

QUEER TEMPORALITY AND THE PROJECT OF REVISIONING

THE FUGITIVE DEAD:
QUEER TEMPORALITY AND THE PROJECT OF REVISIONING
IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY FICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

Following from such theorists as Sara Ahmed, Lee Edelman and Heather Love, this thesis seeks to address current scholarship on queerness and temporality that conceptualizes queer subjects as complicating traditional notions of linear time, reproduction, and progress. Mobilizing theories of temporal disruption and disorientation, including backwardness and the queer moment, this thesis explores the association between such disruptions and a persistent impulse to reckon with and reconstruct what I refer to as “the fugitive dead,” understood here both as past events and as the ghostly figures of the dead and effaced. Such disruptions can, this project posits, foster queerly generative affinities between seemingly separate categories (e.g. between the present and the past or between the living and the dead), thereby providing alternatives and challenges to normative temporal trajectories.

My analysis considers literary representations of such temporal disruptions, drawing on Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* to explore their treatments of temporal linearity, queer moments, affinity and connection, as well as haunting and spectrality. Furthermore, this thesis also addresses the capacity of literary texts to *enact* temporal disruption in the form of the revisioning project, which can be figured as the literary attempt to encounter the fugitive dead. Ultimately, this thesis explores the literary and intertextual dimensions of this complex approach to queer temporality, advocating for the generative possibilities of an attentiveness to the continued presence of the past and an engagement with the figures of the lost and disappeared.

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INTRODUCTION

TEMPORAL (DIS)ALIGNMENT, GHOSTLY ENCOUNTERS

Consider the following literary ghosts: Bruce Bechdel, a closeted gay man whose life is reconstituted through his daughter's graphic memoir and the countless textual materials – everything from Marcel Proust to Kate Millet to a box of family photographs – out of which it is comprised; Septimus Warren Smith, war veteran and visionary, who is driven to suicide by impending footsteps on the stairs, only to reemerge within the consciousness of impeccable hostess Clarissa Dalloway; and Virginia Woolf, modernist writer and genius, whose life and work is refracted through a novel by contemporary author Michael Cunningham. The works I am referring to here, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, are each bound up with considerations of literary spectrality and its connection to queerness. Each of these characters is positioned as queer not only in terms of sexual orientation, but also in terms of their relation to temporality: their reappearance in the narrative present suggests the texts' refusal to relegate that which is dead and disappeared to the realm of the past. In the pages that follow, I will consider the connections between queerness and non-normative temporality as a means of disruption to typical notions of time and progression. I will address, firstly, how temporal progression can be theorized, before shifting my focus to notions of temporality and disruptive (“queer”) moments, and conclude by discussing the implications that the concept of queer time has for the project of revisioning.

I. BEING “IN LINE”

Before I venture into considerations of temporal non-normativity, I would like to establish my theoretical framework for thinking about the problematic aspects of linear progression and about the alternatives provided by the notion of queerness. In her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed considers how it is that one becomes oriented. Her focus is largely on spatiality; she speaks primarily of directions taken, of paths chosen, and of a “line” that designates one’s life course, determining the range of objects or possibilities within reach. While the directions we turn and the paths we follow represent our own means of navigating space, they “might also function as forms of ‘alignment,’ or as ways of being in line with others” (15). In other words, Ahmed adds a social dimension to the concept of orientations, evoking an image of a well-trodden path that represents a kind of normative, socially sanctioned direction or trajectory.

Insofar as following such a line necessitates a kind of “straightness,” it also precludes any deviation from the predetermined course (16). Indeed, concepts such as Adrienne Rich’s compulsory heterosexuality and Lee Edelman’s reproductive futurism, to which I will return later, offer considerations of how “deviant” directions and trajectories are often not regarded as possibilities for orientation at all, but are rather eclipsed by an insistence on a readily available “field of heterosexual objects” (Rich qtd. in Ahmed 87), a field which does not allow queer objects even to “come into view” (91). Queerness, then, is often theorized as a kind of failure to stick to the straight line, as a

perversion that manifests in one's desire to seek something outside of that which is readily available.

To further extend her considerations of normative and non-normative trajectories, Ahmed draws attention to the association between queerness and spatiality. Queer, for example, is “a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line,’ a sexuality that is bent or crooked” (Ahmed 67). While Ahmed's discussion of queerness as a kind of deviant path that offers an alternative to a typical (hetero)normative trajectory provides a helpful framework for considering possibilities for queer life, I would like to take her idea of deviancy in another direction, so to speak. Ahmed's queer is figured as a lone wanderer, as one who has strayed, or been forcibly precluded, from the beaten path, and whose footsteps can serve as a potential trajectory for others. Indeed, as Ahmed says, “deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines” (20). While an alternative life course such as this is undoubtedly generative, I would like to suggest that perhaps another form of deviancy may be to abandon the progressive trajectory of the line altogether. What happens, I would like to consider, when one turns around entirely? How is an orientation to the past queerly generative, and how does it manifest in the literary process of revisioning?

II. TEMPORALITY AND THE BACKWARD TURN

To turn around entirely, I would argue, is not simply a matter of direction, but also implies a disruption to normative temporal trajectories that emphasize the supposed value of “progress,” both in terms of a life course and of a literary narrative. To further

expand on this notion of time-as-progress, it may be helpful to consider Elizabeth Freeman's work on chrononormativity, which resonates closely with Ahmed's notion of being "in line." Chrononormativity is described by Freeman as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity," or the process by which "people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time" (*Time Binds* 3). Like Ahmed's "line," chrononormativity necessitates orienting oneself in the same direction as others, and thereby following a prescribed, well-trodden path toward a supposed "maximum productivity" which, she continues, is defined by "teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals" (4). In order to be "made to feel coherent," one must hit certain bases on one's life course, moving through stages or phases of life in a certain order, always with the goal of "progress" or "productivity." Through a discussion of what she calls chronobiopolitics, Freeman emphasizes the role of the state in constructions of a normative life course, and asserts that "the state and other institutions link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change" (4). In other words, a coherent, "properly temporalized" state is predicated upon a population that is oriented along a straight line – that prioritizes (re)productive practices and trajectories. A parallel trajectory is set out by the literary text – the movement from stage to stage, from beginning to middle to end, implies, in most cases, the same emphasis on progression, with characters facing and overcoming obstacles that may stand in the way of the actualization of the next stage in their life course.

The emphasis in this kind of prescribed life course is placed on a sense of futurity, of progress by means of an infinitely deferred achievement. For Lee Edelman, this unceasing emphasis on future progress is represented by the figure of the “Child,” who, as Edelman states, “has come to embody for us the telos of the social order” (11). The Child is a key figure in what Edelman terms reproductive futurism, and has come to be seen as “the one for whom [the social] order is held in perpetual trust” (11). Social organizing principles revolve around this Child, placing value on practices that presume to be for the benefit of the future. While reproductive futurism is undoubtedly visible in political practices (such as Bill Clinton’s branding of himself as “the defender of the children” [2]), it is also evident in the implicit (as Ann Cvetkovich might say, “insidious” [32]) social attitudes, such as homophobia, that form the basis for political beliefs and platforms. As Edelman explains, the reproductive capacity of heterosexual relationships, and the resulting futurity (represented by the Child) that it implies, ensures the “absolute privilege of heteronormativity,” and consequently relegates queer or non-reproductive sexualities to the margins (2). Indeed, queerness, or “the side of those not ‘fighting for the children’” (3) is effectively “render[ed] unthinkable” (2).

What, then, would a practice of queer resistance look like? Under what circumstances can literary texts enact this resistance? Sara Ahmed sees a queer life as one that refuses the reciprocal “gestures of return,” as one that, in diverging from the “direction promised as a social good,” fails to pay off the “debt of its life” (21). I read “return” here as another version of progress or productivity; in refusing to submit to the logic of reciprocity, queerness also denies the logic of chrononormative progress. Indeed,

the “social good” that Ahmed invokes is an articulation of chrononormativity in that it consists of “imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course” (21). Edelman also conceives of queerness as a denial of a kind of social good, framed here in terms of social intelligibility: “The queerness of which I speak would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of knowing ourselves and hence of knowing our ‘good’” (5). In denying the “proper” trajectory, the way of the social good, queerness is therefore rendered socially incoherent. A literary practice of queer resistance would also, under the same principles, be precluded from intelligibility. In failing to organize itself around the necessary bases in terms of narrative progression, a text would ostensibly go nowhere; it would, as many of the texts I will consider, revolve around repetition and disjunction, ultimately ending almost where it began.

While queerness represents a site of difficulty in terms of the “social good,” another connotation of deviance is that it threatens the values of a typical life course, or the progression implied by linearity and by normative narrative trajectories. Edelman outlines the potentially unnerving implications of queer resistance, stating that:

whatever refuses [the] mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, insofar as it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends. (11)

Queerness, therefore, in its challenge to the “logic of futurism” also threatens the basis of the social order.

Furthermore, in denying the progression of a trajectory based on futurity, or the life-affirming potentiality of the Child, queerness comes to be seen as a challenge to life

itself. Both Ahmed and Edelman consider the association of queerness and death, emphasizing the disruptive potential of queerness to an inter-generational “line.” Essentially, while the metaphor of the “line” can represent a single life course and the privilege that (re)productive practices hold therein, it can also be used to illustrate broad social progressions that find their trajectories in inheritance, or the “family line.” While the accumulation of wealth and assets for oneself is itself an avenue towards supposed “progress,” the logic of inheritance, of passing on one’s assets to one’s children, is seen as an investment in futurity, and therefore as an articulation of the social good. As such, a failure or refusal to engage in reproductive practices, simply put, to *not* have children, is to run counter to, and consequently threaten, the futurity of the line. Queerness is, in this sense, a “death threat” (Ahmed 77).¹ The literary texts I will be considering are therefore bound up with notions of death not only in their evocation of ghostly figures, but also in the degree to which their queer narrative strategies serve to disrupt the typical narrative course that insists on reproductive progression.

I use the phrase “run counter to” deliberately here in order to evoke, once again, a sense of backwardness. Edelman’s argument represents the connection between queerness and death, and, in so doing, articulates a vision of queerness as a kind of negation of life. In refusing to “fight for the children,” queerness becomes a site of negativity, of a refusal to adhere to the ideological “progress” of the line. Edelman argues that “the embrace of queer negativity (...) can have no justification if justification

¹ It is worth considering, in this context, the literal death threat of AIDS, a syndrome often explicitly associated with non-normative sexual practices (e.g. as a “gay disease”). As Ross Chambers elucidates in his book *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting*, a PWA, or person with AIDS, is rendered ghostly both in the social unintelligibility of implied queerness, but also in the cultural and generic liminality and incoherence of trauma (24).

requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself” (6). Queerness then, does not presume to offer a “positive social value,” as an alternative or “deviant” line might do. Instead, it negates the very logic of the practice of valuation itself. Rather than providing simply another direction, queerness insists upon its own lack of perceived value, ostensibly offering, as Edelman posits, nothing at all. What I want to suggest is that, in its negation of normative notions of progression, queerness is not simply deviating from the normative linear trajectory, but is, instead, turning around entirely. Queer negativity, in my reading, is inextricable from backwardness.

