Female Gothic is usually beneficial because it provides female characters with the permission to indulge in the spectacle of the uncanny before eventually bringing them, and readers, from the unknown into a safe, comforting, and rational world with social norms and empirical resolutions (Reyes 106-107). However, Waters's utilization of this literary device in her Neo-Victorian Gothic writing does not have the same soothing effect as the 'explained supernatural' found in, for example, Radcliffe's eighteenth-century Gothic fiction. The revelation of Peter/Ruth as a mastermind behind the fraud creates unease. Selina and Ruth are agents in plotting the deception. Ruth perpetrates sexual transgressions with women in sessions, manipulates Selina, and commits criminal acts with Margaret through Peter's dominating ghostly form. The explained supernatural tactic is not affirmative but instead exposes the master

trope of performativity operating in the text. Waters's return to rational explanation near the end of the narrative allows her to explore the issue of performativity and, accordingly, the denaturalization of gender and sexual identities. I argue that the revelation of Ruth performing Peter's identity can be read in the context of Jagose's theory and arguably problematizes the structures that designate lesbianism as a second-order sexuality.

Significantly, reading the knowledge of Peter's identity as a woman demonstrates a problem of sequence in the configuration of lesbianism. The narrative sustains a struggle between compliance and defiance. As such, the sexual sequence in *Affinity* is more complicated than being complicit with the hegemonic sequence of the lesbian as secondary. Despite its figuration of derivation, Jagose notes, it is "not as a mark of its inadequacy but as the condition of its possibility" (7). Although female same-sex sexuality in the story is figured as secondary in terms of presentation, the plot twist problematizes the sequential logic rather than affirming the sexual hierarchy prescribed by the numerical order of first/second. The plot twist provides transformative knowledge, drawing on a typical characteristic of sensation novels that usually "revolve around a central secret that is not revealed until the end and, in light of which, the reader's knowledge of what came before is transformed" (Mitchell 122). Knowing that Peter is Ruth transforms the precedence of heterosexuality. According to Jagose, heterosexuality has been identified as holding precedence due to its assumed first-order and natural origin. The disclosure of Peter's true sex and the concomitant implication of "fake" heterosexuality confuses the narrative mechanism of numerical order and suggests

that heterosexuality is not authentic or primary form of sexual organisation. The claim of heterosexuality superiority is thus demolished.

It should also be noted that the revelation of Peter as Ruth does not affirm her sexual identity as a “lesbian”. This complex effect of transformative knowledge is suggestive of a concern with corrective historiography and the retrospective claim of genealogy. In other words, the belated knowledge is more complicated and does not equate to the stabilisation of a modern lesbian identity for Peter/Ruth. As Carroll argues in “Rethinking Generational History: Queer Histories of Sexuality in Neo-Victorian Feminist Fiction”, the “truth” about Peter’s identity is unstable and incoherent. She explores the complex temporalities of knowledge and “identity/desire” that *later come to be called* lesbian, contending that “the ‘truth’ about gendered and sexual identities which retrospective knowledge seems to disclose, is actually its effect” (136). The restorative knowledge that seems to give authority to contemporary readers does not reveal “true” identity due to ambiguous sexual agency in the séance scene. As Carroll elaborates, readers should not translate the sex of the actors in the intimate séance into a “truth” about their desire or identity because doing that would obscure the significance of the ambiguity of female agency and object (142). That is, sexuality in the spiritualist space is too uncertain and complicates traditional femininity in terms of sexual agency and object. Given that female sexual desire was believed to exist only in reproductive heterosexuality, the spiritualist encounter in the dark circle could not be experienced as sexual.

Moreover, while the sensation novel’s narrative convention promises to reveal a singular “truth” about identity, Waters’s narrative denies “a single sexual

origin capable of settling the identification question” (145). The revelation about Ruth confuses various kinds of knowledge about her identity, including class and economic status. Additionally, what is particularly useful and relevant to my discussion in Carroll’s article is her argument about the performative nature of sexual identity and desire as well as queer erotic instability in the spiritualist space. Carroll remarks that “[t]he masquerade of heterosexuality staged by the dark circles is not a mask beneath which is concealed a ‘true sexuality’, whether same-sex of [sic] heterosexual; rather it foregrounds the performative nature of sexual identity, the mobility of desire, and the instability of its object” (142).

