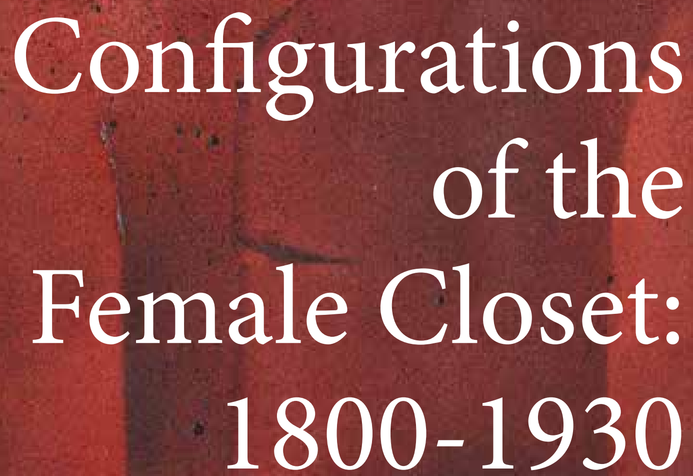
Nathalie Walker



Configurations of the Female Closet: 1800-1930

TLP-Dissertationen/Anglistik

Configurations of the Female Closet: 1800-1930

D i s s e r t a t i o n

zur

Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Doktor der Philosophie

in der Philosophischen Fakultät

der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

vorgelegt von

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aus

73614 Schorndorf

2019

CONFIGURATIONS OF THE FEMALE CLOSET: 1800-1930

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EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

TÜBINGEN
LIBRARY PUBLISHING

Gedruckt mit Genehmigung der Philosophischen Fakultät
der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Dekan: Prof. Dr. Jürgen Leonhardt

Hauptberichterstatterin: Prof. Dr. Ingrid Hotz-Davies
Mitberichterstatter: Prof. Dr. Christoph Reinfandt

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 26.03.2019

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie, detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über
http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

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http://hdl.handle.net/10900/91211
http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:21-dspace-912110
http://dx.doi.org/10.15496/publikation-32592

Tübingen Library Publishing 2019
Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen
Wilhelmstraße 32
72074 Tübingen
druckdienste@ub.uni-tuebingen.de
https://tlp.uni-tuebingen.de

ISBN (Hard/Softcover): 978-3-946552-31-4
ISBN (PDF): 978-3-946552-32-1

Umschlaggestaltung: Sandra Binder, Universität Tübingen
Coverabbildung: Jakob Bareiß
Satz: Nathalie Walker
Druck und Bindung: Pro BUSINESS digital printing Deutschland GmbH
Printed in Germany

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Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to

- my supervisors, Ingrid Hotz-Davies and Christoph Reinfandt
- my parents, Ute and Bernd Walker
- the Landesgraduiertenförderung and the Prof.-Dr.-Friedrich-Schubel-Stiftung for supporting my project
- Jakob Bareiß for the cover art
- my colleagues, especially to Anna Berger, Hanne Roth and Mascha Wieland
- Moritz Bareiß and Ann-Katrin Fett

A special thank you to those who (also) proofread parts of my thesis or discussed it with me: Ann-Katrin Fett, Ute Walker, Moritz Bareiß and the participants in our colloquium.

Introduction

Tracing the Female Closet

"At a Dinner Party" (Amy Levy)

With fruit and flowers the board is decked,
The wine and laughter flow;
I'll not complain – could one expect
So dull a world to know?

You look across the fruit and flowers,
My glance your glances find. –
It is our secret, only ours,
Since all the world is blind.
(qtd. in Emma Donoghue, *Poems Between Women* 102)

Amy Levy's short poem "At a Dinner Party" (1889) illustrates a concept largely neglected in literary studies: the female closet. The poem sets the scene in its title: "At a Dinner party" takes place in a crowd, at a formal gathering, where the individual glances of two women meet and bring about an act of secret communication. The setting in itself is conventional, sparsely outlined in the description of a board decked "[w]ith fruit and flowers" (line 1) and the "wine and laughter" (line 2) the company enjoy. But this conventional gathering is met with a subversive element. In line 3, the description of the outward setting is suddenly abandoned with the appearance of the speaker and a subsequent turn inward. Here already, the tension between the "dull […] world" (line 4), oblivious to what is going on, and the speaker's secret knowledge is established. Instead of being weighed down by her secret, the speaker seems to enjoy her advance in

knowledge vis-à-vis her uninspiring and uninspired companions: The use of the rhetorical question (line 3 and 4) gives the speaker's statement a feeling of superiority, which is repeated in the last line of the poem where the company is charged with being "blind". Instead of trying to reach an understanding with the oblivious people around her, the speaker turns to the only other person 'in the know' in the second stanza. We suddenly become aware that "You", the speaker's addressee and sharer of the secret, is present at the dinner party, too. Again, we are confronted with an outward description which gives way to an inward turn in the middle of the stanza. The "fruit and flowers" signalling conventionality in the first line here take on an erotic quality, in that they are associated with the addressee's searching gaze. The gaze is here not, as so often, an instrument of power, establishing who is constituted as the subject or object in the relationship, but instead functions as a transmitter for a secret communication between the two women, "a quiet laugh at the expense of a society in denial" (Donoghue, *Poems* xxxviii). While their communication is successful, their speaking glances are contrasted with the blindness of the rest of the company. Is this company simply unaware or wilfully blind? The poem does not give a definite answer to that question. At the same time, we, as the reader, seem to become a part of the company: Just as they, we are excluded from the exchange between the two participants in this little scene. "It is our secret" (line 7), the speaker posits, but as to the content of the secret we are none the wiser. Ultimately, the poem does not tell its secret; it teases us with the promise of a scandalous secret, without ever admitting to anything.

But what constitutes *the* secret in the late nineteenth century? As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has demonstrated, "after the late eighteenth century […] 'knowledge' and 'sex' become conceptually inseparable from one another […] so that knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance" (*Epistemology* 73). *The* secret of modernity is, above all, sexuality, and from there, it is an easy step to homosexuality: "[B]y the end of the nineteenth century, when it had become fully current

– as obvious to Queen Victoria as to Freud – that knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted *as* secrecy" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 73), namely a sexuality involving two members of the same sex. In a poem of the late nineteenth century, an unspecified secret involving two people, a secret moreover kept from an oblivious world, and tenderly eroticised by shared glances and decorative elements such as flowers[1], can easily be read as a female homosexual secret. Poetry, as Emma Donoghue emphasises, "seems always to have represented a freer – perhaps because more private, veiled and metaphorical – space for the expression of love between women in all its variety" (*Poems* xliv). Lillian Faderman also points out that the often inevitable interpretation of love poetry as heterosexual constitutes a grave mistake: "If the female speaker in a poem does not address the beloved as 'she,' the assumption has always been that the beloved is 'he'" (*Chloe* 444). In her reading of "At a Dinner Party", Donoghue explicitly draws the connection to discourses of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Comparing Levy's poem to Lord Alfred Douglas's "Two Loves" (1894), where homosexuality is famously described as 'the love that dare not speak its name', Donoghue concludes that "[t]here is surprisingly little in women's poetry of the note we hear in Lord Alfred Douglas's 1894 poem […]. [T]he tone is more one of coy, delighted secrecy than of weighty shame" (*Poems* xxxviii). In its playful treatment of female homosexuality, "At a Dinner Party" thus offers us a first clue that the male and the female closet are not necessarily the same: The female closet has its own specificity, its own characteristics; it is more than just an imitation or copy of its famous male 'counter'part. This, moreover, does not entirely come as a surprise: After all, next to homosexuality, the closet is primarily connected to secrecy and secrecy, in turn, has a long history of being intimately entwined with femininity. The cultural expectation of female reticence and silence is already a given in the Bible, where woman famously is

1 Flowers have a history of being associated with lesbian sexuality, cf. Faderman, *Chloe* 295 or Winston 63.

described as “a fountain sealed” (*King James Bible*, Song of Solomon 4.12). This formulation already points towards the fact that what we are dealing with is a thoroughly patriarchal perspective, from which women appear as the ‘unknown’, the ‘other’. Eve, as the ‘first’ woman, and her deception of Adam in the Fall narrative is an example of what Rachel E. Adelman has termed “[t]he female ruse” (3), an archetypal storyline in the Hebrew Bible, which is, for instance, repeated in the Biblical narratives of Lot’s daughters, of Leah and Rachel, or of Queen Esther (cf. Adelman 1). The seeming dishonesty of woman, condemned to silence and dangerous through that very silence, is a re-occurring motif in the Bible and in the commentaries on it, and mostly rooted in a belief in women’s inherent tendency towards deception, signalled by their foremother Eve’s misconduct (cf. O’Faolain and Martines 130). Outside of a Biblical context, Greek poets and philosophers such as Hesiod or Plato also comment on female guile (cf. O’Faolain and Martines 5, 7), demonstrating that the idea of female deception occurs across cultural boundaries in Western society. Moreover, the male injunction for female silence, inarticulacy, invisibility, which often coincides with a demand to veil herself (cf. O’Faolain and Martines 37, 132-133), simultaneously causes an increased male fear of the potential rebelliousness of the ‘mysterious’, ‘unknowable’ female and a consequent association of women with dishonesty and opacity which is, for instance, still very much in circulation in the Victorian era and, presumably, even today (cf. Kucich 33). A silent woman is only at first glance convenient for a patriarchal system: The obedience which silence seems to express can change to the opposite if she seems *too* silent, if her silence is no longer the muteness of the oppressed but participates in the subversive discourse of a dangerous secrecy. It is this threatening potential of female silence and secrecy which we will encounter time and again in our investigation of the female closet.

To date, the female closet has been largely ignored in academia, including the two fields where one could reasonably have expected an investigation of it, women’s studies and studies of the closet. Since Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s ground-breaking *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) research has

almost exclusively focused on what I would term 'the male closet'. The closet itself, of course, as an abstract concept, has no gender in that sense: The gender derives from the human beings and characters in it. By dealing exclusively with men and male characters and sometimes even insisting on a close entanglement between closet and patriarchy (cf. Bauer 37), however, closet research has basically created the closet as a *per se* male concept. In speaking of a 'male' and a 'female' closet, I am trying to break up this exclusivity and to demonstrate that the closet is not inherently entwined with masculinity.[2] On the contrary, as especially my investigation of the victimisation closet will show, there is a whole strand of closet literature reserved for women and female characters. This is, however, not reflected in the academic literature, where studies on the male closet abound: From Dominic Janes's *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain*, Gero Bauer's *Houses, Secrets, and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James*, Michael Brown's *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor From the Body to the Globe*, Allen J. Frantzen's *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from* Beowulf *to* Angels in America, to Alan Stewart's "The Early Modern Closet Discovered" and Henry Urbach's "Closets, Clothes, disClosure" the male closet has been treated from all kinds of angles, in monographies and articles, from Antiquity to the present day, from literary studies to geographical analyses. While many of the scholars mentioned above are aware of their exclusive focus and, from time to time, even include a justification for their neglect of female closetedness in their writing, the basic problem remains the same: A systematic investigation of the workings of the female closet has never been undertaken. The reasons for this may be manifold: The closet has been associated with concepts such as patriarchal power (cf. Bauer 195), knowledge, and desire – all aspects which are traditionally seen as male domains. The power structures in a patriarchal society, moreover, lend the concealment and disclosure of male secrets an aura of

[2] It is by no means my desire to strengthen the gender binarism our culture constructs: I am not claiming that there may not be other closets depending on other gender definitions or even entirely independent of them. What I am trying to do is to delineate an alternative to the male-centred closet research that has been conducted so far.

greater importance, in that women's secrets can seemingly only pertain to private, personal content, while a man's greater participation in public discourses gives any kind of knowledge he possesses political relevance. Consequently, researchers on the male closet may have expected more 'relevant' findings from an investigation of male closetedness. In spite of the enormous achievements women's studies can boast of, Western culture – among others – and, as a consequence, Western academia, is still part of a cultural system with an inherent bias towards male subjects, topics and interests. The neglect of the female closet is certainly partly due to this inherent bias, especially as a study dealing with the female closet necessarily involves an investigation of lesbian identities and lives. As a consequence, the research gap of the female closet may further be connected to an overall problem that lesbian studies are faced with: According to Terry Castle, "[t]he literary history of lesbianism [...] is first of all a history of derealization" (*Apparitional* 34) and Judith Butler adds that lesbianism "has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable" (20). In spite of several studies dealing with lesbian experience both today and in former centuries,[3] the relative invisibility and the erasure of lesbian interests and desires remains a relevant topic. Several critics have noted "The Queer Disappearance of Lesbians" (title of an article by Sheila Jeffreys),[4] in that any kind of term denoting both gays and lesbians (and others), such as 'queer', is prone to come to be read as only referring to men. Lesbian interests are doubly threatened by erasure: As both women and homosexuals, lesbians form a part of disadvantaged groups which suffer from discrimination. To focus on the female closet is thus to shed light on a topic which in its very structure is subject to neglect.

3 Examples for this are Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, Lisa L. Moore's *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel,* Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture*, Valerie Traub's *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* and Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present.*

4 Other critics who address the issue besides Sheila Jeffreys are Terry Castle (*Apparitional* 12) and Vincent Quinn (45).

In the context of a study on the female closet, Amy Levy's "At a Dinner Party" can serve as a neat introduction, for it offers a short glimpse at such a closet, teasing us with the possibilities of what else there is in terms of female closetedness. It introduces us to that form of closetedness with which we are the most familiar: The homosexual closet, which is here, however, given a twist in that it concerns female-female desire. The following thesis will delineate not only such a lesbian closet, but will take a closer look at various configurations which the female closet takes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. "At a Dinner Party" also draws on several discourses surrounding the closet which we will encounter time and again in one form or the other: In the poem, the female closet functions subversively and transgressively, undermining a society based on (implicitly) male rules and interests. The ever-same of society is subverted by the erotic exchange of glances, by the playful give and take of the speaker and her lover, which takes place in full view of the company. Consequently, the secret draws attention to itself: The speaker expects the company to know, her frustration seems to be with the explicit denial of an erotic possibility that the people around her emit. Furthermore, the secret is a shared secret, for the speaker and her addressee form a tiny community of their own, even with a 'language' of their own, through which communication is not blocked but actively encouraged. At the same time, this is a mute form of communication: As the possibilities of speaking out are restricted by the company, other forms of 'speaking' are made use of. But the restrictions of society are here not seen as inherently oppressive or threatening. Instead, the necessity for a secret understanding almost seems to stimulate the speaker: It strengthens her bond to her lover and provides her with a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis her environment. The closet is here not the negative entity as which it is often presented today and as which we will sometimes encounter it in the texts to be investigated, but the poem instead demonstrates how a specific secret language between homosexuals, here the language of eye contact and mutual understanding, can make the closet function in a positive, affirmative way. In "At a Dinner Party", we thus find

not only a first hint that a concept such as the female closet may exist and that a closer investigation of it may bear fruit, the poem also represents one of those rare occasions where the closet is imagined as more than a mere site of oppression and instead as a place of possibilities.

The Closet: Speaking and Not-Speaking

The concept of the closet – in its male variant – was first given prominence in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. In it, Sedgwick establishes the closet as "the defining structure for gay oppression in this [the twentieth] century" (*Epistemology* 71) and "proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured […] by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century" (*Epistemology* 1). While the term 'closet' itself – in its relation to homosexuality – only came up in the 1950s (cf. Janes 13), Sedgwick demonstrates how the closet has functioned as the main structure for homosexual experience from at least the end of the nineteenth century onwards by a close reading of texts such as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Henry James's *The Beast in the Jungle*. The closet points to the concealment of homosexuality; it is "a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men" (M. Brown, *Closet* 1): 'To be in the closet' means to hide (a part of) one's identity, knowledge that one usually only imparts to a small minority of people – if at all. But the closet is more than just hidden sexual information: "[I]n a culture where same-sex desire is still structured by its distinctive public/private status, at once marginal and central", homosexuality functions "as *the* open secret" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 22). As such, homosexuality is shrouded in an atmosphere of secrecy which continuously draws attention to itself. This "telling silence" (Urbach 67) points towards the paradoxical construction of the closet: "[C]uriously enough, the fact the secret is always known – and, in some obscure sense, known

to be known – never interferes with the incessant activity of keeping it" (Miller, "Secret Subjects" 27).

As a consequence, the closet is intimately connected to the problem of knowledge. Sedgwick demonstrates how vulnerable homosexuals are in their management of information: Homosexuals are likely to experience "radical uncertainty […] about who is in control of information about their sexual identity" (*Epistemology* 79) and both telling and not telling can be used against them in different contexts. As it pertains to secret information, the closet suffers from the instability of secrecy, for "[d]oes one ever have at one's disposal either sufficient criteria or an apodictic certainty that allows one to say: the secret has been kept, the dissimulation has taken place, one has avoided speaking" (Derrida 18)? For homosexuals in the closet, the question keeps reoccurring: Does my environment know – even without me having told them? Have I betrayed myself through other means than speech? Have I been seen somewhere (e.g. in a gay bar), has my body betrayed me (e.g. through styles and manners read as 'gay'), have I given away information simply by failing to do something (e.g. ever having a partner of the 'opposite' sex)? The possibilities are countless. Even the coming out, which seemingly dissolves the closet, only temporarily does so, as the closet keeps resurfacing in a culture where homosexuality is still the underside of a presupposed heterosexuality. As Sedgwick points out, this "heterosexist presumption" (*Epistemology* 68) leads to a recreation of the closet and a possible need for keeping it up or dispensing with it at every new social encounter, thus producing ever new demarcation lines between secrecy and disclosure. The closet "produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come" (J. Butler 16). Coming out of the closet can, moreover, push someone else into the closet, as (involuntary) keeper of somebody else's secret (cf. Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 80). As is the case with most information kept secret, the closet also gives rise to "*blackmailability*" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 89), which also means that somebody else can perform the act of outing you, without your consent. At the same time, the

duality of being in the closet opens up possibilities that other identity structures do not allow for, as "[u]nlike other identity-oppressions, one sometimes can hide one's sexuality […] [and] [o]ne could be both in and out of the closet simultaneously" (M. Brown, "Sedgwick's" 124). And although the closet has often been seen as negative, as a place of heterosexist oppression, it can also be read differently: Michael Brown, for instance, claims that it can be a "place of safety or individual privacy to be respected" (*Closet* 14), while Dominic Janes stresses that the closet is not only a site "of oppression but also, at times, of creative opportunity" (12) and agrees with M. Brown in seeing the closet as "a device that enabled many people to develop their sexual lives in private" (18). Urbach also emphasises the use of the closet as "a social and literary convention[,] […] [a] device by which 'the love that dare not speak its name' could be spoken" (67) and Stewart points out that the closet is not necessarily "a place of isolation […] but […] a transactive space" (77). Secrecy in general can be both oppressive and empowering, for it is also "the spiritual exercise by which the subject is allowed to conceive of himself as a resistance" (Miller, "Secret Subjects" 27) and "a mode whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject's formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible to the culture that would otherwise entirely determine him" (Miller, "Secret Subjects" 19). That prevalent cultural paradigm which considers disclosure to be unequivocally preferable to the concealment of information is undermined by Michel Foucault's thesis that "truth is not by nature free [….] but […] its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power" (*History* 60). Even by adhering to the confessional scheme which Foucault sees as paradigmatic of modern Western culture, one does not escape the discourse of power but remains entangled in its grip, as both speaking and not speaking are part of the same power structure. This is not to say that coming out has not played a major role in lesbian and gay liberation and it is also no recommendation for homosexuals (and others) to stay in the closet, for political progress in the direction of homosexual rights cannot take place within the closet. In-

stead, this is supposed to demonstrate the ambivalence that closet structures give rise to. For the belief that the "process of outing one's 'nature', of being known, of becoming readable, is itself a form of political action and of liberation" (Hotz-Davies, "No Use" 186) can sometimes function as "an unqualified idealisation of disclosure", especially in our day and age, where there is "certainly much to be said for *not* being known, *not* rendering oneself transparent" (Hotz-Davies, "No Use" 187).

As we have seen, the closet is necessarily bound up with the question of communication. Coming out of the closet is an excellent example of a performative speech act in the sense of John L. Austin's famous speech act theory. "Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts" (Yule 47): Language used in this way does not just express sentiments or ideas, but actually 'does' things; it is performative. Admitting to being gay has the potential 'to change the world', to bring about a fundamental transformation in one's relationships, both private and public. "When gay people in a homophobic society come out […], perhaps especially to parents or spouses, it is with the consciousness of a potential for serious injury that is likely to go in both directions" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 80), for "the erotic identity of the person who receives the disclosure is apt also to be implicated in, hence perturbed by it" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 81). Outing oneself is also potentially injurious to one's public life, meaning one's job or reputation, and thus may have grave consequences for one's material status. That this was even more so the case in former times, when homosexual acts – at least, in their male variant – were still forbidden by the law in Great Britain, comes as no surprise: From 1533 until 1861, male homosexual acts could be punished by the death penalty and even afterwards, under the Labouchère amendment of 1885, they could lead to a prison sentence or hard labour, as in the case of Oscar Wilde (cf. White 25, 26).[5] In the context of speaking and not-speaking, it is interesting to note that homo-

[5] Homosexuality is still punished with the death penalty in some countries today; in others it can result in a prison sentence.

sexuality has a history of being represented as 'unspeakable' or 'inexpressible' (cf. Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 202), as in Lord Douglas's 'love that dare not speak its name' mentioned above or in the "*Peccatum Mutum*" (White 9), the 'silent sin' of Christian doctrine. The unspeakability of homosexuality moreover points towards the fact that homosexuals sometimes perform the closet by not discussing their sexuality "for the simple reason that [they] do […] not have the word, the sign for it" (M. Brown, *Closet* 40). This is especially relevant when discussing sexualities in former centuries and in relation to lesbianism and will be taken up again in a later section.

At the same time, speaking is not the only thing that counts when it comes to the closet: "'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 3) and the seemingly "binary division […] between what one says and what one does not say" (Foucault, *History* 27) is an instable one: "There is not one but many silences" and they "function […] alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies" (Foucault, *History* 27). Communicating from within the closet is consequently a balancing act between the spoken and the silent. The greatest challenge is constituted by the necessity to communicate with *some* people but not others, to make use of "references that evoke recognizant knowledge in those who already possess it without igniting it in those who may not" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 101). This process is also described as "*Dropping Hairpins*" (xiv) by David M. Robinson or as a "wink" (94) by James Creech: "Rather than transmitting information from one who knows it to one who doesn't, the wink enacts a communion of those already presumed at least preconsciously to know the taboo secret. The confident hope for that communion, that sharing, is what a wink is" (94). This strategy is not only useful in the actual lives of homosexuals, it is moreover a valid literary device for communicating queer desires:

> In a society where homosexuals were seen as degenerate, evil, demonic; as gender-traitors, class-traitors, and vicious, dangerous

> conspirators against health, work and light, those wishing to write about homosexuality as a positive, healthy and productive identity were obliged both to find discreet ways and discrete discourses of speaking about themselves, to each other and the world, and also to invent a literature of their own. Such writing relies on an encoded framework there to be read by those in the know. (White 116)

Several strategies have been discovered that allow for such a veiled communication: One is to rely on the ambiguity of language, its "slipperiness" (Hotz-Davies, "Not Drowning" 277). This form of writing often makes use of unclear references, of gaps and silences that can but need not be filled by the reader. The double entendre is another way of communicating only with those 'in the know' (cf. Faderman, *Chloe* 445). Writers have also sometimes changed their narrative to conform to societal norms by platonising relationships or by actively "*Posing as the Enemy*" (D. M. Robinson xiv). Faderman has also pointed to the way that "many lesbian writers have simply bearded their pronouns" by writing "an original draft using a feminine pronoun or name and then edit[ing] it for publication by supplying a masculine pronoun or name" (*Chloe* 445). Another strategy pertains to intertextuality, to the "encoding of contemporary lesbian subject matter through the use of the veil of antiquity" (Faderman, *Chloe* 445), for instance by writing in the tradition of the classical source of lesbian material, Sappho (sixth century BC). This goes to show that the closet has not simply been a place of silence and inarticulacy, but that it has also brought about its own special paths of communication.

The Chronology of the Closet

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick follows Michel Foucault in her assumption that homosexuality and, as a consequence, the closet are formations of the late nineteenth century. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously dates the 'invention' of homosexuality to 1870 and argues that a

discourse on homosexuality was first established in the medical writings of late nineteenth century sexologists (cf. 43), together with classification systems for other 'perversions'. The invention of homosexuality as an identity category is seen by Foucault as in opposition to the former category of 'sodomy': While sodomy, "[a]s defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes […] was a category of forbidden acts […] [t]he nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (*History* 43). An identity category thus replaced an older notion of forbidden deeds; where "[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration[,] the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, *History* 43). In contrast to the sodomite, whose misdemeanour did not define him, the homosexual was marked for life, "less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself" (Foucault, *History* 43). What Foucault describes here is the notion of 'inversion' which was pervasive in late nineteenth century sexological writings and which saw homosexuality as only one aspect of a larger psychological condition: Male 'inverts' were seen as "female soul[s] enclosed in a male body" (Hekma 219) and the opposite seemed to be true of female 'inverts'. Foucault's position is one stressing alterity in the history of homosexuality instead of continuity: Instead of seeing homosexuality as a category that has – in some way or other – always been in existence, Foucault emphasises how other cultures and times may have notions and concepts that radically differ from ours. This position has been adopted by many scholars, for instance by David M. Halperin in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* where he claims that "[h]omosexuality and heterosexuality, as we currently understand them, are modern, Western, bourgeois productions. Nothing resembling them can be found in classical antiquity" (8). Allen J. Frantzen's argument in *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from* Beowulf *to* Angels in America goes in a similar direction: "Men and

women in Anglo-Saxon England […] were without the apparatus of identity" (4) and thus without homosexuality in a modern sense.

Nonetheless, Foucault's claim has been criticised by both alterists and continuists on different grounds. Some scholars take issue, for instance, with Foucault's focus on the medical invention of homosexuality: Recent research has emphasised "the role of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and other homosexual activists in formulating the notion of a female soul in a male body (and vice versa)" (D. M. Robinson xii), and thus, a homosexual identity, in the 1860s already. Ulrichs used the terms 'Uranians' (male homosexuals) and 'Urnindes' (female homosexuals) to describe what he saw as "a third sex of feminine men and masculine women" (Hekma 213). As has been shown before, this theory of 'inversion' is one of the homosexual discourses emerging in the nineteenth century: There is also, as an opposite theory, the gender separatist model (cf. Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 87), which "stresse[s] [male homosexuals'] […] masculinity […] and s[ees] male homosexuals as masculine ideals for young men" (Hekma 228). Ulrichs's political agenda and the way in which the medical profession in turn rested their evidence for what they went on to call 'homosexuality' on his theoretical framework, undermine Foucault's theory of the origin of a discourse on homosexuality in the medical, pathologising language. More importantly, recent studies have convincingly demonstrated that the notion of sexual identity arises before the late nineteenth century which is marked by Foucault as the date of its origin. One of the first studies to throw into doubt Foucault's theory was Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, which, in its detailed account of the culture of 'molly houses' in the early eighteenth century, showed that a form of male homosexual identity was already in existence long before the late nineteenth century medical discourses. In the molly houses and their focus on effeminacy and transvestism, "new meanings were now being attached to homosexuality: it was more than a mere sexual act" (Bray, *Homosexuality* 88). As Bauer notes, Bray's molly houses, for instance, "show that the idea of a 'sexual identity' […] is a phenomenon that has to be dated back at least to the two centuries

between 1600 and 1800" (14). Moreover, this phenomenon does not only relate to men. Trumbach argues that "[b]y the end of the eighteenth century there is some evidence that there was beginning to appear a role for women which was parallel to that of the molly for men. Such women were sometimes called 'tommies,' but the more usual term was 'sapphist'" ("London's Sapphists" 111, 112). A similar lead is followed by Terry Castle, who also uses terms denoting a homosexual identity (or something akin to it) to demonstrate that "Western civilization [….] has always known on some level about lesbians" (*Apparitional* 9). Taking on a continuist stance, she claims that "there have always been *other* words [than lesbian] […] for pointing to (or taking aim at) the lover of women" (Castle, *Apparitional* 9) and mentions "*tribade, fricatrice, sapphist, roaring girl, amazon, freak, romp, dyke, bull dagger, tommy*" (Castle, *Apparitional* 9). Proof for the necessity of predating the emergence of sexual identity can also be found in Thomas Laqueur's elaborate study on sexuality, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. In it, Laqueur postulates the time around 1800 as decisive in the development of a two-sex model, which, through its insistence on a 'natural', bodily difference between men and women, has also led to a naturalisation of heterosexual relationships and to a construction of sexual identity as quintessential for human beings (cf. Laqueur 152). The one-sex model, dominant throughout antiquity, the middle ages and well into the seventeenth century, sees men and women as gradual variances of each other, possessing essentially the same body and only differing with regard to the perfection of this body: Men are higher on the perfection scale than women, but may lose their masculinity through 'unmanly' acts, while women may gain masculinity and thus prestige by behaving like men (cf. Laqueur 62). In contrast, the two-sex model regards men's and women's bodies as inherently different and incommensurable, with no possibilities of crossing gender and sex lines. Opposites are then said to attract, which lays the groundwork for a normative heterosexuality, legitimised by 'nature'. Regarding, very roughly, the time 'around 1800' as constitutive of sexual identities means to be able to locate them within a greater network

of identity structures: The late eighteenth century is often seen as the time of the emergence of the modern individual (cf. Armstrong 8) and of an increase in the relevance of modern constructions of identity. The emergence of sexual identities is part of a greater current of emerging modern identities and as such what matters is not so much locating an exact 'birth date' of homosexual identity – which would probably be impossible anyway – but seeing it as part of a whole bundle of identity structures characterising the modern individual. In that context it is helpful to refer to Valerie Traub's attempt to bring about a compromise between alterists and continuists:

> [S]ocial constructivist claims regarding the emergence of modern homosexuality – whatever the date proposed – have been founded on the basis of a relatively limited set of preoccupations (e.g., identity, subcultures, medical concepts and legal codes) which have been used to stand in, metonymically, as evidence of homosexuality *tout court*. In the aggregate, they prod us to query whether the different dates that have been proposed for the 'birth' of the modern homosexual may not result from these themes' separate temporal arcs. Upsetting the premises of identity history by proliferating the range of relevant issues, they urge us to ask whether what is sometimes presented as whole-scale diachronic change (before and after sexuality, before and after identity, before and after modernity) might rather be a manifestation of ongoing synchronic tensions in conceptualizations about bodies and desires (and their relations to the gender system). ("Present" 135)

Other Closets

The closet is, as we have seen so far, above all a metaphor for a distinctive homosexual experience, demonstrating the "epistemological distinctiveness of gay identity and gay situation in our culture" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 75). At the same time, the closet "has become a 'dead' metaphor"

(M. Brown, *Closet* 6) and "more and more people resignify the closet-sign to refer to anything done/known secretly, or in private" (M. Brown, *Closet* 148). This "apparent floating-free from its gay origins of that phrase 'coming out of the closet'" (*Epistemology* 72) is remarked upon by Sedgwick herself, who points out that "one could 'come out as' a Jew or Gypsy […] much more intelligibly than one could typically 'come out as,' say, female, Black, old, a wheelchair user, or fat" (*Epistemology* 75). Still, by enlisting these possibilities, Sedgwick draws attention to the fact that there are indeed other forms of identity structures that could theoretically be represented in closets. A useful starting point for thinking about 'other' closets is Erving Goffman's investigation into stigmas: As markers that characterise a human being as, in some form or other, deviant, stigmas can come in various shapes, relating to physical deformations, racial and ethnic background, religious convictions, but also psychiatric diseases, criminality, addiction, homosexuality and many more (cf. Goffman 12, 13). Goffman goes on to analyse these markers according to their visibility in the sense of their perceptibility to outsiders and comes to differentiate between "discredited" persons whose stigma is immediately evident (e.g. physically handicapped or deformed people; Sedgwick's women, blacks and wheelchair users belong in the same category) and "discreditable" ones whose stigma is, in most contexts, 'invisible' (e.g. homosexuals or criminals as well as Sedgwick's Jews and Gypsies) (cf. 12). As normality is what individuals seek in a society which offers rewards for such an adaptation (cf. Goffman 96), discreditable stigmas are frequently hidden, 'closeted' away. The situation that Goffman outlines for stigmatised people of the discreditable variety is strikingly similar to the one experienced by people inside the closet: They, for instance, are vulnerable with regard to their strategies of information management in that they can never be sure who exactly knows what (cf. 86), especially when it comes to people 'of their own kind' or associated with it ('It takes one to know one') (cf. 109). The stigma can, moreover, come to 'spread out' to other people in their environment (cf. Goffman 43) and force them into the closet, too. At the same time, an

'outing' is expected of both stigmatised and closeted persons, but has the potential of grave repercussions (cf. Goffman 126). The parallel between discreditable stigmas and the closet is obvious: A discreditable stigma is consequently one that, at least potentially, participates in the discourse on the closet.

The formation of closets tells us a lot about what a culture considers to be "closet-worthy" (Hotz-Davies, "Dark Doors" 171) and thus about that culture's standards and values, which, of course, differ for men and women and thus participate in the construction of a gendered closet. These standards are, however, also variable in time: A different century might very well construct a different closet. Ingrid Hotz-Davies, for instance, has claimed that in the early modern period relations between members of different classes might potentially have been more closet-worthy than same-sex relations (cf. "Dark Doors" 171). In addition, Gero Bauer has demonstrated how "the [male] 'closet,' a rhetorical space […] rooting in early forms of actual patriarchal private space, became more and more 'sexualised'" (37) in the course of the nineteenth century, finally resulting in the modern homosexual closet. And Richard Rambuss has shown the centrality of the devotional closet in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as, following Matthew 6:6, Protestants came to cherish "a metafigurally incorporated condition of inwardness within the individual Christian" (8), which was then often materialised in an actual prayer closet. This thesis, too, will make no claim for the universality of the closet configurations that it discusses, but instead sees them as rooted in the cultural and historical background of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is specifically in this context that the different configurations of the female closet which this thesis delineates arise: I have grouped my primary texts together under the headings of 'the criminal closet', 'the closet of female victimisation' and 'the lesbian closet'. Only the third category is, of course, a closet in the strictly Sedgwickian sense: But where, from a twentieth century perspective, the closet is primarily a homosexual entity, the nineteenth century

closet is more fluid, and while it participates in the homosexual discourse, it is not yet dominated by it.

The Spatial Closet

The closet is not just any metaphor: It is above all a spatial metaphor. While Michael Brown has claimed that there is a "tendency in queer theory to conceptualise the closet as an aspatial force" (*Closet* 3), many scholars have, on the contrary, explicitly stressed the spatial origin of the metaphor. Although Michael Brown claims that Sedgwick's work "is primarily a textual geography of the closet" (*Closet* 15), Sedgwick indeed starts her investigation of the closet with a reference to its material nature. According to her, the metaphor of the closet derives from its spatial reality in former centuries: The closet was, in the first place, "[a] room for privacy or retirement; a private room; an inner chamber" (*OED*, "Closet"). Different scholars have argued for various dates of origin regarding the spatial closet, often dependent on which rooms count as pre-forms or actual realisations of the closet in their accounts. Mark Girouard is of the opinion that the closet had formed "[b]y the end of the Middle Ages" (56), Danielle Bobker claims that the closet "had origins in sixteenth-century palace apartments designed in *enfilade*" (70) and Mark Wigley sees the closet as originating in the fourteenth century study (cf. 347). As a general guideline, Michael Brown's account seems to accommodate most opinions: The term "'closet' appeared in Middle English sometime between 1150 und 1500, and originally referred to a small private room used for prayer or study" (*Closet* 5). By the sixteenth century, closets had started to appear in greater numbers in both upper and middle class homes (cf. Stewart 80). The most significant change that the appearance of closets in private homes signals is a turn towards privacy at a time when privacy was rare: "It was essentially a private room; since servants were likely to be in constant attendance even in a chamber, it was perhaps the only room in which its occupant could be entirely on his own" (Girouard 56). The emergence of the closet points towards a development of the private sphere which is accelerated in the centuries to come.

Thus, architecture reflects the development towards an intensified split between the concepts of the public and the private that characterises European society in the late seventeenth and in the eighteenth century and which goes along with the emergence of a bourgeois society (cf. McKeon ix ff.). As a result, eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture is even more dominated by the appearance of private rooms for the upper and middle classes and an increasing separation from the servant quarters (cf. Trodd 46). At this time, privacy as a merit in itself gains in importance, for instance through the rise of Protestantism and its focus on the private individual (cf. Rambuss 8): "First defined as a kind of withdrawal available only to the elite, privacy became in the eighteenth century a positive category of experience, as desirable as it was variable" (Bobker 71).

The privacy the closet seemingly affords is, however, problematised from the very beginning of its existence. On the one hand, this privacy is very much embedded in the context of the public, for to withdraw into the privacy of the closet means to perform "a very *public* gesture of withdrawal" (Stewart 81). Although a private space, the closet is, moreover, not necessarily a place of isolation but instead a space for potential secret meetings: "Far from rendering relationships and transactions secret, the closet paradoxically draws attention to those relationships and transactions and marks them off as socially and even ethically problematic" (Stewart 93). This construction of the closet as a site of potential relationships and transactions hidden from the public eye leads to an eroticisation of the closet. The eroticisation of the closet has its origin in the early modern closet, which, rather than being a space for one man alone, was a "secret nonpublic transactive space between two men behind a locked door" (Stewart 83), namely the secretary and his master. This description of the closet as a room for the privacy of two, secretary and master, shows the closet "as site of sexual anxiety" (Stewart 87), especially of a homoerotic nature, and hence emphasises the sexual connotations the closet could possess. Although the discussion has so far been limited to the male closet, the

eroticisation of the closet is especially relevant when dealing with the female closet, as we will see at a later point.

"[T]he active production of gender distinctions can be found at every level of architectural discourse" (Wigley 329) and the closet is no exception. The male and the female closet are constructed as different rooms with different functions. This gendering of rooms becomes even more common at the end of the eighteenth century, which enforces the "idea of gendered space" (Wall 352), defining rooms as masculine or feminine not only "in design or decor" (Wall 352), but assigning them to the use of either men *or* women.[6] While both are private spaces, the male closet is "a room for private devotions, and a room for private study and business" (Girouard 56); a place where "the *paterfamilias* consolidates his control by secreting the family documents […] in a locked chest in his study" (Wigley 348), which, together with his books, constitute "materials for producing knowledge" (Chico 54). The female closet, on the other hand, is designated for activities marked as 'female': It contains "materials of household management (baskets, bottles, and cooking utensils)" (Huebert 41), but also "clothing, cosmetics, children, and servants" (Chico 54). Even the terminology differs: While the male variant of this small, private room is unequivocally called a 'closet' in most sources, the female closet's denomination varies. Nicole Reynolds argues that a room similar to the closet appeared in mid-eighteenth century France under the name of 'boudoir', while pointing out that only by the end of the century was this room "almost exclusively assigned to women" (123). In her opinion, the boudoir had similarities to "other small rooms" (105), like the cabinet, in that all of them were designed as private spaces. Tita Chico discusses the similarities between the male closet and the female dressing room, whose appearance in England she dates to the mid-seventeenth century (cf. 45). Novel writers often share the confusion over terms denoting the female closet: In Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*,

[6] Cynthia Wall demonstrates how the dining-room, for instance, became thus a space for male interactions, while the drawing-room was designated for women (cf. 352, 353).

for instance, Lady Delacour's small room is mostly referred to as a "boudoir" (e.g. 21, 128, 132, 160, 268), but it is also called a "cabinet" (21, 31), a "closet" (22), or a "dressing-room" (127). Due to the overlapping of metaphor and spatial reality I will, in general, continue to refer to the female variant of the closet as a 'closet', while also, in later chapters, taking on the terminology used in the individual novels.

As an "analogous space" (Chico 46), the female closet shares, in its conceptuality, its main focus with the male closet: It is foremost a "space for the private mind" (Reynolds 103). Similar to the male closet, the female closet "emerged as a result of a trend toward private spaces in domestic architecture" (Chico 47). The female closet moreover "institutionalized the potential for female autonomy" (Chico 45) and endowed women with new opportunities: It allowed them, for instance, "to host intimate social gatherings of their choosing" (Chico 56). But while the privacy the male closet afforded was already suspect in that "its ultimate secrecy [...] [was] imbued with an unfocused but powerful eroticism" (Stewart 80), this was even more so the case with the female closet: Metaphorically, it stood "for the dangers associated with women's privacy" (Chico 45), which was seen as leading "inevitably, almost necessarily, [to] illicit [acts]" (Chico 56), especially as it seemed to make "sexual promiscuity and cosmetic transformation" (Chico 46) possible.

The female closet thus "manifested an eroticized, fetishized notion of female privacy" (Reynolds 103). Stewart describes this problem with regard to the secretary's access to his lady's closet in the early modern period, which "renders their relationship sexually suspect" (87), confounding not only the relation between chastity and sexuality but also between two different classes. But even without a secretary in it, the room was prone to be interpreted as a sexualised space. For Chico this is the case because of its similarity to the 'tiring-room', as a room in which actors, but from the Restoration onwards actresses, too, could meet with the audience (cf. 47). The uncertain status of actresses within society and their seeming similarity to prostitutes is what made these rooms appear in a sexually suggestive way,

implying sexual promiscuity. Chico takes these elements to be characteristic of not only the tiring-room, but also its domestic equivalent, the female closet. Both "operated as a sort of transit point" (Chico 52), with the female closet bringing "the theatricality and erotics of the tiring-room into the home" (Chico 52), as it suggested a definite point where a woman would "dress and undress" (Chico 52) and put on cosmetics. From a patriarchal viewpoint, the use of cosmetics was often seen as problematic in former centuries (and it still sometimes is today): As Wigley points out, "[t]he woman's use of decoration and make-up is condemned because its dissimulation calls into question her chastity" (355). The spatial reality of the female closet allowed women to hide themselves behind 'masks' such as elaborate clothes and cosmetics, just as it provided a more or less private space for sexual contacts. These sexual contacts, through their privacy, could move outside of the acceptable space of monogamy or heteronormativity and thus even opened up the possibilities of "homoerotic exchanges" (Chico 54), similar to the male closet. Consequently, the female closet "staged the conflict between the imperatives of public decorum and the freedom available in private" (Chico 52). This freedom, as well as the eroticisation of the closet, necessarily contributes to suspicions towards the female closet. In a patriarchal society, female privacy and its associations with female autonomy are necessarily suspect. It therefore comes as no surprise that the privacy the female closet affords was never nearly as complete as that of the male closet: Female privacy "always [has] provisional character" (Huebert 61) in that "men are free to interrupt women's privacy virtually at will, but […] the converse does not apply" (Huebert 59). The female closet is thus a much more unstable realm than the male closet, "incit[ing] the [male] desire to look, to peer within the mystery of her privacy" (Reynolds 113).

Gendered Privacy

As we have seen, the closet stands in direct relation to the question of privacy versus the public, "one of the 'grand dichotomies' of Western

thought" in the sense of "a binary opposition that is used to subsume a wide range of other important distinctions" (Weintraub 13). While scholars nowadays point out that the private and the public cannot be regarded as simply opposite categories but in fact depend on and establish each other (cf. Hahn and Koppetsch 9), former centuries often attempted to draw a hard dividing line between the private and the public. Studies concerned with the development of the private sphere ultimately refer back to Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, in which he roots the emergence of a private sphere in the domesticity of eighteenth century bourgeois society. The bourgeois nuclear family which attempts and succeeds in establishing itself as a powerful fraction vis-à-vis the aristocracy from the eighteenth century onwards is also the locus of a newly found focus on the private, the individual, the inner sanctum of the home (cf. Habermas 87-89). That this dividing line between private and public is also reflected in architectural changes has been demonstrated in previous sections. Habermas's account stresses how the private sphere is ultimately located in the realms of the middle-class family and home. Domesticity is the key word of the bourgeoisie: This emphasis on the domestic leads, however, to the establishment of a discourse on 'separate spheres' in which the private sphere and the public sphere become increasingly gendered. While men are assigned to the public sphere of action, of politics and economics, women are limited to the home, and to the duties of housekeeping, motherhood and child-rearing (cf. Hall 73). This separation and gendering of public and private realms is especially "characteristic of Victorian culture" (Kucich 21), in which the bourgeois woman is ultimately produced as a domestic woman, 'the Angel in the House', endowed with virtues like obedience, passivity, and chastity that define her against and elevate her above her counterpart, the morally dubious aristocratic woman (cf. Armstrong 5). The private nature of women's lives in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, especially of the middle and upper classes, pertains to their increasing limitation to the realm of the home, their inability to participate

in the public discourses of political interaction and trade, and their absolute dependence on men in many respects: Women were, for instance, expected to stay at home, to forego physical activities, to devote themselves entirely to taking care of their children and husband, while they were, at the same time, debarred from the privileges of voting, of standing for public office, of signing contracts, to mention only a few. "Once married, a woman became a ghost or shadow" (Olsen 43), for "husband and wife became one person in law" (Perkin 73), meaning that, effectively, the husband took over for his wife in all legal procedures. The situation was similar for unmarried women whose legal guardian was, in most cases, a male relative. The absolute identification of (middle-class) women with the private thus contributed to their deprivation of rights.

We have to keep in mind, however, that even if the nineteenth century propagated and promoted an absolute identification of the female with the private, privacy and the public sphere are not neatly separated entities after all and might even blur into each other to such a degree that the distinction comes to collapse. As Nancy Duncan points out, "there are no politically neutral spaces" (135) and, similarly, Nancy Armstrong concludes that the 'private' is political as well: "[T]he whole domain over which our culture grants women authority" is political, too (26, cf. also Lloyd and O'Brien xix). Women's lives, even when largely restricted to the home, have political relevance. It is also interesting to see that privacy is a double-edged sword when it comes to female experience: "Privacy is everything women as women have never been allowed to be or to have; at the same time the private is everything women have been equated with" (MacKinnon 656, 657). Although women have been associated with the private, they have been debarred from actual privacy. As we have seen in the discussion on the spatial closet, privacy was much harder to attain for a woman in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century than it was for a man: Female privacy is very much unstable and likely to be, ultimately, under the control of men. We also have to confront the actual reality of women's lives in the centuries under discussion: While women were occasionally in possession

of a closet as an at least partly private shelter, the greater part of their lives was spent in company. The ladies of late eighteenth and nineteenth century novels do not spend their time knitting, crocheting and embroidering in a private room of their own – oftentimes, they lack such a room and share even their bedrooms with, for instance, a sibling. Instead, even the seemingly private activity of reading is mostly conducted in the living-rooms of their homes in the company of other women and, from time to time, men. Is this privacy, reclusiveness, invisibility? On the contrary, in the privacy of their home, women in fact could lead highly public lives. The fact remains, however, that nineteenth century culture itself made a connection between privacy and femininity that was even more intense than in the preceding centuries and that partly remains with us today. Thus, we can see that women, in the nineteenth century and in history overall, have been intimately associated with two concepts around which the closet revolves: secrecy and privacy.[7] It comes as no surprise, then, that women have their own privileged relationship to the closet.

The Female Closet

After these preliminary discussions of the closet, I will now turn to the specific variant of closetedness that this thesis sets out to investigate: the female closet. To show the specificity of the female closet, three different forms of female closetedness that appear in the nineteenth and early twentieth century will be delineated, namely the criminal closet, the closet of female victimisation and the lesbian closet. This is not to say that these are the only configurations of the female closet that the nineteenth and early twentieth century constructs: In my research on texts with a female closet

[7] For the difference between privacy and secrecy, see Warren and Laslett: While "both privacy and secrecy involve reduced observability and an increased potential to deny access to others" (26), the two concepts are "differentiated, however, by the moral dimension of the behaviors to which they refer" (26). In contrast to privacy, "[s]ecrecy is nonconsensual; the behaviors it protects are seen as illegitimate and as involving the interests of the excluded" (32). Secrecy is also "an even more extreme form of denial of access to others than is privacy – for not only is access denied when secrecy is maintained, but the most successful secret occurs when knowledge of denial of access (the secret's very existence) is also withheld" (27).

in them, however, each of the closets that I discovered could be assigned to one of these categories which have thus proved to be effective ones. These configurations of the female closet will be examined in texts from the early nineteenth century – we start out with Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* from 1801 – up to the twentieth century, or, more exactly, the year 1928: We end with Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. The time around 1800 is chosen as a starting point for various reasons outlined above: It is the time when closeted identities begin to take a definite shape, and identity structures in general begin to form themselves in their modern variants, so that sexuality, for instance, starts to take on a decisive role in the identity construction of the individual. The stronger focus on the individual in texts from the later eighteenth century onwards, which can be seen, for example, in the emergence of the novel, brings with it an equally stronger focus on the individual mind and its (secret) desires, ambitions and motivations. At the other end of the spectrum, we meet with a literature slowly emerging from the closet: The publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 led to a growing awareness of female same sex desire in the wider cultural consciousness, a form of literary 'outing'. As such, the novel's impact has frequently been compared to the Wilde Trials which had the same effect with regard to male homosexuality about thirty years earlier (cf. Doan, *Fashioning* xii).[8] This literary outing means that texts written after 1928 were written and read under a different premise and should thus be part of a different thesis.

The section "The Male and the Female Closet" offers a comparison between William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) in order to show the differences and similarities between the male and the female closet and to establish some of the specificities of the female closet that emerge when it is read alongside the male closet. *Caleb*

[8] The Wilde Trials were not the only homosexual scandal of the late nineteenth century and were, for example, preceded by the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889. They are, however, the most prominent and visible instance of late nineteenth century homosexual prosecution and are thus often seen as a marker or watershed in homosexual history.

Williams and *Belinda* are here both seen as 'typical' closet novels: *Caleb Williams* especially has a long history of being read for its closeted (homoerotic) energies and can thus be seen as a paradigmatic novel dealing with the male closet. At the same time, both texts are relatively early examples of novels that concern themselves with the closet and they thus serve as a neat starting point for an investigation of closetedness. What will emerge in the reading of the two texts is a central point for the overall conception of the female closet: That it is, above all, associated with female gender transgression. In *Belinda*, it is related to cross-dressing, to female homoeroticism, to disobedience vis-à-vis men, and to a failure in motherhood, all of which are marked as highly transgressive for women and have to be given up on in order for Lady Delacour, the novel's female closet dweller, to be re-integrated into the patriarchal society. While *Caleb Williams*, too, is concerned with transgressive energies (especially in its depiction of homoerotic desires between men), its focus is much more directed towards the establishment and loss of patriarchal power and towards the accompanying secrets of patriarchy which are used to solidify this power and which are hidden away in the closet. A comparison between the novels also demonstrates the greater vulnerability of the female closet, whose private status is always precarious and which is prone to be spied into by men, especially due to the suspicion of illegitimate sexuality which often rests on it.

The frequent occurrence of the female criminal closet (Section "The Criminal Closet") in nineteenth century novels can be seen as a consequence of the connection that the period draws between women and criminality, while at the same time furiously denying the same connection. The nineteenth century constructed a narrowly-defined image of womanhood, relegating women to passivity, purity, submission and a life lived exclusively at home: The very narrowness of this definition at the same time led to fears of an undermining of this 'Angel in the House'-ideal, from which the sensation novels of the 1860s drew much of their narrative energy. In the 'sensation mania' of the 1860s, cultural fears concerning female gender

transgression find expression, showing that the period is much more obsessed with female than with male criminality and thus much more interested in the female criminal closet than it is in the male. The sensation novels revolve around female insubordination and secrecy in a strictly patriarchal society: Proposing a "special relationship between femininity and crime" (Trodd 96), they concentrate on female characters with a secret past which resurfaces within the course of the novel. It is this secret criminal past that the female protagonists have to closet in order to establish their seeming adherence to the norms of femininity and the rules of patriarchy: Beneath the façade of the 'Angel in the House', these female characters follow their own ambitious and criminal agendas. Lady Audley in Mary E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), for instance, uses the 'Angel in the House'-doctrine to hide her various gender transgressions: Her embodiment of men's expectations of female behaviour allows her to remain undetected while she bigamously marries Sir Michael Audley in order to gain money and status. To avoid detection, she does not even shrink from (attempted) murder. As in *Belinda*, Lady Audley's secret is spatialised and kept hidden within her private room, which is only frequented by herself and her maid Phoebe, with whom she shares a homoerotic connection. Lydia Gwilt's secret in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) is similarly disruptive of middle-class society, but especially subversive of patriarchy: As a girl of twelve already, Lydia forges a letter and thereby enables an unsanctioned marriage; later she poisons her husband, blackmails her former mistress and fundamentally disturbs the homosocial/homoerotic relationship between the two Allan Armadales, representatives of male power and prerogatives. Lydia's deceit and cunning finally stand no chance against the stronger male bonding between the two main characters and her subversion of patriarchal power structures is only temporary. But her ability to keep her closet, to have an autonomous, inward secret space of her own allows her a much greater sphere of influence than that of any other female character within the novel. The female characters keeping a criminal closet are necessarily expelled from bourgeois society at the end of the novels, but

their mere presence is enough to materially call into question the idealised, patriarchal constructions of femininity.

The victimisation closet (Section "The Closet of Female Victimisation") is a formation that seems to only exist for women, as a consequence of their position in a patriarchal society: It is a sort of 'secondary' closet formation, where a woman is not only in the closet because she has been victimised, but also comes to take on a closet identity *for* a man, mostly in order to protect him. In terms of the story, it *should*, logically, or *could*, potentially, be the man who is in the closet for the deed he has committed; women's male identification in a patriarchal world, specifically culturally enforced in the nineteenth century, however, leads to a shift in this constellation. Instead of possessing a secret of their own, women in nineteenth century novels frequently keep a man's secret and are thereby subjected to persecution, social marginalisation and conflicts of identity – all typical consequences of being within, or in the vicinity of, the closet. Where in all other closet configurations we thus have a one-to-one relationship between a character and the closeted identity she/he takes on, the victimisation closet adds an additional layer to this structure and complicates it: It becomes triangular, suddenly involving two characters and the closet. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) provides a paradigmatic example of the female victimisation closet: Helen Huntingdon, the novel's heroine, at first actively silences and closets the domestic abuse she suffers at the hands of her alcoholic husband Arthur, so that none of her friends and relatives know of the details of her situation. This episode of her life is later extended into a further closet once she has escaped from her husband and found a new home: Here, still, it is at first impossible for her to disclose her past and with it, her husband's violent behaviour. Being in the closet for her husband's acts proves to be a complicated situation for Helen, as the villagers attribute her secretiveness to failures in her own moral standards and suspect her of having an affair. Helen can only defend herself against these rumours by coming out of the closet and 'outing' herself to her admirer Gilbert. Like Helen, Rachel Verinder in Wilkie Collins's *The*

Moonstone (1868) remains silent when confronted with the (assumed) misdeed of her lover Franklin Blake, whom she suspects of having stolen a diamond of immense value from her bedroom. Although it eventually turns out that Franklin is innocent, Rachel's reputation and health suffer as a consequence of her decision to shield her lover and to take on what should by all means be *his* (criminal) closet and guilt. The same goes for Rachel's competitor in the novel, lower-class Rosanna Spearman: She, too, attempts to shield Franklin by taking on his secret and, like Rachel, she suffers from the suspicions of her environment. But her victimisation extends even further, ending in her suicide. The novel, however, modifies the basic structure presented by *The Tenant* in showing that the victimisation closet can also provide its keepers with a degree of power over their environment: While this power is mostly imaginary when it comes to lower-class Rosanna, Rachel's silence becomes the most important and most powerful gesture in the novel. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) is about victimisation on all levels and the closet makes this victimisation unsurvivable: Here, Tess is in the closet with regard to a deed committed by a man, her rape by Alec D'Urberville. Thoroughly indoctrinated into the patriarchal norms of her society, Tess largely accepts the guilt for this criminal act against her, which emphasises how Victorian society's focus on female sexual purity turns the male crime of rape – which should, to our modern mind, give rise to a male criminal closet – into the basis of a female closet of victimisation. Although Tess is not concerned with protecting Alec but her own reputation and psychic well-being by non-disclosure, she later extends her closet when she has married Angel: By closeting their marriage, she attempts to protect him from a public association with a 'fallen woman'. As we can already see in these short synopses, the victimisation closet is, in the case of *The Tenant* and *Tess*, part of a basically conservative plot in which the patriarchal system seems all-encompassing and there is hardly any freedom to be gained in women's closets. The very privacy they attain through the closet is negatively-figured and has to be given up eventually, when men re-establish their control over the plot and women

end up silenced or dead. *The Moonstone* follows the same basic pattern, but offers its heroine more possibilities of exploiting the closet for her own ends. In contrast to the other two closet configurations investigated in this thesis, the victimisation closet is not primarily concerned with gender transgressions: On the contrary, in attempting to protect the men in their environment and in taking on what should be their closets, women act according to patriarchy's norms and are, at least in the case of Helen and Rachel, 'rewarded' for their behaviour through marriage to 'decent' men.

The female homosexual or lesbian[9] closet (Section "The Lesbian Closet") is certainly what most readers expect to be confronted with when reading a text on the female closet. After all, Sedgwick's *Epistemology*, the founding text for all research on the closet, dealt with its homosexual dimensions. What the section on the lesbian closet in this thesis wants to demonstrate is that the homosexual closet is no structure that is limited to men – something which Sedgwick, more or less implicitly, makes a claim for in her *Epistemology*. Instead, we will come to see that the lesbian closet is a formation that is symptomatic of the female closet in that it constitutes a gender transgression: In a patriarchal society, it is crucial for women's desires to be directed at men. It is further a formation that goes back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century: The Anne Lister Diaries (circa 1815-1840) already offer proof of a specific lesbian identity and identification which had to be closeted in the strictly heteronormative society of nineteenth century England. They are a particularly striking example of lesbian closetedness because they act as a visualisation of the workings of the closet: In her Diaries, Anne made extensive use of a privately devised 'code', a mixture of Greek letters and symbols of her own making, in which she wrote those passages dealing with 'private' matters, such as her various sexual relationships with women. The Diaries are thus not only a particularly interesting and, in terms of homosexual chronology, early

[9] The introduction to the section on the lesbian closet will justify my use of the word 'lesbian', which is often seen as anachronistic when discussing nineteenth and late eighteenth century examples.

account of female homosexuality, but also a *literal* manifestation of the closet. It comes as no surprise that they themselves were subjected to the censorship associated with the closet: Almost burnt and finally hidden behind panels in Anne's ancestral home, their lesbian content was only unearthed for the general public in the late 1980s. In them, we are further confronted with Anne's masculine identification, which predates the 'inversion' theories of the late nineteenth century. These theories will eventually analytically determine and pathologise a relation between female homosexuality and masculine identification (and, conversely, a relation between male homosexuality and female identification). They also act as a primary influence on Radclyffe Hall's construction of her heroine, Stephen Gordon, in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). In order to understand herself and her 'deviant' desires, Stephen turns to inversion theory's explanations and reads herself as an 'invert': This can only happen, however, once she has 'discovered' her homosexual identity in the literal closet of her father's study. This discovery, in turn, leads to Stephen's realisation that she needs to hide her desire for women in a metaphorical closet of her own. Interestingly, there is also a meta-level on which *The Well*'s publication itself participated in the history of the lesbian closet: As has been mentioned before, its publication in 1928 can be seen as an 'outing' of lesbian desire vis-à-vis the general public. Aside from these evidently lesbian closets, this section will also take a look at the female queer closet in short stories by Vernon Lee, namely "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1896), "A Wedding Chest" (1904) and "The Doll" (1927). Here, desire becomes more blurred in the 'lesbian boy' figures which the texts frequently choose as protagonists. These in-between characters relish their indeterminacy and thrive on the queer indefiniteness of their desires. Only "The Doll" returns to a more firmly lesbian perspective.

The Male
and the Female Closet

A Comparison of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*

The following chapter offers a conceptual comparison between the male and the female closet by addressing two novels from roughly the same time period, namely William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801).[10] As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, the late eighteenth century is the time in which closeted identities begin to take shape. The comparison drawn in this chapter is supposed to outline the major similarities and differences between the male and the female closet by taking a look at two prototypical and early gendered closets. The similarities will prove that there *is* such a thing as a female closet and that one is right to call it a 'closet'; the differences, on the other hand, will demonstrate that the female closet is no mere copy of the male one but has its own characteristics and specificities. *Caleb Williams* has often been read as a closet-novel, both due to its focus on the secrets of patriarchy and masculinity and due to its 'queer', homoerotic relations between men. *Belinda*, on the other hand, can be seen as one of the – if not *the* – first novel(s) to explicitly trace a female closet and make it the pivotal point of the narrative. Although this is an early female closet, in *Belinda* we can trace specific outlines of the female closet which will reappear in later chapters: We can see how the female closet is, above all, associated with gender non-

[10] This chapter is based on my unpublished MA-thesis "The Closet in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*".

compliance and the transgression of gender norms, how the secret content of the closet is gendered 'female', how the female closet's privacy becomes problematic in a patriarchal society and how female homoeroticism is put in relation to the closet. Both *Belinda* and *Caleb Williams* deal with closets that show criminal as well as homoerotic traits; however, their manifestations are different. For women, criminality as well as homosexuality represents a gender transgression and is thus in need of closeting.[11] We will re-encounter these thematic complexes in the section on the criminal closet and the section on the lesbian closet. What the two novels cannot offer an explanation for is the closet of women's victimisation, the third thematic complex, addressed in the section "The Closet of Female Victimisation", for it is a specifically female condition in the nineteenth century – in some sense, it is the most characteristically female closet of them all – and forms an exception in that it is expressive of a displacement: The closet is developed by a (female) person in place of another (male) person. Still, *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda* will help to make comprehensible the overall structure of this thesis and to sharpen our understanding of the specificities of the female closet as well as the closet in general. In order to make the following chapter accessible for the reader unacquainted with the two novels, a short summary of them follows, before a closer look will be taken at the novels' spatial and metaphorical closets, the power relations surrounding these closets, the (homo)erotic energies circling around them as well as the queer gender performances taking place in their vicinity.

In *Caleb Williams*, often seen as a highly political, anarchist novel in the context of the French Revolution, young Caleb, an orphan, becomes a servant in the service of Mr. Ferdinando Falkland. Caleb is marked out as the victim of his master's displeasure when he, by accident (as he claims), enters his closet and sees him leaning over a chest therein. Intrigued by the contradictions in Falkland's character and the secrets he seems to harbour,

[11] Homosexuality, of course, also represents a gender transgression for men. Homosocial relationships, on the other hand, are absolutely crucial for the patriarchal power system: For men, it is thus of central importance to stay on the right side of the demarcation line; a line which *Caleb Williams* constantly blurs.

Caleb sets out to learn more about his master. Mr. Collins, another servant, tells him the story of Falkland's past: Due to his noble character and general popularity, Falkland attracted the envy of his neighbour, Mr. Tyrell. The conflict escalated when Tyrell's niece Emily fell in love with Falkland and Tyrell publicly humiliated Falkland – the same evening, he was found dead. Falkland, however, succeeded in convincing the public of his innocence; instead, two servants were found guilty and executed. After hearing this story, Caleb becomes obsessed with his master's secret: He is certain that Falkland murdered Tyrell and that the evidence is hidden in the closet. Falkland cannot escape Caleb's intrusions and finally admits the murder to him, prohibiting him by penalty of death to ever speak of it. In the aftermath, he sets out to silence Caleb: In public, he accuses Caleb of theft, so that the young servant is brought to prison. Caleb manages to escape, the start of a long journey through England, where he has to live a miserable life while constantly trying to evade the law and Falkland, whose power seems to grow every day. His plans to leave England are thwarted, partly by Falkland himself, and all his attempts at building a life for himself are prevented. His only weapon against Falkland seems to be the truth about the murder; out of loyalty to his master, however, he refuses to tell this story until the very end. Finally, when he feels that he cannot live on otherwise, he summons the magistrate and accuses Falkland of murder. Falkland breaks down and admits to everything, and the two forgive each other, but Falkland dies shortly after, leaving Caleb with the bitter feeling of having been responsible for his death. In the novel's original ending, which was only discovered in the 1960s, Caleb's public accusation of Falkland fails as nobody believes him and Caleb himself dies in captivity, slowly going mad.

In *Belinda*, often seen as a conduct or courtship novel, the eponymous heroine, Belinda Portman, is to be introduced into society and thus she is sent to live with the lively, witty and charming Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour is the soul of every festivity and prefers enjoying herself at social gatherings to staying at home and caring for her family: She is estranged

from both her husband and her daughter and has thus ‘failed’ as both wife and mother. Instead of being taught by her, Belinda educates her mentor throughout the novel. For Lady Delacour has a crucial secret: Her breast was hurt in a duel some years ago, which she fought in men’s clothes, accompanied by the manly, ‘unnatural’ Harriet Freke, her best friend at the time, but now her sworn enemy. Lady Delacour takes the wound to be indicative of breast cancer: Convinced that she is dying, she hides her illness and the medicine for it in her boudoir, to which she finally admits Belinda, her new confidante. Belinda persuades Lady Delacour to undergo an operation which cures her as she was in fact only suffering from a bruise caused by the recoiling gun. She further reconciles the lady to her husband and her daughter. After having thus educated Lady Delacour in what it means to be a ‘proper woman’, Belinda herself has to choose between two lovers: Mr. Vincent, a West Indian Creole, whom she rejects because of his love for gambling, and Mr. Clarence Hervey, a friend of Lady Delacour’s. Belinda finally marries Clarence in spite of his earlier mistakes: Inspired by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he has brought up a young woman far away from society in order to create a ‘perfect’ wife for himself. The novel ends in a tableau representing successful domesticity as the characters are bound in heteronormative marriages.

The Master’s Closet and the Lady’s Boudoir: Spatialised Closets in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*

As is frequently the case in novels dealing with the closet, the metaphorical closets in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda* are substantiated by being placed in parallel with spatialised equivalents: The spatial closets serve as the repository of their owners’ secret, their metaphorical closet. These rooms, far from shielding Falkland’s and Lady Delacour’s secrets, on the contrary draw attention to their metaphorical closets: The mere atmosphere of secrecy and mystery surrounding these private spaces leads to suspicions on the part of the people in their environment. Caleb and Belinda are outsiders

within the household and, at the same time, they are both placed in an uneven relationship to a person in power. As the novels focus on their perspectives, the reader is invited to discover the master's and the lady's secrets along with them, voyeuristically peeping into the superior's closet. These spatial closets and their metaphorical equivalents are explicitly gendered: While Falkland's closet, the stereotypical private room of the paterfamilias, hides the 'male' criminal deed of murder, Lady Delacour's, the female closet turned sickroom, conceals her 'female' secret of failed motherhood and women's transgression against patriarchy.

In *Caleb Williams*, the spatial closet is introduced within the first few pages of the narrative: Caleb stumbles upon "a closet or small apartment" (*Caleb Williams*[12] 6) while wandering through his master's house, allegedly "to put any thing in order that [he] might find out of its place" (*CW* 6). Falkland's closet can be said to represent the typical male closet in a patriarchal society, a room reserved specifically for the master of the house, a sign of his status and his right to privacy, especially his right to private knowledge. The room itself is, in contrast to many female closets, not described in detail; the only noteworthy object is the "chest" (*CW* 6) on whose contents Caleb's obsession begins to centre. Here we find the box-within-a-box structure so typical of the closet, a doubling of closeting structures that seemingly offers protection against intrusions into it, but in fact makes it even more vulnerable by drawing attention to it. Accordingly, Caleb's thoughts start circling around the contents of the chest. But it is exactly these contents which the novel never reveals, for Caleb never succeeds in physically penetrating his master's chest: "The contents of the fatal chest from which originated all my misfortunes I have never been able to ascertain" (*CW* 293), Caleb states at the very end of the novel. The fact that the truth which the chest is supposed to offer is "always deferred" (Feldmann 76), draws attention to Caleb's obsession with it rather than to

[12] Godwin, William. *Caleb Williams*. Ed. Pamela Clemit. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. References to *Caleb Williams* will be abbreviated with *CW* and the page number.

the actual content of the closet. This "remarkable narrative gap" (Verhoeven 211) opens up various possibilities for interpreting the contents of the chest. Consequently, it has been interpreted as a "symbol for all secrets" (Kilgour 73), as "a metonymy for mysterious adult sexuality and the guilty unconscious" (von Mücke 331), biblically as a symbol of the tree of knowledge or Pandora's box (cf. Proske 150) or even biographically as "a highly dramatized symbolical picture of Godwin himself in the act of writing *Political Justice*" (Furbank 215). But as Verhoeven points out, it is a mistake to believe "that the meaning of the trunk *is* its contents" (212); it is rather what Falkland and Caleb construct as its meaning. The chest is thus "an empty signifier" (Feldmann 76), whose "signification can be filled by anyone" (Feldmann 76). This is exactly what Caleb does: He is "persuaded that the secret it inclose[s] [is] a faithful narrative of that [Falkland's murder of Tyrell] and its concomitant transactions to be reserved in case of the worst" (*CW* 293). Hence, the knowledge closeted away constitutes a typical 'male' criminal secret: The knowledge of a deed committed to protect patriarchal power interests. It is, most likely, the secret of Falkland's dishonourable murder of his rival Tyrell, of how he "watched [his] opportunity, followed Mr Tyrell from the rooms, seized a sharp pointed knife that fell in [his] way, came behind him, and stabbed him to the heart" (*CW* 132). This deed represents both a transgression of the law in the juridical sense and of the laws of honour in which Falkland roots his identity and masculinity. Falkland within his closet is supposed to represent the patriarch in full control of his (and his family's) secrets; the novel, however, comes to subvert this idea, as the patriarch begins to lose this control through the insatiable "curiosity" (*CW* 115) of his subordinate, who involves him in a homosocial power struggle. Consequently, Caleb deprives Falkland "of something to which he, and particularly he as a man, feels he has a right: the right to withdraw from the ever-prying public eye into a place of safety" (Ellis 153).

However Caleb's motives are to be interpreted, he is "not altogether innocent" (Storch 199) when it comes to his dealings with the closet. Although constantly protesting his innocence, even Caleb comes to the conclusion that he can "recollect nothing, *except the affair of the mysterious chest*, out of which the shadow of an accusation […] could be extorted" (*CW* 155; emphasis mine) and that "[i]n that instance no doubt [his] conduct ha[s] been highly reprehensible" (*CW* 155). After all, on several occasions Caleb actively tries to force his entrance into the closet and into the chest – and by that, into Falkland's mind. Transgressing the boundaries implicitly and explicitly set to him, Caleb "intrudes upon his employer's masochist communion" (Roemer 49) with his secret, hidden within the chest. Directed "by some mysterious fatality" (*CW* 128), he becomes so obsessed with Falkland's closet that instead of participating in the efforts to put out a fire on the estate, he uses "chissels [sic] and other carpenter's tools" (*CW* 128) to attempt to open the chest. In trying to gain knowledge of the secret by all means, Caleb thus becomes suspect himself, which shows that "intimate knowledge makes each the guilty party" (Mackie 185). The secret is therefore more than just knowledge that Caleb seeks and can walk away from after attaining it: In a scene reminiscent of a marriage ceremony (cf. Fincher 111), Falkland makes Caleb "attest every sacrament, divine and human, never to disclose [the secret]" (*CW* 131). As the keeper of his secret, Caleb is bound by the same limitations as Falkland, so that "[w]hen Falkland admits that he is the murderer of Tyrell, Caleb is placed involuntarily within the closet that Falkland inhabits" (Fincher 111). This scene thus demonstrates one of the main mechanisms of the closet, in which revealing the secret, that means coming out of the closet, has a potential to create ever new closets.

The gendering of space in the eighteenth and nineteenth century means that equivalent rooms are given different names depending on the gender of their occupant: Falkland's closet is paralleled by Lady Delacour's

"boudoir" (*Belinda*[13] 21) in *Belinda*. Similar to Falkland's closet, Lady Delacour's boudoir is introduced at the beginning of the novel, demonstrating its centrality within the overall plot: Shortly after her arrival in the Delacour household, Belinda realises that her new mentor has a secret, for there is "some mystery about her ladyship's toilette" (*B* 20) and about the way she obeys her servant Marriott's every whim. Thus, it seems to Belinda "as if Marriott [i]s in possession of some secret, which sh[all] for ever remain unknown" (*B* 20) and she quickly associates this mystery with the "little cabinet beyond [Lady Delacour's] bedchamber, which [she] call[s] her boudoir" (*B* 21) and which no one is allowed to enter, except for Marriott. In contrast to Caleb, Belinda does not try to force her way into Lady Delacour's closet; instead it is Lady Delacour herself who comes to confess her secrets willingly. In a gesture heavy with meaning, she "let[s] her mask [fall]" (*B* 30) after attending a masquerade and laments her loss of "'reputation, happiness […] to the love of frolic'" (*B* 30). But instead of orally communicating her story, Lady Delacour at first uses her boudoir as a visual sign of the closet by "bidding Belinda follow her […] to the door of the mysterious cabinet" (*B* 30, 31). In doing so, she reveals her boudoir to be a sickroom, with "vials" (*B* 31) and a "strong smell of medicines" (*B* 31) for what she believes to be a cancerous breast, but also a form of "vanity chest" (Wu 33), hiding Lady Delacour's cosmetic secrets which help her to keep up the appearance of health and thus "to be admired as a fashionable *bel esprit*" (*B* 10).[14] "[I]n a spectacle tinged with Gothic terror" (Wu 55), she goes as far as "baring one half of her bosom, […] reveal[ing] a hideous spectacle" (*B* 32). Hence, Lady Delacour's confession is highly dramatised, with a clear emphasis on visual and bodily aspects: As a transgression against the norms of femininity, the secret is inscribed upon the female

[13] Edgeworth, Maria. *Belinda*. Ed. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. References to *Belinda* will be abbreviated with *B* and the page number.

[14] This is one of the 'dangers' associated with the boudoir: It offers "the possibility that women hid[e] their true selves beneath clothing and cosmetics" (Chico 58).

body, and upon an exclusively female body part, as illness, a typically 'female' condition.[15] It is this inscription that contributes to the difficulty of keeping the secret, for it makes Lady Delacour, unlike Falkland, dependent on others and passivises her.

The spoken revelation of the secret only follows as a second step. Where most of Falkland's story is told by Falkland's steward Collins as his mediator, Lady Delacour's is "'related by herself'" (*B* 35). Consequently, it is less idealised: After all, Collins tries to convince Caleb of Falkland's innocence, whereas, in the logic of the novel, Lady Delacour's function is to caution Belinda against imitating her lifestyle, thus serving as a "Dreadful Warning" (Atkinson and Atkinson 96). But what is the secret hidden within the boudoir? In general, it is the secret of gender non-compliance, of "'a life of folly'" (*B* 32), by which Lady Delacour refers to the tale of her unhappy marriage to Lord Delacour, her failures as a mother, her affair-like relationship with Colonel Lawless for whose death in a duel she thinks herself responsible, and, above all, her friendship to Harriet Freke who convinces her of a duel with a Mrs. Luttridge, dressed in men's clothes. This participation in the duel as well as the donning of men's clothes do not only deviate from the norms prescribed for women, they also constitute an unlawful act at the time (cf. Ty 164), marking Lady Delacour's closet as criminal. It is from this duel that Lady Delacour derives her breast injury, for the gun "'recoil[s]'" (*B* 58) when the duellists decide to fire into the air instead of performing the actual duel. Consequently, Lady Delacour's secret is intricately bound up with the question of gender transgression, which is greatly emphasised by the fact that it is her breast, supposedly one of the strongest markers of femininity, which is hurt. For her wound can be seen as a "symbolic punishment for her disobedience of the codes prescribed by patriarchy for the female sex" (Ty 164), as "signal[ing] both her maternal failure and her sexual ambiguity" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 108), "as

[15] The nineteenth century "romanticizes the notion of woman as a permanent, a necessary, even a 'natural' invalid" (Dijkstra 25) and comes to associate "even normal health [...] with dangerous, masculinizing attitudes" (Dijkstra 26), thus making explicit the connection between femininity and illness.

punishment for her rejection of domestic values, particularly that of good motherhood" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 112), and as a "symptom of her will to power, which needs to be chastened" (Wu 33). It is thus a marker of sexual deviance and failure to comply with the demands of a patriarchal society in which women are assigned to passivity and motherhood, and heterosexuality is compulsory.

The boudoir in *Belinda* hence confirms the notion of 'dangerous' female privacy typically associated with it. Within the logic of the novel, the boudoir is problematic, for *Belinda* can be said to aim at promoting "the very 'naturalness' of a particular domestic arrangement" (Kowaleski-Wallace 243) with an important element being "the ideal performance of a 'perfect mother,' of a woman who lives exclusively for and through her children" (Kowaleski-Wallace 244). But the boudoir gives Lady Delacour the possibility of creating a space for herself for it is "a small, obscure and limited space precariously and temporarily controlled by female forces" (Ty 161) in which "power comes from the possession of secrets" (Ty 161). At the beginning of the novel, only women are allowed to enter it and thus it is a feminised space, in which patriarchy cannot assume the power it holds in the society outside the boudoir. In the privacy of the closet, the homosocial bonds between women may turn homoerotic: "[I]n the small space of the boudoir, Belinda and Lady Delacour are as intimate as lovers" (U. Klein 6). This is why the boudoir can be said to "conceal the 'truth' of Lady Delacour's body and sexuality and hence may be said to conceal the essential Lady Delacour herself: 'a lover of miss Portman'" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 96). But this privacy is fragile: In contrast to Falkland's closet, which is unnoticed by or seems unremarkable to everyone in the household but Caleb, Lady Delacour's boudoir is subjected to a variety of rumours. It is first noticed by Belinda, but when Lady Delacour is hurt during a ball, it draws Lord Delacour's and Clarence's attention to it, who immediately associate it with the sexual and regard it as a room for hiding a lover, thus assigning to it "a convergence of pleasure and power" (Reynolds 103). This scene is reminiscent of what Reynolds calls the "[m]ale

eroticization" (108) of the boudoir, which is subjected to a voyeuristic, masculine gaze, expressive of patriarchal power. This connection between the female closet and the sexual has to be severed by Belinda who helps "transform Lady Delacour's boudoir into a sickroom" (Reynolds 113) in the eyes of the world when she shows the room to Dr. X so that he can "satisf[y] himself by ocular demonstration, that this cabinet [i]s the retirement of disease, and not of pleasure" (*B* 133). As a member of the medical profession, Dr. X is a clear representative of the patriarchal establishment; accordingly, the threat of female privacy has to be contained by opening the female private space to the male gaze. However, when presenting the boudoir in the right light, Belinda does not only act out of consideration for her mentor, but also out of self-interest. For after she has denied Lord Delacour entrance to the room and dispelled the rumour of Lady Delacour hiding a lover within it, this thought is immediately transferred to herself. If it is not a lover of Lady Delacour hidden within the closet, then it must be "'a lover of miss Portman's'" (*B* 128), which demonstrates that "Belinda's proximity to Lady Delacour's boudoir and to her wounded body place her close to the boundary of virtuous behavior herself" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 96). Just as Caleb, Belinda is placed within the closet when she finds out about Lady Delacour's secret and what is true for Caleb and Falkland, proves true for the two women: "[T]he boudoir's secret […] binds them" (Reynolds 114). In *Belinda*, a demarcation line is drawn between the women within the boudoir and the men outside it, trying to gaze into it. In the home, women are under permanent observation: Where Falkland only has to defend his privacy against Caleb, Lady Delacour's behaviour is under constant surveillance by various people, starting with Belinda who observes that "[a]broad, and at home, lady Delacour was two different persons" (*B* 10) and continuing with Dr. X who states that her "'high spirits do not seem quite natural'" (*B* 115). Clarence, too, wishes "to see her as

happy in domestic life as she *appear[s]* to be in public" (*B* 165), thus detecting a rupture in her personality, just as Anne Percival[16] reminds her audience that "'lady Delacour was not always the unfeeling dissipated fine lady that she now appears to be'" (*B* 105). The panopticon-like structure of both home and society makes it difficult to keep a secret, especially for women, who are constantly placed in a position of visibility.

Disclosure and Non-Disclosure: Relations of Power and the Closet in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*

Since Foucault's analysis of power structures at the latest, we have known that knowledge and power are fundamentally entwined. In a Foucauldian framework, the closet is first and foremost knowledge hidden away from a panoptical societal structure which aims at producing individuals *as* knowledge. Contemporary culture constructs the 'outing', the disclosure of closeted information, as a universally positive, 'liberating' act: The outing, after all, is akin to a 'confession' and Foucault has convincingly demonstrated Western culture's obsession with this strategy of producing knowledge which goes back at least three centuries (cf. *History* 23). In its very attempt to escape this confessional framework, the closet shows its subversive potential – at the same time, this is what constitutes it as essentially bound up with relations of power. This intimate entanglement with power also connects the closet to pleasure: This pleasure lies in the necessity to escape a power which constitutes itself through surveillance, "a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light" (Foucault, *History* 45). In this voyeuristic set-up, pleasure is built up in both the person who watches and the person being watched, leading to "*perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*" (Foucault, *History* 45). In

[16] Anne Percival is married to Lady Delacour's former lover, who gave up on her due to her dissipated lifestyle. It comes as no surprise, then, that Anne, in contrast to Lady Delacour, is presented as a model of the 'ideal' wife.

Caleb Williams and *Belinda*, the closet works as a focal point of power, knowledge, and pleasure. For the closet contains the knowledge that may not be known, thus making it a powerful tool in the dealings with what is for Belinda, Marriott and Caleb a person who supposedly holds power over them: Lady Delacour is Belinda's mentor and Marriott's lady, and Falkland is Caleb's master and employer. Their secret in the hands of their inferiors is a powerful source of blackmailability, one of the symptomatic traits of the closet. The power struggle, however, is much more pronounced in *Caleb Williams*, for the novel offers a concise and fascinating analysis of patriarchal power structures: The secret of patriarchal power is what lies at the bottom of the male closet, and patriarchal power depends on the secret in order to establish itself. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that *Caleb Williams*, much more than *Belinda*, makes the power struggle between its two male characters its focal point. Both knowledge and power further offer possibilities of experiencing pleasure for the characters in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*: The knowledge attained borders on the sexual and so does the will to that knowledge. But power relations are also gendered: While Falkland manages to turn the tables on Caleb and, at the same time, remain above suspicion from society due to his male privileges – his participation in the public sphere allows him to openly persecute him via the law and to establish his own 'innocence' – Lady Delacour is only able to keep her closet as long as it circulates in the female homosocial community formed by her and her maid.