The association of queerness and backwardness is by no means a new one. In her book *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love evokes rhetoric that connects queerness to a sense of arrested development or physical and mental immaturity (and consequent failed sexuality), as well as to manifestations of “unproductive” feelings such as melancholia, or, as she puts it, “feeling bad” (14). “Queers,” to quote Love, are seen as “a backward race” (7). She also posits queerness as a counterpoint to the “the idea of modernity” and its “suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance,” a perspective which is also taken up by Elizabeth Freeman (5). Both theorists see queerness as an embodiment of a kind of temporal drag, to use Freeman’s term, understood here as meaning both sexually deviant and as lagging behind. Love describes figures who are left behind by modernity (5-6), while Freeman sees “sexual dissidents” as those who represent “occasional disruptions to the sped-up

and hyperregulated time of industry” (7). What we can glean from these two theorists is the idea that queerness has a unique, often troubled relationship to normative temporality. In its insistence on backwardness, it serves to disrupt, or, as Edelman suggests, even negate the logic of progress and futurity. What interests me is this disruptive potential of non-normative temporalities, of moments and temporal trajectories that don’t fit into a “line,” but rather that serve to interrupt or otherwise unravel the linear thread of narrative.

III. QUEER MOMENTS

The queer moment is one such temporal disruption that is, as I will argue, intimately bound up with notions of backwardness and of an orientation towards the past. This concept has been taken up by countless theorists, from Woolf and Benjamin to Sedgwick and Edelman, and has consequently been subject to significant variation. In their most basic form, queer moments serve to disrupt or challenge normative temporal progression (e.g. Freeman’s chrononormativity or Woolf’s moments of non-being), and, in so doing, induce feelings of disorientation in the subject. Sara Ahmed, drawing on the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, describes queer moments as those “moments [...] where the world no longer appears ‘the right way up,’” in which “objects appear ‘slantwise’” (66). She traces these moments to the experience of a confrontation with that which is “out of line,” claiming that it is not only the deviant thing itself which “appears oblique,” but that “the world itself might appear on a slant, which disorients the picture and even unseats the body” (67). Merleau-Ponty describes these moments of disorientation as “vital experiences of giddiness and nausea” and emphasizes the feelings

of “horror” that are produced in the subject (4). A typical response to such feelings of disorientation and horror, Ahmed argues, is to attempt to reorient oneself, to rewrite the unusual experience into a normative, logical narrative. Since moments of disruption, according to Merleau-Ponty, induce a kind of paralysis that “block[s] bodily action,” they must be overcome in order for the body to continue to progress along the “line” and to regain once again its capacity to “extend into phenomenal space” (66).

Here, Ahmed provides an anecdote of a personal encounter in order to further illustrate this tendency to “straighten things out” or to “see straight.” She describes coming into contact with those for whom the relationship between Ahmed herself and her partner is unsettling or disorienting. One example stands out in particular, that of a new neighbour asking, in reference to Ahmed’s partner: “Is that your sister or your husband?” (95). Ahmed elaborates on this utterance and its emphasis on normative categories of relations (e.g. biological or marital), and states that it “rereads the oblique form of the lesbian couple, in a way that straightens that form such that it appears straight” (96). While Ahmed does not explicitly relate this anecdote to her discussion of queer moments, I think the connection can definitely be made: Ahmed’s neighbour’s confrontation with that which is “out of line,” namely, the relationship between Ahmed and her partner, induces feelings of disorientation which she, the neighbour, then lays to rest by rereading the relationship as either sisterly or heterosexual.²

² I use the phrase “lays to rest” intentionally here, because Ahmed, in her embodiment in this moment of that which is “out of line,” occupies a parallel positionality to the ghosts I have mentioned. Her queerness cannot be easily incorporated into the neighbour’s understanding of categories of relations; her relationship with her partner is therefore “rendered unthinkable,” even spectral.

Queer moments are not limited, however, to encounters with an incoherent or allegedly threatening “other.” Horror and disorientation can also result when one perceives one’s own deviation from the “line.” Patricia Juliana Smith elaborates upon this experience, focusing specifically on literary representations of lesbian sexuality. She develops a concept she calls “lesbian panic,” and which she defines in narrative terms as: “the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character – or, conceivably, an author – is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire” (2). Lesbian panic manifests, according to Smith, when one is suddenly faced with one’s own transgressive behavior or identity, and when one then reacts with a desperate attempt to “straighten things out.” Where Merleau-Ponty describes feelings of nausea, giddiness and horror, Smith invokes a more clinical description of a panic attack, citing symptoms such as “depersonalization or derealization; fear of dying; and fear of going crazy or doing something uncontrolled” (3). During queer moments, then, it may not be simply the world that appears slantwise, as Ahmed describes, but oneself as well.

Smith’s descriptions of a panic attack resonate very closely with Virginia Woolf’s accounts of “moments of being,” which I read as an articulation of the queer moment concept, and which Woolf describes at length in her memoir *Moments of Being*. These moments, for Woolf, range from her experience in a seemingly trivial fistfight with her brother, to her meditations on a flower, to the paralysis induced by being confronted by an apple tree (*Moments of Being* 71). They consist of, at the most basic level, the experience of receiving a “sudden shock” with “sledge-hammer force,” that induces a feeling of “peculiar horror” (72). One instance in particular, which Woolf recounts in her

memoir as well as in her novel *The Waves*, echoes very closely the feelings of depersonalization or derealization described by Smith. It consists of Woolf's (and the character Rhoda's) sudden inability to cross a puddle: "There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something... the whole world became unreal" (78). The feeling of unreality, or of imminent dissolution, as well as the need for a kind of tangible solidity or reorientation ("I tried to touch something") is evident in both iterations of the event. For Woolf, it is unclear what causes the "sudden shock" or "peculiar horror" that she experiences on a regular basis. Indeed, it seems as though the mechanism of perception, of taking in and interpreting the world, has suffered a kind of inexplicable breakdown, resulting in paralysis or an inability to move forward (to recall Merleau-Ponty's description).

While queer moments are disorienting at the time they are experienced, they are also "out of line" in their continued resonance throughout the minds and experiences of the subject(s). Indeed, a consistent characteristic of queer moments in most of their incarnations is their tendency toward repetition. Woolf's *Moments of Being*, for example, represents an attempt to create an archive of her experiences of moments of being, which also find expression in her other writings. The description of the puddle in both *Moments of Being* and *The Waves* is by no means the only instance of parallelism between Woolf's autobiography and her fiction. In her introduction to the 1976 Sussex University Press edition of *Moments of Being*, for example, Jeanne Schulkind discusses incidents in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, respectively, which echo moments described in Woolf's

memoir (23-24). It is interesting that a single description of an event does not seem to be enough for Woolf. Instead, the moment in question has become so embedded in her consciousness that its expression must consistently be repeated. It can never quite be accounted for.

My analysis of queer moments draws on this capacity, almost necessity, for repetition that queer moments engender. It is this ongoing resonance of queer moments that figures them as temporally disruptive in a way that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as “recurrent” and “eddy” (qtd. in Haffey 143). Kate Haffey considers Sedgwick’s theory of the queer moment, positing that such instances function as “whirlpools within the flow of time,” and that they have a “tendency to recur or repeat” (143). She also looks more closely at Sedgwick’s “eddy,” citing a definition that describes an eddy as “a drift or tendency that is counter to or separate from the main current, as of opinion, tradition, or history” (143). Following from Sedgwick, I would like to posit that queer moments are interruptions to Ahmed’s “line” or to Freeman’s chrononormativity; they disrupt linear progress by insisting on repetition and backwardness, even running counter to the normative trajectory (143). Queer moments, therefore, represent a means of conceiving of the relationship between queerness and backwardness. In their constant disruption of temporal linearity, they disturb distinctions between the present and the past, repeating supposedly “past” instances, and consequently troubling the logic of progression or futurity.

While their emphasis on backwardness may not be “productive” in a conventional, normative sense, queer moments are generative, I would argue, in their

challenge to, as Lee Edelman would say, “value as defined by the social” (6). Ahmed’s articulation of the moment of disorientation focuses on the tendency towards reorientation, on one’s perceived need to escape the sensation of horror by “straightening things out” or bringing what is deviant back into alignment. She also posits, however, that if we can resist the pressure to reread or dismiss the experience, if we can instead “stay with such moments,” then “we might achieve a different orientation toward them” (4). “Such moments,” she continues, “may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find joy and excitement in the horror” (4). Rather than aligning oneself and one’s world wholeheartedly with the “line” and the emphasis on linear progression that it implies, to allow oneself to “inhabit the intensity” of the queer moment would be to look at the world differently, to embrace a different, maybe even a backward, orientation, and in so doing, to allow oneself the experience of vitality and pleasure (107).

Indeed, it is a crucial aspect of queer moments that they are not simply horrific, but also potentially pleasurable. In Elizabeth Freeman’s book, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, she considers the work of various artists, all of whom espouse a project that, as Freeman states, “is less to negate than to prevaricate, inventing possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense” (xv). Indeed, for one artist in particular, Nguyen Tan Hoang, this disoriented and disorienting relation to time is precisely what makes the queer moment pleasurable. To quote Freeman, “‘the hottest part of the tape,’ as Nguyen’s note puts it, appeared in his viewing of it as instances returning to themselves over and over, and as a series of leaps

across the bodily gestures or sexual choreographies that we are ordinarily supposed to experience as smooth, continuous, and natural” (2). Repetition, or a “hiccup in sequential time,” in this reading, is not only disruptive but also a source of sexual arousal and pleasure (3).

It is a critical premise of this thesis that, much as their tendency towards repetition can serve as a touchstone for the experience of the erotic, the repetitive quality of queer moments can also be generative in terms of literary creativity. Indeed, while Woolf describes her experiences of queer moments as evoking a sensation of “peculiar horror,” she also sees them as those instances that prompt her to exercise her capacity for language and which, once articulated in writing, can provide her with a more complete understanding of the truth. A moment of being is “a token of some real thing behind appearances” that can only be made real by the use of language (72). “It is only by putting it [the moment] into words,” she continues, “that I make it whole” (72). Woolf even goes so far as to posit her own “shock-receiving” capacity as that which “makes [her] a writer” (72). Being confronted with such startling moments of incomprehensibility, and the subsequent impulse towards explanation that they engender, provides Woolf with what is perhaps “the strongest pleasure known to [her]”: her capacity to “discover what belongs to what” in her writing (72). Moments of being, for Woolf, provide a jolt; they startle her out of everyday ways of perceiving the world, and, in so doing, offer a glimpse of “some real thing behind appearances,” or “the thing itself” that so inspires her writing (72).