Jagose’s theory of sexual sequence is indebted to Butler’s study of gender performativity. Butler famously claims that “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). I propose that the theme of performativity can be found in *Affinity* and is significant in the logic of sexual sequence for its characters. Additionally, the notion of performativity is present at many levels of the text, including genre. Critics have long established substantial affiliations between the Gothic and performativity. For example, Catherine Spooner has traced the employment of theatricality, camp, and dressing up from early Gothic to contemporary Gothic. There is a correlation between Gothic and gender performativity in particular. Halberstam writes that “[g]othic is a cross-dressing, drag, a performance of textuality, an infinite readability and indeed, these are themes that are readily accessible within Gothic fiction itself where the trope of doubling and disguise tend to dominate the narrative” (*Skin Shows* 60). Using the Victorian Gothic and Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.

Hyde" (1886) as an example, Halberstam argues that "the grotesque effect of Gothic is achieved through a kind of tranvestism" (60). The "monster is always a master of disguise". This might partly explain the unsettling effects readers experience from the belated revelation of Peter as Ruth. Her disguise, her doubling identities, and the fluidity of her identification mark Ruth as monstrous.

Close readings of the text can support this argument about performative gender and sexual identity. In hindsight, there is some evidence to suggest that Peter/Ruth does not have a fixed or natural innate identity. In the scene described above, Selina asks, "O God, are you real?" (193) after seeing Peter and determining the gender of the spirit based on their clothing and physical appearance. Her remark betokens the inauthenticity implicated in this scene. Peter is not real but rather a role Ruth plays. The constructed nature of sexuality is more evident when considering the thematic deployment of doubling and performance in spiritualist practice. The trope of theatricality subtly appears together with spiritualist discourse. Retrospectively, it is not accidental that Waters compares the spiritualist medium to an actress. An instance of this is when Margaret reads the report where Selina once led a séance at Holborn: "[t]he flowers and the paper tubes, the words marked out upon her flesh – it seemed a tawdry sort of show, even if put on by spirits. She [Selina] had held herself at Millbank as an actress might, surveying a marvellous career [. . .] performing garish tricks for petty payments, like music-hall turn" (135-6).

The reference to a "music-hall" is also significant. Considering the larger cultural context of this time, music halls were a space allowing gender performativity as well as queer acts such as male impersonation. In *Tipping the*

Velvet (1998), Waters employs gender performance as the novel's central theme and makes use of the music hall as a symbolic location in which license is granted for the expression of alternative conceptions of gender and female same-sex desire. As such, Ruth's cross-gender masquerade undermines naturalized gender concepts, challenges Victorian social expectations, and causes a category dilemma. Gamble argues that, while the nineteenth century may have been one in which the differences between masculinity and femininity were strictly maintained by insisting on differences in clothing, public social roles, and personal behaviours, it was also a period when such demarcations were breaking down (129). She adds that "perhaps such a dissolution of naturalised conceptions of gender was an inevitable outcome of an age predicated, whether openly acknowledged or not, upon a central and fundamental act of 'queering'" (129). Ruth can assume another gender identity and construct any form of sexuality without adhering to her assumed biological sex. Her mannish clothes trouble sexual differences and sexual identity by establishing dissonance between her gendered presentation and her sex.

The naturalization of gender and sexuality mutually support each other. Whenever Peter appears during the materialisation practices, a sequence of activities is performed and followed by Peter's heterosexual expression:

It was a man, a man with whiskers, bowing to you, and gesturing [. . .] and I saw it, I can tell you, *many times*. He *would always* begin, then, to speak of spiritualism. He would tell us of the new time that is coming, when so many people will know spiritualism to be true, spirits will walk the pavements of the city, in the day-light –that is what he said. But, well, he was mischievous. He

would start to say this, but then he would grow tired of it. *You would see* him look about the room [. . .] *You would see* him look about him. Do you know what he looking for? He was looking for the handsomest lady! When he found her, he would step close to her [. . .] And then he would take her up, and have her walk with him about the room; and then he would kiss her.