Relations of Power and the Closet in Caleb Williams

In *Caleb Williams*, the closet is a site of power struggles. Interestingly, it is a source of disempowerment to Falkland only as long as it is *not* known, for it is then that he seemingly has to guard it against intrusions. Falkland becomes a successful male patriarch at the very point when his secret is threatened with disclosure, for he is then able to transcend the private sphere of the home where he had before been trapped with his closet and seize upon a *public* strategy against Caleb's intrusive curiosity. We can see

here how the very suspicion of harbouring a secret finally invests Falkland with power. Before that, however, the closet forces him into isolation, destroys his happiness and makes him potentially susceptible to blackmail. It is the pressure of constantly having to keep that secret, of not betraying himself in the presence of others, which demands his loneliness. When his half-brother Mr. Forester visits him, for instance, it is soon "sufficiently evident that the society of either would be a burthen rather than a pleasure to the other" (*CW* 137), for Mr. Forester tries to penetrate Falkland's seclusion. But Mr. Forester is not the real threat, as Falkland soon comes to understand: While Falkland and Forester have "scarcely any points of contact in their characters" (*CW* 137), and it is thus impossible for Forester to form an intimacy with his sibling, Caleb's "sympathetic oneness" (Myers 608) with Falkland, the "magnetical sympathy" (*CW* 109) between them, enables his finding out about Falkland's secret. This serves as a manifestation of the 'It takes one to know one' principle, which is typical of the closet: As he himself experiences illicit desires for Falkland (further discussed in the section on sexuality in *Caleb Williams*), Caleb can successfully detect his master's (homoerotic) closet. As several critics point out "[t]he conclusion Caleb draws from observing Falkland […], his certainty about Falkland's guilt, is not reached through a rational process" (von Mücke 326, cf. also Myers 608), but instead the result of an (homoerotic) identification with Falkland on Caleb's part: The evidence Caleb has for suspecting Falkland is at best circumstantial. While Falkland's closet is supposedly hidden deep, it still draws attention to itself and betrays itself to one who acts as a "double" (Heiland 83) for him.

Moreover, it is within the "patronage system" (Mackie 183) that such "identifications between Falkland and Caleb Williams" (Mackie 183) are problematic, for they threaten the class hierarchy. Caleb violates the relationship between master and servant, as he "is claiming an intimacy with Falkland to which even a social equal would have no right[,] [hence] not merely offending against the initial terms of their relationship but threatening to reverse them" (Ousby, "My servant" 53). For when he decides "to

place [himself] as a watch upon [his] master" (*CW* 104), he arrogates to himself the power of surveillance and endeavours to penetrate his master's closet and thus, symbolically, the depths of his mind. Both Caleb and Falkland realise the danger that this role-reversal represents. Caleb thinks that the "danger in the employment [of spying] serve[s] to give an alluring pungency to the choice" (*CW* 104), and Falkland explicitly addresses the transgression that Caleb is enacting: "Who gave you a right to be my confident? Base, artful wretch that you are! learn [sic!] to be more respectful! Are my passions to be wound and unwound by an insolent domestic" (*CW* 114). For Falkland Caleb's investigation into his secrets represents a "threat to his power, rank, and masculinity" (Daffron 219). The closet, as the patriarchal secret of an aristocrat, is a powerful instrument in the hands of a servant, leading to Caleb potentially being able "to threaten the legitimacy of the gentry" (Daffron 221) by blackmailing Falkland.[17]

Thus, the growing knowledge Caleb attains with regard to the closet seems to equal growing power in *Caleb Williams*. In fact, however, the closet's power spreads out until it seizes on Caleb himself, for whom the quest for closeted knowledge becomes "irresistible" (*CW* 104), an obsession: "I had a confused apprehension of what I was doing, but I could not stop myself" (*CW* 110). While he defends his desire to know the secret by referring to his "admir[ation] and love" (*CW* 103) for Falkland, his intrusive spying still undermines the trust-based relationship between employer and employee. Due to Caleb's narrative unreliability (cf. M. Butler, "Godwin, Burke" 248), questions concerning the motivation for his intrusion can be raised: For Fludernik, Caleb does not act out of ill will but from an "involuntary evil urge" (881). Marilyn Butler goes further in asserting Caleb's innocence when she writes that in his connection to Falkland he follows a "virtuous impulse […] to base human relationships upon truth" (*Jane Austen* 64). Haggerty, on the other hand, claims that "Caleb wants to know the

[17] Trodd has demonstrated how the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century were obsessed with changing master-servant-relationships and the power that a servant's position in the household, in the private sphere of her or his master, granted her or him (cf. 8).

secret because he feels pushed to identify his employer" (115), which in turn "will tell him what he needs to know about himself" (115). Gold also interprets Caleb's intrusion with regard to his relationship to Falkland, for "in pursuing Lord Falkland's secret he is in fact pursuing an intense and complex love" (141). Storch sees his motivation as not lying in "idle curiosity" (196) – as Caleb would make us believe – but in a wish for "power over Falkland, disobedience and rebellion" (196). For although Caleb claims the contrary, stating that his "object [is] neither wealth, nor the means of indulgence, nor the usurpation of power" (*CW* 130), he seems to have a definite wish for power, an "attraction to the power that knowledge can provide" (Handwerk 953). He himself describes Falkland's situation vis-à-vis his servant as similar to "that of a fish that plays with the bait employed to entrap him" (*CW* 105); a negative image which throws doubts upon Caleb's alleged innocence. Moreover, Caleb *does* make use of the power he possesses over Falkland at the end of the novel: In betraying Falkland's secret to the magistrate, and thus the public sphere, Caleb turns his illicit knowledge into political capital.

At the same time, *Caleb Williams* enacts a strange reversal when it turns the point of the completion of Caleb's knowledge, the scene of his master's first confession, into the moment of his disempowerment; a situation in which he remains until the very end of the novel. "The period at which my story is now arrived seemed as if it were the very crisis of the fortune of Mr Falkland" (*CW* 128), Caleb writes after he has gained what he considers the ultimate proof of Falkland's guilt. But Caleb is mistaken: Strangely enough, it is not Falkland's crisis of fortune, but Caleb's that will be enacted from that point onwards, for "[p]aradoxically, it is when his secret is hidden that Falkland is in Caleb's power; when his secret is revealed, the power system changes" (Kilgour 65). There is a "remarkable reversal in the roles of victim and persecutor" (Dumas 594) when Falkland discloses his secret: The very fact that Caleb knows his secret invests Falkland with (patriarchal) power. "Now instead of Caleb watching Falkland, he will be watched himself" (Kilgour 65), restoring the power balance between

servant and master. In accusing Caleb of robbery, Falkland turns the tables on him. This strategy is successful for two reasons: Firstly, Falkland reasserts his public position through his accusation of Caleb and thereby returns into the rightful sphere of the patriarch after years of isolation in the 'private' sphere of his own estate, isolated from the male homosocial bonds which lie at the heart of patriarchy. Secondly, his success is based on the mere fact that no one contests his claim. Society in *Caleb Williams* is universally prone to believe the lies of a gentleman; surprisingly, however, it is not only society which presents itself as an obstacle to the true criminal being found out: It is Caleb himself who swears to himself to "never become an informer" (*CW* 134).

Caleb hints at various reasons for his compliance. After his extensive spying, he has no clear conscience, either, as has been pointed out before. More importantly, however, Caleb has internalised the power structures within his society. Instead of rejecting Falkland's (class-related) power over him, he reads him as an expression of the sublime: Thus, Falkland, like the sublime, evokes "admiration", "terror" and "astonishment" (Burke 58) and comes to possess "connotations […] [that] relate to attributes of divinity" (Fludernik 865). When faced with Falkland's tirades, Caleb is often "render[ed] […] speechless" (Fincher 115)[18] at the beginning of the novel: "I felt as if deprived of all share of activity, and was only able silently and passively to quit the apartment" (*CW* 115), Caleb states, for instance, after Falkland has accused him of spying on him. The focus on Falkland's sublimity strengthens in the course of the novel. After Caleb has tried to betray his secret, for instance, Falkland threatens him: "You defy me! At least I have a power respecting you, and that power I will exercise; a power that shall grind you into atoms" (*CW* 272). The longer Caleb is persecuted by Falkland, the more he "appears supernaturally powerful to Caleb" (Garofalo 48), so that he has trouble convincing himself that "Mr Falkland,

[18] This, of course, also relates to the discourse of homosexuality's 'unspeakability': Caleb's silence "symbolize[s] erotic desires that do not have a voice" (Fincher 123).

wise as he is and pregnant in resources, acts by human and not by supernatural means" (*CW* 280). At the same time, Falkland tries to control Caleb by acting as a "self-appointed God" (Ellis 153), for he must "inspire Caleb with a sense of his own divine sublimity to silence his curiosity and to prevent [his] persecution" (Fincher 121). The power divide between the two characters is thus aggravated after the secret has been disclosed and only collapses at the end of the novel, when Caleb finally succeeds in having Falkland reveal his secret to the public.

Caleb's potential for defending himself is limited by society's prejudice against him, but also by the fact that he cannot make his side of the story appear credible without betraying Falkland's secret. He is thus trapped within the closet of another man, "tormented with a conscious secret of which [he] must never disburthen [him]self" (*CW* 134). This makes him appear suspicious: Towards Mr. Forester, for instance, he only claims that there are "certain reasons which render […] it impossible for [him] to have a tranquil moment under the roof of Mr Falkland" (*CW* 143), thus raising prejudices against himself which later make it easy for Falkland to plant doubt concerning Caleb's behaviour in Mr. Forester's mind. It also means that Caleb can never disclose his own identity because it is intrinsically linked with Falkland's secret; he himself can never be known because the secret may not be known. Falkland's secret spreads out, burdens Caleb and makes it impossible for him to connect to others: He "like Falkland now [becomes] suspicious that others will discover his secret" (Kilgour 67), for he "becomes paranoid that encounters will inevitably involve betrayal" (Kilgour 67). The only way to resist the power Falkland and his closet have over him appears to be a counterattack, in which Caleb, like Falkland, comes to transfer their conflict from a private homosocial relation between two men to the public sphere. Caleb, intent on sustaining the intimacy of their bond, has long shrunk back from this step; his final confession of Falkland's deeds in front of the magistrate, however, enacts this transference of their relationship into the public sphere. And although Caleb claims that, after Falkland's death, he is filled only with remorse and regret,

he has in fact proved his ultimate power over Falkland, the power over life and death.

Before Caleb is forced to disclose the secret, however, the closet is marked, above all, as a site of pleasure in *Caleb Williams*. This is the case as soon as Caleb decides to start his observation of Falkland in order to determine the true nature of his offence: For "[t]he instant I had chosen this employment for myself, I found a strange sort of pleasure in it" (*CW* 104), Caleb states. But what is the nature of this "strange sort of pleasure" (*CW* 104)? Caleb himself attempts an answer: "To do what is forbidden always has its charms, because we have an indistinct apprehension of something arbitrary and tyrannical in the prohibition" (*CW* 104). The pleasure he feels is thus, on the one hand, the pleasure of secrecy, of overstepping the territory of the known in exchange for the unknown, and what provides it with a special allure is the "danger in the employment" (*CW* 104); hence it is the "pleasure of transgression" (Garofalo 46) that attracts Caleb. But it is a pleasure which is nevertheless more than the general attraction of the forbidden, for it is directed at Falkland in particular: It is, after all, "the stern reprimand [he] ha[s] received" (*CW* 104) and Falkland's "terrible looks" (*CW* 104) which give Caleb "a kind of tingling sensation, not altogether unallied with enjoyment" (*CW* 104), showing that one "source of excitement lies in the anticipated repetition of Falkland's anger" (von Mücke 329). In fact, Caleb is attempting to establish a bond with his master. This wish for intimacy, as one possible incentive for Caleb, is also what sexualises his desire for the secret, making "his investigation erotic" (Garofalo 46) and leading to a "thrillingly erotic motivation behind Caleb's power" (Daffron 224) over Falkland. Caleb is coming dangerously close to exchanging the homosociality which is so central to male relationships in a patriarchal system for unacceptable homosexual desires. The pleasure that is experienced in the vicinity of the closet within *Caleb Williams* is thus, although not exclusively, nevertheless in many cases positioned on the threshold of the sexual.

This pleasure is "informed by both sadistic and masochistic traits" (von Mücke 329). In this sado-masochistic set-up, Caleb and Falkland constantly exchange roles, so that "each [acts as] the sadist to the other's masochist" (Day 20). This underlines the fact that their relationship is based on an eroticisation of patriarchal power. Caleb, for instance, plays "sadistic games" (Wehrs 504) with his master, deliberately touching upon topics which disturb him. In that sense, Caleb's behaviour towards Falkland is marked by ambivalence, for he "idealizes Falkland as a superior being, [and] still [...] lays out bait to trap him […]. The more he feels he is hurting Falkland, the more he makes amends by admiring him" (DePorte 157). His sadistic behaviour has, moreover, clear sexual connotations: His spying is constructed as "an act of sexual violence" (Haggerty 113), for "Falkland finds Caleb's spying so offensive that he describes it as if it were the very act of sodomy" (Daffron 224), calling it "penetration" (*CW* 133). In this way, "[s]exuality is understood in terms of power" (Haggerty 112) between Falkland and Caleb and pleasure and power become intrinsically linked in this "sado-masochist complex" (Gross 410). At the same time, Caleb's sadistic behaviour towards Falkland is accompanied by a clear masochism: He changes from "a sadistic sense of having power over [Falkland], to an insistence on masochistic self-abnegation" (Kilgour 61). Caleb's masochism shows itself in the pleasure he experiences at having his master's anger directed at him, which goes along with a wish for prolonged punishment: "For God's sake, sir, turn me out of your house. Punish me in some way or other, that I may forgive myself" (*CW* 116), he states, for instance, after having confessed an act of espionage to Falkland. This masochistic streak keeps resurfacing throughout the novel: "Do with me any thing you will. Kill me if you please. [...] I could die to serve you" (*CW* 117), he tells Falkland shortly thereafter. In this light, Caleb's obsession with the secret can also be read as a masochistic wish to be punished for his transgressions against his master's privacy. This desire to be controlled and overpowered by Falkland is especially clear when the secret is revealed, for then it be-

comes evident that Caleb "unconsciously enjoys the thrill of being an object of persecution" (Fincher 124). For when Caleb "imagine[s] that [he] [i]s the sole subject of general attention, and that the whole world [i]s in arms to exterminate [him]" (*CW* 231), the "very idea tingle[s] through every fibre of [his] frame" (*CW* 231). The sado-masochistic intimacy is, however, also sought by Falkland, for it is he who refuses to let Caleb escape or die. When Caleb attempts to leave England, for instance, Falkland's helpmate Jones prevents him from doing so, claiming that "[t]he squire is determined [Caleb] shall never pass the reach of his disposal" (*CW* 290). And it is Falkland who "maintain[s] [Caleb] in prison" (*CW* 269) and "meditate[s] to do [him] good" (*CW* 269), finally even letting the charges fall, thereby preventing the death penalty Caleb expected. This is surprising as Falkland's wish to have his secret kept would certainly have been better served by putting Caleb to death or by letting him leave England. In that sense, Falkland contributes to his own downfall. His motivation lies in the pleasures of his sado-masochistic relationship to Caleb which suspend even his instinct of self-preservation. The sadistic power that Falkland exerts over Caleb is pleasurable to him as it manifests itself as absolute power over another human being: "I was willing to prove you. You pretended to act towards me with consideration and forbearance. If you had persisted in that to the end, I would yet have found a way to reward you" (*CW* 269), he tells Caleb, arrogating to himself the power that Caleb often attributes to him, that of a god with the power to punish or reward. Caleb and Falkland depend on each other for the gratification of their desires, but the instability of this relationship is shown in its final collapse. Falkland's reign over Caleb becomes too powerful as his persecution starts to leave no space for Caleb's identity, going so far that Caleb fears he "shall be wholly deserted of [his] reason" (*CW* 291). His public accusation of Falkland brings an end to their pleasurable relationship. The power that Falkland needed for pursuing Caleb is no longer in his hands, for Caleb has "conquered" (*CW* 301). The reversal of roles is shown in Falkland taking on Caleb's masochistic vocabulary: "[D]o with me as you please. […] You cannot hate me more than I

hate myself. I am the most execrable of all villains" (*CW* 302). Where Caleb could switch between the roles of sadist and masochist, Falkland, as has been shown before, is no masochist and thus the relationship – and with it, the pleasure it brought – must collapse. Throughout the novel's plot, however, the closet is a site where power and pleasure convene for all those placed in its vicinity.

Relations of Power and the Closet in Belinda

The closet affects the dynamics of power in Falkland's and Lady Delacour's relationships to their subordinates and other people around them. But whereas Falkland, as long as he is *in* the closet, is deprived of his power and suffers at the hands of his curious servant Caleb, Lady Delacour's closet initially provides her with influence over her environment. For her secret is primarily the secret of her independence from a patriarchal society that attempts to dominate her: Her power lies in her deviance from its norms, which, however, has to be hidden. The secret provides Falkland, as a patriarch, with power; for Lady Delacour it can only fulfil this function as long as it is out of the reach of patriarchal society. Lady Delacour, as a woman with a title and a fortune of her own, is in no need of a husband; when she decides to marry nonetheless, she is obviously intellectually superior to her husband and makes use of that superiority in their quarrels, correcting him in linguistic matters and publicly making fun of him (cf. *B* 11, 12). This goes so far that Lord Delacour's greatest fear becomes that of being "'a man to be governed by a wife'" (*B* 38). Even after losing her fortune, Lady Delacour tries and succeeds in keeping the upper-hand in their relationship. Disappointed by her marriage, she forms an alliance with Harriet Freke, who is also caught in an unloving marriage, and the two of them henceforth enact their lives as women independent of men. "'We joined forces, and nothing could stand against us'" (*B* 43), Lady Delacour says of their friendship, thus emphasising the power the two women possess through their homosocial union. This power consists of their independence, but also of their potential sexual freedom, for Lady Delacour

takes Colonel Lawless as an, admittedly, platonic lover. But on top of that, Harriet convinces Lady Delacour of taking part in a duel against her arch-enemy Mrs. Luttridge, dressed in men's clothes: This duel scene is "symbolic of Delacour and Freke's struggle for the power traditionally given to males" (Ty 164), as duels and men's clothes were both privileges reserved for men in the eighteenth century. Interestingly, the cause for the duel is also associated with the public sphere traditionally belonging to men, for Mrs. Luttridge and Lady Delacour get involved in "'a contested election'" (*B* 53) in order to act out their antagonism publicly, which leads to Mrs. Luttridge stating that "'[s]he wishe[s] […] to be a man, that she might be qualified to take proper notice of [Lady Delacour's] conduct'" (*B* 54). Although the duel is not executed due to both duellists losing their nerves, "'[t]he fate of the election turn[s] upon this duel'" (*B* 60), which demonstrates the political potential of female agency and rebellion within a male-dominated society.

At the beginning of the novel, Lady Delacour moreover succeeds in keeping her spatial closet – and thus, symbolically and literally, her metaphorical closet – intact, for the room is inaccessible to anyone but Marriott; even Lord Delacour is not admitted into it. The more Lady Delacour opens herself and her closet to her environment and especially to the patriarchal establishment represented by Lord Delacour and Dr. X, the more she loses her power and independence. For women too, secrecy is thus a potential source of immense power, allowing Lady Delacour to lead a life far removed from the feminine ideal of domesticity. At the same time, disempowerment in the closet is hinted at in *Belinda*, as in *Caleb Williams*, through the destabilisation of the class hierarchy. Both aristocrats, Falkland and Lady Delacour, first provide servants with access to their closets, and in both cases, this threatens to bring about a reversal of roles. A cliché as it may be, the servants in these novels gain considerable power by being situated in the vicinity of their masters' closets. At the beginning of the novel, Marriott appears as the epitome of the insolent servant for as Lady Delacour states "'she rules [her] with a rod of iron'" (*B* 20) and "'must have her

own way in every thing"' (*B* 20). The explanation Lady Delacour offers for this is directly connected to the closet for '"*Marriott knows her power*"' (*B* 20), a fact that causes Lady Delacour "extreme vexation" (*B* 20), for she knows that she can potentially be blackmailed by her. Hence, the relationship with Marriott represents an "unnatural bond with a subordinate" (Rosenberg 586), which is shown by both Belinda's and Lady Delacour's aversion to Marriott at the beginning of the novel. Belinda, for instance, notes that "Marriott exercise[s] despotic authority over her mistress" (*B* 20) and that "Marriott [is] no favourite with lady Delacour" (*B* 20). In the scene in which Lady Delacour is about to admit her secret to her new confidante, Belinda interestingly states her promise of friendship with regard to Marriott: '"Trust to one […] who will never leave you at the mercy of an insolent waiting woman – trust to me"' (*B* 33), she says, thus defining herself in opposition to Marriott in terms of class. It is better for Lady Delacour to trust her secret to middle-class Belinda, for in the logic of the novel, this does not offer the same hazards with regard to blackmail: She also voluntarily admits the secret to Belinda, while Marriott knows about it out of necessity. At the beginning of the novel "Lady Delacour and Belinda share the common belief that servants cannot be trusted" (Nash 44), thus "reflect[ing] the common English fear of social unrest and revolutionary mercilessness on the part of the lower classes" (Nash 45). In fact, however, Lady Delacour's secret remains safe as long as she is only sharing it with her maid; it is only Belinda's involvement that brings about its disclosure and thereby Lady Delacour's disempowerment.

Belinda, as a representative of the middle-class this novel favours and as a collaborator with its patriarchal system, has internalised the middle-class's values and thereby its emphasis on an ideal of womanhood that sees women primarily as domestic: Focused on motherhood and child-rearing, the ideal wife stays within the private sphere of the home, paying deference to her husband whom she supports in his endeavours. Confronted with Lady Delacour's 'unwomanly' secret as well as with her lack of domesticity

and neglect of her relationships to her family, Belinda acts as a representative of the male patriarchy and convinces Lady Delacour to give up her 'dangerous' female privacy: "[U]ntil Lady Delacour is willing to reveal her secrets to the eye of her husband, she has no hope of reform" (MacFadyen 434). Patriarchy demands "her body to be circulated among men" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 115); the purely female homosocial relationships within the closet are marked as suspect. Lady Delacour's acquiescence to Belinda's demand comes about through Belinda's "blackmail" (Lightfoot 130) of her, for she threatens to leave her mentor if she does not comply with her wish to let her body be examined by Dr. X (cf. *B* 130) and to finally open her secret boudoir to her husband (cf. *B* 267). This threat is directly connected to the closet and even expressed by Belinda as such: "'[W]hen I am gone you will have no friend left – when I am gone your secret will inevitably be discovered, for without me Marriott will not have sufficient strength of mind to keep it'" (*B* 131). Lady Delacour's confession must even go so far as to show the letters she has received from Clarence to her husband, so as to dispel the sexual rumours associated with them. As a result, Lord Delacour's reform is brought about, for immediately after being trusted by his wife with Clarence's letters, he decides against a visit at Lord Studley's, a place associated with his drinking habit, in order to "'dine at home'" (*B* 283). An overarching confession on the side of the wife – the husband's privacy is, of course, perceived as unproblematic – is thus required for "[d]omestic harmony[,] [which] can be restored only when th[e] final lock has been opened and th[e] final secret been told" (MacFadyen 435). Belinda thus makes use of her power over Lady Delacour, but there is no open power struggle between the two women and Belinda's use of force is presented as the power of rational argument and convincing logic.

Where Caleb paradoxically loses his power when he discovers his master's secret, the power balance between Belinda and Lady Delacour shifts more according to expectations: It is from that moment on Belinda who acts as the mentor and Lady Delacour who takes on the role of the pupil.

After having learned about the secret of Lady Delacour's boudoir, Belinda "tremble[s] at the idea of being under the guidance of one, who [i]s so little able to conduct herself" (*B* 69) and is "surprised at her aunt's having chosen such a chaperon for a young woman just entering into the world" (*B* 69). As her mentor, Lady Delacour appears as a safety hazard, and it is for that reason that Belinda decides, together with Clarence, to win her over to a more "domestic life" (*B* 165), removed from the gender transgressions of her past. The aim is thus to "reform […] Lady Delacour in adopting the bourgeois ideals of domestic virtue" (Wu 32), the ultimate goal for a woman to achieve. This reformatory aim is a way of exercising power over Lady Delacour on the part of Belinda, who as an "exemplary character" (Mason 277) knows how to solve the Delacours' marital problems without any experience in the matter herself, and uses her "principled mind and rational self-control" (D. Weiss 448) to reform Lady Delacour. By returning to her family and dispelling her closet Lady Delacour is "[a]nimated with the new feelings of returning health, and the new hopes of domestic happiness" (*B* 320), showing that both her body and her mind are finally 'healed'. Just as with Falkland, keeping a secret is in itself harmful, for after the operation Lady Delacour is "no longer in continual anxiety to conceal the state of her health from the world" (*B* 316) and "ha[s] no secret to keep – no part to act" (*B* 316), which "contribute[s] much to her recovery" (*B* 316). Moreover, dispelling the closet "establishes Lady Delacour's ability to oversee household order" (Greenfield, "Abroad" 218), so that she is no longer in the power of her servant. In general, the disclosure of the secret leads to a change in Lady Delacour, turning her from the field of "gender ambiguity" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 115) and a fashionable life towards a promotion of domesticity, not only in her own life, but also in that of others: It is she who, after all, succeeds in marrying off both Belinda and Virginia, thus contributing to the heteronormative ideal the novel presents in its final scene.

Similar to how it is in *Caleb Williams*, the power structures surrounding the closet are associated with pleasure in *Belinda*. This is demonstrated in

the character of Marriott, Lady Delacour's "sadomasochistic servant" (Greenfield, "Abroad" 217), whose ambivalent relationship to Lady Delacour is described by the lady herself: "'Marriott's a faithful creature; and very fond of me; fond of power too – but who is not? – we must all have our faults'" (*B* 21). Marriott obviously enjoys having power over Lady Delacour which is shown by the way she exercises it in bagatelles, for instance when she orders Lady Delacour to wear the costume of the tragic muse at a masquerade. When both Belinda and Lady Delacour attempt to subvert her judgement, claiming to feel more comfortable in the other's role, Marriott "look[s] extremely out of humour" (*B* 19) and finally even "throw[s] down the dresses" (*B* 20) and sets about to leave the room. Considering her position in the household, her reaction is most insolent. Marriott's will to power is, moreover, informed by sadistic traits. She "'rules [Lady Delacour] with a rod of iron'" (*B* 20), making her yield to "every caprice" (*B* 20) of hers; a description that implies both strict rule and enjoyment of power. Marriott also attempts to monopolise her power over Lady Delacour: She "would by no means suffer Belinda to follow her into the boudoir" (*B* 21) and thus she tries to limit the access to Lady Delacour's private sphere to herself. Similar to Caleb, for whom access to Falkland's private sphere is sexualised because it means intimacy with his master, Marriott wants to preserve the right to Lady Delacour's private matters for herself, thus creating an intimate space in which the two of them are alone. Hence, her behaviour is contrasted with Belinda's, for the latter step by step convinces Lady Delacour of sharing her secret with the male establishment, thus destroying the female homosocial private sphere, in which, after she has been introduced to it, Belinda is for some time enclosed with Marriott and Lady Delacour. Where Marriott enjoys the intimacy that the closet provides, Belinda dispels it in order to re-establish the heteronormative order and reunite Lady Delacour with her family.

As soon as Belinda gains access to the boudoir accordingly, the pleasurable power relations within the closet are disrupted. Presented with Belinda's judgement, Lady Delacour begins to see the inappropriateness of

being under the influence of her servant and tries to "reassert her authority over her maid" (Nash 45). She does so by exercising her power in bagatelles as well, and tells her that her "'macaw must go'" (*B* 159). When Marriott threatens to leave the house rather than parting with the bird, Lady Delacour, instead of giving in to her as before, defies her: "'She thinks that she has me in her power. No, I can die without her, I have but a short time to live, I will not live a slave – let the woman betray me if she will'" (*B* 159). The quotation makes evident the enormous influence that Marriott has over Lady Delacour due to her knowledge of her secret, for the fight over the macaw presents another power struggle over a trifle, in which Lady Delacour's refusal to let Marriott have her way can nevertheless have grave consequences for her. But Lady Delacour's fears are unfounded: Although Marriott has been "'pestered […] with so many questions and offers, from Mrs Luttridge and Mrs Freke, of any money, if [she] would only tell who was in the boudoir'" (*B* 160), she "'def[ies] them to get any thing out of [her]'" (*B* 160), showing that "Lady Delacour has more to fear from the schemes of her 'equals' than from her waiting-woman" (Nash 46). Marriott's loyalty towards Lady Delacour is greater than her wish for power over her and thus, the power balance between them is reversed once again. Interestingly, Marriott voices her masochistic "submission" (*B* 161) similar to Caleb: "'O, miss Portman, take my macaw – do what you will with it – only make my peace with my lady'" (*B* 161), she exclaims, "clasping her hands in an agony of grief" (*B* 161). And later, she tells Lady Delacour: "'Do what you please, my lady, with [the macaw] – and with me'" (*B* 161). The submission she shows is thus an act of self-abnegation and when Lady Delacour "grant[s] Marriott's pardon […] she most sincerely rejoice[s] at this reconciliation" (*B* 161). From that moment onwards, the roles between them are not contested anymore. In *Belinda*, the closet is thus presented as an obstacle to a fulfilled life, which can be removed through its disclosure and through a reintegration of Lady Delacour into the heteronormative,

patriarchal society. In Caleb Williams, in contrast, the closet has so fundamentally affected the power structures surrounding the relationship between Caleb and Falkland that such a normalisation is no longer possible.

Homoeroticism and Triangulation: Sexuality and the Closet in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*

In *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*, we can find the beginnings of that sexualisation of the closet which Bauer sees as typical of the nineteenth century (cf. 11). While Bauer, however, believes that the homosexual closet can only come about with the establishment of a modern homosexual identity in the late nineteenth century (cf. 35), this thesis sees the consolidation of such an identity and, along with it, the coming into existence of a homosexual closet, as already given in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the novels under investigation – which are both from exactly this era – we are not simply confronted with a criminal closet but instead with closet structures which are distinctly eroticised. An important aspect of Falkland's closet, which remains so mysterious, so 'unspeakable' within the novel, is his relationship to Tyrell: In their obsessive focusing on each other, their strict exclusion of heterosexual bonds in favour of homosocial ones, they overstep the boundary lines of the homosocial – so central in a patriarchal society – and move within the direction of the homosexual. This eroticisation of the closet does not only relate to Falkland and Tyrell, however: It necessarily spreads to Caleb as soon as he comes in contact with that forbidden knowledge. Lady Delacour's closet is similarly eroticised and homosexualised: Its primary content could be said to be her intimate homoerotic relationship to Harriet Freke and her later attempts at establishing homoerotic bonds to other women within the 'privacy' of her closet. Both novels, moreover, make extensive use of triangular relationships in the Sedgwickian sense: "[I]n any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (*Between Men* 21), or it is, in fact, "even stronger"

(*Between Men* 21). Two rivals of the same sex often triangulate their relationship: The triangulation occurs because of society's prohibitions against homosexuality, which is why a mediator in the form of a woman or a man is implemented.

Sexuality and the Closet in Caleb Williams

Many critics have commented on the potentially homoerotic nature of Caleb's relationship to Falkland, which is marked by strong emotions on Caleb's part: "I found a thousand fresh reasons to admire and love my master" (*CW* 103), Caleb, for instance, states enthusiastically after having been told Falkland's life story. This is just one example demonstrating how Caleb "assumes the language of romance" (Gold 141) in his relationship to Falkland. Most significant, however, is Caleb's sexualised quest for Falkland's secret, which can be seen as both a search for sexual knowledge per se and a specific interest in establishing a closer relationship to his master. This quest is motivated, above all, by Caleb's curiosity, his main characteristic and a drive that is clearly put in the vicinity of the sexual within the novel:

> Curiosity is a principle that carries its pleasures as well as its pains along with it. The mind is urged by a perpetual stimulus; […] the insatiable desire of satisfaction is its principle of conduct, so it promises itself in that satisfaction an unknown gratification, which seems as if it were capable of fully compensating any injuries that may be suffered in the career. (*CW* 119)

Hence, the scenes in which Caleb intrudes into Falkland's closet in order to satisfy his insatiable curiosity are "remarkable for [their] sexual overtones" (Paulson 219): When Falkland accuses Caleb of "watch[ing] [his] privacies with impunity" (*CW* 7), "[t]his accusation arouses Caleb sexually" (Corber 92). This can be seen in the way "[t]he sound of [Falkland's voice] thrill[s] [Caleb's] very vitals" (*CW* 7) and in the way "he projects his desire for his patron onto the trunk" (Corber 92). The scene in which the mystery

is seemingly solved, in which Caleb "finally pushes Falkland out of the closet" (Daffron 224), is consequently an orgasm-like climax taking place in that age-old setting expressive of forbidden desires, of the "fall from innocence into (carnal) knowledge" (Feldmann 74), the Eden-like garden:

> I hastened into the *garden*, and plunged myself into the deepest of its thickets. *My mind was full almost to bursting*. I no sooner conceived myself sufficiently removed from all observation, than my thoughts forced their way spontaneously to my tongue, and I exclaimed in a fit of *uncontrolable* [sic] *enthusiasm*: 'This is the murderer! The Hawkinses were innocent! I am sure of it! I will pledge my life of it! It is out! It is discovered! Guilty upon my soul!' […] *I felt as if my animal system had undergone a total revolution. My blood boiled within me. I was conscious to a kind of rapture for which I could not account*. I was solemn, yet full of rapid emotion […]. In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. I cannot better express the then state of my mind, than by saying, *I was never so perfectly alive as at that moment*. (*CW* 126; emphasis mine)

Caleb, as Daffron puts it, experiences "a physical and mental explosion, analogous to an ejaculation of sorts" (224) when he discovers what he takes to be proof for Falkland's deed.

The quest for the closet also brings about the 'necessity' for watching Falkland on Caleb's part and thus for subjecting him to the erotic male gaze, for in *Caleb Williams* "desire and power [are] mediated through the body" (Fincher 125). Hence, Caleb enjoys his voyeuristic viewing of Falkland's bodily reactions whenever he is confronted with his closet: "The blood forsook at once the transparent complexion of Mr Falkland, and then rushed back again with rapidity and fierceness" (*CW* 109). Gazing at Falkland and interpreting his bodily reactions is thus a way for Caleb to establish knowledge and power over him, but also to act out his desires

towards him. As Fincher claims, "the look and its interpretation may be a way in which desire is conveyed between men in the late eighteenth century in the absence of any physical expression" (126) and the "power relationship is determined via who gazes" (126). The object of the gaze is constructed as passive and even feminised, which is why "neither Caleb nor Falkland wishes to be the object of each other's gaze, because to gaze marks out the masculine" (Fincher 126). With Falkland and Caleb the gaze is expressive of "an initial erotic attraction and then a phobic exchange" (Fincher 125). Accordingly, Falkland's defence strategy against Caleb's spying is to subject him to his all-encompassing gaze in his relentless persecution of him, thereby relegating him to a feminised position. Feminisation is a central problem in *Caleb Williams*: Men's obsessive dread of it keeps resurfacing throughout the novel and is the underlying root of all homosocial conflict. Both Caleb and Falkland are feminised within the novel's logic, Caleb through his obsessive curiosity (a 'female' trait) and his subordinated position, and Falkland through his "small stature, with an extreme delicacy of form and appearance" (*CW* 4), and through his 'feminine' manners which make him particularly agreeable to women: "His polished manners [a]re admirably in union with feminine delicacy" (*CW* 18). In this novel, however, feminisation and homosexuality are closely linked: Corber points out that Falkland might be constructed as a "sodomite" (88), a crime often associated with aristocrats, feminised themselves by eighteenth and nineteenth century culture. Through the excessive focus on feminisation in the novel we can see that the male closet, too, in its queer elements, participates in the discourse on gender transgression which is so central for the female closet. Homosexuality is, for both men and women, an act of gender non-compliance in a society that associates it with an 'inversion' of gender identity, as the nineteenth century was prone to do long before the late nineteenth century 'inversion' theories. For women, however, this is aggravated by the fact that they function as the 'object of exchange' in patriarchy: By focusing their desires on their own sex, they deny men their

status as 'objects of exchange' and demonstrate their independence from men, which represents a grave threat to the patriarchal system.

It is, however, not only Caleb's relationship to the closet which is eroticised, but, as has been pointed out before, the actual content of the closet can be regarded as homoerotic. For this content pertains to Falkland's homoerotic relationship to his neighbour, Tyrell, which is, in a manner typical of the male closet, fashioned as 'rivalry' in a patriarchal system: "The arrival of Mr Falkland g[ives] a dreadful shock to the authority of Mr Tyrell" (*CW* 18). While Collins, the narrator of the story, regards their enmity as sexual rivalry, for "the ladies regard [...] Mr Falkland with particular complacence" (*CW* 18), Tyrell seems in fact to experience a strong desire for Falkland which he can only translate into homophobic hatred. Both attraction and homosexual panic are strong in Tyrell: "This Falkland haunts me like a demon. I cannot wake, but I think of him. I cannot sleep, but I see him" (*CW* 30). He cannot even consent to slight bodily contact with Falkland; shaking his hand is a "gesture [...] too significant" (*CW* 28). Significantly, Corber interprets Tyrell's reaction as expressive of his fear of "feminization" (97) by Falkland, who represents a feminine "sexual antithesis" (Corber 97) to the masculinity that Tyrell, "muscular and sturdy" (*CW* 16), "insupportably arrogant, tyrannical to his inferiors, and insolent to his equals" (*CW* 16), is trying to display.[19] In contrast to Falkland and Caleb, Tyrell and Falkland attempt to resolve their conflict through triangulation before accepting the inevitable conclusion of their homoerotic desires in death. They "compete over a series of characters, both male and female, in whom they take little interest except as the object of each other's desire" (Corber 93). The most important of these 'objects' is Tyrell's niece Emily,

[19] Tyrell's and Falkland's rivalry can be read as the result of their differing interpretations of masculinity and patriarchal power: Where Tyrell stands for an "outdated tyranny" (Garofalo 37), Falkland represents the "modern master" (Garofalo 37), whose "brute force can no longer appear in public" (Garofalo 39). "Tyrell [is] anxious about the superiority of the physical model of masculinity to which he adheres" (Marshall 119) and this goes along with a fear of feminisation.

who is initially constructed as a potential heterosexual 'alternative' to homosocial bonds for both men. Through her close connection to Tyrell, she seems at first to present a likely partner for him; after Falkland rescues her from a burning house, however, she falls in love with Tyrell's rival. Although Falkland does not seem to be interested in Emily in a sexual or romantic way, he nonetheless "uses her as the structuring third term of his relations with Tyrell" (Corber 93). For, as Corber points out, "[s]urely if he truly cared about her welfare he would avoid noticing her at all since he knows that doing so will only turn his rival against her" (93). And this, of course, is exactly what happens: "All [Tyrell's] kindness for [Emily] gradually subside[s]" (*CW* 57), when he realises that she is in love with Falkland; a fact which he considers as "the ultimate provocation" (Corber 93). After attempting to force her into marriage to Grimes, an ugly, unrefined farmer, and Falkland's renewed rescue of her, Tyrell finally confines her to prison where she dies: "[C]aught in their cross fire, she is destroyed" (Mackie 181), for "[i]n a novel so preoccupied with infatuated male-male antagonism, all powerfully charged relations […] are between men" (Mackie 184). Her death defines the relationship between Falkland and Tyrell in its final stage, for they are now arch-enemies. In their final confrontation, pent-up bodily desires are finally released when Tyrell hits Falkland in public, thereby both passivising and feminising him. This act, the ultimate challenge to Falkland's position as a patriarch, also represents a metaphoric rape as can be seen by his extreme reaction:

> He wished no doubt for annihilation, to lie down in eternal oblivion, in an insensibility, which compared with what he experienced was scarcely less enviable than beatitude itself. Horror, detestation, revenge, inexpressible longings to shake off the evil, and a persuasion that in this case all effort was powerless, must have filled his soul even to bursting. (*CW* 94)

Although this is admittedly Collins's interpretation of Falkland's emotions, the truth of his statement is proven by Falkland's deed: Inferior in terms of strength, he resorts to a dishonourable murder in order to take revenge on Tyrell. Patriarchal power can only be maintained in this way. Just as it is with Falkland and Caleb, the relationship between the two can hence only be resolved through the death of one of the rivals, which shows how the sexualisation of desire in homosocial relationships necessarily ends fatally in *Caleb Williams*.

Sexuality and the Closet in Belinda

In *Belinda*, "the most passionate and permanent relationships are between the female characters" (U. Klein 1). Similar to Falkland's, Lady Delacour's closet is partly formed through a homoerotic attachment, in this case to Harriet Freke. As has been mentioned before, for women in a patriarchal society such homoerotic attachments are even more problematic than for men as female desires should be exclusively focused on men to guarantee their availability for them. A desire that only circulates between women is, of course, independent of men and thereby undermines the power structures of a patriarchal society which treats women as goods to be exchanged. As a consequence, female homosexuality per se represents a grave gender transgression. In *Belinda*, the relationship to Harriet is presented as an alternative to Lady Delacour's marriage for it is when she fails in her heterosexual relationship to her husband as well as in her role as a mother, when she has "'nothing at home, either in the shape of husband or children, to engage [her] affections'" (*B* 43), that Lady Delacour turns to Harriet, showing that "homoerotic relations offer escape from this traffic [in women]" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 107). Harriet's desire, too, is focused exclusively on women within the novel; although she is married,[20] she "'bitterly hates'" (*B* 66) her husband and frequently has 'romantic' female friends. At their

[20] This underlines the (obvious, but often neglected) fact that "marriage and procreation tell us nothing about sexual desire or orientation" (D. M. Robinson 12).

first meeting, as well as afterwards, "Lady Delacour's reaction to Harriot is nervous and erotically charged" (Donoghue, *Passions* 101):[21]

> 'I believe it was this 'aching void' in my heart which made me […] take *such a prodigious fancy* to Mrs Freke. She was just then coming into fashion – she struck me the first time I met her, as being downright ugly; but there was *a wild oddity* in her countenance which *made one stare at her*, and *she was delighted to be stared at – especially by me* – so we were mutually agreeable to each other – I as starer, and she as staree. Harriet Freke had, without comparison, more assurance than any man or woman I ever saw. […] Such things as I have heard Harriet Freke say! You will not believe it; but her conversation at first absolutely made me, like an old fashioned fool, *wish I had a fan to play with*.' (*B* 43; emphasis mine)

Transgression, homoeroticised 'oddity', and implied masculinity[22] is what makes Harriet attractive to Lady Delacour, as can be seen in this description: She reacts to her as she is supposed to react towards a male suitor,

[21] The name 'Harriet' is spelled 'Harriot' by some critics.
[22] We will re-encounter this association between female homoerotic desires and masculinity as a common phenomenon in the nineteenth century in the section on the lesbian closet. Harriet's 'masculine' demeanour is presented as a threatening gender transgression within *Belinda*, but as one that is not closeted but openly demonstrated. In her character, however, we can see how the novel problematises gender reversal and cross-dressing in general. Although Harriet as a "trickster" (Bilger 103) figure brings about comic scenes, too, tricksters also "embody a potent threat to the status quo by providing a foil for the heroines' discreet conduct and by acting out the heroines' transgressive desires" (Bilger 98). In Harriet's case, this transgression is expressed through her cross-dressing and the open defiance she shows towards the strict division between the female and the masculine, for "the donning of men's clothes becomes an overt signal of the usurpation of the domain usually assigned to males in eighteenth-century society and culture" (Ty 164). The novel's relation to gender transgressions is ambivalent, for, on the one hand, the mere presence of a character such as Harriet shows how essentialised notions of masculinity and femininity can be radically destabilised: "The traits […] commonly ascribed to men, and those seen as natural in women, are set loose to float freely in the social sphere, attaching themselves to any individual, regardless of his or her sex" (D. Weiss 449). On the other hand, the novel makes an effort to stabilise the notions of sex and gender which it has so radically destabilised in the character of Harriet Freke by punishing and banishing her, thereby eliminating the threat of her transgression: She is "'caught in a man trap'" (*B* 311) which spoils "the

blushing and wishing to hide herself. Interestingly, just as in *Caleb Williams*, desire in this quotation is also aligned with the gaze, the sexual stare. Where normally, however, the stare is used as a means by which the man, as the staring part, establishes himself as the subject and the woman as the object, this order is reversed: For it is Harriet, marked as 'male', who is the object of the gaze. Her desire to be subjected to the gaze is here used as a way to mark her 'unfeminine' lack of modesty. A more traditional employment of the sexual stare can be found in Lady Delacour's confrontation with a Harriet dressed in men's clothes:

> As the colonel was going to hand me to my carriage, a smart-looking young man, as I thought, came up close to the coach door, and stared me full in the face: I was not a woman to be disconcerted at such a thing as this, but I really was startled when the young fellow jumped into the carriage after me: I thought he was mad: I had only courage enough to scream. (*B* 45)

Of course, the young man turns out to be Harriet Freke and the situation is quickly resolved. But the scene contains "veiled hints of rape" (Donoghue, *Passions* 101), communicated through the gaze, "the stare of desire" (D. Weiss 457), which is, even though employed by a woman, here gendered male and which Lady Delacour perceives as indicative of "an imminent sexual attack" (D. Weiss 457). Although Lady Delacour mistakes Harriet for a man, the scene is symptomatic of their overall relationship which is marked by "lesbian panic" (P. J. Smith 2); a condition that keeps resurfacing in *Belinda*, and which can be described as "the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character [...] is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire" (P. J. Smith 2).

As it turns out, however, Harriet is an opportunist, who changes sides as soon as it is more advantageous for her to be Mrs. Luttridge's friend.

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beauty of her legs" (*B* 312) so that she will "never more be able to appear to advantage in man's apparel" (*B* 312).

When Lady Delacour finds out about her betrayal she "speaks of Harriet Freke like a lover who has jilted her" (U. Klein 5): "'Whilst I thought she really loved me, I pardoned her all her faults […] All, all I forgave […] I always thought that she cared for no one but for me – but now I find she can throw me off as easily as she would her glove'" (*B* 66). Lady Delacour has invested more into the relationship than Harriet, and thus she turns to Belinda to compensate for her. "Belinda replaces Harriet in Lady Delacour's affections" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 114) and consequently the relationship is eroticised. Lady Delacour's feelings for Belinda are even stronger than those for Harriet:

> 'For what was Harriet Freke in comparison with Belinda Portman? Harriet Freke, even whilst she diverted me most, I half despised. But Belinda! Oh, Belinda! how entirely have I loved! trusted! admired! adored! respected! revered you!' (*B* 183)

Just as Caleb does when he is confronted with Falkland, Lady Delacour assumes the language of romance when speaking about her female friends and "her declarations of love or distrust of Belinda are characterized by a vehemence she does not express for her husband or any other man" (U. Klein 7). But while Lady Delacour is thus "tempted to pursue a homoerotically charged relationship with her […], Belinda resists this in the interest of heterosexuality and maternity" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 114), leaving Lady Delacour no other choice than to return to the field of heterosexual relationships. This shows that "before Lady Delacour can be reclaimed for the family and private life, she has to relearn or abandon all her previous ways of relating to women" (Gonda 215), turning sexually charged relationships into platonic ones. Whether Lady Delacour is, however, ever truly won over to domestic, heterosexual life, is a fact that many critics doubt: Montwieler claims that "her 'reformation' [is] ultimately unbelievable, for Edgeworth clearly establishes her from the beginning as an actor unafraid to assume any role" ("Reading" 350) and Terry F. Robinson states that Lady

Delacour "never really finds her 'true' identity, but, rather, […] plays at the novel's close her most convincing character" (146). Lady Delacour may simply have become better at hiding her gender transgressions – at keeping her closet safe. Joan Riviere has drawn our attention to the way in which 'womanliness' can be used as a masquerade: According to her, "women who wish for masculinity [e.g. masculine privileges] may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (303). By "masquerading as guiltless and innocent" (306), they attempt to appease men in their environment through an over-emphasis on their 'feminine side'. In taking on the mask of womanliness, motherhood and heterosexuality, Lady Delacour may thus be appeasing the patriarchal establishment while re-establishing the closet surrounding her prohibited and transgressive desires.

Lady Delacour's homoerotic interest in Belinda is associated with her closet through the metaphor of the wounded breast, the sign of her gender transgression: For while it is true that the breast is healed once it is revealed to men, to Dr. X and Lord Delacour, it can also "only return to health once [Lady Delacour's] bosom friend is restored to her" (U. Klein 8), that means, after Belinda's return. This demonstrates the way in which the "breast connects [Lady Delacour] with Mrs. Freke, Belinda, and even the serving-woman Marriot and her rival Mrs. Luttridge" (U. Klein 8): Harriet is the one responsible for the wound, for "Lady Delacour […] receives the mark of Harriot Freke's gender and sexual transgressions on her own body" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 98); Belinda is the one who dispels the secret of the wound and leads to its healing; Marriott is the one assigned to care for it, while Mrs. Luttridge is involved in the duel and later attempts to use the secret against Lady Delacour. All of these relationships are obliquely or openly eroticised. The secret of the breast, which could potentially turn Lady Delacour into an "Amazon" (*B* 34),[23] is thus a sign of the homoeroticism that marks Lady Delacour's relationships with women. For when the

[23] The Amazons are a "mythic tribe of women warriors who […] removed their right breast to facilitate the use of bows" (Wu 56). According to Castle (cf. *Apparitional* 9), the

secret of the breast is revealed to Lord Delacour, "the heterosexual impact is immediate" (Greenfield, *Mothering* 115); his love is instantly rekindled. The wound in the breast thus serves as an obstacle between Lady Delacour and heterosexuality, just as it prevents her from performing her role as a mother.[24] Not only that one of her children dies because she breastfeeds it, the breast also literally and symbolically stands between her and Helena: When her daughter "presse[s] close to her mother's bosom, clasping her with all her force" (*B* 173) in a fit of enthusiasm, Lady Delacour "scream[s], and pushe[s] her daughter away" (*B* 173) due to the pain the embrace causes her breast. Only after the breast, whose wound functions as the sign of her gender transgression and transgressive homoerotic desires, is healed, can Lady Delacour thus seemingly return to her family and hence to motherhood and heterosexuality.

Just as in *Caleb Williams*, apparently heterosexual relationships in *Belinda* can be used to indirectly and obliquely express secret homoerotic desires, thus creating a triangulation of desire. This is the case in the relationship between Lady Delacour, Colonel Lawless, and Harriet Freke. For while Harriet's object of desire is obviously Lady Delacour, she still needs "a proxy" (D. Weiss 457) in order to "launch a sexual attack on Lady Delacour" (D. Weiss 457) and this proxy comes in the form of Lawless. After all, it is Harriet who strongly supports Lady Delacour in engaging in an affair-like relationship with him in order to render her husband jealous. But Lawless in himself is unimportant: He is no more than an "'empty […] coxcomb'" (*B* 38) in Lady Delacour's eyes and Harriet does not even care whether he is alive or dead, claiming that it is "'a weakness in [Lady Dela-

word 'amazon' had clear lesbian connotations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; a fact which emphasises Lady Delacour's homoeroticism.

[24] The meaning of the breast "changes during the eighteenth century, becoming less associated with eroticism and sexuality and more attached to the maternal role of women in society" (U. Klein 2). In an age that sees motherhood as "a woman's ultimate fulfilment" (Perry 213), Lady Delacour's refusal of the role is highly problematic: By "stubbornly clinging to her sexual self – and refusing the responsibilities of domestic life – she does real damage to her maternal organ" (Perry 232).

cour] to think so much about poor Lawless's death"' (*B* 52). The relationship is thus triangulated with the help of Lawless, but the alleged object of desire hardly matters. The triangulation, however, helps to closet the homoerotic nature of the connection. A similar constellation can be found in the relationship between Clarence, Belinda and Lady Delacour. Desire is triangulated, for Clarence is an admirer of Lady Delacour and in the beginning, Lady Delacour appears to Belinda "as a dangerous rival" (*B* 16). Although Lady Delacour does not seem to be in any way sexually or romantically interested in Clarence, she is "'determined to retain Clarence Hervey among the number of [her] public worshippers during [her] life"' (*B* 81) and only afterwards, she tells Belinda, "'he'll be all [her] own"' (*B* 81). Lady Delacour "promote[s] a flirtation between Clarence and Belinda" (MacFadyen 430), but she "also call[s] attention to […] herself, setting up an uncomfortable triangular relationship" (MacFadyen 430, 431). Clarence, however, only functions as a proxy in a relationship that is primarily between Belinda and Lady Delacour, for their bond "becomes the most consistently and intensely eroticized one in the novel" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 92).

Interestingly, a triangulation of desire is not restricted to a heterosexual set-up in *Belinda*. The novel abounds with triangular relationships between women which are marked as potentially homoerotic and which all occur in connection with Lady Delacour's secret. This is, for instance, the case in the relationship between Marriott, Lady Delacour and Belinda, as well as Lady Delacour, Harriet Freke and Mrs. Luttridge. The most obvious instance of triangulation occurs, however, with regard to Harriet Freke, Belinda and Lady Delacour. As soon as Harriet hears about a rupture in the friendship between Lady Delacour and Belinda, which causes Belinda to leave her friend and instead stay at the Percivals, she "cast[s] herself in the role of [the] Prince" (U. Klein 6) who comes to rescue Belinda from her new friends' 'dullness'. Accordingly, she tries to "'carry [her] off in triumph"' (*B* 225) in an "attempted elopement" (L. Moore, "Something" 504). Hence, she is "establishe[d] […] as a suitor to Belinda and a rival for

her heart" (U. Klein 7) in a similar way that Lady Delacour is, for both relationships have homoerotic overtones. But it is obviously Belinda's relation to Lady Delacour that has drawn Harriet's attention to her. This is shown by the way she immediately asks Belinda if she and Lady Delacour "'are off'" (*B* 226), claiming that they were "'once great friends'" (*B* 226). Thus, Belinda acts as the seemingly desired object in a relationship in which Harriet and Lady Delacour do not only desire her. Instead, Harriet still takes great interest in Lady Delacour's affairs and Lady Delacour's enmity towards her is a sign of her emotional investment: Their relationship is the primary one in this constellation. Once again, the dynamics of desire within a triangular relationship are thus complicated, but this time within a purely homosexual context. The gender of the characters involved, however, does not change the basic set-up, in which rivalry for an object of desire presupposes a, perhaps even stronger, desire for the rival.

A Brief Summary

The closets in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda* show partly similar traits; these are, however, invested with different meaning. In both novels we find a literal closet, a room which functions as a spatialised embodiment of Falkland's and Lady Delacour's metaphorical closets. The names given to these rooms already point towards the gendering of rooms typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Falkland's 'male' variant is called a 'closet', while Lady Delacour's 'female' one is referred to as a 'boudoir'. This gendering further pertains to the functions these rooms are supposed to take on and to the amount of privacy these spaces can grant. Falkland's closet represents the typical patriarchal private space, which closets knowledge relevant in the preservation of the patriarchal power structure, and it is, accordingly, off-limits to all other household members. Lady Delacour's boudoir, on the other hand, is associated with femininity through the discourse of illness, a typical 'female' condition, and is more vulnerable to intrusions from outsiders. As we will see throughout this thesis, one of the

main characteristics of the female closet is its precarious status as a 'private' room. This privacy presents, on the one hand, one of the greatest threats to patriarchy, female independence – the closet often hosts women in a homosocial environment, unobserved by men –, and, on the other hand, an erotic attraction for men, who voyeuristically spy into this supposedly private female space. This goes along with a sexual suspicion which rests particularly on the female closet, where men expect, above all, to find a woman's lover. Throughout the novel, Lady Delacour is the subject of society's surveillance, constantly observed and spoken of and suspected of harbouring sexual secrets, while Falkland only has to fight against Caleb's obsessive persecution. Falkland, as a man, is much more successful at guarding his secrets within his closet: If it had not been for Caleb's feminising, intrusive curiosity, he would have presumably been able to keep his secret until his death. In contrast, *Belinda* can only reach an appropriate ending by satisfying the male establishment's wish to spy into Lady Delacour's closet: Only after she has literally and metaphorically opened her private space to patriarchy is she able to be reformed and, in the novel's logic, 'happy'. What is, moreover, interesting is the fact that the content of the two closets differs greatly according to the gender of the keeper of the secret. Although both closets are partly criminal closets in that they pertain to infringements of the law, these crimes are presented as 'typically' male and female. Murder, a crime gendered male, is frequently the content of the male closet, especially when combined with dubious eroticised homosocial relations between men.[25] Falkland's case is typical of the male closet: Murder, for him, is a 'necessity' in order to maintain his patriarchal power vis-à-vis a competitor, whose claim to power rivals his own and whose homoerotic investment in him threatens to undermine the foundations on which patriarchy rests. Lady Delacour's crimes are also, above all, 'female'

[25] The sensation novels, as we will see in the next section, allow women to become murderers, too. That this represents a thwarting of reader expectations can be seen in the contemporaries' shocked reactions to these kinds of novels.

crimes, for they are related to a subversive transgression of the patriarchal gender system and to a failure in 'proper' femininity and motherhood.

Both novels relate the closet to discourses of power, sexuality and gender performance; all thematic complexes which are frequently relevant when dealing with the closet and which we will encounter again and again throughout this thesis. As knowledge and power are inextricably connected, power relations are in constant flux around the closet. While both novels depict this connection and its variable nature in detail, showing how the power that information on the closet grants can have the potential to influence the rigid class hierarchy as well as constitute an inimitable source of pleasure, there are gendered differences in the power relations the novels envision. The power struggle between the two male characters is of central importance in *Caleb Williams*: Patriarchal power constitutes itself with recourse to the closet. In contrast to Caleb, who intrudes into his master's closet, Belinda is not deliberately breaching her lady's private sphere: Her original goal is not to gain power over her, but to normalise Lady Delacour's relationships and to transfer her into the sphere of heteronormativity. Where Caleb enacts a fierce, and eroticised, struggle with his master, Belinda is trying to harmonise the relationships in her environment according to the norms of her society. Furthermore, Falkland, as a man, is especially vulnerable when he hides his secret within the private sphere of the home; as soon as he reclaims the public sphere to which the patriarch traditionally belongs, he is able to fend Caleb off. Lady Delacour, on the other hand, can only construct a space of independence and provisional privacy as long as the secret is kept within the female homosocial community; when it reaches beyond this sphere, it is destroyed. Both novels are also interesting in that they actively connect the closet to the discourse of a homoerotic sexuality, often 'hidden' beneath triangular relationships. Here we can already see early versions of the homosexual closet which gains currency in the nineteenth century until it comes to represent what we today perceive as *the* closet per se. In addition, this demonstrates that homoerotic energies are not limited to men in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth century as has often been implicitly and explicitly presumed. We have, for instance, proof of the eighteenth century molly house (cf. Bray, *Homosexuality*) as an early meeting-place for male homosexuals, but of no similar space for female ones. In characters like Harriet Freke, we can detect an early form of a lesbian identity, which, like the molly's feminising gestures, points towards a concomitant gender reversal (an aspect which tends to accompany manifestations of lesbian desire in the nineteenth century). Such gender reversals are everywhere in *Caleb Williams* and *Belinda*; the closet in itself along with its homoerotic connotations seems to bring about a destabilisation of these supposedly rigid, essentialised barriers. Gender transgression thus marks the (queer) male closet as well as the female closet; it is, however, much more symptomatic of the female closet than it is of the male. While gender is thus primarily seen as performative within the novels, this is especially true of femininity: Lady Delacour, as well as many of the characters we will meet within the next chapters, has to put on a mask of 'perfect' femininity in order to hide ambitions and characteristics marked as masculine. This can finally be said to represent the quintessential difference between a male and a female closet in the novels under discussion and in the nineteenth century: While the male closet uses strategies of secrecy for establishing or protecting patriarchal power, the female closet hides behaviour that deviates from a patriarchal culture's expectations concerning women, often through the female characters' impersonation of an idealised, conform femininity. The closet thus reflects the power imbalance between the genders at the same time as it demonstrates how the limitations set for women lead to a great necessity for secrecy, for being in the closet.

In the following, this thesis will trace the outlines of the female closet established in this chapter through a discussion of the female criminal closet and the lesbian closet. We will further meet a specifically female closet as of yet untouched, the closet of women's victimisation. The insights won in this chapter concerning the similarities and differences between male and female closet as well as the specific forms the closet can

take on will serve as a basis for the analyses offered in all that is yet to come. Now, however, it is time to turn our attention to the female criminal closet in its heyday, in the sensation novels of the 1860s.

The Criminal Closet

Introductory Remarks

Gender transgression is the quintessential feature that marks the female closet in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. One of the central transgressions of women that the nineteenth century – especially the mid-nineteenth century – constructs is criminality: It goes against the character traits that the age's strict gender division assigns to women. In this system of gender separation, women should be passive, submissive and home-bound – all characteristics that do not easily go along with a criminal mind-set. It comes as no surprise, then, that criminality, similar to homosexuality, is hidden in the closet, for it undercuts normative female behaviour in a radical fashion and subverts a patriarchal society. It also frequently – at least in the novels under investigation – goes along with a whole cluster of 'abnormal', queer desires that must be hidden as well. The connection between criminality and homosexuality becomes even more evident when we remind ourselves of the fact that homosexuality, at least in its male variant, constituted an actual crime, an offence against the law, in Britain throughout the nineteenth century and far into the twentieth century. Criminality is also crucial for a discussion of the closet, as it is sometimes suspected of constituting an 'original' male closet: Bauer, writing on masculinities, sees the closet's origins in the Bluebeard tale's paranoid secret, which "in the course of the nineteenth century […] will turn into the 'sexualised' rhetoric of the 'closet'" (11). Bluebeard's closet, as well as that of the male patriarchs in Gothic novels, is, above all, a criminal closet (often with murderous content), based "on a rhetoric of homosocially shared secrecy which […] becomes increasingly problematic within the discursive context of ever more virulent categories of 'deviant sexualities'" (Bauer 25). "It is only […] with the emergence of modern notions of 'sexual identities' […] that the 'closet,' in its fully-fledged modern shape, appears" (Bauer 35).

The criminal closet is here seen as constituting a previous form of the closet, which then, in the late nineteenth century, takes on the homosexual meanings it holds today. This timeline approach does not hold for an investigation of the female closet: We are here presented with an 'early' lesbian closet in the form of the Anne Lister Diaries (cf. "The Lesbian Closet").[26] Nonetheless, Bauer's approach alerts us to the importance of an investigation of the criminal closet, so that we now take a closer look at female criminality and the relations surrounding the female criminal closet.

The nineteenth century, while on the one hand regarding criminality as an absolute deviation from its compulsory standards of femininity, at the same time relegates the female criminal a central status in its literary imagination. This is especially true of the sensation novels, a literary genre which was immensely popular in the 1860s – contemporary critics spoke of the "Sensational Mania" (Unsigned Review in the *Westminster Review*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 158) of the age. In its depiction of "murder, blackmail, illegitimacy, impersonation, eavesdropping, multiple secrets, a suggestion of bigamy, amateur and professional detectives" (Hughes 173) the sensation novel tried to evoke in readers a "vibrant response to the thrilling quality of the plot" (Ascari 207). As "novel[s] with a secret" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 14), sensation novels are, moreover, in their very structure intricately bound up with the closet. What they do above all is, however, to propose "a special relationship between femininity and crime" (Trodd 96) and to see women as the "inherently […] more criminal sex" (Trodd 96), thereby breaking up preconceived ideas of femininity. "The genre creates sensationalism by locating crime where one would least expect it – not only in the home but in the actions of a woman" (Cvetkovich 46), so that women take on centre stage in the sensation novels' complex plots. We

[26] I am, moreover, of the opinion that "modern notions of sexual identities" already emerge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This idea ties in with the example of Anne Lister's 'early' identity construction. Accordingly, I am sceptical whether the male closet's intimate entanglement with homosexuality only comes about with the late nineteenth century – for me, a novel like *Caleb Williams* shows already definite traits of a homosexual identity construction in its characters (my discussion of the novel can be found in the section "The Male and the Female Closet").

have already seen a criminal closet in *Belinda* where Lady Delacour's closet originates in a transgression of the law, in a women's duel in men's clothes. In this section, we will take a closer look at female criminal closets in two sensation novels, namely Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866). Not only do these novels constitute two representative texts of the sensation genre, their depiction of female criminals was also regarded as most outrageous by contemporary critics. Here we can see the ambivalent nature of female criminality in the nineteenth century: Although crime is closely connected to femininity, it is also seen as the very antithesis of womanliness; a point that is underlined by the following historical considerations.

Feeley and Little have demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, criminality has not "always […] been a male phenomenon" (723). In fact, "during the first half of the eighteenth century women constituted roughly three to four times the proportion of felony defendants that they have in the twentieth century" (Feeley and Little 722). The turnaround takes place sometime "over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" where we suddenly find a "marked decrease in women's criminal involvement" (Feeley and Little 720). The reasons for this development can presumably be found in the increasing gendered separation of the 'public' and the 'private' sphere, in the cult of domesticity in which women were depicted as primarily mothers and wives and in a cultural doctrine that attempted to establish women as inherently non-criminal: "[W]omen became less inclined and able than men to engage in activity defined as criminal, and women were less subject to the criminal sanction as other forms of more private control emerged" (Feeley and Little 741), for instance in the panopticon-like structures of the middle and upper classes' homes with their intricate systems of surveillance (cf. Wigley 341). Exclusion from the public sphere makes criminal involvement difficult or changes the crimes that women are able to commit: "[T]he greater participation of women in economic production in the eighteenth century may mean that they were less controlled, more able to engage in criminal activity, and more subject

of formal legal controls" (Feeley and Little 745). The sensation novels, with their focus on female criminality, can then be seen as representing the other side of this cultural paradigm which limits women's influence to the immediate sphere of the home. As the nineteenth century depicted women as essentially non-criminal, actual, undeniable female criminality came to present a much greater deviation than male criminality: "Women's crimes not only broke the criminal law but were viewed as acts of deviance from the 'norm' of femininity" (Zedner 308). As "women were supposed to act as a potential moralizing force in society" (Zedner 326), criminal behaviour on their part was perceived as a grave threat. This thought pattern has stayed with us to the present: "[T]he assumption remains that in women such behaviour [meaning violent behaviour] denotes deviance – moreover deviance that so dramatically contravenes accepted norms of behaviour that it is usually suspected of being pathological in origin" (Kirsta 37). It comes as no surprise then that rather than accepting a notion of female criminality that would shake fundamental assumptions about an essentialised femininity, women's criminality was instead relegated to the realm of the medical: "[T]hroughout the nineteenth century women constituted a declining portion of the prison population and correspondingly a growing portion of the population in insane asylums" (Feeley and Little 750). The discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale* will support this argument, for in both novels the female criminal's final resting place is the madhouse, not the prison. The close links between criminality and madness that are established in the nineteenth century go along with an increasing connection between the two concepts and femininity, so that criminality, femininity and madness form a close-knit cluster that will be investigated in the following chapters of this section.

The previous discussion has demonstrated how criminality stands in an ambivalent relation to femininity: Conceived of as its antithesis, the very boundary line between the female and the criminal simultaneously triggers a cultural preoccupation with female criminality, which, in the sensation novels, aims at subverting expectations. Criminality, for women, presents a

transgression of gender norms, while, at the same time, criminality and femininity are inextricably entwined in nineteenth century literature. Consequently, the criminal closet is, to a large extent, also a female closet. While crime often constitutes the core of the male closet, too, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this criminality comes about in connection with an attempt to protect a patriarchal secret, or is equivalent with this patriarchal secret. Patriarchal power and interests are secured and erected through the establishment of the closet. The transgression that female criminality enacts, however, is even stronger than that of male criminality, as it is not only a transgression of the juridical law but also a transgression of gender norms. In its very connection with criminality we can see that the female closet forms the *other* strand of a male tradition that is equally entwined with criminal aspects. The following chapters on *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale* will focus on this relation between femininity, criminality and gender transgression, and demonstrate how Lucy Audley's and Lydia Gwilt's closets are marked as characteristically female ones.

Confessing “anything” – The Criminal Closet in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*

Lady Audley’s Secret (1862) confronts us with one of the most iconic female criminals of the nineteenth century, the infamous Lucy Audley. In her story, we do not only find an archetypal female closet, both spatial and metaphorical, but a female criminal closet which consists of an accumulation of closeted information. This cluster of closetedness pertains to criminality and (homo-)sexuality, to motherhood and illness; a cluster that is characterised by a general gender non-compliance on Lady Audley’s part which makes up the specific ‘femaleness’ of her closet. *Lady Audley’s Secret* tells the story of Helen Maldon, who, in order to escape her poverty, marries the rich dragoon George Talboys and gives birth to a son. When George is, however, disinherited by his father due to his marital choice, the couple starts to fight and George leaves Helen secretly to try to make his fortune in Australia. Three years later, he has succeeded in his endeavour and returns to England to re-establish contact with his wife. When he arrives in England, the newspaper declares his wife dead. Thrown out of balance by the events, he joins his friend, Robert Audley, in Robert’s visit to his uncle, Sir Michael, at Audley Court. Sir Michael has only recently married a beautiful young governess of unknown parentage, Lucy Graham (now Audley). This young wife appears, in everyone’s eyes, as the epitome of womanly perfection. While Lucy and Sir Michael are away from Audley

Court, George and Robert creep into the lady's locked boudoir and discover a painting depicting her. The next day, George disappears after having paid a visit to the Court. For Robert, this is the beginning of a desperate search for his friend, which gradually leads him to realise that Helen Maldon, George's presumably 'dead' wife, and Lucy Audley, Sir Michael's young wife, are one and the same person, meaning that Helen/Lucy has bigamously married Sir Michael, abandoned her son and faked her own death in order to throw George off the scent. When threatened by discovery, she pushed George down the old well at Audley Court. At the same time, Lucy's servant Phoebe and Phoebe's husband Luke blackmail the lady with the information concerning her past that they have been able to get into their possession. The most dangerous of Lucy's enemies is, however, Robert: After having established her past history, he confronts Lucy with the evidence. As a consequence, Lucy, with her back against the wall, sets the Castle Inn, where Robert is staying, on fire, with the explicit intention to kill him. This plan fails as Robert has exchanged rooms; instead Luke dies in the fire and Lucy is forced to confess her deeds to Sir Michael and Robert. In this confession, Lucy's hereditary madness is first revealed and this serves as the ultimate revelation; that which Robert's extensive investigation of Lucy's background has been incapable of uncovering. In order to hush up this family scandal – and, presumably, because his evidence would not have stood up in court – Robert decides to lock Lucy away in a Belgian madhouse where she dies shortly thereafter. In a turn of events, George is discovered to be alive, having survived his fall into the well. The ending is marked by romantic resolution, as Robert marries George's sister Clara, and establishes a family of his own.

Lady Audley's Secret has, just as the sensation novels in general, attracted much critical attention in recent years. Among these discussions of the novel, we find one in which it is looked at through the lenses of the closet. In *Houses, Secrets and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James*, Gero Bauer sees Lucy Audley as "a female Bluebeard" (144), a character that "successfully performs a secretive identity that bears the

markers of patriarchal, secretive, paranoid masculinity" (144); elements which Bauer takes as constitutive of the (male) closet. Bauer's thesis revolves around masculinity and the male closet; accordingly, his discussion of Lucy's closet does not consider it as a specifically female closet. Instead, he claims that she is repeating a pattern of masculine closetedness, "employing a politics of domestic secrecy that has, for centuries, been a means of power for men" (149). For Bauer, "Braddon does not primarily denounce deviant […] performances of *femininity*, but exposes the paranoid mechanisms of a *masculinity* that […] bases its power on pathological structures of knowledge" (150). The secret of patriarchal power structures is what lies at the bottom of the male closet, as Bauer demonstrates – but Lucy is, above all, a victim of such patriarchal structures. In contrast to Bauer, I see Lucy's closet as a typical female closet, necessitated by her gender non-compliance which, in a patriarchal society, must be hidden. Bauer's thesis, while offering a profound and stringent analysis of male closetedness, fails to make a statement about femininity, and thereby implicitly relegates the male closet to a position of anteriority (and superiority) vis-à-vis the female closet. This is a prime example to demonstrate how the exclusive focus on a male closet has led to a constricted perspective: Even when critics find themselves confronted with an obvious female closet, they work to integrate it into the framework of masculinity. This is especially significant as *Lady Audley's Secret* can, in many ways, be seen to trace the outlines of an archetypal female criminal closet. Lucy Audley's crimes are caused by female dependence and lack of opportunities in the Victorian Age and they are marked by female masquerade and acting, both subversive of patriarchal society. All is there: The deviant woman hides her gender non-conformity in a literal, spatial closet and behind a mask of compliant womanliness; her transgressive ambitions and desires are muted behind a façade of respectability, a performance of ideal femininity which consists of passionlessness and asexual childishness. Both criminality, in this case bigamy and attempted murder, and female homoeroticism are forms of female gender non-compliance and are part of what is closeted

away. Motherhood appears as 'failed' and serves as an unfortunate concomitant which curtails the criminal's scope of action and offers clues to her 'true' identity. Finally, however, it is 'madness', an illness specifically gendered female in the nineteenth century (cf. Showalter, *Female Malady* 3), which is presented as the ultimate closet and its confession as the surprise effect within the story. The status of Lucy's 'madness' – whether it is an actual illness, a further ruse on Lucy's end or merely a strategy for patriarchy to re-establish its power – remains uncertain though. At the same time, the predominance of any one secret is undermined by the novel as a whole: In it, the closet does not function as a singular entity, neatly marked-off from other parts of Lucy Audley's life. The original crime of bigamy cannot remain just that, an isolated incident: In fact, the closet begins to spread, to ulcerate, until it infects Lucy's entire being, so that her closet is constituted of a whole cluster of (female) deviance.

Lady Audley's Secrets: Criminality, Motherhood and 'Madness'

If the female closet is a structure whereby a failure to conform to cultural norms of femininity is closeted, sometimes behind a masque of perfect gender compliance, then Lucy Audley's closet can be seen as a stereotypical formation. Her secrets are manifold, their common denominator is, however, that they are rooted in impulses, desires, and ambitions that are outside the prescribed realm of the 'womanly'. This non-compliance is, then, closeted behind a façade of ideal femininity. Lucy Audley refuses to passively accept her economic and social circumstances after her husband has left her; instead, she takes on an active role and deliberately manoeuvres herself into a more favourable position. The most prominent of her secrets consists of a crime against the law, namely her bigamous marriage to Sir Michael after she had before already married George Talboys. In the mid-nineteenth-century, "[t]he crime of bigamy, while by no means common, was not unheard of" (Fahnestock 57) and constituted a definite offence

against the law, as well as a frequent plot device of Victorian novels, especially sensation novels, with Mary Elizabeth Braddon as "the author most prominently associated with the plot" (McAleavey 4). In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the progression of the plot thus seems to be towards the revelation of this secret circumstance surrounding Lucy Audley. The motivation for her original crime is materialistic: Lucy has married both George and Sir Michael for their money, in order to escape "'poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations, deprivations'" (*Lady Audley's Secret*[27] 13), but "[b]oth this goal and the method by which she initially attempts to gain it – marriage – are sanctioned by the classist patriarchy in which she lives" (Knowles and Hall 41). However, Lucy "has been indoctrinated into the feminine ideal to far too great an extent" (Talaiarch-Vielmas, *Moulding* 122) and "threatens bourgeois culture by too closely parodying its ideal, and revealing it as a hollow idol" (Reynolds and Humble 110). The 'crime' she commits in her original marriage is her awareness of the system's reliance on the 'traffic in women', namely that she knows that her "'ultimate fate in life depend[s] upon [her] marriage'" (*LAS* 379). What necessitates the closeting is that Lucy begins to 'work' this patriarchal system and exploit it for her own benefit: She refuses to patiently wait for her husband's return, inwardly declares him dead (as George has not once written to her in the three years of his absence this thought is not that unrealistic) and re-enters the marriage market under the pretence of being as yet 'unused goods'. These are all deeds that jar with patriarchy's ideal of femininity, with its focus on passivity, reticence and virginal modesty, and dangerously subvert it. As is so often the case with the criminal closet, the threat of discovery, moreover, necessitates the accumulation of deeds that, in turn, have to be closeted. In order to hide her bigamy, Lucy is forced to commit other crimes which are more damning and which emphasise her gender non-compliance in the extreme, namely the faking of her own death and the attempted murders of George

[27] Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. London: Penguin, 2012. References to *Lady Audley's Secret* will be abbreviated with *LAS* and the page number.

and Robert, as well as the accidental murder of Luke. While Robert claims that he would have let Lucy's bigamy slide and even contemplates "'abandon[ing] [his] search for the evidence wanting'" (*LAS* 210) in the case of George's disappearance, leaving his friend unburied and unfound in order to "'spare'" (*LAS* 372) Sir Michael, Lucy's final attempt on his own life constitutes a point of no return: From this moment onwards, Robert sees in Lucy "'no longer a woman'" but "'the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle'" (*LAS* 373), which shows that her "crimes increase in culpability" (Knowles and Hall 46). They do so because they are increasingly marked as 'male' crimes of violence and aggression that subvert the ideal of femininity: While bigamy is a "surprisingly gender-neutral" (McAleavey 2) crime, where "the bigamist is as likely to be a woman as a man" (McAleavey 2), murder and arson take Lucy out of the publicly-approved realm of femininity and mark her as 'unnatural'. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the depiction of the actual criminal acts is hidden from the reader's view, closeted within the novel's significant ellipses. When George disappears at Audley Court, the meeting between him and Lucy is elided: "He [George] […] strode away from the door without leaving either card or message for the family. It was full an hour and a half after this when Lady Audley returned to the house" (*LAS* 86). The crime has happened in between paragraphs and this is similarly the case with Lucy's attempt on Robert's life (cf. *LAS* 350). We thus never actually *see* Lucy commit the crimes she is accused of and thus, to the reader, her masquerading performance remains, to some degree, intact.

This cluster of deviance, which is formed by actual crimes against the law, is supplemented with other elements deviating from a cultural norm of femininity, for instance Lucy's failed motherhood, which constitutes one of the central clues to her closet. Here, we have a traditional element to be found in female closets: The emphasis placed on the successful performance of motherhood in Victorian society – the "cult of motherhood" (Showalter, "Family Secrets" 108) – made failures to conform to this standard equivalent to failures in femininity, which had to be closeted in order

to create an appearance of gender compliance.[28] Significantly, Lucy "'d[oes] not love the child'" (*LAS* 381) she bears and when re-inventing herself as 'Lucy Graham' "'leav[es] her little boy, who was out at nurse in the neighbourhood'" (*LAS* 269). The criminal woman can, of course, not be a good mother at the same time; her ventures into the realm of 'masculine' deeds substantially impede her relations with her children. Lucy's desire to closet her motherhood is, of course, not primarily motivated by a wish to closet her failures in that respect: Her true intention is to hide evidence of past sexuality and former marriage, as this would ruin her chances at re-marriage in an age obsessed with virginity and with few possibilities of divorce (cf. McAleavey 6). In terms of her performance of a successful criminal persona, Lucy is very right in attempting to sever her bonds to her family, that is her father and her child, and her sentimentality in keeping mementos of them serves as an obstacle in her endeavour. Not only that her son's hair and baby shoe will come to be used as objects for blackmailing her by her maid Phoebe (cf. *LAS* 35), her son and father also constitute a 'weak link' in the history of the past she has constructed. Her son is constantly on the verge of unwittingly betraying her secrets when faced with Robert Audley (cf. *LAS* 102, 181) and her father is too afraid of both Robert and his own daughter to act as the keeper of her secret (cf. *LAS* 186). Family and motherhood hence act as Lucy's weak point, for they provide clues to her former identity.

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, 'femininity' functions as an elaborate performance which hides the evidence of female non-compliance. Lady Audley manipulates the unspoken rules of the gendered discourse. Like Lady Delacour in *Belinda*, Lucy uses womanliness as a masquerade, and builds up an image of herself as "a childish, helpless, babyfied little creature" (*LAS* 151) in order to hide a personality that is far from child-like and radically self-

[28] We have already seen this in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*: Lady Delacour's closet is closely entwined with her failures as a mother and, in the logic of the novel, she can only perform a successful motherhood once her closet has been dissolved.

sufficient, ambitious and self-centred. "Lady Audley's power must be hidden behind the masquerade of femininity – the infantile beauty, the bubbling laugh, the gracious manner – because it is forbidden" (37), Rosenman states.[29] In this novel, Lady Audley's performed childishness and asexuality present the epitome of men's desires; she is "at least one Victorian ideal of womanhood: the child-bride" (H. Klein 165). Lucy is actively involved in the construction of her own child-bride persona, calling herself "'a poor little woman'" (*LAS* 152), and that she is constantly stylised as childlike, helpless and, consequently, asexual by men in the novel, both by her first husband, George, her second husband, Sir Michael, and by Robert Audley (cf. *LAS* 21, 40, 58, 59, 71, 83, 97, 273, 335), only shows how successful her performances are. Hence, Lady Audley "appears to incarnate an impossible ideal which lay at the heart of Victorian domestic ideology, namely the playful child-wife who is yet a capable manager of the household" (Trodd 106). Several critics have pointed out how Lucy Audley is, above all, a character that points towards a deconstruction of the revered figure of the 'Angel in the House', for she demonstrates that "[t]he angel in the house […] is an elaborate theatrical performance – and a performance that men might not necessarily understand" (Montwieler, "Marketing" 51). In the character of Lucy Audley, one of the central tenets of the sensation novel finds expression, namely the tension between appearance and reality, which is especially relevant in descriptions of the home. This home could no longer be seen as "a sanctuary, […] enclosed against the hostile and dangerous external world" (Trodd 1), but, on the contrary, "could harbor a bigamist, a lunatic, or a cold-blooded murderer hidden behind the mask of respectability" (Dobosiewicz 98). As a consequence, "Lady Audley, whose defining characteristics are her golden-haired beauty and her capacity to commit murder, represents the genre in microcosm" (Cvetkovich 46). How successful her performance is can be seen in the reactions the people

[29] In an article on female homelessness, Wetzel has also pointed out how quasi-homeless women like Lady Audley "[i]n order to achieve domestic permanence, […] must adopt submissive, feminized guises" (82).

around her evince before Robert Audley appears on the scene: "Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Every one loved, admired, and praised her" (*LAS* 8). She is also "better loved and more admired" (*LAS* 58) than Sir Michael's daughter Alicia, who in her straightforwardness and unguardedness represents a counter-figure to her stepmother.[30] No one is able to see through Lucy's performance of femininity, not even George, who after having been married to her for a year, still sees her as his "'gentle, innocent, loving, little wife'" (*LAS* 21) whom he expects to have patiently waited for his return from Australia. Lucy's performance is so successful because she manages to incorporate male desires for passivity, unthreatening asexuality, and child-like innocence, but also because "she is perfectly happy in the conventional mold" (Hughes 125) once her ambitions have been satisfied: What she gets by marrying Sir Michael is what she actually desires; she has no wish for independence or rebellion, but gladly fulfils her wifely duties ("'I dispensed happiness on every side. I saw myself loved as well as admired; and I think I might have been a good woman for the rest of my life, if fate would have allowed me to be so'" (*LAS* 383)). Acting, as a defence strategy against the patriarchal system, also comes natural to Lucy: When brooding over the potential disclosure of her secret by Robert Audley, a knock at the door of her closet is enough for her to completely alter her posture, "fl[inging] her beautiful head back upon the soft cushions, and t[aking] a book from the table near her" (*LAS* 323). "Insignificant as this action was it spoke very plainly […] how complete an actress my lady had been made by the awful necessity of her life" (*LAS* 323), the narrator comments. Female masquerade hence constitutes a significant aspect of women's closets: As many emotions, desires

[30] On the surface, it is Alicia who "constantly threatens Victorian gender boundaries through her engagement in masculine activities and her violent, passionate behaviour" (Lin 59). The irony is of course that at the novel's end Alicia turns out to be that which Lucy merely affected to be: "the obedient Angel in the House" (Lin 59). In contrast to Lucy, Alicia is at first unable to *perform* an adequate femininity, her 'masculine' characteristics are, consequently, not closeted but openly displayed and, hence, criticised by a society that values female conformity.

and ambitions allowed or tolerated in men are prohibited to them, a successful performance of an often stereotypical femininity is a necessity to them in order to hide feelings, thoughts and experiences that are positioned outside the socially accepted realm. Due to the fact that women are, in a patriarchal society, affected by more prohibitions than men, they are also in greater need of secrecy in order to hide their (potential) subversion of these prohibitions. As a necessary side effect of gender compliance, the female closet hence appears to be magnified vis-à-vis the male closet: To some degree it might even be true that *all* women are in some closet.