This description offers, I think, a version of a common trope in Woolf’s writing: the relationship between surface and depth³. It is only in her experiences of moments of being that the surface is penetrated, that she is made aware of the artifice of normative worldviews. I connect this to Ahmed’s idea of the imposition of linearity, or, to invoke Rich and Freeman, the constructed nature of compulsory heterosexuality and chrononormativity. These cultural scripts are typically enforced outside of conscious recognition – they become the means by which we orient ourselves, by which we evaluate ourselves and the world around us – and ultimately form a kind of backdrop to our social interactions. These cultural scripts structure our interactions with one another, but ultimately consist of a degree of pretense and artificiality. A queer moment, I would argue, is figured as an instance in which the normative is revealed to be a construction, in which, as Avery Gordon puts it, the “cracks and rigging are exposed,” and one is able to see beneath the surface and to recognize the artificiality of the principles that guide our interactions (xvi). Ann Cvetkovich, in her considerations of trauma, refers to such instances as “sign[s] or symptom[s] of a broader systemic problem, a moment in which abstract social systems can actually be felt or sensed” (43). “Trauma stories,” she continues, quoting Kathleen Stewart, ““fascinate because they dramatize odd moments when latent possibilities materialize without warning and effects hidden from view of a center in denial suddenly grow tactile”” (44). For Cvetkovich, then, queer moments are able to inspire not only pleasure or creativity but also an understanding and recognition of

³ See the water imagery in novels such as *The Waves* as well as in shorter works such as “Street Haunting.”

the traumatic imposition of normative alignment.

IV. HAUNTING AND AFFINITIES: ENCOUNTERING THE FUGITIVE DEAD

Queer moments also bring into view, for many theorists, those ghostly figures who have experienced this trauma of linear imposition and effacement, of a “failure” to conform to normative standards of alignment. Indeed, Avery Gordon’s concept of haunting figures the queer moment as an experience of spectrality, when those who have been left behind by chrononormative progress become visible. It is worth quoting Gordon at length:

I used the term haunting to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. [...] Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away. (xvi).

Haunting is here figured as temporal disruption, as a repetitive, defamiliarizing encounter with the spectres of the past or the “people who are meant to invisible,” that ultimately serves to trouble distinctions between categories of temporality (past, present, future). Queer moments can be conceptualized as a raising of the dead, then, not only in their tendency toward repetition, and so revocation of past instances, but also in the more literal way that they surface figures of the dead and effaced.

I would like to look into the capacity for resonance that queer moments engender, and to consider their ability to echo through subjectivities, even “refracting outwards” and fostering connection between the living and the dead (Cvetkovich 19). The ghostly resonances of queer moments, I would argue, serve as a means of creating affinity across time and space, connecting diverse people through shared, uncanny temporal moments. These are moments, I would like to posit, when our relationship to time itself becomes disorienting, when the past quite literally comes alive in the present, and when we come face to face with, to quote Foucault, “the archive’s stray dogs” – those people who have been lost and abandoned by the progress of the “line,” and who have no place in the dominant narrative of history (qtd. in Freeman xii). Gordon invokes Benjamin’s concept of “profane illuminations,” defining them as “those moments at a crossroads where ‘ghostly signals flash from the traffic, and inconceivable analogies and connections between events are the order of the day’” (xii). Queer moments, in this example, are those moments when the “ghostly signals” become visible, when experiences can be seen to resonate across time, when seemingly differentiated events throughout history can make their connections felt. These instances are able, therefore, to render somewhat tangible the connections between the living and the dead, between the historical and the contemporary, and between the past and the present.

This notion of the capacity for connection and affinity can be applied just as easily to individuals as to historical events. If we return to Freeman’s discussion of Nguyen’s work, then, the repetitive nature of the moment emerges as not only pleasurable, but also as having the capacity to “connect a group of people beyond monogamous, enduring

couplehood” (3). She describes Nguyen’s film entitled *K.I.P* as making use of “fragmentation and remixing to open up gaps in the sexual dyad, inviting in not only a third party in the figure of the spectator but also, potentially, any number of viewers or even participants” (3). Presenting the sex act as discontinuous and repetitive is to leave room for articulations of sexuality that don’t fit into the logic of reproductive futurism, as well as to evoke, through its repetition, an infinite capacity for participation that could presumably extend across time and space.

Heather Love’s analysis of affinities between individuals focuses more explicitly on the relation between the past and the present, referring to a “queer impulse to forge communities between the living and the dead” (31). She advocates for identifications across time which, she says, “can illuminate the uncanny life of the past inside our present,” and describes the often troubled relationship of contemporary queer identity to a queer past which is often marked by “historical losses,” melancholia, or otherwise “feeling bad,” ultimately suggesting that such affinities should be cultivated rather than disavowed (45).⁴

While such instances provide a sense of the presence of the past, or a partial reconstitution of the lives of the forgotten, I would also suggest that these connections are

⁴The emphasis that Love places on “feeling bad” is, I would argue, evocative of the Ann Cvetkovich’s considerations of the resonance of historical trauma. I read the reverberation of trauma through the present as another version of Love’s melancholic history, as a fractured past making itself felt in the present by means of resonance and identification. Cvetkovich describes the effects of trauma as “haunt[ing] the present” and claims that they “take surprising forms, appearing in textures of everyday emotional life” (6). What I want to suggest from this, in reference to queer moments, is that there is as much capacity for disruption or disorientation in the “ordinary” as in the “extraordinary.” Moments of temporal disorientation and the affinities they engender do not, therefore, have to be figured as instances of catastrophe. They do not even have to be particularly dramatic. Rather, they can resonate throughout day-to-day experience, and can manifest in something as seemingly benign as an encounter with a puddle. Ghosts have a way of cropping up where we least expect them.

necessarily fleeting and uneasy, and that the affinity we feel with the lost and disappeared can never be made entirely tangible. The connections we make with these spectral figures are necessarily mediated and incomplete. Ross Chambers, in his analysis of AIDS writing, refers to the troubled signification of ghostly figures: they exist, he posits “at the threshold of our consciousness, standing on the doorstep,” in the liminal space between recognition and effacement (13). It is the work of witnessing and testimonial, he states, to “bring about some acknowledgement of the unrecognized” in a process he refers to as “relay” (24). Such an encounter must necessarily be partial, developing out of the twists and turns of rhetorical “figuration,” as the writer or mediating agent engages in a project that “does not directly represent its object so much as make it recognizable as a readable presence, and so represents it indirectly” (38). I think that the necessarily mediated and indirect project of witnessing can be considered in relation to Heather Love’s concept of the fugitive dead, or the figures of the dead who elude direct encounter and representation. Love considers the long-standing association between queerness and “failure, impossibility, and loss,” and offers a discussion of the impossibility of an “effort to recapture the past”:

To reconstruct the past, we build on ruins; to bring it to life, we chase after the fugitive dead. [...] While contact with the dead is impossible, queer history is marked by a double impossibility: we will never possess the dead; our longing for them is also marked by the historical impossibilities of same-sex desire. (21)

I would like to extend Love’s discussion of the “fugitive dead,” a concept that, I believe, can serve as a touchstone for the figures of the lost and disappeared, as well as for the past in general, both of which come into view during queer moments. The pleasurable and creative potentiality of queer moments, as well as their capacity to illuminate the

ghostly presence of the past, is by nature partial and transitory. What characterizes a queer orientation, I would argue, is a desire to go backwards, to return again and again to moments of disorientation, to listen to the voices of the spectres and to come into contact with the fugitive dead.

V. A QUEER ARCHIVE

How, then, does this impossible desire for recuperation manifest in literary and cultural texts? Elizabeth Freeman refers to a particular instance of reclamation: one block of the AIDS Memorial NAMES Quilt which she describes as reading “‘I had a FABulous time,’ the word ‘fabulous’ emerging from the label of a bright orange bottle of laundry detergent” (xxi). Reflecting on this reappropriation of literal refuse, she speaks of a queer relationship to the past that is based upon “gather[ing] up life’s outtakes and waste products and bind[ing] them into fictitious but beautiful (w)holes” (xxii). I especially like Freeman’s bracketing of the “w” of “(w)holes,” which, in my reading, indicates an iteration of Edelman’s queer negativity: queer moments, as a “gather[ing] up of life’s outtakes,” or “holes,” do not presume to offer a positive social value or, in other words, to adhere to linearity, but rather serve to interrupt the dominant trajectory, as well as to question categories of valuation, of what is considered “whole.”

I would like to employ the term “queer archive” to refer to this attempt to foster connection with that which is lost and disappeared, and, in so doing, to “gather up” the figures of the fugitive dead. Freeman’s notion of “gathering up” also resonates in Ann Cvetkovich’s discussions of trauma archives. Cvetkovich emphasizes the ephemerality of the experience of trauma which forms the archive’s subject, but which, I think, can also

be applied to an encounter with the fugitive dead. In foregrounding this ephemerality, Cvetkovich highlights the necessity of constructing an “unusual archive” which takes as its materials those entities which are “themselves frequently ephemeral” (7). Referring to gay and lesbian cultures, she draws attention to the fact that

In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge. (7-8)

Memory and, I would add, one’s encounters with the traces and resonances of the past (during the experience of queer moments), can serve as a kind of alternative history, and can be “gathered up,” like Woolf’s own moments of being, into an archive that represents a challenge to normative notions of valuation – what does and does not merit historical remembrance.

Queer archival strategies are evident in the texts I will be considering in the following chapters: ghosts crop up both in terms of the texts’ content and the intertextual projects that the authors undertake. First, I offer an analysis of Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and focus on its treatment of a number of elements that I have here described: orientations and linear alignment, disruptions to normative temporality in the form of backwardness and queer moments, and finally the experience of affinities and the attempt to reclaim the fugitive dead (figured as both the spectres of the dead and as the resonance of past events).