(152; my emphasis)

The scene implies that heterosexuality is constructed and relies on sequential repeated activities, including gender performativity. In this ritual, the heterosexual interactions within the dark circle occur in a repeated sequence. Furthermore, both language and sentence construction in this passage are full of sequencing. The modal verb “would” indicates the speculative future and patterns. Subordinate clauses like “when” followed by the consequence as well as the use of the conjunction “and” also indicate patterns. Here, linguistic patterns are linked to behavioural patterns. Frequency markers like “many times” and “always” connote certainty and reflect an attempt to establish heteronormative order. “Masculinity” can be adopted through stereotyped gender roles of sexual activity and dominance: the sequential ritual ends with Peter displaying his sexual advances toward female sitters. Peter’s sexual object of choice is female: “[h]e was looking for handsomest lady” (152). Gender construction and sexual interaction thus mutually reinforce each other. Peter being Ruth through acting and cross-dressing and having sensual interactions with women demonstrates Butler’s claim of “the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original” (*Gender Trouble* 31).

As the story has shown, practitioners are allowed to explore and perform various aspects of bodies, gender, and sexual roles. The incorporation of S/M aesthetics in séance and ritual scenes helps to emphasise the constructedness of sexuality in this space. In hindsight, Waters' depiction of sadomasochism-inflected spiritualist performance between Selina and Ruth, in disguise as the male spirit, denaturalises gender and sexual identities. The trope of disguise in these spiritualist rituals can be read as roleplaying. The heteronormative power presented in these scenes is constructed and facilitated by gender performativity. Specifically, Selina takes spiritualist practices as her stage to feign female submissiveness while Ruth adopts a dominant male role. While masochism and submissiveness were expected in women, sadism and sexual activeness were often viewed as male in Victorian culture. The staged erotic power play illustrates that gender roles and sexual agency are relational and not absolute. This supports Jagose's argument that every "sexual identity, retrospectively assembled from the behaviours and affects it touts as its natural expression, is always imitative and belated" (x). Through the two women's role-playing, a rigid hetero/homosexual bifurcation is collapsed.

In conclusion, *Affinity* emerges from a queer position of belatedness in a double sense: it is concerned with a literary genre that is "belated" in nature (like the neo-Victorian), and the novel deals with the belated, derivative status of lesbians. Waters is writing for a readership that is familiar with the contemporary category of lesbian identity. At the same time, she purposefully reaches back to a time when her characters do not have the knowledge or the label. As this chapter has shown, Waters explores this tension between the past and the present and

revels in the instability of sexuality found in the late Victorian era. She mobilises this complexity and instability via a collaborative relationship between various literary genres and the theme of spiritualism. Waters's deployment of literary modes and genres, especially historical fiction and Female Gothic, helps to tackle the logic of sexual sequence both in terms of retrospective history writing and hierarchy-inflected chronological order. The intersecting genres also unsettle the normative sequence and simultaneously provide broader forms of female queer subjectivities and desires in addition to female same-sex erotics. This literary combination allows Waters to create a space for the imaginative exploration of Victorian cultural concerns, particularly those pertaining to gender and sexuality. The reimagined Victorian spiritualism offers liminal, performative, and transgressive spaces for queer reinterpretations of normative sexual sequence assigned to female homosexuality.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the numerous ways in which sexuality and temporality are interconnected and the way that this intimate entanglement is utilised in the chosen literary texts to reflect queer female sexualities in the cultural settings of the late Victorian period. The female authors considered in this thesis engage with or reach back to the Victorian era. In response to the ambiguities surrounding Victorian discourses of female sexualities, these writers create alternative temporal frameworks in their works, enabling their sexually non-normative characters to participate in queer temporalities. The depictions of queer time in the selected texts are defined by backwardness, interruption, delay, anachronism, or a history that is negotiated and rewritten. I have made the case that these queer temporal possibilities are articulated by incorporating elements of the Gothic. As shown in the preceding chapters, each author has approached queer temporalities from several directions through a variety of Gothic tropes, and has brought out counter-hegemonic aspects in these texts. These non-normative modes of time undermine or even subvert the prevailing configuration of time as cohesive, linear, and forward-oriented to reveal queer possibilities.