So far we have seen some of the elements that make up Lucy's 'cluster' of deviance, the many separate components that form the basis of her closet of gender non-compliance, so that in the end, it does not even seem to signify what exactly Lucy confesses: She is ready to tell Robert and Sir Michael, the representatives of the patriarchal social order who once again serve as confessors for the female criminal, "'anything – everything'" (*LAS* 374). "[I]t is in fact the very structure of secrecy within Braddon's text that one secret always both covers and stands in for another, that transgressions of the dominant order are always cover stories or metaphors for each other" (O'Malley 107). But in spite of this claim which seems to level her various crimes into one overarching cluster of deviance, where the exact nature of the crime is replaced by a democratising equivalence, one of Lucy's deviances in fact takes centre stage at the novel's end. The confession of madness ("'You have conquered – a MADWOMAN!'" (*LAS* 374)) becomes *the* central revelation in *Lady Audley's Secret*, which even Robert's comprehensive background check has been unable to establish.[31] The novel in general is very interested in the fine line between 'normality' and 'abnormality' in terms of psychological processes: The phrase "mad to-day and

[31] Critics have also offered other interpretations of Lucy's 'central' secret: Welsh, for instance, claims that "Lady Audley's most comprehensive secret is simply her inferior origin, which would undermine her status as Sir Michael's wife even if she were not a bigamist and would-be murderer" (22) and Tomaiuolo is of the opinion that "the secret […] is not simply the Lady's inherited and intermittent madness, but rather her dangerous female assertiveness, which […] must be clinically domesticated" (145).

sane to-morrow" (*LAS* 224, 435) occurs twice and the difference between 'madness' and 'sanity' is described as a "narrow boundary" (*LAS* 224), a "delicate […] fragile […] invisible balance upon which the mind is always trembling" (*LAS* 435).[32] In Lucy's description of her madness, the illness is, moreover, presented as a form of (hereditary) closet: Initially, she is caught in her mother's closet, for after she visits her mother in the asylum for the first time, she goes away with "'a secret to keep'" (*LAS* 378), a secret that moreover constitutes an enormous "'burden'" (*LAS* 378) to her as it "'might affect [her] injuriously in after-life'" (*LAS* 379). The secret is here, once again, infectious. The onsets of madness that she herself claims to experience after she has given birth to her son would then invest her with a closet of her own, leading to her conclusion that "'[p]eople are insane for years and years before their insanity is found out. *They* know that they are mad, but they know how to keep their secret; and, perhaps they may sometimes keep it till they die'" (*LAS* 310). Madness is seen predominantly as a stigma, an invisible marker that creates a gulf between 'normality' and deviations from that norm. *Lady Audley's Secret* makes that especially evident in the descriptions of its madwomen, for they undercut the "Victorian belief in somatic fidelity, the idea that the body necessarily and indisputably displays its inner truths" (Voskuil 613). In the novel "the narrator maximizes an uncertainty about visibility and readability" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 91): Lucy's mother just like Lucy herself does not look 'mad', she is "'no raving, strait-waistcoated maniac, guarded by zealous gaolers; but a golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature'" (*LAS* 378) – an epitome of perfect gender-compliance. Still, the novel assures its readers that secrets will come out, that they do draw attention to themselves, for

[32] The question of madness is central in *Lady Audley's Secret*, where Lucy is not the only one under suspicion of it. In order to defend herself against Robert Audley, she accuses him of being mad himself, "'a monomaniac'" (*LAS* 311) who "'dwelt upon this one idea [of George's disappearance] until he lost the power of thinking of anything else'" (*LAS* 311). Interestingly, when Sir Michael considers Lucy's allegations, he connects Robert's "eccentric[ity]" (*LAS* 358) above all with his failure to love Alicia, in Sir Michael's eyes "his most fitting bride" (*LAS* 359), and with his obsession with George. For Sir Michael, accordingly, madness is bound up with a refusal to commit oneself to heterosexuality and a preference for homosocial/homoerotic bonds.

"'[t]here are some things which, as people say, cannot be hidden'" (*LAS* 188).

But is madness actually a part of Lucy's secret or is it just another mask that she adopts or is forced to adopt? Lucy's confession, after all, has triggered much critical debate: One of the most famous contributions comes from Showalter who claims that her "real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (*A Literature* 167). A similar vein is struck by D. A. Miller who sees Lucy's madness as a mere replacement for her criminality, for "[t]he madwoman finds a considerable part of her truth [...] in being implicitly juxtaposed to the male *criminal* she is never allowed to be" (*The Novel* 168).[33] Critics have especially doubted the diagnosis of madness due to its equivocal nature in the novel, for the doctor that Robert consults about Lucy, Doctor Mosgrave, first sees "'no evidence of madness'" (*LAS* 407) but mere understandable self-interest in her deeds, and, after a closeted interview with Lucy herself, changes his opinion by declaring her "'latent insan[e]'" and "'dangerous'" (*LAS* 409). Thus, Robert and Mosgrave have been suspected of "constru[ing] vague biological explanations of her inherited madness to mediate and mask their own vested interests in her diagnosis and treatment" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 75), for as a threat to the patriarchal order and as a potential shame-inducing factor for the Audley family, Lucy is preferably locked away.[34] Their interests are best

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[33] "In the course of the [eighteenth] century [...] the appealing madwoman gradually displaced the repulsive madman, both as the prototype of the confined lunatic and as a cultural icon" (Showalter, *Female Malady* 8). Accordingly, the numbers of women in asylums increased and "by the 1850s women were the majority of the inmate population" (Showalter, *Female Malady* 17). It has, of course, often been claimed that the mere 'facts' of women's lives – their incarceration in the middle class home, their lack of fulfilling activities, their suppressed desires and ambitions – led to psychological illnesses which would then be seen as 'madness'.

[34] The question of rightful or wrongful incarceration in asylums, as well as the theme of madness in general, is typical of the Victorian Age: "Among the many problematic issues that plagued the Victorian era, society's response to the mentally ill was one of the most pressing, as well as one that led to the creation of purpose-built asylums throughout the country" (Raducanu 427). One of the greatest anxieties surrounding these newly-built asylums was the fear of "[e]nforced, often wrongful, incarceration" (Wagner 35); a fear that was most prominently addressed in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.

served by a diagnosis of 'moral insanity', a common 'illness' in the nineteenth century, which was seen as "a morbid perversion of the moral disposition and natural impulses that did not seem to come from any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect, and that did not result in delusions or hallucinations" (Matus 196) and which was often attributed to women if they "behaved outside […] middle-class norms of femininity" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 82). After the collapse of her closet at the end of the novel, the discourse of madness could thus be said to take on the function of the closet in serving as a screen for Lucy's gender non-compliance, this time in the service of the patriarchal establishment, for which declaring women 'mad' serves as a disciplining measure. With the help of it, Lucy's façade of femininity can be kept up without upsetting the structure of the patriarchal society. Madness would then be simply another masque that Lucy is forced to adopt in order to fit into society's gender norms.

In Lady Audley's Boudoir: The Female Spatial Closet and Male Surveillance

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, we do not only find a complex metaphorical closet consisting of clusters of deviance expressive of female gender non-compliance, but this closet finds an equivalent in Lucy Audley's spatial surroundings, in her – more or less – private chambers at Audley Court. These chambers are presented in parallel to the intricate web of secrets that Lucy is in possession of: With their "labyrinthine architecture" (Bauer 145), they do not only consist of the "fairy-like boudoir" (*LAS* 33) itself, which nevertheless serves as their centre, but also of an "octagon ante-chamber" (*LAS* 66) and "a dressing-room" (*LAS* 33). These three rooms together form Lucy Audley's "apartments" (*LAS* 66), and, in their elaborate structure, point towards her position within the class hierarchy after her marriage to Sir Michael. Her status as the wife of a rich estate owner, a member of the aristocracy, grants her extensive privileges, among them a seeming right to privacy, expressed in spatial terms. That Lucy's private rooms are a

literal manifestation of wealth and status can be seen in their extensive decoration: "The shrine of Lady Audley's boudoir shows readers the proper objects to desire, the items one must possess in order to affect gentility" for "[p]art of ladydom is appreciating the proper things, particularly the proper ornaments" (Montwieler, "Marketing" 55). Hence, the boudoir is filled with status symbols, with

> [d]rinking-cups of gold and ivory, chiselled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Marie Antoinette, amid devices of rosebuds and true lover's knots, birds and butterflies, cupidons and shepherdesses, goddesses, courtiers, cottagers and milkmaids; statuettes of Parian marble and biscuit china; gilded baskets of hothouse flowers; fantastical caskets of Indian filigree work; fragile teacups of turquoise china, […] cabinet pictures and gilded mirrors, shimmering satin and diaphanous lace; all that gold can buy or art devise[.] (*LAS* 319)

In its focus on external appearances, on decorative objects expressing the wealth of their owner, the boudoir is marked as a typically female room. While the male closet, as has been shown before, is associated with the male right to knowledge, and specifically knowledge concerning the family (cf. Wigley 348), the female closet is associated with objects and activities seen as 'typically female'. In Lucy's boudoir, there is an "excess of […] accessories that signify her femininity" (Cvetkovich 49). Her statuettes and furniture, as well as her "handsome dresses", "[j]ewellery, ivory-backed hair-brushes, and exquisite china" (*LAS* 75) bespeak a 'feminine' love of appearances, cosmetics and decorative items. The same can be said for "the looking-glasses, cunningly placed at angles and opposite corners by an artistic upholsterer, multipl[ying] my lady's image" (*LAS* 318, 319), and thereby constituting "the favourite accomplice of female aestheticization" (Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding* 148). Lucy's worn "dresses" (*LAS* 75), as well as the "atmosphere […] oppressive from the rich odours of perfumes"

(*LAS* 75) moreover present the boudoir as an erotic space, expressive of a specifically female sexual energy (cf. Pykett, *Improper Feminine* 91 and Royal), for the boudoir "comprise[s] a collection of erotic fragments, typical of the fetish" (Felber 478). Consequently, the boudoir serves both as an expression of Lucy's own sexuality, private and independent of men, and, through the many instances where it is, in fact, seen through the lenses of "the policing male gaze" (Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding* 126), a male vision of female sexuality which is fetishised and voyeuristic. Cosmetics, decoration and female sexuality potentially independent of men, of course, mingle with male fears of female artifice, deceit and subversiveness: The threat that such feminine decorativeness and independent eroticism contains is expressed in both George's and Luke's feeling of alienation "among all these womanly luxuries" (*LAS* 75) (Robert, feminised himself, does not feel out of place). Their masculinity renders them intruders in this feminine space, so that spatial relations are explicitly expressed as gendered relations. Hence, Lucy's boudoir can be seen as the most archetypal depiction of a nineteenth century female spatial closet in any of the novels investigated in this thesis. It is a long way off from Lady Delacour's sickroom, which in its vials and pharmaceuticals offers a literal analogy to her 'diseased' body. By contrast, Lucy's boudoir fulfils readerly expectations concerning a female 'private' space and gratifies the (male) reader's intrusive, voyeuristic desire to "creep into Lady Audley's boudoir and fondle her clothes and jewels" (Haynie 65).

This voyeurism, of which not only readers are guilty, undermines the supposed 'privacy' of Lucy Audley's space. Just as the lady of the house serves as a mere status symbol, as an extension and visible surface of her 'owner's', namely her husband's, wealth, reputation and social standing,[35]

[35] This is especially true of Lucy Audley: Sir Michael takes great pleasure in Lucy's performances of wifely duties, and "watche[s] the impression my lady ma[kes] upon his nephew with a proud delight in her beauty and fascination" (*LAS* 94). That Sir Michael may have married Lucy more for her representative potential than out of sexual attraction is hinted at by his infantilisation of her, his fascination at the "childish vivacity" (*LAS* 151) that his "'poor little woman'" (*LAS* 114) exhibits.

her ostensibly private rooms in fact "become a public stage upon which she exhibits her desirability and its corresponding commodities for public pleasure and consumption" (Royal). Although Lucy's rooms are supposedly private, this privacy is, in fact, marked by a high degree of ambivalence. This is firstly the case because the rooms themselves, rather than being a space of solitary retreat, are designed in a way "to invite a covetous gaze" (Royal). They are, for instance, decorated with "'the best pictures in the house'" (*LAS* 73). Secondly, Lucy herself constructs these rooms as liminal spaces, positioned on the threshold between the public and the private sphere, by inviting several other people into them. Phoebe Marks, as her maid, is to be expected within the private chambers of a lady, but there are also scenes in which both Sir Michael and Robert Audley join Lucy in her boudoir (cf. *LAS* 125, 318). Thirdly, and most importantly, however, Lucy's private rooms are continuously invaded by other people against her will; they "are curiously vulnerable to penetration" (Langland, "Enclosure" 9), both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. Two of the most decisive scenes hinge on literal invasions of the closet and both times the clandestine entering of the spatial closet leads to an increase in knowledge concerning the metaphorical closet. In a very early scene in the novel, Phoebe and Luke enter Lucy's chambers while she is away. Their motivation is initially expressed in class terms: As members of the lower class, they want to bathe in "the splendour of the room" (*LAS* 34), in an examination of "'diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds […] [that] would set [them] up in life'" (*LAS* 34). But what they in fact discover is that Lucy's closet consists of several closets: The room itself houses a "massive walnut-wood and brass inlaid casket" (*LAS* 34) in which, next to the diamonds, there is a "'secret drawer'" (*LAS* 35). What we find here, is the box-within-a-box-(within-a-box) structure so typical of the spatial closet. While the first two boxes (the boudoir and the casket) seem to partially hide what is known and known to be known anyway, namely the wealth the aristocracy amasses, the final box (the secret drawer) serves as the 'real' closet and the actual source of

potential fortune for Luke and Phoebe. For in it, clues to Lucy's 'true' identity can be detected, "a baby's little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and a tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby's head" (*LAS* 35). Phoebe is right to "'rather have this than [a] diamond bracelet'" (*LAS* 35), for these objects constitute proof concerning Lucy's motherhood, and thereby function as one of the most damning clues to her former life. For Phoebe and Luke, this entrance into their lady's secret chambers lays the groundwork for their later blackmail of her. Appropriating the space of their superior leads to their own rise on the social ladder as the secrets of the wealthy become commodified goods in the hands of their servants.[36]

The second illicit entrance into Lucy's private space happens shortly thereafter when Robert Audley and George Talboys, under the guidance of Sir Michael's daughter Alicia, come to view Audley Court. Although Lucy has explicitly "'locked'" (*LAS* 73) the ante-room and "'taken the key to London'" (*LAS* 73), this manifest desire for privacy is easily overcome by the visitors. All three characters see Lucy's rooms as a proper space for their investigation: Alicia finds it "'[i]mpossible'" (*LAS* 73) and "'provoking'" (*LAS* 73) that Lucy should have taken the key, Robert continually asks

[36] In Phoebe and Luke's blackmail of Lucy Audley, one of the great fears of the Victorian Age is expressed, namely the fear of "a household taken over by servants" (Trodd 52). According to Trodd, the "crisis in the relations between householders and domestic staff" (45) that marked the nineteenth century led to a new "desire to protect [...] privacy against the alien and hostile group" (46) under the same roof. Servants, who had before been seen as an integral part of the family, now came to be perceived as invaders of the same, leading to an increased fear of blackmail. Phoebe – just like Rosanna Spearman in *The Moonstone* – can be seen as an example of the "new 'professional' servant" (Trodd 8) who is marked by a "dedication to his [sic] own interests combined with an appearance of overwhelming respectability" (Trodd 54). Her "power of repression and self-control" (*LAS* 29) is especially threatening, for it makes her, to a certain degree, unreadable. The novel also explicitly discusses the servant's power, and especially that of the maid, in an extensive paragraph (here shortened): "Amongst all privileged spies, a lady's maid has the highest privileges. [...] She has a hundred methods for the finding out of her mistress's secrets. She knows by the manner in which her victim jerks her head from under the hair-brush, or chafes at the gentlest administration of the comb, what hidden tortures are racking her breast – what secret perplexities are bewildering her brain [...]. [S]he knows when the ivory complexion is bought and paid for [...]. She knows when the sweet smile is more false than Madame Levison's enamel, and far less enduring" (*LAS* 364).

Alicia for a "'way of getting into the room'" (*LAS* 73) and even George seems to have no moral scruples to "'crawl […] upon [his] hands and knees'" (*LAS* 74) through a secret tunnel in order to see apartments which have deliberately been locked. An explanation for this lack of restraint with regard to the violation of private rooms can be found in Langland's claim that "country houses […] are architectural, domestic sanctuaries that function as visible signs of the social order" ("Enclosure" 3): "Because it [the country house] operate[s] most effectively through its continual visibility, it [is] thus open to random visitors and even its most intimate spaces c[an] be penetrated with impunity" (Langland, "Enclosure" 7). The seemingly private is thus, in reality, public, and this is especially true when it comes to women, for "at the center of that visible structure st[ands] the lady of the house, whose motions [are] precisely regulated by etiquette practices such as morning calls, afternoon teas […], and elaborate dinners that put her continually on display" (Langland, "Enclosure" 7). As the wife of Sir Michael but also as a woman per se, Lucy is expected to be always visible and the same goes for her ostensibly 'private' space. Although women are, on the surface, identified with the private sphere of the home, within this home, they actually function as public agents, so that a violation of their private space does not signify in the social order. Significantly, none of the characters is tempted to view Sir Michael's private chambers: Implicitly, they are marked as off limits. The desire to enter Lucy's closet, as well as the obsessive construction of women as public and visible within the home in general, is also connected to a hidden awareness of the threat that complete, unviolated female privacy poses to the patriarchal order. Robert's wish to enter Lucy's closet can then be read as an attempt to contain this threat. Interpreting Robert's desire in this way would demonstrate, once again, how the closet has a tendency to draw attention to itself, to betray itself in the very act of seemingly guarding information.

The boudoir scene is also remarkable for its sexual undertones, which have been noted by several critics: Montwieler sees the invasions of Lucy's boudoir "as metaphorical rapes that function as violations of Lady Audley's

identity" ("Marketing" 53), Cvetkovich describes Robert's and George's creeping along the "'the secret passage'" (*LAS* 74) in analogy to "entering the womb that will reveal the mysteries of femininity" (49) and both Felber (cf. 473) and Pykett (cf. *Improper Feminine* 91) point towards the sexualisation of the scene. Regarding Robert's and George's invasion as a metaphorical rape is certainly appropriate when one remembers how their actions signify a total loss of control for Lucy, relegating her to a passive position. Although she functions as the lady of the house, with ostensible power over her private space, "'[s]he doesn't know of it [the secret passage] herself'" (*LAS* 74), which demonstrates how Lucy "loses control over the house's spatiality" (Bauer 150), from the start marked as a "patriarchal home" (Bauer 143).[37] The spatial passivisation of Lucy then comes to stand for her metaphorical bodily passivisation in Robert and George's 'rape' of her 'private parts'. This sexualisation repeats a pattern of masculine reaction vis-à-vis the female closet which can be seen as typical: Female privacy gives rise to male voyeurism, which is, implicitly, rendered as a sexual desire 'to know'. This goes along with the behaviour that Robert exhibits overall throughout the novel in his obsessive desire to find out about Lucy's secrets, which betrays both a queer, quasi-incestuous desire for Lucy herself ("'I feel like the hero of a French novel; I am falling in love with my aunt'" (*LAS* 63)) and a queer, homoerotic desire for George Talboys. How these desires are related to each other will be discussed at a later point; for the moment it suffices to point towards the connection between male voyeurism and the female closet with which we are already acquainted.

The two men's invasion of Lucy Audley's closet repeats the former violation of her privacy by Luke and Phoebe. Although their motivation is expressed in different terms dependent on their class – Luke and Phoebe, as has been shown before, come to view pearls and diamonds unobtainable to them while Robert and George's stated wish is to view "'the best pictures

[37] It also points towards the difficulty of information management so typical of the closet: Everyone around Lucy seems to know more about her private rooms and, metaphorically, about her private thoughts and desires than she does herself.

in the house"' and especially "'her [Lucy's] own portrait"' (*LAS* 73) – all of them are, in fact, motivated by a desire to know and see, by the voyeuristic urges triggered by Lucy's desirability, both in terms of wealth and sexuality. The sexual undercurrent in their desire to examine the private rooms can be seen in the fact that "Robert and George build up to viewing the unfinished portrait as the climax of the boudoir exhibition of artwork and of their voyeurism" (Felber 474), "leaving this unfinished portrait for a *bonne bouche*" (*LAS* 76). In this forbidden entrance into Lucy's closet, her portrait takes on the function that the secret drawer had in the first invasion, in that "behind the painting lies the coveted secret to her real identity" (Royal). Like the baby-shoe and lock of hair, the portrait is a literal marker of the closet and hidden away, "covered with a green baize" (*LAS* 76); and the 'disrobing' of the portrait comes to stand for Robert's and George's desire to undress Lucy Audley herself. "The narration is focused on the two men's desire to read and interpret the Lady's portrait in order to enter her mysteries through a voyeuristic practice" (Tomaiuolo 149), and both Robert and George gain access to Lucy's metaphorical closet by looking at her portrait, even though to a different degree. While for Robert, the portrait exposes deviant sides in Lucy's character which he, in his stereotypical conception of her, has been unable to see, namely that there are "unresolved contradictions between delicate and wicked, brightness and darkness, innocence and sexuality" (Hedgecock 120),[38] for George, the portrait offers a much more extensive revelation, showing him both that his wife is still alive and that she has bigamously married another man. At this point, the closet stands almost completely revealed for George, making the portrait, hidden at the centre of the spatial closet, the most explicit clue towards the metaphorical closet. This is even true for Robert, who merely sees "new lines and new expressions never seen […] before" (*LAS* 77) in Lady Audley, for the portrait, which undercuts his idealised vision of Lucy,

[38] Just like the boudoir, the painting is supposed to be a status symbol that constructs Lucy Audley as an object within her husband's household. This function is, however, undermined by the subversiveness that the painting actually comes to express, by its indirect connection to Lucy's criminal identity.

lays the groundwork for his later suspicions of her. The fact that the portrait literally survives Lucy and is, at the end of the novel, "often shown to inquisitive visitors […] [who] admire my lady's rooms, and ask many questions about the pretty, fair-haired woman, who died abroad" (*LAS* 479), demonstrates that "even after her death, Lady Audley remains as a disturbing presence" (Pykett, *Improper Feminine* 93). The portrait continues to 'speak' for her and remains a visual reminder of the closet.

Lucy Audley's boudoir is, however, not the only closet-like structure within *Lady Audley's Secret*. The most obvious other closet, this time one not chosen as such by Lucy herself, can be found in the new and final space allocated to her at the end of the novel in the maison de santé at Villebrumeuse, which constitutes "a nightmare parody of her fairy boudoir" (Felber 482, 483) and the "final and effective closet into which to push the family skeleton" (Matus 204). Just like her boudoir at Audley Court, these new rooms make up "a stately suite of apartments, which included a lobby, […] a saloon […] and a bed-chamber" (*LAS* 419), thereby underlining the "persistently troubling links between country house and madhouse" (Langland, "Enclosure" 4). In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault demonstrates the connection between the family and the madhouse, for "[g]reat emphasis was placed on the concept of the 'family' which organized the community of the insane and their keepers" (252) in the new, more psychologically-oriented asylums of the eighteenth century. But this is not the only troubling association that the asylum at Villebrumeuse evokes: Even more disturbing is the constant link between the maison de santé and the grave. The rooms that Lucy Audley is assigned to are "of a dismal and cellarlike darkness […] with gloomy velvet draperies, and with a certain funereal splendour" (*LAS* 419), the light is "pale and ghostlike" (*LAS* 419), the walls are covered with "great expanses of glimmering something […] which my lady mistook for costly mirrors, but which were in reality wretched mockeries of burnished tin" (*LAS* 419). This is fitting, for the room represents both Lucy's metaphorical and literal grave, as she soon realises herself: "'You have brought me to my grave, Mr Audley'" (*LAS* 421), Lucy exclaims, in a

chapter significantly called "Buried Alive". This is even more so the case as she suffers from a "growing insubstantiality of her identity" (Sparks 33) in the maison de santé: She is not only deprived of her right to free movement ("under no circumstances was she to be permitted to leave the house and grounds without the protection of some reliable person" (*LAS* 420)), but also of her name, for "the person locked up at the novel's end, Madame Taylor, is named by Robert and is totally his fabrication" (Felber 483). Moreover, "[t]he Belgian asylum, interestingly, is in the town of 'Villbrumeuse' [sic] whose English translation of 'foggy city' registers the obscurity that Lady Audley's banishment ultimately signifies" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 102). As we will also see in *Armadale* in the next chapter, the grave comes to function as the ultimate closet within these two sensation novels, to which the guilty family secrets are finally relegated.

In its panoptical observation of its female members, the madhouse comes very close to the manor house, however: In both, "the confinement of the lady's legitimate activities within a limited sphere keeps her virtually under continual surveillance" (Langland, "Enclosure" 10). Lucy's difficulties in keeping her closet safe arise due to the oppressive atmosphere that characterises Sir Michael's manor house: "Audley Court […] represents in *Lady Audley's Secret* the enclosed space in which control and surveillance predominate and in which Lady Audley is subjected to the 'Panoptical' gaze of those who, spurred by different motivations, search into her past life" (Tomaiuolo 27). As has been shown before, Lucy's private chambers are a site of constant intrusions. But even outside that space, she is subjected to an observation that centrally focuses on her, for she is the object of both the (desiring) male and the (jealous) female gaze: "'She [Lucy] [is] only ornamental; a person to be shown off to visitors, and to play fantasias on the drawing-room piano'" (*LAS* 257). "More than being simply available to viewing, Lady Audley is herself decked out to invite scrutiny, her garments and jewels metonyms for class privilege, luxury, and idleness" (Langland, "Enclosure" 9, 10) just as her performance of femininity becomes a status symbol, a good to be coveted by men. Thus, Lucy "appear[s] at several

public balls at Chelmsford and Colchester, and [is] immediately established as the belle of the county" (*LAS* 59) and is "the chief attraction of the race-course […] fascinating half the county" (*LAS* 62). While the desire of the lower orders is thus expressed in a wish to possess her riches, that of the middle and upper class is embodied in wanting to possess *her*. Although Lucy may have deliberately chosen the isolated spot of Audley village as a home in order to escape the patriarchal gaze, in this case her first husband's gaze, who "'unless he saw the grave in which [she] was buried, and the register of [her] death, […] would never believe [she] was lost to him'" (*LAS* 384), she finds in fact that this gaze proves to be inescapable. Apart from Robert's gaze, "the detective's scrutinising eye" (Tomaiuolo 89), she is moreover married to a man whose main activity consists in watching her: "[I]t was very rarely that the baronet's eyes were long removed from his wife's pretty face" (*LAS* 62). When Robert "notice[s] a bruise upon her [Lucy's] delicate skin" (*LAS* 97) Sir Michael is immediately asserting his rights over his wife's body by "look[ing] into the matter of the bruise upon his wife's pretty wrist" (*LAS* 97). And the home he provides her with, Audley Court, comes to look more like a prison:

> To have attempted to leave the house secretly by any of the principal outlets would have been simple madness, for the housekeeper herself superintended the barricading of the great doors, back and front. The secrets of the bolts, and bars, and chains, and bells which secured these doors […] were known only to the servants who had to deal with them. (*LAS* 341)

This constant surveillance by her husband severely curtails Lucy's freedom of action and especially her possibilities of protecting her secret. In the scene quoted above, Lucy wants to burn down the Castle Inn in order to get rid of the threat that Robert represents and is hindered by the house's prison-like structure, just as, at an earlier point, her husband's insistence on accompanying her to London makes her alibi more fragile (cf. *LAS* 66).

But it is not just Sir Michael who acts as an agent of surveillance; in fact, it seems that the very house has eyes and ears; it is a "'house where there's always somebody listening'" (*LAS* 30). It is only fitting that Lucy's 'secret' deed, the attempted murder of George, is watched by both Phoebe and Luke and that her final resting place is an asylum, "a panoptically-structured social and architectural institution" (Tomaiuolo 32). In contrast to Lydia Gwilt, whom we will encounter in the next chapter, Lucy also only rarely manages to turn the situation around and become a watcher herself. Her position as lady of Audley Court restricts her mobility to a great degree and she is generally uninformed about Robert's steps, having to rely on Phoebe for information about his doings (cf. *LAS* 144). That she is unable to keep Robert in her sight is what leads to her final downfall, for she tries to lock him into a room which he, in fact, does not occupy. The patriarchal system of panoptical surveillance within the manor house is a detriment to the female endeavour to keep both space and thoughts private, to have a literal and metaphorical 'room of her own'.

Homoeroticism, Narcissism and Incestuous Desires: Queer Relations and Lady Audley's Closet

Robert's voyeuristic relation to Lucy's closet is one of the many instances within *Lady Audley's Secret* in which the closet and the ties surrounding it are queered. Lucy and Robert each have a closet of their own, and Robert's attempts at accumulating information about his aunt may very well be investigations of his own closetedness. As Bauer has noted, "Robert's homoerotic search for George is paralleled by an attempt to 'normalise' his own 'sexual identity'" (153), and this relationship to George "makes Robert […] just as deviant and 'closeted' as Lucy herself" (157). Hart even goes so far as to claim that "the secret of *Lady Audley's Secret* is the homosocial and homoerotic bond between men" (34). For Robert's obsessive search for George and his detection of Lucy's secret progress in parallel and, in the end, turn out to be one and the same. While Robert contemplates his own

sexuality, wondering how "'it is possible to care so much for a fellow'" (*LAS* 98), he translates this sexual insecurity into a curiosity about Lucy's closet (cf. Hedgecock 128), a curiosity that, similar to Caleb's interest in Falkland's closet in *Caleb Williams*, feminises him even further. The novel is full of instances in which Robert is presented as the antithesis of the masculine norm, for with his "German pipe, and […] French novels" (*LAS* 36), his "dawdling, indifferent, irresolute manner" (*LAS* 36, 37), and his utter disinterest in 'manly' activities such as hunting (cf. *LAS* 124), "Braddon has associated him with a recognizable aristocratic type possessed of, by this historical moment, clear homosocial/homosexual overtones" (Nemesvari, "Robert" 519, 520). Robert's only possibility of escaping both his obsession with George and his feminisation lies in a reassertion of his masculinity through an active investigation of Lucy's secret and a heterosexualisation of his desire for George through marriage to George's sister Clara, an obvious instance of a triangulation of desire (cf. Nemesvari, "Robert" 524). Consequently, Robert's relationship to Lucy's closet is marked by a projection of his own closetedness onto her; instead of investigating his own secret desires, he decides to poke into another person's hidden past. Following the 'It takes one to know one'-doctrine, he is the only one capable of detecting her secret in the first place: In his homoerotic impulses, Robert Audley is, according to the law, a criminal himself.[39]

At the same time, Robert does not succeed in distancing himself from Lucy's closet, for the "incestuous intermingling of familial relations and detection makes Robert Audley's role peculiar" (Cvetkovich 56): It queers his desire for his aunt's secret even further and partially pushes him into her closet. The closet is shown, once again, to be 'infectious', and revealing it would undermine patriarchy's claim to power. Even after he has forced Lucy to confess her bigamy to Sir Michael, he continues to closet her graver misdeeds from him: "Sir Michael Audley must never learn that the woman

[39] In 1862, the time of the publication of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the death penalty for homosexual acts had only recently been abolished (cf. White 26).

he had loved bore the red brand of murder on her soul" (*LAS* 430). This intention to participate in covering Lucy's crimes up becomes even more problematic when Robert is confronted with Clara, for here the closet constitutes an obstacle to his desire for her:

> He had no claim upon Clara Talboys; for he had resolved to keep the horrible secret that had been told to him. How then could he dare to meet her with that secret held back from her? How could he ever look into her earnest eyes, and yet withhold the truth? […] If he was indeed to keep this secret he must never see her again. To reveal it would be to embitter her life. (*LAS* 448)

Being in Lucy's closet makes Robert afraid of being readable, of being put in a feminised position with the observing gaze upon him, and this is especially the case with Clara, who "could watch his every action, and from those actions deduce the secret workings of his mind, tracing his doubts home to their object" (*LAS* 278). His concern is certainly justified, for Clara's suspicions have long been directed towards Lucy Audley due to Robert's behaviour (cf. *LAS* 282). Being Lucy's unintentional confidant, Robert is put in a similarly vulnerable position as the original keeper of the secret herself, demonstrating once again that the closet cannot be seen in isolation but has an effect on numerous relationships surrounding it. It is also interesting that in this novel, the sexual suspicion so typical of the female closet rests on Robert and not exclusively on Lucy, who, as a woman, is prone to be read as harbouring sexual secrets. It is Robert's behaviour which is interpreted as non-normative and therefore potentially sexually deviant. He is suspected of nurturing a quasi-incestuous, adulterous desire for his young aunt, a suspicion that Lucy promotes in order to get rid of him. Sir Michael disinvites Robert from Audley Court and tells him that he "'must learn to think of her as [his] aunt […] though she is young and beautiful'" (*LAS* 237), Mr Dawson, the local surgeon, suspects him to "'have been falling in love with [his] uncle's pretty wife […] and […]

to make [Mr Dawson] a go-between in some treacherous flirtation'" (*LAS* 239), and Alicia resentfully thinks that "'[h]e is in love with [her] step-mother's wax-doll beauty'" (*LAS* 285). Consequently, Robert's environment reads his behaviour as closeted rather than Lucy's, and transfers a feminising sexual suspicion from Lucy onto him.

At the same time, Robert is not alone in establishing queer relations to the closet. Lucy's queer sexual desires themselves have been interpreted as both "[h]omoeroticism" (Schroeder 91) and "narcissism" (Felber 481) and, significantly, these closeted desires simultaneously find their expression in the spatial closet. Narcissism can be seen as the consequence of "the essentially artificial, supposedly passionless age that encouraged women to worship their youthful beauty and to become passive, angelic child-wives, perfectly innocent and sexless" (Schroeder 90). The whole architecture of Lucy's female, 'private' space points towards a "sublimat[ion] into […] self-adoration" (Schroeder 90) through the extensive decoration focused on reflecting surfaces and cosmetic aids. This narcissism is, however, also connected to the other 'queer' desire acted out in her closet, namely homoeroticism: 'Mirroring' structures are both a sign of narcissism and of homoeroticism (cf. Vicinus, "Adolescent" 105) and thus link these two traits that characterise Lady Audley's sexuality. As homoeroticism constructs a desire independent of men, it is one of the quintessential forms that women's gender non-compliance can take on.[40] Lucy's main object of desire in the novel is her maid Phoebe: The two share a "female-homosocial intimacy that is always on the brink of going too far" (Bauer 146) and that is lived out in the closeted space of the boudoir. "[T]he only expression of tenderness and eroticism of which Lady Audley is capable occurs in relation to Phoebe" (Hart 45), for instance when she "smooth[es] her maid's neutral-tinted hair with her plump, white, and bejewelled hand" (*LAS* 65), or "curl[s] herself up cosily under the eider-down quilt […] bury[ing] herself in soft wrappings of satin and fur" (*LAS* 65) only to then

[40] A more elaborate argumentation in favour of this point can be found in the section on the lesbian closet.

ask Phoebe to "'kiss'" (*LAS* 65) her. Lucy's relationship to her maid "is depicted as that of a model to a faint copy; Phoebe is the washed-out image of Lady Audley" (Hart 45). The novel continues to stress that Phoebe and Lucy are "'alike'" (*LAS* 64) that "'with a bottle of hair dye […] and a pot of rouge'" (*LAS* 64) the pale maid could be made to look like her colourful mistress. This surprising likeness is also described as "a point of sympathy between the two women" (*LAS* 115), whose intimacy both points towards "the collapse of class structures" (O'Malley 121) and, at the same time, ironically demonstrates that these class distinctions never existed in the first place, for Lucy's position in the class hierarchy was not unlike Phoebe's prior to her marriage to Sir Michael. The similarity between the two women, however, poses a problem in interpretation, for "[u]nlike the doubling of Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie in Collins's *The Woman in White*, which is crucial to the plot when their identities are switched by Laura's scheming husband, the doubling of Phoebe and Lucy reflects no authorial formal plan" (45, 46), according to Hart.[41] But the doubling is in fact crucial to the homoerotic plot, for Phoebe is not only presented as Lucy's lower-class copy, but also as her *ghostly* double.[42] She is described as having a "pale face and […] light grey eyes" (*LAS* 29), marked by "an absence of colour" (*LAS* 29):

> Not one tinge of crimson flushed the waxen whiteness of her cheeks; not one shadow of brown redeemed the pale insipidity of her eyebrows and eyelashes; not one glimmer of gold or auburn relieved the dull flaxen of her hair. Even her dress was spoiled by this same deficiency; the pale lavender muslin faded into a sickly

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[41] There is, however, a doubling in the novel that follows the pattern of Collins's *The Woman in White*, for "[d]oing Collins one better, Braddon introduces yet another double for Lady Audley[,] […] the frail, consumptive girl named Matilda" (Tilley 485), who dies as 'Helen Maldon'.

[42] Blodgett reads the doubling of Lucy Audley in Phoebe from a feminist perspective which privileges Lucy's autonomy over Phoebe's seeming dependence: "Phoebe is her grey shadow because only Lucy is the woman who has refused simply to accept her husband's abuse of her through desertion" (143), while her maid stays with Luke out of fear of domestic abuse (cf. *LAS* 118).

> grey, and the ribbon knotted round her throat melted into the same neutral hue. (*LAS* 29)

Her lover Luke mistakes her for an "'evil spirit'" (*LAS* 30) when she "glid[es] softly through the dark oak passages of the Court" (*LAS* 116) and on her marriage day, "a superstitious stranger might have mistaken the bride for the ghost of some other bride, dead and buried in the vaults below the church" (*LAS* 121). It is exactly this ghostliness that can be read as an expression of Phoebe's sexuality which she indulges in with her lady: Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* has impressively demonstrated the link between the apparitional and the female homosexual, "the very frequency with which the lesbian has been 'apparitionalized' in the Western imagination" (7). "Actual spectral metaphors are crucial to the business of derealization" (*Apparitional* 6) of which Castle finds Western civilisation guilty, so that ghostly metaphors and spectralising descriptions can be seen as a marker of lesbianism. The homoeroticism of Lucy's and Phoebe's relationship is closeted in Lucy's private chambers to which solely Phoebe has constant access, and it is only seen by other intruders into the closet, such as Alicia, who "withdr[aws] in disgust at my lady's frivolity" (*LAS* 65). Alicia's main objection is to Lucy's being "familiar with her servants" (*LAS* 65), so that we can see that both cross-class and same-sex relations are, once again, regarded as suspect and, potentially, to be closeted. Phoebe is Lucy's confidante when it comes to the secret, running errands for her lady, and the only one who remains, in some sense, loyal to her until the end, when she is still interested in Lucy's well-being and regards her as "'a kind mistress'" (*LAS* 443).[43] The problems, however, begin to arise when the homoerotic relationship between the two women is disturbed by a male presence; that is when Phoebe lets Luke into her lady's boudoir and secrets. While Phoebe is repeatedly characterised as "'a woman who could keep a

[43] Phoebe does, admittedly, blackmail Lucy with her knowledge of George's 'murder'; however, she claims that she only told Luke about it because "'[h]e forced it from [her]'" (*LAS* 120) and her financial interest is, in fact, Luke's interest, for she provides him with a "'public-house'" (*LAS* 35).

secret'" (*LAS* 145), this is not so the case with her husband, whom she constantly has to silence (cf. *LAS* 148). Lucy is rightly against Phoebe's marriage: "Undercurrents of homoeroticism […] account for Lady Audley's strong objections to Phoebe's marriage" (Schroeder 92), but this bond is especially threatening as it introduces a man, who, even in his lower-class status, is still part of the patriarchal order, into the female homosocial system of secret, non-compliant desires. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the female closet is thus only safe as long it is embedded in female homosocial/homoerotic relationships, in a female community.

Delayed Outings – The Criminal Closet in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*

In Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866), as in so many sensation novels, closet-like structures abound. The narrative is built around a central secret and confession which takes place right at the beginning of the novel, in the Prologue, and spreads out from there, is caught up by different characters and, finally, overshadowed by other disclosures. *Armadale* is, to begin with, the story of altogether five characters named Allan Armadale: The first Allan Armadale is, from the perspective of the novel's main part, of the grandfather-generation. He disinherits his son, Allan Armadale (who then takes on the name of Fergus Ingleby), and passes on his estate in Barbados to his godson Allan Wrentmore, under the condition that he adopts the name of Allan Armadale as well. This first part of the novel is set in the late 1820s: Ingleby, the disinherited son, gains Wrentmore's confidence without Wrentmore's knowledge of his true identity, and, by pretending to be Wrentmore himself (or rather, 'Allan Armadale'), marries his love-interest, Miss Blanchard. For this to succeed, however, Ingleby and Miss Blanchard need the help of Miss Blanchard's 12-year-old maid, Lydia Gwilt, who forges a letter from Wrentmore's mother to Miss Blanchard's father in which she supposedly consents to their marriage. When he finds out about the proceedings, Wrentmore murders Ingleby by locking him in a sinking ship's cabin. Both Wrentmore's new wife, whom he marries in the aftermath of the events, and Miss Blanchard bear sons called Allan Armadale. While Wrentmore's son, after his father's death, passes an unhappy childhood as a vagabond and takes on the name of Ozias Midwinter to

escape his past, the other Allan Armadale becomes, after the death of his mother, the rich estate owner of Thorpe-Ambrose, and befriends Ozias Midwinter. This represents the main storyline of the novel, which is set in 1851. Ozias has meanwhile learned about his father's deed from a confessional letter, which also warns him to avoid both Allan Armadale and Lydia Gwilt at all costs. He dreads repeating the past and, especially after a prophetic Dream on Allan's part, sways between staying with his best and only friend and leaving him in order to prevent harm from coming his way. At the same time, Lydia Gwilt re-emerges from the past, meanwhile having stood trial for murder and theft (and having committed numerous other, undetected crimes), and plots to marry Allan Armadale to both get at his fortune and avenge herself on the family. The rest, and main part of the novel, is concerned with her attempts to ensnare Allan and, finally, her marriage to Ozias under his real name of Allan Armadale, which he has told no one at Thorpe-Ambrose but her. The identical names would then allow her to kill Allan and impersonate his widow. In this plot, which she details in her diary, she is helped by shy and weak Mr. Bashwood, an assistant of the local lawyers at Thorpe-Ambrose, the Pedgifts. In the end, her plans fail due to Ozias's intervention and the homosocial bond between the two men survives Lydia's interference, while she herself commits suicide in the Sanatorium where she has lured Allan in order to kill him.

The closet structures in *Armadale* are, above all, criminal closets in that they pertain to some secret criminal deed committed in the past; this is frequently the 'capital' crime of murder. Such a criminal closet occurs in its male as well as in its female form within the novel: Wrentmore's death at the beginning of the story introduces us to his male criminal closet. As so many characters in the novel, Wrentmore delays his confession to the very end of his life: Delay is, of course, a strategy of the sensation novel and, later, the detective novel in general, which teases its readers by postponing confessions. Still, it is striking how systematically the characters in *Armadale* defer their outings to their very end or beyond it. This central secret to which the reader is introduced through Wrentmore's confession

is a typically male closet, an almost archetypal disclosure of male rivalry, homoerotic triangulation and murder, as it can similarly be found in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*.[44] Wrentmore's patriarchal power is threatened by Ingleby's interference and in order to re-establish it, he kills him: Murder is the secret at the heart of the patriarch's power and that which is closeted away. Moreover, the content of this closet proves infectious, as is so often the case with closet structures: After Wrentmore's death, it attaches itself to his son, Ozias. Like his father before him, Ozias experiences the closet as a feminising structure, and as dangerously close to the homoerotic. But Ozias's compulsive urge to 'out' himself, his nervous, speaking body, undermines the patriarchal structure of the male closet, whose power depends on its ability to *keep* the secret (or, at least, keep up the appearance of a secret).

Lydia Gwilt's closet is shown to be a different affair: She is in the closet for her various criminal deeds which are, above all, presented as markers of her gender non-compliance and inability or unwillingness to abide by the societal and juridical rules of her time. The novel repeats a pattern typical of many sensation novels in placing a female character and her criminal closet at centre-stage. Lydia Gwilt, seen by first reviewers as "one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction" (H. F. Chorley in the *Athenaeum*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 147), harbours several criminal secrets which bespeak her gender non-compliance: Among them we can find her past involvement in the marriage between Fergus Ingleby and Miss Blanchard (fraud), her poisoning of her first husband, Mr. Waldron, her marriage to her lover Manuel, which turns her marriage to Midwinter into a bigamist one, and her various

[44] The rivalry between Tyrrell and Falkland in *Caleb Williams* has certain parallels to the relationship between Wrentmore and Ingleby in that both outline a stereotypical male homosocial relationship in which masculinity is expressed through aggression, a competition between two patriarchal figures: An initial or suppressed attraction to the other man is replaced by a strong rivalry, which, of course, still bears the traces of this attraction, and which ends in a triangulated relationship with a woman who is supposedly the love interest of both, a challenge to a duel and, in the end, a dishonourable murder. The patriarch has to kill to re-establish his rightful position: This murder is his secret and lies at the core of his power.

plans to get rid of Allan Armadale. Lydia's closet, hidden under a mask of perfect femininity, thus functions as a condensation of Wrentmore's male closet: It overshadows its single deed of murder in a whole conglomeration of criminal acts. In the course of the novel, the original male closet, which was from the start marked by ambiguity, comes to represent nothing more than a weak replica of a much more profound female criminal closet. At the same time, the two closets come to partially look alike in their combination of criminality, gender-bending, their fundamental instability and their delayed confessions which turn speaking into – literally – the ultimate act.

Wrentmore's Confession: The Male Closet

Wrentmore's disclosure functions as the starting-point of *Armadale*'s long and winding plot. Dying of a paralysing illness,[45] Wrentmore wants to use his last moments in order to formulate a letter to his son, who is at that point a little child, too small to understand him, and which he is supposed to receive when he is of age. Wrentmore's letter is first of all a confessional letter, in which he admits to a crime as yet "unseen, […] unpunished" (*Armadale*[46] 45), the murder of his rival, Fergus Ingleby, whom he locked and left to drown in a ship's cabin out of jealousy: By taking on Wrentmore's identity and taking away his bride, Ingleby presented a clear threat to Wrentmore's patriarchal power. But the letter is also more than a mere confession: That Wrentmore's real intention is to warn his son, Ozias Midwinter, not to repeat the past, can be seen by the fact that he has already completed the confessional part of his narrative in writing by the time he lies dying (cf. *A* 43). The warning he has not succeeded in writing yet, however,

[45] Sutherland sees this illness as "clearly […] syphilis" (Introduction to *Armadale* xii). Syphilis does indeed paralyse and this interpretation would also go along with the fact that Wrentmore's 'crimes' are predominantly connected to the erotic: His murder of Ingleby is, as we will see, also the result of a strong homoerotic attraction to him.
[46] Collins, Wilkie. *Armadale*. Ed. John Sutherland. London: Penguin, 2004. References to *Armadale* will be abbreviated with *A* and the page number.

is important enough for Wrentmore to confess his past to two strangers, the Scotsman Mr. Neal and the German doctor at Wildbad, where Wrentmore has come for health reasons. Thus, the confession is no mere confession for confession's sake in the face of threatening dissolution and potential metaphysical reckoning, but a clear warning to "[n]ever let the two Allan Armadales meet in this world: never, never, never" (*A* 48). Consequently, "the father's confession revisits the prototypical Gothic manuscript revealing the crimes of the past and foreshadowing that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the sons" (Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins* 53). The confession is twice marked by a blank: First, the murder is represented by an ellipsis in Wrentmore's narrative letter, which is only filled afterwards. It takes place between "We lowered her [Miss Blanchard], insensible, into the boat" (*A* 38) and "I was the last who left" (*A* 38) in the first attempt at confession. This gap is later filled: "I did my part in lowering her safely into the boat. […] But his [Ingleby's] head rose to the surface before I could close the cabin door. I looked at him, and he looked at me – and I locked the door in his face. The next minute, I was back among the last men left on deck" (*A* 44). A second blank occurs unintentionally on Wrentmore's part when he is struck by a stroke in trying to formulate the warning to his son. Wrentmore's confession is thus the attempt to fill the gaps his narrative has so far provided.

Wrentmore's dread of a re-established homosocial relationship between his son and Ingleby's son in the next generation is caused by his own catastrophic experiences with male homosocial relations. Wrentmore's closet repeats the structure of one stereotypical male criminal closet, in which male rivalry causes murder. Murder is then what lies at the bottom of the patriarchal power structure and the closet. But this rivalry is also marked by a homosociality which crosses the line between the acceptable and unacceptable by coming too close to the erotic. Bachman and Cox have pointed out how the relationship between Wrentmore and Ingleby is, from the start, characterised as homoerotic: Both are marked by "passions […] left […] entirely without control of any kind" (*A* 28), by "idleness and self-

indulgence" (*A* 27), by an "unspeakable" (Bachman and Cox 324) depravity; all factors which point toward deeds 'contra naturam' in the veiled double-speak so typical in matters of same-sex desire. Just like Allan Armadale will do later vis-à-vis Ozias Midwinter, Wrentmore takes "a fancy to the stranger [Ingleby] the moment [he] set[s] eyes on him" (*A* 28, 29), and in the same way that Miss Blanchard will desperately try to separate her son from Ozias, Wrentmore's mother makes "effort after effort to part [them], and fail[s] in one and all" (*A* 29). She obviously "interprets this relationship as an unnatural alliance" (Bachman and Cox 324). In setting up Miss Blanchard as a rival for Ingleby in Wrentmore's affection, Wrentmore's mother is trying to cure one infatuation with another. But all she succeeds in is triangulating desire in another repetition of a typical Sedgwickian triangulation structure, where the desire between the two rivals is as strong as that between them and their ostensible love interest. Ingleby shows "surprise and mortification" (*A* 31) at Wrentmore's plans to leave him, a reaction from which "we might surmise that the 'intimacy' that exists between the two men is more than male bonding" (Bachman and Cox 324), and labours to elide Wrentmore's new lover by interposing his own body between them. Upon this elimination of two love interests at once, Wrentmore's attraction to Ingleby turns into aggression: Feminised already by Ingleby's 'theft' of the woman that Wrentmore has, without meeting her, already marked as his property ("the woman whom I had lost, the woman vilely stolen from me" (*A* 38)), he is further put into a female position in a physical conflict with Ingleby, who "set[s] his mark on [Wrentmore's] face by a blow" (*A* 35). After Ingleby has, moreover, deprived Wrentmore of his chance to reclaim his masculinity in a duel by escaping the island (cf. *A* 35, 36), Wrentmore's only possibility of revenge is dishonourable murder. The content of the closet, when stripped of all surrounding circumstances, is thus murder; a deed committed to reclaim patriarchal power. Moreover, the murder is, as is often the case with the male closet, accompanied by a feminisation of the murderer and by homoerotic relations which give rise to the violent action. Wrentmore kills Ingleby by "lock[ing]

the door [of the ship's cabin] in his face" (*A* 44), thereby literally pushing him and the guilty knowledge that attaches to him into a closet.[47] Suffocating Ingleby is also a literal manifestation of depriving Ingleby of his voice: The guilt of male homoerotic attachment is silenced through suffocation. The motifs of the ship's cabin (or similar closet-like structures) as well as of suffocation resonate throughout *Armadale*, where murder takes place in actual closets and suffocation is the preferred choice of killing another human being. The original closet thus lays the groundwork for the novel's investigation of closet structures overall.

The confession scene that stands at the beginning of the novel is already marked by a clear feminisation of Wrentmore's closet. While Wrentmore would like to establish and tries to fashion his closet as a secret shared between men, "a sacred confidence between father and son" (*A* 45), in which Ozias is supposed to "grant her [his mother] the mercy of still concealing the truth" (*A* 45), the confession is in fact a highly public occurrence over which Wrentmore has lost all epistemological control.[48] To begin with, Wrentmore is feminised by the position in which he is put in Wildbad: Marked by "the death-in-life of Paralysis" (*A* 13), he is completely "helpless" (*A* 13). The confession in front of strangers is forced upon him by his incapability to even control his limbs ("'He can still move his hands a little, but he can hold nothing in his fingers'" (*A* 15)), and his quickly-fading ability to speak. Even when speaking, he is placed in a position of absolute dependence and vulnerability, for in the German town of Wildbad, the only choice of a confessor given to him is the other English-

[47] Ship cabins also keep reoccurring in Allan Armadale's life: On the night on 'La Grace de Dieu', the ship where his father was murdered, Allan has his fateful Dream after having taken a look into the cabin where the deed was done. In the Dream, the guilty secrets of the past keep resurfacing, for Allan dreams that he and his father are together in the cabin with "[w]ater r[ising] slowly over [them]" (*A* 141), a literal image of his father's death. Moreover, Allan later finds himself the victim of a murderous plot taking place in a ship's cabin which is "nailed down on [him]" (*A* 601). Once again, this criminal deed is closeted in the small room, with the difference that Allan, unlike his father, manages to escape the cabin and the sinking ship.

[48] Costantini, for instance, stresses how "[b]efore and after haunting Midwinter, the epistolary confession is read by many undesignated recipients, affects their behaviour, and often inspires a course of action that is at odds with the sender's wishes" (26).

speaking person present, Mr. Neal (cf. *A* 16).[49] If we, like Sutherland, take his illness to be syphilis, his body is moreover marked by his past deeds in a way that presents these deeds as sexual misdemeanours. Wrentmore is hence not only in a position of absolute passivity, inactivity, and dependence, his body also betrays his secret by making it readable. In the moment of its confession, the male closet in this novel thus comes to look remarkably similar to its female 'counter'part. The situation that Wrentmore finds himself in at Wildbad is comparable to Lady Delacour's and Lady Audley's in their confessional scenes: Monitored by a doctor who represents the medical authority, Wrentmore has to make his darkest secrets known in front of the male establishment. Even the room in which the confession scene takes place reminds one of a female boudoir:

> Cupids and flowers were painted on the ceiling; bright ribbons looped up the white window-curtains; a smart gilt clock ticked on a velvet-covered mantelpiece; mirrors gleamed on the walls, and flowers in all the colours of the rainbow speckled the carpet. In the midst of the finery, and the glitter, and the light, lay the paralysed man[.] (*A* 22, 23)

Both mirrors and decorations, cupids and flowers, finery and glitter, are elements we associate with the depiction of female boudoirs. The sickroom appears like a toned down version of Lady Audley's boudoir, with its riches and splendour, but also evokes Lady Delacour's medicalised closet. At the same time, the cupids and flowers also introduce a sensual element, as a reminder of Wrentmore's potential homoerotic 'misdeeds'. By entering Wrentmore's sickroom, Neal "[c]ross[es] into the private space of Allan Armadale's […] bedroom" (Cole 111); a room that is marked as private both by its association with illness (one of the few 'private' occurrences in

[49] The secret is thus forced upon Mr. Neal as well: He, like Ozias later, is pushed into Wrentmore's closet against his will and evidently regards his own unwanted interference as dangerous (cf. *A* 19).

Victorian life) and by its clear demarcation from the outside, for its threshold may only be crossed by specific people. But, as in the case of the female closet, this privacy is marked as precariously instable, for the confession itself is witnessed by various people for whom it is not meant, among them interestingly enough, Wrentmore's own wife.

The paralysis from which Wrentmore suffers necessitates the fact that his confession is overheard by more people than the person it is intended for, his son Ozias. The inclusion of Mr. Neal, while unwanted per se, does not bother Wrentmore, nor does the inclusion of the doctor; as they are "'strangers'" (*A* 41), Wrentmore appears to accept their intrusion. At the same time, to the surprise and horror of Neal and the doctor, Wrentmore excludes his wife from the confession. This, again, is typical of the male closet: The patriarch's secret may only circulate among men. While he is at first unwilling to let her hear any part of it, her passionate appeal to him, which borders on emotional blackmail (cf. *A* 25, 26), convinces him to allow her to stay in the room during the first part of his confessional story, up until the murder itself. Thus the actual content of the closet is still barred from her. This behaviour is put in perspective when we begin to understand that what is at stake between Wrentmore and his wife is a desperate struggle for power; a power that is interpreted by both as control over knowledge. Wrentmore's wife is in the position of Bluebeard's wife: Excluded from the secret knowledge possessed by patriarchy, she is seduced into curiosity by the mere awareness of this exclusion. At the same time, Wrentmore's absolute vulnerability, the fact that he is hemmed in from all sides, his closet vulnerable and penetrable to the extreme, leads to a constellation reminiscent of the female closet. The power struggle between husband and wife, as well as the confession scene, repeat the pattern of voyeurism typical of the female closet, this time with reversed roles: It is Wrentmore who is in the closet and who tries to guard his secret and his privacy by all means, while his wife makes use of every possibility to penetrate his private sphere and hence the knowledge from which she is debarred. The typical suspicion of sexual infidelity is also what lies at the root

of her motives, for "a torture of jealous suspicion – suspicion of that other woman who had been the shadow and the poison of her life – wr[ings] her to the heart" (*A* 25). Incited by the suspicion of sexual infidelity, Wrentmore's wife has before attempted to find out about his secret by all means, spying upon him in his private rooms.

> 'It was when we were in Switzerland, and when his illness was nearly at its worst, that news came to him by accident of that other woman who has been the shadow and the poison of my life – news that she (like me) had borne her husband a son. On the instant of his making that discovery [...] a mortal fear seized him: not for me, not for himself; a fear for his own child. The same day (without a word to me) he sent for the doctor. I was mean, wicked, what you please – I listened at the door. I heard him say: *I have something to tell my son, when my son grows old enough to understand me. Shall I live to tell it?* The doctor would say nothing certain. The same night (still without a word to me), he locked himself into his room. What would any woman, treated as I was, have done in my place? She would have done as I did – she would have listened again.' (*A* 17)

Would any 'decent' woman according to Victorian standards have actually listened at the door of her husband's closet?[50] By regarding information concerning her husband as rightful knowledge for herself, Wrentmore's wife acts like the husband in the relationship, who decides what knowledge is relevant for both parties to possess and who tries to invade the private sphere of his partner. The knowledge of the secret teases and seduces, and the relationship between Wrentmore and his wife is, for her, a half pleasurable, half painful struggle for control of this knowledge: With "hungering suspense" (*A* 40) does Wrentmore's wife regard the letter, and she tries

[50] The male closet is explicitly defined against potential female intrusions; it is set off from the space designated for the wife (cf. Stewart 78) and "marks the internal limit to the woman's authority in the house" (Wigley 348).

to avoid having to leave the room by "draw[ing] back behind the bed-head, out of his sight" (*A* 40). When this fails, she falls back on her former strategy and eavesdrops on the rest of the confession: "'Was she listening?' whispered Mr Neal, in German. 'The women are restoring her,' the doctor whispered back. 'She has heard it all'" (*A* 42). Wrentmore is incapable of regulating the access to his secret in his paralysed, feminised state; he even remains unaware that his wife has, in the end, won their struggle, both by eavesdropping and by, eventually, marrying Mr. Neal, with whom she is connected through their shared knowledge of the closet. Wrentmore also fails to keep his secret vis-à-vis the other female participant at this point of the story, Miss Blanchard: "The widow alone knew, from that time forth, why her husband had been murdered, and who had done the deed" (*A* 45). While Wrentmore's closet functions as both the 'original' and as a stereotypically male closet within the novel, the confession scene, in its strong focus on the vulnerability and penetrability of this closet, draws parallels between his male and the more threatened, instable female closet, which we will encounter later. At the same time, the point of confession, the point of 'outing' oneself as a murderer, coincides for Wrentmore, similar to Lydia later, with the point of death, and is thus, as in so many instances in the novel, delayed.

Spreading out: In Someone Else's Closet

In *Armadale*, contact with the 'original' closet is infectious: Everyone who has, in some way or other, touched upon the murderous relationship between Ingleby and Wrentmore is necessarily entangled in secrecy and silence. The Blanchards attempt to silence Lydia, who has committed the crucial deed of forgery, by "'pa[ying] for the schooling on the Continent to keep her out of the way'" (*A* 522) as she is "'in possession of [the] family secret'" (*A* 522). While she is also profiting from this secret through her blackmail of Miss Blanchard, the forgery itself represents a capital crime which lays the groundwork for Lydia's future criminal career, which,

in its turn, will have to be closeted. Miss Blanchard, too, is forced into silence, both by her own actions and by her knowledge of Wrentmore's deed. Miss Blanchard, although absolved by the overall narrative in her position as Allan's revered mother, has committed several questionable acts in the past, which are all marked by gender non-compliance. She has not only married without her father's consent, but has in fact actively deceived him in order to marry Ingleby: "The letter [to Wrentmore's mother] never went to its destination; and, with the daughter's privity and consent, the father's confidence was abused to the very last" (*A* 34). The difficulty of "fabricat[ing] the answer from [Wrentmore's] mother which Mr Blanchard expected" (*A* 34) is, as has been said before, resolved by resorting to Lydia's help. Here again, Miss Blanchard's position is dubious, for Wrentmore "neglects to mention that her [Lydia's] early efforts came at the behest of her young mistress, Ms. Blanchard, and that to Lydia, in the position of a friendless young girl employed halfway around the globe, her mistresses' orders were law" (Young-Zook 241). At the same time, Miss Blanchard can be suspected of harbouring illegitimate feelings for Lydia. Whenever the first meeting between Miss Blanchard and Lydia is described, it is stressed how Miss Blanchard, similar to the way that Wrentmore reacts to Ingleby and Allan to Ozias, has taken a sudden and inexplicable liking to Lydia as a young girl. Lydia is "an orphan girl of barely twelve years old, a marvel of precocious ability, whom Miss Blanchard had taken a romantic fancy to befriend" (*A* 34), and the words used to describe how Miss Blanchard takes to her echo Wrentmore's and Allan's passion: "'[A] young lady, driving through the market-place, stopped her carriage to hear what it was all about; saw the little girl; and took a violent fancy to her on the spot'" (*A* 521).[51] Like Wrentmore, Miss Blanchard does not only suffer through

[51] Lydia, with her pre-raphaelite hair, is *the* object of sexual passion in the novel: Allan, Ozias, Bashwood, her old music teacher and Mr. Waldron all fall under her spell and Sutherland even suspects Ingleby of having seduced her as a young girl (cf. Introduction to *Armadale* xvii). In light of this, it would come as no surprise if Miss Blanchard was also unable to resist her.

her knowledge of forbidden acts committed in the past, but also through her own prohibited desires.

In the aftermath of the events on Madeira, Miss Blanchard exiles herself to a small village with only little contact to other people. Her greatest fear remains that someone, especially Lydia, could 'out' her vis-à-vis her son; she is afraid that "'[s]he [Lydia] will find her way to Allan next, [that] she will poison my son's mind against me'" (*A* 72). As in the case of Wrentmore, but also the other characters in the closet, such as Lydia and Ozias, her "health [is] breaking fast" (*A* 58), and, at the same time, she "gr[ows] more and more fretful, more and more subject to morbid fears and fancies" (*A* 58) near the end of her life. At this time, she has seen signs that point towards a repetition of past events, for Lydia has come back to blackmail her – another typical aspect of closet-structures is their likelihood to render their subjects blackmailable, as we have already seen with both Lady Delacour and Lady Audley – and Allan has "taken a violent fancy" (*A* 63) to the stranger Ozias Midwinter. Just like Wrentmore, Miss Blanchard is convinced that a homosocial relationship between their sons would be fatal, and she desperately attempts to cause a rift in the bond between her son and Ozias. Her death is marked by both a refusal to confess and a fear of the knowledge of her guilt reaching her son:

> Even on her death-bed she had shrunk from letting the light fall clearly on the story of the past. She had looked at Allan kneeling by the bedside, and had whispered to Mr Brock [the local rector]: '*Never let his Namesake come near him! Never let that Woman find him out!*' […] The secret which she had kept from her son and from her friend, was a secret which she carried with her to the grave. (*A* 73)

Miss Blanchard's wish is granted and her secret remains a secret to Allan; the confession is thus not only delayed but actively withheld. While this protects her reputation, it also stresses the dangerous potential inherent in

her quasi-closet: With her subversion of patriarchal rights at marital decision-making, her dangerous deviance from the norms prescribed to women, Miss Blanchard might be even more subversive than Wrentmore, the murderer.

The transference of the closet onto characters originally uninvolved in it can most explicitly be seen in the depiction of Wrentmore's son, Ozias Midwinter. For Ozias, reading his father's confessional letter becomes a turning point in his life: While he had before only felt the need to conceal his vagabond background,[52] the confessional letter pushes Ozias into his father's closet and at the same time transfers his feelings of guilt onto him. Ozias immediately feels the need to 'out' himself. His first reaction on reading the letter is to share his newly-acquired knowledge with Mr. Brock, Allan's mentor, whom he has only recently met: "'Read that,' he said; 'and, for Christ's sake, pity me when you know who I am'" (*A* 87). Allan's Dream, which Ozias interprets after a superstitious fashion as a warning against any contact between him and Allan, only strengthens these feelings, for Ozias is unsure "whether his destiny is to be that of Oedipus or Faust, automaton or free agent" (Sutherland, Introduction to *Armadale* xxiv). Ozias's urge to confess resurfaces throughout the novel and at several points he feels compelled to reveal his origins, especially to Allan, but also to Lydia. Trapped with Allan on 'La Grace de Dieu', the ship where his father murdered Allan's father, Ozias is "driven headlong into speech and action by a maddening temptation to reveal the truth" (*A* 124, also *A* 130 where this is worded similarly as "[t]he torturing temptation to reveal the

[52] That Ozias's unhappy childhood and vagabond background are, in fact, consequences of his father's deed shows the destructive influence of the closeted knowledge. His step-father, Mr. Neal, and his mother, Wrentmore's former wife, treat Ozias badly because they know about his father's act: "'I [Ozias] remember myself locked up in a lumber-room, with a bit of bread and a mug of water, wondering what it was that made my mother and my stepfather seem to hate the very sight of me. I never settled that question till yesterday, and then I solved the mystery, when my father's letter was put into my hands [...] they were both well aware that the shameful secret which they would fain have kept from every living creature, was a secret which would be one day revealed to *me*'" (*A* 89).

truth"). When Lydia, in a shot in the dark, asks him whether 'Ozias Midwinter' is his real name, Ozias's reaction immediately reveals the truth ("'Who told you?'" (*A* 421)) and the full revelation is brought about by Lydia's sexual advances. In drawing attention to itself, the fake name hence functions as a literal sign of the closet.[53] Ozias's feminised, 'talking' body that is constantly on the verge of confessing[54] undermines the patriarchal order, for in 'outing' himself to Lydia, he gives rise to her plan to kill Allan and impersonate his widow, thereby striking at the heart of the male societal order. But, above all, it undermines the structure of the male closet, whose patriarchal power rests on the male's ability to keep a secret (or, at least, to uphold the illusion that there is a secret). The feminised, hysterical body is thus one of the greatest threats to the male closet. Ozias's closet constantly draws attention to itself, for both Lydia and Mr. Brock regard him as a man with a secret. While Mr. Brock's reaction, in its blatant racism – part of his distrust of Ozias comes from his "tawny, haggard cheeks; his bright brown eyes, preternaturally large and wild; his tangled black beard; his long supple, sinewy fingers, wasted by suffering, till they looked like claws" (*A* 64) – can also be regarded as a mere defence reaction against a stranger daring to come near his pupil, Lydia's immediate suspicion regarding Ozias is more interesting. It illustrates one of the mechanisms of the closet, for Lydia can be said to find out about Ozias's secret through her own association with secrecy (which will be a topic of later sections of this chapter), thereby demonstrating the workings of the 'It takes one to know

[53] Lydia decides to keep her real name in her deception at Thorpe-Ambrose, following Mrs. Oldershaw's (her fellow conspirator) advice, which states that "an assumed name is, nine times out of ten, a very unnecessary and a very dangerous form of deception" (*A* 167). The novel proves her right: Lydia goes unnoticed even after Ozias and Mr. Brock are warned of a 'Miss Gwilt', while Ozias's name frequently draws suspicion upon itself. Lydia's other names become threatening for her, for she may not be known either as 'Mrs. Waldron' or as 'Mrs. Armadale'. Especially 'Armadale' functions in the novel as that which may not be named: Several characters associated with it, for instance Ingleby, Ozias and Lydia, are forced to or decide to take on an alias. The name 'Armadale' is, of course, the key to the novel's overall structure; it triggers the original plot and, thereby, the original closet, and it gives rise to Lydia's impersonation plan.

[54] Next to his urge to confess his father's deed, Ozias tends to feel the necessity of confessing his relapses into a superstitious belief in the Dream (cf. *A* 264, 293, 510).

one'-doctrine. Her suspicions about Ozias arise through the parallels in their early lives, where both faced neglect and hardship: "Everything about this man is more or less mysterious […] I am positively certain Mr Midwinter has done something or suffered something, in his past life, young as he is; and I would give I don't know what to get at it" (*A* 286, 287). Lydia is criminally knowledgeable and her experience with changing names allows her to recognise Ozias's name as a fake identity: "'Midwinter?' she said […] 'I don't believe in his name, to begin with!'" (*A* 389)

As it is the case with his father, being in the closet leads to a feminisation on Ozias's part. Several critics have pointed out how Ozias's frequently mentioned 'nerves' feminise (cf. Young-Zook 237, J. Taylor 165, Daly 468, Bachman and Cox 327) and orientalise him, for Ozias does not only – similar to Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone*, another racial hybrid[55] – possess a "sensitive feminine organization" (*A* 220), he is also, by turns, "hysterical" (*A* 221), in a "frenzy" (*A* 222), "feverish" (*A* 222), in a "sheer delirium" (*A* 225) and suffers from a "hysterical paroxysm" (*A* 225).[56] His hysterical, feminising reactions reoccur whenever Ozias is confronted with his father's secret and the possibility of repeating his deed; that means whenever one of the scenes from Allan's Dream becomes a reality. This hysteria is also connected to Ozias's homoerotic desire for Allan,[57] which he attempts to suppress throughout the novel, for "his hysteria, his perpetual anxiety and feelings of terror, stem from an unconscious awareness that his 'love' for Armadale signifies death" (Bachman and Cox 329). This leads to his onsets of "homosexual panic" (Bachman and Cox 329). Ozias's "unconquerable

[55] Ozias's racial hybridity will not be discussed in detail here, but many critics have made it their topic. Antinucci, for instance, claims that "[m]ixed-race, uprooted, vagrant and emasculated, Ozias Midwinter typifies an ideal figure that in Victorian terms stands for absolute 'otherness'" (133). Other critics that have offered postcolonial readings of *Armadale* and Ozias Midwinter are Lyn Pykett in *Wilkie Collins*, Lillian Nayder in a monography likewise called *Wilkie Collins*, and Monica M. Young-Zook in an article on "Wilkie Collins's Gwilt-y Conscience: Gender and Colonialism in *Armadale*".

[56] These descriptions also move him in the vicinity of madness, the "female malady" (Showalter, *Female Malady* 3).

[57] I am not the only one to read the relationship between Ozias and Allan as homoerotic, so do Marroni (51), Jung (103, 108), Dever (113, 118), and, of course, Bachman and Cox.

affection for Allan" (*A* 131) makes it impossible for him to leave his friend and thereby fulfil his father's wishes. The novel is full of comments on the relationship between Ozias and Allan which can be read as homoerotic. A symptomatic scene occurs at the very beginning of the novel when Ozias confesses his reason for staying with Allan in spite of his father's warning to Mr. Brock. This reason is, namely

> 'My love for Allan Armadale.' He [Ozias] cast a doubting, almost a timid, look at Mr Brock as he gave that answer; and, suddenly leaving the table, went back to the window-seat. 'Have I no right to speak of him in that way?' he asked, keeping his face hidden from the rector. 'Have I not known him long enough; have I not done enough for him yet? […] ask your own heart if the miserable wretch whom Allan Armadale has treated as his equal and his friend, has said too much in saying that he loves him? I do love him! It *will* come out of me – I can't keep it back. I love the very ground he treads on! I would give my life – yes, the life that is precious to me now, because his kindness has made it a happy one – I tell you I would give my life –' The next words died away on his lips; the hysterical passion rose, and conquered him. (*A* 102)

In light of countless other instances of homoerotically-charged encounters between the two, it will hardly do to regard such emotional effusions as a mere expression of 'brotherly love'. Like their fathers, Allan and Ozias attempt to deal with their loaded relationship by triangulating their desire through their rivalry for Lydia Gwilt. While this rivalry initially "brings about a disruption of the homosocial bonds of male order" (Verzella 326), in the end, the triangulation actually strengthens their relationship, for "the men's heterosexual desire works efficiently to consolidate their dyadic, homosocial relationship" (Dever 119), so that Lydia is finally excluded, while the bond between Allan and Ozias is confirmed at the very end of the novel (cf. *A* 676, 677). Interestingly enough, the bond between Allan and

Ozias requires no confession: After Lydia's and Mr. Brock's death, Ozias is the only keeper of the original secret remaining[58] and, unlike his father, it is implied that he will take it with him to his grave.

The Male Closet Overshadowed: Lydia's Closet

Armadale is interesting in that the original male criminal closet, while playing a large role as the founding moment of the narrative, is gradually overshadowed by a female criminal closet which then comes to dominate the novel until its very end. The main female character, who could also be said to be the novel's main character,[59] both participates in the original closet (by forging the letter of consent when she is still a young girl) and manages to accumulate such an enormous criminal record in the time period between, roughly, 1828 and 1851 that she has countless reasons for being in a closet of her own. One contemporary reviewer lists her crimes as follows: She is "a forger, a convicted adulteress, murderess, and thief, aged thirty-five" (H. F. Chorley in the *Athenaeum*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 147).[60] The violence and aggression that Lydia's crimes bespeak have to be closeted as they pertain to behaviour which is stereotypically marked as 'male' and thus not compatible with Victorian culture's female gender expectations.[61] With regard to Lydia's own closets, we must again differentiate between two specific closets in which she partakes: The first relates to her

[58] I do not count his mother and his stepfather, who know about Wrentmore's deed but whose later fate is not disclosed in the novel.
[59] Wilkie Collins named the dramatic adaptation of his novel *Miss Gwilt*. In addition, contemporary reviews on *Armadale* generally focused on the character of Lydia Gwilt much more than on Allan Armadale or Ozias Midwinter (cf. H. F. Chorley in the *Athenaeum*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 147; Unsigned Review in the *Spectator*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 150; and Unsigned Review in the *Saturday Review*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 152).
[60] Lisa Niles has pointed out how Lydia's age might actually be her greatest crime: "The undetectability of Lydia's age presents another, even more terrifying, potential fraud: the theft of possible years of reproductive potential" (75). The question of age, of course, is especially relevant for women, whose 'value' on the marriage market and in society in general declines the older they get. It is a further marker of Lydia's gender non-compliance that she refuses to accept her declining 'value' on the marriage market.
[61] Lydia's association with Doctor Downward, presumably an abortionist, could be said to demonstrate her disinterest in motherhood. With the exception of one scene ("I

past, which is detected by the private investigator Bashwood Junior, and pertains to her unknown birth, her forgery, her participation in countless frauds, her adulterous relationship with the Cuban Manuel, her poisoning of her first husband when he detects this affair, her public trial under the name of 'Mrs. Waldron', her blackmail of Miss Blanchard and her suicide attempt (cf. *A* 520-536). Her second closet relates to the immediate present of the novel and is chronicled in her letters to her co-conspirator Mrs. Oldershaw and in her diary, in which she first plots to marry Allan Armadale and then, when this plan fails, attempts to murder him in order to pass as his widow. Interestingly, these two closets seldom overlap within the novel: While Mr. Bashwood and his son, for instance, are the only ones to find out about her closeted past, they are largely unaware of her immediate criminal present. Even Mrs. Oldershaw, who from the start participated in the knowledge of her past and is greatly invested in the plot to get Lydia married to Allan, is later excluded from Lydia's plans when they turn murderous. Ozias Midwinter, on the other hand, necessarily detects her present criminal intentions by almost becoming her murder victim himself, but the novel tells us nothing about him finding out about her past. While we may suspect Ozias to know about the connection between Lydia as his wife and the twelve-year old girl who figured so dominantly in his father's letter, this knowledge is only suggested to him through his superstitious belief in the Dream, in which he interprets Lydia as the 'female' shadow, who together with himself as the 'male' shadow, brings about Allan's death. Lydia herself also evades the totalising confession that Ozias prefers: In her dealings with Doctor Downward, who helps her in her final attempts to trap Allan in the Sanatorium where she plans to kill him, she "tell[s] him what [she] had settled to tell him – and no more" (*A* 589) and even her suicide letter informs Ozias about nothing more than her involvement in a plot on Allan's

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wonder whether I should have loved my children if I had ever had any? Perhaps, yes – perhaps, no. It doesn't matter" (*A* 426)), Lydia, just like Lady Audley, is shown without motherly instincts within the novel; a fact that makes her gender non-compliance even more obvious if we keep in mind that the Victorian Age saw motherhood as *the* embodiment of femininity (cf. Matus 157).

life. Revelations about Lydia are partial; in light of this fragmented knowledge, she remains largely unknowable. As we will see later, with the help of Lydia's diary, the reader is the only one treated to a supposedly 'complete' perspective on her.

On the face of it, Lydia's motivation for her criminal deeds largely mirrors Lady Audley's in her focus on economic and class advantages: "While she is resolutely amoral, Gwilt's driving motivation is identical with that of conventional Victorian heroines: the emotional and financial security provided through marriage" (Morris 111). Her upwardly mobile behaviour is also perceived as threatening, for "[l]ike Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley, the chameleon-like Lydia Gwilt both plays out a fantasy of upward social mobility and represents a pervasive middle-class insecurity about the unreliability of class signifiers in a period of rapid social change" (Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* 120). However, these economic and class reasons for engaging in criminal activities are mostly suggested to her by Mrs. Oldershaw, who encourages Lydia to become Armadale's wife or widow in order to get at his fortune or the "*twelve hundred a year for life*" (*A* 160) to which his widow is entitled.[62] In fact, Lydia's plans seem to be caused by a desire for "transgenerational revenge upon Allan's mother who exploited her as a young girl" (Cole 119), for in justifying her murderous intentions to herself, she claims to "hate him [Allan] for his mother's sake" (*A* 447). However, in contrast to Lady Audley, for whom criminality signifies plain survival, Lydia takes active pleasure in her plotting and uses it as an antidote to the boredoms of domesticity. Thinking back to her days in Thorpe-Ambrose from the perspective of her monotonous married life, Lydia exclaims: "What a time it was, – what a life it was, at Thorpe-Ambrose! I wonder I kept my

[62] Mrs. Oldershaw and Lydia have a business-like relationship which also demonstrates how Lydia, much more than Lady Delacour or Lady Audley, is, through her lower class status, involved in commercial transactions, thus participating to a greater degree in what is deemed the public sphere. Here again we see the connection between criminality and participation in the public sphere which is relevant for the question of female criminality: As Lydia's life is not entirely limited to the private sphere, she has more opportunities to engage in criminal activities than Lady Delacour and Lady Audley. The public sphere is, however, also 'no place for women' in the nineteenth century and Lydia is thus, once again, going against the rules prescribed to her gender.

senses. It makes my heart beat, it makes my face flush, only to read about it now!" (*A* 547) And who could think any less of her after the reader has been treated to a description of the torturous sameness and loneliness of her life with Ozias? "[I]t was lonely enough in my lodging at Thorpe-Ambrose, but how much lonelier it is here" (*A* 547), Lydia claims with her husband in the same house but buried in work. No wonder that Lydia condemns Ozias's "hateful writing" (*A* 547) and the rain that prevents her from going outside (cf. *A* 549) when her only entertainment consists of putting her "dressing-case tidy, and polish[ing] up the few little things in it" (*A* 550). The truth is that Lydia, with Ozias as her only social contact and in addition neglecting her, simply has nothing to do but plot. When Lydia, in her suicide letter, claims to "have never been a happy woman" (*A* 666), she forgets about the pleasures and excitement of criminality.