The second, slightly more amorphous consideration that I would like to explore is the notion of revisioning as a queer archival strategy that enacts a parallel project of reclamation to that which the characters in the novels undertake. Here, I consider how

contemporary texts, particularly Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, look to the literary past in order to inspire and inform their own initiatives. My analysis is concerned with the complex connections forged between Woolf's work and Cunningham's revisioning project. Indeed, this second novel is itself an attempt to revisit the previous, or past, text, and ultimately to trouble distinctions between seemingly temporally separate works. It is, essentially, another attempt to foster affinity with the dead, to resurrect, so to speak, the literary past. I would like to consider the ways in which such revisioning projects are constructed, how they can be bound up with notions of queer temporality, and how they can help illuminate a larger consideration of the connection between queerness and backwardness, between queerness and the insistently present past.

CHAPTER ONE

**DISMANTLING THE “WALL OF GOLD”:
PERMEABLE BOUNDARIES AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS IN *MRS.*
*DALLOWAY***

While it has often been argued that *Mrs. Dalloway* is concerned predominantly with oppositions (life and death, past and present, sanity and insanity, etc.), I would like to posit in this chapter that such easy categorizations are precisely what Virginia Woolf is seeking to counteract in this novel. While Sir William Bradshaw’s diagnosing eye seeks to erect strict divisions between categories, between, for example, the socially coherent and the socially incoherent, Woolf’s text as a whole emphasizes instead the notion of the permeable boundary, or the sense of movement and vacillation from one realm to another, which includes, but is not limited to, mobility across temporal categories. My reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* centres on the notion of affinity, or the sense of connection, tenuous as it may be, that can be formed across elements of difference and, in so doing, disturb strict boundaries and distinctions (e.g. between the past and the present or between the living and the dead). Affinity with the figures of the fugitive dead (with the past or with a more literal ghostly presence) serves to emphasize the interconnectedness between seemingly oppositional or incompatible categories, as well as to highlight and challenge the imposition of the normative trajectory that operates through strict categorization and foreclosure.

I. LINEARITY, DIAGNOSIS, AND THE HEGEMONY OF “CLOCK TIME”

Several critics of *Mrs. Dalloway*, including Hermione Lee and Kate Haffey, have offered an analysis of the novel’s depiction of linear, heteronormative time. The phrase “clock time” is often employed as a representation of the concept of temporal control, of the mobilization of notions of temporality to regulate and enforce social norms (Lee 111). This regulation is symbolized by a number of figures and images, most notably Sir William Bradshaw (critic James Bradshaw refers to the doctor’s “Bradshavian exactitude [xxiv]) and the constant tolling of Big Ben, which doubles as a symbol of “the forceful manipulation of people” or of empire and state control more generally (Bradshaw xxxiii). The novel is punctuated by the peals of the bells announcing the hours, marking the progress of the characters in the narratives of their days. Indeed, because *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place over the course of a single day, it can be read as a representation of a larger life narrative, as a condensed articulation of the characters’ greater trajectories. The demarcation of the hours, then, stands in for the progress through discernible stages that signifies, in Ahmed’ sense, a coherent, properly aligned life. The characters seem to be hyperaware of the time of day, seeing in the toll of the bells a kind of comment on their own position in the trajectory.

For example, Clarissa’s former suitor, Peter Walsh – having just come to London from India – occupies a troubled, ambivalent position in relation to British society more generally and demonstrates a considerable amount of anxiety regarding the tolling of Big Ben. During his meeting with Clarissa, the eponymous Mrs. Dalloway, he is prompted both by the bells and by the entry of Clarissa’s daughter Elizabeth (living proof of

Clarissa's capacity for reproduction and consequent alignment) to leave the Dalloways' house (*Mrs. Dalloway* 41). Clarissa's cry "Remember my party tonight!" echoes in Peter's ears as he marches up Whitehall, and the resonance of her words is repeated in the terms of temporal regulation: "Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself *rhythmically, in time* with the flow of sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half hour" (41; emphasis mine). The peals of the bells implicate both Clarissa and Peter in their authoritative demands: Clarissa becomes a mouthpiece for the dictum of time, while Peter's speech literally parallels the rhythm of the "flow of sound." He also reflects explicitly upon Clarissa's, and his own, apparent subservience to clock time. The bells of St. Margaret's conjure Clarissa's image, and he sees her as a hostess figure "coming downstairs at the stroke of the hour in white," having subsumed a portion of her own individuality into the regulatory imperatives of the clock (42). He recognizes Clarissa in "ring after ring of sound," with the first peal of the bells conjuring an image of their youth, at a moment of their "great intimacy" (42). Subsequently, "as the sound of St. Margaret's languish[es]," he perceives her in her recent illness, with the bells "express[ing] languor and suffering" (43). Finally, as the "sudden loudness of the final stroke toll[s] for death," he sees her in the very moment of collapse (43). Clarissa's life is defined by the bells, with each peal corresponding to a specific moment in her narrative, and with the fading of the sound representing her death. The tolling of the hour inspires in Peter not only concern, even panic, about his own mortality ("She is not dead! I am not

old, he cried”), but also an explicit reflection upon life stages and their inextricability with regulated temporality (43).

While Peter demonstrates a great deal of anxiety regarding the imposition of temporal regularity, he is often, as I will return to later on, coded as ambiguous in the degree to which he can be considered socially aligned and therefore coherent as an educated middle-class man. Conversely, perhaps the most salient example of adherence to linearity in *Mrs. Dalloway* is the figure of Sir William Bradshaw, the doctor who “treats” veteran Septimus Warren Smith for shell shock. Sir William is positioned as a figure of authority and control, one who is renowned for his “almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis,” but also for his “sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul” (81). He is able to diagnose Septimus at first glance, and, in the first few minutes after meeting his patient, he identifies the degree and quality of Septimus’ symptoms (81). Sir William’s perceived power comes from the very act of diagnosis, in the capacity to examine another person and to declare that they are this or that (a quality which is contrasted in the character of Clarissa). His declarative statements, centred on the repetitive refrain “Sir William said,” are reminiscent of the measured tolls of Big Ben (82). It is no surprise, then, that Sir William structures his days around patient appointments, carefully measuring his time, devoting “three-quarters of an hour” to each individual case (84). Using language that sounds almost surgical, Woolf draws a comparison between restoring a sense of “proportion,” to use Sir William’s own term for the goal of his psychiatric practice, and the regulatory clocks of Harley street, the city’s medical district: “Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at

the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion” (87). “Proportion” is the refrain that repeats through Sir William’s consciousness, and, by implication, through the point of view of the medical community, just as the bells of Big Ben punctuate the larger narrative. The bells serve to reduce the vibrancy and potentialities of life to nothing more than the demarcation of hours and minutes, in the same way that Sir William’s personal philosophy and method of conceiving the world around him is narrowed down into a single word, “proportion.” The clocks “nibble at the June day,” gradually reducing it until any sense of diversity, multiplicity, and meaning is subsumed by the hours.⁵ Similarly, Sir William, in his devotion to proportion, has precluded any notion of deviancy from entering into his own self-concept.

This pruning and paring down of multiplicity into unity is also evident in Sir William’s attitude toward his patients and toward society in general. Indeed, there has been quite a bit of scholarship written about his capacity to stand in for the patriarchal and oppressive state. As Hermione Lee posits, “Sir William is the representation of a way of life [...] in which individuals are made to toe the line, or are put away” (107). It is only bodies who are considered coherent – in alignment – that are presumed to be valuable to the nation, and those who turn around or otherwise deviate are consequently precluded from society and history; they are gradually cut away, as a surgeon would remove a

⁵ While my reading emphasizes the regulatory imperatives of the clocks of the city, the text itself remains largely ambiguous about the clocks’ signification. While she aligns them with proportion and subdivision, Woolf also mobilizes the tolling of Big Ben as a means of transition from one character’s subjectivity to another; she takes, ironically, a symbol for authoritative control and divisiveness and utilizes it to demonstrate the inherent connection between individuals. This notion of vacillating signification or ambiguity will emerge as a key concept for this chapter, especially in terms of the (dis)alignment of Clarissa and Peter.

tumor. With his devotion to “proportion,” Sir William seeks to stabilize the social realm, to favour the coherent and to banish the incoherent, and ultimately to act for the perceived welfare of the state. Woolf describes the undertakings of the doctor as follows:

worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they too shared his sense of proportion. (84)

The emphasis here, to borrow from Lee Edelman, is on the notion of futurity and reproduction. Sir William is concerned primarily with the future health of England and consequently attempts to control the reproductive practices of those he considers “unfit.” He is able to draw spatial boundaries (e.g. secluding the lunatics) as well as temporal ones (e.g. the control of reproduction and futurity) around particular bodies, reducing their mobility across time and space and effectively relegating them to the margins of society, positioning them on the other side of a “wall of gold” (80).

If clock time erects walls, “consciousness time” (a term I have borrowed from Hermione Lee [111]), serves to break down boundaries and distinctions. While clock time emphasizes the passing of the hours and the narrative of progress that is implicit in such demarcations of time, consciousness time resists strict categorizations, and places the experience of present and past side by side. This kind of queer temporality is, I would argue, associated with the notion of the backward turn – characters (often prompted by present experience) become oriented towards the past, delving into vivid memories, such that past and present frequently become almost indistinguishable for the reader, or even for the character him or herself. Woolf sees the present moment as an instance against which the pressure of past memories and moments is always pressing – she describes, for

example, “the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings” – like, I imagine, a floodgate which can open at any time (31). Indeed, a pervasive trope in Woolf’s oeuvre is the dichotomy between surface and depth, in which the past, usually far below, can occasionally break the surface of the mind and enter into conscious thought. Another way to conceive of this may be the image of a wave, another central motif for Woolf⁶, which disrupts the smoothness of the surface and creates a kind of oscillating, permeable boundary between surface and depth. The fluidity of Woolf’s writing style is wave-like itself, vacillating between the present and the past, and ultimately interpenetrating them with each other. For example, as many critics have noted, the reader’s first encounter with Clarissa Dalloway centres on her being transported into the experience of her eighteen-year-old self. Prompted by a “squeak of the hinges” and the freshness of the morning, the surface of Clarissa’s present consciousness is broken and she finds herself “plunged” into the depths:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave [...]. (3)

Here, Clarissa’s plunge into the June day as well as into the experience of her past is paralleled with the sensory memory of the plunge of her younger self into the open air of Bourton. It is particularly important here that she compares this plunging sensation to the “flap of a wave,” indicating, perhaps, that her opening of the French windows is an

⁶ See the water imagery in Woolf’s novel *The Waves*.

experience of a permeable boundary (e.g. from inside to outside) in the same way that the waves symbolize the fluidity of distinctions between surface and depth. In this passage, her present-day entry onto the streets of London, her entry into the open air of Bourton, and her entry into the experience of her past are parallel occurrences; each entails troubling distinctions between categories, the fluidity of boundaries, and the interpenetration of surface and depth suggested by the waves.