One of the recurring motifs in the thesis is the deviation from normative timelines of development. Temporal regression and arrested development were often regarded as indicative of queer subjects, who were not seen as “mature” or “fully” developed human beings. For instance, models of individual sexual development and evolutionary discourse have been treated as pivotal to the fictional representation of female homosexuality in most of the discussed texts. While scholars have often associated sexology with rigid and static sexual identity

categories, sexual scientific works also presented developmental and evolutionary temporalities that unsettle and disturb sexual identity in queer ways. I have argued that the fictional literary texts discussed in this thesis respond to, adapt and counter such discourses, reshaping the scientific rhetoric of sexual temporality in order to present alternative forms of subjectivity, kinship and reproduction. The female writers analysed within this thesis frame their queer female characters through queer temporalities that rework or resist reproductive futurity. Hence, they suggest that there are other temporal models that defy biological sexual reproduction and exist outside the “straight time” of reproduction that nineteenth-century institutions (whether scientific, familial, or national) tried to secure. They employ Gothicised temporalities that are detached from reproductive sexuality as a springboard for new expressions of queer sexualities.

As has been shown, Gothic themes are strategically employed in the form of techniques and tropes in queer writing, serving as creative strategies to enact different forms of queer rupture and resistance to normative time, social norms and dominant ideologies. The uncanny, haunting, and the fantastic play an important role in the presentation of queer temporalities, either directly or indirectly. This thesis has drawn upon recent debates around queer temporality to reveal how the Gothic has helped to resist, appropriate, or refuse normative models of temporality. Vernon Lee employs a broader sense of queerness via queer temporalities and the Gothic theme of the unravelling self. Her female protagonists discover a new life path outside heteronormative reproductive futurity through queer identifications that exist outside the present moment. Charlotte Mew’s nameless narrators, struggling with their own non-normative sexuality, participate in a queer developmental

timeline: a journey in queer space filled with transience and death, and a sideways growth marked by primitive and degeneration. Mew avoids adopting emergent ideas of sexual identity and uses the pessimistic language of queer uncertainties through Gothic imagery of the Urban Gothic and the fairy. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* engages with anachronism, haunting and the spectral to foreground the instability of the female sexual invert. The notion of chrononormative time and the queer child reveal Hall's construction of Stephen as an anachronistic subject. Chapters Four and Five focus on novels that create dialogues between the haunting Victorian past and the contemporary age. In these Neo-Victorian texts, the Victorian past is revised and reimagined for queer purposes. In reading Angela Carter's Gothic carnivalesque, the concepts of backwardness and the primitive intersect with the promise of queer utopia. As for Sarah Waters's Gothic historical fiction, reading *Affinity* in the light of theorisations of sexual sequence sheds light on her critical engagement with the problem of representing the lesbian past. The spiritualist circle makes it possible to depict female queer desires, and Waters's deployment of literary conventions from Gothic subgenres that related to women, such as the Female Gothic and sensation fiction, allow her to grapple with the dominant logics of sexual sequence that present female homosexuality belated and secondary.

The Haunting of Bly Manor: Queering Sequence and New Directions of Neo-Victorian Gothic

The connections between the Victorian era, the Gothic and queer temporalities that the thesis has explored so far continue to shape representations of female queer sexualities in the 21st century. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020),

Netflix's television miniseries created by Mike Flanagan is a fascinating example of recent works that demonstrate this interplay of themes and interests. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is a reinterpretation of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). I see *The Haunting of Bly Manor* as participating in the same conversation about Gothicised queer time I have explored throughout the thesis, particularly the notion of haunting. However, as demonstrated in the following discussion, there are also important changes in the ways in which female queer sexualities and desires are depicted in more recent cultural and political contexts.