It is this revelling in her own criminal acts that Lydia manages to hide successfully. The men surrounding her fall into the trap of interpreting her closet as what they deem necessary for a *woman* to hide, namely as sexual misdemeanour. When Allan, suspicious of Lydia's refusal to talk about her family circumstances, follows the references she has given on taking on her job as a governess to London and finds, at the end of his trail, the empty house in Pimlico, his immediate conclusion is that Lydia must be a "miserable, fallen woman, who had abandoned herself in her extremity to the help of wretches skilled in criminal concealment […] and whose position now imposed on her the dreadful necessity of perpetual secrecy and perpetual deceit in relation to her past life" (*A* 345). For the house in Pimlico belongs to Mrs. Oldershaw and Doctor Downward: While Mrs. Oldershaw, next to being a beautician (a profession suspicious in itself), "may also be a procuress and controller of prostitutes" (Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* 144), there are many signs "that Downward is an abortionist" (Mangham 177). Hence, "Lydia Gwilt's association with the cruel and grasping Mrs. Oldershaw (a procuress) and her abortionist-physician associate, Dr. Downward, suggests an association with, if not an actual past in, prostitution" (Young-Zook 242). It is significant that Allan, even after Lydia has cleared herself

of the accusation, can never again regard her as a potential wife: Innocence destroyed once, even if only by allegation, is innocence lost forever. Similarly, Ozias's only explanation for "her open disavowal of him, and […] her taking the name under which he had secretly married her" (*A* 647) at the end of the novel is that there is an "unknown man who had wronged him" (*A* 647). As Charret-del Bove points out:

> The very notion of female criminality is impossible to maintain because it would shatter the whole system of beliefs and values. Hence, in *Armadale*, Allan stands for the majority of well-educated people who firmly believe that ladies cannot be criminals, but only poor creatures and sentimental victims. (35)

While Lydia's closet may thus pertain to what critics have described as her transgressive 'masculinity' (cf. Young-Zook 237, Antinucci 142, Verzella 322), men's stereotypical interpretation of female secrecy as well as Lydia's successful performance of femininity[63] protect her from the detection of her non-compliant closet of violence and murder. Consequently, her closet can be seen as a typical female closet, in which gender non-compliance is hidden in order to fabricate the appearance of gender compliance. Lydia may be constantly suspected of harbouring *some* kind of secret: Midwinter, for instance, assumes that there is a link between her and the girl involved in the forgery, Allan finds her family circumstances suspicious and the Pedgifts think that she is after Allan's fortune. These supposed secrets are, however, always firmly anchored in a stereotypical belief in a woman's appropriate sphere of criminality: the domestic.

[63] Lydia, similar to Lady Audley and Lady Delacour, puts on a mask of 'womanliness' in Joan Riviere's sense in order to hide her gender non-compliant, 'masculine' ambitions and desires and to shield herself against men's potential retribution (cf. 303). She openly performs her femininity so as to 'pass' as a woman by displaying her modesty, accomplishments and her eroticism.

As is so often the case for closeted people, being in the closet is both an empowering and a disempowering experience for Lydia. It is empowering as it provides Lydia with a source of pleasure for herself, a sort of autoerotic enjoyment that is hers alone. Her pleasure in criminality borders on the sexual: In poisoning Allan in the Sanatorium, for instance, her "murderous excitement [is] akin to sexual arousal" (Tutor 51), for "[t]he fever-heat throb[s] again in her blood, and flush[es] fiercely in her cheeks" (*A* 662). In Lydia, the stereotypical 'passionless' nineteenth-century woman is thoroughly deconstructed, for she "is candidly unembarrassed by her sexual power" (Morris 112).[64] The closet provides her with an outlet for these redirected sexual pleasures that are all the more threatening as they are independent of men. Lydia is also a master at re-inventing herself, which provides her with mobility and possibilities unavailable to people sticking to one identity. Even when warned against a 'Lydia Gwilt', Mr. Brock and Ozias are unable to identify her, for she has "*been proved not to be [her]self*" (*A* 284) by changing clothes with a housemaid. In contrast to Ozias, she does not even have to change her name in order to be unidentifiable; her successful performance is enough. This change of identity allows Lydia, among other things, to use her sexual power over men while posing as a virgin. While her red hair may, according to Victorian physiognomical standards, function as "a clear warning of her depravity" (Cox, "Reading Faces" 117), "[h]er beauty is a mask which hides a criminal story" (Marroni 57) and her main asset in seducing men. But, as has been hinted at before, this beauty in fact only functions as another surface layer which closets the important information of her age. The amount of power she gains by trading on her looks and sexual attractiveness can best be seen in her sadomasochistic relationship with Bashwood: His fascination with Lydia, "a strange mixture of rapture and fear" (*A* 377), makes him, a shy

[64] Lydia herself comments ironically on the ideal of female passionlessness when she is contemplating murdering Allan: "If so ladylike a person as I am could feel a tigerish tingling all over her to the very tips of her fingers, I should suspect myself of being in that condition at the present moment. But, with *my* manners and accomplishments, the thing is, of course, out of the question. We all know that a lady has no passions" (*A* 552).

and insecure man, her accomplice in murder and finally leads to his mental derangement.

At the same time, being in the closet is also a disempowering experience for Lydia and creates a great source of suffering. Her past life brings about a chasm between her and respectable society which makes it, for instance, impossible for her to visit London without her veil[65] down (cf. *A* 463) for fear of being recognised after the publicity of her trial. This situation leads to despair deep enough for Lydia to attempt suicide (cf. *A* 80), contemplate suicide (cf. *A* 434), and finally commit suicide (cf. *A* 666). As with so many closeted characters[66] in the novel, the closet also contributes to her ill-health, so that she has to rely on laudanum to be able to sleep (cf. *A* 417): In tracing her drug-use, the novel "display[s] a pattern of increasing psychological dependence, physical exhaustion, and mental instability" (Pamboukian 115). But above all, the closet deprives her of control of the information that circulates about her. It creates an uncertainty about who is 'in the know' and Lydia, for instance, puzzles over to which degree Bashwood may be informed about her former life (cf. *A* 597). Moreover, the closet makes her blackmailable: Having traded on Miss Blanchard's closet by extorting money from her, Lydia herself becomes subject to blackmail when she meets her former lover Manuel in Italy. Although he "ha[s] not the shadow of a claim on [her] […] the mere attempt to raise it would, as he was well aware, lead necessarily to exposure of [her] whole past life" (*A* 566). Manuel's attempt at blackmail actually necessitates the continuation of Lydia's plans to murder Allan, as in order to evade his threats she has to "thr[o]w Armadale to him, as [she] might have thrown a piece of meat to a wild beast who was pursuing [her]" (*A* 567). Bashwood, after having found out about her past, has similar dreams of blackmailing her and forcing her into a relationship with him, which he is, however, unable

[65] While "[f]or Lydia, the veil [thus] signifies the freedom to conceal and manipulate her identity, to block the detective's gaze" (Pal-Lapinski 107), it, at the same time, limits her freedom of expression as wearing it becomes a necessity.
[66] Both Wrentmore and Miss Blanchard die before their time and Ozias, as has been demonstrated before, suffers from attacks of pathological nervousness.

to actualise (cf. *A* 520). The closet also becomes problematic for Lydia as soon as she is married to Midwinter. In this union, she is afraid of unwittingly betraying herself: "I ask myself whether any unconscious disclosure of the truth escapes me in the close intimacy that now unites us?" (*A* 546) Sexual intimacy is here seen as dangerous for the closet: The closeted person may enjoy pleasures on their own; connection to other people is, however, seen as threatening potential unintentional disclosure.

Avoiding the Gaze: Surveillance and the Closet in *Armadale*

Disclosure is, of course, what Lydia fears most and with disclosure she is constantly threatened. Surveillance is ubiquitous in this novel, which presents us with a panopticon-like[67] structure, "a nightmare world, in which even thoughts cease to be private, a picture of English society as a claustrophobic prison" (Peters 275). While surveillance and detection are, in general, important motifs in the sensation novel, *Armadale* takes these concepts to their extreme. Lydia, "perhaps the most watched woman in English literature" (Grass 202), stands at the centre of this network of surveillance. Her closet attracts the voyeuristic gaze of almost all other characters, male or female.[68] It is all the more remarkable that she manages to evade the numerous attempts at investigations of her closet as well as the raw power of the gaze. Like Lucy Audley, Lydia draws the desiring male gaze upon herself through her beauty and (ironically) through her successful perfor-

[67] "In a Foucaultian critical perspective, the control exerted by detectives over the people involved in an investigation turns detective fictions into what can be defined as 'panoptical narrations' […] where the criminal is constantly observed from an invisible source of institutional power" (Tomaiuolo 83). This is similarly the case in some sensation novels.
[68] A notable exception is Ozias, who is "the only one untainted by what it is deemed as the worst sin, espionage" (Antinucci 138), even if his male gaze is still directed at Lydia. This changes at the end of the novel, however, where a mere lapse in his wife's correspondence to him causes him to leave Italy for London in order to find out about her doings.

mance of femininity, as is stressed several times in the novel: When Bashwood falls for her, Lydia claims that "of all the ways in which men have looked at [her], no man ever looked at [her] in that way before" (*A* 289) and Ozias, too, "look[s] at [her], like a man petrified, without speaking a word" (*A* 287).[69] Minor characters react in a similar fashion (cf. *A* 162). She is, however, also more actively watched by various characters for very different reasons: Her first husband, Mr. Waldron, watches her "'carefully'" (*A* 526) out of pure jealousy, Mrs. Milroy and her nurse open her private correspondence in order to find out about her alleged affair with Major Milroy (a delusional idea of the pathologically jealous Mrs. Milroy) (cf. *A* 318), both Allan and Ozias are constantly on the lookout for her while she is governess at Thorpe-Ambrose (both for romantic motives) (cf. *A* 287), Allan sets a spy on her after the Pedgifts suggest her potentially criminal nature (cf. *A* 370) and Bashwood does the same in order to prevent her supposed marriage to Allan (cf. *A* 516). Lydia is even under constant observation from herself: Talairach-Vielmas has drawn attention to the fact that Lydia's "glass becomes the leitmotiv of the murderous plot" (*Moulding* 153) and that her mirror functions as another "site of surveillance" (*Moulding* 148). But Lydia's secret to successfully keeping her closet for most part of the novel lies in her ability to – intentionally or unintentionally – redirect the observing gaze to other sites: When under surveillance by Mr. Brock and his man, Lydia, as has been mentioned before, manages to pass on the suspicion onto her housemaid, a plot that proves most successful in keeping Mr. Brock permanently away from Thorpe-Ambrose. Similarly, the doubts concerning her character reference are displaced through Allan's fear of her being a fallen woman. When actively persecuted by spies, Lydia manages to turn around the situation by applying for help from Ozias and presenting herself as the innocent victim of espionage (cf. *A* 381), and by vanishing through back entrances and changing

[69] Note the connection between sexual attraction and fear which is also symptomatic of Bashwood's sadomasochistic relationship to Lydia.

means of transportation and addresses (cf. *A* 502). She also turns the tables on her pursuers by watching them in return: Right at the beginning, she and Mrs. Oldershaw employ a spy to be informed about the situation at Thorpe-Ambrose (cf. *A* 163), Lydia spies on Allan, both with the help of Mr. Bashwood and on her own (cf. *A* 378, *A* 431), and tracks Allan's movements on the Continent through his letters to Ozias (cf. *A* 549). Furthermore, Lydia makes active use of her status as 'most watched woman': When travelling to London, she arranges for Allan to sit in the same train cabin so that all the observant bystanders suppose that "'[s]he'll come back 'Mrs Armadale''" (*A* 465). She is usually very aware of the incidents in her environment and her downfall comes significantly from letting both Allan and Ozias slip from her view, for it makes their movements unpredictable. Strategies of surveillance thus render Lydia's closet typically female in that it invites aggressive voyeurism, especially by men, while they at the same time provide her with a weapon of her own with which she is able to fight back against the seemingly all-inclusive panopticon that forms the world of *Armadale*.

Intact Privacy? Lydia Gwilt's Diary

One of Lydia's main strategies for evading surveillance lies in a retreat into the supposedly private space of her diary which becomes *the* central locus of her closet, "a repository of the secrets Lydia keeps even from Oldershaw and thus from the staring of the novel" (Grass 210). Significantly, the transition in the novel's structure from the correspondence between Lydia and Mrs. Oldershaw to Lydia's diary occurs in the midst of one of her letters to her 'mentor' (cf. *A* 423). While she has shared her plans to ensnare Allan with Mrs. Oldershaw, she closets her murderous intentions from her. The diary becomes the medium for that closet. In contrast to, for instance, Lady Audley and Lady Delacour, Lydia possesses no stable

spatial closet in the form of a room of her own[70] and the whole novel is marked by a "lack of feminine domestic space" (Cole 111).[71] The only closet-like spatial structure associated with Lydia is the small room at the Sanatorium which she uses as a death trap for Allan and which, in this capacity, is unreliable.[72] In the novel, this room functions similarly to the ship's cabin in which Ingleby died in that it closets the guilt associated with the murderous deed. As a room in a Sanatorium, where Lydia is posing as a patient, it does, of course, invoke the discourse of madness that figured so prominently in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Here, this discourse is much more muted and the question whether Lydia may suffer from 'moral insanity' – her intellect seems completely undisturbed, as is demonstrated by her rational plotting; in contrast, her moral sense may be said to be skewed – is only indirectly asked.[73]

In the absence of a stable private room, the functions of such a space are condensed into the pages of the diary, which provides the stability lacking otherwise by travelling with her from England to Italy and back to England again. The importance of writing in following the traces of the closet is also emphasised by the fact that investigations about Lydia are often attempts at literally 'reading' her, for instance in Mrs. Milroy's opening of her letters or Allan's tracing of the person who gave her the written character reference. Whether we get an unmediated or a mediated access to Lydia's

[70] This is, of course, also a consequence of the fact that she is no member of the upper class to which Lady Audley – after her marriage – and Lady Delacour – from birth onwards – may count themselves. Lydia fails in her endeavour to replicate Lady Audley's "rise in social status through advantageous [...] crossings of class borders" (Columbo 161).

[71] Lydia does have one space that belongs exclusively to her, namely her small abode at the outskirts of Thorpe-Ambrose; her constant change of places, however, prevents this room from taking on the qualities of a spatial closet.

[72] As we have seen before, this is also the case in *Lady Audley's Secret*, where both the well and the room at the Castle Inn fail to fulfil their function as murder weapon. Like Allan, Robert Audley escapes his aunt's murder attempt by changing rooms.

[73] Here we find another parallel to *Lady Audley's Secret*: Similar to Lady Audley, who first attempts to turn the tables on Robert and declare him mad, and finally, when her plan fails, resorts to (attempted) murder, Lydia and Doctor Downward initially want to trap Allan in the Sanatorium as a 'madman'; it does not take long, however, for them to switch to a plot against his life. Both novels do, however, show the power of the (male) medical authorities in that they alone are able to officially label people as 'mad'.

thoughts in the pages of her diary – a question debated by many critics,[74] just as the diary as a whole has attracted much critical attention – the diary provides the reader with an insight into Lydia's closet which no character in the novel is ever treated to. In the diary, "a deliberate portrait of criminal intent, designed to see into and account for the thoughts and motives of a Victorian murderess" (Grass 198), we can follow Lydia's gender non-compliant plotting and thus see her as different from the ideal of a woman that the men at Thorpe-Ambrose have turned her into. At the same time, we can detect her doubts, fears and inner conflicts, and thus come to understand that she is also not the cold-hearted plotter that she presents herself as in her letters to Mrs. Oldershaw. The diary thus "reveals Lydia to be far more complex than she first appeared" (H.-J. Lee 256). For instance, "[i]t also reveals a secret at which her letters barely hint: that she is, inexplicably, fond of Midwinter" (Grass 212). This love for Ozias, which only ever becomes obvious in the pages of her diary, is crucially important as it will prevent her from executing her final murderous plan.

At the same time, the diary is seemingly incomplete in itself: It mostly pertains to the second part of Lydia's closet, her present attempts at becoming Allan's wife/widow, while the past is, except on rare occasions, omitted. The same goes for the actual attempts on Allan's life: While Lydia quite openly discusses her plans and desires for murdering Allan in her diary ("There I was, alone with him, talking in the most innocent, easy, familiar manner, and having it in my mind all the time, to brush his life out of my way" (*A* 486)), unwilling to "tell […] lies to [her] Diary" (*A* 568), she still – rather unsuccessfully – closets the murders she has committed or is about to commit. Finding Manuel's old letter which convinced her of killing her first husband, she does not spell out the deed, but merely refers

[74] Liggins, for instance, claims that Collins's "characteristic use of women's letters, diaries and testimonies alongside supposedly more 'authoritative' and controlled male narratives ensures that their dissatisfaction is not always mediated through male narrators". Costantini, on the other hand, claims that "the fact that it [the diary] is inserted in the omniscient narrator's text deflates its subversive potential" as "Lydia is finally denied an authorial status" (45).

to it as "the letter he wrote to encourage [her], when [she] hesitated as the terrible time came nearer and nearer" (*A* 444). But most importantly, the scene in which Lydia tries to poison Allan by putting, presumably, arsenic in his lemonade, is presented in the diary as a blank. Similar to Wrentmore, who in his confession went over his murderous deed only to return to it later, Lydia at first closets her act: "I had a few minutes of thought with myself, which I don't choose to put into words, even in these secret pages. I got up, and unlocked – never mind what. I went round to Midwinter's side of the bed, and took – no matter what I took. […] I shall pass over what happened in the course of the next hour" (*A* 559). However, this seeming concealment functions as a mere ruse, for the next pages provide ample suggestions for what Lydia did in the blank space in between, by having herself ask Ozias: "'*Do you think I tried to poison him?*'" (*A* 562) The diary in general thus opens up a question that Lydia herself poses: "Why do I keep a diary at all? Why did the clever thief the other day (in the English newspapers) keep the very thing to convict him, in the shape of a record of every thing he stole?" (*A* 559) With her aspirations at being a criminal mastermind, keeping a record of her deeds is indeed unreasonable, if the only goal is to avoid criminal detection. At the same time, this may well be the very way in which the diary functions: Not only as a "vehicle for self-exploration" (Costantini 43), "a way of giving order to chaotic reality" (Marroni 51), a place to seek "guidance" (Tutor 38) or "to keep track of events future and past" (Grass 199), but as something to be exhibited, to be consumed by posterity, which may marvel at her abilities. Marroni has made a similar claim with regard to Lydia's suicide note, which functions as a sort of shortened version of the diary: According to him, this suicide note is, above all, oriented towards "self-monumentalization" and can be read as "an extreme melodramatic staging of her narcissism" (54). This is even more so the case as "[t]o take one's life is to force others to read one's death" (Higonnet, "Speaking" 68). While the diary thus functions as her ultimate closet, Lydia simultaneously aims at outing herself in

some unforeseeable future.[75] Unfortunately for her, insofar as the novel is concerned, the diary actually remains unread. The diary's only reader is the reader of *Armadale* herself. Through her, the problem of the fragmentation of knowledge with regard to Lydia's personality is resolved, for all strands of information about her come together in her mind. The novel itself, however, ends on a determined closeting of both Lydia's death and her suicide note: "The spectacular death-scene, despite sensational potential and worthy of depiction in a novel that continuously relies on performance, display and acting […] is not depicted" (Jung 106); the only clue we get to her death is acoustic, "a sound […] dull and sudden, like the sound of a fall" (*A* 666). Similar to *Lady Audley's Secret*, the grave comes to function as the final closet in *Armadale*: "Lydia's death – like her birth – returns her to a realm of obscurity" (Jung 106), for "nothing has been inscribed on the tombstone, but the initial letter of her Christian name, and the date of her death" (*A* 672). Like Robert Audley, Ozias actively contributes to the effacement of his wife's life by "hush[ing] up" (*A* 672) the matter, not even telling Allan about Lydia's plans. As has been mentioned before, the final outing of the novel can be found in Lydia's suicide letter, but, even if it is aimed at self-monumentalisation, it can scarcely be said to fulfil this function in the way the diary does. It is limited in its scope to the person of Ozias Midwinter and it remains strangely unspecific: The only claim it makes is that Ozias "saved Armadale by changing rooms with him to-night – and […] saved him from [Lydia]" (*A* 665). Consequently, the outing conceals more than it admits to. As in Wrentmore's case, the suicide letter functions as another delayed outing; in this case the confession is even postponed after the death of the person concerned. In a similar manner, Ozias, after having nervously confessed twice within the novel, finally "ke[eps] the secret of the two names" (*A* 677) vis-à-vis Allan. In this way, his is the ultimate delayed confession; postponed after the novel's end itself.

[75] We will also detect this irrepressible wish for an outing, even in the case of possible repercussions, in other diary-keeping women within this thesis.

The Closet
of Female Victimisation

Introductory Remarks

The victimisation closet is a complex structure: On the one hand, victimisation itself forms the closeted content. For the person concerned, the very fact of her own victimisation has to be closeted away. On the other hand, it frequently produces a 'second layer' of closetedness, where a person takes on the closet identity instead of another. In the nineteenth century, it presents itself in the following form: Someone (a man) commits a deed that could potentially push him into the closet but does not; instead, someone else (a woman) forms the closet for him.[76] The victimisation closet is thus a quintessentially female closet. But why is this closet so specifically gendered in this era? The answer lies in the problem of male identification and the tendency of nineteenth century society to actively promote it in women: "Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations [...]. Interaction with women is seen as a lesser form of relating on every level" (Barry 172). Women's primary identification is thus not with their own gender, but with men, so that they come to protect or shield male interests.[77] The nineteenth century emphasises the values of self-sacrifice and self-erasure in women: The most striking expression of this can be found in the principle of coverture. By re-defining a married woman in terms of her husband, by obliterating her identity in marriage and melting it into her husband's, the law literally turned male identification into a reality: "When the husband and wife exchanged vows, they became one person

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[76] This means that the male closet which could potentially have been formed is not identical with the female closet that comes into existence: The female characters do not simply adopt the men's closets but form their own versions for them.
[77] This also explains the lack of female community within the novels under discussion, which we will later note. The dominance of male interests necessarily renders potential female support secondary in the novels' logic, and it hence further isolates the heroines.

[…]. The wife […] upon marriage lost virtually all powers over any property that she possessed. […] Once married, a wife could not sue or make a contract on her own nor make a will without her husband's consent" (Pool 184). In the novels discussed in this section, the female characters that develop a victimisation closet are married to the men for whom they take it on or stand to them in a relation similar to marriage. This partially explains their male identification and willingness to accept what should be the man's closet. But coverture is also simply expressive of a society in which male identification is generally expected of women, in which men are relegated to a position so far superior that their well-being is of primary importance. One typical survival strategy in such clearly hierarchical structures is to identify with the superior: "The perspective from the male standpoint […] is the dominant point of view and […] women are pushed to see reality in its terms […]. Women who adopt the male standpoint are passing, epistemologically speaking. This is not uncommon and is rewarded" (MacKinnon 636).[78] We can now see why the victimisation closet is a female structure and does not affect men: Being at the top of the hierarchy, they have no need to identify with those who are their inferiors and such behaviour would not be rewarded. It makes no sense for them to accept the burden of another's (a woman's) closet.

This structure of male identification is one factor that contributes to women's victimisation within a patriarchal society which victimises women per se. Women are turned into victims and even victimise themselves by adhering to the norms in which they have been indoctrinated. We can see this in the novels under discussion: In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), the main character Helen accepts and contributes to the conspiracies of silence which are built around the domestic abuse experienced by her and her female friends and closets her husband's deeds. In Wilkie

[78] We can see actual rewards for male identification in *The Moonstone* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where Rachel's and Helen's self-sacrifices are presented to us, and the men in their environment, as noble deeds, which are finally rewarded through their marriage to 'worthy' men. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is much more critical of male identification, for in this novel it is shown to be destructive and, eventually, fatal.

Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Rachel shields her lover Franklin Blake whom she suspects of having stolen the novel's eponymous diamond and risks her own reputation in the process. And in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Tess comes to hide not only her own sexual encounter but also her husband's name in order to protect him from being associated with herself and thus with her status as 'fallen woman'. But the victimisation is not only the result of their male identification, not simply an 'inner' process. They are also, and primarily, victimised by the men in their environment: Helen suffers from her husband's mental abuse of her, Rachel becomes the victim of Franklin's theft, and Tess is raped by Alec. The experienced victimisation is then closeted out of shame. Discussing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Wiener has spoken of a "'victimization' tradition [which] flowed into many of the now much-studied sensation novels of the 1860s, placing men's treatment of women in the dock" (153). By thus focusing on the abuse suffered by women in a patriarchal society, the novels under discussion point towards the problematic aspects of a society which produces women primarily as victims. However, this socio-critical impulse is at the same time undercut by novels such as *The Tenant* or *Tess* which in their demonstration of the extremes of male identification on the part of women buttress the system of patriarchal dominance and often seem conservative in their final denial of women's privacy and their female characters' turn towards the haven of marriage or their progress towards the silence of death. In contrast to the criminal and the lesbian closet, the victimisation closet, as it is presented in these novels, is thus less concerned with women's gender transgression but more with their overly ready acceptance of gender scripts which fits neatly into the dominant structure of patriarchy. *The Moonstone* modifies this scheme by providing its heroine, Rachel, with a degree of power: Her shielding silence also constitutes her stubborn autonomy, so that while she is covering for Franklin, she is at the same time most threatening to the family and at the height of her independence. But this is only the case for a while, for as soon as her silence begins to threaten Franklin himself, it is no longer acceptable and has to

be broken by force. The novel finally denies Rachel her privacy and reintegrates her into the heteronormative mainstream society, silencing her at the same time. Even while the novel thus modifies the basic structure of the victimisation closet which *The Tenant* demonstrates, it still works to solidify a conservative societal structure in the end. This most female of closets is thus, to a certain degree, the least liberating (and this may only be appropriate given women's dependent status in (modern) history): In its relationality, it remains constantly directed at and dependent on men.

A Doubled Silence – The Victimisation Closet in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848) is Anne Brontë's[79] second novel after the less successful *Agnes Grey* (1847) and the "longest single-narrative, enclosing epistolary novel of the nineteenth century" (Gordon 719). Consequently, it starts out with a letter: In 1847, Gilbert Markham, one of the novel's main characters, writes to his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, promising him "an old world story" (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*[80] 10) in return for personal information Halford has confided to Gilbert. This story – set twenty years before in 1827 – pertains to Gilbert's youth in the fictional village of Linden-Car, whose peace and quiet is interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious new tenant at the old manor house Wildfell Hall. This new tenant is the beautiful widow Helen Graham (her real name is Huntingdon, as we will later learn), and she and her young son Arthur soon become the object of speculation and rumour among their neighbours. Not only is Helen unwilling to impart any information on her former life, she also holds unusual and egalitarian ideas on education and supports herself and

[79] The Brontës published under the gender-neutral or masculine-connoted names of Acton, Ellis and Currer Bell – they were 'in the closet' with regard to their gender, for "Victorian women seemed to face the risk that in defining their voices as female they would be excluded altogether from public debate" (Carnell 8).

[80] Brontë, Anne. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Ed. Stevie Davies. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996. References to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* will be abbreviated with *TWH* and the page number.

her child financially by being a professional painter. Her very mysteriousness and independence lead to the formation of malicious slander among the inhabitants of Linden-Car: The frequent visits that the local squire, Frederick Lawrence, pays to Wildfell Hall are construed as evidence of an affair between him and Helen. These rumours anger and hurt Gilbert, who has meanwhile fallen in love with Helen, leading him to a vicious attack on Frederick. When he later demands an explanation from Helen, she hands him her diary. This diary then traces the past six years of Helen's life, starting with her marriage to the cheerful, attractive, but irresponsible Arthur Huntingdon, which she enters into in spite of her aunt's dire warnings. Over the next six years, their marriage increasingly deteriorates: While Helen initially aspires to reform her husband's ways, she gradually loses hope when confronted with his infidelity, debauchery, abuse and alcoholism. His frequent absences from their home, Grassdale Manor, and long sojourns in London, where he meets with his profligate friends, become more and more convenient to his wife. Their marriage deteriorates beyond repair when Arthur and his friends begin to amuse themselves by 'corrupting' Helen's and Arthur's son, Arthur Junior, encouraging him to drink alcohol and turning him against his mother. As a consequence, Helen decides to leave her husband, taking her son with her. After a first attempt at this fails due to Arthur's intervention, Helen finally manages to escape to Wildfell Hall, her childhood home which belongs to her brother, Frederick Lawrence. At this juncture, the narrative returns to Gilbert's point of view: Being now acquainted with her past and her status as a wife, he and Helen decide to part forever, relying on a purely 'spiritual' exchange of letters. However, shortly afterwards Helen returns to Grassdale Manor in order to nurse her estranged husband, who lies ill after a fall. Complications that arise due to his alcoholism finally lead to his premature death, allowing Helen and Gilbert to marry.

Many critics have puzzled about *The Tenant*'s complicated narrative structure, which constitutes an extreme, and, as often remarked, unrealistic form of the epistolary novel, for after all "[w]ithin the long second letter

is a journal covering six years, letters within letters, and finally the information that the entire story is being told from a retrospective view some twenty to twenty-six years after the events described" (A. M. Jackson 198, 199). Accordingly, various explanations have been offered for this interesting narrative set-up: These range from earlier accusations of inexperience on the author's part (cf. G. Moore 240) and of "weakness" and "clums[iness]" (Gérin 13) which could have been avoided by an oral report, to later assessments that stress Anne's attempt to mirror patriarchal structures (cf. Jacobs 204), her valorisation of written over oral narrative (cf. MacGregor 31), or her actual privileging of the female viewpoint (cf. Langland, "Voicing" 117) and often recur to the idea that the author had to embed her radical narrative in order to soften its subversive message (cf. Diederich 36, Talley 137). Another, and for our purposes highly relevant, point is brought up by O'Toole, who sees the narrative structure as a strategy for making form and content mirror each other, for "in proceeding through the multilayered narrative and remaining for a surprisingly protracted time in Helen's painful account of her nightmarish marriage, the reader experiences a sensation that might be labeled narrative claustrophobia" (715) so that "[t]he text thus produces an effect on the reader that mimics the entrapment Helen experiences in her marriage" (715). But this mirroring structure goes even further than that: Helen's diary, the core of the novel, constitutes in fact the female closet of this text and Helen's 'outing' is brought about by Gilbert's and the reader's simultaneous perusal of it. While she is in Grassdale Manor, married to Arthur, Helen is physically within a closet-like structure, an imprisoning house which she can hardly escape, and metaphorically closeted due to the silencing dynamics of domestic abuse. As soon as she leaves Grassdale, this episode of her life is turned into the new, slightly different metaphorical closet she keeps while residing in Wildfell Hall under a newly-assumed identity, a structure that still closets the domestic violence but now in order to escape detection and a forced return to the place of abuse. This closet, which still physically manifests itself in the pages of Helen's diary, inevitably draws attention to

itself and leads to its own detection. The tension closet/outing is central to this complex novel and the novel's 'nested' structure thus comes as no surprise; after all, the set-up mirrors the strategies of secrecy and silence that the novel outlines. Accordingly, this chapter will start out by outlining Helen's quasi-closeted situation while she resides in Grassdale Manor, an episode that is marked by silence and repression, and then goes on to discuss the changes effected by her subsequent relocation to Wildfell Hall, where this former situation comes to be closeted in the assumption of a new identity. While Helen is, in both instances, in the closet as an abuse victim – and thus for deeds performed by men – in her second home she also takes on a closeted identity as a lawbreaker, for whom detection could potentially be fatal.

Grassdale Manor: Conspiracies of Silence

Life at Grassdale Manor is, for a large part of Helen's stay there, marked by mental and occasionally physical violence in the form of domestic abuse. Both Helen and her closest friend, Milicent Hattersley, are victimised by their husbands who, in accordance with the laws of the nineteenth century, were "allowed wide discretion in exercising [their] proper authority within [their] household, particularly among [their] wi[ves] and children" (Wiener 150) and "entitled to confine their wives and even to use physical force to punish them if they felt it was necessary" (Lau 356). Debates on domestic abuse – at that time mostly called "'marital cruelty' as a legal description or 'wife beating' as a colloquial one" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 2) – were only just beginning to be led in the cultural and political discourse of the 1840s (cf. Surridge 83, Wiener 154). As a consequence, *The Tenant* is extremely zeitgeisty[81] in its treatment of women's victimisation in the female-connoted domestic sphere, which is shown to be anything but a safe

[81] It is also distinctly feminist in its "petition for an end to the sexual double standard, for a married woman's right to protection from her dissolute husband and for the equal education of girls and boys [...] at a time when the organized women's movement was just beginning to gain momentum" (Cox, "Gender" 31).

haven for women within this novel, demonstrating that "[d]omestic violence is […] itself a rupture in a cultural order that stressed the home as a woman's sphere, as the place of her security and her rule" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 2).[82] It is also clear-sighted in its depiction of victimisation as a trigger for closetedness, for both Helen and Milicent react to their abuse by isolating themselves and actively contribute to the construction of a conspiracy of silence which surrounds the familial and social relations within the group of friends, relatives and acquaintances who occupy Grassdale Manor at various times.

From an early point in her marriage on, Helen is "subject to systematic mental cruelty" (Ward 158). It starts out with Arthur's favourite pastime, which consists of "tell[ing] [her] stories of his former amours" (*TWH* 208) in order to awaken Helen's jealousy, a first indication of his later affairs with several women, among them his friend's wife, Annabella Lowborough, and his son's governess, Miss Myers. There are several other points of contention among the couple, for instance Helen's religiosity and independence (cf. *TWH* 204), which, even while not in themselves leading to abusive situations, still demonstrate how marital coverture – "the legal and ideological 'oneness' of husband and wife in marriage" (Lamonica 142) which, in effect, led to the wife being "divested of autonomous legal status" (Ward 153) – functions "as an underlying cause of domestic assault and abuse" (Surridge 73) by "den[ying] them [women] moral independence" (Surridge 101). Helen's real trials begin, however, with Arthur's love affair with Annabella, especially as the two do not behave in a discreet fashion but openly celebrate their affection in Helen's presence, addressing each other with "affectionate familiarity" and exchanging "whispered words, or

[82] In contemporary reviews, the depiction of domestic violence was also one of the most controversial parts of this frequently criticised novel. E. P. Whipple's review in the *North American Review* nicely demonstrates how the feeling of violation experienced by the female characters within the novel was seen to effectively pass over to the reader in an act of sympathetic – if involuntary – mirroring: "The reader of Acton Bell gains no enlarged view of mankind, giving a healthy action to his sympathies, but is confined to a narrow space of life, and held down, as it were, by main force, to witness the wolfish side of his nature literally and logically set forth" (qtd. in Allott 262).

boldly spoken insinuations" (*TWH* 313). Arthur clearly enjoys torturing his wife and Helen's angry and hurt reactions contribute to his "amusement" (*TWH* 315). At the same time, he denies her the right to leave him as a consequence of his actions, thereby imprisoning her within her own home and within the abusive situation (cf. *TWH* 306). Later on, he even offers her up to his friends – and, by so denying her his protection, also to potential rape – claiming that he "'ha[s] no wife'" and that "'any one among [them], that can fancy her, may have her and welcome'" (*TWH* 355). Consequently, Hargrave, one of Huntingdon's circle, attempts to sexually assault Helen (cf. *TWH* 358). As the husband's authority in marriage was basically unlimited in the 1820s and as divorce became an actual possibility for women only with the passage of the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 (cf. Lau 355) – and even then, "[m]ental cruelty […] was not recognized as grounds for abuse" (Ward 159) –, Helen is caught in a crucially unbalanced network of power, with no hope of redress by the law. Her only defence against these violations is to deny her husband further sexual relations with her ("'I am your child's mother, and *your* housekeeper – nothing more. […] I will exact no more heartless caresses from you – nor offer – nor endure them'" (*TWH* 306)), a strategy to which she recurred before in one of their marital fights (cf. *TWH* 210). However, not even this is sanctioned by the law of the land: "Under Victorian law, a woman was considered to consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at the time of marriage and could not withdraw that consent thereafter" (Surridge 91).

Some critics have argued for evidence of physical and sexual abuse in Helen's marriage: Surridge claims that the novel "suggests physical violence by using the trope of the abused animal" (76) in a scene where Arthur's book, thrown at his dog, hits Helen instead, and Doub sees her statement that she "could do with less caressing" (*TWH* 202) and similar ones as signs of "sexual assault" (15). The prime example for a physically abusive marital situation is, however, represented by Helen's close friend Milicent Hattersley. Pushed into marriage with the coarse and brutal Ralph Hattersley by

her mercenary mother, Milicent suffers from his physical abuse in self-imposed silence, which is only disrupted when the intoxicated Hattersley openly displays his brutality at a dinner party. Starting out with Hattersley "crushing her slight arms in the gripe of his powerful fingers" (*TWH* 277), the situation intensifies until he "throw[s] her from him with such violence that she f[alls] on her side" (*TWH* 278). While never losing sight of the fact that Milicent is the victim in an abusive situation, the novel still stresses her problematic meekness and submissiveness and, in a later scene, openly "portray[s] a male abuser admitting that such submission increases his violence" (Surridge 93), when Hattersley complains that Milicent "'lies down like a spaniel at [his] feet and never so much as squeaks to tell [him] that's enough'" (*TWH* 289). In the abusive situation itself, Milicent's primary interest is to keep the abuse hidden from the eyes of the company, a fact that chimes with the abused characters' overall interest in upholding a whitewashed surface of their private and family lives. At first, she attempts to escape the situation, then she begs Hattersley to "'remember [they] are not at home'" (*TWH* 277), and finally she tells him that she will answer him "'some other time [...] when [they] are alone'" (*TWH* 278). The open display of the abuse worsens the situation for Milicent – as is typical of abuse victims – for it further affects her with shame and disrupts the self-image she has so far been able to project to her surroundings. Closeting their victimisation is thus, for the female characters in the novel, also a way of maintaining their dignity.

In this explicit plea for silencing the abuse and the very reticence among the characters when it comes to a verbal exchange of abusive experiences we can thus see typical structures of abuse, which leads to networks of silence. However, this silence is also, to a certain degree, symptomatic of Milicent and Helen's social, class and gender position. Domestic violence was specifically associated with the lower-classes in the nineteenth century, so that "domestic violence with an origin *inside* the bourgeois home verges on the edge of the non-narratable, and is thus replete with manifest evasions, silences, and distortions" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 6). As upper-

class women, the cultural imagination sees Helen and Milicent as exempt from domestic abuse and this is the self-image that they attempt to portray and uphold. At the same time, they are subject to and have internalised the value system of a culture which demands a high degree of male identification from its female members: The Angel in the House doctrine which is so typical of Victorian society asks women to sacrifice themselves for men, thereby implicitly and explicitly elevating men to a superior, more important position. In stressing the basic undividedness of husband and wife which still provides the husband with significantly more rights, the legal statute of coverture contributes to this ideology. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Helen and Milicent identify with their husbands and see any criticism of them on their part as a sign of disloyalty. Helen, for instance, tells her diary that

> since he [Arthur] and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own; I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence, I must be and I am debased, contaminated by the union, both in my own eyes, and in the actual truth. (*TWH* 262)

And Milicent explicitly writes to Helen about her intention to never complain of her future husband's behaviour as soon as they are married:

> [D]on't say a word against Mr Hattersley, for I want to think well of him; and though I have spoken against him myself, it is for the last time: hereafter, I shall never permit myself to utter a word in his dispraise, however he may seem to deserve it; and whoever ventures to speak slightingly of the man I have promised to love, to honour, and obey, must expect my serious displeasure. (*TWH* 222)

Milicent and Helen identify themselves with their husbands, while at the same time taking on a submissive position vis-à-vis them. This internalisation of the male's superiority contributes to the women's victimisation and to their closeting of this victimisation. As we can see in Helen's quotation, the strong identification with the male leads, at the same time, to a participation in his shame, which is, in all likelihood, predominantly shame experienced by the wife in place of her husband: "Helen herself feels tainted by Arthur's behaviour" (Chitham, *Life* 152). This quasi-infectious experience of shame triggers a further need for a retreat into the silence of this – very female – closet. The dissociation from the male is thus a very important step in a gradual disentanglement from the net of abuse and Helen explicitly formulates this development within the ideological framework of the time by refusing the role of the Angel in the House. While she was initially seduced by "the self-sacrificing ideal of Victorian femininity which would play into her blind belief that she has the power to save Arthur" (Torgerson 34), she now comes to reject the role:[83] "I am no angel and my corruption rises against it" (*TWH* 267). Later, she even confesses that she "no longer love[s] [her] husband […] [but] HATE[S] him" (*TWH* 308) and accepts that "he may drink himself dead, but it is NOT [her] fault" (*TWH* 322). These are necessary insights for breaking the silence attendant on abuse.

These conspiracies of silence characterise every aspect of life at Grassdale Manor, which is marked by secrecy and repression: "Helen's sense of propriety and desire for confidentiality is so powerful that it isolates her" and it also "wrecks the possibility of alliances" (Joshi 911). Although caught in similar situations, Helen and Milicent do not discuss the abuse experienced with each other; on the contrary, Milicent repeatedly claims to

[83] That the doctrine is universally accepted in society is demonstrated by the fact that not only the female characters but both Arthur and Lord Lowborough believe in it as well: Arthur constantly calls Helen his "'angel'" (*TWH* 169), "says that if he had [her] always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing" (*TWH* 149) and even expects her to save him from damnation on his deathbed (cf. *TWH* 441), while "Lowborough does not think he can keep his resolutions not to drink or gamble unless he has a wife" (Kemp 203).

be happy (cf. *TWH* 283, 375) and sees her husband as vastly superior to Arthur (cf. *TWH* 283). While they are "weep[ing] for each other's distresses" (*TWH* 284), these distresses are only ever hinted at, not openly discussed, so that a network of support becomes impossible. That such a network would have proved helpful in Milicent's case at least is intimated by the fact that it is Helen's discussion with Hattersley that finally effects his reformation and leads to a reconciliation between the couple (cf. *TWH* 380). The closet is hence not necessarily the place of isolation and loneliness as which it has often been regarded and as which it resurfaces in this particular novel. By more extensively communicating with each other in the 'secret languages' and codes often used by closet-dwellers Helen and Milicent might have been able to establish a closer communion. Helen's intervention in Milicent's marriage, however, can only come about after she has had an insight into the problematic aspects of silence in her dealings with Lord Lowborough. In typical fashion, Helen refuses to "'publish the matter'" (*TWH* 311) of Arthur and Annabella's affair, claiming to act in the interest of friends and relatives (Milicent is Annabella's cousin): "'I have no wish to publish your shame. I should be sorry to distress your husband with the knowledge of it. […] I shall do my utmost to conceal it from [Milicent]. I would not for much that she should know the infamy and disgrace of her relation!" (*TWH* 311, 312) Two years later, however, when Lord Lowborough confronts her with her secretiveness, she begins to feel "like a criminal" (*TWH* 341) and repeatedly admits to her mistake in hiding this crucial information from him. Helen begins to understand that silence leads to isolation within the abusive situation and starts to wish for closer relations with other abused persons in her vicinity, desiring "a friend's right to comfort [Lord Lowborough]" (*TWH* 347). This is a marked difference from her own reaction to Arthur's infidelity: "I wanted no confidant in my distress. I deserved none – and I wanted none. I had taken the burden upon myself: let me bear it alone" (*TWH* 305). But Helen learns to understand that isolation benefits the abuser and heightens the dependence of his victim, so that "[b]y the time the victim realizes he or

she must do something to get out of the relationship there may be several obstacles in the way" (Quinn and Brightman 127). In enumerating these obstacles that Quinn and Brightman identify we begin to see that Helen's case is a prime example of an abusive situation: "The victim may be financially dependent on the abuser, he or she may lack the resources and contacts (including friends and family) to be able to leave, there may be children in the relationship and the victim may fear that they will be taken away or that they will be harmed if the victim leaves" (127). Isolation, however, proves to be the greatest stumbling block for Helen: It is only after she has proactively decided against the closet and opened herself up to an at least partial confession of her situation to others that she is able to escape her circumstances.

Even while actively secreting any signs of unhappiness and abuse within her marriage, Helen is unable to completely erase them: Her closet is thus an 'open closet', a secret that is "known to be known" (Miller, "Secret Subjects" 27). Most people in her direct environment – those who actually reside at Grassdale Manor from time to time, but even people with whom she only ever interacts via letters, such as her brother Frederick – suspect the 'truth' at some level. Huntingdon's friends especially know of his neglect of her and partly seem to encourage it by convincing him to stay in London for extended periods of time, thereby relegating his wife to an intense loneliness. Hargrave, Helen's would-be seducer, is motivated in his endeavours by her status as "a neglected wife" (*TWH* 230), which is common knowledge among the group of men. At the same time, Huntingdon's circle is informed of his affair with Annabella and actively supports him in it (cf. *TWH* 301). These men are better acquainted with Arthur's character and habits than Helen herself, so that they are able to draw conclusions about their married life, and it is similar with Milicent who through her own experiences with marital abuse is able to divine Helen's situation. But even Frederick seems to know "much more of [Helen's] situation than [she] ha[s] told him" (*TWH* 371), demonstrating that there appears to be a general consensus among Helen's acquaintances as to the success of her

married life. Her very secretiveness, her very "reserve" (*TWH* 371) when it comes to the topic of her marriage, draws attention to its private failings and to the attendant victimisation.

Having decided to leave Arthur for good, Helen finally informs her friends and relatives of the reasons for this significant step in "three letters of adieu" (*TWH* 385), an outing of sorts. In these letters, she justifies her decision – unlawful at the time – but even here, there is only a slight indication of the actual abuse she has suffered. Vis-à-vis Esther, Milicent's sister and a close friend of Helen's, she states that she "f[inds] it impossible to stay any longer at Grassdale, or to leave [her] son under his father's protection" (*TWH* 385). These are only externals, and even the letter to Milicent is only "a little more confidential, as befit[s] [their] longer intimacy, and her greater experience and better acquaintance with [Helen's] circumstances" (*TWH* 386). The most "difficult and painful" (*TWH* 386) letter is, however, the one she sends to her aunt, for here face-saving is not the only consideration: Having counteracted her aunt's explicit wishes in marrying Arthur, Helen has always been "extremely anxious to appear satisfied with [her] lot" (*TWH* 264) vis-à-vis her aunt, whether out of "pride" (*TWH* 264) or "a just determination to bear [her] self-imposed burden alone" (*TWH* 264).[84] These feelings of guilt thus intensify Helen's isolation. The most significant act of 'confession' is, however, her talk with her brother for, as a man, he is able to help Helen in a way that her female friends are not. This outing is also more complete than the other ones, for at first, she encounters slight resistance on Frederick's part, who – as is the experience of many abuse victims – is unwilling to accept the intensity of the abuse and the hopelessness with regard to improvement:

[84] Helen's feelings of guilt towards her aunt are intensified by the fact that she has chosen Arthur as a husband out of "sexual desire" (Nunokawa, "Sexuality" 130), overriding her own earlier stated preference for a 'reasonable' choice: "Brontë daringly implies that her heroine's culturally sanctioned role as the would-be reformer of a sinful man serves as a cover for her sexual attraction to him" (O'Toole 716). As women were generally regarded as devoid of sexual interest in the Victorian Age, female sexual desire is at some level 'non-narratable' and hence has to be secreted.

> [H]e looked upon my project as wild and impracticable; he deemed my fears for Arthur [Junior] disproportioned to the circumstances, and opposed so many objections to my plan, and devised so many milder methods for ameliorating my condition, that I was obliged to enter into further details to convince him that my husband was utterly incorrigible, and that nothing could persuade him to give up his son whatever became of me, […] and that, in fact, nothing would answer but this [escaping to Wildfell Hall], unless I fled the country as I had intended before. (*TWH* 372, 373)

This more complete confession convinces Frederick "to have one wing of the old Hall put into a habitable condition, as a place of refuge against a time of need" (*TWH* 373) and assures Helen of his support, demonstrating that "[m]aking contacts and establishing outside support networks is a crucial step for a woman who seeks to escape a violent home" (N. Duncan 133). For Helen, however, this is, above all, a learning process with regard to the workings of silence and the closet, whose structures contribute to the victims' isolation and helplessness in an abusive situation by depriving them of external support. The very act of speaking frees Helen and the outing contributes to her self-development, allowing her a hitherto unknown degree of freedom and independence in choosing her own future. At the same time, this newly found freedom is immediately undermined again in her escape to Wildfell Hall: Her sojourn there demonstrates the difficulty of ridding oneself of the closet, which keeps resurfacing in every new social situation.

Before moving on to Helen's closeted experiences at Wildfell Hall, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at Arthur's relation to the closet. This is interesting as, after all, Helen is in the closet as the victim of *his* abuse, and, to a certain degree, in the closet with regard to his excesses. Arthur himself, however, does not participate in the conspiracy of silence; on the contrary, he openly celebrates his affair with Annabella as well as his alcoholism and

does not shy away from indicating to his friends the degree of his marriage's failure. This is, however, not the case when Helen proposes a separation: Here, suddenly, Arthur fears public exposure, for while his affairs and scornful treatment of his wife may serve to emphasise his masculinity,[85] a separation would make him "'the talk of the country'" (*TWH* 306),[86] undermining his status as all-powerful husband figure by stressing his wife's autonomy. This is even more so the case as Helen plans to support herself by painting, which Arthur regards as a "'disgrace'" (*TWH* 366) directed at himself. But by hindering Helen from leaving Grassdale Manor, the physical manifestation of her closeted experience, a prison in spite of its "beautiful" (*TWH* 469) park and "expansive grounds" (*TWH* 469),[87] Arthur contributes to the upkeep of her closet and thus to her victimisation. The Grassdale episode *is* the closet in the novel's logic, what happens there is what will later be closeted away within the pages of the diary and within Helen's psyche, which will then trigger the desire to penetrate her silence and secretiveness in her neighbours. Arthur is fundamentally entangled with this closet: It is he who perpetrates the abuse that is secreted away by Helen, it is he who makes it impossible for her to lawfully leave him, thereby necessitating furtiveness and disguise, and it is he who attempts to uphold this structure against all odds.

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[85] Critics have pointed out that Arthur and his circle are examples of "the masculine ethos of the Regency" (McMaster 354), so that "[t]he men drink and wench and swear, not out of simple inclination, but out of a sense of social obligation" (McMaster 354). Gilbert, on the other hand, is representative of new Victorian ideals of masculinity, where husbands "were expected to spend time in the evenings around the hearth reading and talking to their wives and children" (Phegley 6). Among other things, the novel "thus reflects on the momentous shift that occurred in ideals of marriage and domesticity between the Regency and the Victorian periods" (Surridge 73). In fact, however, Arthur is no unequivocal example of Regency masculinity, but split along exactly those lines: While a Regency aristocratic model would have left both husband and wife to their devices after producing enough offspring to guarantee an heir, Arthur wants a 'middle class' wife who lives only for him.

[86] This also underlines the theme of gossip's power that runs through *The Tenant*, a novel that is "alive with rumour, scandal, conjecture, slander, gossip" (Langland, *Anne* 121).

[87] Grassdale Manor is constructed as a counterspace to Wildfell Hall, a sort of 'golden cage'. The "cold and gloomy" (*TWH* 23), 'wild' Hall is "an extreme example of isolation and elevation" (E. Berry 73) but still affords its inhabitant a greater degree of independence than Grassdale does.

Arthur's treatment of his wife causes her need for silence and repression, which, paradoxically, then comes to constitute a weapon against the abuse. For in the novel, secrecy and silence, although negatively portrayed in society in general, gain a positive rating as a 'female' means of defence against an overwhelming patriarchal discourse. This is shown from the beginning where the contradictory expectations vis-à-vis women in Victorian society are exposed: While women were in general obliged to be honest and straightforward, they similarly had to guard their emotions and the privacy of the home (cf. Trodd 9). In Helen's case, men are often disturbed by her reserve – it is exactly Arthur's inability "to control, or even touch, the core of his young wife's nature and personality" (Thormählen, "Villain" 836) that so unsettles him and triggers his attempts to invade her private space –, while her aunt counsels against a display of emotions: "'Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention'" (*TWH* 132). If the novel in general demonstrates how "[e]xcess may lead to disaster, but too much restraint is just as disturbing" (L. Berry 41), it is no surprise that while the aunt's doctrine of a passionless marriage is not endorsed by the novel, Helen still comes to treasure her advice with regard to the advantages of silence. For, as Frawley has claimed, "Brontë here reveals both the extent to which Helen embraces privacy well before she becomes the tenant of Wildfell Hall and the extent to which preservation of her privacy is a matter of survival" (124). In order to keep up her self-esteem within her marriage, repression of her feelings and silence vis-à-vis her husband become fundamental strategies in Helen's struggle to survive her humiliating experiences. One of her most important lessons is to learn that her passionate outbursts do not help her against Arthur, for "his delight increase[s] in proportion to [her] anger and agitation" (*TWH* 208); instead she has to "endeavour […] to suppress [her] feelings" (*TWH* 208). Years later, Helen has almost perfected this spirit of repression: "What a good thing it is to be able to command one's temper! I must labour to cultivate

this inestimable quality: God, only, knows how often I shall need it in this rough, dark road that lies before me" (*TWH* 316). Her diary, her most private writing, shows another such attempt "to adopt secrecy as a defense mechanism" (Frawley 3); ironically, it is this very diary, which only partially silences a person's discourse and at the same time draws attention to it, that leads to her detection. The role of the diary will be further discussed in the next section, which follows Helen's journey from Grassdale Manor to Wildfell Hall, from a seeming dispelling of the closet towards the erection of a new, and even more precarious and relevant closet.

Wildfell Hall: Rumours and Speculations

With Helen's secret escape to Wildfell Hall her 'true' closet experience begins, for she is now in an indisputable position of closetedness as a victim of abuse vis-à-vis her all-too curious neighbours. This is first demonstrated by her taking on a closeted identity: Instead of publicising her past experiences – which would inevitably lead to a discovery by her husband and to a forced return – she instead pretends to be a young widow (cf. *TWH* 390). Her change of identity is signalled by a change of names, for she now goes by her "mother's maiden name" (*TWH* 388) Graham. This acceptance of a closet identity is accompanied by secrecy's well-known confidant: "the haunting dread of discovery" (*TWH* 393). It is worthwhile remembering that Helen is, de facto, in a criminal as well as in a victimisation closet and her position and name changes bear similarities to Lydia Gwilt's (*Armadale*) and Lucy Audley's (*Lady Audley's Secret*) experiences in roughly comparable situations. "Ironically, it is Helen's attempts to support, care for and protect her son which are illegal, whereas her husband's abuse of her and his son is legally sanctioned" (M. Lee), meaning that discovery would bring grave consequences for Helen. After all, it was only with the "Infant Custody Act of 1839, which, in a case of separation or divorce, granted women who had not been found guilty of adultery or other marital misconduct the right to petition for custody of their children under the age of seven"

(Gruner 305) that Helen would have stood a chance at gaining custody of her young son. In absence of such a law, Arthur Junior unmistakably belongs to his father and taking him from his parent equals kidnapping.[88] In a similar vein, Helen has no right to the property that she takes with her from Grassdale Manor, for it is only the 1870 Married Women's Property Act which gives "women the right to control […] any wages they earned while they were married" (M. Lee) and thus the right to some property. In 1827, the year of Helen's escape, however, everything she thinks she owns belongs in fact to her husband in the eyes of the law. In this dire situation, keeping up the closet becomes a much more important matter to Helen, a matter of survival even; in her eyes, discovery would spell disaster for herself and her son. Before leaving Grassdale Manor, Helen's life there has become unbearable, she is "weary of this life" (*TWH* 325) and only hangs onto it out of a feeling of responsibility for her son's salvation, "to guide him through its [the world's] weary mazes, to warn him of its thousand snares, and guard him from the perils that beset him on every hand" (*TWH* 325). It is only with her escape that Helen is able to hope again for the future and consequently, the task of hiding her past within the closet becomes central.

Helen reacts to this situation by isolating herself and making "her desire for privacy known to her new neighbors" (Frawley 117), for whom she now becomes "the mysterious lady" (*TWH* 15) and "the fair unknown" (*TWH* 16). Her secretiveness thus becomes her prime characteristic, demonstrating how the closet draws attention to itself in its very act of seemingly obfuscating the truth. Helen is in a very difficult situation which demands of her to achieve a balance between silence and telling: "[T]heir [the neighbours'] curiosity annoys and alarms me: if I gratify it, it may lead to the ruin of my son, and if I am too mysterious, it will only excite their

[88] It is, of course, ironic that the nineteenth century, which so intensely valued motherhood, was, at the same time, unwilling to grant mothers legal rights. This demonstrates "the dilemma of a legal code at odds with a cultural representation of nurturing motherhood" (L. Berry 35), a problem that gradually began to be addressed from the time of the Infant Custody Act of 1839 onwards.

suspicions, invite conjecture, and rouse them to greater exertions" (*TWH* 395). This is exactly what happens: "She is immediately put into circulation as an object of community gossip, speculation, and horror" (Langland, "Voicing" 114), and the more she rejects the community's attempts at knowing her, the more she is "constructed by provincial neighbors as someone alien and threatening to cultural stability" (Shires, "Of maenads" 161). While the community immediately objects to some of her manners of living – as "'a single lady'" (*TWH* 14) in a place that is "'in ruins'" (*TWH* 14), as one who holds unusual ideas about education (cf. *TWH* 31) and does "'not make her appearance at church on Sunday'" (*TWH* 14) – they at first try to come to terms with her by oral inquiries into her past, which are, however, rebuffed:

> '[S]he is quite young, they say […] but *so* reserved! They tried all they could to find out who she was, and where she came from, and all about her, but neither Mrs Wilson, with her pertinacious and impertinent home thrusts, nor Miss Wilson, with her skilful manoeuvering, could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections. Moreover, she was barely civil to them, and evidently better pleased to say 'goodbye,' than 'how do you do'.' (*TWH* 14)

Sharing information about oneself emerges as an important communal activity and Helen's refusal to participate in it necessarily draws suspicion onto her. The next few months and chapters "are really nothing more than the attempt of gossip to come to terms with meaning" (Gordon 722) and when even direct questions after her "'birth, extraction, and previous residence'" (*TWH* 62) lead to no conclusive remarks, the community is quick to turn to slander to satisfy its desire for narrative. Initial rumours and

speculations – which might still serve "the vital function of creating fellowship and community" (Joshi 909) – now take on a threatening dimension: The sibling relationship between Helen and Lawrence is interpreted as an affair. In the case of Gilbert, it is shown how the "two hostile encounters with Lawrence are triggered by the scandalmongers, Eliza and Miss Wilson, and how Gilbert, unknowingly, becomes the victim of their gossip" (López 183). Helen, moreover, becomes increasingly isolated within the community as people start to cut her. Both early gossip and later slander also show to what degree Helen is under surveillance within the tightly-knit community, even if she keeps herself apart both literally in far removed Wildfell Hall and metaphorically in her relations to her neighbours. Even though she and Lawrence attempt to keep their rare meetings from the community, they are detected and misconstrued, and interestingly enough, the neighbourhood finally discovers Helen's background story on their own, evidently in no need of the expedient of her diary that Gilbert uses (cf. *TWH* 420). In this respect, the community is best at divining the closet: It is immediately alerted to its presence and does not pause until it discovers its roots.

The rumours surrounding Helen are typical of the female closet for once again we see that female secretiveness is necessarily interpreted as sexual deviance. While in *Caleb Williams* Falkland's secret, although at least partially sexual in nature, is never deemed to be so, the female closet in all the novels we have discussed so far is first and foremost interpreted as being sexual in nature. In inventing "'these shocking reports about Mrs Graham'" (*TWH* 77), the community reproduces "negative stereotypes of widows and single mothers, both of whom were popularly regarded as sexually voracious and morally corrupt social outcasts" (M. Lee). The rumours' source and main medium of dispersion are the female members in the community, which shows that the middle-class standard of femininity is policed by this group itself: It has been efficiently indoctrinated in its rules. After having initially been suspicious of Helen due to her failures in 'proper' femininity, they quickly distance themselves from her in order to

establish their own unquestionable adherence to the rules she has seemingly overstepped and thus to enhance their status vis-à-vis the men. This is especially noteworthy in Eliza Millward, who, as Gilbert's former love, attempts to win back his affection by denigrating Helen (cf. *TWH* 78). Consequently, the women refuse "'to sit by Mrs Graham'" (*TWH* 80) and exclude her from their company. The sexual suspicion, however, is, after having been brought up by the women, transferred onto men, so that Gilbert himself, although initially calling the rumours "'idle slander'" (*TWH* 78), cannot help wondering whether young Arthur is really Frederick's son (cf. *TWH* 82), and finally comes to believe in the affair after mistaking Frederick's brotherly signs of affection for a lover's. It is in order to dispel these rumours that Helen finally hands her diary to Gilbert, for she "ironically discovers that the only way to maintain her status as a private, domestic woman, and a mother, is to 'go public' with her story, at least to Gilbert" (Gruner 311) and thus, as we shall see, the patriarchal establishment.

As we have seen with Lady Delacour, Lydia Gwilt and Lucy Audley, women are especially prone to be under constant surveillance in a patriarchal system. This is also the case for Helen, for the most determined of her persecutors are all male: Arthur, Gilbert and Hargrave all attempt to penetrate Helen's inner reclusiveness by invading her private space. Gilbert is by far the most determined of her pursuers and his permanent and voyeuristic surveillance of Helen chimes with his community's malicious gossip as well as with the more brutal invasions by Hargrave and Arthur. From the start, Gilbert evinces the same curiosity as his neighbours in determining the character of the new tenant of Wildfell Hall: He first watches her in church (cf. *TWH* 17) and later deliberately visits Wildfell Hall to quench his own inquisitiveness (cf. *TWH* 23). As soon as he starts falling in love with Helen, he goes out of his way to meet her in various situations, making it look like an accident. This behaviour is similar to Hargrave's, who basically 'patrols' the edges of Grassdale Manor's estate in order to happen upon Helen, thereby severely restricting her freedom of movement:

> But that indefatigable foe was not yet vanquished: he seemed to be always on the watch. I frequently saw him riding lingeringly past the premises, looking searchingly round him as he went – or if *I* did not, Rachel did. […] [S]he would give me a quiet intimation, if she saw me preparing for a walk when she had reason to believe he was about[.] […] I would then defer my ramble, or confine myself for that day to the park and gardens – or if the proposed excursion was a matter of importance […] I would take Rachel with me, and then I was never molested. (*TWH* 331)

In a similar manner, Gilbert loiters around Wildfell Hall, always on the lookout for his beloved: "I seldom suffered a fine day to pass without paying a visit to Wildfell, about the time my new acquaintance usually left her hermitage" (*TWH* 53). This happens no matter her evident unwillingness to see him (which Gilbert, in his smug masculinity, indirectly attributes to repressed love for him). Often when they meet, Gilbert feels "half inclined to think she t[akes] as much pains to avoid [his] company, as [he] to seek hers" (*TWH* 53) or is not convinced that "Mrs Graham [is] particularly delighted to see [him]" (*TWH* 60); on the contrary, she is "most provokingly unsociable" (*TWH* 64) and shows an "evident desire to be rid of [him]" (*TWH* 68).

Hints at the Closet: Helen's Paintings and Diary

Ignoring these hints, Gilbert continues to invade Helen's private space which is especially evident in his relation to her art. Helen's artwork plays a central role in the novel: It puts her in the unusual position of being able to support herself and thus demonstrates "[t]he radicalism of Brontë's economics, professionalizing a woman as painter" (Poole 869) at a time when "paid work and mothering were increasingly seen to be at odds" (M. Lee) and middle-class women were pushed out of the professional public sphere

into domestic space. Helen, on the other hand, shows "a radical professional female identity […]: she paints for money, has a studio of her own and a recognizable artistic style, and evinces a commitment to art, not to the self" (Losano 58). Losano, however, sees this commitment to art instead of self as the product of a learning process in which Helen begins to understand that her initial "self-expressive art" (50) is dangerous. Again and again, Helen's paintings serve as problematic symbolisations of her inner life within the novel, for "she uses her art both to express and to camouflage herself" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 81). Self-expression comes to represent a threat as soon as men voyeuristically attempt to invade her artwork – and thereby herself – by force, something that happens time and again in Helen's life. In her first courtship with Arthur, for instance, he reads her early "masterpiece" (*TWH* 159) as an expression of her desire for him, just as he "examine[s]" (*TWH* 160) her portfolio against her will, thereby discovering that she "has been using the reverse side of her paintings to express her secret desires" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 81): She has drawn "his own face" (*TWH* 155) onto them. Helen's interpretation of his behaviour afterwards is accurate in a patriarchal society that teaches women to dissimulate their sexual desires: "'[H]e despises me, because he knows I love him'" (*TWH* 156). Through the medium of her art, Arthur attempts to gain access to Helen's interiority; her "humiliation" (*TWH* 157) demonstrates that he succeeds. This invasion of her privacy is later repeated in his reading of her diary; his simultaneous burning of her painting materials is also a direct and brutal attack against her privacy and interiority. "Common law, however, gives Arthur the legal right to destroy the paintings" (Diederich 32), as "legally he has simply destroyed his own possessions" (Losano 63).

The parallel between Arthur's and Gilbert's behaviour has been pointed out by Diederich, who claims that "Gilbert's notice of Helen's artistic talent as well as her paintings reminds Helen, and Brontë's readers, of her first husband and the restrictions on her artistic freedom that she endured as a wife" (28). Although Helen has distanced herself from the self-expression

of her earlier years, her paintings still serve as hints toward her closet and thus as dangerous relics of a hidden past: When Gilbert looks at one of Helen's paintings of Wildfell Hall he discovers, for instance, that she has given it a fake name. His inquiry into the reason for this leads to a first partial outing on Helen's part who, "with a kind of desperate frankness" (*TWH* 47), tells him that there are "'friends […] in the world, from whom I desire my present abode to be concealed'" (*TWH* 47). Shortly afterwards, he rummages through her paintings during her absence and even takes one up which has "its face to the wall" (*TWH* 48) and which shows Arthur. While Gilbert regards it "with considerable interest" (*TWH* 49), evidently unaware that he is invading her privacy, Helen is "seriously annoyed" (*TWH* 49). The paintings hence "reveal the truth of Helen's situation even as she attempts to conceal it" (Diederich 31, 32) and are one of the primary clues to her closeted identity. At the same time, her art, as deeply entangled with her closet, also shows similarities to it in its potential to "incite […] masculine desire: to control, to possess, or simply to interpret as the man so chooses" (Losano 64). In his relation to art (and the closet), the male's "behavior is characterized by intrusiveness, appropriation, and violence" (Poole 860) which is especially obvious in Arthur's aforementioned burning of the paintings, but also in Gilbert's intrusion on Helen in various instances when she is painting. Gilbert is then continually "watch[ing]" (*TWH* 54) her although he is aware of and frequently informed about the fact that "her sketch d[oes] not profit by [his] superintendence" (*TWH* 54). "While he is feeling sexual attraction [via watching her paint], she is being robbed of the power to pursue the work that gives her economic independence" (Poole 862), thereby demonstrating once again how the female closet exists within a complicated network of overwhelming male power structures.

The close communion between art and closet is repeated in the relationship between Helen's diary and her closeted identity. The diary can be seen – as is so often the case with the female closet – as *the* expression of Helen's closet, as a physical manifestation of that which is kept hidden. It,

or at least the part of it that is available to the reader and Gilbert, coincides with her time at Grassdale Manor, showing that the Grassdale episode and the diary are both synonymous with the closet. The diary has frequently been seen as a weapon against the community's gossip by which Helen is surrounded: It serves as a "written testimony to her excellence" and "validates her even though the community persists in vilifying her" (Langland, *Anne* 123). Consequently, it participates in what has been identified as an important discourse within the novel, the tension between orality and the written word. Most critics are of the opinion that "Anne Brontë's novel is profoundly concerned for the integrity of the word" (Davies xiv), and, generally speaking, privileges writing over the spoken word (cf. MacGregor 31, Morse 117, Langland, *Anne* 122). The diary is thus relevant in establishing the 'truth' of Helen's identity and past and serves as the main vehicle for her outing.[89] For her personally it is also a place to turn to in her isolation:

> This paper will serve instead of a confidential friend into whose ear I might pour forth the overflowings of my heart. It will not sympathize with my distresses, but then, it will not laugh at them, and, if I keep it close, it cannot tell again; so it is, perhaps, the best friend I could have for the purpose. (*TWH* 154)[90]

But it is exactly this notion of the inviolability of the diary, and thus, the closet, that the novel comes to deconstruct. First this is the case as the diary proves decisive in betraying her escape plan to her husband, thereby

[89] Helen's outing in form of her diary is thus the longest in any of the novels investigated here. While Lucy Audley's and Lady Delacour's confessions are dealt with in one chapter and Lydia Gwilt's is limited to her suicide note (if one excludes her diary which is, within the novel's pages, not shown to anyone), Helen's takes on tremendous importance by being situated so centrally and protracted over half of the novel's length and by being a document that is being *read* by a character within the novel.

[90] As we will see later, Anne Lister comments on the function of her diary in a very similar manner: She, too, thinks of it as a 'friend' and stresses its cathartic uses. Keeping a diary may be especially necessary for closeted women, who cannot share a crucial aspect of their lives with their environment and who thus suffer from isolation.

outing her intention against her will: Similar to his attack on her paintings, this serves as "a symbolic rape" (Lokke 128), for "rifling Helen's desk can be read as a form of physical or sexual assault upon a woman's 'private spaces'" (Losano 63). Like her paintings earlier, he "forcibly wrest[s] it from [her]" (*TWH* 364) and its contents lead to his casting her entire painting materials "into the fire" (*TWH* 365) thereby depriving her of her means to support herself. The male invasion of privacy is destructive and humiliating for Helen, and the diary is explicitly associated with women by Arthur and the novel: "'It's well you couldn't keep your own secret – ha, ha! It's well these women must be blabbing – if they haven't a friend to talk to, they must whisper their secrets to the fishes, or write them on the sand or something'" (*TWH* 367).[91] Frawley also points out that "[t]he diary functions as a private form of writing associated in the novel with the female protagonist" (119) while Gilbert, on the contrary, is associated with letter writing, a more public form of expression. She further notes that by "enclosing her heroine's voice within a small pocket of narrative reserved for the revelation of her diary, Brontë stylistically reinforces many of the political themes the novel broaches, most notably the 'hidden' position of middle-class women within the confines of home, that quintessentially private sphere" (17). Similar to *Armadale*, the diary in *The Tenant* is hence expressive of a particularly female closet identity.

While the diary thus mirrors the female position in that its privacy is highly vulnerable, it also comes to serve Helen as an instrument for making her own voice heard. On the one hand, Helen is forced to conduct this step after Gilbert's voyeuristic intrusion on her meeting with her brother whom he misinterprets as her lover. In this situation we have a definite feeling that Helen is obliged to justify herself vis-à-vis the patriarchal establishment; that – as we have frequently seen with the female closet, for instance in the case of Lady Delacour or Lucy Audley – a confession of its content

[91] This need for disclosure that Arthur misogynistically identifies might simply be an expression of the fact that, in a patriarchal society, women necessarily have more that is forbidden to them and are thus obliged to keep these various pieces of information secret.

to a man is indispensable: "[I]t is hardly a willing gesture" (Frawley 131). In order to save her reputation, to show Gilbert that she is "'better than [he] think[s]'" (*TWH* 128), she has to 'tell', the act that Frawley identifies as central to *The Tenant* (cf. 122). But the very orality whose lack critics have often criticised is rejected as a means for such a confession. Propriety would not allow Helen to directly tell Gilbert the relevant information concerning her failed marriage and in that respect, the conspiracy of silence that we identified in the Grassdale episode is still intact: "Helen's diary thus enables Brontë to center the narrative on a woman who either cannot, because of her social situation, or will not, because of her psychological state, speak for herself" (Frawley 119). Even while the diary has before betrayed her in her escape plans, it now comes to represent a means by which she assumes narrative control and directs her outing in a way that strengthens her position. In being so readily handed over to Gilbert in an act of justification, we might even begin to wonder if it was not at some level *meant* to be read to begin with, especially if we keep in mind that "[e]ven the most private kinds of autobiographical writing [...] are public gestures of a sort" (Frawley 13).[92] Helen, at least, comes to use it as a quasi-political instrument in advancing her unlawful cause. Consequently, the diary definitely fulfils various important functions for her: It "serves a [...] vital function in *educating* Gilbert" (Langland, *Anne* 134), convincing him that his "adored Helen [is] all [he] wishe[s] to think her" (*TWH* 398) and thereby 'clears' her name. In this respect, her outing can be seen as a success: Her closet identity is accepted and integrated into mainstream society, even though it contradicts this society's own laws.

The imperative to tell, however, does not stop with this single instance of outing. Gilbert's immediate desire after he has learned the contents of the closet is to tell again, to make Helen 'known': He feels "strongly tempted, at times, to enlighten [his] mother and sister on the real character

[92] This thought has already been discussed with regard to Lydia Gwilt's diary in *Armadale* and will be taken up again in the analysis of Anne Lister's Diaries. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, however, the diary is *literally* meant to be read and is used as "public property" (Frawley 131).

and circumstances of the persecuted tenant of Wildfell Hall" (*TWH* 412). By being closely associated with Helen, Gilbert has become the object of rumours as well and his desire to "clear her name from these vile calumnies" (*TWH* 412) is thus not for her sake alone. In saving Helen's reputation, he would heighten the perceived worth of his love object and in doing so, his own.[93] Gilbert is saved from betraying Helen's secret by the simple fact that the closet's contents have begun to circulate by themselves (the novel never tells us how exactly): The whole community is suddenly aware of the fact that "'Mrs Graham's husband is not really dead, and that she had run away from him'" (*TWH* 420). But the temptation to spill her secrets assails him again and provides the impetus for the whole novel, in which secret sharing is the basis of the narrative. After all, Gilbert tells his then wife's story in order to "atone" (*TWH* 9) for not having reciprocated Halford's confession with one of his own, so that "[i]t strikes the reader as curious at best that Gilbert would transcribe for another man the contents of his wife's intimate diary, and disturbing at worst that Helen's hellish experience is used for a homosocial end" (O'Toole 720). Consequently, "Huntingdon is not alone in using Helen's diary to expose her" (Joshi 914) and "[t]he violence of this act is unmistakable; for the second time, Helen is exposed and spoken for" (Joshi 914).[94] The retelling of Helen's story and

[93] Interestingly enough, Gilbert simply assumes that outing Helen would lead to her acceptance within the community. But who says that leaving your husband – an illegal act – is to be preferred to conducting an affair? While this seems to be the community's general consensus, Helen's act, so endorsed by the overall novel, is still criticised by some. The local vicar, Mr. Millward, for instance "maintain[s] that she had done wrong to leave her husband; it was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife, and a tempting of Providence by laying herself open to temptation; and nothing short of bodily ill-usage (and that of no trifling nature) could excuse such a step" (*TWH* 459). This is more in line with the actual legal situation of the time.

[94] This also emphasises the "interchangeability" (Claybaugh 106) between Gilbert and Arthur which critics have often pointed out and problematised. They are found to be alike in their violence (cf. Langland, *Anne* 133, O'Toole 716, Diederich 37), their condescending attitude towards women (cf. Losano 60, O'Toole 716, Langland, "Voicing" 115) and incapacity for change (cf. O'Toole 718, Joshi 915, Westcott 221). Gilbert has, of course, also been defended from this charge by critics who stress his fundamental difference from Arthur in his greater compatibility with Helen (cf. Lokke 127, McMaster 363), his different social status (cf. L. Berry 45), his sense of duty (cf. Thormählen, "Aspects" 167) and his (positively seen) feminisation (cf. MacDonald 494, Shires, "Of maenads" 161, Chitham, "Diverging" 102).

the violation of her diary that goes along with it corresponds to an outing of her closet against her will and to an invasion of her privacy. Thus it comes as no surprise that Helen's voice is elided at the end of the novel, that her whole experience is sandwiched between the story parts which Gilbert narrates, with him assuming narrative control. This fact has frequently been discussed by critics: Carnell finds that "[i]t is possible to argue that the final suppression of Helen's voice marks the underlying tragedy behind the romantic conclusion of the novel" (23), while O'Toole complains that "we have only his word for the success of their marriage" (728) and Senf finds "the reference [to Helen] […] all too brief" (452). By coming out of the closet, by having her closeted experience be read by an outsider, Helen has effectively yielded the narrative control she seemed to assume with her diary, which is now used to retell a story which is only partially hers. This demonstrates, once again, the precarious status of the female closet in a patriarchal society, where being within the closet triggers the male urge to watch and spy into this private space, while outing oneself means abdicating the right to privacy.

Protecting Men – The Victimisation Closet in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*

The Moonstone (1868), probably Wilkie Collins's best-known novel and generally regarded as "the first and greatest of English detective novels" (Eliot 464), deals with the story of a jewel theft and "[t]he conduct pursued, under [this] sudden emergency, by a young girl" (Collins, Preface to *The Moonstone* liii). This young girl is the novel's heroine, Rachel Verinder: She inherits the eponymous stone on her birthday as a valuable present from her uncle John Herncastle, who has attained it under dubious circumstances – presumably by murdering its guardians – in India. The stone is thus a colonial legacy and protected by three Indians from the Brahmin caste, who follow it to England. Their attempts to gain it back are, however, thwarted, when the stone is stolen from Rachel's boudoir on the night of her birthday. In typical country house mystery style, the list of potential suspects is short: Her cousin and lover Franklin Blake, a second cousin and would-be lover, Godfrey Ablewhite, the servant and former criminal Rosanna Spearman and Rachel herself. One of them must have entered the boudoir at night, stolen the Moonstone and brought it to London. The main clue is represented by a smudge on the newly painted door of the boudoir, which left a stain on the thief's nightgown. Solving the mystery of the jewel theft then constitutes the rest of the novel's plot, whose main complication rests on the fact of Rachel's silence about the events of that night, which leads to her becoming the main suspect in the eyes of the

investigating Sergeant Cuff. As we learn by the end of the novel, Rachel has seen Franklin Blake steal the Moonstone when he was – unknown to her and himself – under the influence of opium, so that her silence is an attempt to protect him. The same goes for Rosanna Spearman's suspicious behaviour: Finding that Franklin's nightgown bears the incriminating stain that Sergeant Cuff has declared to be the most important clue to the riddle's solution, she, being in love with Franklin as well, hides this piece of evidence at the nearby Shivering Sand, and, after having failed to come to an understanding with him, kills herself. In spite of the complications effected by the women's silence, the novel's amateur detectives come to find out the real thief, Godfrey Ablewhite, who took the stone from the opium-intoxicated Franklin and pawned it in London in order to pay for his exorbitant debts. In a grand finale, Ezra Jennings, the local doctor and half-Indian outcast, clears Franklin's name by conducting an experiment in which he comes to unconsciously repeat the theft of a fake Moonstone when administered opium. Franklin and Rachel are now able to marry. Godfrey Ablewhite, after redeeming the real Moonstone, is killed by the Indians and the Moonstone is restored by them to its original place, a temple in India.

As one can tell from this short summary, in *The Moonstone*, the female victimisation closet is the basis of the whole plot: Rachel's – and partly, Rosanna's – silence is what propels the action; "there would *be* no mystery if Rachel had not suppressed her knowledge of the theft […] or if Rosanna's letter had not been sunk in the quicksand, to be dragged back, much later, on a chain" (J. Taylor 179).[95] Both women are victims of their socially

[95] The fact that Collins made Rachel's character into the lynchpin of the mystery attracted a lot of criticism from his contemporaries, especially as he was generally seen as an author whose strengths rested in plot, not character development: "In the *Moonstone*, however, we have no person who can in any way be described as a character, no one who interests us, no one who is human enough to excite even a faint emotion of dull curiosity as to his or her fate. The heroine is an impulsive girl, generally slanging somebody, whose single speciality seems to be that, believing her lover had stolen her diamond, she hates him and loves him both at once, but neither taxes him with the offence nor pardons him for committing it, a heroine who seems to have been borrowed from one of those old novels where everybody is miserable because nobody will talk

conditioned male identification: Their primary identification is with the man they love, Franklin Blake, and the deeds they commit in order to protect him incriminate them. While Rachel's reputation and mental health suffer heavily due to her self-incriminating silence, Rosanna's self-abandonment goes so far that she comes to erase herself. At the same time, the secret they keep provides the two women with a sense of power: Rachel gains actual power through her silence, but Rosanna's increase in power is wholly imaginary. As often in the novels under investigation, the women decide or are forced to confess their deeds vis-à-vis the patriarchal establishment, thereby finally abdicating their right to privacy (even if this is, in their case, partly a sort of 'negative' privacy, more of a burden than a privilege). By transferring what should be a male criminal closet onto women, Collins demonstrates the workings of the female victimisation closet; how women's more fluid identity boundaries can push them into what should constitute someone else's closet. As in all novels discussed in this section, that person is male, demonstrating that the victimisation closet depends, to a great extent, on the power difference between the genders in (Victorian) society.

Male Identification: Men's Crime, Women's Silence

The theft of the Moonstone is the starting point both for the novel's detective storyline and for its examination of the workings of the female closet. The very moment of Franklin Blake's transgression, when he takes the stone from the drawer of Rachel's boudoir, is also the instant in which Rachel is plunged into the depths of a female victimisation closet. This scene of double watching – after all, we have Godfrey "detect[ing] Miss

common sense for five minutes" (Unsigned Review in the *Spectator*, qtd. in Page, *Wilkie Collins* 172).