I would like to add, however, that while this passage mobilizes the metaphor of the waves to disturb temporal and spatial categorizations, it does not collapse distinctions entirely. Rather, the construction of this passage places present and past side by side; neither is overtaken by the other. Clarissa's thoughts move from the present (e.g. the "squeak of the hinges, which she could hear *now*") to the past at Bourton, only to return to the present again (3; emphasis mine). Indeed, the implicit meaning of her "stillier than this of course," is that Clarissa is contrasting this moment in June with her experiences of Bourton, and recognizing that they do not overlap perfectly. There remains a distinction, in Clarissa's consciousness, between the present and the past; they are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they wholly collapsible. To return to my central concept of the fugitive dead, I would like to suggest that, as Heather Love states, the attempt to reconstitute the dead, or by extension, the past, is "doomed from the start" (21). While categories are troubled by the oscillations of queer time or consciousness time, they are not destabilized entirely; the present and the past do not merge into one. I would argue, however, that it is the tentative, uneasy connections that can be formed across boundaries, both temporal and spatial, that are ultimately generative.

II. TEMPORAL DISRUPTION: QUEER MOMENTS AND INTERRUPTIONS

One particular instance that stands out in reference both to these uneasy connections and to disruptive temporality more generally is the passage in which Clarissa retreats to her attic room and muses about her feelings towards and about women (which include, but are not limited to, her youthful attraction to her old friend Sally Seton). Her musings culminate in a description of an orgasmic moment:

It was a sudden revelation [in which one] felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over – the moment. (27).

This description is reminiscent, for me, of the notion of surface and depth, of something profound momentarily breaking the surface of conscious thought. The “pressure of rapture” is connected to the weight of the past on the present moment, on the capacity of that which has been pushed down to resurface. Indeed, critics such as Deborah Guth focus on this moment as representative of Clarissa’s capacity for visionary ascension; Clarissa herself ascends the stairs into the attic space, not quite reaching the sky, just as the “inner meaning” just barely breaks the surface before retreating back as the exquisite moment fades (19). While Guth’s reading of Clarissa’s erotic aspirations dovetails well with my considerations of surface and depth, I would add that the passage also focuses on imagery that evokes notions of inside and outside – the “match burning in a crocus” and the “inner meaning,” for example. The world “splitting its thin skin” is another articulation of the permeable boundary, when what is inside travels outside, just as

Clarissa, when we first encounter her, steps out of her house in Westminster into the June day.

While it does not last for long itself, this moment becomes the catalyst for the past/present boundary to become fluid, and for Clarissa to revisit her past experience with Sally Seton. It is important as well that the sensation she describes here is over so quickly, that the “close with[draws]” and that the “inner meaning” has not quite been expressed. This suggests that contact with the profound (whether it be the “inner meaning” that the world holds, the often repressed experience of the past, or the connection with the dead) is necessarily fleeting and uneasy, and ultimately impossible to hold onto. While these moments cannot be extended, the experience is undoubtedly generative in its capacity to interrupt the authoritative, even violent, assertion of normativity. In this case, Clarissa experiences a sensation that stands in direct contrast to the typical, “cold” moments of her life – “the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt,” and Richard dropping his hot water bottle on the stairs (27-8). Her memories of her feelings for women give Clarissa the ability to experience, if only momentarily, the breakdown of the wall so carefully constructed by “proportion,” and the consequent breaking through of past experience into her present consciousness. For a moment, things are no longer in their “assigned places” (Gordon xvi), and the trauma caused by the imposition of normativity, the pain of the “cracks and sores” that Clarissa describes, can be alleviated.⁷

⁷ Woolf’s references to illness and contagion speak to, I think, the enforcement of the “line” as a form of Cvetkovich’s “insidious” trauma (Cvetkovich 32). Here, the “cracks and sores” take the form of Clarissa’s monotonous existence, her distant relationship with Richard and the imposition of “proportion” that, as she

I would argue that because of its capacity to interrupt the normative progression of her life, as well as its obvious association with same-sex desire, Clarissa's moment of revelation, rupture, and alleviation can be read as one of the novel's many queer moments. Indeed, I see queer moments in general as interruptions or disruptions to the imposition of normativity or of, in this text, Sir William's constructed limits around temporality, sexuality, etc. There is, I would argue, no exact definition of queer moments; they have the capacity to range from Woolf's sensation of "peculiar horror" (*Moments of Being* 72) to Ahmed's "vitality," "joy" and "excitement" (*Queer Phenomenology* 4), and even to Freeman's "hiccup in sequential time" that provides a potential source of sexual pleasure (*Time Binds* 3). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, queer moments are experienced most often by the two central characters, Septimus and Clarissa. They also vary from experiences of jouissance or pleasure (like Clarissa's revelatory moment described above) to moments of horrifying unreality, which occur predominantly within Septimus' consciousness. Indeed, the novel's representations of queer moments seem to be bound up with the entanglement of horror and pleasure, suggesting both Smith's concept of lesbian panic, or the horror that one experiences when confronted with deviation, and Ahmed's notion of the pleasure that can be gleaned from "stay[ing] with such moments" (*Queer Phenomenology* 4).

While queer moments in the novel are given a troubled signification in terms of horror and pleasure, I would add that perhaps the most constant feature of the queer moment is its capacity for interruption of typical "clock time." The clearest example of this interruption is the kiss between Clarissa and Sally, which Clarissa recalls as the

claims later in the novel in reference to Sir William Bradshaw, "make[s] life intolerable" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 157).

“most exquisite moment of her whole life” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 30). This moment of jouissance occurs when Sally casually bends down to pick a flower, and, rising, suddenly kisses Clarissa on the lips (30). Clarissa feels the world move “slantwise,” to recall Merleau-Ponty’s description, and becomes immediately disoriented (qtd. in Ahmed 66). In this moment of connection between the two of them, when the social boundary that prohibits their union is crossed, Clarissa imagines that she has

been given a present, wrapped up, and just told to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked, (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (*Mrs. Dalloway* 30)

This description focuses on the dichotomy of inside and outside, recalling Clarissa’s revelatory moment quoted above. In unwrapping the present, Clarissa effectively breaks down divisions between the two spheres, gaining momentary access to epiphany and meaning, as well as to Sally herself. The unwrapping of the present could also be applied to the permeability between temporal boundaries – the revelatory moment in Clarissa’s present in which the “world split its thin skin” provides access to this analogous moment of revelation that occurred in the past. Here, the past is the “diamond” whose radiance shines through, breaking into Clarissa’s present consciousness and resulting in a parallel experience in the present.

Queer moments, despite their capacity to interrupt and possibly even divert linear trajectories, are still susceptible to disruption and obstruction themselves. Indeed, the refrain of “clock time” or of normativity in general is often mobilized in the text as a force that shatters or disturbs such moments, reasserting the primacy of temporal linearity and progression. In this case, the moment of connection between Sally and Clarissa, the

figure of normative reassertion is Peter Walsh.⁸ His intervention is described by Clarissa as “running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness” (30). Clarissa can sense his “hostility,” “jealousy,” and clear “determination to break into their companionship,” and ultimately, I would add, his reassertion of the privilege of straightness over that which is deviant. His disruption of the moment gives rise, in Patricia Juliana Smith’s analysis, to a reassertion of normativity on the part of Clarissa. Confronted by Peter, she yields to the imposition of the alignment that he represents, and, as Smith puts it, she “abandons both her suitors [Sally and Peter] and marries a relatively undemanding and uninteresting admirer” (1). Smith reads Clarissa’s trajectory as a manifestation of lesbian panic, or “the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character – or, conceivably, an author – is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire” (2). Essentially, Peter’s disruption of and insensitivity towards the moment of connection that Clarissa is experiencing with Sally provides a glimpse, for Clarissa, of the antagonism that is directed toward non-normative behaviours or identities. Indeed, as Smith points out, to occupy a non-normative space is to forgo any chance of “economic survival, as the object of exchange [namely, women] is inevitably dependent on the exchanger [men] for her continued perceived worth” (6). Fearing the dissolution of her own value, Clarissa desperately realigns herself and marries the kind, nondescript Richard Dalloway.

⁸ As I will elucidate further a little later on, Peter is not necessarily always bound up with notions of alignment and social coherence. He is himself rather an outsider, having spent a great deal of time in India and espousing socialist values that are generally at odds with notions of British nationalism (Blanchard 301). It is interesting here that the panic that he evokes in Clarissa does not, in fact, prompt her to marry him, but rather to compels her to turn to a more definitively aligned suitor, the aristocratic and politically astute Richard Dalloway.

It would be an oversight, however, to align Peter categorically with the imposition of “clock time.” His role as a figure of reassertion is not absolute – past experience is just as likely to surface in his consciousness as in Clarissa’s, and he is also capable of achieving a queer relation to temporality in the form of the queer moment. For example, soon after arriving in London, Peter encounters a group of marching soldiers, their synchronized footfalls echoing the bells of Big Ben. Inspired by the measured steps and single-minded progress of the soldiers, Peter considers the relative freedom of his own trajectory. I read his experience here as yet another queer moment. Watching the soldiers, who are representative of alignment not only in their devotion to British conquest and Empire but also in their evocation of typical masculinity, he senses an affective distance from their set trajectory, and feels an “irrepressible, exquisite delight; as if inside his brain, by another hand, strings were pulled, shutters moved, and he, having nothing to do with it, yet stood at the opening of endless avenues down which if he chose he might wander” (44). Here, once again, is the notion of the permeable boundary, recalling most explicitly Clarissa’s bursting open of the French windows and welcoming of the fresh air. Peter also likens himself to a child running out the front door of his house, escaping from the watchful eye of his nurse, and once again evoking notions of inside and outside (45), an escape that reminds me of the momentary collapse of regulation and the Bradshaws’ disciplinary “wall of gold” (80). He turns away from the alignment that the soldiers represent, rejecting their intent, resolute focus on the path ahead, and allows his attention to be captivated by the indiscriminate stimuli at hand. His gaze here alights on a young woman who passes him on the street, and he begins to follow her, imagining a potential

encounter (45). His reverie is shattered, however, when the girl reaches her home and goes inside, and “Clarissa’s voice saying, Remember my party, Remember my party, [sings] in his ears,” just like, as I touched on earlier, the repetitive refrain of Big Ben (46). This time, it is Peter who experiences the queer moment and Clarissa herself who becomes the figure of normative reassertion.