As is evident in the title, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* engages with the topic of queer temporality while employing Gothic modes as it revolves around the concept of haunting in many ways. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* demonstrates that the queer temporality of the trope of haunting continues to provide a vehicle for representing female queer sexuality and desires. The main plot of *Bly* is similar to that of James's text, in which a governess becomes haunted by evil spirits after taking a job caring for two children at a remote country manor. The TV adaptation moves away from the original Victorian setting to the late twentieth century. One of the most significant changes in this adapted version is the fact that the nameless governess now has a name as well as a female lover. The governess is called Dani and her lover is the gardener of the house, named Jamie. If we use the theoretical framework of queer temporality, we can see that this lesbian ghost story embraces queer time in many ways, especially through its engagement with haunting.

The Haunting of Bly Manor is a case study of the way in which the Victorian has not yet been laid to rest. As the notion of haunting expands to new media,

alternative approaches to engaging with history appear. We might think of a global neo-Victorian mode of critical engagement as one that operates along two axes simultaneously: temporal and transnational (Jones 38). Netflix's platform is accessible from anywhere in the world. Such media transgresses the restrictions of time and place as people can thereby access the Victorian past at any time and anywhere in the world. As Jason Whittaker notes, "[o]nline communities enable individuals to draw on what Bell describes as a 'disembedded' experience, no longer restricted to one place, a deterritorialisation that allows them to participate on global flows" (275). The ghosts of the Victorian past are still haunting, leaving spectral traces in contemporary narratives.

In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Flanagan's handling of Victorian narratives takes on a ghostly quality as it contains haunted traces from the past. In addition to *The Turn of the Screw*, a few other works by Henry James influence *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, such as "The Jolly Corner" (1908) and "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (1868).⁷² *The Haunting of Bly Manor* features many ghosts and Flanagan draws on James's stories to create and reimagine these ghosts. *The Romance of Certain Old Clothes* shapes his characterisation of the Lady of the Lake, the first ghost of Bly. Her real name is Viola Lloyd, who was once an owner of the estate. Dani's dead fiancé is similar to a character in another story of Henry James's texts, *Sir Edmund Orme*. This evocation of the past and adaptation of the texts accords with Linda Hutcheon's view on adaptations as "inherently 'palimpsestuous' works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (6).

⁷² See "How 'Haunting of Bly Manor' Reimagines 'Turn of the Screw'" in <https://time.com/5898095/haunting-of-bly-manor-turn-of-the-screw/>.

This adapted show could also be brought into dialogue with another contemporary theoretical queer temporality: Flanagan's decision to adapt the text as a lesbian story can also be read in relation to Jagose's argument about seriality and sequence. In Jagose's chapter "First Wife, Second Wife: Sexual Perversion and the Problem of Precedence in *Rebecca*", she explores a series of texts that take Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel, *Rebecca*, as their linchpin: du Maurier's novel itself; Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 film adaptation, *Rebecca*; subsequent readings of Hitchcock's film in feminist film criticism; and Susan Hill's 1993 sequel to the original novel, *Mrs. de Winter*. Rebecca's sexuality in the original text is ambiguous; it has long been interpreted that Mrs. Danvers might have feelings for Rebecca. Jagose examines an attempt to make a sequential distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of female sexuality (102). Jagose discusses various adaptations of *Rebecca*, focusing on their attempts to contain or repress queer content. In the original text, techniques such as frequent temporal switchbacks and its prioritisation of the gothic past over the romantic future create a queer sexual sequence. The sequel, however, eliminates sexual ambiguity and organises desire along a single scale of heterosexual progress, showcasing a developmental sequence that prioritises heterosexuality over other forms of sexualities. In general, adaptations of *Rebecca* tend to reauthorize the more normative sequential logic of before and after that had been undermined in the original novel. Looking at Jagose's analysis of textual sequence helps us to understand the topic of adaptation and sexual sequence in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*.

The Haunting of Bly Manor works differently as it relies on an opposite technique of sequential distinction. Instead of eradicating the sexual ambiguities in *The Turn of The Screw* and returning to heteronormativity, it brings out the implicit queerness and makes it visibly queerer than the original text. James' novella already circulates around "unspoken" sexual ambiguities. Laura Westengard points out that the ghosts in this text represent the governess's suspicion of "inappropriate intimacies between the adults and the children of the manor that linger beyond death", "the 'unmentionable' thing that Miles did at his boarding school", and "the implicitly homosexual transmission of words that remain unspecified in the text" (262). These queer potentialities are further amplified in *The Haunting of Bly Manor*.