Verinder, silently watching [Franklin] from her bedroom" (*The Moonstone*[96] 452) – is responsible for putting Rachel into the criminal closet of a man, for in deciding to protect him and remain silent about the events of the night, she is also cast into the role of criminal herself. Like Helen in *The Tenant*, Rachel does not only closet her own victimhood, but further shields a man and his (assumed) delinquency. The novel from the start prepares us for Rachel's silence: As several (male) characters point out, her "one defect" (*M* 52) is that she "judge[s] for herself, as few women of twice her age judge in general; never ask[s] your advice; never t[ells] you beforehand what she [is] going to do; never c[omes] with secrets and confidences to anybody, from her mother downwards" (*M* 52, 53). In Rachel, we thus find an independence and secrecy – and thus, a potential for power – that is suspect to her surroundings and inimical to the patriarchal ideology of her society which expects candour of women, at least vis-à-vis their next of kin. At the same time, we see that Rachel's characteristics are expressive of the double bind with which women were confronted in the Victorian Age:

> Although they are constantly perceived as 'odd' and 'wild' by her family and friends, Rachel's secrecy, her self-dependence and exceptional self-control are, in a sense only heightened versions of those virtues of self-containment, modesty and restraint which were universally recommended to respectable middle-class women, and were, indeed, the defining characteristics of domestic femininity. (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 33)

Interestingly enough, this character 'defect' also corresponds to "[t]he Moonstone's mysterious flaw" (Carens 255), just as her unreadability goes

[96] Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. Ed. John Sutherland. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. References to *The Moonstone* will be abbreviated with *M* and the page number.

along with the Moonstone's "unfathomable" (*M* 61) depths. This parallelisation of Rachel and the Moonstone – which is similar to the association between Rosanna and the Shivering Sand which we will later discuss – means that "[t]he mystery of the disappearance of the Diamond becomes submerged in the mystery of Rachel's conduct" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 32): "In effect Rachel also goes missing" and "becomes the mystery, the puzzle to be solved, and the cherished object that is restored to its domestic setting after careful detective work" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 32).[97]

It comes as no surprise, then, that Franklin's intrusion into Rachel's boudoir[98] – a violent appropriation of her private space and her private belongings – has often been read as a sexual misdemeanour: As "the moon and precious gems have been female symbols since antiquity" (Lonoff 210), it is not difficult to see "the theft-as-virgin-rape dimension of Franklin's 'theft'" (Sutherland, Introduction to *The Moonstone* xii). Rachel's silence could then be explained not only by her desire to protect Franklin:

[97] The association between Rachel and the Moonstone is also suggested by their 'colonial' nature. Rachel's "innate Otherness" (Willey 230) and "dark complexion" (Swartz 166) connect her to the Indian Moonstone, a symbol of "colonial guilt" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 31). Anti-imperialist readings of *The Moonstone* and of Wilkie Collins's work in general are frequent: The Moonstone is then seen as a colonial legacy that comes to haunt the English middle-class home and disrupts its seeming innocence and safety (cf. Willey 230, 231). This goes along with a relatively positive description of the Indians and Indian religion within the novel and an exposure of the brutality and ruthlessness of the English, both as colonisers in India and as 'ordinary people' at home (cf. Nayder, "Robinson" 219, Reed 283, Peters 309, Lycett 279, Lonoff 225). An exception to these readings is Roy's "The Fabulous Imperialist Semiotic of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*", which regards the novel as participating in colonial discourses. A middle-course is steered by Ian Duncan: "Collins's tale does not propound an anti-imperialist sympathy for oppressed colonial peoples, or admiration for a devilish Hindu culture, but neither does it enthrone the imperialist subject-position" (300).
Cutting up the Moonstone into several other stones – a plan that is suggested at several points in the narrative – would cure it of its defect but would also rob it of its sacred identity, so important to the Indian characters in the novel. While the stone is allowed to remain intact by returning to India, Rachel, on the other hand, is re-integrated into Victorian society after having been 'cured' of her defect, her independence.

[98] In this novel, the boudoir does not function as a safe-keep for Rachel's secrets; instead, the boudoir is the place of the crime and by intruding into her private space, Franklin necessitates the creation of a metaphorical closet in Rachel. Still, we have the box-within-a-box structure which keeps reoccurring in the novels whenever private locations take centre place, for the private space of the boudoir is doubled in the Indian drawer. As a female private space, it also needs to be opened up to male investigation, both by the members of the household and by the more public police officers.

It is also the silence of the (metaphorical) rape victim, who closets her own victimisation out of shame. That she has become a victim of Franklin's (sexual) violation of her private sphere (metaphorically, her body) is what constitutes a part of her secret and she is completely aware of the sexual innuendo and dimension of the event. This sexual interpretation is also underlined by the stain on the nightgown which comes to function as the main clue (cf. Thoms, *Detection* 107). In a similar manner to Huntingdon in *The Tenant*, Franklin – even though later excused in his behaviour through being unconscious – intrudes into Rachel's most private space and takes that which is most precious to her, a symbol of her own identity.[99] Her silence can thus be seen as being made up of several components: Her "horror", "anger", "contempt" (*M* 338) and shame are triggered both by her own perceived weakness, her status as a victim, her incapability of resisting her (sexual) feelings for Franklin even after his violation, and by her taking on his criminal closet and protecting his criminal identity. For our interest in the closet of female victimisation, however, it is Rachel's protective urge towards Franklin which is of special interest. In effectively taking on what should constitute Franklin's criminal closet, the theft of the Moonstone, Rachel acts in a way that is both typical of her character and of a society with a clear hierarchy between the genders: She over-identifies with the male and takes on his failings and crimes as her own.

Time and again in the novel, Rachel is shown as the victim of a male identification. In the case of Franklin, she "'accept[s] [the] dreadful responsibility'" (*M* 233) of keeping his identity as the thief of the Moonstone secret, so as to protect the reputation of the man she loves. She thereby assumes that which should by all rights be *his* male criminal closet and which, after Rachel, in a very interesting set-up, effectively 'outs' him to

[99] "Recalling the Victorian maxim that a young girl's virginity is her most precious possession" (Lonoff 210), it is appropriate to equate Rachel's virginity with a central part of her identity.

himself partly takes on this quality. From this point onwards, Franklin begins to suffer from his own criminal deeds and becomes wary of 'outing' himself to others, for instance to Ezra Jennings:[100]

> To have answered him with the frankness which his language and his manner both claimed from me, would have been to commit myself to openly acknowledging that I was suspected of the theft of the Diamond. Strongly as Ezra Jennings had intensified the first impulsive interest which I had felt in him, he had not overcome my unconquerable reluctance to disclose the degrading position in which I stood. (*M* 371)

Franklin now attempts to guard his secret just as Rachel did before; he is – to a certain degree – in the closet that she took on for him.[101] Rachel chooses to protect Franklin in spite of his despicable act; similarly, she refuses to out Godfrey's mercenary interest when she breaks off her engagement to him (cf. *M* 256).[102] In both cases, it is striking how Rachel feels tainted by the men's behaviour: Watching Franklin's theft, for instance, "she feels disgraced by her act of observation" (Thoms, *Detection* 107). In explaining to Godfrey the source of her guilt, her incapability to divorce her identity from Franklin's, she tells him:

[100] Franklin and Ezra exchange outings; as "*alter ego[s]*" (Caracciolo 166), their stories of undeserved suspicions and loss of reputation mirror each other. Their homosocial bonding over their respective closets leads to the solution of the mystery and thus makes possible what the outing of the female closet alone could not.
[101] Like Rachel, Franklin acts guiltily although he is innocent: "Innocent as I knew myself to be, certain as I was that the abominable imputation which rested on me must sooner or later be cleared off, there was nevertheless a sense of self-abasement in my mind which instinctively disinclined me to see any of my friends" (*M* 336).
[102] In Godfrey's mercenary designs on Rachel we find another aspect of how she is victimised, again by means of her gender. This focus on the dependent position of women is typical of Collins: "[H]is novels repeatedly focused on the victimization of women by men who plot against, mistreat, and imprison them, very often with the support of the law or social custom" (Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* 123).

> 'Suppose you were in love with some other woman? […] Suppose you discovered that woman to be utterly unworthy of you? Suppose you were quite convinced that it was a disgrace to you to waste another thought on her? Suppose the bare idea of ever marrying such a person made your face burn, only with thinking of it? […] And, suppose, in spite of all that – you couldn't tear her from your heart?' (*M* 233)

Rachel suffers from the same problems of separating her own female from her lovers' male identity in the case of Godfrey:

> 'I have believed in that man. I have promised to marry that man. How can I tell him he is mean, how can I tell him he has deceived me, how can I disgrace him in the eyes of the world after that? I have degraded myself by ever thinking of him as my husband. If I say what you tell me to say to him – I am owning that I have degraded myself to his face. I can't do that. […] The shame of it would be nothing to *him*. But the shame of it would be unendurable to *me*.' (*M* 271)

Rachel's humiliation completely corresponds to Franklin's and Godfrey's misdeeds (cf. *M* 341). As a consequence, Rachel is victimised by her own blind adherence to her society's rules, by her acceptance of the doctrine of male superiority and of coverture. For in taking on Godfrey's and Franklin's crimes – both are at some point of the novel potential husband figures – she accepts coverture's principles of the effective 'oneness' of husband and wife, in which the wife's legal, societal and economic identity is merged into her husband's. As we have already seen in *The Tenant*, it is hence women's indoctrination into their society's gender doctrines and laws that leads to their victimisation and silence in the closet of female victimisation. While Rachel can accept the harm done to her own reputation in keeping Franklin's secret, she is unable to bear accusations against Godfrey which

she knows to be false. Once again, she thus puts a man above her own interests: "'This is my fault! I must set it right. I have sacrificed myself – I had a right to do that, if I liked. But to let an innocent man be ruined; to keep a secret which destroys his character for life – Oh, good God, it's too horrible! I can't bear it!" (*M* 208) At the same time, Rachel is not purely a victim: We must not forget that she gains power by being in the closet, by keeping a secret that is considered to be of the utmost relevance by her environment. In contrast to Rosanna, who due to her lower class status is unable to profit from the secret as we will see, Rachel's position in the class hierarchy combined with her reticence provides her with enormous power. Her silence becomes the pivotal point of the novel and it is certainly remarkable that she goes to great lengths to keep her secret intact. By recalling the male narrators' statements on Rachel's "one defect" (*M* 52), her ability to judge for herself and her independence, we can assume that her silence is more than the mere consequence of her victimisation and her unwillingness to out both it and the man she loves, but it is also a tool for resisting the patriarchal society that would – and will, at the novel's end – otherwise completely rule her.

Rosanna's actions repeat Rachel's in a different register and with a different goal: "Although Rosanna and Rachel appear to be rivals for Blake's affections, these women from vastly different class backgrounds thus are also doubles, linked by a desire to serve the man they love that ensures their silence about his role in the theft" (Heller 147). Rosanna's status in the class hierarchy makes her love for Franklin, which is parallel to Rachel's, an impossibility and a laughing matter to the occupants of the household (cf. *M* 46). Nevertheless, Rosanna's aim, too, is to "'shield […] [Franklin] from being discovered, and disgraced for life'" (*M* 316), when she hides his stained nightgown and sews a new one. As a consequence, Franklin's actions push both her and Rachel into a victimisation closet. But Rosanna, being of a different class (at least this seems to be the novel's implicit explanation of the fact), does not experience the same feelings of taintedness with which Rachel is confronted; instead, as a former thief herself, she sees

Franklin's deed as a sign of their compatibility by which he "'ha[s] let [him]self down to [her] level'" (*M* 316). Although it is she who is most obviously victimised by the closet – it will, eventually, lead to her suicide – ironically, for her it also comes to represent a potential source of power: It could, in her mind, allow her to bridge the gulf that exists between her and Franklin in terms of class and gender. Rosanna assumes that she is in the role of Caleb; just as he, as a servant, has surprised his master's secret and thereby gained power over him, she thinks that she has done the same vis-à-vis her superior Franklin. While Rosanna thus interprets her role as accessory in a crime and in the closet, she has in fact taken on the closet of a man who does not even know that he should be in a closet. Being Franklin's quasi-confidante seems to "'open […] a chance before [her] of winning [his] good will'" (*M* 316) and thereby turning the class hierarchy upside-down. Consequently, Rosanna experiences the feeling of power over another human being that goes along with the detection of another's closet: She feels "'some little triumph at knowing that [she] h[olds] all [Franklin's] prospects in life in [her] own hands'" (*M* 321) and enjoys feeling that he is "'at [her] mercy'" (*M* 323). She assumes that she has "'got the whip-hand of [Franklin]'" (*M* 323), an image that evokes the sexualisation of power that is quite obvious in Rosanna's dealings with Franklin: Her sexual obsession with him – strong enough to kill herself for it – makes it doubtful whether her professed aim of "'being useful to [him] in the future'" (*M* 323) is her only reason for attempting to communicate her connivance to him. Instead, Rosanna's behaviour borders more on that of a blackmailer and stalker, who "hopes to exchange information for emotional [and as I see it, sexual] advantage" (Trodd 84). By saving Franklin from detection, she in fact wants to supplant her rival Rachel and to gain his affections.

Rosanna's plans are, however, doomed to fail as Franklin is oblivious of both her and what should be his own closet for the largest part of the novel. She is victimised by his class-based ignorance of her, which "'mortif[ies] and disappoint[s]'" (*M* 144) her and finally leads to her suicide: Her power over him is wholly imaginary in the strictly stratified social sphere

of the novel and at no point does she pose a real threat to him. But Franklin's behaviour is not only an expression of his class, but also of his unawareness of the closet. This can best be seen in Rosanna's attempts to communicate her knowledge to him, for these conversations can be regarded as failed 'closet conversations', in which Rosanna tries to let him know that she knows:[103]

> 'Believing, as I did, that you had got the lost Diamond hidden about you, while you were speaking, your coolness so provoked me that I got bold enough, in the heat of the moment, to give you a hint. I said, 'They will never find the Diamond, sir, will they? No! nor the person who took it – I'll answer for that.' I nodded, and smiled at you, as much as to say, 'I know!' *This* time, you looked up at me with something like interest in your eyes; and I felt that a few more words on your side and mine might bring out the truth.' (*M* 317)

The closet conversation is, however, treacherously ambiguous. While Rosanna thinks she is clandestinely letting Franklin know that she is informed about his closet, he in fact interprets her behaviour as a sign of her own guilt or potential madness (cf. *M* 90). It is the very nature of a conversation where everything is stated purposefully ambiguously to be potentially misleading, of course, but the real complication arises due to Franklin's unawareness of his own potential for closetedness. As a consequence, he is unable to pick up or rightly interpret the hints or 'hairpins' that Rosanna lets drop. Both Rosanna and Rachel are then, effectively, silenced by their own collaboration in a system that demands male identification, but also

[103] Rachel has considered taking a similar path as she later reveals: "'I ended in writing to you [Franklin]. [...] My letter would have told you nothing openly. It would not have ruined you for life, if it had fallen into some other person's hands. It would only have said – in a manner which you yourself could not possibly have mistaken – that I had reason to know you were in debt [...]. If you had read on with some interest after that, you would have come to an offer I had to make to you – the offer, privately (not a word, mind, to be said openly between us!), of the loan of as large a sum of money as I could get'" (*M* 347). This plan, too, fails due to Franklin's inability to perceive his own potential for closetedness.

by Franklin's inability to understand the mechanism that transforms what should be his own closet into a female victimisation closet.

Suspicion and Surveillance: Open Secrets

Both Rosanna and Rachel's silence is interpreted as a sign of their own guilt. Their secrets are open secrets in so far as the community knows that something is hidden away, but misinterprets the closet's exact content. The workings of the female victimisation closet, in which women come to be in the closet for men through a process of male identification, are misunderstood by society at large, even as it keeps up the very structures that lead to the constitution of this closet. They are especially misunderstood by the male part of the community, who make up the group of people investigating the theft of the Moonstone: Their inability to understand the women's motives demonstrates the fundamental unreadability of women which the novel outlines and fears at the same time.[104] The mystery of the Moonstone rests on the mystery of women, so that a parallel is drawn up between the diamond's and the women's unfathomability. It is this lack of (male) insight into the forms a female closet could potentially take that leads to suspicions coming to rest on Rachel and Rosanna. In stereotypical fashion, Rachel is suspected of sexual or economic misdemeanour and Rosanna is pushed into the role of a 'fallen woman', whose secretive behaviour can only be interpreted as a backsliding into her old thieving ways. The closet of women's victimisation is thus, for the most part of the novel, misinterpreted, and only by actively outing themselves are the female characters able to dispel male fears of uncontrolled female privacy associated with gender and class rebellion.

[104] The only one who has a hunch of Rachel's motives is Mr. Bruff, the family lawyer: "He had not scrupled to suspect dear Mr Godfrey of the infamy of stealing the Diamond, and to attribute Rachel's conduct to a generous resolution to conceal the crime" (*M* 218). Mr. Bruff, however, is unable to come to the right conclusion due to his fundamental trust in Franklin Blake, which, for him, automatically excludes him from the list of potential suspects.

Rachel's silence on the events of the night is the most striking instance to the other characters in the novel. It is, moreover, accompanied by extreme shows of passion on her side: She is constantly either "crying" (*M* 86) or "wild and angry" (*M* 86). The very obviousness of her secretive behaviour turns her closet into an open secret: Everyone knows that she hides something, but still, for a long time, no one is able to penetrate the mystery. Rachel reacts to the emotional shock of Franklin's theft by "withdr[awing] into her bed-room" (*M* 79), thereby spatially expressing her isolation, and by a refusal to discuss the events of the night with anyone, not even excepting her own mother (cf. *M* 80) or the police (cf. *M* 85). From the very start, her strange behaviour is pathologised in an attempt to conjure an explanation for it: "'The loss of her jewel seems almost to have turned her brain'" (*M* 81), her mother tells the servant and narrator[105] Betteredge, and she later plans to "'consult […] the best medical advice'" (*M* 180) on her daughter's condition. This is similarly the case with Rosanna, whose behaviour, as has been shown before, is interpreted as 'madness' and is, in the eyes of Betteredge, "'a matter for the doctor to look into'" (*M* 146). Both Rachel and Rosanna are thus associated with hysteria,

[105] *The Moonstone* is famously told by from the perspective of different characters who "present their case like witnesses in a trial" (Thomas 65) and may only speak "as far as [their] own personal experience extends, and no farther" (*M* 8): These are the servant Betteredge, Miss Clack (a relative of the Verinders), Mr. Bruff (the family lawyer), Franklin Blake himself, Ezra Jennings (the local doctor) and Sergeant Cuff, as well as some minor characters who only contribute short statements. Some critics have seen this as emphasising the "palimpsest" (Heller 155) form of the novel and stress the "ambiguity and ambivalence" (O'Neill 15), "subjectivity" (Thoms, *Windings* 159) and potential unreliability (cf. Hutter 191) of the characters that is created, so that "[t]he effect is to provide a continually shifting viewpoint on the action, offering not merely different but sometimes contradictory views of the same event or character" (Ousby, *Bloodhounds* 117): This is especially the case as "the conditions under which the writer-characters write almost militate against the truth. […] The writers are expected […] to speculate about truths that they may since have come to know" (Murfin 655). The most famous opinion to the contrary comes from D. A. Miller, who in "From *roman policier* to *roman-police*: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*" declares: "[T]he 'unreliable' and 'contradictory' narrative structure of *The Moonstone* works only as a ruse. […] A reader is supposed to listen to the various witnesses, and to make up his mind about the validity of their reports as he will […]. Yet […] all readers […] pass *the same judgment*" (167) once they have reached the end of the novel, thereby turning the novel into a "thoroughly *monological*" (168) affair.

which is "the uncomprehending response to female autonomy" (J. Taylor 201) within the novel. Their very secretiveness deviates so much from the norms prescribed for women that it can only be read as illness. The problem with their behaviour for the household is that it draws attention to itself, that it makes readable the very disruption of the home that its members would like to hide. While Rosanna's "distracted appearances in places where servants should not be […] offer the most visible clue to the mysterious derangement of the household" (Trodd 63), Rachel's rude and unapologetic behaviour vis-à-vis both the police and Franklin acts in a similar way. As a member of middle-class society, Rachel's unusual silence and hysterical demeanour is a source of shame to her environment: "She said those words so spitefully, so savagely, with such an extraordinary outbreak of ill-will towards Mr Franklin, in her voice and in her look, that – though I had known her from a baby, though I loved and honoured her next to my lady herself – I was ashamed of Miss Rachel for the first time in my life" (*M* 101), the old servant Betteredge comments, for instance. It does, however, more than embarrass the household: It also makes her into a prime suspect, as everyone except Betteredge quickly comes to realise. Taking on Franklin's criminal closet gives Rachel the appearance of hiding a criminal closet of her own. While her mother, Betteredge and Franklin attempt to firmly believe in her innocence, no matter what proof is brought against her, and instead try to transfer their suspicions onto Rosanna,[106] the chief investigator, Sergeant Cuff, sees her having stolen her own diamond as the riddle's solution. While Trodd reads this in terms of class – the lower class

[106] There is a hierarchy of class and gender in the characters' attempts to protect some and suspect others: Franklin Blake, a gentleman, is at its top, Rachel, a woman but of the upper middle classes, comes next and Rosanna, lowly born and female, is at the very bottom. Consequently, characters are prone to blame her and wish for a solution in which Rosanna's guilt establishes Rachel's innocence. It is interesting, however, that in spite of their professed firm belief in Rachel's innocence, everyone except Betteredge immediately understands the suspicions that are building up in Sergeant Cuff's mind, demonstrating that they themselves have had the same suspicions: Cuff and Franklin, for instance, "thoroughly underst[and] each other, without having previously exchanged a word of explanation on either side" (*M* 118) when it comes to the question of Rachel's involvement.

Cuff does not "understand that a heroine of manifest integrity must have the highest motives for concealing crime" (29) – his particular interpretation is also indicative of a general male stereotyping of the female closet:

> '[Y]oung ladies of rank and position do occasionally have private debts which they dare not acknowledge to their nearest relatives and friends. Sometimes, the milliner and the jeweller are at the bottom of it. Sometimes, the money is wanted for purposes which I don't suspect in this case, and which I won't shock you by mentioning.' (*M* 164)

What this interpretation shows is that "Cuff is defeated by the silence of women (Rachel and Rosanna), by feminine reticence (Lady Verinder), and the failure of individual women to conform to dominant stereotypes of femininity" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 35). By reading Rachel as 'typical', he misunderstands her reasons for keeping a closet.[107] As is so often the case with the female closet, there is also a sexual suspicion expressed here: What is unspoken and "unmentionable" (Briefel 143) in Cuff's words appears to be "a clear allusion to an illicit abortion" (Morris 116).[108] Although he is wrong, Cuff's interpretation is also the one that makes its way into the public consciousness: Despite the fact that he is hired as a confidential agent, the scandal of the Moonstone is transported to London on the grapevine, becoming even more of an open secret. Suspicions there focus

[107] Cuff also misinterprets the nature that female community takes on in the novel. While he expects "'Rosanna Spearman [to be] […] simply an instrument in the hands of another person'" (*M* 119), namely Rachel, and thus thinks that the women are working together, the only relation that exists between the two is one of competition and jealousy (from Rosanna's point of view): "'I hated Miss Rachel'" (*M* 311). Like in *The Tenant*, it is exactly the *lack* of female community that complicates the mystery, for it isolates both Rachel and Rosanna and makes it impossible for them to confess their closets to anyone.

[108] Rosanna, too, at first interprets the stain on Franklin's nightgown as proof of a sexual misdemeanour: "'I said to myself, 'Here's the proof that he was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room between twelve last night, and three this morning!' I shall not tell you in plain words what was the first suspicion that crossed my mind, when I had made that discovery'" (*M* 314).

on Rachel, too: Miss Clack, although disqualified by her evident dislike of Rachel and general hypocrisy, is representative of the public mind when she expresses her impression that Rachel "'is keeping a sinful secret from [her mother] and from everybody'" (*M* 201).

In a similar fashion, Rosanna's closet is marked as highly visible. From the start of the investigation, "[s]uspicion falls predictably on the alien, marginal figures" (J. Taylor 174), and Rosanna is variously characterised as such by being female, a servant, a former thief and misshapen, with "one shoulder bigger than the other" (*M* 22). She is especially suspect as she is already in a closet, at least vis-à-vis the greater part of the household, for the story of her criminal past is told to no one "excepting Miss Rachel and [Betteredge]" (*M* 21). This is still a very open secret in the novel's logic, for all the relevant characters are aware of her former life and Sergeant Cuff's suspicions are accordingly directed at her. She further draws attention to herself through her various attempts at communicating with Franklin and her related appearances in parts of the house in which she is not allowed. Here we can see that it is Rosanna's class status that makes it especially difficult for her to keep and communicate her closet: "One successful communication would resolve the mystery" (Trodd 84), but the gulf between master and servant, enforced by spatial structures, is simply too wide. The greatest problem for Rosanna, however, is that, as a servant, she is under even closer scrutiny and surveillance than Rachel.[109] Despite her criminal expertise, she is unable to escape the watchful eyes of the fellow household

[109] Rachel may manage to hide within her bedroom during the first part of the novel and so is able to escape a great degree of the surveillance directed at women. In the few scenes in which she leaves her bedroom, however, she is even more closely scrutinised by her mother, Betteredge, Franklin Blake, and, above all, Sergeant Cuff. Here, we have Betteredge's statement, for instance: "It showed a want of due respect, it showed a breach of good manners, on my part, but, for the life of me, I couldn't help looking out of the window when Miss Rachel met the gentlemen outside" (*M* 86). The most remarkable instance of surveillance, however, comes in the second part of the narrative, in which the novel "allow[s] us […] to be a voyeur with Drusilla Clack" (Thoms, *Windings* 155, 156), hidden away behind a curtain, who witnesses Godfrey's marriage proposal to Rachel.

members. In his Foucauldian reading of the novel, D. A. Miller has identified the disciplinary structure of *The Moonstone*, in which the open exercise of punishment is exchanged for the subtlety of discipline, which is, in turn, effected through surveillance: "Natural curiosity and common gossip double for an informal system of surveillance that is in force on the estate well before the Moonstone is stolen" ("From roman" 161). Accordingly, Rosanna's love for Franklin is immediately guessed by her fellow servant Penelope (cf. *M* 45) and her attempts to create a new nightgown for him are surprised by others (cf. *M* 116). But while the atmosphere of surveillance is dispersed throughout the whole household, where everyone is "'[p]rying, and peeping, and listening'" (*M* 143), it is still specifically directed at the female characters. Their every movement seems to be recorded by the community, while the actions of Franklin and Godfrey, for instance, remain undiscussed. The suspicion does not only fall onto them due to their own, admittedly conspicuous, behaviour, but also because they, more than others, are under a strict surveillance that registers their every deviation from the norm.

Out of the Closet: Confessing Victimisation

Surveillance alone, however, is not enough to solve the mystery of the Moonstone. This can only be effected once the female closets have been opened up: While Rosanna's spectacular confession offers a first glimpse as to the solution of the riddle, Rachel's quasi-forced statement paves the way for Ezra Jennings's final experiment[110] and successful dispelling of the secret. It is especially Rosanna's confession that demonstrates the "Chinese box intricacy" (Hayter 259) of the novel's relation to secrecy: After all, the metaphorical key to her closet is hidden in a complicated build-up of objects and spatial structures. First, there is a letter directed to Franklin via

[110] That the mystery's final solution depends on an experiment emphasises the importance of science in *The Moonstone* and in Collins's novels in general; a science that is not "cordoned off into rigid categories but touches on the metaphysical as well as the inductive, dreams as much as facts" (Nadel 240).

Limping Lucy, Rosanna's best friend and potential lesbian lover,[111] which can only be handed to Franklin directly (cf. *M* 185). When this letter, a year later, finally reaches Franklin, it turns out to be "'a memorandum'" (*M* 303), by which he is directed to Rosanna's favourite spot and final resting place, the Shivering Sand, where, after following some complicated instructions, he finds a box within which Rosanna has hidden away both the nightgown and her final confessional letter. Accordingly, the spatial structures come to mirror the complex build-up of the novel's mystery itself: The metaphorical closet is reflected, once again, in a spatial box-within-a-box set-up. This is also indicative of the difficulties of gaining access to female privacy, which is underlined by the several failed attempts at confession vis-à-vis Franklin on Rosanna's part. We can see this most strikingly, however, in the image of the Shivering Sand, which has often been read as *the* expression of female sexuality, and, consequently, represents both female mystery and the threat to the men confronted with it.

The Shivering Sand is the most notable example of a spatial closet within the novel; and a closet that is, moreover, exclusively associated with women and especially with Rosanna Spearman. Although in general seen as a "horrid" (*M* 22) spot, the path leading there is "Rosanna Spearman's favourite walk" (*M* 23) and it functions as a sort of hiding place, in which she constructs her own private space outside the spatial structures of the home, where such privacy is not easily available to women and servants. The Shivering Sand is, however, associated with female sexuality and danger at the same time:

> The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between

[111] It is Limping Lucy's greatest dream to go with Rosanna, whom she "'love[s]'" (*M* 184), to London "'like sisters, and liv[e] by [their] needles'" (*M* 184); she is, moreover, hostile towards men. Her "homosexual attachment" (Lonoff 209) to Rosanna and "rejection of heterosexuality" (Heller 148) go along with her general rebelliousness, expressive of class anger (cf. *M* 184).

> the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of the Shivering Sand. (*M* 22)

Sutherland, among many critics, reads the image of the Shivering Sand as a "grotesque parody of female orgasm" (Introduction to *The Moonstone* xx) and Talairach-Vielmas sees it as specifically "mirror[ing] the housemaid's physiology" (*Wilkie Collins* 84): Her "shudders of repressed desire for unattainable Franklin Blake" (Carens 248) are reflected in the comings and goings of the tide and the shivering of the quicksand.[112] Being forced to directly confront it in order to get at the secrets hidden away by Rosanna, Franklin feels "unutterable dread" (*M* 305), a dread that is clearly sexual in nature: "The exploration of the quicksand is […] equated to a physical examination" (Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins* 87). With his "face […] within a few feet of the surface of the quicksand" (*M* 305) Franklin has to "close […] [his] eyes at the moment when the point of the stick first enter[s] the quicksand" (*M* 305). Having thus (literally) penetrated this very female mystery, he is rewarded by gaining access to the female closet. But what he finds within the "japanned tin case" (*M* 305) which he has extracted from the rocks is a nightgown bearing his own name: "I had discovered Myself as the Thief" (*M* 307). In discovering himself as the thief, he also discovers his own criminal closet, a closet that through his own unawareness of its existence was transferred onto the female characters and transformed into a female closet.

[112] I have already mentioned that while the novel associates Rachel with the Moonstone, Rosanna is brought into connection with the Shivering Sand. But as "the Stone anticipates the 'fathomless depths beneath' Shivering Sand" (Hennelly 33), there is in actual fact a linkage between all four: Rachel, Rosanna, the Moonstone and the Shivering Sand. All of them are unfathomable, mysterious, and female(-connoted).

For Rosanna, however, this insight comes too late. Hers is the ultimate victimisation closet, for her identification with Franklin goes so far as to erase her own identity, leaving her no other option but suicide. For her, the closet proves fatal. The impossibility of dispelling it is expressed in her incapability of communicating with Franklin: "'If I miss my next opportunity – if you are as cruel as ever, and if I feel it again as I have felt it already – good-bye to the world which has grudged me the happiness that it gives to others'" (*M* 327). Rosanna "remain[s] trapped in the prison of her self, and in her frustration commit[s] suicide in the quicksand, allowing herself to become engulfed in her own solipsistic world" (Thoms, *Windings* 149). While "Rosanna's suicidal impulse should also be linked to the accusation of theft and the threat of exposure of her criminal past" (Liggins), it is finally the failure to communicate from within the closet while alive which is fatal here. As a grave, the quicksand proves to be the closet par excellence: "'What the Sand gets, the Sand keeps for ever'" (*M* 157). In this quality, it is similar to Lydia's nameless grave in *Armadale* and Ezra Jennings's in the novel under discussion, in that it promises total erasure and obscurity. But in contrast to Ezra, who, on his deathbed, orders his friend and doctor Mr. Candy to bury his writings with him (cf. *M* 456), Rosanna's long suicide letter, although one of the "various hidden or buried texts" (Lonoff 227) of the narrative, explicitly demands to be read.[113] Hence, Rosanna demonstrates, once again, that "[t]o take one's life is to force others to read one's death" (Higonnet, "Speaking" 68): "In their deaths, many are obsessed with projecting an image […]. In order to limit the intrinsic ambiguity of the act, many suicides are doubled by explanatory texts" (Higonnet, "Speaking" 69). Rosanna's suicide letter is expressive of an explicit wish to out herself, to step out of her closet and to achieve in death the kind of understanding with Franklin that she was debarred from

[113] As the parallel between Rosanna in *The Moonstone* and Lydia in *Armadale* demonstrates, Collins keeps returning to female suicide and the confessional suicide letter in his work. "[U]ntil suicide law was liberalized in the 1880s and suicide became more widely discussed, there was in Victorian England only one well-known novelist whose work included suicide after suicide: Wilkie Collins" (Gates 305).

in life. For Rosanna, the real confession comes at the very start of her suicide letter: "'A confession which means much misery, may sometimes be made in very few words. This confession can be made in three words. I love you'" (*M* 309). Interestingly enough, it is exactly this seemingly simple confession that cannot bridge the gulf between her and the gentleman Franklin: "'In the name of Heaven […] what does it mean?'" (*M* 309) is his immediate reaction and he refuses to read more than a third of the letter. Here we can see that Rosanna's outing fails, at least vis-à-vis the person it was intended for: "Rosanna's final plea for understanding by her employers is unanswered, and the household conditions which produced the mystery survive its solution" (Trodd 85). In the eyes of the other characters and in the logic of the novel, Rosanna's confession of love is not half as important as her confession of victimisation, of having actively risked drawing suspicion onto herself in order to shield Franklin. At the point when the letter is read, Rosanna has been dead for almost a year: Her attempt to assert narrative control via her letter necessarily fails once it is read and reread by various characters in her absence and interpreted in their fashion. The precarious status of her confessional letter is especially underlined by the fact that it is regarded as potentially untrue by the others. Mr. Bruff makes that clear:

> 'Without alluding to the woman's career as a thief, I will merely remark that her letter proves her to have been adept at deception, on her own showing; and I argue from that, that I am justified in suspecting her of not having told the whole truth. […] I will only say that, if Rachel has suspected you *on the evidence of the nightgown only*, the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that Rosanna Spearman was the person who showed it to her.' (*M* 332, 333)

Even in death, Rosanna's class status still works against her, and an ultimate resolution to the mystery seems to be only possible with the help of Rachel, a lady.

While Rosanna's confession in the form of a letter, only read a year after the events and with her no longer present, in this way deprives her of narrative control, Rachel's oral statement seems to provide her with more autonomy. But unlike Rosanna's, Rachel's confession is by no means voluntary. On the contrary, Rachel succeeds in keeping an almost complete silence on the topic of the Moonstone towards her closest friends and relatives and, when pressed by the male establishment in the form of Franklin, repeatedly refuses to see him (cf. *M* 290). This is a clear demonstration of Rachel's power vis-à-vis the patriarchal establishment, which has regarded her independence and strong will as suspect from the start. While we are informed about Rosanna's wish for power through her suicide letter, Rachel's motivation for staying silent is less clear: In her dealings with her environment, and especially the men who surround her, we can, however, detect an unwillingness to give up on the power that her silence has granted her, a resistance against the control that the patriarchal establishment attempts to exert over her. Rachel's silence may not only be the consequence of the shame she experiences through her victimisation and of her wish to protect Franklin; it may also be a deliberate effort to keep a secret that her environment considers to be of the utmost importance. Her attempts to keep her closet safe go so far as to make her change her location: She leaves her maternal home for the nearby manor house of the Ablewhites and later travels to London. She also "refuse[s] to have her wardrobe examined" (*M* 110) along with the rest of the household, thereby resisting male attempts to invade her private space. This utter self-control is all the more surprising as Rachel claims to suffer enormously under the pressure of having to keep what she feels is a guilty secret; she is even "'miserable enough and desperate enough'" (*M* 235) to agree to an engagement to Godfrey Ablewhite despite her lack of love for him. This secretiveness – always already suspiciously regarded by the male establishment – can be born no longer once one of its members is accused of the theft, as Mr. Bruff and Franklin decide:

> 'The first step to take in this investigation […] is to appeal to Rachel. She has been silent all this time […]. It is impossible, after what has happened, to submit to that silence any longer. She must be persuaded to tell us, or she must be forced to tell us, on what grounds she bases her belief that you took the Moonstone.' (*M* 332)

Female privacy can no longer be tolerated once it threatens male reputation: The female closet must then be intruded into, if necessary by force.[114] Franklin's explicit goal on returning to England is to investigate the disappearance of the Moonstone and thus the female closet. The men's utter disregard for female privacy becomes clear when Franklin and Bruff agree to turn Bruff's house "'into a trap to catch Rachel'" (*M* 335). Bruff "'firmly believe[s] Rachel will live to thank [him] for turning traitor to her'" (*M* 336): Accordingly, he hands Franklin a key for the "'gate in [his] back-garden wall'" (*M* 336), thereby allowing him to intrude into a space that has, through Bruff's invitation of her, deceptively been marked as safe for Rachel. Although he feels "a certain guilty doubtfulness" (*M* 337) about his proceedings, Franklin fully expects the surprise effect to be helpful in his endeavour to force the secret from Rachel, just as both he and Bruff count on her "'still preserving, in some remote little corner of her heart, a certain perverse weakness for [Franklin]'" (*M* 335). Rachel is right in accusing Franklin of unfairly intruding on her: "'[I]s it a manly action, on your part, to find your way to me as you have found it to-day? It seems a cowardly experiment, to try an experiment on my weakness for you'" (*M* 339). He, on his part, feels justified in using his emotional power over her, as can be seen in his calculating establishment of bodily contact: "[W]hile her hand lay in mine I was her master still! […] I own I kept possession of her hand. I own I spoke to her with all that I could summon back of the sympathy and confidence of the bygone time" (*M* 341, 342). The confession scene is

[114] This goes along with the fact that the search for the Moonstone has from the start been marked as male: "The struggle for ownership of the jewel is a male one, with its origin in the violence of colonial conquest" (Peters 304) and the amateur detectives, collaborating in order to restore it, are all men.

thus explicitly described as a power struggle, a fight for the control of female privacy: "Collins' staging of this scene makes it clear that the battle to break women's silence is, like the scene on the Shivering Sand, a battle over the control of knowledge. In Foucauldian terms, this knowledge is understandable as a form of power" (Heller 152).

As with Rosanna's confession, Franklin finds that the dispelling of the female closet leads him back to a criminal closet of his own. This time, his guilt seems established beyond any doubt, although this is of course later qualified by his unawareness of the act. While the heart of the confession for Rachel, as for Rosanna, seems to lie in her unconquerable but guilty love for Franklin (cf. *M* 346), the most relevant part for Franklin and for the novel's plot lies in her statement that she "'saw [Franklin] take the Diamond with [her] own eyes'" (*M* 340) and kept this fact a secret in order to shield him. By outing herself as being in a closet of victimisation, Rachel thus plunges Franklin into a sort of closet of his own, thereby reversing the initial impulse in the story in which she was put into his (unconscious) closet. Rachel's confession is thus much more successful than Rosanna's, for her closet is revealed to be seemingly harmless and even beneficial for patriarchy and thus more acceptable to its representatives: By subordinating her own interests to a man, Rachel has proven herself to be in full alliance with patriarchal ideology. In contrast to Rosanna, she has neither (openly) attempted to use her knowledge of Franklin's deed for her own purposes, nor has she tried to overcome the class barrier. The power she has gained vis-à-vis the patriarchal establishment by keeping silent is glossed over at the novel's end and her silence is instead interpreted as a sign of her gender-conform, selfless love for Franklin: In taking Rachel's power away and reinstating her in the 'normal', heteronormative order, the novel tries very hard to cover up the subversive nature of the scenario it has before constructed. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that "[t]he reward for Rachel's collusion is marriage, the price of Rosanna's delusion is self-destruction" (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 34). That this is no liberating vision for women is obvious; as is so often the case with the closet of

victimisation, in the end, it maintains a patriarchal society rather than questioning it. This goes along with the fact that Rachel is, after this confession scene, and generally for large parts of the novel silent and silenced.[115] For obvious reasons, it is impossible for her to be a narrator – "her first words would give away the secret" (Lonoff 191) – but this also means that "[t]he legal representatives of Rachel's interests, her husband and her lawyer, decide how best to tell her story, which still leaves her essentially locked in the silence of her bedroom" (Swartz 166). The situation is similar to Helen's in *The Tenant*, but in contrast to her – and Rosanna – Rachel is at no point in the story given the possibility of expressing herself in her own words via a diary or letter.[116] She is only ever recorded by other, mostly male, people. Even while she succeeds in stepping out of her victimisation closet, she thus remains victimised by the patriarchal structures of her society, so that the last (and, after the breaking of her silence, seemingly only relevant) information about her that we get concerns her marriage and pregnancy (cf. *M* 459). In Victorian society, this is a woman's only possible success, but in *The Moonstone*, as in *The Tenant*, this coincides with a depressing retraction from a female insistence on privacy. The female closet, while victimising women in these cases, also offers them a space of their own, an interiority that provides them with possibilities of self-definition and independence otherwise unattainable: In Rachel's case, it even temporarily supplies her with a power that is unequalled in the novel. It is ambivalent: But with its suspension, all that remains for the female characters is the non-equivocal acceptance of a role, either as dutiful wife in marriage or fallen woman in death.

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[115] The only thoughts and feelings that Rachel can express after the confession scene are completely directed at Franklin: "'Where is he now?' she asked, giving free expression to her one dominant interest – the interest in Mr Blake. 'What is he doing? Has he spoken of me? Is he in good spirits? How does he bear the sight of the house, after what happened in it last year? When are you going to give him the laudanum? May I see you pour it out?'" (*M* 411)

[116] Of course, both Rosanna's letter and Helen's diary are still edited by men and inserted into male narratives. Nonetheless, they offer at least some kind of a counter-perspective to the male-dominated narratives.

A Persecuted Heroine – The Victimisation Closet in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

One of the most victimised heroines of English literature's whole canon is certainly Thomas Hardy's Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891): After all, "[i]t is probably the only novel in the English language that allows a heroine to be raped, abandoned, thrown into poverty, arrested for murder, and hung" (Shires, "Victorian Novel" 75). To elaborate on this rough draft of the plot, we can state that the novel starts out by presenting to us young Tess Durbeyfield, a sixteen-year-old working class girl from a large family, with numerous younger siblings to provide for. At the novel's beginning, her father, John Durbeyfield, has only recently learned that he and his family are impoverished descendants of the old aristocratic line of the D'Urbervilles and this information leads him to entertain dreams of grandeur, further indulged in by drinking. Due to their father's drunkenness, Tess and her younger brother have to drive a cart to a neighbouring market at night; during this excursion, the family horse Prince is killed by a speeding mail carriage. As Tess feels she is to blame for the event, she is easily convinced to 'claim kin' with the D'Urbervilles, a rich family living in the vicinity, from whose aristocratic lineage the Durbeyfields believe to be descended; in fact, they are nouveaux riches, who have taken on the old name in order to gain credibility. Travelling there, Tess meets Alec D'Urberville, who takes an immediate fancy to her and provides her with an occupation at his manor

house. He repeatedly harasses Tess and, finally, luring her into the old forest of the Chase at night, he rapes her. In the aftermath, Tess returns to her family and, several months later, gives birth to a child named Sorrow, who dies almost immediately. Unable to bear an environment in which everyone is aware of her past sexual experiences, she leaves her home village of Marlott and seeks work as a milkmaid in the neighbouring valley at Talbothays, where she can hide her past. In the Edenic atmosphere of the lush valley, Tess falls in love with Angel Clare, a gentleman who, due to his unorthodox religious beliefs, was deprived of the chance of a university education by his father and instead plans to become a farmer. Although she suffers from great pangs of conscience, having sworn to herself never to marry due to her past, she finally accepts his marriage proposal. Various attempts to confess her past fail due to her own lack of courage, fate and Angel's ignorance, so that the couple only comes to discuss their secrets after their marriage. While Tess easily forgives Angel for a past sexual encounter, he cannot accept her experience in that field. Consequently, the couple splits up, with Angel trying his luck in Brazil, while Tess is forced into farm work again. The lack of working opportunities in winter finally leads her to "the Hell of Flintcomb Ash" (Lecercle 15), where she has to work under inhumane conditions. An aborted visit to Angel's parents results in a renewed acquaintance between Tess and Alec, who starts to harass her again. When, shortly afterwards, her father dies and her mother and siblings are evicted from their house, Tess feels obligated to become Alec's mistress in order to provide for her family. Angel has meanwhile forgiven Tess and returns to England; their meeting leads to Tess's murder of Alec so that she is able to fully become Angel's wife again. The couple spends a few dreamy days hiding away in the countryside before Tess is caught at Stonehenge and finally executed for her deed.

As one can tell from this short summary, the novel "presents a female protagonist as the title character who has a secret" (B. Mitchell 193) and this secret takes on the shape of a closet of victimisation. From the novel's beginning, Tess is presented to us as a victim, especially of male desires,

and this is a tendency that is later exacerbated by her indoctrination into the structures of male identification. Her experience in the Chase, the rape, pushes her into a closet of victimisation: That she has become a victim of sexual violence constitutes her defining secret throughout the novel. While Alec need not hide his sexual adventures with peasant girls, for Tess her sexual experience invariably marks her and creates the necessity for secrecy and silence. This is a classic female victimisation situation: "[T]he woman pays for transgressions in which she is involved or for trespasses committed by someone else. […] In this exchange she is substituted for the other guilty person" (Bronfen 67). In Tess's case, however, coming out of the closet does not bring about the promised relief; on the contrary, it is exactly the breaking of the silence, the telling, which is to become literally fatal. Tess's extensive male identification does not allow her to reject the judgement passed on her by Angel; she accepts his 'verdict' and their separation as well as the victimisation inherent in it. From there on, the movement of the plot seems unstoppable: Coming out of the victimisation closet will not free Tess, but only victimises her further, which is proved by her final act of desperation and consequent execution. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the female victimisation closet is thus, finally, fatal: The very structures of women's victimisation closets are here non-survivable.

Tess's Victimisation: Rape

Tess's whole story, from beginning to end, is one of victimisation. It starts even before she meets Alec: As a female member of the impoverished working class, Tess is doomed by both her gender and class, aspects that Alec will further exploit. Despite her "complex class-position (decayed aristocratic lineage, economic membership of the newly-forming rural proletariat, modified by an education that provides her with a degree of access to the culture of the bourgeoisie)" (Boumelha, *Women* 117), it is her economic status that marks her most forcefully in the beginning of the novel.

"[T]he shiftless house of Durbeyfield" (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*[117] 23) will drag Tess down time and again; the responsibility that she feels towards the other family members leads her to attempt to escape her poverty by accepting the post at Alec's house, in spite of her serious misgivings. From the start, this is seen as an economic opportunity for the family in terms of a 'traffic in women': "'Tess ought to go to this other member of our family. She'd be sure to win the lady – Tess would; and likely enough 'twould lead to some noble gentleman marrying her'" (*Tess* 27). This demonstrates how "Tess serves as a valuable par excellence" (Bronfen 76), for "her mother does regard the sacrifice of her virginity when she has just reached the age of consent as a somewhat risky investment that will lead to marriage" (Lovesey 923): "'And if he don't marry her afore he will after'" (*Tess* 57). The patriarchal system in which women are primarily objects of exchange is, once again, upheld by women as well as by men: Tess's mother has "been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth" (*Tess* 52). Although Tess senses that Alec is up to no good, she agrees to her mother's plans, trained in female obedience and passivity and aware of the precarious state of her family's finances (cf. *Tess* 51). At the same time, the Durbeyfields in their entirety are victimised by their class position: Not only that their social standing necessitates 'selling' their daughters into good marriages, their lack of knowledge further exacerbates the situation. After all, the D'Urbervilles are not really relatives of theirs and 'claiming kin' with them in hope of financial support is pointless: "Of this work of imagination [the D'Urbervilles' annexation of their name] poor Tess and her parents were naturally in ignorance – much to their own discomfiture" (*Tess* 42). In a similar manner, hoping for marriage into the upper classes is a futile endeavour for the working class.[118] It is, accordingly,

[117] Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. London: Penguin, 2012. References to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* will be abbreviated with *Tess* and the page number.
[118] At least this is the case in a late-nineteenth-century novel: "One plot that shaped the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England – a virtuous serving girl winning the love of a master vastly her social superior – disappeared in the nineteenth century. [...] [T]he classes do not intermarry" (Langland, "Nobody's Angels" 290).

a complex interplay of characteristics that mark Tess as female and those that mark her as poor that lead to her victimisation at the hands of one who is her superior in terms of both class and gender: "[Tess's] sexual body and her working body figure alternately as the object of economic exchange" (Boumelha, Introduction xxiv). The rape is only the logical consequence of a serious imbalance in power that predestines Tess to become a victim.[119]

This disequilibrium manifests itself from the first encounter between Alec and Tess to the very end of their relationship and is only turned around at the moment of Alec's murder. Alec repeatedly abuses his superiority vis-à-vis Tess: "For Alec, the entire pursuit, including the night in the Chase, is an exercise of power, and for Tess [...] the experience is one of powerlessness and subjection" (W. Morgan 184). On their first drive to Trantridge, for instance, he refuses to slow his horse down without a kiss from Tess in exchange (cf. *Tess* 60); a scene that foreshadows the later rape, the pivotal event in Tess's victimisation, as so many encounters between them do (further examples are the scene in which Alec's rose pricks Tess's chin, thereby drawing blood (cf. *Tess* 47), and the scene in which he forces a strawberry down her throat (cf. *Tess* 44)). Critical opinion has long been divided on the issue of Tess's rape, which some critics have read as a seduction scene instead.[120] The novel, while not presenting the actual rape

[119] R. Morgan, for instance, argues for a direct causality between Tess's status as a labourer and her rape by Alec: "The labour/woman exploitative, machine-grinding world in *Tess*, its exhausting demands closely linked at salient points throughout the text to Tess's beleaguered states of being, is quite clearly a causal factor in her tragedy: the taxing demands upon her energy and resilience have immediate, palpably felt repercussions upon her faculties" (90). Significantly, Tess is asleep before or even during Alec's assault. This goes along with the importance of trance-like and sleeping states in the novel that many critics have emphasised (cf. Humma 69, Silverman 21, Paris 67), which can be read as an effect of her labour, and which re-occur at several important points in the novel (Prince dies because Tess falls asleep, she is raped while sleeping, kills Alec in a trance-like state and sleeps at Stonehenge, only to be caught).

[120] Critics like W. E. Davis and Sutherland (*Heathcliff*) present the counter argument which sees in Tess's staying with Alec and other textual evidence a sign of her acquiescence, of seduction. I do wonder though why one should regard the fact that Tess continues to stay with Alec after her rape as a sign that she was seduced: After all, Tess has been dependent on Alec and the job he offers her from the start and it might take her time to break with their arrangement. It is certainly a consistent pattern for victims to

scene, makes it clear, however, that Tess dislikes Alec's attentions to her from the start: When Alec feeds her the strawberries, for instance, Tess is in "distress" (*Tess* 44), and when Alec forces her to kiss him, she is "in desperation" (*Tess* 60) and tells him that she does not "'want anybody to kiss [her]'" (*Tess* 61), while trying to "undo […] the kiss, as far as such a thing [is] physically possible" (*Tess* 61). She also explicitly tells him that she does not "'like [him] at all'" and "'hate[s] and detest[s] [him]'" (*Tess* 62) and it is said of her that she "never quite g[ets] over her original mistrust of him" (*Tess* 72). Immediately before the rape scene, Tess emphasises once again that she does not like Alec kissing her because she is not in love with him (cf. *Tess* 78, 81). By listening to Tess herself we can thus form a clear picture of her relationship to Alec, which is moreover presented as problematic through her obvious dependence on him and the power imbalance between them (cf. *Tess* 81). Her aversion to him is obvious and, without being presented with the actual sexual scene between them, the encounter can easily (and more coherently) be read as a rape. Alec, after all, has deliberately brought Tess into a situation from which she cannot escape when he takes her into the foggy depths of the Chase at night and has abused his power over her in this fashion. The interpretation is further underlined by the fact that Tess is asleep at the start of or during the entire event, which would even provide a legal basis for calling it a rape (cf. W. A. Davis 224). After the night in the Chase, Tess is even more adamant in emphasising that she is not and has never been in love with Alec (cf. *Tess* 89-91).

Although Tess is his primary victim within the novel, some scenes moreover demonstrate that Alec has time and again abused his superior status towards lower class women in his environment. Car Darch, one of the women who walk home with Tess on the night of her rape, for instance,

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stay with their abuser, sometimes even for years. There are also those critics who present both sides of the argument without reaching a conclusion, like Waldoff, or who argue for an (intentional) ambiguity within the text, that "Hardy seems deliberately to leave open the question of Tess's exact or even identifiable feelings about Alec" (Kramer 52).

has been "till lately a favourite of D'Urberville's" (*Tess* 73) and Alec is well-known, even in other parts of the country, for his "most reckless passions" (*Tess* 199). The combination of femaleness and lower class status is thus most dangerous and prone to lead to victimisation in this particular novel. With Tess, Alec repeatedly demonstrates his superiority by emphasising his economic possibilities and buys presents for her family, for instance (cf. *Tess* 81). It comes as no surprise, given Alec's constant attempts to dominate Tess (he will later express his wish to "master" (*Tess* 394) her), that his rape of Tess can primarily be seen as a "[p]ower rape" in which "[s]exuality becomes an expression of conquest" (Stock 62). "[A] common misperception of such rapists is that their victims enjoy the rape, a belief that confirms a sense of control and power" (Stock 63) and this seems to be the case with Alec, who, like all men within the novel,[121] cannot take a woman's rejection seriously: "'I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late.' 'That's what every woman says'" (*Tess* 89). Moreover, Alec's usual attitude is one of victim-blaming: After all, he makes Tess "'swear that [she] will never tempt [him] – by [her] charms or ways'" (*Tess* 370), complains about her "'tempt[ing]'" (*Tess* 384) him and calls her a "'temptress'" and "'witch of Babylon'" (*Tess* 384). In a discourse so much controlled by patriarchal notions, one in which even a rape victim is stylised as having 'tempted' her rapist, victimisation is the logical consequence of an enormous imbalance in the power structure between the genders. Alec's attitude throughout the whole novel is one of conquest; he continues to haunt Tess and takes advantage of her helplessness and economic dependence whenever he gets the chance. After she can no longer support her family through her work, she is thus forced to give in to Alec's sexual demands: "Her second fall is a matter of economic necessity" (Morris 129), demonstrating that Alec's

[121] Angel, for instance, cannot accept Tess's refusal to marry him: "Her refusal, though unexpected, did not permanently daunt Clare. His experience of women was great enough for him to be aware that the negative often meant nothing more than the preface to the affirmative; and it was little enough for him not to know that in the manner of the present negative there lay a great exception to the dallyings of coyness" (*Tess* 208). This attitude is typical of Angel who, up to Tess's confession, has great trouble in taking her seriously.

exercise of power and consequent victimisation of women is the driving force in the novel.

Alec is not alone in his victimisation of women who are marked by society as his inferior. Just like Alec, Angel is superior to Tess in terms of class; after all, he is a gentleman's son in spite of his lowly occupation as a farmer and "[o]n the farm he can be both democrat and demigod" (Bayley 192). Unlike the milkmaids and normal farmhands, who shift from menial occupation to menial occupation, Angel dreams of "the Colonies, or the tenure of a home-farm" (*Tess* 134). In leaving Tess on her own after the wedding night's confession, Angel actively contributes to her victimisation: He disregards the factual difference between his status as a gentleman farmer and his wife's precarious position. Angel takes advantage of his patriarchal prerogatives in leaving the country, while Tess is debarred from the same amount of mobility. Her movements are restricted to her immediate environment and she can only choose between a limited amount of working opportunities: "First she inquired for the lighter kinds of employment, and, as acceptance in any variety of these grew hopeless, applied next for the less light, till […] she ended with the heavy and coarse pursuits which she liked least […] work of such roughness, indeed, as she would never have deliberately volunteered for" (*Tess* 333, 334). By leaving her behind, Angel contributes to Tess's economic vulnerability and makes it easier for men like Alec and employers like Farmer Groby to victimise her. Tess's situation is exacerbated by the fact that the female community is of so little help to her: Although she is often surrounded by female relatives like her mother or female fellow workers like the dairymaids at Talbothays who later work with her in Flintcomb Ash, they cannot support her, being economically deprived as much as she is. Her mother, for instance, worsens Tess's situation on several occasions by applying to her for money (cf. *Tess* 325) and her and her husband's fecklessness are the reason for Tess's downfall at the end of the novel. The dairymaids, on the other hand, function as both Tess's doubles – she stresses repeatedly that Angel should

have married one of them[122] (cf. *Tess* 166, 219) – and her rivals for Angel's affection. They selflessly give up Angel to Tess – in an interesting scene, they use Tess's body as a proxy and kiss her in order to gain access to the male[123] (cf. *Tess* 237) – and make repeated attempts to help and support her: Izz, for instance, tells Angel that she could not love him more than Tess, thereby convincing him to not take her as his mistress (cf. *Tess* 321), and Marian and Izz together write Angel a letter in which they try to effect his return to Tess (cf. *Tess* 433). But these demonstrations of a female community remain without effect within the novel and cannot change the course of the overall events. This is the case because of the situation of women, especially working-class women, within a patriarchal society: Economically dependent, the most important relation that women stand in is towards men. Tess's victimisation by men, without any respite offered by her female relationships, is thus an effect of the gendered power imbalances within her society and this demonstrates again that she is victimised through the inscriptions upon her of both gender and class.

The characters singled out so far are, however, not the only ones who act as representatives of society's attitudes. On the contrary, Hardy time and again makes use of minor characters whose only function is to comment on the events and thereby provide a quasi-panoramic impression of society's view of the situation. These characters, representatives of societal morals and norms, contribute to Tess's victimisation, too. There is, for instance, the sign-painter whose words, "'THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT'" fill "Tess with accusatory horror" (*Tess* 92). There are,

[122] Sternlieb basically argues for a polyamorous reading of this duplicating structure: "The dairymaids' relationship is probably as close as Hardy could have come to imagining a situation in which one man is *shared* among four women" (357).

[123] At the same time, "[s]uch a scene reveals that Tess's body is a vehicle not only for her lovers […] but for members of her own sex as well" (Ragussis 142); it thereby has clear homoerotic overtones. Tess's erotic power is as seductive to women as it is to men: "Izz spoke with a magnanimous abandonment of herself to the situation; she could not be – no woman with a heart bigger than a hazel-nut could be – antagonistic to Tess in her presence, the influence which she exercised over those of her own sex being of a warmth and strength quite unusual, curiously overpowering the less worthy feminine feelings of spite and rivalry" (*Tess* 351). Her influence on women is clearly marked as 'odd'.

moreover, several characters who comment on Tess's beauty and the likeliness of it leading to no good: "'But Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don't get green malt in flower.' It was a local phrase which had a peculiar meaning, and there was no reply" (*Tess* 28). The rumours around her force Tess into isolation: "The people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more" (*Tess* 98). What these examples demonstrate is that victimisation in *Tess* is not just caused by the individual – although Alec and Angel are certainly most blameworthy – but that the structure of society as a whole victimises women, especially in the context of their sexuality: "The necessity that she [Tess] live in a society that judges her experiences, holding her responsible for her sexual encounter with Alec without any recognition of mitigating circumstances, creates a traumatic situation for her" (B. Mitchell 199). At the same time, Hardy repeatedly emphasises the arbitrariness of the societal laws in whose context Tess functions as a "social warning" (*Tess* 107) and how it is, above all, Tess's indoctrination into them which causes her victimisation: It is this indoctrination, her passive acceptance of moral norms, which also makes her so prone to male identification, as we will see in the following.

The Problem of Male Identification: Tess and Angel

One of the most problematic aspects of Tess's character is certainly her over-identification with men, which often leads her to passive acquiescence into her circumstances. This is especially evident in her relationship to Angel; interestingly enough, it is not the case with her relationship to Alec. Like Helen and Rachel, Tess is in the closet for a man's deed and thus in a victimisation closet, but in contrast to them, her silence is not triggered by an urge to protect him: Tess closets her own victimisation, not Alec's involvement in the matter. She acts out of self-preservation: "[H]er instinct

of self-preservation was stronger than her candour" (*Tess* 226). By not disclosing her story, she attempts to re-invent herself and to flee from the determinant events of the past:

> To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away. Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? she would ask herself. She might prove it false if she could veil bygones. The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone. (*Tess* 115)

What we see in this is that Tess is able to imagine, at least for a time, an alternative reality in which societal laws lose their hold on her and that her silence on the past is an attempt to re-align herself with and re-integrate herself into society. Protecting Alec never enters Tess's mind and, given his reputation and Victorian moral standards, this would not be necessary anyway: "Clearly, Alec does not suffer from this encounter; as a male he experiences no repercussions because of it" (B. Mitchell 199). After all, the sexual double standard typical of Victorian society, which will figure prominently again in Angel's and Tess's wedding night confession, "holds the woman ultimately responsible for the moral rectitude of any sexual act" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 157) and dictates that, while virginity is a woman's most important possession,[124] for men "[t]o have wide sexual experience is to be a 'real man'" (Nemesvari, "The Thing" 90). Alec's deed can thus only bring a female closet into existence; for a man there is simply nothing to closet away.[125]

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[124] "*Tess* was begun in 1888 at a time when the late-Victorian obsession with virginity had turned into a mania" (Lovesey 917); its intense focus on the question of the restorative potential of virginity thus comes as no surprise.

[125] If Alec's deed is indeed rape, which I take it to be, it could, of course, theoretically plunge him into a criminal closet of sorts. But as a wealthy landowner, Alec has no need to hide away his sexual crimes: "Domestic servants had always faced enormous obstacles to bringing and winning a prosecution for rape against their masters: their poverty, their employers' higher social position and the power they wielded over them, their relative lack of community and even family support close at hand all militated against

Tess's male identification becomes evident in her relationship to Angel and especially after she has confessed her past to him and has been rejected by him as a consequence. Even before they are married, Tess has internalised the principle of coverture, which makes her give up her own identity to take on her husband's: "[H]er natural quickness, and her admiration for him, ha[d] led her to pick up his vocabulary, his accent, and fragments of his knowledge, to a surprising extent" (*Tess* 209). We never hear of a similar influence by Tess on Angel; as the female part of the relationship it is her role to adapt to him. Even when it comes to Angel's condemnation of her, Tess, although having before entertained ideas of obtaining his forgiveness for the deed, accepts his judgement thoroughly and does not even attempt to change his mind: "Tess's reluctant agreement with the double standard makes her initially condone Angel's condemnation of her. She endorses the ideology of male mastery that allows Angel more sexual freedom than she has" (Shumaker 451). She takes on his view of her as a 'fallen' woman and, except for her last, accusatory letter, never rebels against this construction of her, while, at the same time, forgiving him his sexual experience which is deliberately placed in parallel to hers (cf. *Tess* 272). Although the narrator emphasises that it would have been in Tess's power to change Angel's mind and thereby prevent the catastrophic events that follow, her identification with Angel is too strong to take on a stance opposite to his own: "In her submission – which perhaps was a symptom of that acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole D'Urberville family – the many effective chords which she could have stirred by an appeal were left untouched" (*Tess* 301). Tess's self-sacrificial attitude goes even far enough to consider suicide in order to 'free' Angel from her: "'[I]t was thought of entirely on your account – to set you free without the scandal of the divorce that I thought you would have to get'" (*Tess* 285). It is symptomatic of her male over-identification that she reconsiders putting an end to herself for the same

their being able either to defend themselves against attack or to win justice in the courts" (Wiener 101).

reason: "'But I could not – do the last thing! I was afraid that it might cause a scandal to your name'" (*Tess* 284).

It is exactly this fear of smudging Angel's reputation that, after the confession, pushes Tess into a further closet: This time, it is her past experience with Alec as well as her marriage to Angel which have to be hidden away. These secrets being found out could represent a blow to Angel's name, which is why Tess decides against presenting herself as his wife. This manifests itself in her refusal to wear her wedding ring (cf. *Tess* 335) and to be called by her wedded name (cf. *Tess* 336):[126] "'I don't wish people to suspect who I am by marriage, or that I am married at all […] I don't wish to bring his name down to the dirt'" (*Tess* 336). "The secret name Tess kept hidden during the Talbothays idyll, in order to protect herself, changes to the secret name she now keeps hidden in order to protect her husband" (Ragussis 151). At the same time, the refusal to speak of Angel is also a way for Tess to protect him from accusations of misbehaviour towards herself: "[S]he did not tell them [her parents] of the sorriness of her situation: it might have brought reproach upon him" (*Tess* 337). Although she has been seriously mistreated by Angel, who has exposed her to the dangers of both hard work and sexual harassment, she still puts his well-being above her own, demonstrating the extremes of male identification. Even vis-à-vis Alec, she only confesses to being married, but leaves her husband's name unsaid: "'It is a secret here [her marriage], or at any rate but dimly known. So will you, *please* will you, keep from questioning me?'" (*Tess* 376). The final proof of the extent of Tess's identification with Angel comes, however, in her murder of Alec: After all, this deed is triggered by her meeting Angel again, who has before stated that he cannot live with her as long as Alec is alive (cf. *Tess* 289). The murder is hence at least partly committed for Angel's sake, for "Tess kills Alec to annihilate his ownership of

[126] The question of names and naming runs through the novel, of course: Tess's 'real' name of D'Urberville brings about the initial catastrophe of the rape; her hiding Alec's name leads to her marriage to Angel, whose name is then closeted away. In the final pages of the novel, Tess takes on her family name of D'Urberville; this re-appropriation is, however, ironically broken by her becoming Alec's mistress.

her body and to yield it to Angel Clare" (J. Parker 49). Although Tess also murders Alec to free herself of him and of the memories of a traumatic past, she still attributes an even share of responsibility to Angel: "'I owed it to 'ee, and to myself, Angel'" (*Tess* 458). Male identification thus proves not only catastrophic throughout Tess's life, but, in the end, is fatal to her: "Tess's murder of Alec is also her own suicide, since she knows she cannot escape the law" (Shumaker 455). Tess is unable to distance herself from the norms of a society which awards men with a superior status and which teaches women to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their male fellow beings. As in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *The Moonstone*, male identification is shown once again to be an important component in the construction of female victimisation; this time with even more tragic consequences: Male identification leads to the erasure of the female.

Gaps, Silences, Secrecy: Keeping the Closet

As mentioned before, Tess's closet experience is made up of two stages: The first pertains to her closeting the sexual experience of the Chase, the second to her later closeting of her marriage to Angel in order to avoid his being tainted by association. The events of the Chase are, of course, the main closet that the novel constructs and the scene has led to extensive discussion among critics. After all, what happens in the Chase is not simply closeted away from some of the novel's characters, but most rigorously from the reader herself: "[A] reader must become resigned to a fundamental uncertainty about the decisive event in Tess's life" (Waldoff 140). The novel is notorious for its gaps and ambiguities which leave the reader in the dark as to the most relevant occurrences; gaps that systematically re-occur so that the gap in the rape scene is repeated in two closeted confession scenes.[127] The rape scene in the Chase takes place in between chapters and

[127] For the gapping of the sexual encounter between Tess and Alec, it does, in the logic of the nineteenth century novel, not even matter whether the scene presents a seduction or a rape, for both are, due to their very focus on sexuality, unpresentable and hence non-narratable.

'phases'[128], so that it is primarily the headings of these phases – "The Maiden" (*Tess* 1) and "Maiden no More" (*Tess* 85) – that draw attention to the extensive veil of silence that is actually drawn over the events. The scene that Hardy sets up – Alec returns to the sleeping Tess in the obscurity of fog and darkness in the forest – is interrupted by a narratorial comment, which diverts the attention away from the characters' actions:

> The obscurity was now so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. Everything else was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. She was sleeping soundly. Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primaeval yews and oaks of the Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and around them the hopping rabbits and hares. But where was Tess's guardian angel? where was Providence? (*Tess* 83)

Tess's sleeping is the last occurrence which is actually mentioned; after that, the narrative eye turns away, first by highlighting the natural surroundings and then by indulging in a lengthy narrative comment (here very much shortened) which attempts to establish who is to blame for the wrong done to Tess. We next see Tess weeks or months later, when she leaves Trantridge for her hometown again. Hardy reapplies the same structure in Tess's confession scene to Angel, thereby reinforcing the basic ambiguity of this novel: Here again, the confession falls in between chapters and phases, between "The Consequence" (*Tess* 181) and "The Woman Pays" (*Tess* 269), and we are not informed about what it is that Tess tells Angel. The third instance of confession takes place vis-à-vis her mother, and even though this is a minor event and does not necessitate a new chapter and phase, her

[128] "In replacing the customary literary demarcation, 'Book', with 'Phase' […] Hardy places a rhythmic, periodic accent upon [Tess's] story" (R. Morgan 99), so that, as has often been noted, "Tess's story is also placed in a history of repeated events, as part of a cycle" (Shires, "Radical Aesthetic" 150).

actual words and thus the information for the reader as to the events are elided again: "Her mother eyed her narrowly. 'Come, you have not told me all,' she said. Then Tess told. 'And yet th'st not got him to marry 'ee!' reiterated her mother" (*Tess* 94). How different the effect of an actual retelling of events would have been can be seen when we compare the novel version with the one published in the *Graphic*. After "three successive rejections of the half-completed *Tess*" (Jacobus 319), Hardy agreed to revisions for the publication in the *Graphic*; he "removed the section of Tess's rape as well as the midnight baptism of her child" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 148). In this version, where instead of being raped by Alec, Tess has been duped into a fake marriage, she tells her mother of her experiences with Alec:

> Then Tess told. 'He made love to me, as you said he would do; and he asked me to marry him, also just as you declared he would. I never have liked him; but at last I agreed, knowing you'd be angry if I didn't. He said it must be private, even from you, on account of his mother; and by special license; and foolish I agreed to that likewise, to get rid of his pestering. I drove with him to Melchester, and there in a private room I went through the form of marriage with him as before a registrar. A few weeks after, I found out that it was not the registrar's house we had gone to, as I had supposed, but the house of a friend of his, who had played the part of the registrar. I then came away from Trantridge instantly, though he wished me to stay; and here I am.' (qtd. in Bernstein, "Confessing" 173)

There is no ambiguity here, no uncertainty that demands interpretation, and we can see how through the very act of not-telling, the actual novel takes on a further dimension, how its refusal to say 'all there is to say' produces ever new possible secrets. It is the gaps in *Tess* that have kept critical discussion alive for more than a century.

The meaning of the gaps has been discussed time and again by critics: While some see them as a deliberate attempt on Hardy's part to stress fundamental ambiguity (cf. Shires, "Radical Aesthetic" 147, Kincaid "Hardy's Absences" 202), others regard them as a means to escape Victorian censorship (cf. Williams 300). They have also been seen as a strategy to "preserve Tess' purity" (Rooney 97), for "as a 'subject' who doesn't speak, her silence guarantees her right to our sympathy" (Rooney 97), so that the gaps are Hardy's way of "protect[ing] his heroine by speaking for her" (Hedgecock 181), thereby at the same time taking away her subjectivity (cf. Higonnet, "Fictions" 213) and marking female desire as inexpressible. But the gap is also a typical marker of the experience of sexual violence in literature, as "rape in many ways resists representation" (Sielke 4):

> Over and over […] rape exists as an absence or gap that is both product and source of textual anxiety, contradiction, or censorship. The simultaneous presence and disappearance of rape as constantly deferred origin of both plot and social relations is repeated so often as to suggest a basic conceptual principle in the articulation of both social and artistic representations. (Higgins and Silver 3)

As such, *Tess* joins the ranks of an extensive literary tradition in its gapping of the rape scene. It has, however, also repeatedly been pointed out that by not representing the scene of sexual violence, "the structure [of the novel] manifests the same fragmentation and silence as the victim" (B. Mitchell 194), that form and content come to mirror each other: "The gap between Alec's discovery of the sleeping Tess and the beginning of the second phase symbolically renders the tearing of flesh that it literally does not describe" (Higonnet, "Fictions" 214). In this way, a closet on the novel's plot level is aligned with a closet on the level of the novel's narrative struc-

ture: The narrative gap, the secrecy on the structural level, comes to represent a sort of open secret – the reader knows *something* has been hidden away, but cannot exactly determine what.

While she is in her hometown of Marlott, one can indeed hardly speak of Tess's being in the closet. On the contrary, the village community is informed by her talkative parents about every step that leads Tess to Trantridge and on her return, rumours about Tess focus on her relationship to Alec, even though her pregnancy has not yet made the nature of this relationship obvious:

> For the fact that it was this said thirty-first cousin, Mr D'Urberville, who had fallen in love with her, a gentleman not altogether local, whose reputation as a reckless gallant and heart-breaker was beginning to spread beyond the immediate boundaries of Trantridge, lent Tess's supposed position, by its fearsomeness, a far higher fascination than it would have exercised if unhazardous. (*Tess* 96)

Rumours thus exist within the community, but it is Tess's child, Sorrow, who finally substantiates them and makes the secret visible; for the reader, too, it is a literal sign of what happened in the ellipsis of the Chase. The absent hymen is, of course, invisible, and, as we have seen before, Tess can even imagine it re-growing, but Tess's child cannot escape notice. While she hides herself away during her pregnancy, she returns to the community when the baby is born; the one scene in which the reader gets to see her with her child emphasises the observation and the concomitant comments by the rest of the village folk: "'She's fond of that there child, though she mid pretend not to be, and say she wishes the baby and her too were in the churchyard'" (*Tess* 104). But Sorrow "conveniently dies as illegitimate children tended to do at all levels of Victorian fiction" (Hughes 188) and with this literal marker of the closet, the community's half-hearted disapproval disappears: "She [Tess] had held so aloof of late that her trouble, never generally known, was nearly forgotten in Marlott" (*Tess* 115). When leaving

Marlott behind, though, Tess decides to take on a new identity, a closeted identity, and it is the Talbothays episode that most explicitly shows Tess in the clutches of the closet.

From the beginning of her stay in Talbothays Tess attempts to get rid of all clues to her former identity. She deliberately chooses a new location so as to hide away her old life, although Talbothays is "not quite so far off as could have been wished" (*Tess* 116). While she still introduces herself with her own name – later, as we have seen, she will hide it – she tries to sever herself from her past by denying the D'Urberville connection, for instance (cf. *Tess* 126). In general, the D'Urberville name is set in parallel to the sexual closet: Her aristocratic lineage has brought about the necessity of keeping a secret in the first place and later, when pressed by Angel to divulge her reasons for not marrying him, Tess, unable to speak the truth about her sexual encounter, mentions her aristocratic background instead (cf. *Tess* 225). By talking of her aristocratic lineage instead of her sexual past, Tess presents the first part of her story but not the victimisation in which it ends, which remains the unspeakable truth.[129] Tess has no trouble keeping her secret before she falls in love with Angel; it is only with his proposal of marriage that the closet becomes unbearable, for it forces Tess to decide whether to 'out' herself or not. Tess feels a responsibility towards Angel which shows that for her (as for Victorian society) her closet is a crucial part of her personality: Before he is to marry her, he must know her sexual story. Even though he will later reject her for it, it is exactly Tess's closet that makes her interesting in Angel's eyes: The narrator stresses repeatedly how her experience has changed Tess, for "[s]ymbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into

[129] The connection is brought up again in the confession scene, in which Angel blames Tess's 'fall' on her D'Urberville heritage: "'I cannot help associating your decline as a family with this other fact – of your want of firmness. Decrepit families postulate decrepit wills, decrepit conduct. [...] Here was I thinking of a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the exhausted seedling of an effete aristocracy!'" (*Tess* 277) There is, moreover, a parallel between the 'secret' of the Durbeyfields' ancestry which is revealed to Tess's father in the beginning and the secret of Tess's experience with Alec: Both, when revealed, trigger catastrophic events.

her voice" (*Tess* 115). It is exactly this 'depth' that Angel finds "strange[,] […] impressive, interesting, pathetic" (*Tess* 147). But Tess is "trying to lead a repressed life" (*Tess* 148), which is interrupted by Angel's love-making. At first, Tess is of the opinion that she "c[an] never conscientiously allow any man to marry her now, and […] ha[s] religiously determined that she never w[ill] be tempted to do so" (*Tess* 163). Her constant exposure to Angel and the simultaneous rivalry between her and the other enamoured milkmaids, however, gradually lead her to give up her principles: "'I shall give way – I shall say yes – I shall let myself marry him – I cannot help it!' she jealously panted, with her hot face to the pillow that night, on hearing one of the other girls sigh his name in her sleep. 'I can't bear to let anybody have him but me!'" (*Tess* 213). Her initial refusal is seen as strange by the other milkmaids and Angel and these scenes function as clues to her closet, which are, however, not picked up: "'I don't think marrying is in his mind at all; but if he were even to ask me I should refuse him, as I should refuse any man.' 'Oh! would you? Why?' said wondering Retty. 'It cannot be!'" (*Tess* 173). The seeming contradiction between Tess's desire for Angel and her refusal of him leads to the need for secrecy and silence:

> 'Oh, Mr Clare – I cannot be your wife – I cannot be! […] I *cannot* marry you!' 'Tess,' he said, holding her at arm's length, 'you are engaged to marry some one else!' 'No, no!' 'Then why do you refuse me?' 'I don't want to marry. I have not thought o' doing it. I cannot. I only want to love you.' 'But why?' Driven to subterfuge, she stammered – 'Your father is a parson, and your mother wouldn't like you to marry such as me. She will want you to marry a lady.' (*Tess* 204)

These scenes reoccur within the novel and show how Tess's attempts to keep her closet necessitate a turn towards secrecy and subterfuge. Her refusal to tell also means that Angel does not take her rejection of him seriously and their love-making is presented as a struggle: "The struggle was

so fearful; her own heart was so strongly on the side of his […] that she tried to fortify her resolution by every means in her power" (*Tess* 209) – but a short time later, she knows "that she must break down" (*Tess* 217). The effect of this breaking down is, however, not a disclosure of the secret, but a temporary decision to keep the closet.

While thus being in the closet, Tess is repeatedly threatened by the possibility of being outed by someone else. This shows the instability with which the keeper of the closet is constantly confronted, the vulnerability with which she or he is affected: Tess never knows who is informed about her past. Even Angel represents a source of danger at the start, when Tess becomes aware of the fact that he is the young man who did not dance with her at the beginning of the novel: "The flood of memories brought back by this revival of an incident anterior to her troubles produced a momentary dismay lest, recognizing her also, he should by some means discover her story" (*Tess* 131). At a later date in her courtship with Angel, she is actually recognised by a random passer-by at an Inn, demonstrating that it is only the seclusion of Talbothays which keeps Tess's closet safe:

> Two men came out and passed by her among the rest. One of them had stared her up and down in surprise, and she fancied he was a Trantridge man, though that village lay so many miles off that Trantridge folk were rarities here. 'A comely maid that,' said the other. 'True, comely enough. But unless I make a great mistake –' And he negatived the remainder of the remark forthwith. (*Tess* 247, 248)[130]

Tess's immediate reaction to the event is a desire to hide herself, to "'go away, a very long distance, hundreds of miles from these parts'" (*Tess* 249)

[130] The passer-by who recognises Tess will later become her employer, Farmer Groby, at Flintcomb Ash. This demonstrates again the fundamental instability of Tess's closet which is never 'safe' and always potentially known.

and a wish to out herself to Angel, which is, however, unsuccessful. Similarly, Tess is repeatedly affected by stories and hearsays told at the dairy which are in parallel to her own: The story of a young man who has "'ravag[ed] [a young girl's] trustful innocence'" (*Tess* 159), for instance, makes Tess "pale-faced" (*Tess* 159) and she is "wretched […] at the perception that to her companions the dairyman's story had been rather a humorous narration than otherwise; […] no one knew how cruelly it touched the tender place in her experience" (*Tess* 160). The same story is told again at a later point in the novel when Tess is deciding whether to inform Angel about her past or not and she is again depressed at the parallels: "This question of a woman telling her story – the heaviest of crosses to herself – seemed but amusement to others. It was as if people should laugh at martyrdom" (*Tess* 215).[131] The closet cannot be simply hidden away, and Tess is never allowed to forget about her past: Her shame and trauma keep resurfacing in these instances, so that what hurts and threatens her is not only what others know about her, but what she knows to be true about her own past. She is incapable of closeting her own knowledge from herself. In the logic of the novel, the threat thus comes primarily from within: While she could theoretically be outed from the outside, the real struggle that the novel presents is one within herself, and the power to tell or not to tell is finally hers.

Observing Tess: The Closet and the Male Gaze

Much critical attention has been paid to the function of the male gaze in *Tess*, a gaze that has been seen to originate not only from the male characters but from the (male) narrator himself. Time and again, it has been pointed out that Tess is primarily the object of "a colonizing male gaze" (Silverman 7), which emerges from both Alec and Angel, but also "[f]rom

[131] Tess is right: In this novel, being female and belonging to the rural working-class is presented as martyrdom. In contrast to the classic Christian martyr's public performance of martyrdom, though, Tess has to keep her suffering secret, a fact which victimises her even further.

the passing strangers at the beginning of the novel to the sixteen patient policemen who wait for her to awake at Stonehenge at its end" (Wright 109). Alec's desire for Tess is triggered by seeing her, by her external beauty which is presented as irresistible to the male within the novel, and "her fate [is] decided […] on whether and how she is seen" (Freeman 315) both at the beginning of the novel ("she was doomed to be seen and marked and coveted that day by the wrong man" (*Tess* 46)) and when she unveils herself close to the novel's end only to be discovered by Alec and subjected to his harassment again: "[T]he moment that she moved again he recognized her. The effect upon her old lover was electric" (*Tess* 364). Angel's love for Tess starts with his "observ[ing] her" (*Tess* 141) to which she reacts "with the constraint of a domestic animal that perceives itself to be watched" (*Tess* 141). The effect of this male gaze on Tess is clear: She is "rendered passive by being viewed more or less consistently through an insistently male gaze which fixes on the spectacle of the female body" (Pykett, "Ruinous" 158) and "[s]uch looking is always erotic, and always implies power and control of the viewing subject over the viewed object" (J. Mitchell 176).[132] This is even more so the case as this male gaze extends further than simply to the novel's characters: "Alec d'Urberville's fascinated gaze meets its match in the narrator's own obsessive eye" (Nunokawa, "Tourism" 72) and "[t]he narrator's erotic fantasies of penetration and engulfment enact a pursuit, violation and persecution of Tess in parallel with those she suffers at the hands of her two lovers" (Boumelha, *Women* 120),

[132] There are frequent scenes of voyeuristic watching within the novel, some of them without a male gaze present. Tess's murder of Alec, for instance, is presented through the eyes of the voyeuristic landlady, who eavesdrops and "look[s] through the keyhole" (*Tess* 453). The scene, however, is secreted away from her and the reader's gaze: The landlady attempts to spy into a room that she and "the reader never enter" (Page, *Thomas* 18) and the only indication to the events taking place in it is the blood stain that becomes visible on the ceiling. Similarly, Tess and Angel are observed when they closet themselves away in the deserted mansion in the New Forest: They are seen by the "old caretaker" (*Tess* 465) when "[a] stream of morning light through the shutter-chink f[alls] upon the faces of the pair, wrapped in profound slumber" (*Tess* 465, 466).

so that he almost comes to represent a "third suitor" (Shires, "Radical Aesthetic" 155). Consequently, "Hardy's narrative technique is distinctly masculine" (Brady 101).