The novel, then, remains ambiguous, I would argue, about aligning particular characters with any particular orientation. Clarissa and Peter both have the capacity to vacillate between consciousness time and clock time, between a queer or straight orientation, and both are able to become either figures of queer temporality or figures of imposition and interruption. The ambiguity here speaks to the text’s critique of “proportion.” Just as it is a central quality of queer moments that they foster connections between ostensibly separate categories, *Mrs. Dalloway* embodies this concept on another level, refusing to draw clear-cut distinctions between characters or temporal classifications and, ultimately, disorienting the reader, knocking him or her out of alignment.

III. WOOLF’S “WORK OF ART”: AFFINITIES AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

I would like to expand on the capacity of the queer moment to foster connections between characters and categories. More specifically, I would like to dwell on how experiences such as these are represented within the consciousnesses of the two central characters of the text, Septimus and Clarissa, who are often considered to be doubles of each other. What I would like to draw attention to here is the tendency for queer moments

to be figured as instances in which barriers break down and affinities are formed, in which the characters experience and react to a suddenly fluid sense of the world around them, as well as to how Septimus and Clarissa seem to espouse contrasting ways of dealing with sudden disorientation.

Septimus, first of all, often experiences queer moments as horrifying and frightening. When we first encounter him, he is paused on the curb, “unable to pass,” caught up in the “standstill” that a certain motor car, possibly carrying the Prime Minister, has caused in the street (12). We immediately get a sense of a kind of calm before the storm, of a pause that is fraught with fear and anticipation: “the world has raised its whip; where will it descend?” (12). Septimus perceives, on the drawn blinds of the motor car, a “curious pattern like a tree,” and immediately begins to sense the world collapsing around him, everything coming together to a single point, “as if some horror had come almost to the surface” (13). The description of Septimus’ sense of impending catastrophe is reminiscent of, and simultaneously oppositional to, Clarissa’s revelatory moment. The interplay between surface and depth that is evoked by the images of the “match burning in a crocus” and of the “inner meaning almost expressed” (27) are reimagined here as a “horror” that “had come almost to the surface.” This passage also recalls the familiar dichotomy of inside and outside, here evoked through the image of the drawn blinds in the motor car. Septimus, paused on the brink of catastrophe, resists the breaking down of boundaries or the “drawing together” of the world around him, fearful of the incoherence that the dissolution of categories would entail. Indeed, he sees the breaking of the surface here as ultimately destructive, and imagines that the world is

“threaten[ing] to burst into flames” (13). His own immobility on the sidewalk seems to be the only means towards salvation, the only way to stop the influx of disaster: “It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. [...] Was he not being weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose?” (13). Despite the repeated coaxing of his wife, Rezia, that he come with her across the street, he remains paralyzed. In his insistence on closing off any possible trajectory, in remaining rooted to the spot, I think that Septimus is embodying, however counter-intuitively, another articulation of linearity. While he is not “progressing” in a typical sense, his stasis is intended to foreclose any opportunity for deviancy, any potentially incoherent experience. Indeed, Septimus constantly emphasizes the need to be “scientific, above all scientific,” in his observations, ironically echoing the diagnostic inclinations of Sir William (19). His inability to move is an extreme version of “proportion,” one that is so fearful of any sort of deviation that it becomes paralyzed.

Septimus’ experience of queer moments is often strikingly similar to moments described in Woolf’s own autobiographical writings, particularly in her memoir *Moments of Being*. Arguably, Woolf, like Septimus, also has a difficult relation to queer moments, often experiencing them as horrifying, just as he does (*Moments* 78). They also often have to do with suspension and stasis – just as Septimus is unable to cross the street, Woolf describes herself as unable to cross a puddle in the path (78). The desire for stasis or the inability to move here is, at its most basic level, a defense mechanism. The influx of incoherent experience is perceived as threatening and must, for Septimus as for Woolf, be counteracted by retaining a grip on objective “reality.” When Septimus, sitting on a park bench with his wife, begins to perceive the rhythmic interconnectedness of the world

around him, it is only Rezia's hand on his leg that keeps him "weighted down" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 19); similarly, Woolf, paralyzed at the edge of the puddle, gestures vaguely for something material to hold onto (*Moments* 78).

It is important to add, however, that such moments are not, for either Woolf or Septimus, without generative possibilities in terms of interconnectedness or the capacity for creativity. When the impulse towards stasis and coherence is overcome, when the feeling of "peculiar horror" is faced, what results is an experience of an inner meaning, not unlike the "match within the crocus" that Clarissa perceives. This sensation of "inner meaning" also recalls Ahmed's claim that, if we "stay with such moments," we "might even find joy and excitement in the horror" (*Queer Phenomenology* 4). In this case, despite Septimus' attempts toward stasis and control, he nevertheless begins to feel the boundaries around his sense of self dissolve, feeling "the leaves [of the elm trees] being connected by millions of fibres with his own body" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 19). He sees the world around him, the sights and sounds he perceives in the park, as interconnected in an intricate pattern that recalls the tree-like pattern from the blinds of the motorcar: "the sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches [...]" (19). In her work on Virginia Woolf's relationship with the natural world, Christina Alt touches on this sense of interconnectedness, referring to critic Charlotte Zoe Walker's claim that Woolf "express[es] poetically" the scientific notion that "all life is interrelated" in a "vast web of life" (qtd. in Alt 9). I would posit that it is no coincidence that this scene deals primarily with natural imagery, specifically the leaves on the trees and the motion of the

birds. This sense of diverse interconnectedness is, I would argue, the inner meaning that the queer moments or moments of being bring to the surface. The rising and falling of the sparrows evokes the permeable boundary symbolized by the waves, and connections are then formed between such seemingly unrelated entities as the birds' flight and a nearby child's cry (19). In her own experience of queer moments, which she describes at length in her memoir, Woolf is able, like Septimus, to conceive of a pattern of interconnectedness as well. To quote Woolf:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; [...] that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. [...] we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (*Moments* 72)

This is a very helpful articulation of the troubling of boundaries that is, in my analysis, central to the experience of the queer moment as one of affinity, connection, and disorientation. Additionally, Woolf's philosophy leaves room for diversity within a sense of unity. Rather than conceiving of everything in the world merging together, of boundaries collapsing entirely, this image of "parts of the work of art" emphasizes the inherent multiplicity that makes up the larger pattern. While barriers are often breached or rendered permeable within the novel, they do not dissolve entirely. The same is true in Woolf's "moments of being" philosophy: the pattern is perhaps the ultimate symbol of coherence, but, in this case, it does not serve to box everything into its proper place, to label or sterilize as does Sir William's diagnosing eye in the context of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Rather, patterns, as they emerge, illuminate a sense of connection across barriers, creating unlikely affinities between elements as diverse as, in Ruotolo's summary, "the quivering of a leaf in the wind, flying swallows, flies rising and falling, the sound of a motor horn"

(105). This means of conceiving of the world sits on the borderline between coherence and incoherence, maintaining diversity even as it forges unlikely and uneasy connections.

This philosophy of Woolf's, expressed in *Mrs. Dalloway* through Septimus, is also integral, according to Woolf, to the writing process. Lucio Ruotolo, in his book *The Interrupted Moment*, analyzes Septimus' encounters with the beauty of the queer moment and the poetic impulse that it engenders:

At those [queer] moments when Septimus overcomes fear and allows a vision of exquisite diversity to invade his being, his perceptions [...], while filtered through the author's consciousness, take on a creatively poetic form: "all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere." (105)

Here, Septimus' thoughts and perceptions regarding the world around him begin to shift away from the scientific perspective he had previously espoused (19), and to turn towards the poetic. It is the experience of interconnectedness, of his capacity to see the pattern and the beauty beyond "ordinary things," that inspires Septimus' language. Indeed, his out-of-line experiences prompt him to record his thoughts, to set down his new understandings about the world around him in writing. He feels compelled to write down revelation after revelation, noting them on the "backs of envelopes" or having Rezia take dictation (21).

While language is often used as a means to come to terms with incoherent experience, to render it safe and intelligible, I would like to posit that the linguistic patterns described by Septimus and Woolf ultimately serve to forge connections between seemingly incompatible materials (e.g. Septimus' jumbled notes), rather than to erect barriers as labels and diagnoses do. Indeed, Woolf's philosophy of words and language, described by Christina Alt, espouses an approach to writing that foregrounds organic connection

rather than scientific classification. Woolf emphasizes the interrelationships of words to one another, claiming that “a word is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. It is not a word indeed until it is part of a sentence... Nor do [words] like being lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately” (qtd. in Alt 189). In this articulation, words are meaningful in their connections with one another. Likewise with Septimus’ scattered envelopes and postcards: ostensibly these are hasty notations that seem to have nothing to do with one another. Rezia, for example, ponders what could possibly be meant by his considerations of such diverse concepts as death, Shakespeare, crime, the Prime Minister, and Miss Isabel Pole. She describes his dictations to her as “perfect nonsense”; in fact, even Septimus himself seems not to recall what his revelations signified (*Mrs. Dalloway* 83). His frenzied note-taking, then, doesn’t serve to clarify or otherwise account for the incoherence of his experience. Rather, it presents a jumble of seemingly unrelated ideas expressed together in a way that, if nonsensical, is nonetheless precious, not only to Septimus but to his wife as well. As Dr. Holmes approaches, Rezia insists on binding the notes, some of which she believes to be “very beautiful,” together with a ribbon, seeking to preserve them from the onslaught of “proportion” (125-6). I see this collection of notes as a version of Woolf’s “work of art,” or pattern of interconnectedness: diverse entities that come inexplicably and imperfectly together in order to create something that is inexplicably meaningful, something that must be preserved from categorization and diagnosis.

For Septimus, queer moments, or moments of disorientation and disalignment, are fraught with contradictions. I argue that the novel once again remains ambiguous

regarding how such instances are experienced by Septimus: while they are ostensibly moments of horror that he attempts to stop, they are also potentially generative in their capacity to illuminate the profound, underlying sense of beauty that pervades everyday life. The sense of interconnectedness described by Septimus and Woolf, the fleeting, uneasy connections to which queer moments give rise is, I would like to suggest, the underlying concept behind *Mrs. Dalloway* itself, and resurfaces within the consciousness of Clarissa as well.

Both Septimus and Clarissa are often figured in states of suspension – paused in anticipation of a boundary about to be crossed. Septimus is paralyzed at the side of the road, waiting for the whip to descend and for the world to burst into flames (12), while Clarissa waits with excitement to make her way across the street. Indeed, on the first page of the novel, Clarissa waits on the curb and describes the feeling of suspense that she feels before the tolling of Big Ben that, when it is broken (as she crosses Victoria Street), sparks a sense of chaotic interconnectedness (4). She refers to life as something that is formed through a process of “making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh,” and describes the rush of activity around her in a barrage of short phrases marked by commas and semi-colons: “In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar, the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; [etc.]” (4). One can infer that, for Clarissa, the “building” of life is akin to the process of forging connections between diverse elements, of the drawing together of chaotic parts into a “work of art.” Countless sights and sounds are piled on top of each other, coming together to signify this particular

“moment of June” (4). For Clarissa, this notion of interconnectedness represents a sense of joyful possibility, of the capacity for life to be constantly changed, built up and reconstituted by the hectic influx of experience. The suspense she feels, waiting to cross the street, is not a sense of impending doom as it is for Septimus, but rather encompasses anticipation of connection and affinity.