The queering of the narrative in *The Haunting of Bly Manor* results in the plot taking a different turn that focuses specifically on "female" queer relations. The drama series queers the source text by depicting a female same-sex relationship set against the backdrop of a ghost story. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* adapts and revises its source material to allow for a clear representation of female same-sex sexuality and conceptions of queerness. Compared to *Affinity*, which is set in the nineteenth century, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* has a different and more contemporary setting. *The Turn of the Screw* is set in the 1890s, with occasional flashbacks to events in the 1840s, whereas the setting of the Netflix series is England in 1987. The desire between women is rendered more explicit and is depicted more affirmatively in the Netflix show. Here, the romance turns into a relationship between the governess and a female gardener, a new character named Jamie who does not exist in the original novel.

The adaptation changes its setting to the late twentieth century instead of the late nineteenth century. In doing so, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* departs from the queer indeterminacy of the Victorian period in which sexual identity categories were unstable and emergent. The ambiguity in sexual identity discourses that marked the Victorian period is thus lost in this adaptation. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* targets a more contemporary audience within a different political environment. Lesbianism is more directly narratable and representable in the 1987 setting and is more visible in the twenty-first century. For instance, near the end of the series, Dani and Jamie move in together and live as a couple. While the lovers are still unable to get married in 1980s England, Dani gives her lover a ring to signal her commitment, anticipating later legal developments in the twenty-first century with which viewers are familiar. This twenty-first century representation of *The Turn of Screw* transforms a previously ambiguous space of sexuality representation into one clearly accommodating the modern identity of women who love women. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* significantly diverges from its source material and other adaptations in this sense.

The drama series foregrounds female queer visibility by reimagining a new character and providing an affirmative vision of women who love women through the series's utilisation of haunting and spectrality. Among many Gothic tropes that enable queer temporality, haunting is one of the most ubiquitous, as this thesis has shown. Today, one can still see the legacies of this interplay between haunting and representations of female queerness. In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, its continued capacity to disrupt temporal boundaries enables the representation of lesbian love as long-lasting and permanent. In the series, female same-sex love is still

configured as asynchronous and present in non-linear time. The entire show is a frame narrative: the story is told in the present about the past by a female narrator. The narrator is a middle-aged woman telling a story after a wedding. We realise at the end that this woman is an older Jamie. At the end of the story, the series adds a closing frame going back to the older Flora and the older Jamie. After Jamie finishes narrating the story, Flora says, "You said it was a ghost story. It isn't. It's a love story." And Jamie replies, "Same thing, really". Their conversation is true as the ghost and female-female romance in the story are intermingled. Thematically, the haunting is used for depicting female same-sex love. In *Bly Manor*, love and haunting are conflated, occurring outside a temporal linear progression. When they first meet, Jamie walks into the room and there is a voice-over telling us that, "The gardener did not even introduce herself to the new au pair. She barely acknowledged her at all. Simply treated her as if she'd *always been there*," and "The others in the room just assumed that they'd already met, which, if she were honest, was how the au pair felt when she first saw the young woman".

In *The Haunting of Bly Manor's* final moments, the long-established trope of the apparitional lesbian is employed. The spectralisation of the lesbian occurs when Dani returns to Bly and sacrifices herself to save the children. Dani drowns herself and becomes the new Lady of the Lake. The heartbroken Jamie cannot move on and is eternally waiting for her lover. However, in *Bly Manor*, the employment of this trope no longer highlights the invisibility of the lesbian. The figure of the lesbian is not repressed and rendered invisible by culture, as in the past. Within the present-day context, the trope of haunting is employed to achieve an opposite temporal effect. The haunting highlights the eternal nature of the love

between the two women. The ghost of a past love can haunt a partner for the rest of their life, and Flanagan employs Gothic tropes to illustrate this. Jamie and Dani demonstrate the older Owen's words at the beginning of the first episode: "To truly love another person is to accept that the work of loving them is worth the pain of losing them". The ending scene shows that Dani never leaves her lover as there is a mysterious hand with a ring on Jamie's shoulder. I view the scene as creating an open-ended haunting for the enduring romance between two women.