Men look at Tess in the novel mainly out of sexual desire, but also sometimes because they have knowledge of her secret. The danger of male sexual desire for Tess becomes apparent in her frequent attempts to escape the male gaze, in "her repeated impulse to disappear, to remain unseen" (Freeman 318). The male gaze fixated on her causes Tess trouble time and again, first in the form of Alec's and Angel's watching of her mentioned above, but also in the observation by random passers-by. The most symptomatic scene is one in which Tess cuts off her eyebrows after having been harassed by Farmer Groby and several other men ("rude words were addressed to her more than once" (*Tess* 328)), thus disfiguring herself to avoid being seen:

> [S]everal young men were troublesomely complimentary to her good looks. […] [S]he was bound to take care of herself […] and keep off lovers. To this end Tess resolved to run no further risks from her appearance. […] [S]he mercilessly nipped her eyebrows off, and thus insured against aggressive admiration she went on her uneven way. (*Tess* 332)

Through this act, Tess "believes she has transformed herself beyond a gendered body, and thus beyond gender oppression" (Law 262); later events, however, will prove her wrong. For Tess, both the body and the male gaze remain inescapable. The sexual desire expressed by the male gaze goes along with a suspicion of sexual promiscuity or availability which the comments of the passer-by characters often voice, both before Tess's actual encounter with Alec ("Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don't get green malt in flower" (*Tess* 28)) and afterwards, when she is recognised by people due to her sexual past. Interestingly enough, however, it is Angel of all people who never harbours the suspicion of a sexual secret, although he

often muses on Tess's reasons for rejecting him. His idealising (and "narcissistic" (Bronfen 78)) tendencies, which have been commented on by a number of critics, make it impossible for him to suspect her of possessing a real secret: "He regularly renders her a type in his mind" (Blake 697) so that he is, in fact, "in love with an image of his own making" (Waldoff 143) and "can scarcely conceive of a Tess brought into being without his creation" (R. Morgan 103). There is no space for sexual misdemeanour in this vision of his; for him she is "'a genuine daughter of Nature'" (*Tess* 141), pure, chaste, perfect. But this presumption of innocence proves to be just as oppressive as the suspicions of guilt which rest on Tess, for after all Angel is simply incapable of imagining a woman having a sexual secret or being the object of sexual and economic exploitation. While the voyeurism so typical of men confronted with a female closet does not extend to him, his attitude is equally problematic: He cannot imagine that a woman could have any kind of interiority that is not available to him or that does not emerge from his own being, that she has private thoughts and experiences and a sexuality independent of him.

A Failed Outing: Tess's (Attempted) Confessions

For Angel, then, the idea of Tess being in a closet is unthinkable. This attitude of his actively stands in the way of Tess's confession[133] to him, for he frequently prevents her attempts to out herself to him. He is not alone in this; it rather seems that fate itself conspires against Tess: "Prior to the wedding night, Tess's attempts to confess her sexual history to Angel are either interrupted by circumstances, truncated by Angel's insertion of his fairy-tale version of her past, or abandoned by her unsteady resolve to tell

[133] By speaking of a 'confession', I adopt the novel's terminology in spite of some of the term's implications (for instance, that there is something to confess in the first place, that there is an implicit guilt). Compare the *OED*'s definition of the term: "The disclosing of something the knowledge of which by others is considered humiliating or prejudicial to the person confessing; a making known or acknowledging of one's fault, wrong, crime, weakness, etc." ("Confession").

a story that her mother advises Tess not to disclose" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 155). For example, she confesses her D'Urberville ancestry instead of the actual secret: "She had not told. At the last moment her courage had failed her, she feared his blame for not telling him sooner; and her instinct of self-preservation was stronger than her candour" (*Tess* 226). The most memorable instance of coincidence standing in her way is the scene in which her confessional letter to Angel is by accident slipped underneath the carpet:[134] "With a feeling of faintness she withdrew the letter. There it was – sealed up, just as it had left her hands. The mountain had not yet been removed" (*Tess* 251). But it is Angel himself who most decisively prevents the confession: "One reason it is so hard for women to tell their story may be that men won't listen; certainly this is Tess's experience" (Higonnet, "Woman's Story" 16). On the one hand, this is the case because of his idealisation of Tess; he is simply incapable of seeing her as an entity separate from his own construction of her. Accordingly, he treats her confessional impulses in a condescending fashion:

> 'I will tell you my experiences – all about myself – all!' 'Your experiences, dear; yes, certainly; any number.' He expressed assent in loving satire, looking into her face. 'My Tess has, no doubt, almost as many experiences as that wild convolvulus out there on the garden hedge, that opened itself this morning for the first time.' (*Tess* 211, 212)[135]

[134] At the same time, the novel is full of omens and portents that act as clues to Tess's closet, which are, however, not picked up by Angel: "[N]ature seems to conspire to reveal her secret of the encounter in the Chase" (L. Parker 276). The "crowing of a cock" (*Tess* 256) on Tess's wedding day is read by the congregation as an ominous sign, but this is not understood by Angel, and the sunlight "m[akes] a spot like a paint-mark set upon [Tess's skirt]" (*Tess* 259) shortly thereafter.

[135] There is a similar scene in which Angel's satirising attitude breaks Tess's resolve to confess to him: "'But my history. I want you to know it – you must let me tell you – you will not like me so well!' 'Tell it if you wish to, dearest. This precious history then. Yes, I was born at so and so, Anno Domini –'" (*Tess* 224).

In Angel's eyes, it is impossible that there could be anything to confess in Tess; his conviction that he knows her completely makes it hard for Tess to oppose his image of her with a new one. But Angel's stifling of Tess's confessions can be seen in a different light, too: It is also done to protect his own secret of a past sexual encounter about which he informs Tess after their wedding.[136] Accordingly, he prevents Tess's last attempt at confession before their marriage: "'But it would be better for me to do it now, I think, so that you could not say –' 'Well, you shall tell me anything – say, as soon as we are settled in our lodging; not now. I, too, will tell you my faults then'" (*Tess* 252). Her confession would create the necessity for him to confess and, like Tess, he does not want to do so before having 'secured' her as his wife; we can see the same mechanism at work in Tess's reaction to his confession: "'Oh, Angel – I am almost glad – because now *you* can forgive *me*! […] I have a confession, too'" (*Tess* 268). A confession triggers a confession; in their case, however, the difficulty consists of their embeddedness in cultural norms and constructs which, through the double standard, make similar situations appear in a different light.

Interestingly, in *Tess*, as in all of Hardy's novels, "the clear standards of truth-telling and transgression which always emerge in Victorian novels are constantly revealed to be inadequate" (Kucich 206). In fact, the novel almost seems to be a warning against disclosure if we look at the catastrophic impacts of the confession, and the outing itself is constructed as highly problematic: "Tess's confession begins to look like a fatal mistake" (Ragussis 155). Contrary to Victorian cultural norms and beliefs, the novel appears to advertise staying silent by revealing "honesty's inadequacy as an ethical ideal" when "adherence to Victorian codes of honesty leads only to moral confusion" (Kucich 201). The narrator, giving various examples of how Tess could have won Angel back, concurs with Joan Durbeyfield's advice:

[136] It could also be argued that Angel simply does not *want* to know; the text, however, rather presents him as ignorant and naïve.

> Tess, I say between ourselves, quite private but very strong, that on no account do you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him. I did not tell everything to your Father, he being so proud on account of his Respectability, which, perhaps, your Intended is the same. Many a woman – some of the Highest in the Land – have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a Fool, especially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all. (*Tess* 229)

Fate, too, along with Tess's human advisors, seems to tell her to remain silent, as we can see, for instance, in the disappearance of the confessional letter. But the confessional impulse, which Foucault has shown to be so typical of the nineteenth century (and the centuries that follow it), is strong in Tess:

> We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses – or is forced to confess. […] Western man has become a confessing animal. (Foucault, *History* 59)

For Tess, absolution can come only through confession; her innermost desire is not to hide her past away, thereby escaping its consequences, but to

confess it. She follows the 'internal imperative' to confess that Foucault postulates, becoming a paradigmatic example of the 'confessing animal'.

Tess's confession to Angel is, in contrast to Helen's in *The Tenant* and Rachel's in *The Moonstone*, a failed outing, for it does not result in the understanding and forgiveness that the confessor expects of the confessed-to: "*Tess* argues against the convention that confessions which reinscribe the gender and class hierarchies lead to the 'fallen' woman's salvation" (Shumaker 445). Tess's confession has the opposite effect; instead of bringing her and Angel closer together, it creates an unbridgeable gulf between them. This is the case because her revelation changes her identity in his eyes: "'Forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person; now you are another. […] [T]he woman I have been loving is not you.' 'But who?' 'Another woman in your shape'" (*Tess* 272, 273). Again, his idealisation of her is catastrophic, for he "proceeds to replace his former construction of an innocent maid with a new one, the corrupted woman, the deceiver, and he can write a new script, safe in the narrative formula he has created" (Kincaid, "Absence, Death" 25). But his reaction is also typical of outings in which the confessed-to rejects the information newly provided to her/him; the perception of a change in the identity of the confessor and a subsequent refusal to accept this 'new' person is a common reaction to any outing. This is all the more interesting as Angel, in his condemnation of Tess, is enacting the sexual double standard of his society, when, in fact, his former confession of a past sexual encounter is equivalent to hers. But "Angel's confession acts as purgative, Tess's as pollution" (Bernstein, "Confessing" 170). Tess confesses because she thinks it is safe to do so after Angel has revealed his secret, but what she does not understand is that while her sexual encounter puts her into a closet, this is not the case for him as a man: "Tess' resolve to tell her story is predicated on her (mis)perception that a woman's story may be the same as a man's" (Rooney 103). This, more than anything else, demonstrates that Tess is in a *female* closet: The victimisation she experiences is a female one and, accordingly, her closet cannot be mirrored in a man's. "[T]he significance and consequences

of confession are gendered, a distinction further accentuated by the double confession scene within the novel" (Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects* 154); in the same way, the novel's closet is the result of a gendered imbalance.

Although the closet is thus a specifically female closet, it still shows the usual propensity of closets to attach themselves to other people, to create a closeted identity for another (cf. Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 80). In typical closet-fashion, it comes to disturb Angel's sexual identity as well: While Tess initially "appears to Angel as unsexed, sexless, the sort of non-physical spiritualised essence he […] wants" (Tanner 192) in order to "neutralise the physical response she provokes" (Nemesvari, "The Thing" 97), the confession confronts Angel with her physicality and with his own sexual desires and this is partly the cause of his rejection of her which is also a rejection of his own body. Moreover, Tess's closet shows contagiousness in attaching itself to Angel: He is unable to tell his parents why there is a misunderstanding between him and his newly-wed wife. "[H]e was returning to Emminster to disclose his plan to his parents, and to make the best explanation he could make of arriving without Tess, short of revealing what had actually separated them" (*Tess* 310). Pressed by his parents, he even lies to them outright in order to protect both her and his own reputation: "'Angel – is she a young woman whose history will bear investigation?' […] 'She is spotless!' he replied; and felt that if it had sent him to eternal hell there and then he would have told that lie" (*Tess* 314). In the same way that Tess's closet has sent her wandering around England/Wessex, Angel's knowledge of her secret drives him to leave his familiar surroundings and instead go to Brazil. But these are not the most dramatic consequences effected by the closet. Angel's reaction shows the catastrophic impact of an outing that is not successful: It can only be accommodated by an abrupt separation between the couple. The outcome of the outing is destructive in the extreme, for both the confessor and the confessed-to, for from the outing onwards events cannot be stopped, when before there was at least a possibility of things going differently: Tess had to actively decide whether to speak or to remain silent. The direct consequence of Tess's confession and

the couple's subsequent separation is, however, Tess's murder of Alec and her execution; from her disclosure onwards, the events in the novel are presented as inexorable. This shows, once again, the novel's subdued argument for non-disclosure. Tess and Angel's attempts to closet themselves away, to disappear from society's eyes, in the deserted mansion in the New Forest fail, for even here they are subjected to observation, and in the end, the only thing that remains for Tess is to literally disappear: The unmarked grave of other novels is here the black flag, all that remains of her, and a mere symbol of her death. Her victimisation is now complete, for she is silenced forever: "Tess […] *has to* be hanged: not because she is guilty, but because her disturbing voice […] has to be hushed for ever" (Ramel 75). Hardy has thus created a heroine who disrupts her own closet, comes out of it, only to be caught again in the structures of female victimisation which created it in the first place.

The Lesbian Closet

Introductory Remarks

The homosexual closet is, of course, the constellation with which most people are familiar and from which this study takes its cue. However, while Sedgwick in her ground-breaking work on this homosexual closet only took into account the male homosexual one and, further, followed Michel Foucault in claiming that the late nineteenth century marked the start of its existence (cf. *Epistemology* 73), this thesis, on the contrary, proposes that there is also a female homosexual closet and that its beginnings lie in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. We have already seen an example of a closet formation in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* from 1801; with the Anne Lister Diaries we find proof of an explicitly lesbian closet in the early nineteenth century. There is always an extensive debate about whether words like 'lesbian' can be applied to the eighteenth and nineteenth century – where the term itself was still 'missing' – or whether there is a specificity of the terminology which links it to the twentieth century (cf. Halberstam 51). However, this thesis believes that the basic concept of 'lesbianism' is very clear indeed and that a woman like Anne Lister, even without having a concrete term for her desires herself, can still be appropriately described as a lesbian:[137] Lesbians are women "whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to [their] own sex" (Castle, *Apparitional* 15). It is also unproductive to see the term as an anachronism as some studies have proposed, for words are used to evoke a general, understandable concept all the time without paying attention to the finer shades of distinction: "[W]ords for heterosexual concepts such as 'marriage' and 'wife' have changed their meanings radically over the centuries, but nobody is accused

[137] In a similar vein, Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness* can be described as a lesbian despite the fact that she sees herself, in the terminology of her day, as an 'invert'. Inversion also implies a certain degree of masculine identification, but her desires can still reasonably be seen as lesbian desires.

of anachronism when they refer to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century 'marriages' and 'wives'" (Donoghue, *Passions* 7). Why should the term 'lesbianism' be relegated to different standards?

Other desires, such as a wish for masculinity, can, of course, go along with this desire and this is frequently the case in the nineteenth century. The concept of 'female masculinity' which Halberstam has proposed as fruitful for reading women's masculine identification[138] coincides with lesbianism at some points in this era, in which women use the performative potential inherent in gender roles to put themselves in a masculine position.[139] A masculine identification is certainly one possibility – and a very prominent one – of understanding and 'explaining' lesbian desire in the nineteenth and sometimes still in the twentieth century. Late nineteenth-century's inversion theory does exactly that by "conflat[ing] sex role behavior (in this case, acting in ways that have been termed masculine), gender identity (seeing oneself as male), and sexual object choice (preferring a love relationship with another woman)" (Faderman, *Odd* 45). It comes as no surprise, then, that Stephen Gordon in *The Well* follows these theories and uses them to explain her 'aberrant' desires to herself. But even long before inversion theory's beginnings, the Anne Lister Diaries show proof of a similar constellation:[140] "[M]asculinity was perhaps one form of role which

[138] I am using the term 'masculine identification' for the constellation in which women identify as male in terms of their gender identity to differentiate it from the 'male identification' which figured so prominently in the section on women's victimisation: Women with a male identification do not take on a masculinised identity, but identify with male interests and act according to them.

[139] This is, of course, not to mean that *all* women with a masculine identification are lesbians. Female masculinity is, as Halberstam sees it, certainly an identity formation of its own (cf. 46); however, there is tendency for it to overlap with lesbianism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For Halberstam "the masculine woman [is] a historical fixture, a character who has challenged gender systems for at least two centuries" (45).

[140] Anne Lister could live out her masculine identification while participating in society – she still profited from a one-sex model which was just about to be superseded by the strict gender division of the two-sex model (cf. Laqueur 6). While Radclyffe Hall could similarly position herself as a masculine identified 'invert', on the level of literature, this is no longer acceptable as soon as the homosexual closet is fully established in the late nineteenth century, as we can see in Stephen Gordon's example. Experiencing both suspicion and harassment, Stephen can only survive in society by ghettoising herself. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the masculine identified woman becomes a

lesbians may have adopted in order to be understood and to understand themselves, paradoxically, *as hetero*sexual, or as attracted to women" (Hallett 49). In a strictly heteronormative society, this behaviour is easy to comprehend. Desiring women is only allowed to men in such a society; it comes as no surprise then that women who desire other women see themselves as 'male'. This is not to say that this is the only possibility of expressing and experiencing lesbian desire in the nineteenth century, but it is certainly the most prominent: While I am convinced that there is also a strand of lesbian history where desire is found between woman-identified women in an explicitly female community, the examples[141] for this pale next to the "hypervisibility" (Halberstam 56) of women like Anne Lister or Stephen Gordon. Their identification with masculinity also coincides with and is made possible by their upper-class status, which allows them to read themselves as estate owners, a role traditionally reserved for men. In my investigation of Vernon Lee's short stories I will try to show up alternatives to the set model which Anne Lister and Stephen Gordon present: In Lee's use of the 'lesbian boy' figure, desire represents itself less as firmly lesbian and more as confusingly queer. Female desires are here approached from another perspective, for where Anne Lister and Stephen Gordon are examples of a female masculinity, Vernon Lee's 'lesbian boys' can be said to be examples of a male femininity. They are in-between figures who thrive on their very in-betweenness. While Anne and Stephen search for categories with which to define themselves, Lee's characters are happy to stay in the uncertainty of the middle-ground. But the very queerness of these desires opens up a space for the reader to understand the innuendo of the stories and to read

problematic figure in literature, demonstrating authors' increasing uncomfortableness with this concept in the tense and paranoid atmosphere of the time.

[141] They might possibly be found in the girls' school stories of the late nineteenth century. Vernon Lee's short story "The Doll", which will be investigated in this chapter, provides an example of an explicitly female community and desire. So does the character of Valérie Seymour in *The Well*: Valérie is undeniably presented as an alternative to Stephen in almost every respect, and so, too, in her 'femininity' and in her attempts to build up a feminine, polyamorous community rather than a lesbian relationship modelled on the heterosexual example.

them as expressions of a desiring relationship between female identified characters – to read them as a closeted communication.

The closet plays an important role in all of these texts. The nineteenth century female closet predominantly hides women's gender transgressions, and lesbian desire clearly constitutes such a transgression: In a heteronormative, patriarchal society, women's desires should be exclusively focused on men. Lesbian desire subverts this constellation in a radical manner, and in its 'dangerous' independence from men, it threatens the very basis of patriarchy. Such transgressive desires are then hidden within the depths of the closet. It is, after all, not Anne's or Stephen's partly masculine identification that has to be concealed from the world – it cannot be hidden, the texts imply – but their sexual and emotional bonds to other women have to be closeted: their lesbian desire. It is the same for Vernon Lee's 'lesbian boys' and for the female bond in "The Doll", for in each case what is closeted is the queer or lesbian desire for a woman. This chapter traces these hidden desires, the lesbian closet, from its beginnings around 1800 to its full establishment and final 'outing' in 1928: From Anne Lister's early formulation of a lesbian identity, her closet communications and coded diaries, to Vernon Lee's queer characters and their resistance to definition, to, finally, Radclyffe Hall's and Stephen's attempt to dissolve the closet and to out lesbian desire to the world.

An Early Closet, An Early Identity – The Lesbian Closet in the Anne Lister Diaries

The Anne Lister Diaries (circa 1815-1840) are certainly the most unexpected and radical proof that we have of both pre-1900 lesbian sexuality and the lesbian closet. Emma Donoghue has concisely called them "the Dead Sea Scrolls of lesbian history" (qtd. in Whitbread, *SDMAL* Cover) and claimed that "they changed everything" (qtd. in Whitbread, *SDMAL* Cover). In terms of lesbian history, their scholarly 'discovery' in the late 1980s[142] does indeed change a lot: Most importantly, they demonstrate the existence of a lesbian sexual identity prior to the late nineteenth century, thereby refuting Michel Foucault and his famous claim that homosexual identity is a result of late nineteenth-century medicalisation (cf. *History* 43). While this theory had long been doubted in terms of male homosexuality, proof[143] of lesbian sexual activity prior to 1900 was extremely hard to come

[142] The Diaries were discovered long before that date; it was, however, only in 1988 that Helena Whitbread's edition of them made the coded passages which predominantly refer to lesbian sexuality accessible. The history of the Diaries' discovery will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

[143] There is, of course, the problem that proof for sexual activity of any kind in the lives of writers or other persons of interest is extremely hard to come by. While heterosexuality is, however, in a heteronormative society easily assumed, "attributions of lesbianism must not be held to a higher evidentiary standard than assumptions of heterosexuality" (Lanser, "Befriending" 184). But this is still frequently the case: Especially the famous 'Ladies of Llangollen' (Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby) are often taken as examples of "the kind of depressingly chaste female bonding modern social historians have become so fond of discovering in past epochs" (Castle, "Pursuit" 6). Later parts of this chapter will consider the interesting view that Anne Lister, as a fellow 'woman-identified woman', took of the matter.

by, leading to a scholarly over-investment in the theory of 'chaste', 'virtuous' and asexual romantic friendships between women. The various documents that alert us to the existence of (from a contemporary perspective) extremely close, both emotional and (partly) bodily relations between women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were here seen as purely platonic (cf. Faderman, *Odd*; Smith-Rosenberg). With the Lister Diaries, however, the "no-sex-before-1900 school" (Castle, *Apparitional* 93) was finally proved wrong.

The Lister Diaries are a series of diaries composed by Anne Lister (1791-1840) in the years between roughly 1815 and 1840.[144] Anne was born into an impoverished minor gentry family whose ancient heritage, however, was greatly esteemed in her hometown of Halifax. Ambitious and clever, Anne distanced herself as far as possible from her seemingly feckless parents and instead came to live with her unmarried uncle and aunt at Shibden Hall in 1815 (cf. Whitbread, *SDMAL* xxi). In 1826, her uncle died, leaving the estate in Anne's competent hands, and thus turning her into an independent and influential woman (cf. *NPBL* 155). The Diaries trace these changes in Anne's personal life and, of course, many of the historical, political and economic developments of the time:

> They record how a young woman without access to university education sustained a systematic programme of classical and scientific study; how industrialization helped reshape class relationships in a West Riding community; how political power was exercised by minor landed gentry both before and after the reforms of 1832; and they give uniquely frank and unrestrained insight into the web

[144] I only work with those portions of the diaries that have been published in an accessible format (I thus rely on the work of all those diligent scholars who have had the endurance and patience to deal with Anne Lister's rather illegible handwriting, her abbreviations and the code). These are the following: Helena Whitbread's *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* (extracts from the diaries between 1816 and 1824; abbreviated with *SDMAL*), her *No Priest But Love: Excerpts from the Diaries of Anne Lister, 1824-1826* (abbreviated with *NPBL*) and Jill Liddington's *Female Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority. The Anne Lister Diaries and Other Writings, 1833-1836* (abbreviated with *FF*).

> of affectionate female relationships Anne nurtured in Halifax, York and – as her European travels widened – further afield. (Liddington, "Anne" 48)

It is, of course, especially the last point that is of interest here. Anne had already "beg[u]n keeping a brief journal" in "1806, when she was fifteen" (Liddington, "Anne" 47)[145] but it was only "from 1817, aged twenty-six, [that] she wrote this diary systematically" (Liddington, "Anne" 47). Anne was certainly "a compulsive diarist" (Liddington, "Anne" 47) and became even more so as she grew older:[146] It comes as no surprise, then, that her collected Diaries "consist […] of twenty-seven quarto-size volumes containing some four million words written in Lister's abbreviated hand" (Bray, *Friend* 239, 240). Of these four million words, "roughly a sixth are in Anne's private code" (Liddington, "Anne" 47), certainly one of the most interesting aspects of her Diaries. This code, a mixture of Greek letters and self-devised symbols, was originally invented by Anne and her first lover, Eliza Raine, and allowed them to communicate in private. Anne refined it and used it to record various 'prohibited' subject matters, among them her many love and sexual affairs. The most important of these are her relationships with Mariana Lawton (née Belcombe), Maria Barlow and, finally, Ann Walker, and they will thus be contextualised shortly. It is, however, important to keep in mind that Anne was rather promiscuous and at most times had several lovers and love interests at the same time (her relationships to Mariana and Maria Barlow, for instance, were partly simultaneous, while Isabella Norcliffe, one of Anne's earlier lovers, was hovering in the background as an intermittent sexual partner for years). Isabella Norcliffe introduced Anne to Mariana in 1812 and the latter quickly became Anne's

[145] Interestingly, the beginnings of Anne's ventures into diary writing are thus intimately connected to her lesbian identity: "The journal begins unmistakably as a record of the relationship between Anne Lister and 'a girl of colour', Eliza Raine, wealthy daughter of an East India Company surgeon" (Liddington, "Anne" 60) and Anne's first love interest.
[146] Anne later started to "obsessively record […] exactly how many hours she spent on each activity. Every single letter written or sermon heard was timed down to the exact minute" (Liddington, "Anne" 63).

primary obsession and 'great love' (cf. Whitbread, *SDMAL* xxiv). Mariana's marriage to Charles Lawton in 1816 greatly upset Anne, who had hoped to become Mariana's life companion as soon as she had accumulated enough money for the two of them to live together. Nonetheless, they continued their affair and met as often as possible, even exchanging secret marriage vows and rings, and constantly hoping for Charles's early death. It was only around 1828 that Anne finally gave up hope of their ever being together; the friendship, however, continued until the end of Anne's life (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 205). It was towards the end of the sexual part of their relationship that Anne met Maria Barlow on her sojourn in Paris in 1824. Maria Barlow longed to become Anne's life companion; her lack of rank and money and Anne's still-ongoing 'marriage' to Mariana made this impossible, however. The affair thus came to an end around 1828 (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 205). In 1832 Anne began her relationship with Ann Walker, who would become her second 'wife': Ann Walker was a young neighbouring heiress whom Anne had known for a long time. Now in her early 40s, Anne had given up on the romantic dreams of her youth and her emphasis in her search for a life companion had begun to shift: Money and rank were more important to her than emotional considerations and Ann Walker's money thus made her desirable (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 206). The 'marriage', although far from happy, lasted until Anne's death and led to an intimate entanglement between the two women's lives, in private as well as in financial terms. Ann Walker's money made it possible for Anne to improve her estate, Shibden Hall, to move in higher circles of society and to go on extensive travelling tours: It was during one of those that she died in Kutaisi, Georgia in 1840 (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 206).

We can already sense in this short overview that the Lister Diaries are a rich source for considering the lesbian closet. This chapter will thus first deal with the history of their 'discovery' which is itself a history of a forceful closeting of knowledge about lesbianism by both individuals and institutions, symptomatic of our culture's dealings with (female) homosexuality. It will then turn to their form, which is, through the use of the secret code,

closeted to the highest degree: Lesbian encounters are here only written about from the perspective of the closet and the necessity of secrecy is thus urgently stated. Thereafter, this chapter will take a look at Anne Lister's self-construction as a lesbian and the discourses of female masculinity that she drew on. Finally, we will come to see how Anne's life itself (or at least the life she chose to depict in her Diaries) was ruled by closet considerations – in her everyday routine, her conversations and her personal appearance.

Closeting the Anne Lister Diaries

The Lister Diaries are certainly closeted on several layers. Anne's use of a secret code is one case in point; at the same time, the Diaries themselves, when discovered, were treated in a way that can be seen as typical in a heteronormative society. After Anne's death, Shibden Hall, according to her will, went to Ann Walker as the two women had changed their wills to grant each other life tenancies on their respective estates, while leaving them entailed on actual relatives (cf. Liddington, "Beating" 270). Ann Walker, however, had a history of mental illness that made it easy for her relatives to send her to an asylum, so that tenant families took up residence in Shibden Hall up to her death (cf. Liddington, *FF* 238).[147] The estate itself was entailed onto Anne's closest Lister relatives, the Lister family from Wales, who then "moved north to take up residence in Shibden Hall in 1855" (Liddington, "Anne" 50). It was their son, John Lister, who became the first to occupy himself with the Lister Diaries: "His edited selections from the diaries were published in the *Halifax Guardian*" (Liddington, "Anne" 50). He was also the first to crack Anne's elaborate code together

[147] Interestingly enough, Anne's first lover, Eliza Raine, was also sent to an asylum for her 'mental illness', presumably partially brought about by Anne's break-up with her (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 4). We can see here that lesbian sexuality has a tendency to be regarded in terms of 'madness' – also strategically so, for madhouses were, of course, the nineteenth century's control mechanism over rebellious, unadjusted and independent women (and women who were simply in the way of patriarchal interests, as famously fictionalised in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*).

"with a Bradford antiquarian, Arthur Burrell" (Liddington, "Anne" 52). In Burrell's statements on their reaction to the coded passages we can see how the Lister Diaries themselves, due to their very transgressiveness, have again and again been pushed back into the closet: "The part written in cipher – turned out after examination to be entirely unpublishable. Mr Lister was distressed but he refused to take my advice, which was that he should burn all 26 volumes" (Arthur Burrell, qtd. in Liddington, "Anne" 52). Imagine John Lister *had* followed Burrell's advice: A crucial piece of lesbian history would have been lost forever in order to keep up a heteronormative culture.[148] Interestingly enough, John Lister himself may have been in the closet with regard to his homosexuality: "[I]t seems likely that John Lister himself was homosexual, and so any discussion about 'an inherited diseased condition' may have caused him particular anxiety about unkind publicity" (Liddington, "Anne" 52). We see here, once again, the (metaphorical) infectiousness of the closet and its potential to threaten even 'bystanders'. In a literal, spatial closeting of the Lister Diaries, John, instead of burning the Diaries, further decided to hide them behind panels in Shibden Hall, condemning them to "a forty-years' silence" (Liddington, "Anne" 52).

They were next investigated after John Lister's death in 1933, when Shibden Hall "fell to the local council" (Liddington, "Anne" 53) and "[t]he borough librarian Edward Green received permission to enter the Hall to see the archives" (Liddington, "Anne" 53). Edward Green contacted Arthur Burrell who now agreed to give him access to the code: "Edward Green let Muriel [his daughter] have a copy of the key to the code; but, his daughter recalled, he kept the original under lock and key in his library safe" (Liddington, "Anne" 53). This spatial closeting goes along with Muriel's statement on her transcription of Anne's letters, which further

[148] We can also muse on how many pieces of lesbian or homosexual culture in general have potentially been destroyed for exactly this reason, leaving us with an impoverished understanding of our homosexual past.

demonstrates the reign of silence that had descended upon the Lister Diaries:

> I don't think my father knew much about Anne Lister, that she was a lesbian or anything. And I never mentioned it. We didn't talk about it in those days. It would have cast a slur on the good name of the Lister family if it were known then, so I didn't put it into my Letters at all. It doesn't come into the Letters really. (Muriel Green, qtd. in Liddington, "Anne" 53).

"It" may not "come into the Letters", but it certainly provides an important background for them. In a similar manner, editors that choose to publish all kinds of extracts from the Diaries with the exception of the ones referring to lesbian sexuality actively construct an image of Anne that leaves out a vital part of her identity and life. Censorship has threatened the Diaries again and again, from personal as well as from institutional agents. This can be seen in the next investigation of the Diaries by Dr Phyllis Ramsden and Vivien Ingham in the 1950s and 60s, who, in their research, "expurgated certain coded passages […][,] [i]n part […] bending to local censure" by the institutions (Liddington, "Anne" 55). Ramsden further attempted to keep Anne's closet intact by claiming that the

> long accounts in crypt-writing of her sentimental exchanges with her friends, excruciatingly tedious to the modern mind…are of no historical interest whatever….It is notable that at all periods when the author was engaged in pursuits which she found mentally or physically satisfying the amount of 'crypt' falls to insignificance. (qtd. in Liddington, "Anne" 56)

Anne's coded passages are here condescendingly constructed as 'unimportant' in an attempt to contain lesbian sexuality and to eliminate any interest in it. It was only with Helena Whitbread's 1988 edition of the Diaries

that Anne's lesbianism was finally recognised and publicised – a very late outing that could only come about at a time when lesbianism (and homosexuality in general) was becoming at least slightly more acceptable in the public realm. Even then, however, lesbianism was in parts met with sheer disbelief: "The Whitbread edition caused controversy – initially over whether the diaries were fakes" (Liddington, *FF* xv). Anne Lister certainly defies our expectations of a nineteenth century woman, and especially so in the realm of sexuality, where even today lesbian sexuality is still frequently treated as a myth.

This short overview on the Diaries' history demonstrates the workings of the closet in our culture and how texts which go against the grain, questioning heteronormativity, are forcibly kept in that closet – silenced, suppressed, fractured, threatened by destruction. The various editors' actions may be understandable, but are highly problematic: As they did not draw attention to Anne's lesbianism, knowledge of it was basically lost for the general reader due to the very obscureness of the Diaries, written by a relatively unknown woman in a terrible handwriting, with long passages abbreviated or in code. The sheer mass of the journals poses another problem:

> Given the journal's length, it is unlikely that the whole of her autobiographical writings will ever be published. This means that scholarly debate about Lister's life has been peculiarly dependent upon the way in which editors, such as Whitbread, Liddington and Muriel Green […], have shaped Lister's journals for publication. (Colclough 159)

But by ignoring or obliterating Anne's lesbianism, thereby keeping her in the closet, the editors actively deprived the homosexual community (and

all other people interested) of something that has come to be seen as central to the oppressed: a story, a history of 'their' people.[149]

Cracking the Code: Anne Lister's Diaries as a Spatial Closet

Anne's Diaries to a certain degree function as her spatial closet: After all, 'proof' of her sexual identity is here not kept within a room, the spatial equivalent of the closet that we have encountered in so many novels, but in the pages of the Diary, further hidden by the code. This is similar to Lydia Gwilt's relation to her diary in *Armadale*, which also functions as the explicit materialisation of her metaphorical closet, but it is this time equipped with a further layer, through the box-within-a-box (the code within the Diaries) structure so typical of the closet. Anne's code is certainly her most obvious closeting strategy and it predominantly relates to her lesbian sexuality: While several other events and feelings are coded as well, lesbian sexuality is always referred to in code, demonstrating that it makes up the central part of Anne's closet and that there was an active realisation on her part of the necessity of closeting this part of her identity, a knowledge of the 'forbidden', the thing to be kept 'unknowable'. The code in general deals with occurrences that are marked as shameful, transgressive, not quite 'correct' or deceitful. Coded passages refer, for instance, to the body and outward appearances, both shameful topics for Anne: "*Teazed with the feeling to want a motion – my bowels have been wrong-doing – nothing but little round bits for the last five or six months*"[150] (*FF* 154). This is also the case with bodily reactions that stress Anne's femininity (a sore topic for her, as we will see later), for instance her period, which she referred to as

[149] See, for instance, Love: "The longing for community across time is a crucial feature of queer historical experience, one produced by the historical isolation of individual queers as well as by the damaged quality of the historical archive" (37).
[150] Italics are here used to demonstrate that the original passage in Anne's Diaries is written in code.

her 'cousin' (an interesting case of using euphemisms even in coded language, a sort of double closeting): "*Had slept in cousin-linen with paper as usual, & white worsted stocking besides, which kept all very comfortable; A- never found out that I had cousin*" (*FF* 149). Unsurprisingly, the code also extended to the venereal disease that Anne contracted from Mariana Lawton in 1821. It is also very noticeable when reading the Diaries that clothes are always referred to in code, presumably because Anne felt uncomfortable about both her figure and her sense of dress, for "[s]he was frequently criticized for being unfashionable, that is, unfeminine" (Trumbach, "The Origin" 290). Shame may also be the reason for coding references to Ann Walker's mental illness ("*A- very low, till I accidentally told her I had no fear, nor had Doctor Belcombe, of her going really wrong (in her mind)*" (*FF* 217)), as well as for coding Anne's negative comments on what she considered to be inappropriate and embarrassing relatives or acquaintances (her father and her sister Marian, who, to Anne's great distress, planned to marry a town merchant). The 'vulgarity' of the people in her environment is here frequently stressed: "*Shocked to see them* [her father & Marian] *both look vulgar. The first sight of them always makes me low*" (*SDMAL* 173). Anne further coded almost all references to money, possibly because of money's partly 'taboo' status, but also because she occasionally hid the true state of her financial affairs from her aunt and uncle so as to escape their censure of her 'unnecessary' expenses:

> *I read my uncle & aunt the letter & shewed* [sic] *them four of the notes but said nothing of the fifth. This is a sort of dissimulation which my heart does not approve, & I already repent having practised it, but it is not pleasant not to have a sixpence but what they know of, as I may occasionally want a pound or two extraordinarily*. (*SDMAL* 11)

Anne's dependent status here necessitated secrecy. It is no surprise then that expressions of her wish for independence are also constantly coded in her Diaries ("*Musing on the subject of being my own master*" (*SDMAL* 138)).

Due to the 'private nature' of the coded passages in the Diaries, the uncoded bits often read as the 'official' record that Anne planned to leave behind, so that emotions and 'inappropriate' actions on Anne's part are also frequently coded. The fact that Anne often formulated Ann's letters for her, specifically when it came to legal questions, is always coded, for instance ("*Then till nine and a quarter, writing for A- copy of what she should write to her sister about the [joint] coal account*" (*FF* 150)). Moreover, Anne and Ann's reaction to a 'fake marriage announcement' (a sort of harassment of their relationship with which they sometimes had to deal) is divided into an official, uncoded version ("I smiled and said it was very good – read it aloud to A- who also smiled and then took up the paper and read the skit to my aunt" (*FF* 143)) and a private, coded one ("*A- did not like the joke*" (*FF* 143)), demonstrating that emotions are split along a public/private dimension.[151]

The code's primary function is, however, to closet lesbian desire. Anne used it to describe her flirtations, lovers' vows and sexual encounters in all explicitness and, partly, at great length:

> *Tried for a kiss a considerable time last night but Isabella was as dry as a stick & I could not succeed. At least she had not one & I felt very little indeed. She was very feverish, quite dry heat & seemed quite annoyed & fidgeted herself exceedingly at our want of success […] It was certainly odd as she by no means seemed to want passion. I carried the thing off as well as I could,*

[151] In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James C. Scott analyses power relations between dominant and subordinate groups with the help of the concept of the "public" and the "hidden transcript": "If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term *hidden transcript* to characterize discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders. […] By assessing the discrepancy *between* the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse" (4, 5). In our case, heteronormativity constitutes the dominant discourse: In the public transcript ruled by heteronormative power structures, Ann Walker thus reacts in a very different manner than in the hidden transcript, in the privacy of her homosexual relationship with Anne.

> *that is to say very well, tho' I confess I felt surprised & disappointed.* (*SDMAL* 79)

She also made use of euphemisms even within the coded passages, as we have seen before; here, the ubiquitous 'kiss', a code word for a (full) sexual encounter or an orgasm (cf. Whitbread, *SDMAL* 402). This strategy for closeting lesbian desire – the use of the code – is interestingly not restricted to Anne herself. Several of her acquaintances also used a code for communicating *with others*: Anne and Eliza, as we have seen, had originally invented the code so as to be able to write to each other at a time when they were both under the strict surveillance of both parents and teachers. Similarly, Mariana and Anne made use of coded passages in their letters so as to be able to freely write to each other: "Wrote 2 ½ pp. to M-, chiefly in our secret alphabet which I have lately, in my letters to her, used a great deal" (*SDMAL* 17).[152] This was especially necessary once Mariana was married to Charles, as a strategy for circumventing the ubiquitous surveillance enacted by the patriarchal system, and it can hence be seen as an explicit, *female* subversion of this system. Such a strategy is necessitated by the situation of women in a patriarchal society, which is exacerbated by the female closet, the frequent object of men's curiosity. Mariana and Anne encountered the restrictions of the patriarchal system early in their friendship, when Charles found one of Anne's letters, which – evidently without use of the code – referred to their plan to live together after his (hopefully soon to come) death (cf. Whitbread, *SDMAL* 16). From then on, the women had to restrict their correspondence,[153] being "*in constant fear of him forbidding her [Mariana] writing to [Anne] at all*" (*SDMAL* 17): "*M- thinks we had better be cautious lest he should forbid her writing to me, & therefore desires to*

[152] There is a further love interest of Anne's, Miss Vallance, to whom she gives the alphabet in order to be able to communicate with her in secret: "*Gave her* [Miss Vallance] *the crypt hand alphabet which M- has*" (*SDMAL* 158).

[153] Anne later brought about a reconciliation between herself and Charles which made it, for instance, possible for Mariana to accompany her on her trip to Paris: "Made what I consider a very handsome offer of reconciliation between Charles & myself, tho' without any 'constrained or uncomfortable compromise of my feelings'" (*NPBL* 159).

hear from me every other Tuesday, as there will be little comfort for her & me as long as he lives & God knows how long that may be" (*SDMAL* 16). In the context of such an immense power on the part of the patriarch, it is no surprise that Anne and Mariana had to be extremely wary with regard to their relationship, so that the crypt alphabet functioned as a strategy for subverting the power structures that be and helped closet Mariana's primary, lesbian or bisexual identification.

The code is certainly the most explicit closeting strategy used within the Diary. But we also have to consider the Diary itself as a component of Anne's closet identity. After all, the Diary is situated on the dividing line between the public and the private, which becomes especially relevant in the context of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, when Diaries more frequently were subject to publication. At that time, there was a "growing consciousness in the mind of the diarist of diary-writing as literary composition, a process in which the writer has an eye on himself [sic] writing, and in which increasingly he [sic] invests a deliberate 'literariness'" (Fothergill 32). By emphasising this point, Fothergill also criticises the tendency to regard diaries as spontaneous expressions of subjectivity or "an unpremeditated sincerity" (40) instead of as a construct of a highly mediated, "deliberate self-expression" (55). In the case of the Lister Diaries, it is very hard to tell in how far they were intended for publication and were therefore 'public' expressions of identity: Anne certainly had "literary ambition[s]" (Tuite 192, Webb 399) and the division in the Diaries between coded and uncoded passages reads, as mentioned before, like a separation into a 'public' self, meant to be seen by the 'world', and a 'private' one, hidden from its eyes.[154] On the other hand, Anne was extremely cautious

[154] The Diaries certainly served private functions for Anne and she mentions again and again their cathartic effect: "I owe a good deal to this journal. By unburdening my mind on paper I feel, as it were, in some degree to get rid of it; it seems made over to a friend that hears it patiently, keeps it faithfully, and by never forgetting anything, is always ready to compare the past & present & thus to cheer & edify the future" (*SDMAL* 171). This function might have been especially relevant for Anne because of the isolating effect that being in the closet has. After all, she was barred from discussing a large part of her life (her sexual and emotional needs) with the people in her environment, even those closest to her, and the Diary took on this function of a 'friend'. It also acted as an

about people's knowledge of her diary writing and kept this information within the closest circle of her family and friends:

> Isabel, much to my annoyance, mentioned my keeping a journal, & setting down everyone's conversation in my peculiar hand-writing (what I call crypt hand). I mentioned the almost impossibility of its being deciphered & the facility with which I wrote & not at all shewing my vexation at Isabella's folly in naming the thing. *Never say before her what she may not tell for, as to what she ought to keep or what she ought to publish, she has the worst judgement in the world.* (*SDMAL* 111)

This annoyance may, however, also be triggered because Anne, in general, frequently attempted to hide the degree of her education (while on other occasions, she openly showed off her extensive knowledge),[155] in order to "protect […] herself from charges of *bas-bleuism*" (Euler 364). Her education was, to some degree, a "gender-bending activit[y]" and "obvious deviations from feminine respectability threatened her social standing" (Euler 133). The Diary was also resented by people in her environment, thereby acting as a threat to Anne's reputation, and its existence may have been kept relatively 'secret' for this reason: "But it was my journal that frightened people. She [Mrs Waterhouse, an acquaintance] had made up her mind not to open her lips before me. Mrs Rawson, at the Saltmarshes' had abused my poor journal – wished I would destroy it – it reminded me of a great deal I had better forget" (*SDMAL* 363). In general, however, the

aid to memory for Anne, as mentioned above, and she reread it from time to time: "*Volume three, that part containing the account of my intrigue with Anne Belcombe, I read over attentively, exclaiming to myself, 'Oh, women, women!'*" (*SDMAL* 373)

[155] This may seem contradictory, but we have to remember that a diary is no novel or autobiography: "The diary is a way of constructing a private sense of self, but since it is written day by day, rather than invented as a self-conscious whole (as an autobiography would be) the tensions and contradictions between identity and behavior become more apparent" (Clark 29). Moreover, Anne was a rather contradictory person in general.

sheer obsessiveness with which Anne kept her Diaries and the elaborate system that she devised for doing so points to a wish for an audience.

> Sometimes one does get the almost eerie feeling while reading this journal that she did expect that her complete record (both Roman alphabet text and code) would be preserved for analysis by future generations. She will cross-reference, for example, between years in the diary and between diary and correspondence, and she indexed much of the diary herself. (Euler 60, 61)

The coded passages would then be a secret way of communicating with a future generation of readers 'in the know': a typical closet strategy.

Anne Lister as an Example of Early Nineteenth Century Lesbian Identity

So far this chapter has taken a closer look at the coded passages in the Lister Diaries and has stated that they, to a great extent, deal with Anne Lister's lesbianism. It is exactly this lesbian identity onto which further light will be shed in this section. It is necessary to do this as the existence of a lesbian (or male homosexual) identity in the early nineteenth century is, as mentioned before, an impossibility in the Foucauldian framework which has dominated queer research for years (cf. Foucault, *History* 43). The reasons for questioning this framework and for instead proposing one in which homosexual identity already comes into existence in the late eighteenth century have been stated in the introduction and, intermittently, in other chapters. Instead of recapitulating them, I want to focus on Anne Lister's personal identity construction and its implications for a lesbian identity. This is especially important as "[t]he double marginalisation of lesbians in this sexual economy, as female and homosexual, as doubly lacking and doubly excessive, has made the creation of a positive lesbian subject doubly difficult" (Martin 255). As we will see in this section and the

next, Anne nevertheless succeeded in establishing such a subject position, by boldly positioning herself as unique and by drawing on the possibilities of female masculinity.

In the Lister Diaries, a lesbian identity is explicitly and uncompromisingly formulated: "*Burnt…Mr Montagu's farewell verses that no trace of any man's admiration may remain. It is not meet for me. I love, & only love, the fairer sex & thus beloved by them in turn, my heart revolts from any other love than theirs*" (*SDMAL* 161). Even without using the term 'lesbian' or 'homosexual', Anne has hit upon the main characteristic of lesbian identity to this day. After all, 'only loving the fairer sex' is what most people would recognise as the quintessential feature of lesbianism.[156] Anne was also constantly ready to defend her lesbian identity vis-à-vis her lovers by stressing its 'naturalness', for "[i]n her account of her attachments to women, Lister tries to create and uphold a distinction between a 'natural' propensity for her own sex and 'learned' desire that comes from books" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 86). Here, we can see an instance of Anne's defence strategy, which, next to emphasising the naturalness of her desires, also contrasts them with male homosexuality and bisexuality and uses the 'nameless' quality of female homosexuality as a point in her favour:

> *She* [Anne Belcombe, one of Mariana's sisters with whom Anne had an affair] *asked if I thought the thing was wrong – if it was forbidden in the bible & said she felt quere* [sic] *when she heard Sir Thomas Horton mentioned. I dexterously parried all these points – said Sir T.H.'s case was quite*

[156] There has, of course, been a long discussion on this matter: Vicinus summarises this conflict by stating that "we lack any general agreement about what constitutes a lesbian" ("They Wonder" 468). Critics like Rich, who speaks of a "*lesbian continuum*" (648) in which, theoretically, all women are included, and Cook, who claims that "[w]omen who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, are lesbians" (738), have frequently been criticised for denying or "obscur[ing] the specificity […] of lesbian desire" (Castle, *Apparitional* 11), especially its sexual element. I follow Castle in believing that the meaning of "'I am a lesbian' […] is instantly (even dangerously) clear: I am a woman whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to my own sex" (*Apparitional* 15). In Lister's case, the sexual element is undeniable and her lesbian identity, even without the concrete term, is an obvious case, in spite of her recourse to female masculinity.

> *a different thing. That was positively forbidden & signally punished in the bible – that the other was certainly not named. Besides, Sir T.H. was proved to be a perfect man by his having a child & it was infamous to be connected with both sexes[.] […] I urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct, for so I might call it, as I had always had the same turn from infancy. That it had been known to me, as it were, by inclination. That I had never varied & no effort on my part had been able to counteract it. That the girls liked me & had always liked me.* (*SDMAL* 5)

Constancy in her desires was another important factor for her: In contrast to those of bisexuals, her desires were not fickle and were not merely the result of temporary sexual lust, but fulfilled an internal and 'natural' sexual need. In conversation with Mariana, too, Anne speaks of her "*conduct & feelings being surely natural to [her] inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious, but instinctive*" (*SDMAL* 320). Anne's conflicts over her sexuality seem to lie in the past at the time of her writing (after all, she was already in her mid-twenties to early 40s at the time of the Diaries quoted here). At one point, however, we have evidence of Anne's past searching for a bodily 'deviation' which would explain her inclinations towards women:

> Said how it [Anne's preference for, or sexual attraction to, women] was all nature. Had it not been genuine the thing would have been different. [I] said I had thought much, studied anatomy, etc. Could not find it out. Could not understand myself. It was all the effect of the mind. No exterior formation accounted for it. (*NPBL* 49)[157]

In a one-sex model, Anne's desire for women, as a 'male'-connoted desire, would have a more 'male' body formation as a consequence or vice versa.[158]

[157] Unfortunately, in *No Priest But Love* Whitbread does not mark which passages are written in code. We can, however, safely assume that this passage was coded in the original.

[158] Several of her acquaintances were in doubt as to Anne's gender identity or confused gender identity and object choice: "She [Mrs Barlow] said I astonished Mme Galvani at

Similarly, the late nineteenth century theories of 'inversion', which will be discussed at greater length in the chapter on *The Well of Loneliness*, would seek for 'deformations' in Anne's body to explain her homosexuality. In spite of her propensity for a 'masculine' demeanour, Anne, however, rejected a bodily explanation and saw homosexuality as a 'mental' formation. Anne's account of her homosexuality is relatively elaborate when one considers that she had no examples to follow (aside from "two main sources: the classics and romantic writers" (Clark 31)): "Anne therefore could not simply take up roles already existing in the culture, but instead, creatively put together the fragmentary cultural materials available to her to understand her desires for women" (Clark 31). Hers is thus largely a case of "the individual acquisition of a sexual identity" (Clark 27), something which, as the Diaries demonstrate, is by no means impossible.

It is also surprising (and refreshing) that "Lister seems to have been remarkably self-aware and guilt-free" (Castle, "Pursuit" 7). This is a further example of how differently male and female homosexuals dealt with guilt,[159] already mentioned with regard to Amy Levy's "At A Dinner Party" in the introduction to this thesis. Anne's partners often had more problems dealing with guilty feelings due to their homosexual encounters, but this may also have had to do with the sometimes 'adulterous' nature of the relations, the general consensus on women's 'passionlessness' and the opprobrium against extra-marital relations. Anne's lesbian identity definitely had a strong sexual element and her Diaries are full of descriptions of sexual encounters. During her marriage with Ann Walker, "Anne began each daily diary entry with a comment on Ann Walker in bed" (Liddington, *FF* 101), "*No kiss*" (*FF* 107) meaning that no sexual encounter had taken

first, who once or twice said to the Mackenzies she thought I was a man & the Macks too had wondered. Mrs Barlow herself had thought at first I wished to imitate the manners of a gentleman but now she knows me better, it was not put on" (*NPBL* 37) and Dupuytren, a doctor that Anne visited, too, "th[ought] [her] singularly made" and "recommended that seringue à manivelle [a syringe with a crank] which might be used by a man" (*NPBL* 172).

[159] I have mentioned before that it is possibly the greater 'invisibility' of lesbian sexuality that leads to less official prohibitions against it and thus to a minimisation of guilt.

place – in the other instances, the number of (presumably) orgasms is noted (here from intercourse with Mariana): "Went to Marianna four times, the last time just before getting up. She had eight kisses and I counted ten" (*NPBL* 163).[160] Anne was also sometimes very explicit in her description of sexual adventures:

> I locked the door as usual, then lifted her down and placed her on my knee. […] I was heated & in a state not fit to see anyone. I had kissed & pressed Mrs Barlow on my knee till I had had a complete fit of passion. My knees & thighs shook, my breathing & everything told her what was the matter. […] I then leaned on her bosom &, pretending to sleep, kept pottering about & rubbing the surface of her queer. Then made several gentle efforts to put my hand up her petticoats which, however, she prevented. But she so crossed her legs & leaned against me that I put my hand over & grubbled her on the outside of her petticoats till she was evidently a little excited […]. (*NPBL* 47)[161]

From time to time, Anne also discussed sexual practices with her female lovers, like the use of phalli in lesbian sex, against which she spoke out (cf. *NPBL* 50). Her lesbian identity was no mere 'women's continuum', as these instances all make clear, but was definitely marked by a strong consciousness of and willingness to engage in sexual encounters with women.

Anne's lesbian identity is also fascinating due to the 'polygamous' nature of her relationships. This is certainly, on the one hand, a result of her masculine identification which will be the subject of the next section and

[160] The name 'Mariana' is spelt differently by critics – Anne herself always refers to her as 'M-'. I follow the spelling that I encountered most frequently in the secondary literature.

[161] Once again, we see Anne's curious use of euphemisms for sexual activities or body parts. Whitbread claims that "Anne uses the word [queer] to denote the female pudendum" (*NPBL* 55) – an etymology that cannot be found in the *OED* (cf. "Queer") – and, according to Euler, "Lister used the verb 'grubble' to indicate penetration" (328). Here, however, the latter might simply be another word for 'to rub'.

which allowed her to imitate male behaviour, "accept[ing] sexual philandering as one of the privileges of a squire" (Vicinus, *Intimate* 21). "The first three decades of the nineteenth century were a time when rakish aristocratic libertinism was challenged by middle-class respectability. Anne often emulated the first ideal, especially during the 1820s when she embarked on foreign adventures of seduction" (Clark 48). The prevalence of polygamous female relationships also certainly had something to do with the fact that "women were not bound by legal requirements to stay together and […] in an atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality there was little support for them to do so" (Euler 334). This model might, however, also be seen as a sort of 'forerunner' of the polyamorous network that Natalie Clifford Barney established in 1920s Paris (cf. A. Weiss 91) and similar networks that contemporary lesbians engage in.[162] The tendency towards polyamory in lesbian relationships certainly has to do with the idea of a 'women's community' that, from the time of Sappho onwards, has been at the bottom of one strand of lesbian identification. It should, however, be made clear that Anne's relationships, while polygamous, were not yet 'polyamorous' in the contemporary sense: While Anne's lovers did, to a certain degree, accept her sexual relations with other women, there was often a great deal of conflict around issues of fidelity and Anne frequently had to hide her sexual encounters from her lovers (cf. *NPBL* 127).[163] On the other hand, she does not seem to have tolerated her lovers having other affairs – or if they did have them, she did not mention it. It seems, however, improbable that a woman like Isabella Norcliffe, whom Anne only rarely saw

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[162] In their study of contemporary American singles, Haupert et al. find "those identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual being more likely to report previous engagement in CNM [consensual nonmonogamous] relationships" (436).

[163] Deri claims that "[p]olyamory differs from polygamy (wherein a husband can have several wives) in its emphasis on gender equality; in polyamory both men and women are free to have multiple partners. Polyamory differs from adultery in its focus on honesty, consent, and full disclosure by all parties involved" (4). By seeing Anne's relationships as more 'polygamous' than 'polyamorous', I am thus stressing her masculine identification. In a fully polyamorous relationship Anne and her partners should further (ideally) have been able to be in several relationships without having to hide them (as Anne did and her partners might have done, too).

and who seems to have had a strong lesbian identification, would not have had other female partners. Anne might have chosen to ignore these relationships or simply not considered them possible. At the same time, Anne did nothing to alleviate her lovers' distress over her infidelity and often used it instead to manipulate them. She sometimes deliberately read Mariana's letters to Mrs. Barlow, for instance:

> [R]ead her the whole of my letter to Marianna, narrowly watching her countenance. I saw it fall to hear a style so affectionate. […] She thought the letter very warm enough from a husband to a wife but there was nothing beyond friendship. […] Mrs Barlow out of spirits. I saw it was about the letter. (*NPBL* 53)

She did the same to Mariana, reading to her a letter that her sister Harriet (Mrs. Milne) had sent to Anne after a period of intense flirtation between the two women: "Sat up reading Marianna the copies of my letters to Harriet Milne & her last but one (to me). I had only read about half the copy of my last letter when I thought Marianna could bear no more & I stopt" (*NPBL* 164). We may not forget that Anne "manipulated people and she manipulated situations" (Liddington, *FF* 242) and that by doing so, she attempted to retain the upper hand in relationships. Her polygamous network was thus ruled by strict power structures and Anne tried everything to remain at its centre.

The existence of this polygamous network of lesbian relationships points to another interesting factor: The sheer number of women willing to enter into sexual flirtation or even intercourse with Anne is simply astonishing, given that Anne's social circle was, at least in her younger years, mostly limited to acquaintances in Halifax and York. Anne often presented her love objects as relatively passive, as mere receivers of her advances – this may, however, have had something to do with her masculine self-identification which included taking the active part in love matters. Moreover,

Anne *did* meet other women who, more actively, sought for female companions, such as Miss Pickford (a 'mannish' acquaintance of hers). One part of this proclivity that many women showed to engage in lesbian relationships certainly had something to do with the strict separation of genders in late eighteenth and nineteenth century society and the absolute necessity for marriage in order to engage in sexual relations. Women were, furthermore, basically limited to one sexual partner in their life – their husband. Only in the case of widowhood and consequent remarriage was there a real possibility of 'changing' sexual partners. Extramarital relationships were extremely dangerous, especially so because they could result in unwanted pregnancies. Flirtations with other women were given relatively free space due to the reigning concept of romantic friendship and Anne must have seemed like a godsend to many women: "Anne's lack of a penis […] allows her 'pleasure without danger,' almost unlimited access to women she desires and the joys of sex without marriage. She is not troubled by the social danger of impregnating her partners" (Halberstam 68). On the other hand, we must never forget that there is a huge probability that there were and are simply many more lesbians or bisexual women than we think – compulsory heterosexuality just redirected and redirects many of those desires. Both Ann Walker and Mrs. Barlow, for instance, had received marriage offers from men and rejected them for Anne: "*Had had Mr Ainsworth writing and offering again etc – once thought she* [Ann Walker] *ought to marry – lastly refused him*" (*FF* 85). Although an unwillingness to lose their independence factored into the two women's decisions – the theoretical equality in a same-sex marriage was certainly enticing – their desire and love for Anne was also strong enough to motivate them to wish to 'marry' her instead.

A 'Mannish' Lesbian: Anne Lister's Lesbian Identity and Female Masculinity

Masculinity was a very central component of Anne's identity and it often went together with her sexual identification. What is obvious here is that

Halberstam is right in seeing 'female masculinity' not as a result of the late nineteenth century 'inversion' theories, but as a tendency that is present in the whole nineteenth century or even earlier: "[H]er [Anne's] understanding of herself as masculine certainly seemed to hint at an identity formation and allows us to think about the emergence of a notion of sexual identity as a long process rather than the result of one intense period of medical research and social reform" (75). She was "a self-consciously mannish lesbian" (Vicinus, "They Wonder" 481), regarded her 'maleness' as a vital part of her identity and participated in a self-construction as 'masculine': "*Talked of the abuse I had had for romance, enthusiasm, flattery, manners like those of a gentleman, being too particularly attentive to the ladies*" (*SDMAL* 6). Anne's decision to wear only black[164] underlined a figure, voice and facial features that were per se seen as 'masculine' by her contemporaries (cf. Euler 138): "*The people generally remark, as I pass along, how much I am like a man. I think they did it more than usual this evening. At the top of Cunnery Lane, as I went, three men said, as usual, 'That's a man' & one axed* [sic] *'Does your cock stand?*'" (*SDMAL* 60, 61). We can see here already that Anne was intermittently subject to harassment due to her 'masculinity'. At the same time, the quotation above seems to point to a certain pleasure that Anne took in these bystanders' comments, which expressed in her mind the effect of her queer sexual attractiveness, her in-betweenness, on them. Anne herself especially identified with the 'rake' figure so prominent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: She "adopted what has been termed a 'Byronic posturing' in the style of the male libertine" (Hallett 56). Sexual conquest was central to her – a feature that very interestingly belies the female 'passionlessness' the nineteenth century constructs[165] – and she claimed to be constantly on the lookout for another girl. After a conversation with

[164] "Undertaken by a young, single woman, Lister's performance and fashionable practice of wearing all black puts into circulation for her contemporaries a strange and perplexing social semiotic – particularly striking given that fashionable dresses worn by young women in this period were almost invariably all white" (Tuite 189).

[165] Although Anne, as we will see shortly, certainly constructed her partners as 'truly feminine', she never denied them sexual passion of their own: "*A goodish kiss last night – all her* [Ann Walker's] *own bringing on – I never spoke but took it*" (*FF* 157).

Miss Pickford, another 'learned' lady, Anne, for instance, states that she "*would rather have a pretty girl to flirt with*" (*SDMAL* 262) and, after another meeting, wonders how she "*can still run after the ladies*" (*SDMAL* 256). The male discourse of 'dangerous', attractive women is obvious: "But 'tis indeed foolish to flirt in this way & shew myself for nothing. But somehow I seem as if I could never resist the opportunity. A woman tête-à-tête is a dangerous animal to me" (*NPBL* 152). It is interesting, however, that for Anne her sexual object choice was intimately entangled with her sexual identity: Lesbianism and masculine identification go together; Anne identified herself as more of a 'ladies' man'. Not being treated as a woman was central for her: "Besides, she [Mrs Barlow] lets me see too much that she considers me too much as a woman. She talks to me about being unwell. I have aired napkins before her. She feels me, etc. All which I like not. Marianna never seems to know or notice these things. She suits me better" (*NPBL* 88). This goes together with Anne's "stone butch" (Trumbach, "The Origin" 293) identity; her unwillingness to let her partners touch her genitals. Instead, she evidently liked to rub herself on her partners, a technique sometimes preferred by stone butches:

> In getting out of bed, she suddenly touching my queer, I started back. 'Ah,' said she, 'that is because you are a pucelle [virgin]. I must undo that. I can give you relief. I must do to you as you do to me.' I liked not this & said she astonished me. She asked if I was angry. No, merely astonished. However, I found I could not easily make her understand my feeling on the subject & I dropped the matter altogether. Marianna would not make such a speech. This is womanizing me too much. Marianna will suit me better. I cannot do much for Mrs Barlow except with my finger. I am more sure of going on well with Marianna who is contented with having myself next to her. (*NPBL* 85)

It is unsurprising given this strong masculine identification that Anne sometimes fantasised about having a penis: "*Foolish fancying about Caroline Greenwood, meeting her on Skircoat Moor, taking her into a shed there is there & being connected with her. Supposing myself in men's clothes & having a penis, tho' nothing more*" (*SDMAL* 167). "Tho' nothing more": This may imply that in spite of her desire for male clothes and a penis in this particular scene, she did not imagine herself to *be* a man. After all, Anne certainly was not transgender in the modern sense, for "[t]he phallus was a sign of her desire *for* a woman, rather than of her desire to *be* a man" (Clark 43) and was evidently strongly connected to a desire for masculine privilege. Anne, after all, stressed that she was content with being a woman, as it allowed her much more possibilities to freely meet other women: "'It would have been better had you been brought up as your father's son.' I said, 'No, you mistake me. It would not have done at all. I could not have married & should have been shut out from ladies' society. I could not have been with you as I am'" (*NPBL* 36). And in spite of her masculine identification, what Anne actually does is construct a purely feminine community, stating again and again how she "*very much […] prefer[s] ladies to gentlemen*" (*SDMAL* 91). Her reigning interest in women means that men simply do not figure in the Diaries, except as relatives, tenants or acquaintances – they are unimportant to Anne, which is, in a patriarchal society, surprising and subversive, and confirms, to a certain degree, male suspicions of lesbianism and its 'dangerous' independence of men.

Anne hence created an imagined men-free environment in which, nevertheless, both femininity and masculinity existed in a fluid and performative manner. Anne's masculine identification played heavily into her construction of her relationships, which were based on clear (heterosexual) roles. We can see this especially in her 'marriages', which were obviously modelled on the heterosexual example: "[M]arriage offered a linguistic allegory for a stable and loving relationship. Heterosexuality will permit no other" (Hallett 48). Within her first marriage, Anne acted as the 'husband', Mariana as her 'wife' and Mrs. Barlow as Anne's 'mistress'. Anne's female

partners thus can be seen to perform different types of femininity, just as Anne herself performed a masculine identity. Mariana, for instance, wondered: "'*I shall not lose you, my husband, shall I? Oh, no, no. You will not, cannot, forget I am your constant, faithful, your affectionate wife*'" (*SDMAL* 145).[166] And Anne identified Mrs. Barlow's problem: "At last I said I knew what always made her most uneasy. It was that, supposing a woman must be either wife or mistress, she felt herself most like the latter to me" (*NPBL* 81). In taking a 'mistress', Anne's masculine identification becomes obvious; she further always described her lovers as 'yielding' to her sexual advances, thereby constructing herself as the active, masculine party and them as passive and feminine. She thus imitated the behaviour of the typical nineteenth century husband, allowed sexual liberties that his wife could only dream of: "There was, for example, a sexual double-standard which told Anne Lister's masculinized subjectivity that she was free to form as many sexual liaisons as she wished, but if feminized women did so they were no longer worthy of respect" (Euler 166). It comes as no surprise that in her relationship to Ann Walker, Anne managed the estate while Ann managed the household and that one of Anne's constant worries was how to "*master*" (*FF* 182) Ann: "She [Anne] expected that she would be the main decision-maker, focusing upon estate business, while Ann Walker would 'take the woman's part' and deal with indoor servants, philanthropy and the Sunday School" (Euler 289). These roles were, of course, modelled on what they perceived in their society and were obviously accepted by the participants. Marriage was highly important to all of them, and adultery a problem that Anne often

[166] Mariana was also in the habit of calling Anne by a male name, "*Fred*" (*SDMAL* 103, 144). There is certainly a tendency in Anne's lovers to wish for her being a man but we should not see the reasons for this as purely sexual, for mostly they are socially motivated. Marriage, after all, offered a woman 'protection' and status, something that Anne could only provide to a degree: "Just before getting up she [Mrs. Barlow] said she only wished I could be her acknowledged protector. On questioning her I found she would be satisfied if we were what we call really 'going to Italy', that is, if I could acknowledge her as my own & give her my promise for life" (*NPBL* 78). 'Going to Italy' was Anne's code word for sexual intercourse. Mrs. Barlow's aunt also advised against her living with Anne, for "she had better not tie herself to any woman, she had better marry, it would be more respectable" (*NPBL* 71).

worried about in her relation to Mariana, "*another man's wife*" (*SDMAL* 120). Mrs. Barlow, too, recognised Anne's 'marriage' to Mariana and refused sleeping with her before being 'married' to her herself (cf. *NPBL* 52); with Anne, in typical 'masculine' fashion, constantly trying to get her into bed nonetheless. Those female 'marriages' were cemented in the same way as heterosexual marriages, by exchanging rings (cf. *SDMAL* 176, *FF* 94) and taking the sacrament together, "an old way of making a clandestine marriage" (Trumbach, "The Origin" 292, 293). Another important ritual for Anne and Mariana was Mariana's defloration: By accident, they stumbled upon the fact that "Charles had never broken the membrane" (*NPBL* 125) and Anne, accordingly, completed the business. Defloration is, of course, a concept that is highly charged with heteronormative and patriarchal thought and power structures and this scene stresses, again, Anne's assumption of male privilege, while also emphasising the 'power' of the lesbian that equals men's. Financial considerations were, furthermore, important to Anne in marriage and in this she was no different from male husbands. Her decision for a wife was ruled by worldly calculations and both Mrs. Barlow and Mariana were finally given up on due to their lack of money, status and sophistication (cf. *NPBL* 80), while rich Ann Walker, in spite of her, to Anne, 'annoying' temper, remained her wife until the end.[167]

[167] The 'marriage' between Ann Walker and Anne Lister took on very interesting characteristics, for it "acquired all the serious property complications of a conventional dynastic marriage. The implications and public repercussions of this were tremendous: for fifteen melodramatic years strategically-placed Shibden had been united with the adjoining Walker estate" (Liddington, *FF* 241). As has been mentioned before, Ann and Anne succeeded in changing their wills so as to at least grant the other party access to their unentailed property. They thereby managed to partly subvert a highly patriarchal inheritance law and it was a clear attempt on their part to put their marriage on the same footing as a conventional heterosexual one. It is no surprise that this kind of behaviour drew certain resentments onto them (and their closet), especially from Ann's relatives, who were afraid that Anne Lister would deprive them of their inheritance. "Anne Lister had to deflect any financial suspicions from those keen to protect this vulnerable young heiress. [...] [S]ince she was not a male suitor and since this was not a heterosexual relationship, Anne retained almost untrammelled social and financial access to Ann Walker" (Liddington, *FF* 63). The impossibility of producing an heir stood, of course, in the way of some of their dynastic ambitions.

On the other hand, there is one factor that clearly differentiates these female marriages from 'normal', heterosexual ones, no matter how much they are otherwise modelled on them, and this is in the possibility of divorce. In Anne's first marriage to Mariana and second marriage to Ann, we can see a creative and subversive rethinking of the model provided by society.

The roles that show themselves in these 'marriages' are clearly gendered roles. Anne, due to her masculine identification, largely denied having interest in other 'masculine' women and claimed to prefer 'feminine' ones: "*She* [Miss Pickford] *is a regular oddity with, apparently, a good heart. [...] She is better informed than some ladies & a godsend of a companion in my present scarcity, but I am not an admirer of learned ladies. They are not the sweet, interesting creatures I should love*" (*SDMAL* 258, 259). Miss Pickford, after all, is described as "*blue & masculine. She is called Frank Pickford*" (*SDMAL* 255, 256)[168] and Anne, in spite of enjoying her conversations with her and identifying her lesbian inclinations, did not enter into a relationship with her. Most of her lovers were clearly 'feminine' in Anne's book; the only exception to this was Isabella Norcliffe and here we see that Anne, despite her 'masculine' demeanour, engaged in a long relationship with her, even considering her as a life companion from time to time. The roles were thus not as strict as Anne and the rumours considered them to be: "Mr Lally had been visiting Moreton last September & said he would as soon turn a man loose in his house as me. As for Miss Norcliffe [Anne's former lover, Isabella Norcliffe], two Jacks would not suit together [Isabella had a gruff, masculine attitude, apparently] & he did not blame [me?] there" (*NPBL* 127). On the other hand, Anne considered Miss Pickford and herself as being in another 'category' than her other lovers, wondering whether "*there [are] more Miss Pickfords in the world than I have ever before thought of?*" (*SDMAL* 296) If this comment only related to lesbian inclinations, Anne would have had to consider several of her acquaintances as one of these 'Miss Pickfords'; here, Miss Pickford's 'masculine' demeanour clearly struck Anne as similar to her

[168] Anne, too, "became known in her community as 'Gentleman Jack'" (Faderman, *Chloe* 199).

own and different from her usual 'feminine' lovers. Anne never appears to have wondered about the sexual identity of women like Mariana and often it seems as if she did not believe them to have any specific sexual identity *at all*. After all, she emphasised again and again how she was able to "*make a fool*" (*SDMAL* 266) out of any girl she met, seemingly because her strong masculine identification was an automatic attraction for women (who are then presumed to be automatically heterosexual in their preference for the 'male', no matter in what shape or form). Accordingly, Anne never considered their desire for her as a 'phase' or a result of 'disorientation' as later commentators would. Today, we would probably rather think of women like Mariana or Mrs. Barlow as lesbian or bisexual and we should stress that point so as to not eliminate the 'feminine' lesbian or bisexual: Their story has simply not yet been told.

One of the more surprising points of Anne's masculine identification is certainly that she was able to show so much of it to the world and still be accepted by her surroundings: "Certainly Anne Lister *did* exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established gender norms[.] […] Anne Lister's 'transgressive' gender did not automatically exclude her from […] social circles in the early nineteenth century" (Euler 50, 51).[169] Of course, this is, partly, the result of Anne's social standing, for "[s]ocial status obviously confers mobility and a moderate freedom from the disgrace of female masculinity. […] Anne, in a sense, can live out the contradiction of female masculinity because she is upper-class" (Halberstam 69).[170] On the other hand, we can also see this relative acceptance as a consequence of

[169] We will later see that this is not the case for Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* – despite her rank and status which equal Anne's, she is unable to integrate herself into society due to her masculinity.

[170] Vice versa, it was Anne's 'masculinity' that enabled her status to a certain degree, for her uncle was only willing to give the estate to her due to her difference from other women: "On my uncle's death should come in for my uncle's estate, at my own disposal. He had no high opinion of ladies – was not fond of leaving estates to females. Were I other than I am, would not leave his to me" (*NPBL* 19). Because of her masculine identification, Anne agreed with her uncle on this point: "'*you know, there are too many women that one really cannot depend [on],' to which I exprest,* [sic] *& felt, consent*" (*SDMAL* 234).

the one-sex model which still partly ruled the early nineteenth century imagination and which allowed for degrees in gender expression, unlike the strict gender separations that the later nineteenth century and especially the Victorian age demanded (cf. Laqueur 6).[171] Anne Lister's 'in-between' status was acceptable to her environment to a much greater degree than it would have been thirty years later. Nonetheless, she and her partners had to deal with intermittent harassment, especially by bystanders or people only remotely acquainted with them. Anne, for instance, was frequently harassed in the streets due to her 'masculine' looks: "There were several bad women standing about the mail. They would have it I was a man & one of them gave me a familiar knock on the left breast & would have persisted in following me but for James" (*SDMAL* 77). Even more prominent are such harassments by men: A series of letters to Anne claimed that she had "'*advertised in the Leeds Mercury for a husband*'" (*SDMAL* 121) and she evidently thought that such treatment was directed at her due to her 'masculinity'. "Lister's appearance and tailored dress attracted more familiar treatment than a respectable gentrywoman had reason to expect" (Lanser, "Befriending" 190). Her relationship to Ann Walker was similarly object to lampooning: The aforementioned 'marriage announcement' called her "Captain Tom Lister of Shibden Hall" (*FF* 143) and there was also talk of Anne and Ann Walker being "burnt […] in effigy" (*FF* 221). Although Liddington claims that the harassments' "context and timing suggests that

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[171] We can see this, for instance, in a story of gender-bending which Anne was told at an acquaintance's place: "*Just before coming away, Emma told me the story of Mrs Empson's, the old mother's, cook & housekeeper, who had slept with her, rubbed her all over, for two years & whom she recommended to her son, John Empson, turning out to be a man*. 'Mrs' Ruspin was an excellent cook & housekeeper but unluckily fought with the footman which made the place so uncomfortable 'she' could not stay. The housemaid therefore left, to whom 'Mrs' Ruspin had shewn great attachment. They both went to London. 'Mrs' Ruspin married her. They keep a cook's shop in London & Ruspin has taken his proper name & dress. Told the story before a family party after dinner. 'Indeed,' said -, 'I did not know this.' 'No,' said -, 'If you had, I'm sure you'd never have parted with her.' A laugh" (*SDMAL* 141). This is presented as an amusing anecdote, but Emma Donoghue has shown that there were in actual fact people dressing up as the opposite sex in the early nineteenth century, mostly for practical reasons (finding a job, etc.) (cf. *Passions* 62). Such considerations make gender appear as a more fluid category, something which the later nineteenth century tried to categorically deny.

their lesbian sexuality was being symbolically deployed to warn them off their high Tory *political* activity, rather than vice versa" (*FF* 247), Anne still had to be very careful to closet her lesbian attachments. Her relatively open 'masculine' demeanour was one thing, her lesbian sexuality altogether another.

Dropping Hairpins, Covering Tracks: Anne Lister's Closet

To some degree, it is certainly correct to see Anne's homosexuality as an 'open secret': After all, she did very little to draw attention away from her eccentricity, her "*oddity*" (*SDMAL* 374), which many people commented on. She openly paraded her 'masculinity' through her clothes and demeanour for her environment to see, and she never made a secret out of her desire to remain unmarried: "*Sat up talking to my uncle till 11 o'clock about getting married…I took care to say, however, that I never intended to marry at all*" (*SDMAL* 17). At the same time, she was sometimes just as clear about her wish for a female life companion:

> *When walking with Mrs Priestley, said she would believe I should never marry if she knew me better. I had been pretty well tried. I might have had, & perhaps might still have, rank, fortune & talent, a title & several thousand a year with thorough worth & amiability added to great learning. In my own mind alluded to Sir George Stainton. But I refused from principle. There was one feeling – I meant love – properly so-called, that was out of my way, & I did not think it right to marry without. I should have a good fortune & had no occasion. Not that I could live without a companion. […] 'I have chosen already.' […] 'It is a lady & my mind has been made up these fifteen years.' I ought to have said a dozen for, of course, I meant M-, but said I never mentioned this to anyone but my uncle and aunt.* (*SDMAL* 355, 356)

While Anne's desire for a female companion was rather well publicised among her circle, on the other hand, what we would today perceive as

'signs' of homosexuality was not necessarily interpreted in the same vein by Anne's contemporaries. Although some people did draw a connection between Anne's 'masculine' appearance and her lesbian inclinations – we remember Mr. Larry who claimed that he would rather turn a man loose in his house than Anne – this was not a necessary conclusion[172] and Liddington draws our attention to the fact that "polite society had no language with which to allude directly to lesbian sexuality; there was a lack of public discourse through which respectable Halifax could express any reservations about Anne Lister's sexuality" (*FF* 60). Lesbianism was 'invisible'; it did not even have the name of 'sodomy'. In absence of the kind of condemnatory language with which male homosexuality was addressed, Anne could even be proud of her 'oddity' and 'eccentricity'. She was a great admirer of Rousseau and identified with the following quotation: "Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent" (*SDMAL* 306).[173] While she had to be careful about making her lesbian relationships appear too openly sexual, she could live out her 'masculinity' and even a female companion was not denied to her. How was this possible?

There were some people in Anne's environment who were undoubtedly 'in the know' about her sexuality: These were, of course, especially the women with whom Anne had sexual liaisons, such as Mariana, Maria Barlow, Isabella Norcliffe, Harriet Milne (née Belcombe) and Anne Belcombe. Interestingly, all the Belcombe sisters, even those with whom Anne had no sexual affairs, seem to have been aware of the nature of Anne's relationship with Mariana, especially Lou, a younger sister:

[172] It is, of course, no necessary conclusion today either, but female masculinity, just like male femininity, is one of the markers which our culture conceives of as a tell-tale sign of homosexuality. Late nineteenth century inversion theories certainly played a role in establishing this connection, but we can see that even in *The Well of Loneliness*, prior to lesbianism's official 'outing', people are partly unable to draw the connection between masculinity and lesbianism. They resent the masculinity but do not necessarily connect it to lesbianism.

[173] "I am made like no other of those who I have seen; I dare to believe that I am not made like any other of those who exist." (My translation)

> sat talking very cosily to Lou about M-, Lawton, C-, & one thing or other till 8 o'clock. *She, as well as Anne* [Belcombe], *strongly suspects that neither M- nor I would much regret the loss of C-, but that we look forward to the thing and, in the event of it, certainly mean to live together.* Lou and I have joked about it several times, *I asking if she thought I might hope to come in possession of M- in ten years.* (*SDMAL* 38, 39)

Similarly, Anne's sexuality was very well known during her sojourn in Paris in the mid-1820s, which is understandable as, in the nineteenth century, France was a much more liberal country than England when it came to homosexuality:

> The small, almost hermetic group of women living at 24 Place Vendôme were now by no means unaware of the nature of Anne's sexuality. The libertine atmosphere which prevailed in that era, particularly in Paris, towards Sapphic love or love between women, inclined people to view with an affectionate and amused tolerance what later ages were to condemn as inverted and unnatural. (Whitbread, *NPBL* 31)

Anne's flirting in France was a lot more open than back in England.

The closet played, however, a large role in her everyday life. It was especially Anne's relationship to her aunt and uncle, after all her closest confidants, which was marked by the radical uncertainty regarding information management that is so typical of homosexual people in the closet. Anne could never be certain whether her aunt and uncle 'knew' or not. While she sometimes claimed that they were "'all in a mist about it'" (*NPBL* 38), at other times she was uncertain "*whether he* [her uncle] *suspect[ed] [her] situation towards M-*" (*SDMAL* 17). Her aunt and uncle were clearly aware of the turmoil that Mariana's marriage caused Anne and of her wish for a constant female companion:

> *Talking, after supper, to my uncle & aunt about M-. One thing led to another till I said plainly, in substance, that she would not have married if she or I had had good independent fortunes. That her having C- was as much my doing as hers & that I hoped she would one day be in the Blue Room, that is, live with me.* (*SDMAL* 207)

She also frequently sought their advice on the question of who should in actual fact become her life partner and they both actively supported Anne's decision for a female companion instead of a husband:[174]

> Staid talking to my uncle & aunt...Had told them of my having heard from Mrs Barlow & mentioned the real state of the case between us very honestly. They both seemed very well inclined towards her. Were I really wishful to have her I am sure they would throw no obstacle in the way. On the contrary, they appear much in her favour. I told them she had four hundred a year & my aunt & I agreed this evening she might be better for me with this than Marianna with five hundred. […] My aunt is for Mrs Barlow & I am sure I could have her here if I chose. But, alas, I feel it would not do… (*NPBL* 106)

The wish for a life partner was, however, covered by the concept of 'romantic friendship' in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and it was, most assuredly, this construct that was so helpful in hiding Anne's sexuality and in keeping up her closet (cf. Euler 139). "[T]he very prominence of passionate female friendship enabled cover stories for less conventional

[174] Anne's wish for a life partner explicitly excluded the possibility of marriage. For her, female friendship (in reality a lesbian relationship) was obviously opposed to heterosexual marriage and she made it clear in Mrs. Barlow's case, for instance, that a marriage on her part would put things to an end between them (cf. *NPBL* 78). This strict dichotomy might have drawn some suspicion on her relationships, for romantic friendship was often seen as a pre-stage to marriage or as an accompanying element (cf. Marcus 2, Hill 168). On the other hand, Anne's model is similar to that of the Ladies of Llangollen who were accepted in spite of their "separatism" (Donoghue, *Poems* xxix).

behaviors and relationships" (Lanser, "Befriending" 180) and allowed women to express all kinds of deeply-felt emotions towards other women, to sleep together in the same bed and to wish for a female friend to live with instead of a husband. Anne's aunt and uncle, just as most of her friends and relatives (even Charles[175]), knew and accepted that Anne and Mariana slept in one bed during their visits to each other and this was by no means interpreted as a sign of lesbian love-making; it was simply 'normal', accepted behaviour between women. Such behaviour did not have to be noted in code: "The last time I slept in this room & in this bed, it was with Mariana, in 1815, the summer of" (*SDMAL* 24). By using romantic friendship as a cover for sexual activities, Anne serves as a prime counter-example to Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg's theory of the 'asexuality' of these female friendships.