The joyful dissolution of boundaries that Clarissa experiences serves to disrupt the categories deemed indisputable by Sir William and Lady Bradshaw. Clarissa’s capacity to welcome affinity inspires in her a tendency to, as Lucio Ruotolo argues, “question the given,” and to see the potential connections between seemingly separate entities (100). Ruotolo draws a parallel between Clarissa’s perception of the world as fluid and changing from moment to moment and Woolf’s personal descriptions of “spells of insanity”(100). The distortion and disorientation that results from such spells, or, as I have been referring to them, queer moments, causes one to revise one’s relationship to the world and consequently to question what had previously seemed self-evident. This includes, significantly, hierarchical social divisions that so often seem inevitable. Indeed, Ruotolo draws attention to Clarissa’s description of the city around her, of the brass bands and the barrel organs, and the fact that she seems to place all this diverse stimuli on the same level. There is no presumed distinctions in value between, for example, the sandwich men and the motor cars; Clarissa is able, in Ruotolo’s words, to “celebrate a largely classless pageant,” placing value not in the elements themselves, but rather in the endless combinations that make up the experience of the moment (100).

Not only does Clarissa bring together diverse material into a joyful creation of each tumbling moment, she also sees the boundaries that divide her from the world around her as similarly fluid and changeable. Ruotolo reads Clarissa's willingness to engage with the world, and to consequently broaden her sense of self, breaking down barriers between the internal and the external. He sees Clarissa's walk as an opportunity for her to take in the diverse stimuli around her – "a flash of green linoleum, the sound of a dripping faucet" – and to consequently "expand" her "sense of identity" to "include that which is not herself" (111). Just as Septimus sees himself as inextricably connected to the elm trees, constituted, he says, from the same fibres, Clarissa sees herself as interconnected with the activity of the city around her, with the "ebb and flow of things" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 8). She sees her subjectivity as expansive, and herself as

part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of the people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen trees lift the mist. (8)

Once again, the major image that arises in a consideration of interconnectedness is that of a tree. This recalls not only Septimus' vision of "exquisite diversity" but also the tree pattern that appears on the blind of the motor car, and, consequently, Woolf's notion of the organic patterns that underlie everyday experience. Clarissa's description of the mist is also interesting in that it suggests that Clarissa herself is the connecting force that unites the diverse elements around her. This recalls the ways in which she conceives of herself as a meeting point for the coming together of diverse people and the building up

of community (32).⁹ The mist is, however, necessarily transitory and insubstantial, and makes, I would argue, for a rather imperfect connection. Indeed, it is often an obscuring rather than an illuminating force. Once again the affinities and connections forged between elements in this novel are not without tensions. The image of the mist acts as a symbol of the inherent difficulties of connections, drawing attention to the fact that affinities are always fleeting and uneasy, and often at least partially obscured.

Resonances and Mediation

The novel not only explores affinities through the experience of individual characters (e.g. the visions of interconnectedness that Septimus and Clarissa perceive), but also through the psyches of the characters in relation to one another. Images and symbols repeat and refract within multiple consciousnesses, suggesting an implicit link between them and once again evoking the notion of the interconnectedness of all things, even of characters who, in the case of Septimus and Clarissa, occupy very different positions, and, in fact, never actually meet. There has been a great deal of scholarship that explores these instances of parallelism, and many critics have drawn attention to one particular quote from Woolf's diary, in which she discusses her conception of *Mrs. Dalloway*: "My discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity; humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (Woolf qtd. in Hermione Lee 92). This is a beautiful image that conjures the idea of experience resonating and

⁹ Her party, with which the novel culminates, is constantly referred to as an opportunity for connection, as Clarissa's attempt to "kindle and illuminate" (5).

refracting like sound waves through a series of interconnected tunnels,¹⁰ evoking yet another consideration of surface and depth. Each character is connected to one another somewhere deep within the rock, just as Woolf's pattern of interconnectedness is hidden somewhere behind the "cotton wool" (*Moments of Being* 72). But, once again, what is deep down can still "come to daylight," can still break the surface of each character's consciousness. Experience, then, that originates with Septimus can make its way back through the tunnels and re-emerge in Clarissa's consciousness, and vice versa. One example that resonates through the novel is the repetition of the Shakespearean phrase "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (8). This surfaces again and again in both Clarissa's and Septimus' minds, and is also invoked through constant references to the literal "heat of the sun" – during Septimus' queer moment in the park, for example, he describes the "sun growing hotter" as he senses "something tremendous about to happen" (59). It seems as though this phrase is bound up in some way with the experience of the queer moment; it often arises within both characters' consciousnesses in conjunction with their experiences of interconnectedness or of the permeable boundary – for example, when Clarissa describes herself as mist connecting those around her (8), when Septimus is paralyzed on the curb (12), and when Clarissa sews her dress and considers the rise and fall of the waves (34). This phrase, resonating up from the depths of their consciousnesses, acts as an indication of the connection that these characters have to each other; it becomes almost a symbol for the experience of the queer moment, for the resonances that exist between all things.

¹⁰ Indeed, the novel focuses a great deal on sound, especially within Septimus' sections (see pg. 58).

Complicating the valorization of queer moments as rich and joyful, however, Woolf's novel shows that these connections between subjectivities are necessarily imperfect. The locus of connection is far below the realm of conscious thought; in fact, the characters are often entirely unaware that there is a connection at all – they simply experience the bubbling up of certain images or phrases with no understanding of their origins. J. Hillis Miller describes this imperfect connection using the metaphor of glass, claiming that the “characters can only connect through a kind of modified translucency, like glass frosted or fogged,” as though they are divided by a windowpane (93).

This notion of mediated connection is a very important one for a consideration of this text and of the notion of interconnectedness that underlies it. Indeed, yet another recurring image that makes its way into *Mrs. Dalloway*'s various consciousnesses is the image of the blind or screen. This, like the window, acts as a somewhat translucent barrier, making connections between each side difficult, but not foreclosing them entirely. It arises, for example, within the subjectivities of Peter and Clarissa, and seems to be inextricably tied, for them, to memories of Bourton, to a feeling of joyful possibility. Clarissa's throwing open of the windows at Bourton is connected to Peter's feeling of delight when, alone in the streets of London, the “shutters move” and he can go anywhere he likes. Clarissa even asks Peter, at one point, “do you remember how the blinds used to flap at Bourton?” (35), and, soon afterwards, “do you remember the lake?” (36). I think the proximity of these questions suggests that there is something similar about the blinds and the lake, namely, that both images suggest the permeability of boundaries through the motion of the blinds, on the one hand, or of the waves on the other. Indeed, answering her

question with “yes, yes, yes, yes,” Peter feels “as if she drew up to the surface” something that had been pushed down (37). Her questions seem to graze something profound; not only do they touch upon the past, causing almost forgotten memories to break the surface, but they also evoke the two images that resonate through each of the characters’ subjectivities, and which represent their “exquisite intimacy” or the connection of the tunnels far below (39). Their interconnectedness with one another, symbolized by the permeable boundary imagery, is represented as intimately bound up with notions of disruption to normative temporal categories; the memories of Bourton rising to the surface serve not only to connect Peter and Clarissa to one another, but also to connect their present-day narratives with the irrepressible memories of the past.

IV. “THE RAISING OF THE DEAD”¹¹: CONNECTIONS WITH SPECTRES

Not only is the image of the screen or blind and the mediated connection it represents particularly significant for a consideration of queer moments – in terms of the fluidity of boundaries and the capacity for interconnectedness it engenders – but it also lends itself well to an analysis of the fugitive dead, especially in relation to Septimus. Just as the blind represents the permeability between present and past as well as between surface and depth, it is also employed as a symbol for the mediated connections that can be forged between the living and the dead. There are multiple examples in the text of Septimus’ encounters with the dead, whether in the form of his fallen comrade Evans or in the experience of disembodied voices. His inability to visually perceive them,

¹¹ This phrase is courtesy of J. Hillis Miller from his 1982 essay “*Mrs. Dalloway*: Repetition as the Raising of the Dead.”

however, remains a constant in his perceptions of the dead. They are always hidden, always kept from view by a screen or by another intermediary object. This mediation is represented perhaps most explicitly by the literal screen that divides Septimus' living room. Septimus himself describes the difficulty of his encounter with the dead:

As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen. 'Evans!' he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. (123)

Here, the screen is figured as a division between Septimus and the dead; it is an obstacle that blocks the connection that might be forged between Septimus and Evans. It also divides Septimus from the experience of interconnectedness and beauty. Significantly, Septimus figures the sound of a mouse squeaking or a curtain rustling as “the voices of the dead” (123). Not only is Septimus divided from the dead by visual means (e.g. he can't see behind the screen), but the auditory connection is similarly mediated – the squeak and rustling stand in for, presumably, the voice of Evans. The image of the curtain rustling is also important in that it evokes, first of all, the image of the flapping blinds at Bourton, as well as the screen itself. The movement of the curtain symbolizes the permeability of boundaries that allows an uneasy, mediated connection between Septimus and Evans to form.

The connection between Septimus and his commanding officer is also mediated by a variety of other objects or even characters. Evans appears, for example, behind a

tree, singing in Greek from a distance (59).¹² As Evans begins to emerge, however, Septimus begs the apparition to stay back, “for he could not look upon the dead” (59). In this case, the connection between Septimus and Evans is mediated not only by the trees that block Septimus’ view, but also by the fact that the man approaching Septimus is not Evans but is, in fact, Peter Walsh. Here, I read Peter as a mediating figure between the living and the dead, literally embodying for Septimus the figure of his fallen officer. In this case, it is another character rather than a symbol or object that takes on the role of mediator. This positing of Peter as mediator also serves to destabilize distinctions between categories – not only are characters connected to one another (e.g. through the resonances of the caves), but they are also the agents that facilitate the connections. Peter’s role here is similar to Clarissa’s figuring of herself as a mist that unites those around her. While Clarissa bridges the gap between various subjectivities, albeit imperfectly, Peter unintentionally bridges the gap between the living and the dead.