The ghostly hands of the governess on her lover's shoulder will haunt audiences' minds for a long time. The ending of the series sparked discussion and created an emotional attachment to the characters in a fan community. Gothic cybertexts are evolving through online fandom activities. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* demonstrates a new form of queer haunting in the twenty-first century. For example, online audiences continue to reimagine the story. If we search AO3 (the biggest fanfiction site for every fandom) in 2022, almost 1,500 stories with Dani Clayton/Jamie Taylor hashtags appear. Fan fiction (fanfic) refers to stories crafted by fans based on characters and story worlds created by a single source canon of works (Jenkins 24). Some works of *The Haunting of Bly Manor* fan fiction draw on the TV show storyline, but other adaptations have alternate endings or are set in a different time period or universe. This sort of writing, in a sense, serves as a necromantic act by bringing the dead Dani back. In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), Gerard Genette outlines five types of transtextual relationships (Genette uses the term "transtextuality" to denote what others generally mean by "intertextuality"). One of these relationships is "Hypertextuality" by which he means "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the

hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall of course call it the hypotext) upon which it is grafted in such a manner that is not that of commentary” (5). He draws attention to the provisional status of this definition. The derivation may be direct, such as when one text ‘speaks’ about another, or it may be that the hypertext cannot exist without the hypotext, a relationship Genette calls a “transformation” (9). Hypertext as a “mode of textuality that encourages writerly, active reading rather than passive consumption” (Gaggi 104) has an empowering nature. This rhizomatic intertextuality leads to new forms of creative engagement and communication. The reimagination is *performative*; characters from the source material have different storylines in the fanfiction world. Whittaker connects “hypertextuality” to online communities, arguing that “hypertextuality makes any traditionally non-linear series of texts potentially contiguous in a fashion that is both ‘inevitably open-ended’ and ‘inevitably incomplete’” (270). This argument about non-linear series of texts can be applied to *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* and its online fan fiction.

It is interesting to look at the ghostly intertextual networks created through the triangulated relationship between the original novella, the neo-Victorian adaptation, and the new fanfiction written by online audiences. The textual borders are fluid. These audiences can resurrect not only the ghost of Dani but also that of the Victorian past. In this respect, the lesbian love story of Dani and Jamie is forever haunting audiences, leaving a legacy in a digital world. This emergence of new technology offers fruitful sites for exploration concerning dynamics of queer haunting, Gothic cyberspace textuality and narrative sequencing. Academics like Murray Leeder view the internet as a “modern séance” (197). Even Waters makes

a comparison between nineteenth-century spiritualism and modern technological haunting of the internet in her essay “Ghosting the Interface”. In this context, fanfiction can be viewed as a mode of queer reproduction. As the preceding chapters argue, queer reproduction enables the passing on of knowledge and the transmission of ideas in non-heterosexual and non-biological ways. Writing, as discussed in relation to Stephen Gordon in Chapter 3, is one method of queer reproduction. In addition, the unofficial stories fans wrote about Dani and Jamie contain haunting qualities; they ensure that the same-sex love between two women haunts the cyberspace.

The Haunting of Bly Manor – with its intricate relationship to the text it takes as its point of origin and its novel use of the Gothic trope of haunting – demonstrates that the convergence of queer temporality and the Victorian Gothic continues to shape representations of female queer sexuality today cutting across different forms and genres. This suggests yet again that creating a dialogue between the fields of queer temporality studies and Gothic studies can offer an important tool for understanding queer female representation from the nineteenth-century to the present. It shows the enduring legacies of the queer Gothic temporalities explored throughout the thesis. Having observed both patterns and variations in the utilization of Gothic and queer temporalities in diverse fictional Victorian and Neo-Victorian queer female literature, the thesis shows that exploring the connection between the Victorian, Gothic and queer time opens up new directions in literary and cultural studies.

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