The fact that contemporaries mostly saw romantic friendships as asexual, however, was an important part of Anne's cover. After all, her main agenda was to keep people from being in the know with regard to *her sexuality*: This part had to actively be closeted, while her 'masculinity' could be seen by the world.[176] It comes as no surprise that Anne, after having contracted a venereal disease from Mariana, took great pains to hide it from her aunt and, after failing to completely do so due to the severity of the disease, resorted to a lie in order to explain it:

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[175] They even sometimes slept in one bed when he was present: "Obliged to take up with an indifferent one [room], but [it was] the room next to Marianna & Charles' and their's [sic] so hot Charles glad to have it to himself & Marianna slept in mine" (*NPBL* 177).
To effectively use romantic friendship as a cover, it was, however, of advantage to Anne if she was on good terms with Charles: "[H]aving brought Charles Lawton into a state of conciliation, she [Anne] wanted to establish her role firmly as that of family friend *par excellence*, to both the Lawtons and the world, so that the gossips could not speculate too freely about the intimacy between herself and Marianna. Charles' presence as the friendly husband, accepting the bond of friendship between his wife and her 'best friend', sanctioned the relationship and cloaked it with an air of respectability which silenced any would-be scandalmongers, while allowing the women to continue their affair" (Whitbread, *NPBL* 175).

[176] How vital secrecy was for Anne and her respective lovers can be seen in Anne's plea to Mariana to be careful to hide the true state of their relationship from Charles: "*bidding her send me back my letters & be careful, for a discover* [sic] *would be ruin to us both*" (*SDMAL* 148).

> *She* [Anne's aunt] *seems as if she knew more about my complaint. Asked if she had spoken to Cordingley* [Anne's servant] *but she would not tell me. Fancy she may know of my linen being stained but can't make out. […] My aunt thinks I must owe M- a great deal. I fight off. […] During dinner, told my aunt about my complaint, that I thought it venereal. She guessed I had got it at the Duffins'. […] My aunt took it all quite well. Luckily, thinks the complaint very easily taken by going to the necessary, drinking out of the same glass, etc. & it is lucky enough she does think so.* (*SDMAL* 310)

Neither Anne nor the reader nowadays can be sure how much Anne's aunt actually knew or suspected. The fact remains that Anne tried her best to keep up her closet and obviously felt she had to do so vis-à-vis her relatives.[177] Anne always appreciated it when her lovers were able to keep up the façade during the daytime, even if they slept together at night, and found it positive in Ann Walker that she was "*very proper during the day but very sufficiently on the amoroso at night*" (*FF* 95).[178] Isabella, on the other hand, was more problematic as she drew unnecessary attention to her affections: "*I rowed Isabella just before dinner for kissing & seizing hold of M-, especially before the housemaid who was passing through*" (*SDMAL* 189). Lovemaking, too, could only happen in utter secrecy:

> *[S]he* [Mariana] *herself suggested our having a kiss. I thought it dangerous & would have declined the risk but she persisted & by way of excuse to bolt the door sent me downstairs for some paper, that she was going to the close-stool. The expedient answered & she tried to laugh me out of my nervousness. I took off my pelisse & drawers, got into bed & had a very good kiss, she*

[177] She also had to stay in the closet vis-à-vis her doctors, which proved difficult from time to time, especially as she was unmarried and (presumably) a 'virgin', which made a venereal disease hard to explain: "He [the doctor] said he must examine me. I said it was very disagreeable. […] (I was only afraid he should find out I was not married but he certainly did not make this discovery)" (*NPBL* 60).

[178] Discretion in letter-writing was also a plus point: "*The letter* [from Ann] *might be cried at the market-cross, yet still is in the quiet style of confiding affectionate regard*" (*FF* 104).

> *showing all due inclination & in less than seven minutes the door was unbolted & we were all right again.* (*SDMAL* 36)

This, again, was especially so as Anne and her friends, as members of the upper-class, were under constant surveillance from servants and tenants: "When we got home I took her [Mariana] into the stables. I thought not of James Sykes being at his dinner in the barn & believe he must have heard me say, 'I have brought you in here to give you a kiss'" (*NPBL* 171). But their own class posed similar problems,[179] especially the older Belcombes, who obviously were suspicious of Anne: "There appears to have been some coolness on their part over Anne's attitude to M-. People had been somewhat scandalised by the lover-like attentions Anne had lavished on M-" (Whitbread, *SDMAL* 34). Anne was thus guarded towards Mariana's mother: "Studiously avoided shewing any warmth to M-. Had a few minutes tête-à-tête with Mrs Belcombe. […] I said I had changed my manners to M- as soon as I was properly told of the folly of them; but that my regard for her was still the same as ever" (*SDMAL* 35). Later, Anne also advised Mariana against leaving Charles and joining her immediately after her uncle's death: "Anne would have preferred to wait for Charles' death so that it would seem more socially correct for a grieving widow to take refuge with her lifelong friend. This running off from her husband and joining her lesbian lover as soon as Anne was financially independent smacked too much of a scandalous escapade" (Whitbread, *NPBL* 166). By attempting to keep up the closet in this case, Anne in some sense gambled away her chance of ever living with Mariana; on the other hand, at this point she was already doubtful if the union was actually desirable and may have used the fear of scandal as an excuse for staying without ties.

[179] In Anne's flirtation with Miss Browne (later Mrs. Kelly), society in general functioned as a sort of panopticon, instilling in Anne the sense that she was under constant surveillance by her neighbours and friends who would comment on the progress of their friendship and on seeing them together: "My aunt has been told by several people of my attentions to Miss Browne […] Walking, etc, with Miss Browne was so unlike me. The thing seems to be the talk & admiration (wonder) of the town" (*SDMAL* 98).

In spite of her own carefulness when it came to keeping up the closet, Anne was sometimes disappointed in her lovers for being too circumspect. Mariana especially was very much afraid of discovery and resented everything that could draw attention to their relationship – this is not surprising for, as a married woman, she had to be even more careful to keep up appearances than Anne: "*[Mariana] [w]ishes me to be circumspect […] 'I have a feeling on the subject which no earthly power can remove &, great as the misery which it would entail upon myself might be, I would endure it all rather than the nature of our connection should be known to any human being*'" (*SDMAL* 288, 289). Anne was hurt by Mariana's negative comments on her masculine looks and eccentric behaviour, which the latter believed would give away their relationship. When Anne, full of enthusiastic anticipation of Mariana's visit, walked several miles to meet her coach in the middle of nowhere, Mariana was "*horror-struck*", especially due to "the astonished, staring eyes of the man & maid behind & of the post-boys walking by the horses" (*SDMAL* 301). This unpleasantly reminded Anne of a scene a couple of years prior when "*[t]he agitation of [her] inmost soul was met, not with any female weakness of sympathy but with the stronger mien of shocked astonishment; the awkwardness of the cut & curl of [her] hair*" (*SDMAL* 302). "[T]heir love affair never really recovered from the emotional trauma into which Anne was plunged" (Whitbread, *SDMAL* 300). Although she was aware of the fact that Mariana's "*fear of discovery [wa]s strong*" (*SDMAL* 304), she was deeply disappointed by what she felt was a display of shame about Anne and their relationship on Mariana's part. In this respect, the situation of being in the closet had a similar result on Anne and Mariana as it would have on a contemporary lesbian or gay couple: The question of how far to stay in the closet and vis-à-vis whom is a frequent source of quarrels in homosexual couples and a prominent theme in gay media. With Ann Walker, Anne later demanded an at least partially public demonstration of the fixity of their relationship: "They appeared in public together at a public ceremony to lay the foundations of a public building. Obviously they were not in any way hiding the fact that they had joint enterprises, joint interests, or that they

lived and traveled together" (Euler 310). They were, however, hiding that they were sleeping with each other and that constituted their true closet.

One of the most interesting aspects of Anne's closet is the way in which she managed to communicate with those 'in the know' or those whom she suspected to be 'fellow' lesbians. "*Dropping Hairpins*" (D. M. Robinson xiv) is a common strategy among lesbians and gays and one that Anne made extensive use of. Her conversations with other women she suspected of being lesbians are prime examples of closeted interactions and they work in the 'usual' way, by literary and historical allusions: "Anne Lister's diaries record her efforts to track references to sapphic allusions in Juvenal, Martial, and Horace, references she used to gauge the extent of her potential sexual partners' erotic knowledge" (Traub, "Present" 131). "[S]uch allusions implied an inner élite of intimate knowledge, recognised only by those educated few who understood the references" (Liddington, *FF* 249) – they were only available to the upper-class and the educated to which Anne belonged. Anne drew on various sources for her communications and several allusions served as code words for lesbian sexuality: There were the aforementioned classics, a *locus classicus* for homosexual references, such as "*the Sixth Satyr* [sic] *of Juvenal*" (*SDMAL* 291)[180] or mythological "Tiresias" who "had tried both sexes" (*SDMAL* 257). In France, a fellow lodger at Anne's inn inquired "'Êtes-vous Achilles?'" (*NPBL* 26), alluding to Achilles's gender-bending on Syros (cf. Whitbread, *NPBL* 29, 30), and told Anne that she "was the only one in the house to whom she could have written it, because the only one who would have so soon understood […] the allusion to take it that way" (*NPBL* 26). Communication, after all, is no one-way street, and Anne was not alone in using allusions to make herself understood. Italy served as another code word in Anne's book, presumably due to the connection between countries like Italy and France and homosexuality which was often drawn (cf. *NPBL* 34,

[180] "When Juvenal refers to lesbian behavior, it is in oblique and negative terms […]. For Anne, although Martial's depictions of lesbian women were intended to be negative, they at least gave evidence that lesbianism existed" (Clark 33, 34).

35). Marie-Antoinette and Joan of Arc, both suspected of lesbianism, were also frequently used to covertly talk about lesbianism (cf. *NPBL* 31, 84). "Lord Byron's poetry bec[ame] an intricate machine of sexual flirtation and deferral between Lister and Browne" (Tuite 193) and even the Bible was used by Mrs. Barlow and Anne to communicate about sexual 'deviations' (cf. *NPBL* 32). Although the conversations that were led with the help of these allusions seem to presuppose that both parties were aware of what was being discussed, there was a great deal of ambiguity, which is, of course, only to be expected when communicating in allusions. Especially in Anne's conversation with Miss Pickford, another 'mannish lesbian', there was often uncertainty with regard to meaning:

> *[She] said, very oddly, when I talked of a marriage of souls & hinted at bodies too, mentioning connections of les esprits âmes et corps, that it was all esprit on her side, insinuating that it was les corps on Miss Threlfall's part only. I looked surprised. 'Then,' said I, 'there is only one alternative. Do you know it? No, of course you did not say.' In my mind thought of her using a phallus to her friend.* (*SDMAL* 314, 315)

A similar misunderstanding came about between Anne and Mrs. Barlow: "I said I believed that when reduced to the last extremity – I was going to mention the use of phalli but luckily Mrs Barlow said, 'You mean two men being fond of each other?' & I said 'Yes,' turning off the sentence" (*NPBL* 32). While the general gist could be transmitted, the concrete sexual practices often remained 'in the closet' due to the reluctance of both parties to become more obvious.

Anne's most open (but still heavily allusion-dominated) conversation about lesbianism was the one she led with Miss Pickford and this even resulted in an 'outing' on Miss Pickford's part, who was in a relationship with a Miss Threlfall. This only happened, however, after several days and weeks of closet conversations, in which Anne "*[t]alk[ed] in such a manner that if there [wa]s anything particular between them, Miss Pickford might possibly*

suppose [she] had it in mind" (*SDMAL* 263). 'Possibly suppose': Anne was keeping her guard up, dropping hairpins. Miss Pickford's 'masculine' demeanour and knowledgeability on classical sources of lesbian sexuality had made Anne 'suspect', so that she "*[r]attled on as usual…in a style which, if she* [Miss Pickford] *has much nous on the subject, might let her into [Anne's] real character towards ladies, but perhaps she does not understand these things*" (*SDMAL* 263). And Miss Pickford understood[181] and was ready to counter Anne's hints with a full-blown outing:

> *Got on to the subject of Miss Threlfall. Went on & on. Talked of the classics, the scope of her reading, etc. & what I suspected, apologizing & wrapping up my surmise very neatly till at last she owned the fact, adding, 'You may change your mind if you please,' meaning give up her acquaintance or change my opinion of her if I felt inclined to do so after the acknowledgement she had made. 'Ah', said [I], 'That is very unlike me. I am too philosophical. We were sent on this world to be happy. I do not see why we should not make ourselves as much so as we can in our own way.' Perhaps I am more liberal or lax than she expected & she merely replied 'My way cannot be that of many other people's.' Soon after this we parted. I mused on the result of our walk, wondering she let me go so far, & still more that she should confide the secret to me so readily. I told her it would not be safe to own it to anyone else, or suffer anyone to talk to her as I had done. I think she suspects me but I fought off, perhaps successfully, declaring I was, on some subjects, quite cold-blooded, quite a frog. […] I would not trust her as she does me for a great deal. […] I never met with such*

[181] A contrast to Miss Pickford's clear understanding can be seen in Anne's flirtations with Miss Browne. Anne's attempted seduction of her was unsuccessful and it is uncertain in how much she was aware of Anne's true intentions. She seemed interested in Anne's friendship, by which she and her family hoped to gain status, but Anne soon discovered that she had a male suitor whom she eventually married. Anne's kissing her remained a one-time affair (cf. *SDMAL* 112) and it is unclear whether Miss Browne understood Anne's hints: "*Miss Browne; 'Perhaps you will be disappointed in me. I may turn out very wicked.' I; 'That is more likely for me to do, but we have all of us our weak side.' Miss Browne; 'I have many.' I; 'I fear you have not such an one as I should choose you to have if I could choose. At any rate, I know mine'*" (*SDMAL* 93).

> *a woman before. I looked at her & felt oddish, but yet I did not dislike her.* (*SDMAL* 292, 293)

Miss Pickford's outing was not countered with an outing on Anne's part: On the contrary, Anne invested considerable energy into denying all "*practical knowledge*" (*SDMAL* 294) of lesbianism.[182] This was Anne's usual strategy, "*talk[ing it] off*" (*SDMAL* 314), and she never came out of the closet, except to her actual sexual partners.[183] The closet, for Anne, was a place of security and a way to protect her social standing. Even though she claimed that she did not out herself vis-à-vis Miss Pickford in order to protect Mariana, who, as a married woman, was more vulnerable to scandal (cf. *SDMAL* 296), Anne in fact seemed to be more concerned about becoming blackmailable. This becomes obvious in her astonishment at Miss Pickford's openness towards her and in her strict advice to her to not tell anyone else about her lesbian relationship. The fear of blackmailability is, of course, intimately entangled with the closet and Anne's reaction is understandable within its logic.

An interesting case is represented by Anne's visit to the Ladies of Llangollen, a trip that she had planned for some time and which was of the

[182] There is a noted tendency in Anne's conversation towards lying. She frequently pretended to be of an opinion other than she really was, or admitted to things (like an inclination towards the ladies) only to deny them: "*Anne* [Belcombe] *sat by my bedside till 2. I talked about the feeling to which she gave rise. Lamented my fate. Said I should never marry. Could not like men. Ought not to like women. At the same apologizing for my inclination that way. By diverse arguments made out a pitiful story altogether & roused poor Anne's sympathy to tears.* [...] *I contradicted all I said last night. Argued upon the absurdity & impossibility of it & wondered how she could be such a gull as to believe it*" (*SDMAL* 2). This is partly the case due to Anne's manipulative personality; on the other hand, she also tried to 'test' people's reactions without committing herself too much to the truth. As such, Anne's lying can often be seen as a consequence of her closetedness, but it also sometimes takes on the playfulness of a mere game with identity. Fluidity is certainly an aspect that Anne liked to experiment with.

[183] At first, she did not tell Mrs. Barlow about her relationship with Mariana. Later, however, she at least admitted to having slept with her before her marriage, but not since (cf. *NPBL* 85).

utmost importance to her, taking on the character of a "pilgrimage to Llangollen Vale" (Hennegan, *Lesbian* 235). The Ladies of Llangollen – Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby – were

> one of the great 'success stories' of eighteenth-century romantic friendship. […] They resisted their families' attempts to marry them off […]. They donned men's clothing […] and they fled their native Ireland for Llangollen Vale in North Wales. […] In Llangollen they built a shrine to romantic friendship – a charming cottage and garden – where they lived together for more than fifty years […]. Luminaries came from all over Great Britain and the Continent to pay homage to their brilliant conversational wit and extraordinary housekeeping. (Faderman, *Chloe* 32, 33).

Critics have long been debating in how far their relationship was accepted for its seemingly 'platonic' character or, on the other hand, suffered from suspicions. While "[t]he two were often held up as exemplars of chastity" (L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* 83), and some critics presume that, as eighteenth century women, "they were probably happy to be oblivious to their genitals" (Faderman, *Surpassing* 123), others have emphasised that "by no stretch would it make sense to consider Butler and Ponsonby either heterosexual or undesiring given the fact that they brooked rejection and penury to live together and stay together as passionately united partners until death" (Lanser, "Bluestocking" 261). Brideoake sees exactly this uncertainty about their relationship as expressing "a prototypically queer resistance to determination". There were certainly rumours about the Ladies' sexuality[184] and Anne was almost entirely convinced of their lesbian identification, taking an 'it takes one to know one'-approach:

[184] These rumours were split along the same line as the opinions of critics nowadays: "[T]he same pair of women (the Ladies of Llangollen, for example […]) could be idealized as romantic friends *and* suspected of being 'damn'd Sapphists'" (Donoghue, *Poems* xxvi). "[T]he diarist Hester Thrale Piozzi refers to the ladies and their friends as 'damned

> Foolscap sheet from M-…She seems much interested about Lady Eleanor Butler & Miss Ponsonby and I am agreeably surprised (never dreaming of such a thing) at her observation, 'The account of your visit is the prettiest narrative I have read. You have at once excited & gratified my curiosity. *Tell me if you think their regard has always been platonic & if you ever believed pure friendship could be so exalted. If you do, I shall think there are brighter amongst mortals than I ever believed there were.'…I cannot help thinking that surely it was not platonic. Heaven forgive me, but I look within myself & doubt. I feel the infirmity of our nature & hesitate to pronounce such attachments uncemented by something more tender still than friendship.* (*SDMAL* 229)

For Anne, the trip to the Ladies was thus "a rare opportunity […] to obtain first-hand information about how a loving, all-female household may work" (Hennegan, *Lesbian* 235). It was also a search for 'examples', an attempt to establish that a sort of homosexual or queer community existed at least in the mind. Examples are, of course, very important to homosexuals in their status as a discriminated-against minority with no 'history'. It comes as no surprise then that Anne tried to establish the 'truth' about the Ladies' sexuality in conversation with Sarah Ponsonby[185] with the help of her usual strategy: "Contrived to ask if they were classical. 'No,' said she. 'Thank God from Latin & Greek I am free'" (*SDMAL* 221). Critics have, however, identified a sort of secret communication between the two women in Sarah Ponsonby's gift of a rose to Anne: "Do not, said I, give me that rose, 'twill spoil the beauty of the plant. 'No! No! It may spoil its beauty for the present, but 'tis only to do it good afterwards.' There was a something in the manner of this little simple circumstance that struck me exceedingly" (*SDMAL* 228, 229). Brideoake, for instance, takes this as a sign of Ponsonby's recognition that Anne "need[ed] to locate herself

sapphists' and writes that this is why various literary women would not visit them overnight unless accompanied by men" (Stanley 196), while poets like Anna Seward celebrated their friendship in poems (cf. Brideoake).

[185] Eleanor Butler was ill at the time and Anne never got to see her.

within a queer genealogy" and thus she "present[ed] her with a rose from Plâs newydd's garden as a token of their affinity". Anne certainly interpreted the scene in a similar manner and was thus 'exceedingly struck' by it. "After her return from Llangollen, Anne used her women friends' responses to the Ladies and their love as a touchstone to determine character and, sometimes, sexuality" (Hennegan, *Lesbian* 235), making them, in turn, into a code word for lesbian sexuality.

> Mentioned my having seen Miss Ponsonby…Not a little to my surprise, Emma launched forth most fluently in dispraise of the place. A little baby house & baby grounds. […] Everything evidently done for effect. She thought they must be 2 romantic girls &, as I walked with her to see her off, she said she had thought it was a pity they were not married; it would do them a great deal of good […] I have several times said to my aunt that, of all the people here, I liked Mary Priestley & Emma Saltmarshe the best, but doubted between the 2. Emma's remarks this morning & Mary's note this afternoon have made up my mind on this point in favour of the latter, as, I think *pour toujours*. (*SDMAL* 230, 231)

Even while only rarely leaving her closet, Anne was thus, via the medium of closeted conversations, able to communicate a great deal about her and others' sexual identification. In her dealings with her environment, her secret communications with various people around her, we can see an early nineteenth century woman versed in the workings of the closet.

From Lesbian Boys to Female Lovers – The Lesbian Closet in Vernon Lee's Stories

Taking Vernon Lee's short stories as an example for the female and lesbian closet may seem odd initially: After all, her stories make almost exclusively use of male narrators and sometimes almost all characters involved are male. But we must come to see exactly this fact *as* a closeting strategy in its own right, for one of the character types that frequently occurs in Lee's stories is the 'lesbian boy', a figure that Vicinus has rightly described as a cypher for both the male and the female homosexual in the late nineteenth century. This era, as we have seen before, is one in which homosexuality becomes central to society's discourses as it is medicalised and categorised and as the Labouchère Amendment leads to a new wave of prosecution: "Gay and lesbian history has long concentrated on the fin-de-siècle as a pivotal period during which the extant homosexual male subculture became a visible part of the mainstream literary world, the modern lesbian identity was delineated, and the word 'homosexual' was coined and medicalized" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 92). This intense focus on homosexuality is combined with an equally intense fear of it, which, according to some critics, does harm to the century-old system of romantic friendships between women: "The level of social anxiety rose proportionately, so that in the late nineteenth century love between women came to be felt as a threat to the social order. 'Harmless' romantic friendships were discursively transposed into 'unnatural' lesbian relationships" (Ledger 128). It is in this atmosphere of heightened fear and paranoia that Lee formulates her short stories, for

she "wrote her most famous stories in the 1880s and 1890s, a period that included the homosexual panic induced by the Wilde Trials of 1895" (Robbins, "Apparitions" 187). Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that she, like many of her contemporaries – one may think of Henry James, an author with whom Lee corresponded and is often being compared to (cf. Zorn xvi) –, makes use of closeting strategies.

The figure of the 'lesbian boy' is one such strategy and repeatedly made use of by (female) authors at the fin-de-siècle: "The androgynous boyish heroine, if not an actual boy, was an obvious, even overdetermined, choice as a heroine for lesbians" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 99). The "indeterminate character" of "this handsome liminal creature could absorb and reflect a variety of sexual desires and emotional needs" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 91), providing an identificatory potential for both female and male homosexuals: "The most obvious distinction [between female and male homosexuals] is the shift from the desire for the boy to being the boy himself" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 93), so that "the boy-as-lesbian-subject" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 93) becomes a frequent occurrence in texts of the time. The 'lesbian boy' makes it possible to express lesbian or queer desire, cloaked underneath a layer of apparent heterosexuality; he heterosexualises relationships that are really about desire between women. At the same time, he allows female authors to devise a 'female' way of expressing homosexual desire, far from the misogynist depictions of lesbianism in the texts of male decadents.[186] Gender transgression is at the heart of the female closet: The boy's apparent heterosexuality hides the gender transgression inherent in lesbian desire. Simultaneously, this figure can bespeak some lesbians' hidden desire for masculinity, another gender transgression which is closeted

[186] Showalter speaks of the "anti-feminist stance in decadence" (*Daughters* x), which expresses itself in Decadence's *femmes fatales* and the corresponding "representation of female sexuality as frightening and aberrant" (Hotchkiss 37). This is even more so the case in representations of female sexuality independent of men: The lesbian figures of French decadent literature are dangerous and/or withering. "France enjoyed a well-defined decadent movement [...] which had a more overtly misogynist attitude than did its English counterpart" (Schaffer 27) – lesbian desire also figures more prominently in French literature of the time.

through the androgyny and in-betweenness of the boy.[187] Halberstam's theory of 'female masculinity', which we have already encountered in the context of the Lister Diaries, plays into the concept of the 'lesbian boy', for she has demonstrated convincingly that "the masculine woman [is] a historical fixture, a character who has challenged gender systems for at least two centuries" (45). Lesbian or queer desire is frequently entwined with the notion of female masculinity in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. While female masculinity does not necessarily imply lesbian or queer desire, it still becomes one way of expressing such desires, and the figure of the 'lesbian boy' is a logical consequence of this fact. The 'lesbian boy' serves as a closeting strategy for lesbian/queer desire in several late-nineteenth-century stories, but especially in those by Vernon Lee, where desire is per se fluid, queer and transgressive and, at the same time, in constant need to be hidden. This 'queerness' of desire is a universal trait of Lee's stories: A good example is provided by one of her stories which will not be discussed in detail in this chapter, "A Wicked Voice". Here, interestingly, the desires between the composer Magnus and the singer Zaffirino have been read as both male homosexual and female homosexual: On the one hand, Magnus's

[187] There has been an extensive discussion about Vernon Lee's own choice of a masculine pseudonym, a strategy well-known from other nineteenth-century authors, which she herself explains in a letter to a friend: "The name I have chosen as containing part of my brother's and my father's and my own initials is H.P. Vernon-Lee. It has the advantage of leaving it undecided whether the writer be a man or a woman" (qtd. in Maxwell and Pulham, Introduction to *Vernon Lee* 38, 39). This straightforward statement is, however, given a twist in Lee's case: "'Vernon Lee' is unusual because although she chose her male name, she made very little attempt after her first forays into print to hide her real identity. That is, she used the pseudonym in her private life, but every one knew that 'Vernon Lee' was a woman" (Robbins, "Vernon" 159). This has led to speculation about Lee's masculine identification, for "Vernon Lee was much more than a pseudonym; it was [...] her chosen name and identification" (Newman 51) – but it also shows us that gender delineations in Lee must not be taken at face value: Gender is a fluid category even in her own authorial personality. There are, however, critics who see Lee's choice of pseudonym as a successful strategy to hide her gender and to thus escape gender expectations. Nelson, for instance, claims that "[t]elling her stories in a male voice seemingly frees Lee to write more explicitly about desire and to express her own homoerotic desire in an unobjectionable manner" (74) and Fraser draws attention to the fact that "Lee herself was all too aware of women's exclusion from the public world, and her own simulation of a masculine subject position, both by writing under a pseudonym and in other instances of authorial cross-dressing [...] points to the ambiguous status of women writing in masculine culture" ("Women" 87).

attraction to Zaffirino seems to be an obvious case of male homosexual infatuation as they are both assigned to the male gender in the text. On the other hand, Zaffirino's status as a castrato makes him androgynous and feminises him – "the hermaphroditic qualities that mark the castrato were often associated with lesbian sexuality" (Pulham, *Art* 26) – and Magnus's passivisation equally contributes to his feminisation. Gender fluidity is, consequently, a frequent trait of Lee's stories. "A Wicked Voice" is also interesting in terms of the closet, for it has one of the most fascinating dedications at its beginning: "Chi ha inteso, intenda", meaning "'whoever has (already) understood, let him understand' – with an unspoken connotation of 'and if the rest fail to understand, let them'" (Haefele-Thomas 132). This is, of course, as Haefele-Thomas notes, "coded language [which] directly calls out to a specific readership that will understand the code" (132): closet-speak.

Critics have also mentioned other aspects of Lee's stories that can be read as closeting strategies. These effects alienate or lead away from a realist depiction and so open up spaces for queer and transgressive desires, which are, at the same time, hidden underneath the veil of genre and setting. These are two of the main aspects frequently mentioned which allow Lee to experiment with a relatively 'open' depiction of queer desires while simultaneously hiding them. Lee's stories are mostly set in Italy and in the Renaissance or Medieval past. Italy, like France, is, of course, a *locus classicus* for homosexual desire, it "keeps appearing alongside queer desire" (Haefele-Thomas 123), for instance in the Lister diaries, where lesbian sexual consummation is described as "going to Italy" (Haefele-Thomas 123).[188]

[188] It should, of course, not be forgotten that Lee, as "a Victorian cosmopolitan" (A. Brown 185), partly grew up in and spent most of her adult life in Italy. Her familiarity with and enthusiasm for the country might have influenced her choice of setting, too: "Her attachment to Italy was lifelong and profound, and Italian cultural history became her chief source of literary inspiration" (Caballero 385). This, of course, influenced her relationship to her 'mother country': "In England, she was always an outsider" (Dellamora 542). It also added another layer of 'in-betweenness', a "borderline condition" (Fraser, "Interstitial" 115), to her character and life, for "[t]he consciousness of her cultural hybridity is a defining feature of Vernon Lee's writing on art, cultural history and

While allusions to Italy are thus charged with homoerotic energy and serve "as a code for homosexuality" (Wiley 74), the 'foreign' setting at the same time "enables Lee to critique Victorian culture from the safe distance of a 'quaint' Italian past" (Haefele-Thomas 124) – the setting makes expression of 'other' desires outside of the heteronormative scheme possible. The same goes for the setting in other eras, which has often been seen as a coding strategy for homosexuals, for "[a] refashioned past, whether Greek or Renaissance – the most popular eras – signaled both learning and an imaginative space where the lesbian imagination might flourish" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 101).[189] A third strategy for opening up queer spaces lies in the use of genre – Lee's decadent style[190] as well as her intermittent use of the fantastic genre are here seen as possibilities for concealing homoerotic desires. Evangelista, for instance, claims that "[a]estheticism gave her a language to explore gender difference and play with ideas of androgyny and sexual perversion" (92), while Kane speaks of her awareness of "the potential inherent in the supernatural genre for exploring subjects that could not be eluded [sic] to directly" (*Spurious* 16). There are many factors that signal Lee's aberration from the heteronormative order of late-nineteenth-century England and she makes use of a wide variety of strategies to cloak

place; it intersects with her transgressive authorial and sexual identity, and stands in for other, unspeakable identity positions" (Fraser, "Regarding" 247).

[189] In Lee's case, Vicinus sees this fascination with the past and the frequently occurring settings in past times as a case of "[h]omoerotic nostalgia" ("Legion" 599): "[T]he re-created past came to represent fulfilled love" ("Legion" 600), normally denied to the homosexual.

[190] Whether Lee belongs to the Aestheticist/Decadent movement or not has been subject to discussion. While Schaffer sees her as one of the "[p]rominent female aesthetes" (5) and Navarette regards her stories as "conform[ing] to the requirements of the sort of literary Decadence that was characteristic of fin de siècle male fantasy fiction" (144), others, such as Bristow, stress her "aversion toward an undisciplined male aestheticism whose art staked its highest value on somewhat titillating icons of female flesh" (120). Her later "renounc[iation] [of] the doctrine of 'art for art's sake'" (Caballero 386) has also stood in the way of her easy classification as an aestheticist writer. Colby has offered an early compromise between the positions by claiming that "she was at once a puritan preaching a strict morality and an aesthete reveling in the absolute moral detachment of pure art" (*Singular* 236). But in light of this contradictory information, maybe we should just stick with Maxwell's and Pulham's characterisation of Lee's art: "Vernon Lee is simply difficult to categorise" (Introduction to *Hauntings* 22).

these aberrations while at the same time obliquely communicating with those 'in the know'.

In the following chapter, I will discuss three of Lee's stories, namely "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1896), "A Wedding Chest" (1904) and "The Doll" (1927). The first two of these stories make use of the figure of the 'lesbian boy' in order to closet the queer desires at their core.[191] The last, written more than 20 years after the others, at a time shortly before the 'outing' of lesbian desire that *The Well of Loneliness* effected, does not 'need' this device anymore but instead dares to depict a lesbian, desiring relationship between two 'feminine' women – a rare occurrence in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This does not make the story any less closeted: Desire in general, homoerotic or queer as it is, needs to be cloaked, to be spoken of in allusions, to be hidden away in spatial structures appropriate to it in all of these stories.

"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1896)

One of Vernon Lee's most famous stories, "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1896), first published in the aestheticist magazine *The Yellow Book*, also demonstrates her employment of the figure of the 'lesbian boy'. Set in the fictional 'Duchy of Luna', the story deals with "the extinction of its famous ducal house in the persons of Duke Balthasar Maria and of his grandson Alberic" ("Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady"[192] 182). Neglected by his grandfather as he serves as an unwelcome reminder that the "Ever Young" Duke is "of an age to be a grandfather" ("PASL" 196), Alberic spends a lonely childhood secluded in a separate wing of his grandfather's

[191] These are not the only texts by Lee to make use of the figure of the 'lesbian boy': Pulham has argued that "the 'boys' in *Louis Norbert* are covert representations of the lesbian woman" ("Duality" 138) and that the figure also occurs in "A Wicked Voice" and "Oke of Okehurst" (cf. "Duality" 142).

[192] Lee, Vernon. "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady." *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*. Eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham. Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2006. 182-228. References to "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" will be abbreviated with "PASL" and the page number.

uncanny Red Palace. He finds his sole company in the tapestry that decorates the walls of his room: It does not only depict the natural world – plants and animals that the Prince has never seen in the artificial environment of the Red Palace – but also shows a knight with a lady at his side. Alberic is fascinated by the lady although he is, at first, only able to see her upper body, as the lower part is hidden behind a drawer. When the furniture in his room is moved at one point, however, he finds out that she ends in a serpent's tail. This does not put an end to Alberic's fascination. His grandfather, however, decides to replace the tapestry with a more fashionable one. When Alberic, in his anger, slashes the new tapestry to pieces, he is banished to the Castle of Sparkling Waters, the original seat of the Duchy's Dukes. But the Castle, being a real version of the world depicted in the tapestry, is exactly to Alberic's liking. Not only does he meet a tame snake there with whom he becomes friends, there is also a beautiful woman who claims to be his godmother and who appears for one hour each evening to instruct him. When he grows older, he becomes curious about the story depicted in the tapestry: A storyteller finally informs him about his ancestor, Alberic the Blond, who, in an enchanted Castle, kissed a snake and thereby temporarily turned her into a lady. He – and the next Alberic in the line – failed, however, to remain faithful to the Snake Lady, Oriana, for ten years, the precondition for her to permanently become a human being. After hearing this story, Alberic kisses his tame snake which thereupon turns into his godmother. Alberic peacefully lives with the Snake Lady for some years. When his grandfather runs out of money for his lavish building projects, he decides to take Alberic back to the Red Palace and marry him off to a rich heiress. Alberic returns with his pet snake but refuses all attempts to force him into marriage. When confronting his grandson one day, Duke Balthasar orders his advisors to kill the snake. With the Snake Lady dead, Alberic refuses all food and dies shortly thereafter, while Duke Balthasar, having discovered the body of a dead woman in the place of the dead snake, dies due to this shock.

"Prince Alberic" serves as a good example for the way in which Lee uses both setting and genre as strategies to closet queer desire. Setting is prominent in Lee's texts, but it is not simply a way of providing a 'background' for the short stories, but forms a quintessential part of their distancing effect vis-à-vis contemporary Victorian culture. "Prince Alberic" is – like all stories discussed in this chapter – set in the "queer space" (Haefele-Thomas 122) of Italy, with its long association with and, under the Code Napoléon, legal non-criminalisation of homosexuality (cf. Lutes 204). Both this geographical setting and the temporal setting – the story takes place in the last years of the seventeenth century, another fin-de-siècle – remove the story from the heteronormative space and time of Victorian England and open up possibilities for expressing queer desire. The same can be said for the genre: "Prince Alberic" has often been identified as a combination of "[p]art history, part legend, part fairy tale" (Wallace 109), with its fairy tale parts dominating the story so that it is seen as belonging to the 'fantastic' genre. And the fantastic, as a genre, is a means to deal with closeted desires, for it "traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (R. Jackson 4). Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the fairy tale genre is here used to covertly express and at the same time hide queer desire: "Like Wilde, Lee uses the form of the fairy story as a means of camouflaging ideas which readers might otherwise reject if presented in unadorned prose" (Maxwell and Pulham, Introduction to *Hauntings* 16).[193]

This closeting strategy is similarly pursued with regard to the content of the story, where Alberic's feminine characterisation leads to ambivalence and to the possibility of reading the story as one of lesbian or queer love

[193] Stetz, in an interesting interpretation of "Prince Alberic", sees the story as an explicit defence of and homage to Wilde who was, at the time of its publication, imprisoned due to his homosexuality: "The fate of Alberic, the art-worshipping dreamer who is persecuted and imprisoned for refusing to renounce an outlaw love in favour of a socially approved one, is as much a political allegory as a fairy tale" (113). This would be another case of the text's functioning as a coded allusion and would also put emphasis on the homosexual content.

and relationship. Alberic, as several critics have noted, is "another of Lee's effeminate heroes" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 107; cf. also Schmidt 103, Haefele-Thomas 143 and Kane, "Uncanny" 45): He looks "slender and strong, with abundant golden hair falling about his very white face" ("PASL" 192). It is especially his hair on which his feminisation rests: "His long hair, the colour of floss silk, fell in wavy curls, which seemed to imply almost a woman's care and coquetry" ("PASL" 198). While his outward appearance – in its association with women and emphasis on 'boyishness' – serves to code him as a 'lesbian boy', this is just one aspect of his identification with women, which runs much deeper. After all, "Prince Alberic" has frequently been read as a struggle between a male and a female principle, a conflict in which Duke Balthasar's patriarchal system is subverted by the female intrusion of the Snake Lady. In this clash, Alberic stands on the side of the Snake Lady and thus on the side of the female principle: Even in his earliest childhood, Alberic identifies with the Snake Lady in the tapestry, not with the knight who should be the focus of his attention, and his strong love for nature – traditionally associated with femininity[194] – forms a stark contrast to Duke Balthasar's fondness of architecture. "Alberic's ardent and unschooled approval of the Snake Lady, in her various manifestations, forms a counterpoint to the duke's overweening narcissism and culturally constructed misogyny" (Hotchkiss 28). These early inclinations are later strengthened by his 'feminine' upbringing by the Snake Lady: He has formed a "feminine bond with his mythical godmother, negating the absolutist patriarchal rule of his grandfather" (Zorn 153). By educating Alberic, the Duke's heir and, consequently, the future ruler of the Duchy of Luna, the Snake Lady has covertly subverted the Duchy's patriarchal structures, for in her education, she "protects the boy from the patriarchal culture

[194] Recent ecofeminism has tried to re-evaluate the traditionally negatively seen connection between nature and women, claiming that "[d]espite its role as the bedrock of oppressive ideologies, nature has also been a space of feminist possibility, an always saturated but somehow undomesticated ground" (Alaimo 23). In general, however, the connection between the two terms has been regarded critically and attempts have been made to disentangle them.

which exalts military skill and political strategizing" (Kane, *Spurious* 63). Instead, she focuses on teaching him how "to play (for he had never played) and to read, and to manage a horse, and, above all, to love" ("PASL" 202), while still educating him in all the important aspects of Court life. And this 'feminine' education, Lee emphasises, is successful, for when Alberic comes to Court, he proves to be a valuable asset there: "He was marvellously assiduous in the council chamber [...]. He surprised every one by his interest and intelligence in all affairs of state" ("PASL" 217), and many more of his qualities are listed. At the same time, however, his education has strengthened Alberic's identification with women and his faith in the Snake Lady to such a degree that he openly opposes the patriarchal system by refusing to marry according to his grandfather's wishes. In Alberic, we find the 'woman-identified' boy: a 'lesbian boy'.

Regarding Alberic's strong identification with women as proof of his construction as a 'lesbian boy' allows us to see the story as one of closeted queer desire. The story itself is filled with secrets and sudden revelations: Alberic himself spends his childhood hidden away in a deserted wing of the Red Palace because he serves as his grandfather's secret, an unwelcome reminder of the fact that he is "of an age to be a grandfather" ("PASL" 196). Of course, power, not age, is what is really at stake here: After all, Alberic's father "died with mysterious suddenness" ("PASL" 196), and hence, "the text clearly implies, at the order of the duke" (Hotchkiss 30). Alberic, as another contender for the throne and as a guilty reminder of the past murder, is literally closeted away in the deserted wing and thus figuratively put into a back room of the Duke's mind. The Duke's secret is thus a typical male closet, in which the secret of patriarchal power structures is at the bottom of what is hidden away. By contrasting the Duke's male closet with Alberic's female one we can once again see the latter's identification with women and the clash between the male and the female which the story constructs. For Alberic's history with the closet begins quite differently, without the violence and strife for power that accompanies the Duke's: It is Alberic's transgressive love for the Snake Lady that

has to be hidden away and that puts him into the vicinity of the closet. Within the story, the Snake Lady comes to represent the quintessentially 'queer': She herself is in the closet with regard to her snake attributes, which signal her queerness. Alberic's association with and love for her in spite and *because* of her (queer) snake attributes consequently push him into the closet himself.

As so often in Lee's texts, the art object at the centre of "Prince Alberic" functions as a closet, a repository of a secret crucial to the story's characters.[195] In "Prince Alberic", the tapestry introduces Alberic to both nature, as an expression of femininity, and queer desire in the form of the Snake Lady. It is exactly this snake attribute of Oriana which the tapestry hides, however, and only reveals when Alberic is ready for this 'outing', when his education by the tapestry has raised him to both tolerance towards and appreciation for this materialisation of queerness. At first, he can only see her upper body, that (seemingly heterosexual) image of her acceptable to society: "The lady who was looking up into his [the knight's] face was dressed with a high collar and long sleeves, and on her head she wore a thick circular garland, from under which the hair fell about her shoulders" ("PASL" 186). Even this image, however, is faded, making the lady appear ghost-like – a metaphor typical of lesbian desire, as Terry Castle so accurately noted in *The Apparitional Lesbian*.[196] The lady's ghost-like appearance is repeatedly stressed, for she is "so very pale and faded, and almost the colour of the moonbeams through the palace windows in summer" ("PASL" 186) – one of the first of many associations between the

[195] We can see this in both "A Wedding Chest" and "The Doll", but also in Lee stories not mentioned here: In "Oke of Okehurst", for instance, the painter's inability to finish his portrait of Alice Okehurst signals her queer desires for both her male and female ancestor (for the queerness of Alice's desires, see Pulham, *Art* 131). In "A Wicked Voice", Magnus's hidden, homoerotic attraction to Zaffirino finds expression in both Zaffirino's portrait and in his songs, which almost drive Magnus insane (several critics have noted Magnus's homoerotic or queer desires, see for instance Maxwell, "Sappho" 960).
[196] In her book, Castle demonstrates that spectral metaphors are common in the expression of lesbian desire: To draw attention away from the carnal, texts often turn one of the female lovers into a ghost and thereby make bodily consummation seemingly impossible (cf. *Apparitional* 30).

(female) moon and the Snake Lady. As Alberic grows up, he becomes more and more ready for the knowledge hidden by the tapestry: "[T]he figures seemed like ghosts, sometimes emerging then receding again into vagueness. Indeed, it was only as he grew bigger that Alberic began to see any figures at all; and then, for a long time he would lose sight of them" ("PASL" 186). The Snake Lady only reveals herself as such, however, when Alberic is eleven and thus on the brink of sexual understanding: At that point, "the inlaid chest of drawers" ("PASL" 187) that hides the snake body is removed and Alberic sees that the lady he adores "end[s] off in a big snake's tail" ("PASL" 187). The image is blatantly phallic,[197] putting the Snake Lady, like Prince Alberic himself, in the realm of in-betweenness in terms of gender.[198] But Alberic – in contrast to so many of his literary ancestors confronted with snake ladies[199] – is at no point appalled by her: "[H]e love[s] the beautiful lady with the thread of gold hair only the more because she end[s] off in the long twisting body of a snake" ("PASL" 188). Alberic has passed the test of 'queerness': He has understood that Oriana's snake attributes signal her (queer) difference, but this difference is exactly what makes her attractive to him for it creates a point of sympathy between them.

[197] It comes as no surprise then that Hotchkiss, in a psychoanalytic reading of the story, sees the Snake Lady as the "phallic woman" or the "clitoral woman, the woman who has 'never already' lacked anything until patriarchal history reified its own parapraxis and claimed, as Freud often did, that there was 'nothing' where there was, in fact, the powerful and exclusively erotic (a distinction the male organ lacks) female organ of pleasure" (22).

[198] It is also, of course, an "inter-species […] relationship" (Haefele-Thomas 121), which further queers it.

[199] "Among the terms to describe a woman's appearance none were more overused during the late nineteenth century than 'serpentine,' 'sinuous,' and 'snake-like'" (Dijkstra 305) and snake ladies were a frequent, though mostly negative, figure in late nineteenth century literature and art. "'Prince Alberic' is richly intertextual, recalling multiple sources for snake-women including Keats's 'Lamia' (1819), Coleridge's 'Christabel' (1816) and Swinburne's serpent-like fatal women" (Wallace 111). In "Prince Alberic", however, Lee represents "the serpent-woman grotesque as beautiful, wise, erotic, and good" (Hotchkiss 24) which aligns the story most closely with E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf" (cf. Christensen 82).

At this point in the story, Alberic has been introduced into Oriana's closet and her outing vis-à-vis him has been successful: She has both transferred the crucial information and secured his understanding and sympathy. But Alberic has not yet understood his own role within this relationship of desire, for while he has seen that Oriana is a (queer) Snake Lady, he is still unable to see himself as a (queer) lover of a Snake Lady. This is what is effected through the further elaborations on the Snake Lady's story which Alberic has so far only grasped intuitively. Significantly, the story of the Snake Lady figures under the 'don't ask, don't tell'-rule so typical of the closet, for when seeing the snake's tail, Alberic "ask[s] no questions feeling that he must not" ("PASL" 188). But his fear is mostly a fear of learning too much about himself and thus having to confront his own queer desires: "Children sometimes conceive an inexplicable shyness, almost a dread, of knowing more on some subject which is uppermost in their thoughts; and such had been the case of Duke Balthasar Maria's grandson" ("PASL" 201). In his teenage years, however, Alberic "beg[ins] to experience a restless, miserable craving to know all" ("PASL" 204) – the intensity of the wish underlines that this is, above all, a desire for (sexual) self-knowledge. The scenes in which the story-teller and the priest elaborate on the history of Alberic's ancestors and the Snake Lady are "heavily laden with the imagery of ritual initiation" (Kane, *Spurious* 58) and function as rites of passage in which Alberic discovers his own erotic investment in the Snake Lady and thus the queer aspects of his identity. Twice, this discovery leads to states of bodily illness which function as "the sign of overwhelming erotic desire" (Vicinus, *Intimate* 167), but also, and more importantly, as signs of the extreme transformations that occur within the Prince's psyche on his way to an acceptance of his queer identity. The information he gathers not only shows him that his desire is for the Snake Lady, but also demonstrates a way for him to be with her: By kissing the Snake Lady, Alberic discovers

both that the queer snake and his godmother are one and the same[200] and accepts his own queer identity. The scene is heavily laden with moon imagery (cf. "PASL" 213-215; I count nine references to the moon),[201] underlining once again that this is a scene of female communication and female love, a scene open to a lesbian interpretation. The kiss that seals the relationship between Alberic and Oriana brings about the second occurrence of bodily illness, causing unconsciousness on Alberic's part: "Fulfillment is so overwhelming as to be almost unsupportable", leading Vicinus to speculate that "[p]erhaps like Anne Lister […] Lee employed the kiss as metonymy for an orgasm" (*Intimate* 168).[202] "[T]he ideal lesbian romance" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 109) begins now, with Alberic's acceptance of his queer identity.

But this 'ideal lesbian romance' loses some of its ideal character in the necessity for it to be closeted. From the start, Alberic's relationships to both snake and godmother are secreted,[203] although they only turn into a fully fleshed-out closet when he comes to accept his sexual identity. At their first meeting, his godmother immediately tells him: "'Only, you must remember that I do so [visit Alberic] against the wishes of your grandfather and all his friends, and that if ever you mention me to any one, or allude in any way to our meetings, I shall be obliged to leave the neighbourhood,

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[200] The incestuous motif is obvious: "His godmother changes from being his mother and teacher to being his love object" (Vicinus, *Intimate* 167). This is a further sign of the 'queerness' of the relationship.

[201] Here we can also find the image of the well which has occurred before in the story and which can be seen as a lesbian metaphor: "The scene is redolent of lesbian imagery, including not only the lush vaginal-like well, but also the mirroring of two lovers" (Vicinus, *Intimate* 166, 167). Mirroring is often seen as a homosexual metaphor because it stresses the sameness of the lovers, while water is a 'female' symbol. Hotchkiss elaborates on the sexual metaphor by proposing that "the wellspring scene […] suggests that she [Lee] knew a thing or two about cunnilingus" (27).

[202] The explicitly sexual nature of Alberic's relationship to the Snake Lady has repeatedly been stressed: "The erotic implications of 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' are undeniable" (Colby, *Vernon* 229), for there is a "full erotic union with the erstwhile 'godmother'" (Hotchkiss 24) in this quasi-symbiotic relationship (cf. Schmidt 108).

[203] They also take place in the quasi-closeted Castle of Sparkling Waters: Like the deserted wing in which Alberic spent his childhood, the Castle of Sparkling Waters is a place that functions as a sort of 'back room' of his grandfather's and the Court's consciousness. Alberic's reappearances at Court can be seen as a return of the unconscious, of that which has been repressed and would rather be forgotten.

and you will never see me again'" ("PASL" 202). The same goes for the snake, for Alberic does not dare to mention her to his godmother, either: "As to the Snake […] he would willingly have spoken of her, and had once been on the point of doing so, but he had noticed that the mere name of such creatures seemed to be odious to his Godmother" ("PASL" 203). Both godmother and snake – one and the same person, as we will learn later – form relationships with Alberic that are secret and must be hidden away. When Alberic has come to accept his queer identity, he also has to accept that his relationship to Oriana must be closeted vis-à-vis the patriarchal Court of the Duchy of Luna. It is, above all, a "secret relationship" (Zorn 156): One that can prosper in the removed realm of the Castle of Sparkling Waters but cannot survive its 'outing' in Duke Balthasar's patriarchal system.

Duke Balthasar's realm is, above all, a form of panopticon, a state of total control and surveillance, in which the male desire to spy into the female closet, a desire which I have identified as typical of the relationship between men and the female closet, can be indulged in to the utmost. Several critics have noted the way in which the Duke's Red Palace resembles Foucault's panopticon: "Balthasar Marie's Red Palace with its busts of the twelve Caesars, functions as a panopticon on Alberic, instilling a sense of fear and guilt which are aimed at preventing him from acting outside of the prescribed forms of behavior" (Kane, "Uncanny" 49). Alberic is horrified by this spectacle of total surveillance, which expresses itself as a specifically *male* surveillance, the Twelve Caesars as stand-ins for the male gaze:

> Then there were the Twelve Caesars – they were the Twelve Caesars, but multiplied over and over again – busts with flying draperies and spiky garlands, one over every first-floor window, hundreds of them, all fluttering and grimacing round the place. Alberic had always thought them uncanny; but now he positively avoided looking out of the window, lest his eye should catch the stucco eyeball

> of one of those Caesars in the opposite wing of the building. ("PASL" 189)

Within the Red Palace, Alberic is under constant surveillance from the male gaze. Only outside of this place, with its compulsive desire to spy, can Alberic develop both his queer identity and his first queer relationship, far from the sphere of influence of the patriarchal gaze. At his return to the Red Palace, though, Alberic is only able to withdraw from this gaze for so long: His inability to adhere by the implicit and explicit rules of the Court – by showing interest in ladies and following his grandfather's wishes – draws attention to him and his female closet again and thus leads to the catastrophe. His resistance to the Duke's orders is here evidently feminine-gendered, for it consists of his refusal to marry according to his grandfather's desire, to act as "a marketable commodity" (Robbins, "Vernon" 154) for him. This is, of course, a problem that women have faced for centuries in a patriarchal world, where they only function as wares to be exchanged.[204] The more Alberic resists the patriarchal system, the more the spying intensifies:[205] "Direct influence having proved useless, the Duke and his counsellors, among whom the Jesuit, the Dwarf, and the Jester had been duly reinstated, looked round for means of indirect persuasion or coercion" ("PASL" 222). These means are only discovered through ever closer surveillance – the Duke himself "sit[s] in a dark cupboard in his grandson's chamber, and […] look[s] through his keyhole" ("PASL" 223) – which finally uncovers "a rumour, very vague but very persistent, that Prince Alberic d[oes] not inhabit his wing of the palace in absolute solitude" ("PASL" 223). Alberic has attempted to closet his queer relationship by

[204] Haefele-Thomas also emphasises the similarity between Alberic's situation and that of queer people in all ages: "How often have queer people had to endure this inane sort of heterosexist 'hook up'?" (145)

[205] The general atmosphere of surveillance and spying in the story is comparable to that which homosexuals experienced in the late nineteenth century: "With these governmental spies from old Duke Balthasar's house, it is easy to glean a much more sinister and frightening reading of these official figures as spies (like the police in London) waiting to blackmail, at best, or entrap and arrest the suspected sodomite" (Haefele-Thomas 145).

hiding Oriana's human form, keeping her as a seeming pet snake and only leading "whispered conversations" ("PASL" 223) with her, but in this state of ubiquitous surveillance, the truth will come out. Locked in prison, Alberic is visited by the Duke and his counsellors who finally kill the Snake Lady.[206] Alberic cannot survive the discovery of his secret and therefore of his queer sexuality. But the Duke has misunderstood the implications of Alberic's snake in the same way as he has never believed in the existence of the snake lady (cf. "PASL" 183): "[T]here is a notion here that queerness is not to be believed; it is not real" (Haefele-Thomas 143), in the same way as lesbianism is not legally recognised. Only the find of the dead woman in the place where the dead snake should have been teaches the Duke the truth about the existence of the Snake Lady and finally 'outs' Alberic's queer desires.[207] It is this knowledge – of a queer, female-connoted sexuality independent of men – that so shakes the Duke's patriarchal world view that he dies shortly thereafter: "[R]epression and control over what is feminine is an untenable position destined to lead to the fall of the House of Luna, the metaphoric figuration of the House of Patriarchy" (Kane, "Uncanny" 58). Before he does so, however, he relegates Alberic to the status so often aligned with the closeted women in the texts we have encountered: He is "hastily buried under a slab, which remained without any name or date" ("PASL" 227), so as "to remove him from history" (Hotchkiss 35). Queer sexuality must be hidden away even in death.

[206] The accusations that the Duke's counsellors direct at Alberic are all homosexually-connoted: "'Your obstinacy, my Lord,' exclaimed the Dwarf [...], 'betrays the existence of a hidden conspiracy most dangerous to the state.' 'It is an indication,' added the Jester, 'of a highly deranged mind.' 'It seems to me,' whispered the Jesuit, 'to savour most undoubtedly of devilry'" ("PASL" 226). Treason, insanity and devil-worship have all long been connected with sodomy in the general mind. The entire Court thinks of Alberic as "somewhat insane" ("PASL" 223).

[207] This is an example of "the recurrence in her [Lee's] fantastic tales of the figure of a naked woman, always with demoniacal stigmata" (313), as Praz claims. Rather than as demoniacal stigmata, I see the wounds on the figure of the dead woman – which also reoccur in "A Wedding Chest" – as a criticism of patriarchal society's propensity towards violence vis-à-vis women.

"A Wedding Chest" (1904)

We encounter the figure of the 'lesbian boy' again in a later tale of Lee's called "A Wedding Chest" (1904), first published in the story collection *Pope Jacynth and Other Fantastic Tales*. The story starts out with the description of a painted panel, "formerly the front of a *cassone* or coffer" ("A Wedding Chest"[208] 229) (the eponymous wedding chest), listed as an item in a museum catalogue. The panel depicts the stages of love and was originally painted by Desiderio of Castiglione del Lago, contracted for the painting by his rival, Troilo Baglioni, a boyish rake from an influential family. Desiderio is engaged to Maddalena, the daughter of his employer, Ser Piero Bontempi, but Troilo, known for his amorous adventures, takes a liking to her and has her kidnapped on the eve of her wedding to Desiderio. A year later, he returns the wedding chest to Desiderio, calling it a "wedding gift" ("AWC" 237); in it, Desiderio finds the dead body of Maddalena together with her equally dead baby. Having buried Maddalena with the chest as coffin, Desiderio goes into hiding and only re-emerges seven years later when he has received news of Ser Piero's death. Having vowed to take revenge on Troilo, he kills him in the street, drinks his blood, and leaves town, taking with him the chest with Maddalena's dead body.

Similar to "Prince Alberic", "A Wedding Chest" uses setting as a way to distance the story and thus to facilitate the inclusion of queer desires (cf. Pulham, *Art* 86): After all, we are not dealing with contemporary England, but with Renaissance Italy and a story told in a style that "emulates the narrative of a Renaissance chronicle" (Maxwell and Pulham, Introduction to *Hauntings* 17). Next to Prince Alberic, Troilo is another example of a male character in Lee's stories who, by being identified as a 'boy' and given female characteristics, can be said to function as a cypher for queer

[208] Lee, Vernon. "A Wedding Chest." *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*. Eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham. Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2006. 229-242. References to "A Wedding Chest" will be abbreviated with "AWC" and the page number.

desires. After all, he is described as "a most beautiful youth – he was only turned nineteen, and the first down had not come to his cheeks, and his skin was astonishingly white and fair like a woman's" ("AWC" 235). And even when becoming older, Troilo does not lose this feminine charm: At the end of the story, "Messer Troilo [i]s twenty-six years old, but seem[s] much younger, having no beard, and a face like Hyacinthus or Ganymede, whom Jove stole to be his cupbearer, on account of his beauty" ("AWC" 241). "Lee's heterosexual rake looks more like the object of homosexual desire" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 107). Pulham has linked this likeness to the young boys from Greek mythology to the figure of "the castrato" (*Art* 86), which keeps reappearing in Lee's work and which is repeatedly used to queer gender relations, by radically breaking up the binary division between the female and the male. She sees further proof of Troilo's "double-sexed" (Pulham, *Art* 86) nature in his being compared to the Eros figure in Desiderio's wedding chest panel. The uncertain nature of Troilo's gender is thus a way to possibly imagine a lesbian heroine without openly revealing the homoerotic desires at work – it is a way to closet queer attraction.

With Troilo being read as a 'lesbian boy', the story becomes highly subversive. After all, it makes the most of the freedom given to male characters in contrast to female ones: Troilo is not only "[o]ne of the most ruthless boys in any fiction" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 107), "the most beautiful, benign, and magnanimous of his magnificent family" but "also the most cruel thereof, and incapable of brooking delay or obstacles" ("AWC" 235);[209] he

[209] Vicinus claims that "Lee frequently used violence and death to represent the destructive nature of same-sex relations" ("Adolescent" 107) and Haefele-Thomas concurs: "In Vernon Lee's fictionalized decadent Gothic, desire – and more specifically queer desire – does bring about death and destruction" (121). Troilo's violence, however, should rather be seen as part of a whole cluster of deviances which characterise him, of which his homoeroticism is only one, although a very important aspect (this would be similar to the figure of the sodomite, whose homosexuality forms one among many elements of his subversiveness (cf. Hotz-Davies, "No Use" 188)).
It should also be noted that the narrator's sympathy seems to lie with Troilo: "In spite of his condemnation of Troilo's evil deeds, the chronicler nonetheless seems to find him attractive and there is far more space devoted to his appearance than there is to Maddalena's" (Maxwell und Pulham, Introduction to *Hauntings* 17).

is, most importantly, a rake figure and thus "of a very amorous nature" ("AWC" 235). The character's in-betweenness regarding gender makes this interesting: The Victorian Age denied women sexual passion; the figure of the boy, with his female masculinity, however, is able to reclaim such desires. The 'lesbian boy' is here given a very explicit and very strong sexuality: He thus becomes a dangerous rival for the heterosexual man. This is very much so the case with Troilo, for one of his most obvious functions within the text is that he represents a subversion of heterosexual marriage. He not only kidnaps Maddalena exactly on "the eve of [her] wedding" ("AWC" 235), but also returns her dead body in the wedding chest, thus perverting its original use. The wedding chest, "intended to contain the [...] jewels of a bride" ("AWC" 229) – metaphorically, her virginity –, here instead becomes a sign of sexuality outside of wedlock. We can read this as an ascription of immense power to the 'lesbian boy' in his status as a rival to heterosexual men, as an incarnation of exactly the subversive influence that society attributed to the figure of the lesbian from the late nineteenth century onwards.[210] Troilo is not only able to prevent heterosexual marriage, he is, just like Anne Lister, capable of deflowering a woman, a 'power' that society sees as men's prerogative.

What is interesting in this set-up is the story's focus on the object of the wedding chest: "In 'A Wedding Chest' the chronicler lavishes attention on material objects and events while remaining far less communicative about characters' subjectivity and motives" (Maxwell and Pulham, Introduction to *Hauntings* 17). This is, on the one hand, a typical motif in Lee's stories, which repeatedly put art objects at their centre (cf. Vrettos 207, Hoberman 479).[211] However, Lee's art objects are frequently the locus of forbidden desires which are hidden away within them (cf. Brosch 203), and

[210] In the figure of the "hermaphrodite", as a woman with an enlarged clitoris who was thus 'naturally' inclined to desire other women, we can see that lesbian women were seen as a danger to male society long before the nineteenth century (cf. Donoghue, *Passions* 25).

[211] Art also "functions as the crucial intermediary between the past and the present" (A. Smith 76), a relation that is central to Lee's writing.

these desires are "often homoerotic" (Pulham, *Art* xiv). The wedding chest is, ostensibly, an object meant to celebrate heterosexual love, with its "four portions or regions, intended to represent the four phases of the amorous passion" ("AWC" 230, 231), modelled on Petrarca's "The Triumph of Love", and the many heterosexual couples that it depicts, such as "Julius Caesar, who loved Cleopatra […]; Sophonisba and Massinissa […]; Orpheus, seeking for Eurydice" ("AWC" 232) and many more.[212] But its use within the text turns this upside-down, for the chest comes to represent the material incorporation of Troilo's queer 'love' and functions as a way to closet this 'different' kind of desire. Troilo is very much aware of the chest's symbolic value and his return of it as a "wedding gift" ("AWC" 237) to Desiderio, with the dead body of his fiancée inside it, acts as an 'outing', consciously disrupting and subverting the heterosexual relationship Desiderio desired, and replacing it with a queer one. The opening of the chest repeats the box-within-a-box structure which keeps reoccurring in relation to the closet. Not only does Ser Piero "carr[y] the chest into a secret chamber in his house, saying not a word to any creature" ("AWC" 237), Maddalena's body itself is covered under several layers which have to be lifted before she, as a visual sign of Troilo's 'aberrant' love, is disclosed:

> The lid being raised, they came to a piece of red cloth, such is used for mules; *etiam*, a fold of common linen; and below it, a coverlet of green silk, which, being raised, their eyes were met […] by the body of Monna Maddalena, naked as God had made it, dead with two stabs in the neck, the long golden hair tied with pearls but dabbed in blood[.] ("AWC" 237)[213]

[212] It is, of course, worth noting that Greek mythology and Greek history in general, which is a frequent motif on the wedding chest's panel, is also very much homosexually-connoted and that many of the ostensibly heterosexual stories are also obliquely queered. Still, the panel – after all designed by Desiderio, who identifies with heterosexuality – is meant to depict the triumph of heterosexual love.

[213] We see here another example of Lee's tendency to depict naked dead women, which we have already come across in "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady". This is a typical

In killing Maddalena and sending her back to Desiderio, Troilo's role as a conscious adversary of heterosexuality becomes obvious, for he explicitly "revenges himself upon husbands and fiancés" (Vicinus, "Adolescent" 107) and although sexually desiring Maddalena, he inflicts violence upon her in order to fulfil this revenge. Troilo is thus no champion for women's rights against a patriarchal system – after all, there are "many tales [...] concerning the violence he had done to damsels and citizens' wives of Gubbio and Spello and evil deeds in the castle of Fratta in the Apennines" ("AWC" 235) –, he instead repeats the violence of the heterosexual system while living out his rivalry with heterosexual men. He is the threatening 'lesbian boy' figure, a danger to both men and women, and therein lies his radical subversiveness. Desiderio understands this danger and accordingly attempts to reclaim the chest for his own purposes, as a monument to his own heterosexual desire. Before he has killed Troilo, this is only possible by burying the chest, thereby hiding the traces of Troilo's aberrant desires. By his elaborate ritual for burying Maddalena, Desiderio expels Troilo's influence over her and affirms his own love, while trying to preserve her for himself:[214]

> Desiderio tenderly lifted the body of Monna Maddalena out of the wedding chest, washed it in odorous waters, and dressed it in fine linen and bridal garments, not without much weeping over the poor damsel's sad plight, and curses upon the cruelty of her ravisher; and having embraced her tenderly, they laid her once more in the box painted with the Triumph of Love, upon folds of fine damask

motif of decadent literature which repeatedly turns women into passivised objects for the male gaze; in Lee's stories, however, these dead women are "seemingly linked to expressions of lesbian sexuality" (Pulham, *Art* 141). By queering her stories' material, Lee implicitly subverts Decadence's male bias, while at the same time retaining its objectification of female bodies.

[214] We can see in this Maddalena's role as silenced, passivised woman, who is merely the bone of contention between two different, but equally possessive, lovers: "Throughout the story we never have any real insight into the nature of Maddalena's own wishes and desires as she is turned from a lovely dutiful maiden into a beautiful fetishized corpse" (Maxwell and Pulham, Introduction to *Hauntings* 17).

> and brocade […]. They filled the chest with as many flowers as they could find […] and a certain gum called Syrian fizelis […] in which they say that the body of King David was kept intact from earthly corruption[.] ("AWC" 238, 239)

Only with Troilo dead, is Desiderio able to completely reclaim the wedding chest and Maddalena's body by excavating her and taking the chest with him, thus "preserving with him always the body of Monna Maddalena in the wedding chest painted with the Triumph of Love" ("AWC" 242).[215] The wedding chest is hence no longer a symbol of Desiderio's personal love; it is a testimony to the triumph of his heterosexual model of love over the queer, deviant model that Troilo represented.

Desiderio's murder of Troilo can be interpreted in a similar vein, as an attempt on his part to establish his own and his heterosexual model's superiority over his rival, after said rival's 'outing'. The murder, after all, is not just a simple matter of killing Troilo, but is conducted in a ritualistic fashion: Desiderio explicitly "vow[s] never to touch food save the Body of Christ till he c[an] taste of the blood of Messer Troilo" ("AWC" 240) and, after he has killed him, true to his word, "stoop[s] over his chest, and lapp[s] up the blood as it flow[s]; and it [is] the first food he taste[s] since taking the Body of Christ" ("AWC" 241). Desiderio's vow of revenge is not intended to be metaphorical; it is a literal blood-sucking that he deems appropriate as punishment for Troilo. This scene of Troilo's murder has often been read as an expression of the triangle of desire that is established between Desiderio, Troilo and Maddalena. This triangulation is already alluded to in the choice of Troilo's name, for, as Maxwell and Pulham stress, "The word 'troilism' is defined as 'sexual activity in which three persons take part'" (Introduction to *Vernon Lee* 19), and Pulham adds that "it has now come to define 'a psychotic sexual manifestation in which the patient desires the sexual partner of the person for whom he has homosexual

[215] Pulham rightly notes that "Maddalena's body functions as a 'fetish'" ("Colouring" 14) as well.

yearnings'" ("Colouring" 13). These critics thus see the 'love' triangle within the story as a typical homoerotic triangle in the vein of Sedgwick, in which the homoerotic relation between the two rivals is as strong (or stronger) as their relation to the love object. Desiderio's drinking of Troilo's blood would then be seen as literalising this triangulation, for

> Desiderio's vampire-like lapping of Troilo's blood arguably functions as an act of introjection which, given the 'two stabs' that mark Maddalena's neck, suggests a form of vampiric consummation of his relationship with Maddalena mediated via the androgynous body of Troilo's corpse, an act which 'feminises' Desiderio in the process, for it involves a kind of 'homoerotic' engagement with Troilo's body. (Pulham, "Colouring" 13)

This is even more so the case as "[t]he vampire […] is often associated with homoeroticism, particularly via the androgynous vampire mouth with which it feeds on its own as well as on the opposite sex" (Pulham, *Art* 135). While this interpretation is certainly intriguing and valid, it does not work as well when we regard Troilo as a figure for the 'lesbian boy'. In this case, Desiderio sucking Troilo's blood would rather show the extreme violence that patriarchy resorts to when threatened by a 'lesbian boy' or a lesbian in general: It could then be read as a form of queer or lesbian hate crime. Unable to accept a non-heteronormative desire, Desiderio tries to re-install men in the economy of desire between Maddalena and Troilo by 'raping' the latter: "Desiderio had him down, and ran his sword three times through his chest" ("AWC" 241). The drinking of the blood would then be a continuation of this rape symbol, an attempt on Desiderio's part to establish his heterosexual superiority over Troilo and to expel the latter's dangerous, unveiled queer sexuality.

"The Doll" (1927)

"The Doll" (1927), which first appeared in the story collection *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories* and is sometimes alternatively published under the title of "The Image", deals with the strange occurrences a nameless, female narrator witnesses while on a collecting tour in Foligno, Italy. She decides to narrate these events to an equally unnamed listener, presumably a (female) friend. In Italy, the narrator was led to visit a seventeenth-century palace by her Italian guide Orestes, ostensibly to take a look at a Chinese set of crockery. While touring the manor house, she stumbles upon the figure of a cardboard doll, depicting the "'first wife of the [current] Count's grandfather'" ("The Doll"[216] 195), dressed in her former clothes and with a wig made of her real hair. The narrator quickly becomes obsessed with the Doll, exceedingly mixing up the inanimate object and the real-life woman. She feels that, without being able to communicate with either Doll or woman, she is connected to her and knows both her life story and emotions. Confronted with her imminent departure, the narrator decides to buy the Doll and finally burns her with the help of Orestes.

Critics have frequently detected an "odd" (Stableford), "enigmatic" (Colby, *Vernon* 243) quality in this story. Although, in contrast to many of her short stories, not "being supernatural" (Stableford), it is certainly "uncanny" (Kane, *Spurious* 94),[217] its "simplicity of structure and tone" (Navarette 155) barely hiding the underlying disturbing nature of the tale. Instead of the historical setting so typical of Lee's stories, she here makes use of a contemporary one, but the homoerotic desires at the story's core are still distanced by the device of a frame, so that the main action is already

[216] Lee, Vernon. "The Doll." *What Did Miss Darrington See? An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction*. Ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonson. New York: Feminist Press, 1989. 192-200. References to "The Doll" will be abbreviated with "Doll" and the page number.
[217] "[T]he significant aspects of the uncanny are its powers [...] of doubling, of repetition, and, equally, the ability to disturb not with something alien or strange but, instead, through the return of the all too familiar, that which we have repressed, forgotten; something, which we might describe as a secret" (Wolfreys 15). Wolfreys is here summarising Freud's original definition of the uncanny which relies on the ambiguity of the German term "unheimlich".

in the past. It is also one of the very few of Lee's stories in which the narrator is female: In contrast to "Prince Alberic" and "A Wedding Chest", the queer/lesbian content is thus not closeted away in the figure of the 'lesbian boy'. The story rather works by ostensibly proposing another motive for the narrator's unusual actions, one, in which her extreme identification with the Doll is caused by her understanding that they share the common situation of women in a patriarchal society. By offering a mainstream, 'normal' and heterosexual interpretation beside an underlying subversive one, the story closets its homoerotic bearings which are, to a certain degree, only available for the initiated reader. It is thus hardly surprising that Colby proposes such a heterosexual reading: For her, the story presents a "sensitive sketch of a middle-aged woman finding fulfillment for something missing in her own life. That missing something, suggested by her retrieving the doll's wedding ring, involves her marriage and her husband's indifference to her wants and needs" (*Vernon* 244). The Doll, too, is married to a man 'indifferent to her wants and needs': She has been "married straight out of the convent, and, during her brief wedded life, been kept secluded from the world by her husband's mad love for her, so that she ha[s] remained a mere shy, proud, inexperienced child" ("Doll" 196, 197). But this 'mad love' is a purely "narcissistic" (Kane, *Spurious* 110) one on part of the Count, who "never made an attempt to train this raw young creature into a companion, or showed any curiosity as to whether his idol might have a mind or a character of her own" ("Doll" 197). We can certainly find "an inherent critique of heterosexual relations" (Haefele-Thomas 139) in these lines. On one level, the story is about the enforced passivisation of women in a patriarchal society and this is underlined in the figure of the cardboard Doll who serves as a material expression of this female state of "immobilization" (Zorn 193). Several critics have stressed how the Doll comes to represent the Victorian 'ideal woman': Pulham sees "the doll [...] as an analogue for the powerless Victorian woman, subject to male power and control. [...] What could be more passive than an 'inanimate' object? And what more sexually pure than 'the seamless body of

the doll' […]?" (*Art* 71). And Kane, too, emphasises how dolls and automatons made by men "are copies of women designed to reflect what men want to see, images of the other which in no way challenge or make demands on the self" (*Spurious* 105).

But this feminist criticism of heterosexual marriage is supplemented with another layer of meaning, a reading in which the uncanny relation between the female narrator and the Doll comes to present a homoerotic attraction. Seeing "The Doll" as a lesbian tale is not new: Haefele-Thomas even goes so far as to describe the story's central relationship as "an overtly lesbian" (121) one. In the following sections, we will, however, discover both how the strangeness of the tale cannot be explained entirely through a heterosexual reading and how the homoerotic relations within it are, far from being presented in an 'overt' manner, put into a lesbian closet. We can start to do so by paying attention to the story's frame: While framed narratives are certainly not uncommon, this frame has some peculiar characteristics. First of all, it is a very slight frame story, for "[t]he reader's adjustment from the real world to the story world is accomplished here in three lines" (Kane, *Spurious* 96), and it interrupts the story only once again, in the middle of it, while not offering a final interpretative help by reappearing at the end, thus to a certain degree denying closure. Most importantly, it places the story that is to follow in the context of a *confession* between two characters who both remain unnamed and undescribed. As the content of the framed story is, as we will later see, definitely homoerotically charged, the story is thus, with the help of the frame, turned into an outing of a closeted relationship. The receiver of this outing is presumably "a close female friend" (Navarette 156) – the two characters are alone together at home, which almost completely rules out the possibility of a male companion – and the outing thus takes place within the seeming 'security' of a female community. Its confessional tone is emphasised by the narrator's insecurity about telling her tale and the way in which it is presented as a *secret*: "I have often wanted to tell you all about it, and stopped for fear of seeming an idiot. But it weighs upon me sometimes like a secret;

so, silly or not silly, I think I should like to tell you the story" ("Doll" 193). The outing, however, seems to fail, for the narrator soon begins to regret her decision to tell. In the only other disruption of the framed story, the narrator appears to be agitated and angry at the thought of having exposed her secret: "There now! I know even you would think it all silliness. I know what people are – what we all are – how impossible it is ever *really* to make others feel in the same way as ourselves about anything" ("Doll" 197). Seeing the narrator's infatuation with the Doll as 'silliness' would be a typical reaction to the sort of homoerotic attraction she describes, for the late nineteenth century out of whose tradition Lee comes was a time when even the most ardent declaration of love between women could still be regarded as a harmless 'schoolgirl crush'.[218] This interruption also draws our attention to the fact that the narrator has chosen her female friend as the exclusive receiver of her confession, for the sort of lesbian attraction she has experienced cannot be told to men, it must only circulate within a female community: "Do you suppose I could have ever told all this about the Doll to my husband? Yet I tell him everything about myself; and I know he would have been quite kind and respectful" ("Doll" 197). The husband's 'kind and respectful' reaction to his wife's infatuation with a woman (for Doll and real woman become one in her mind, she "ma[kes] no distinction between the portrait and the original" ("Doll" 196)) could be seen to point towards his taking her lesbian inclinations not seriously – similar to her female friend. The narrator's decision not to tell him could be, on the one hand, a defiant reaction against his potentially patronising behaviour towards her infatuation or, on the other hand, a guilty silence which does not want to draw attention to an attraction so deep that it rivals or surpasses the marital one.

[218] We cannot be sure, however, in which year the story is supposed to be set. Even if its setting is the early twentieth century – a time when sexology and scandals like the Wilde Trials had made homosexuality more visible, even between women – however, the characters could still cling to an older, 'Victorian' interpretation of female relationships: "Early twentieth-century women, particularly those of the middle class, had grown up in a society where love between young females was considered the norm" (Faderman, *Odd* 11).

The only other keeper of the secret is the narrator's guide Orestes, for although he is a man, he seems to stand outside the heterosexual economy and to have formed a bond with the narrator which goes beyond the limits of gender. As the narrator regrets her decision to tell the story to her friend, she, at the same time, confirms her relationship to Orestes, which is based on their common appreciation of the Doll and their shared secret: "It was silly of me ever to embark on the story of the Doll with any one; it ought to have remained a secret between me and Orestes. *He*, I really think, would have understood all about the poor lady's feelings, or known it already as well as I" ("Doll" 197). The relationship to Orestes – just as the one to the Doll – is marked by the 'It takes one to know one'-principle so typical of closet relations. "Silence is a powerful metaphor throughout *The Doll*" (*Spurious* 99), as Kane remarks: "The silence of the Doll is suggestive of feminine disenfranchisement and marginalization while, in contrast, the silence of the narrator and her guide, Orestes[,] is a sign of their heightened perception" (*Spurious* 99). This 'heightened perception' means that they understand the Doll as well as each other without exchanging words. The narrator's relationship to the Doll starts out as a simple case of infatuation described in terms associated with homosexuality: She "suddenly experience[s] an *odd* wish to see the Doll once more" ("Doll" 196, emphasis mine), she is "afraid lest [her] maid should find [her] staring at the Doll" ("Doll" 196), she is "thinking of her all day long" ("Doll" 196) and feels, inexplicably, that she "ha[s] just made a new acquaintance of a painfully interesting kind, rushed into a sudden friendship with a woman whose *secret* [she] ha[s] surprised, as sometimes happens, by some mere accident" ("Doll" 196, emphasis mine). It is this strange, seemingly supernatural, connection to the Doll that turns it into a typical closet case.[219] The

[219] Interestingly enough, the Doll, after having been "moved around the palace in something of a *danse macabre*" (Kane, *Spurious* 110) ends up in a closet, the spatial equivalent to the story's metaphorical closet: "'It is the first wife of the Count's grandfather,' said the old woman. 'We took her out of her closet this morning to give her a little dusting'" ("Doll" 195).

relationship to the Doll is thus, from the start, cast in the language of secrecy and mysteriousness that occurs in relation to the closet and it is, most importantly, described as a strange, almost 'telepathic' form of communication with a woman dead a hundred years. But this communication is only possible for those who are themselves 'in the know', it is a story which "the initiated will know without the intervention of an intermediary" (Navarette 171). While the people around them, such as the palace's housekeeper, can only see the Doll as an inanimate cardboard figure, who can be manipulated at will for the amusement of the guests – the housekeeper "proceed[s] in a ghastly way to bend the [Doll's] articulated arms, and to cross one leg over the other beneath the white satin skirt" ("Doll" 196) – the narrator and Orestes, as liminal figures,[220] are able to see through the material object to the person behind it and her (ostensible) desires.[221] The narrator, for instance, claims: "I knew all about the Doll when she was alive – I mean about the lady – and I got to know, in the same way, all about her after she was dead" ("Doll" 197). "This sense of 'already knowing'[,] of 'not needing to be told' is present, to some extent, in many of Lee's tales of the fantastic but in *The Doll* intuitive knowledge relies less on the suggestion of spectral intervention and more on the actual identification of the narrator with the subject of her study" (Kane, *Spurious* 114), an identification that relies on a homoerotic bond. For what exactly the narrator knows remains unspoken in a story "holed with silences that demand interpretation" (Navarette 170). The narrator's claim to know 'all about the Doll' is followed by a refusal to elaborate on this knowledge, seemingly triggered by her feeling that she is not taken seriously by her friend: "Only

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[220] Orestes, for instance, functions as "a mediator between the living and the dead, the past and the present" (Kane, *Spurious* 103) and the narrator, similarly, stands at the threshold between the heteronormative order (her marriage) and homoerotic attractions (her relationship to the Doll).

[221] The strange device of the cardboard figure is also a way of 'ghosting' the Doll who has, accordingly, often been described as "uncanny" (Kane, *Spurious* 94). "Bodily likenesses and simulacra have always had a disquietening power" (Maxwell, "Dionysus" 253) and the Doll's according 'return' from death is a form of haunting, which in turn is, as Terry Castle has argued so convincingly in *The Apparitional Lesbian*, a way to express lesbian desire.

I don't think I'll tell you. *Basta*" ("Doll" 197). This suggests that the narrator was about to disclose the Doll's 'unspeakable' – and thus presumably homoerotic – desires, probably followed by a revelation of her own equally 'unspeakable' ones, but stopped to do so when feeling herself misunderstood.

Seeing the Doll's subjection in the heterosexual order, the narrator attempts to free her of it by transferring her into her own homoerotic order instead. Planning to leave Foligno, she finds it "difficult, nay, impossible, to go" ("Doll" 198) because she feels unable to "abandon the Doll" ("Doll" 198). But articulating her desires seems equally out of the reach of her abilities: "I knew exactly what I wanted; but it seemed impossible, and I was afraid, somehow, of asking him [Orestes]" ("Doll" 198). Why would it seem so impossible to ask to purchase the Doll if not for the 'impossible' desires that are attributed to it by the narrator? The following conversation between Orestes and the narrator is an excellent example for their wordless, closeted form of communication:

> I had prepared a speech to the effect that Orestes would easily understand that a life-size figure so completely dressed in the original costume of a past epoch would soon possess the highest historical interest, etc. But I felt that *I neither needed nor ventured to say any of it.* […] Orestes nodded slowly, then opened his eyes out wide, and seemed to frame the whole of me in them. *It wasn't surprise.* He was weighing me and my offer. 'Would it be very difficult?' I asked. 'I should have thought that the Count–' 'The Count,' answered Orestes drily, 'would sell his soul, if he had one, let alone his grandmother, for the price of a new trotting pony.' *Then I understood.* 'Signor Oreste,' I replied, feeling like a child under the dear old man's glance, 'We have not known one another long, so I cannot expect you to trust me yet in many things. […] But I want to tell you that I am an honest woman according to my lights, and I want you to

> trust me in this matter.' Orestes bowed. 'I will try and induce the Count to sell you the Doll', he said. ("Doll" 199, emphasis mine)

This passage is full of things that are unsaid. A level of understanding is achieved between the narrator and Orestes without them communicating by words. Instead, they seem to intuitively 'know' what the other person is thinking, just as the narrator 'knows' about the Doll's motives and desires. Orestes has discovered the narrator's queer desires – he may also have always 'known' about them, for after all, it was he who invited her to visit the old palace in the first place, possibly with "a hidden or unspoken motive for wanting to take her there" (Kane, *Spurious* 103). Ostensibly, this motive is Orestes's wish to 'free' the Doll from her plight – this demonstrates that he also "*knows* about the Doll without feeling the need to speak" (Kane, *Spurious* 115) – but he seems to have counted on the narrator's hidden desires to accomplish this goal. This strange, knowing relationship between Orestes and the narrator is shown in their "subsequent acting in unison" (Kane, *Spurious* 101), for their burning of the Doll is accomplished without an exchange of words: "We stacked the faggots at the end of the vineyard, and placed the Doll in the midst of them, and the chrysanthemums on her knees. […] Orestes struck a match and slowly lit a pine cone with it; when the cone was blazing he handed it silently to me" ("Doll" 199). This "ritualistic" (Navarette 169) burning of the Doll has often been read as an act of freeing her from a patriarchal order,[222] especially as the narrator takes the Doll's wedding ring in the end: "[T]he destruction of the icon truly does liberate the feminine from an imposed identity" (Kane, *Spurious* 101). It has, however, also been seen as an affirmation of a lesbian relationship between the Doll and the narrator: "As the doll lies on the funeral pyre she

[222] It has also been read as freeing the Doll – as a historical object – from the ubiquity of mass consumption. Focusing on the role of ethical consumption in Lee's work, Mahoney describes "The Doll" as "the story of a collector's reformation" for "[t]he historical contextualization of this object has remedied the narrator's taste for collecting and has facilitated the liberation of an object from degradation and disregard" (39).

momentarily comes alive. […] In this brief moment of animation the doubling between the two women is at its most intense" so that "the burning of one, appears to allow the release of the other into a separate and individual subjectivity, one that is, however, still imbued with a fluid sexuality for, in accepting the doll's wedding ring, the narrator is both 'husband' and 'wife' to the doll" (Pulham, *Art* 107, 108). In my reading, the burning of the Doll frees her from a heteronormative order, but this is especially relevant for the projecting narrator who sees this act as a confirmation of her own homoerotic desires. The whole story is then put into the narrator's lesbian closet, with the lid kept on it up to the moment of the story's frame, when she finally tells it to her friend in a form of outing. The fact that the frame does not reoccur at the story's end, however, leaves us uncertain as to the conclusion of the narrator's attempt at an outing, although the frame's re-intrusion in the middle of the story has left us with a feeling that it is doomed to failure.

A Lesbian Outing – The Lesbian Closet in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*

The Well of Loneliness (1928) is Radclyffe Hall's fifth novel and the first to deal with the topic of 'inversion', a sexological term used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for describing both homosexuality and an identification with the 'opposite' gender: "Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package" (Halberstam 82).[223] The novel thus follows the life story of Stephen Gordon, one of these 'inverts', from her birth to her mid-thirties. Stephen Gordon is the daughter of Lady Anna and Sir Philip Gordon and is born on their estate of Morton. Both parents long for a son and, when disappointed by the birth of an, admittedly very masculine-looking, daughter, give her a male name. Sir Philip also raises her as a boy, allowing her to ride, hunt and fence. While Stephen idealises both Morton and her parents' relationship, her childhood is also marked by isolation, for Stephen and her environment soon realise that she is 'different': From childhood on, she enjoys dressing up as male heroes and at the age of seven, she falls

[223] Inversion theory's point of reference is, quite obviously, heterosexuality: "The term 'invert' reflects the belief that same-sex desire is in fact an inversion of the sexual instincts, since the *natural* direction of sexual attraction within a heterosexual paradigm can only ever be towards a person of the 'opposite sex'" (M. A. Taylor 288). Moreover, it has problems offering an explanation for the 'masculine' woman's partner, who is, by definition, a 'femme': "The feminine invert poses a problem for sexology, since her desire for masculine women cannot be understood as the result of a gendered inversion and therefore attributable to a fault of nature, as can the masculine woman's perverse desire" (Hemmings 182).

in love with the housemaid Collins. Stephen begins to seriously wonder about her difference from others when, in her youth, she feels repulsed by the advances of her best friend, Martin Hallam. When she turns to her father, however, he, although aware of her 'inversion', does not tell her about it out of pity. Shortly thereafter, Sir Philip dies and Stephen falls in love with an American neighbour, Angela Crossby. Angela is married and uses the affair with Stephen to turn attention away from her other affair with a man; she finally hands one of Stephen's love letters over to her husband who, in turn, sends it to Stephen's mother Anna. Stephen's mother, who has always felt ambivalently towards her due to her 'masculinity', exiles her from Morton. On her last day there, Stephen wanders into her father's study and finds his locked bookcase: In it, she discovers the answer to 'what she is' and what knowledge her father has hidden from her in the writings of the sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs. With this newly-acquired knowledge of her 'inversion', Stephen leaves Morton and becomes a writer in London. Dissatisfied with her lack of sexual knowledge and its effects on her work, Stephen moves to Paris shortly thereafter. Through her friend, the homosexual playwright Jonathan Brockett, she becomes acquainted with the community of 'inverts' around Valérie Seymour, a fictionalised portrait of Natalie Clifford Barney (cf. Souhami 160). But World War I is about to break out: Longing to make use of her 'masculine' abilities, Stephen joins the only female ambulance unit operating directly on the frontlines in France. In this unit, she gets to know Mary Llewellyn, another member, and the two fall in love. While Stephen rejects Mary's advances at first, for fear of 'debauching' her, the end of World War I sees them on holiday on Tenerife, where their relationship is finally consummated in the exotic climate of the island. Back in Paris, Stephen and Mary live together in Stephen's flat. Stephen, however, is obsessed with the thought of protecting Mary, which she hopes to achieve through gaining the general public's acceptance of 'inverts' with the help of her novels. She thus neglects Mary for her work. Different circum-

stances cast further shadows on the relationship: They are rejected by society (including Lady Anna) due to their relationship and two of their best lesbian friends die. Sensing Mary's despair and blaming their status as outsiders for it, Stephen makes use of the re-appearance of her old friend Martin Hallam to 'save' Mary. Pretending to have an affair with Valérie, she sets Mary 'free' to be with Martin. The end of the novel finds Stephen surrounded by the spectres of all the 'inverts' in the world, making her their spokeswoman, and demanding from God the right to their existence.

The following sections deal with *The Well*'s lesbian closet in two different ways: First, we will turn our attention to the historical events surrounding the publication of the novel, meaning its reception by the general public and specifically the censorship trial which led to its ban in Great Britain. By investigating these occurrences, we will see that the novel's publication constituted a form of 'outing', a venturing out of the closet: Before the publication, lesbianism as a concept was largely unknown or at least 'nameless' outside of some parts of Britain's educated classes (cf. Doan, *Fashioning* 25). *The Well* introduced it to the general public, thus leading lesbianism out of the closet and making it publicly visible for the first time. On the other hand, *The Well* itself makes extensive use of the closet within its pages and traces Stephen's complicated relationship towards it over the course of her life story. While Stephen is, at the beginning of the novel, merely ignorant, the closet attaches itself to her father instead: By investigating his study, once again a spatial equivalent of the metaphorical closet, she discovers that her identity 'needs' to be closeted. She is thus pushed into the closet and stays there for a considerable time of the novel, bowing to the conventions of closet communications. Fed up at last with subterfuge and lies, she begins to out herself, first in her private life, and later, by taking on the role of representative of the 'inverts', she publicly steps out of the closet. *The Well* is thus the first in a long line of 'gay' novels that takes the outing, the (seeming) dissolving of the closet, as their final destination.

Dissolving the Closet, Keeping Up the Closet: *The Well* and its Position in Literary History

The Well of Loneliness is certainly one of the paradigmatic novels when dealing with the lesbian closet and this is the case on several layers. For interestingly, the novel does not only deal with the closet within its pages – in Stephen's and her father's intense musings on whom to tell and when to stay silent – but it can also be said to play a central role in the social and literary history of the closet. It is the first British novel to explicitly name female homosexuality, to demand its recognition and equal treatment, and, in spite of its tone of despair and sorrow, to describe lesbianism as essentially positive: "Make no mistake indeed; Radclyffe Hall was the first modern writer to say love between women was good – and to do so simply and directly and courageously" (Castle, "Afterword" 402). The backlash to this kind of writing followed soon: "In a matter of weeks the largely favorable response by sober reviewers was overshadowed by the journalist James Douglas's sensationalizing editorial in the *Sunday Express* condemning the propagandistic aims of Hall's project and demanding the novel's suppression" (Doan, *Fashioning* 1). This review, in which Douglas famously declared that he "would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel" for "[p]oison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul" (qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 38), initiated the prosecution of the novel which finally led to its ban in England: "[T]he British courts found Hall's book obscene in November 1928" (L. A. Taylor 253). "[T]he British ban lasted until 1948" (Hennegan, Introduction viii); it was, however, possible to purchase the novel in the USA and in France. *The Well* and its history of censorship and trial thus present themselves as struggles surrounding the closet, as opposing attempts to dissolve it and to keep it up. Consequently, *The Well*'s trial has frequently been compared to the Wilde Trials: "Just as the prosecution of Wilde marked the arrival in public culture of the male homosexual, the controversy over Hall's novel signaled the

female homosexual's transition from the shadows to public visibility" (Doan, *Fashioning* 27). What Doan describes here, is an outing: The Wilde trials pushed male homosexuality out of its closet; *The Well* functioned in the same way for female homosexuality.

The novel hence is an attempt to dissolve the closet and had explicitly been intended that way by Radclyffe Hall herself: She regarded it as the first "'long and very serious novel entirely upon the subject of sexual inversion'" (qtd. in Doan, *Fashioning* 1) and "clearly saw herself in the line of sexual enlighteners speaking up for afflicted minorities" (Weeks 107). To achieve this end, Hall even risked her own reputation; the novel's publication would, as she well knew, clearly out her as a lesbian as well.[224] The novel was supposed to educate the "general public who did not have access to technical treatises" (Hall, qtd. in Backus 254)[225] on 'inversion' during a period in which "sexological discourse was […] in the very process of dissemination from the few to the many" (Doan, *Fashioning* 132). It is a generally accepted fact that World War I changed women's roles, allowing them to venture into traditionally 'male' areas and to fill in the space of their missing husbands, brothers, and fathers, thus causing "gender reversals" (Kent 218). The ground for this increased emancipation had been laid in the decades before, in the women's rights movements that re-occurred in

[224] As it so happened, Radclyffe Hall and her heroine Stephen became almost interchangeable in the contemporaries' minds (*The Well* is still sometimes described as "a form of mythologized semi-autobiography" (C. L. Taylor 76)) and both were identified with the image of *the* lesbian for decades to come. Even to this day they represent the seemingly paradigmatic 'type' of Newton's "Mythic Mannish Lesbian" (7). This is another similarity to the Wilde Trials which "entrench[ed] a particular set of surface appearances as being, supposedly, the signs of the spectacle of the closet" (Janes 102) and it is also one of the main reasons why *The Well* has been rejected by so many lesbian and non-lesbian readers from the 70s onwards: "[I]n its depiction of Stephen as masculine or of a third sex, the novel established an image of the 'true' lesbian which had a deep prescriptive impact on its lesbian readers" (Prince-Hughes 31). Jane Rule's reaction in the mid-70s is symptomatic of this: "[I]n *The Well of Loneliness*, I suddenly discovered that I was a freak, a genetic monster, a member of a third sex, who would eventually call myself by a masculine name […], wear a necktie, and live in the exile of some European ghetto" ("Radclyffe Hall" 78).

[225] These are also, implicitly, heterosexuals in need of education on 'sexual abnormalities'. Thus, *The Well* has sometimes been criticised for being a "self-conscious project of winning the consent of 'normal' heterosexual society" (Radford 97).

several waves throughout the nineteenth century. It also went along with a more intense focus on sexual freedom, as "[f]or many women of Radclyffe Hall's generation, sexuality – for itself and as a symbol of female autonomy – became a preoccupation" (Newton 14). In *The Well*, World War I is thus further described as opening a space for female homosexuals: The novel "configures the Great War as an emancipatory moment for female inversion" (Medd 241), for "the war makes it possible for those women who have been born with particular qualities that tend to accompany inversion to make those qualities and the natures that have produced them visible" (Watkins 58). This growing visibility of lesbianism in the 1910s was becoming even more pronounced in the following decade. After all, the 1920s were "a key decade of struggle in the area of sexuality" (Whitlock 555) and this is especially the case when it comes to the topic of lesbianism.

We only have to look to an occurrence a few years before *The Well*'s publication to understand the struggle over control of the lesbian closet: After almost 400 years of prosecution of male homosexuals, a bill was brought before Parliament that would have made lesbianism illegal in 1921. The timing is relevant as is the reasoning behind the final rejection of the bill, for in both we can sense a growing fear of lesbianism and thus a growing importance and general consciousness of the matter. In the end, the MPs rejected the bill, as the 'third way' of dealing with lesbianism seemed to them more advisable:

> The third way is to leave them entirely alone, not to notice them, not advertise them. That is the method that has been adopted in England for many hundred years, and I believe that it is the best method now, these cases are self-exterminating. They are examples of ultra-civilisation, but they have the merit of exterminating themselves, and consequently they do not spread or do very much harm to society at large […]. To adopt a Clause of this kind would harm by introducing into the minds of perfectly innocent people the most revolting thoughts. (qtd. in Jeffreys, *The Spinster* 114)

We have here, of course, a clear remnant of the idea of women's asexuality; at the same time, we sense in the MP's pretended nonchalance the underlying "morbid paranoia" (Castle, *Apparitional* 6) when it comes to lesbianism: "The MPs were aware that the spread of lesbianism could undermine the institutions of marriage and the heterosexual family through which male dominance over women was maintained" (Jeffreys, *The Spinster* 115). The consequence is, hence, an attempt to keep lesbianism in its closet and to deny its existence.

It is exactly this strategy that was explicitly called into question by *The Well*. Critics have wondered about the strict censorship of the novel when compared to contemporary novels such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women* or Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* which also deal with lesbian relationships but remained unbothered by the law. While there are certainly several factors at play here – it is also a question of the intended audience (cf. Whitlock 559), of style (cf. Gilmore 623) and of treatment (cf. Parkes 434) – it is *The Well*'s attempt to break the fetters of the closet that is responsible for the strict censorship:

> The events of the 1920s signalled that serious, sincere and frank works concerning sexuality, and in particular lesbian sexuality, had no place in literature as far as the authorities were concerned, but that the frivolous, pleasurable text might be deemed benign and therefore less vulnerable to censure. (English 8)

A novel like *Orlando* makes no – at least no open – *political* demand, it does not attempt to educate the reader by providing her with new knowledge, it does not try to dissolve the closet but instead enjoys its playfulness and secretiveness.[226] It stays within the closet and as long as it remains within the boundaries of 'closet-speak' it is considered acceptable by the powers

[226] Modernism's very literary techniques have often been regarded as 'closeting strategies': "Woolf's *Orlando* [...] attempts to write the same story as *The Well*, while using modernist techniques as a kind of 'cover' to avoid censure" (Winning 375).

that be. For *The Well*, on the contrary, the closet is a problem, a concept that must be rejected. The novel is fully within what Michel Foucault has identified as modern Western culture's paradigm: It establishes the confession as its central ritual and sees it as the highest good to be 'known'. But that makes it problematic in the cultural climate of the time: While today, we regard *Orlando*'s very subversiveness as the more radical and 'anarchist', it is *The Well*'s very attempt at inclusion that was seen as much more hazardous in the 1920s. As Dollimore claims,

> This suggests a paradox: at certain historical conjunctures certain kinds of nonconformity may be more transgressive in opting not for extreme lawlessness but for a strategy of inclusion. […] [T]o participate in is also to contaminate the dominant's authenticity and to counter its discriminatory function. (51)

As the rejected bill of 1921 showed, the authorities' main aim at the time was to keep intact the lesbian closet: *Orlando* made this possible, *The Well* did not.

But censorship is not the most effective weapon in a war about information. According to the contemporary editor Raymond Mortimer, Douglas's review by denouncing it "gave the book a flaring advertisement, introducing it to hundreds of thousands of readers who would never otherwise of [sic] heard of it" (qtd. in Doan, *Fashioning* 20), and the court's very ban, while making it difficult for British readers to obtain a copy, at the same time increased the novel's popularity, especially in the US (cf. L. A. Taylor 261). As has been mentioned before, the novel effectively pushed lesbianism out of the closet by providing the public with an image of 'the' lesbian in the form of both its author and its main heroine. In some sense then, Radclyffe Hall succeeded in 'outing' lesbianism, for the knowledge of its existence certainly disseminated among the larger public: "Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* […] t[ook] this paradoxical figure [the mannish lesbian]

out of the relative obscurity of the medico-scientific textbooks, and inscribe[d] her in the popular imagination in a manner which far outreache[d] the influences of the sexological theorists" (M. A. Taylor 287). As has frequently been pointed out, the novel and its image of 'the lesbian' also provided a great identificatory potential for coming generations of lesbians who, up to this point, had no obvious way of understanding or naming their condition. As such, "*The Well* […] helped initiate a reverse discourse in Foucault's sense: lesbians were able to identify themselves, often for the first time, albeit in the very language of their oppression" (Dollimore 48). On the other hand, several critics have pointed out that in terms of literary dealings with lesbianism, *The Well* was counterproductive: "The fate of the book helped ensure that no one would dare approach homosexuality as a central topic in English fiction, at least not in anything other than a heavily condemnatory vein, for decades to come" (Ladenson 109) so that "[f]or several decades […] self-censorship became the rule" (Wachman 165). We also have to consider that the 'outing' that Hall provided was not seen as positive by many people who were themselves closeted. This is obvious in the Bloomsbury Group, unenthusiastic about the novel not only due to its lack of 'literary merit', for "[t]he case forced the Bloomsbury closet to deal directly with its own swinging doors, and to keep them tightly shut" (Cook 732): "They were not prepared to deal publicly with sexual tastes nearly universally described as a sign of regression or degeneracy" (Rule, *Lesbian Images* 54). The same goes for a group of 'ordinary' lesbians in the 1920s and 30s that Bullough and Bullough have investigated and that were very obviously afraid of being pushed out of their closets due to the publication of *The Well*:

> Instead of applauding the fact that lesbianism was being brought out in the open and discussed publicly, almost to a woman they decried its publication. One woman, seemingly typical, felt that the novel caused people who before had never heard of lesbianism to try to classify as a lesbian every woman who wore a suit (with a

> skirt) and was seen more than once in the company of another woman. (897)

The reactions to Hall's attempt at an outing were hence ambivalent; undeniably, however, it *is* an outing and thus a head-on dealing with the long-established workings of the closet.

A Lesbian Closet?: *The Well*, Homosexuality and Masculinity

The Well's outing of female homosexuality to the more or less ignorant contemporary British population is only one side of the story, however. After all, the novel places the closet of its main character and the relation of several other characters to it, among them most prominently Stephen's father, at the centre of its action. Put bluntly, *The Well* is nothing more (and nothing less) than the story of a closet existence as it would realistically express itself at a time when female homosexuality was still in part suffering from the 'unspeakability' so typical of homosexual experience. In the beginning, Stephen is still unaware of the necessity to be in any kind of closet – all she senses is her difference from her environment, as yet a vague and undefined feeling. Her love affair with Angela and her subsequent discovery of her father's books forcibly reveal to her the 'nature' and the extent of her 'difference', thus providing her with a possibility to describe her identity at the same time as stigmatising her. It is this stigma which then creates the necessity for a closet: As so many homosexuals, Stephen – and later Mary with her – lives her life outside and inside of the homosexual community hidden within the closet. In time, Stephen begins to gradually take steps to leave her closet, until the novel finally envisions a complete outing by having her become the spokesperson for her 'kind'.[227]

[227] Stephen's outing through her novel – which is, implicitly, *The Well* itself – parallels Hall's own 'outing' through her novel as described in the preceding section of this chapter.

While this development will be investigated in more depth in the next sections of this chapter, we will now proceed to discuss the exact nature of Stephen's closet. As the title of this chapter indicates, I take Stephen's closetedness to consist of her lesbianism, *not* her masculinity which, as the novel emphasises time and again, is obvious to anyone seeing her.[228] In the novel's logic, of course, these concepts are blurred, as 'inversion' involves both an attraction to other women *and* an identification with maleness. But this distinction is highly relevant for countering Halberstam's claim that "Stephen Gordon in no way lives her life as an open secret, and [that] she in fact represents the unmistakable visibility of female sexual perversion when it appears in male clothing" (98, 99). For Halberstam, "Stephen is never closeted, but only ignorant" as "the secret is a secret only to Stephen because her physical form […] gives her away to everyone else who sees her" (100). But what does her physical form actually give away? If we look at the novel's characters, we can see that except for a few very select persons 'in the know', that is persons with both an intellectual background that makes them acquainted with sexology and an implied or obvious identification as 'inverts' themselves,[229] people are actually unable to draw conclusions from Stephen's 'masculinity' – the 'secret' of her lesbianism remains intact, regardless of her outward form. The novel, on the contrary, time and again draws attention to the fact that people are *unable* to read Stephen's 'masculinity' as providing any further clues, so, for instance, with Mrs. Antrim, one of her neighbours at Morton: "She disliked the girl; she had always disliked her; what she called Stephen's 'queerness' aroused her

[228] There is an extensive critical debate whether Stephen is, in fact, 'primarily' a lesbian or, as Jay Prosser has argued, a transsexual without the medical possibility of a sex change (cf. 157, 163). I will argue in the following for a reading of the text that stresses its lesbian closetedness, but I do not deny that Stephen could very well experience herself as transgender at the same time.

[229] We are speaking of Puddle (Oxford education and an 'invert'), Jonathan Brockett (educated and an 'invert') and Sir Philip. The latter has an Oxford education and is an 'invert' by implication, in spite of his 'ideal' heterosexual marriage to Lady Anna: "[I]n seeing his own likeness in Stephen, Sir Philip recognizes the hereditary nature of her sexual orientation and aligns it with other inheritances he passed on to her" (Watkins 53). 'Inversion' was often regarded as 'hereditary' at the time, rendering especially Sir Philip 'suspect'.

suspicion – she was never quite clear as to what she suspected, but felt sure it must be something outlandish" (*The Well of Loneliness*[230] 93). Other characters, too, feel that Stephen is 'queer' or 'boyish', but even the worldly Angela is unable to put a name to her otherness: "'What in the Lord's name are you?'" (*Well* 153). We are once again in the extralinguistic realm of homosexuality. In some sense then, 'masculinity' certainly draws attention to Stephen's lesbian closet, but in no way makes it obvious or readable – it only marks the fact that there is *something* to be known; her lesbianism, however, is never obvious to these observers or if it is suspected, they are incapable of naming it. This is also why Stephen and Lady Anna succeed in keeping up appearances after Stephen has been exiled from Morton: Her disappearance is attributed to her status as a writer, not to any sexual misdemeanour (cf. *Well* 230). The closet in *The Well* is thus split along the lines of 'inversion'. While 'masculinity' is highly conspicuous and draws constant attention and comment onto itself, it is in no way closeted. It only functions as a clue and highlights to those already 'in the know' what is the closet's true content: lesbianism.

We can see this quite clearly in Stephen's relationship to her mother. While Anna always dislikes Stephen's 'masculine' demeanour and even feels that she is unable to love her due to it (cf. *Well* 7),[231] she does not overtly reject her until she learns of her affair with Angela. As a child, Stephen openly dresses up as Nelson and other male heroes, bragging with her costumes: "'Doesn't Miss Stephen look exactly like a boy?' […] And Stephen would say gravely: 'Yes, of course I'm a boy. I'm young Nelson[.] […] I must be a boy, 'cause I feel exactly like one, I feel like young Nelson in the picture upstairs'" (*Well* 12). But even back then, Stephen's love for Collins,

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[230] Hall, Radclyffe. *The Well of Loneliness*. London: Penguin, 2015. References to *The Well of Loneliness* will be abbreviated with *Well* and the page number.

[231] Anna's resentment of Stephen is very much strengthened by the fact that her daughter resembles her husband and by the implication of incestuous desires that follows from this: "Lady Anna's early rejection of her daughter is as readily explained by the sexual confusion and resentment caused her by Stephen's overwhelming physical resemblance to her father. The distaste is later reinforced by deep (but unacknowledgeable) jealousy" (Hennegan, Introduction xv).

the housemaid, and thus her lesbianism is a "secret" (*Well* 12) to which she only admits her father. Significantly, he tells her to keep this knowledge from her mother after Stephen's disappointment in Collins: "'[Y]ou can come to my study whenever you like. You can talk to me about it whenever you're unhappy, and you want a companion to talk to.' He paused, then finished rather abruptly: 'Don't worry your mother, just come to me, Stephen'" (*Well* 23). Even though Stephen, at this point in the story, is not consciously aware of having to be in the closet, she instinctively keeps her love for Collins hidden and her father confirms her choice by telling her to keep this knowledge to herself or to speak to him within his study, a sort of spatial closet as we will later see. This is probably one of the reasons why Stephen does not tell Anna about her troubled relationship with Angela although she is tempted to do so (cf. *Well* 175); the decision is strengthened by the fact that it is an adulterous relationship (Angela is married after all) and that Stephen's relationship to Anna has never been trusting and loving. When Stephen is finally outed against her will, we can clearly see that, from Anna's perspective, she has been in an unconscious lesbian closet all the time. The outing changes Stephen's identity in Anna's eyes so much that she is unable to accept her at her home anymore; at the same time, it acts as a justification for the revulsion towards her daughter that she has felt all along:

> 'All your life I've felt very strangely towards you […][.] I've felt a kind of physical repulsion, a desire not to touch or to be touched by 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 […]. I would rather see you dead at my feet than standing before me with this thing upon you – this unspeakable outrage you call love.' (*Well* 218, 219)

Anna is the first in a long line of fictional and non-fictional parents who can only react to their homosexual children's outings with a wish for their annihilation.

What adds to Anna's outrage and emphasises once again that we are dealing with a lesbian closet is the focus on the sexual nature of Stephen's relationships. Stephen would not be content with Adrienne Rich's idea of a "*lesbian continuum*" (648) in which all kinds of relationships between women, from mother-daughter relationships to romantic friendships to sexual contacts between women, would find a place. For her, the sexual aspect of her relationships is central: She is disappointed in Angela's "bloodless loving" (*Well* 175) that is limited to kissing, she later feels that her work suffers due to her lack of sexual knowledge (cf. *Well* 235) and she finally finds fulfilment in her definitely sexual relationship to Mary (cf. *Well* 343). Several critics have remarked upon the novel's 'tameness' when it comes to explicit descriptions: "[I]n fact, *The Well* is a singularly unsexy book, devoid not only of 'lewd' language but of any direct description of sexual activity" (Emery 361). At the same time, however, we may not forget that in spite of its lack of sexual explicitness, sex is still presented as absolutely vital to a lesbian relationship in the novel: "Hall makes it clear that celibacy is not the answer to lesbian desire; unfulfilled sexual desire causes Stephen Gordon profound emotional and physical anguish" (Hamer 96). This was also one of the novel's aspects that were felt to be scandalous by Sir Chartres Biron in his judgement on *The Well* that finally led to its ban. In it, he claimed that

> there is a much more serious matter, the actual physical acts of these women indulging in unnatural vices are described in the most alluring terms; their result is described as giving these women extraordinary rest, contentment and pleasure; and not merely that, but it is actually put forward that it improves their mental balance and capacity. (qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 43)

In the novel, Anna is similarly disturbed by the fact that Stephen might actually live out her sexuality: She can accept Stephen's visits to Morton on her own, but will not allow her to bring her partner Mary with her. What this section has proven thus is that we are dealing with a closet that is lesbian in nature: Stephen has to closet her relationships to women that are both emotional and sexual in nature and those parts of her identity that feel an emotional and sexual attraction to other women.

"The Tyranny of Silence": Growing up with the Closet

Although Stephen, due to her ignorance of her 'condition', cannot be said to be in a closet during her childhood, she grows up in an atmosphere of secrecy and repression which the novel itself aptly titles "the tyranny of silence" (*Well* 129). Stephen's childhood is steeped in silence, her parents neither communicate their worries and fears about her to each other nor do they talk to her about it: "[T]hat silence [is] an attempt by those adults to meet their own needs, forgetting that the young Stephen might have had need for information about what was going on inside her" (McNaron 92). Especially Stephen and Lady Anna's relationship is marked by speechlessness, as emphasised repeatedly within the novel: "[S]he would long to inquire what troubled her mother, but would be held speechless through shyness" (*Well* 27). In contrast to Sir Philip and Puddle, however, Anna is truly unaware of what is 'wrong' with Stephen and is thus unable to help her. 'Shyness' is the term with which the relationship is characterised throughout the novel and it describes a lack of understanding or unity between mother and daughter which the novel sees as the effect of Stephen's homosexuality and Lady Anna's unconscious rejection of it. For like Stephen, Lady Anna is ignorant of her daughter's homosexuality – the speechlessness in their relationship is both a result of this incapability of naming and an intuitive presentiment on Anna's part that there is something that acts as a barrier between them. What this troubled family constellation demonstrates is that the closet, even before it is fully fleshed out in Stephen's

consciousness, acts as a disturbance in the 'natural' relations of this idealised heterosexual set-up.[232] Through Stephen and her 'condition', silence becomes the ruling force in the Gordon household: "No one questioned at Morton; they spoke very little" (*Well* 103).

That this silence and repression are a consequence of Stephen's condition is made abundantly clear in the novel, for the closet is, at this point in the novel, kept by someone else in Stephen's stead: by her father, Sir Philip, who is the most important character around her who is 'in the know'. Time and again, the novel draws attention to the fact that Sir Philip knows more than his daughter and his wife. Even when Stephen is still a child, Sir Philip has already discovered what might be 'wrong' with her:

> But at times he would study his daughter gravely, with his strong, cleft chin tightly cupped in his hand. He would watch her at play with the dogs in the garden, watch the curious suggestion of strength in her movements, the long line of her limbs […] and the poise of her head on her over-broad shoulders. […] Getting up, he would turn to the house and his study, to spend all the rest of that day with his books. […] Alone in that grave-looking, quiet study, he would unlock a drawer in his ample desk, and would get out a slim volume recently acquired, and would read and re-read it in the silence. The author was a German, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, and reading, Sir Philip's eyes would grow puzzled; then groping for a pencil he would make little notes all along the immaculate margins. (*Well* 19, 20)

Sir Philip's view of Stephen is medical and aligns him with the sexologists he reads: "It is through his secret marginal notes to texts by Ulrichs, that he not only 'reads' his daughter, but also quantifies her and makes her into

[232] Heterosexuality, as represented by her parents' relationship, remains Stephen's measuring stick for her own homosexual relationships: "Stephen's desire [is] to replicate through inversion the cultural institution of upper-class English heterosexual marriage (MacPike, "Geography" 234).

his own case history" (C. L. Taylor 94). But 'being in the know' pushes Sir Philip into a closet that Stephen has not even built up yet. He is hence in a position of both power and disempowerment: While he keeps a patriarchal control of the closeted information through his prerogatives as a man, he, at the same time, suffers from the consequences of keeping a secret by basically being closeted himself.

While he is alive, Sir Philip's patriarchal control is absolute. He makes use of the fact that he, as a man, has access to information from which his wife and daughter are debarred. His knowledge is, after all, derived from sexological works that were, at the time, hard to come by: "Carefully differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate readers, the medical establishment's aim was to ensure that 'very few members of the general public had direct access' to such [the sexologists'] material" (Doan, *Fashioning* 131). Moreover, he reads them in his study, an explicitly male realm appropriate to the reading of these 'secret' sexological texts: "[T]he acquisition and study of these books became a closeted affair" (Doan, *Fashioning* 134). The lesbian closet is thus kept in the quintessentially patriarchal space of the study;[233] a room that has for centuries housed the metaphorical closets of men. In the first third of the novel, the lesbian closet is hence under the control of a patriarch who arrogates to himself the power to know what is 'best' with regard to the dispensing of information. The novel, sympathising with Sir Philip, attributes his decision to remain silent to his "pity" (*Well* 52) for Anna and Stephen, even while marking it as wrong:

> But Anna shook her head: 'I don't understand, why shouldn't you trust *me*, Philip?' And then in his terror for this well-beloved woman, Sir Philip committed the first cowardly action of his life – he who would not have spared himself pain, could not bear to inflict it on Anna. In his infinite pity for Stephen's mother, he sinned

[233] The whole estate of Morton acts, as country estates tend to do, as "the archetypal patriarchal haunt" (Hope 261). It is "the lynchpin of a hierarchical, patriarchal order" (Whitlock 563): Identifying with this patriarchal order, Stephen would like to accede to it, but this desire is prevented by her being exiled.

> very deeply and gravely against Stephen, by withholding from that mother his own conviction that her child was not as other children. 'There's nothing for you to understand,' he said firmly, 'but I like you to trust me in all things.' (*Well* 52)

Spoken like a true patriarch. Even when Stephen explicitly asks him to explain ("'Is there anything strange about me, Father, that I should have felt as I did about Martin?'" (*Well* 110)), he "lie[s] glibly" (*Well* 110). Once again, this action is explained with "his pity" (*Well* 110). Sir Philip's immense power and his abuse of it are thus excused by the novel through his 'weakness': "After she had gone he sat on alone, and the lie was still bitter to his spirit as he sat there, and he covered his face for the shame that was in him – but because of the love that was in him he wept" (*Well* 111). They are further excused through the fact that the closet acts as a "burden" (*Well* 88) to Sir Philip as well, which also demonstrates one of the workings of the closet with which we are by now well-acquainted: The fact that the closet can be transferred onto others, that it spreads and creates the necessity for ever new closets. For the closet begins to fester: It affects the 'perfect', highly idealised relationship between Sir Philip and Lady Anna. "They said nothing, but she [Stephen] sensed that some deep, secret trouble was afflicting them both; she could see it in their eyes. In the words that they left unspoken she could hear it – it would be there, filling the small gaps of silence" (*Well* 84). In this, the novel – always on the side of truth, honesty and confession – envisions the destructive potential of secrecy and the unspoken closet. Sir Philip's silence is finally made absolute through his death and his final failed attempt at communicating his knowledge to Anna and Stephen is symptomatic of his behaviour throughout the entire novel. In his final words "'It's – Stephen – our child – she's, she's – it's Stephen – not like'" (*Well* 124), homosexuality remains, once again, unnamed and the closet is kept up. An outing, no matter how painful, would have been better, the novel insists repeatedly: In communicating his knowledge to Stephen and Anna, Sir Philip would have fulfilled his protective duty towards the

former and given her information vital to her sense of identity; he might further have been able to redirect Anna's hatred into a more positive reaction.

Sir Philip's strategy of silence and withholding of information is echoed by Puddle, the only other household member who 'knows' of Stephen's condition. Puddle especially decries the "tyranny of silence", while at the same time participating in it and thus acting, together with Sir Philip, as one of the 'guardians of the closet'. As she is an 'invert' as well, functioning as Stephen's "desexualized double" (De Lauretis 113), this silence may be an attempt to protect herself from accusations of 'perversion', even if Puddle herself frames it as a means to help Stephen: "But the resolution [to speak openly] waned because of Anna, who would surely join hands with the conspiracy of silence. She would never condone such fearless plain-speaking. If it came to her knowledge she would turn Puddle out bag and baggage, and that would leave Stephen alone" (*Well* 165). Like Sir Philip, Puddle quarrels with her own resolution to remain quiet and from her and her silent monologues come some of the most intriguing insights into the workings of the closet. Puddle, for instance, is aware of both the homosexual's vulnerability to information spills and the possibility of closet communications, when she considers saying to Stephen "'I *know*. I know all about it, you can trust me, Stephen'" (*Well* 165). In this simple sentence, 'knowledge' is associated with and understood by both parties to be 'homosexual knowledge'; at the same time, it shows how vulnerable the closeted homosexual truly is: Anyone can obtain this crucial 'knowledge' about her/him, whether by simply divining it, by observing her/his body language, mimic, gestures, or by catching her/him in the act of a homosexual encounter. Puddle never openly speaks to Stephen about homosexuality; all her knowledge is derived from simple observation and interpretation, it *could* theoretically all be her own conjecture. Within the novel, she acts as the observer figure per se, never speaking up, but constantly aware of who is in the know: "Grim and exceedingly angry grew Puddle, […] angry with Anna for her treatment of Stephen, but even more deeply angry

with Sir Philip, who knew the whole truth, or so she suspected, and who yet kept that truth back from Anna" (*Well* 118). When Stephen finally begins her path towards an outing and towards becoming a spokeswoman for homosexuals, she hence rejects the example that both Sir Philip and Puddle have set for her: The silence of the closet is replaced by Stephen's written calls for acceptance.

At the same time, Puddle's and Sir Philip's conscious withholding of information is contrasted in the novel with a speechlessness that grows out of ignorance and that has already been mentioned in relation to Lady Anna. This kind of speechlessness with regard to homosexuality is not specific to this particular family constellation: It is typical of the novel's expression of homosexuality in general and, of course, of the contemporary culture's dealings with it. In *The Well*, as in the non-fictional late nineteenth and early twentieth century, homosexuality is 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Hall attempted to counter this by providing a definition of the homosexual as 'invert', for better or worse, and made this abundantly clear by having Havelock Ellis, one of Britain's leading sexologists and theorists on 'inversion', provide a 'commentary' which preceded the novel: "Granting priority to Ellis's commentary, Hall effectively asked him to authorize her novel so that it could be seen to perform his theory of female inversion" (Parkes 441).[234] But in the logic of the novel, we are before the publication of a work like *The Well* (which is, implicitly, Stephen's fourth novel, to be published after the novel's ending). Accordingly, the characters in her novel

[234] Ellis's commentary and Hall's relation to Ellis's theory in her novel have attracted a lot of attention from critics. While some see Hall as strictly following Ellis's ideas, and *The Well* thus as a fictional treatment of Ellis's theoretical and medical position (cf. Weeks 107, Parkes 441), others have stressed "the way in which Hall in fact pulls away from the congenitalist position advocated by medical men such as Ellis, thus inadvertently revealing that she was far from 'mimicking Ellis's voice'" (Doan, "The Outcast" 163). The question especially revolves around the old *nature vs. nurture* debate, with nature in this case represented by the sexologists, nurture by the newly conceived ideas of the psychoanalysts: "[T]here is a blur in the explanation of Stephen's variance. Emphasis on her physical masculinity indicates hereditary causes, as does her father's early recognition of her anomaly. But his consequent indulgence of her proclivities, and the stress laid on both parents' desire for a male child, hint at belief in prenatal as well as childhood conditioning" (Foster 281).

have not been brought up with this kind of terminology and, except for the very privileged Stephen, are often deprived of the possibility to express their ideas about homosexuality. We have already seen this in her neighbours and other bystander characters, who, while constantly sensing that there is something 'different' about her, are unable to put their hunches into language and are only able to comment effectively on her 'masculine' looks: "People stared at the masculine-looking girl who seemed so intent upon feminine adornments. And someone, a man, laughed and nudged his companion: 'Look at that! What is it?' 'My God! What indeed?'" (*Well* 177). However, this lack of a language with which to express themselves extends to bisexuals like Angela and homosexuals like Puddle and Wanda (an artist friend of Stephen's in the Parisian homosexual community), for whom homosexuality remains unspeakable. Angela, for instance, asks Stephen: "'Can I help it if you're – what you obviously are?'" (*Well* 159), omitting the vital information as to *what* that is. And Wanda tells Stephen: "'I was not as they were, ah, no! […] Nor was I as my father and mother; I was – I was…' She stopped speaking abruptly, gazing at Stephen with her burning eyes which said quite plainly: 'You know what I was, you understand.' And Stephen nodded, divining the reason of Wanda's exile" (*Well* 412). It is exactly this impossibility of communicating homosexuality that Hall attempts to cure.[235] In contemporary reviews, on the other hand, this speechlessness is replaced by a confusion over terminology, expressive of a time when the unspeakability of homosexuality was giving way to gradual attempts at definition. In spite of Hall's claiming of the term 'inversion', the reviewers use

[235] Speechlessness characterises another set of relationships highly relevant in Hall's novel, the ones between animals and human beings. Although necessarily without words, these relationships are described as transcending such human limitations; a communication about the closet and homosexuality becomes possible in the animals' very silence: "Stephen loved Raftery [Stephen's horse] and Raftery loved Stephen. It was love at first sight, and they talked to each other for hours in his loose box – not in Irish or English, but in a quiet language having very few words but many small sounds and many small movements, which to both of them meant more than words" (*Well* 58). "The novel presents Stephen's immediate acceptance by animals at Morton as a sign that 'inverts' belong to the same natural order as they do" (Pouchard 59), so that like the 'inverts' in the novel they 'know' but offer no judgement.

different expressions to describe Stephen's 'deviation': We can still find the language of unspeakability ("a novel written on a subject which is unmentionable" (Richard King in the *Tatler*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 63)),[236] but also terms such as "abnormal" (L. P. Hartley in the *Saturday Review*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 50), "the female invert, the man-woman" (Unsigned Review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 51), "Sapphic or Lesbian" (Leonard Woolf in the *Nation & Athenaeum*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 52), "the masculine woman" (I. A. R. Wylie in the *Sunday Times*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 55), "Amazonian soul" (A. M. A. in the *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 62), "the unfortunate intermediate sex" (Richard King in the *Tatler*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 64), and a very modern "homosexuality in women" (Cyril Connolly in the *New Statesman*, qtd. in Doan and Prosser, *Palatable* 67). The silence of the closet is replaced by a whole array of terminology to define what was before unspeakable.

Finding Out: Stephen in the Patriarchal Study

The reign of silence described in the preceding section is kept intact throughout Stephen's childhood and teenage years. In her affair with Angela, Stephen is still unaware that she is in a closet: Instead of attempting to keep the relationship to herself, she wishes to out it. She tells Angela

> 'I can't go on lying about you to Ralph [Angela's husband], I want him to know how much I adore you – I want the whole world to know how I adore you. […] I'm done with these lies – I shall tell him the truth and so will you, Angela; and after we've told him we'll

[236] Interestingly, this strategy of not-naming was also followed in the advertisements for the book: "The large advertisements promoting *The Well* avoided its subject matter" (Doan and Prosser, "Introduction" 4).

> go away, and we'll live quite openly together, you and I, which is what we owe to ourselves and our love.' (*Well* 159)

The obstacle to this outing, at that point in the novel, is the fact that Angela is married and that she does not really love Stephen but only uses her – it is not the fact that it is a lesbian relationship. With Mary later, this is different, for in that relationship Stephen is already so much indoctrinated into the workings of the closet that she herself attempts to keep it hidden. At the same time, however, it is her affair with Angela that leads to Stephen's first and violent confrontation with the closet when she is outed against her own will by Ralph, who shows her love letter to Anna. This demonstrates once again the homosexual's vulnerability when it comes to information management and also shows how homosexuality, through the mechanisms of the closet, makes the homosexual blackmailable. As has been shown before, the outing 'fails', Anna rejects her daughter and her homosexuality. The confrontation between the two breaks the reign of silence that has determined their lives for so long for the shortest time; the veil of silence is then once again re-installed between mother and daughter.

At the same time, however, the forced outing and accompanying exile from Morton lead up to "an episode in *The Well* often seen as *the* crucial moment in Stephen's self-discovery – when she stumbles upon sexological treatises in her father's library" (Doan, "The Outcast" 166). As has been noted before, the study is a quintessentially patriarchal space and has, throughout the novel, been associated with patriarchal control and knowledge and, as such, with the figure of Sir Philip. Accordingly, Stephen is only able to enter it alone after her father's death, after his patriarchal power has vanished. But Stephen, echoing her father, has spent "hours in the father's study" (*Well* 80) along with him, discussing her ideas and reading: It is thus only appropriate that she, but for her 'wrong' gender a patriarch herself,[237] should find her identity in the study. The spatial set-up of

[237] It has often been noted that Stephen's values are essentially conservative and that the novel upholds rather than questions a basic gender separation: There is a "conflict

the scene underlines the box-within-a-box structure so typical of the closet: In order to get to her father's books, she has to "open […] a little drawer in the desk and t[ake] out the key of her father's locked book-case" (*Well* 222). Within this locked bookcase, the relevant books on sexology are "on a shelf near the bottom" in "a row of books standing behind the others" (*Well* 222). We can see how "her inversion becomes her family's deepest secret" (Rosner 321) in the labyrinth-like composition of this, her father's, space. At this point, the knowledge of homosexuality or 'inversion' is still, literally, in the closet. The scene, however, functions both as a revelation of her own identity to Stephen – she finds the terminology to describe the lesbian part of her personality – and as a belated 'outing' on her father's part:

> Stephen therefore enters into a scholarly investigation of her sexual nature only via the mediation or intervention of her deceased father. […] Philip's command of the relevant sexological literature on inversion becomes, in effect, his sexual secret as he withholds vital information concerning his daughter's sexual nature from her and from his wife. (Doan, *Fashioning* 140)

But Sir Philip's patriarchal control is finally undermined by Stephen's penetration of his secret sphere; her discovery of her 'identity', while stigmatising and felt by her to be so (she regards it as the "mark upon Cain" (*Well* 223)), is at the same time empowering as it provides her with a possibility to finally define herself in terms of her lesbianism and to understand

between Stephen's lesbian self and her heterosexist cultural values" (MacPike, "Geography" 237). It is not only that "Stephen […] is deeply conservative", advocating values such as "loyalty to the land, a respect for tradition, a deep feeling for the continuity of line and place" (Hennegan, Introduction xi), this also goes along with the valorisation of masculinity and the degradation of femininity so typical of patriarchal culture. "The world of *The Well*, strangely enough […], is one where men should be men and women women: the former are ideally strong, taciturn, and virile; the latter fragile, emotional, and feminine" (Ladenson 110). As Stephen does not identify with other women, but with men, she sees no necessity to question her culture's patriarchal values.

that there are others like her.[238] And lesbianism, after all, is highly subversive of patriarchy: "[T]he study, masculinity's stronghold, [is] chosen as the repository for a secret that undermines the very authority of the space" (Rosner 322). When Puddle happens upon Stephen in the study, this patriarchal space is taken over by two lesbians who form an "incipient interpretive community" (Doan, *Fashioning* 142), now fully in control of the relevant information concerning their 'condition'.[239] Puddle, after all, "correct[s] Stephen's flawed reading" (Doan, *Fashioning* 142), her initial acceptance of both Krafft-Ebing's and God's condemnation, when she rephrases 'inversion' as an advantage: "'Why, just 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. Nothing's completely misplaced or wasted, I'm sure of that – and we're all part of nature'" (*Well* 223, 224). In re-appropriating the patriarchal space, Puddle and Stephen thus succeed in outing the patriarch's closet, in gaining access to his exclusive knowledge. But as Sir Philip's closet pertains to Stephen rather than to himself, it comes as no surprise that the revelation of her father's closet pushes Stephen into the closet herself. Her closeted existence begins with the study scene, for with the knowledge of possessing an 'inacceptable' identity comes the necessity to hide it. While Stephen's life had been extensively marked by the closet even up to this point, it is only now that she herself takes on a closet identity.

[238] The definition of lesbianism given to her by a book such as Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* is, of course, still male and patriarchal. But Krafft-Ebing, who, after all, also "believed that inversion though congenital was pathological" and that "inversion and insanity" were connected (MacPike, "Geography" 223), is only used as a means to provide terminology and a preliminary identity, which is then further filled by Stephen and Puddle themselves. Doan, for instance, has pointed out the fact that Puddle's idea of the implicit 'superiority' of 'inverts' is taken from the sexologist Edward Carpenter rather than from Ellis or Krafft-Ebing: Stephen is linked "with Carpenter's construction of the intermediate type, a being singularly poised to undertake a unique and special role in the larger scheme of creation" (*Fashioning* 152).

[239] Puddle, at this point, even outs herself to Stephen, although still in the discourse of the unnameable: "'All that you're suffering at this moment I've suffered. It was when I was very young like you – but I still remember.' Stephen looked up with bewildered eyes [...] for she had not understood Puddle's meaning" (*Well* 223). The outing is unsuccessful.

Stephen in the Closet: Exile in Paris

The latter parts of the book, after Stephen's exile from England, tell of her closet existence. In delineating this closetedness, they are certainly very modern and countless homosexuals these days can easily identify with Stephen's conflicts around keeping the closet: Problems of information management, worries about whom to tell and whom not to, about people finding out, about the fact that one may only feel at ease with one's 'own' kind – or, even more troubling, not feel at ease even with them. Stephen reacts to her exile from Morton with repression: The two years that she spends in London are marked by extensive work but a lack of emotional or sexual relationships. After these two years of self-denial, however, Stephen identifies the problem in her writing as consisting of her lack of sexual fulfilment[240] (cf. *Well* 236): In order to address it, she, following the advice of her friend and fellow 'invert' Jonathan Brockett, plans a move to Paris, "the center of literary lesbianism in the first part of the twentieth century" (Stimpson 370) and a city that had a long history of being associated with, especially female, homosexuality (cf. Abraham 336).[241] On the other hand, Stephen is now free to live out her 'masculinity' and does so by, in part, fashioning herself after the model of the 'invert' provided by the sexologists, cutting off her hair and wearing male-connoted suits (cf. *Well* 228). But this outward taking on of a 'masculine' look is no outing; as we have seen before, these signs are not readable to most persons in her environment. An exception to this rule is provided by other 'inverts' – *The Well* very much believes in the existence of a 'gaydar'. Jonathan Brockett, for

[240] It is typical of Stephen's closetedness that in her discussion with Puddle about this problem, the exact nature of it is never defined: Stephen speaks of being '"not complete"' (*Well* 235), of possessing a '"maimed and insufferable body"' which '"must never be indulged"' (*Well* 236), but even between the two 'inverts' the term 'inversion' is not spoken.

[241] Andrea Weiss has written a very enlightening study on female artists living in Paris at the start of the twentieth century, called *Paris war eine Frau: Die Frauen von der Left Bank*. Among the attractions of the place she identifies its (relative) freedom from heteronormativity (cf. 19, 20).

instance, 'knows' merely by observing Stephen: "[A]ll the while he had secretly watched her with his sharp and inquisitive eyes" (*Well* 247) and it is by doing so that "he had peeped through a secret keyhole into her mind, had been spying upon her trouble" (*Well* 255). 'Putting an eye to other people's keyhole' becomes a metaphor for Brockett's ability to find out other closeted homosexuals; a movement that is clearly associated with power and which Stephen hence rejects. But she herself is able to 'read' Brockett's homosexuality just as he can detect hers: After all, "her instinct divined that this man would never require of her more than she could give – that the most he would ask for at any time would be friendship" (*Well* 247). In the logic of the novel, where bodies are transparent and 'readable' through their 'inversion', it is Stephen's 'masculine' look that draws attention to her homosexuality for those 'in the know'; similarly, Jonathan's hands, "as white and soft as a woman's" (*Well* 247), give away his secret.[242] This is also the case with the community of homosexuals that Stephen meets in Paris and that gather in Valérie Seymour's salon: Their homosexuality betrays itself to the initiated in "[t]he timbre of a voice, the build of an ankle, the texture of a hand, a movement, a gesture" (*Well* 388).

Even in contact with these other homosexuals, however, homosexuality is not discussed and instead we find the typical 'closet communications' which consist of 'dropping hairpins'. One of Jonathan's first moves as Stephen's tourist guide in Paris is to lead her to Versailles and to confront her thus with the image of Marie Antoinette: "[I]n England Marie-Antoinette, the queen of France, became for some the most notorious sapphist of all" (Trumbach, "The Origin" 299). Marie-Antoinette functions in lesbian culture in a similar manner to Sappho, as an icon of lesbianism and one of the few figures in history with identificatory potential; at the same time, it

[242] The degradation of the feminine in the novel becomes especially obvious when it occurs in men. Munt notes that the "color white, and unpleasant smells, recur in the novel to connote sexual disgust" and that "this is repeated ad nauseam in the descriptions of Brockett's queenly white hands" (203) (counting very casually, I have found eight allusions to these hands in the novel). Duffy adds that "[t]he depiction of [male homosexuals] [...] in *The Well of Loneliness* shows a distressing [...] attitude of condemnation and caricature" (xiv).

is possible to discuss her relatively freely without necessarily drawing suspicion upon oneself. She is hence the ideal figure through whom closet communications can be led: Only the initiated will pick up the 'signals'. And Stephen does pick them up:

> But most skilfully of all did he [Jonathan] recreate for her the image of the luckless queen who came after [the Roi Soleil]; as though for some reason this unhappy woman must appeal in a personal way to Stephen. And true it was that the small, humble rooms which the queen had chosen out of all that vast palace, moved Stephen profoundly […]. Brockett pointed to the simple garniture on the mantelpiece of the little salon, then he looked at Stephen: 'Madame de Lamballe [Marie-Antoinette's lover] gave those to the queen,' he murmured softly. She nodded, only vaguely apprehending his meaning. […] Brockett said, very low, so that Puddle should not hear him: 'Those two would often come here at sunset. Sometimes they were rowed along the canal in the sunset – can't you imagine it, Stephen? They must often have felt pretty miserable, poor souls; sick to death of the subterfuge and pretences. Don't you ever get tired of that sort of thing? My God, I do!' But she did not answer, for now there was no mistaking his meaning. (*Well* 261)

Stephen perfectly understands Jonathan's meaning; being unwilling to out herself, however, she does not choose to signal him this.[243] She is constantly aware of Jonathan's attempts to draw her into outing herself or to communicate with her within the closet. At Valérie's, for instance, she realises

[243] It is not only her unwillingness to out herself that makes her act the way she does: At this point in the novel – and partly, until its very end – Stephen does not like to see herself as part of the homosexual community in Paris. This is a marker of her individualism and her class status (she is especially repulsed by lower class gay nightlife), but it is also a rejection of the stigma: "Stephen's profound ambivalence about lesbian/gay/queer communal life is based in her sense of her self. […] In order to consider the friendship of those 'like' herself, she has to acknowledge 'what' she is. That is, she has to admit a stigmatized identity and to admit that stigmatized identity as defining" (Abraham 350).

that Jonathan's allusions to other homosexual couples are all "said because of [her]. Brockett wants to let [her] see that he knows what [she is], and he wants to let Valérie Seymour know too" (*Well* 268). This constant attempt at communication on Jonathan's part is his way of trying to dissolve the closet: It is very different from the companionable, but repressed, silence that Puddle and Stephen maintain on the subject of homosexuality.[244]

In the novel, World War I is envisioned as a ground-breaking event in lesbian history. It allows a community of lesbians to come into existence and makes lesbian women 'visible' for the first time:

> And now quite often while she [Stephen] waited at the stations for the wounded, she would see unmistakable figures – unmistakable to her they would be at first sight, she would single them out of the crowd as by instinct. For as though gaining courage from the terror that is war, many a one who was even as Stephen, had crept out of her hole and come into the daylight, come into the daylight and faced her country: 'Well, here I am, will you take me or leave me?' (*Well* 298)

But in spite of this now (to Stephen) visible presence of lesbians, the closet still remains intact. We can see this in Mrs. Breakspeare's, the leader of the ambulance unit Stephen is part of during the war, closet communications with her when it comes to Mary: "'These are strenuous times, and such times are apt to breed many emotions which are purely fictitious, purely mushroom growths that spring up in a night and have no roots at all, except in our imaginations'" (*Well* 316, 317). Once again, although it is implied

[244] By helping Stephen keep up her closet, Puddle is, as is so typical of the closet, caught in its structures as well. This becomes obvious in her meetings with Mademoiselle Duphot, Stephen's first governess: "Then she and Mademoiselle would get talking about Stephen's childhood, about her future, but guardedly, for Puddle must be careful to give nothing away to the kind, simple woman. As for Mademoiselle, she too must be careful to accept all and ask no questions. Yet in spite of the inevitable gaps and restraints, a real sympathy sprang up between them" (*Well* 289).

that Mrs. Breakspeare has divined the nature of Mary and Stephen's relationship, it is given no name and not discussed openly. The same goes for Stephen's behaviour towards Mary: Rather than confront her with her lesbianism, she remains within the closet even though she realises that the other woman is attracted to her. "But at moments Stephen's face would grow clouded because of the things that she could not tell her; because of the little untruths and evasions that must fill up the gaps in her strange life-history" (*Well* 313). It is only Mary's insistence on a bodily relationship and their final consummation of it on Tenerife[245] that triggers an 'outing' on Stephen's part: "Oh, but now she must pay to the uttermost farthing for the madness that had left those words unspoken – even as her father had paid before her" (*Well* 342).[246]

Her relationship with Mary does not free Stephen of the closet, however; instead, it closets them together. Although friends with Mademoiselle Duphot, they never tell her of the 'true' nature of their relationship, for instance. At this point already, Stephen is troubled by her closeted status as it seems to base all her relationships on fundamentally uncertain ground: By not having told a fact that is considered 'vital', the relationship appears akin to a lie and might break as soon as the information is dispersed. This is certainly a feeling that many closeted homosexuals know. Stephen, for instance, wonders time and again: "'Supposing they knew – do you think they'd be so friendly to Mary?'" (*Well* 405) and, when meeting Mademoiselle Duphot, feels that they are there "'under false pretences'" for "'[i]f she knew what [they] were, she'd have none of [them]'" (*Well* 419). While

[245] Chinn has demonstrated how Tenerife is the only possible space within the novel where such an unburdened acting out of lesbianism would be possible: "Hall – comfortably equipped with the imperialist discourses of exoticism and orientalism – constructs an imaginary space of 'the primitive' that allows Stephen and Mary to consummate their love by 'going native'" (301).

[246] As we will learn later in the novel, Stephen's outing, however, has been far from complete: In conceiving of Mary as the 'female' part in the relationship, she has taken on the role of the patriarch towards her and has thus repeated her father's mistakes in remaining silent on vital points. She has, for instance, not told Mary about the reason for her exile from Morton and later conceals the fact that Anna refuses to meet her (cf. *Well* 366, 463).

in Mademoiselle Duphot's case, this is certainly projection, Stephen's misgivings turn out to be justified in her short-lived friendship with Lady Massey. Lady Massey, quite taken with Stephen and Mary as long as she is not aware of their sexual relationship, suddenly breaks off the friendship when she learns of it. The situation makes evident the basic uncertainty that Stephen and Mary (and homosexuals in general) face when in the closet: How the information has been obtained is unclear ("Stephen never knew what enemy had prepared the blow that was struck by Lady Massey" (*Well* 407)) and the exact nature of the accusation remains unnamed ("'The rumours that have reached me about you and Mary – certain things that I don't want to enter into – have simply forced me to break off our friendship'" (*Well* 408)). Mary's reaction underlines the treacherous nature of the closet where the homosexual is constantly in doubt as to who knows and who does not know: "'I thought that perhaps…they understood, Stephen'" (*Well* 409). Mary has misinterpreted Lady Massey's silence on the topic as acceptance when in fact it signalled mere ignorance.

In contrast to her relationship with Angela, which she was willing to announce to the 'world', Stephen has by now realised the necessity of keeping her relationship with Mary silent. At first, she does not even tell the people closest to her about it: "[I]n none of these letters [to Puddle, Anna, and Mademoiselle Duphot] did she mention Mary" (*Well* 328). But her gradual attempts at 'telling' are also vigorously blocked, especially by Anna: "Anna wrote asking Stephen to Morton but with never a mention of Mary Llewellyn. Not that she ever did mention their friendship in her letters, indeed she completely ignored it" (*Well* 366). Anna seems to instinctively know that the most effective weapon against her daughter's homosexuality is to smother it in silence. Stephen's attempts at an outing are simply blocked:

> [B]ut one topic there had been which Anna had ignored, had refused to discuss, and that topic was Mary. […] 'I want Mary Llewellyn to know my real home; some day I must bring her to Morton

> with me.' She [Stephen] had stopped, seeing Anna's warning face – expressionless, closed; while as for her answer, it had been more eloquent far than words – a disconcerting, unequivocal silence. (*Well* 373)

When willing to leave the closet, Stephen is thus kept back by a culture that deliberately ignores and silences homosexuality. Even Puddle, although sympathetic to Stephen's plight, is affected by the workings of this culture as can be seen in her repeated failure to name lesbianism and thus to forge a bond with her former student: "'My dear, I know it's all terribly hard about Morton – about…' She [Puddle] had hesitated. And Stephen had thought with renewed bitterness: 'Even she jibs, it seems, at mentioning Mary'" (*Well* 373). But in the course of the novel, Stephen begins to see it as her task to break exactly this realm of silence, to dispel the fetters of the closet.

Out of the Closet: Stephen as Spokeswoman for her 'Kind'

Even before Stephen herself starts to out herself vis-à-vis her environment, we can find an example of an outed woman in the novel. It is Valérie Seymour, explicitly constructed as Stephen's counterpart, as a "libertine lesbian" (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land* 220): at ease with her lesbianism, happy, polyamorous, with countless contacts to homosexuals and non-homosexuals. "[T]he possibilities Valerie [sic] represents are clearly present in the novel and are frequently showcased by Hall as direct alternatives to Stephen's choices" (MacPike, "Is Mary" 81). It is interesting that Valérie, although in many respects so very much opposed to Stephen, is still always presented as a positive character. Valérie, for instance, manages to live the life that Stephen wishes for, as an openly lesbian woman:

> She [Valérie] wrote delicate satires and charming sketches of Greek *mœurs* – the latter were very outspoken, but then Valérie's life was

> very outspoken – she was, said Brockett, a kind of pioneer who would probably go down to history. […] Great men had loved her, great writers had written about her, one had died, it was said, because she refused him, but Valérie was not attracted to men[.] (*Well* 265, 266)

In conversation with Stephen, Valérie explicitly rejects the closet:

> As for those who were ashamed to declare themselves, lying low for the sake of a peaceful existence, she utterly despised such of them as had brains; they were traitors to themselves and their fellows, she insisted. For the sooner the world came to realize that fine brains very frequently went with inversion, the sooner it would have to withdraw its ban, and the sooner would cease this persecution. (*Well* 449)

In constructing her salon as a non-secret meeting place for (upper-class) homosexuals, Valérie stands by her word. Here, homosexuals can exist openly, outside of their closet, even if still ghettoised:

> Everyone seemed to know everyone else, the atmosphere was familiar and easy. […] Her [Valérie's] manner was natural, and yet Stephen could not get rid of the feeling that everyone knew about her and Mary, or that if they did not actually know, they guessed, and were eager to show themselves friendly. She thought: 'Well, why not? I'm sick of lying.' (*Well* 384)

It is exactly this exasperation with the closet that characterises Stephen's development in the latter part of the book and that leads to her final outing to the 'world' at the end: "She was sick of denials and subterfuges, sick of tacit lies which outraged her own instincts and which seemed liked insults thrust upon Mary" (*Well* 381). The old walls of silence are torn down, when

Brockett refuses to play by the rules of the closet anymore: "'Look here, I'm not going to pretend any more. Of course we all know that you two are lovers'" (*Well* 380). This outing shows Stephen how pleasant it is to exist outside of the closet: "[T]here came over Stephen a queer sense of relief at the thought that he knew…Yes, she actually felt a sense of relief because this man knew of her relations with Mary; because there was no longer any need to behave as if those relations were shameful" (*Well* 381). With Martin, too, there is no need for lies, for having been rejected by Stephen as a young man, he simply 'knows': "He did not seem surprised that Mary Llewellyn was installed as the mistress of Stephen's home; he just accepted the thing as he found it. Yet he let it be tacitly understood that he had grasped the exact situation" (*Well* 456). This gradual path towards an outed state paves the way for Stephen's final step, which is to take on the identity of a 'spokeswoman for her kind'. After Mary has left her, Stephen suddenly "imagines herself surrounded by a hallucinatory 'legion' of spirits – the ghosts of all the women, past and present, who have suffered over their homosexuality" (Castle, *Apparitional* 7). In a scene that has often been seen as a kind of reproduction fantasy (cf. Doan, *Fashioning* 160; Skinner 31; Walton 297), both painful and orgasmic (cf. Castle, *Apparitional* 51; Madden 173; Walton 296), Stephen is asked to take on the role of a 'homosexual representative': "'Stephen, Stephen, speak with your God and ask Him why He has left us forsaken!'" (*Well* 483). By accepting this task ("'Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!'" (*Well* 484)), Stephen not only finally comes to terms with her identity as a homosexual and her place within this group, she also takes on the responsibility of becoming a 'voice' for the homosexual community. This role has before implicitly been assigned to her by Adolphe Blanc, an intellectual member of the homosexual community in Paris. He has emphasised the need for a literary engagement with the issue of 'inversion', independent of a medical explanation, to educate the 'normal', heterosexual masses: "'Ah, but no, they [these heterosexual masses] will not read medical books; what do such people care for the doctors? And

what doctor can know the entire truth? [...] The doctors cannot make the ignorant think, cannot hope to bring home the sufferings of millions; only one of ourselves can some day do that'" (*Well* 429, 430). Stephen's fourth book, which is still a work in progress at the end of the novel and which is, by implication, *The Well* itself, is then to engage with this task, to 'out' homosexuality to the world and, in the process, to out Stephen herself. In a sense then, the ending, although often seen as a negative and logical conclusion to what is seen as a "narrative of damnation" (Stimpson 364),[247] offers a positive vision for the closet: "Having worked its way from the tight confines of the locked bookshelf in the study through a diverse array of more accommodating spaces, inversion has literally moved out of the closet [...] and into the street, where its subjects can recognize each other and be recognized more widely" (Rosner 331).

[247] The ending is read as negative because giving up Mary is interpreted as martyrdom on Stephen's part, an unnecessary act of self-denial. But we should question whether an interpretation that sees Stephen's renunciation of her relationship as catastrophic is not rooted too much in a cultural preconception that regards the romantic relationship as *the* quintessential mode of existence. Green, for instance, points out that *The Well* ends relatively well in comparison with other novels of the kind, stressing that it "does not demand either its protagonist's marriage or, as the price of avoiding it, her death" (291) and Skinner finds it an outright positive ending that "affirms lesbianism" as "Stephen defeats 'self-hatred and doubt' and subverts the definition of lesbianism as a disorder" (32). I would like to further emphasise that, if we regard *The Well* as a *Künstlerroman* (cf. Whitlock 561, Franks 126, Green 292), Stephen's artistic vision is fulfilled at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to prove that, while research so far has exclusively focused on the male closet, there *is* in fact a female closet. It has done more than that: It has also demonstrated that this female closet is placed quite prominently in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature and that it only needs a change of perspective, a closer reading, to discover in the countless secrets and silences of female characters the distinctive structures and characteristics of the closet. The nineteenth century female closet, to be sure, can take different forms and appearances: It is not an exclusively homosexual secret that has to be hidden away, although homoeroticism figures centrally in many of the characters' closets. This thesis has instead identified three distinctive configurations of the female closet in this time period, namely the criminal closet, the victimisation closet and the lesbian closet. Two of these, the criminal and the lesbian closet, are strongly connected to women's gender transgressions, which have thus been identified as a central component of a female closet. The third, the victimisation closet, is less concerned with such gender transgressions, but is, through its specific structure and its extensive focus on women's male identification, also a prototypically female closet. The closets in the texts I have investigated have all fit into one of these categories, although there are certainly at some points overlaps between them: I further want to stress that I by no means see these categories as exhaustive – there may be other forms of female closetedness which this thesis has not dealt with. I do think, however, that these are prominent categories of female closetedness in the nineteenth and early twentieth century – it is thus all the more surprising that closet research has not dealt with female closetedness in this period so far.

At this point I would thus like to again make the point for the importance of female closet research: As so often in our culture, women have

simply been ignored in research on the closet. And, as this thesis has shown, this is certainly not the case because there are no closets to investigate. It is because our cultural bias towards the male has blinded us when it comes to female experience and has made us not even consider women when we write our newest book or article on the closet (and many other topics). For almost 30 years, closet research has been dominated by the male closet: I think it is high time for this to change and I hope that my thesis has contributed to a new investigation of female closetedness.

This thesis has concentrated on the beginnings of the female closet, which I have located in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and has followed its different configurations up until the late 1920s, when Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* pushed lesbianism out of the closet and thus started a new era, at least with regard to female homosexuality. This is not to say that there were no women in the lesbian closet after this event: There were many, of course, but lesbianism had become much more conspicuous and literary dealings with this specific topic changed accordingly. In the nineteenth century, however, the female closet is not limited to homosexuality, but can accommodate various elements, such as female criminality and victimisation. The female criminal closet seems to me rooted in the specific context of the nineteenth century: It is at that point that criminality and femininity are seen to be so very much opposed that the tension between them gives rise to a fascination with this seemingly forbidden topic and leads to the novel's preoccupation with female criminality and the female criminal closet. While this criminal closet certainly still figures in later novels, the sensation mania of the 1860s can be said to be its heyday. The victimisation closet, on the other hand, is a formation that can be found to this very day in the countless occurrences of abusive situations with which women are confronted and it is, accordingly, a formation that is certainly still relevant in literature after the nineteenth century and up to today. Here, we might rather surmise whether the victimisation closet's beginning might not lie at a later date than that of the other two formations: It is a distinct

possibility that it only comes up in the mid-nineteenth century, as a consequence of the ever stronger cultural focus on women's male identification. So far, however, these chronological issues cannot be more than tentative assumptions. A lot more research on the female closet is needed before a definite opinion can be formed.

With regard to the criminal closet, we have met Lucy Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Lydia Gwilt in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* and there are many more women with criminal closets to be found in the genre of sensation fiction: These particular two women use strategies of secrecy and non-disclosure to create an image of themselves that is in accordance with their society's expectations of femininity. Criminality is, in the nineteenth century (and today), associated with masculinity: The sensation novels of the 1860s turn this cultural expectation on its head by making the female criminal the centre of attention and part of the fascination they effected in their audience certainly comes from such transgressive reversals. The nineteenth century, after all, constructed women as passive, private, obedient, chaste, gentle, loving beings; all characteristics which seem to be the very antithesis of the criminal. In order to be able to follow their criminal careers as women, the female criminals in these novels thus have to hide their subversive transgression of gender boundaries in a criminal closet, while at the same time devising masks of perfect femininity to keep up the façade. The very women who seem to be the epitome of what the patriarchal system desires in a woman are revealed to be the most subversive, which sheds light on the nagging fear at the heart of patriarchy (or any oppressive system). It comes as no surprise, then, that the novels make a concentrated effort to finally exorcise the criminal, transgressive woman and that both female criminals end up dead, while the patriarchal system is reinstated after having rid itself of this subversive element. As long as they are in the closet, though, these women gain a considerable freedom through their very privacy and silence and a respite from the patriarchal structures of their society. The closet creates a space for them, a metaphorical and sometimes actual 'room of one's own'. It is patriarchy's

constant attempt to spy into such 'private' female spaces – both to contain the threat emerging from them and out of a curiosity closely connected with an eroticisation of female privacy –, however, that finally undermines the women's efforts to advance through the strategies of secrecy.

While gender transgressions are thus at the heart of the criminal closet, this is not the case with the victimisation closet. This specific closet has a complicated structure: On the one hand, the female characters in the novels hide their own victimisation in a closet. In the case of Helen Huntingdon in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, this victimisation is the domestic abuse she is subjected to by her husband. Rachel Verinder in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* is the victim of Franklin Blake's diamond theft, which is figured as a metaphorical rape, and Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is victimised by Alec's actual rape of her. On the other hand, these women do not only closet their own victimisation out of shame, but they are also in the closet for men: Their male identification – something which the nineteenth century especially propagated, but which is natural in any system which stresses men's superiority – leads to a situation where they take on a closet identity *for* a man. Helen cannot speak of her husband's misconduct, just as Rachel is incapable of outing Franklin as the diamond thief. Tess hides her identity as Angel's wife and her status as a 'fallen woman' in order to protect him from being associated with her. This situation of being in the closet for a man has the same negative consequences as being in the closet to hide one's own secrets: Suspicions come to rest on the women, they are further victimised by their environment, they feel incapable of an outing and they suffer through their very secrecy in a society that stigmatises (female) non-disclosure. While the closet in *The Tenant* can be seen as a prototypical victimisation closet, *The Moonstone* and *Tess* offer slight variations of the theme: In *The Moonstone*, Rachel is not only victimised through her closetedness but also gains – at least for a time – some amount of power, while in *Tess*, the structures of the victimisation closet are shown to be finally fatal. In general, however, the victimisation closet is a conservative structure: Here, women do not transgress gender

boundaries but stay, for the most part, firmly within them, and are finally, at the novels' ends, silenced, either through marriage or death.

Finally, this thesis has turned its attention towards the lesbian closet. The homosexual is, of course, in closet research the prototypical closet and the form in which it has most intelligibly survived until today. In the Anne Lister Diaries we encounter an early explicitly lesbian identity and an early closet identity as well. While Anne profited to some degree from the remnants of a still partly existing one-sex model and had many privileges due to her class position, she still had to hide an enormous part of her life in the closet, which is symbolised by her use of a code in the pages of her Diaries. She also developed successful strategies to communicate with potential partners from within the closet. Like Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness*, Anne understood her lesbianism in terms of a masculinised identity, thereby attempting to implement lesbian desire in a framework of heteronormativity. The short stories of Vernon Lee, which were written in the late nineteenth century (the heyday of suspicions towards homosexuals and, accordingly, of closeted literature), work differently, although they also predominantly build on the association between masculinity and lesbian desire. While Lee, with "The Doll", also wrote a more openly lesbian short story towards the end of her career in the 1920s, her earlier stories are dominated by 'lesbian boy' figures, which are used to closet desires depicted as quintessentially queer. The gender transgression of lesbian desire is here circumvented by the use of a boy character whose female characteristics make him an ambiguous figure and desire per se is detached from a fixed framework and made loose and free-floating. This is not the case in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*: Here, Stephen, after a childhood of secrecy and silence, finally becomes the spokeswoman for homosexuals once she has been able to step out of her own closet, which she has 'inherited' from her father. By making Stephen's self-discovery and her identity as a (mannish) lesbian the pivotal point of the narrative, the novel itself then contributed to outing lesbian desire in real-life Great Britain and other countries.

Considering these categories, one can certainly detect similarities between the male and female closet. I also, however, want to stress the differences between both constellations once again. On an abstract level, these are the following: Whereas the male closet is often seen as constitutive of masculinity and patriarchal power (cf. Bauer), the female closet – at least in its criminal and lesbian variant – hides female gender transgression and is accordingly deconstructive of society's idea of 'femininity'. This aspect goes together with the fact that the male closet uses strategies of secrecy to establish or protect patriarchal power, while the female closet is subversive of patriarchal power. The different positions of men and women in the social hierarchy – as oppressors and oppressed in a system of power – thus lead to very different closet constellations. What has to be closeted is always a consequence of what a culture considers to be closet-worthy: In so far as cultural expectations differ for men and women, it is no wonder that this also applies to the closet formations that are created around them. The closet of victimisation, however, forms an exception to these aforementioned aspects, as it is constructed in a quintessentially different manner. Another major incongruity – and this applies to all female closet constellations – concerns the timeline of the male and the female closet; as we will see shortly, they differ with regard to the aspects of linearity and simultaneousness and are thus situated on different axes. On the other hand, we also find certain similarities between the two closets: The male closet, in its original (Gothic) preform, is, after all, often a criminal closet, associated with "illegitimate private […] behaviour" (Bauer 213) in texts such as the Bluebeard myth, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* or William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. Still, it is very worthwhile to investigate the specific characteristics of the female criminal closet, especially since, in doing so, we have detected that, in the mid-nineteenth century, femininity and criminality are intimately entwined: Consequently, at this point in time, the female criminal closet takes on a role of much greater importance than the male criminal closet in the cultural imagination. Female criminality is also more transgressive than male criminality, in so far as women are in a

position of subordination vis-à-vis the inherently *patriarchal* law: Their criminality transgresses gender norms and in resorting to it, they shake the very foundations of the patriarchal system. It is this patriarchal system which also lies at the heart of the closet of female victimisation: As a form of closetedness that depends on the self-abnegation of women towards their male oppressors, it is a closet that can only exist for the subordinated person in a regime of power imbalance such as the gender system. As a consequence, this is a specifically female variant of the closet. The lesbian closet, on the other hand, again shows similarities to the male homosexual closet, at least on the surface. At this point, however, it has to be kept in mind that the experiences of male and female homosexuality are not necessarily the same, although there is a tendency in our society to see them as equivalent. As women and homosexuals, lesbians are doubly oppressed (cf. Martin 255). While male homosexuals are still part of a patriarchal system that invests them with power as men, this is not the case with lesbians who are deprived of power as both homosexuals and women. Their women-directed desire is also a transgression of gender norms, which is highly problematic in a patriarchal system where women figure (exclusively) as objects of exchange between men. Lesbianism has also never had the same kind of visibility that male homosexuality possesses, as can be seen by its 'birthdate' in the public consciousness in 1928, about thirty years after the Wilde Trials had made male homosexuality visible in the public arena. We can thus see that female closetedness is not just a form of the male closet but has its own specific characteristics that make an investigation into the female closet a crucial undertaking.

By making the outing of lesbianism to the general public the endpoint of my thesis, I by no means intend to propose a teleological reading: I explicitly do not want to state that such an outing was the 'logical endpoint' for the (female) closet. A further consideration may be whether there is a development within the female closet, a linearity similar to the one which critics such as Bauer have claimed for the male closet: Does it, like the male closet, start out as a different or a less fixed entity and then develop into a

firmly homosexual concept in the course of the nineteenth century? The cultural focus on homosexuality in the late nineteenth century certainly leads to a situation in which homosexuality and the closet become more firmly entwined, so that the closet then seemingly emerges as the primarily homosexual category as which we regard it today. In the nineteenth century, the closet is not yet as (relatively) fixed as it seems to be today: Thus, the female closet can also be configured as a criminal or victimisation closet. Firstly, I want to stress, however, that the lesbian closet is no 'invention' of the late nineteenth century but exists already much earlier, as the Lister Diaries have demonstrated. We can hence not claim that the criminal and the victimisation closet 'develop' into a homosexual closet but must instead stress the simultaneousness of these phenomena. Secondly, it is also possible to imagine that the female criminal and the victimisation closet are not limited to the nineteenth century but that they continue to flourish at later points in time, during the consolidation of the homosexual closet in the late nineteenth century and in the twentieth century. As I have mentioned before, it is highly likely that a formation such as the victimisation closet still exists in the twentieth century and today, for our society is still structured by patriarchal notions and concepts such as male identification. This would mean that the linearity which has been claimed for the male closet does not pertain to the female closet, which retains its capacity to incorporate several aspects of closetedness throughout the centuries. These, however, are questions that another researcher might (or will hopefully) someday attend to: My investigation of nineteenth and early twentieth British literature has shown the relevance of the aforementioned three configurations of the female closet at that point in time.

Why is secrecy such an important concept for female experience? This certainly has to do with the fact that privacy, while being associated with women, has largely been denied to them in a patriarchal society. Far from being the 'inherently more secretive' gender, women's status as the oppressed has necessitated the use of strategies of secrecy to subvert a power structure that would like to keep them silent but simultaneously render

them wholly transparent. The closet is such a strategy: By hiding their (gender) transgressions, women are able to keep up the façade expected of them and thus to escape the restrictive clutches of the system. At the same time, the victimisation closet has shown us that secrecy may also be used to buttress this system. But female privacy and female secrecy always draw onto themselves the jealous or eroticising male gaze: Women's privacy is mostly narrowly constrained and their secret spaces are constantly threatened by men. It is thus all the more important for women to keep even the fact that they are hiding a secret a secret – but this is something the characters of the novels and stories we discussed seldom manage to do in the patriarchal world they live in. For the reader, too, the closet has to be marked in some (ever so slight) way: One can only detect the traces of the closet in literature if there *are* at least some traces. The very claim to have successfully kept the secret draws attention to the fact that there *was* a secret to begin with and opens it up for interpretation. We can see this in the poem I want to end this dissertation on, "The Deep-Sea Pearl"[248] by Edith Matilda Thomas:

> The love of my life came not
> As love unto others is cast;
> For mine was a secret wound –
> But the wound grew a pearl, at last.
>
> The divers may come and go,
> The tides, they arise and fall;
> The pearl in its shell lies sealed,
> And the Deep Sea covers all.
> (qtd. in Donoghue, *Poems Between Women* 86)

[248] While Donoghue dates the poem only very roughly as having been written "before 1926" (86), Watts has pointed out that it can be found in Thomas's volume of poetry *The Dancers and Other Legends and Lyrics* from 1903 (cf. 150).

The lesbian love is identified as such through the image of the "pearl" (line 4), a symbol of the female sexual organs, and the water metaphors that dominate the poem, as well as through the emphasis on secrecy, specifically connected to love, and difference from heteronormativity: This love is not "[a]s love unto others is cast" (line 2); instead it is "a secret wound" (line 3). This secret, lesbian love is hidden underneath "the Deep Sea [that] covers all" (line 8) but the very fact that this is addressed draws attention to the secret, of course. While lesbian love is positively figured (as a pearl), it still needs to be hidden within the closet: First, it is a "secret wound" (line 3) and later it is removed from the occurrences of everyday life and nature, the "divers" (line 5) and "tides" (line 6) and the heterosexual masses, those "others" (line 2) for whom love is different. It is "sealed" (line 7) off in a private 'room of its own', the "shell" (7). Here it is safe: The closet draws a veil of privacy and protection over it. In this poem, what happens within the closet, stays within the closet. But like in Amy Levy's "At a Dinner Party", with which this thesis started, this is not a negative, but a positive thing: The pearl is hidden, but it is a pearl still. The poem itself then comes to communicate the secret content from a position within the closet – so that those 'in the know' will be able to pick up the clues and decipher the hidden meaning. In this thesis, I have rarely discussed poetry, focusing on novels, short stories and – in the case of the Anne Lister Diaries – non-fictional texts. As Thomas's poem, as well as Levy's poem with which we began this thesis, show, poetry may, however, be a field with a potential for discovering further female closets. Poetry is often ambiguous, full of silences and gaps, and it is thus ideal for the communication of secret desires. But an investigation of the female closet must not be limited to it: My hope is that this thesis has opened up the discussion of female closets across the whole spectrum of literature.

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Configurations of the Female Closet: 1800-1930

Since the publication of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet, the closet has become one of the most crucial theoretical frameworks of queer studies. Sedgwick and critics following in her footsteps have conceptualised the closet as a quintessentially male construct.

Configurations of the Female Closet: 1800-1930 offers a counterpoint to this tendency by paying attention to the female closet in the period from the closet's development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to the 'outing' of the female (lesbian) closet in the late 1920s. In doing so, this thesis does, however, not exclusively focus on a female homosexual closet: Instead, it also investigates other forms of female closetedness that were prominent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and may still be relevant today.

The terminology of the 'closet' is thus widened to include three central configurations of the female closet: the criminal closet, the victimisation closet and the lesbian closet.

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