This passage also positions Peter as a mediator between the present and the past. The presence of Evans in Septimus’ perception and consciousness is an instance of the past breaking the surface of the present. Indeed, Septimus emphasizes the fact that Evans appears just as he did in life: “no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed” (59). While the boundaries between present and past are permeable, it is often the case that the characters are aware of the moments in which present and past coincide, and are able to keep the distinction intact to a certain degree. Clarissa is able to maintain the distinction, for example, between leaving her house in London and throwing open the window at

¹² This moment also hinges on the importance of sound – the connection between Septimus and Evans here is partially based on a musical call and response, a resonance that speaks to the notion of the caves.

Bourton. In this case, however, Septimus is unable to tell the difference between the present and the past – the resonance of the past (his memory of Evans) is so overpowering that it occludes the present (the literal presence of Peter). Septimus, as I have discussed, has a tendency to resist the permeable boundary, and attempts to hold onto coherence in the face of out-of-line experience. In this case, Septimus once again resists the idea of fluidity – he cannot recognize the simultaneous presence of Evans and Peter, only seeing one of the two. Indeed, the notion of hybridity, or the capacity to be two things at once, is particularly horrifying for Septimus. Just as he cannot “look upon the dead,” he also cannot bear to see any process of transformation that indicates the permeability of boundaries. When he encounters a dog in the park, for example, he believes that it is beginning to change before his eyes: “It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!” (58). While arguably such a sight would be horrifying for anyone, what draws my attention here is the parallel between Septimus’ unwillingness to acknowledge the hybridity of Peter/Evans and his unwillingness to engage with the dog/man. Indeed, it seems that he refuses to perceive any sort of fluidity between categories, whether it be between the living and the dead, the past and the present, or the human and the animal.

Despite the fact that Septimus is so troubled by incoherent experience, his relationship with Evans is perhaps the most out-of-line connection that the novel presents. Not only is it marked by the permeable boundary between the living and the dead, as well as between the present and the past, but it is also out of line in the implications of queerness suggested by the novel. As many critics have noted, Evans seems to be

associated with multiple symbols and indications of homosexuality. The two men are remembered by Septimus as “two dogs playing on the hearth rug,” as long-time, inseparable companions: “They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other” (73). Rezia also briefly recalls Evans as a “quiet man,” and “undemonstrative in the company of women” (73). The linking of Evans with Greek song and with the geographic location of Thessaly evokes notions of the homosexual relationships that were central to Classical Greek culture (59). While the connection between Septimus and Evans has often been read by critics as implicitly queer in terms of homosexual attraction, I would like to add that their relationship also evokes queerness in terms of the disruptions it poses to definitive boundaries and categorizations. I have touched upon Evans’ posthumous appearances within Septimus’ consciousness, as well as the capacity for these appearances to bridge the divide between temporal spheres (e.g. Evans appears unchanged). Here, the out of line experience of permeable boundaries (between the living and the dead and between the present and the past) is associated explicitly with non-normative sexuality, in a way that indicates an underlying connection between them. Indeed, Evans is a constant disruptive presence in Septimus’ consciousness in the same way that the kiss between Clarissa and Sally Seton continues to resurface in Clarissa’s own.

The similarities between Clarissa and Septimus, however, are not absolute. Despite Clarissa’s attempts toward alignment (e.g. her marriage to Richard Dalloway), she is nevertheless able to engage with incoherent experience as it comes and goes within her consciousness. Her party is figured as her attempt to “kindle and illuminate,” to bring

diverse people together (103). The major symbol employed within the passages describing the party is, once again, that of the screen, which I read as an indication of the permeability of boundaries that, for Clarissa, is integral to her efforts to “combine and create” (103). Clarissa is very preoccupied with the “yellow curtain with all the birds of Paradise” through which her guests must pass in order to enter the realm of the party, in order to move from outside to inside (143). She keeps a watchful eye on the motion of the curtain, wanting more than anything for it to billow and open, admitting yet another guest. Her focus on the curtain recalls Septimus’ rapt attention on the screen that divides his room; indeed, the “birds of Paradise” on Clarissa’s curtain seem to evoke the “blue swallows” on Septimus’ screen. When the curtain moves, it “seem[s] as though there were a flight of wings into the room,” recalling the bird song that often acts as an indication of the permeable boundary (e.g. Septimus hearing the birds singing in Greek) (143). Clarissa’s desire for the curtain to blow out, letting in yet another attendee, stands in direct contrast to Septimus’ inability to confront the permeable boundary. Not only does Clarissa accept the coming together of diverse elements, she actively welcomes and even facilitates it. This emphasis on the curtain also recalls the image of the billowing blind at Bourton that has become a focal point in her consciousness. Here, the curtain represents not only her willingness to confront the permeable boundary in the context of her party in the present, but also her capacity to welcome the fluidity of distinctions between the present and the past, to acknowledge the continued resonances (e.g. the recurring image of the blind) that disrupt temporal categories.

Nevertheless, Clarissa is still able to conceive of the permeable boundary without collapsing categories entirely, as Septimus does. While Septimus' encounters with Evans are marked by an inability to confront the notion of hybridity or multiplicity, Clarissa can recognize the difference between present and past. Although her party facilitates the breaking down of boundaries between individual psyches and troubles distinctions between present and past by bringing back Sally Seton, Clarissa is nonetheless able to keep a grip on the notion of separate categories. Sally's reappearance is not the unchanged apparition that Evans' emergence is for Septimus. Rather, the degree to which she is changed from the impulsive young woman she had been is emphasized, rather than disregarded. Recalling their experiences together at Bourton, Clarissa is shocked to see the change in her old friend: "For she hadn't looked like *that*, Sally Seton, when Clarissa grasped the hot-water can. [...] Not like that!" (145; emphasis original). Clarissa acknowledges that it is "extraordinary to see her again," but is nevertheless able to note both the similarities and differences between this Sally Seton and the girl who figures so prominently in her memories. While Sally still possesses the "simplest egotism," bragging about her "five enormous boys," she is nevertheless "older, happier, less lovely" (145-6). Clarissa's capacity to recognize the differences in her friend symbolizes her implicit understanding of temporal distinctions, her ability to celebrate interconnectedness without eliminating difference between categories entirely. While Septimus sees everything as collapsing into itself, Clarissa sees a joyful vision of diversity and multiplicity, culminating in the sense of defamiliarization brought on by her party:

Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background; it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. (145)

The bringing together of diverse people mobilizes a feeling of possibility and connection that sounds almost like an experience of a queer moment, with the possibility of “go[ing] much deeper” echoing Clarissa’s sense of momentary access to “inner meaning” (27) or to “something infinitely precious” (30). Woolf’s descriptions of moments of being often focus on the feeling of unreality that takes over her psyche, making something as ordinary as a puddle seem unfamiliar: “There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; [...] the whole world became unreal” (*Moments* 78). In this case, something which seems ostensibly to be the epitome of social coherence– the throwing of a party and the implication of social obligation that it suggests – is made to signify something quite different, a site of the potentiality of connection, both between people (e.g. the diverse guests at the party) and between temporal categories (e.g. the interplay between Clarissa’s past and present in the form of Sally Seton).

Once again, however, the alignment of certain characters or circumstances with a particular orientation is not as straightforward as it may seem. There is much debate regarding the signification of Clarissa’s party, with many critics commenting on Clarissa’s attempts to create a kind of work of art (Jacob Littleton) or even a religious ritual (Morris Philipson), and, on the other hand, on the social coherence and alignment that the gathering implies (Miller). Clarissa, while capable of drawing together diverse

elements into a vision of exquisite interconnectedness, is nevertheless subject to becoming aligned with, and disciplined by, proportion as well. Just as Clarissa and Peter alternate between the roles of interrupter and interrupted, so too does the party itself seem to change its signification.

The novel suggests, often specifically through the mouthpiece of Peter Walsh, that Clarissa and her parties are the ultimate articulation of alignment.¹³ Indeed, while the permeable boundary of the curtain constantly fluctuates, allowing the coming together of the guests, Clarissa herself remains mostly stationary, somewhat at a remove from the connections being forged among her attendees. J. Hillis Miller states outright that she is, in fact, a “snob,” and that her spatial distance from her guests here implies “something spurious about the sense of oneness with others the party created” (95). I would add that the hostess figure, embodied in the novel by Clarissa, is often referred to in a kind of stasis, and is constantly associated with the spatial position at “the top of her stairs” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 15). Peter’s notion of connection between “Clarissa herself” and the bells of St. Margaret’s, which I discussed earlier, serves to align Clarissa-as-hostess with the regular toll of clock time, figuring Clarissa as “coming downstairs on the stroke of the hour in white” (42). Peter sees Clarissa as unchanging and static, her whole life revolving around the endless frivolity and triviality implied by the social gatherings that are so important to her. When he returns to London and finds Clarissa sewing her green dress, his first instinct is to compare his own lifestyle with her comparatively sedentary one: “Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she’s been sitting all

¹³ It is worth noting that these assertions of Peter’s are often ironic or qualified. He is conflicted regarding his own alignment, as I have shown, but he is also often contradictory in his descriptions of his complex feelings for, and relationship with, Clarissa.

the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties" (35). The implication here is that, while she is also not progressing in a typical sense, there is also nothing (queerly) generative about Clarissa's engagements. Indeed, her stasis, like that of Septimus, comes from adherence to social obligation and alignment, and results in nothing more than the "death of the soul" (50).

Further, Peter also questions the sincerity of the connections forged by Clarissa's party, suggesting that her whole attempt to "kindle and illuminate" is based on nothing more than the ties forged through gossip (136), and takes place in an exclusive space to which only the privileged have access. Indeed, the boundaries of the space are policed by Clarissa, who stands at the doorway greeting her guests: "How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to everyone. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst – effusive, insincere" (142). Here it seems as though Clarissa's adherence to social obligation and decorum becomes an obstacle in her attempts to bring people together – she herself comes across as insincere and inauthentic, as if she is playing a part, seeking to present a certain image of herself which relies upon the foreclosure of certain individuals from the company. She resents the fact that Ellie Henderson has managed to slip past the boundary, and is very aware of the presence of her cousin, with her "cheap pink flowers" and "old black dress" (143). She even assigns responsibility for the party's perceived failure to her cousin's "wandering aimlessly, standing [...] in a corner, not even caring to hold [her]self upright" (143). It seems that, to be welcomed into Clarissa's vision of interconnectedness, one must already occupy a site of privilege, must already have a facility for maneuvering within a certain social network. How effective, then, is

Clarissa's capacity to act as the mist that forges connection across diversity? She seems to unite only those who already occupy the same space, and, furthermore, to construct a unity which exists at the expense of those on the other side of the "wall of gold."

Clarissa herself would like to see her party as a space of illumination, as she puts it, as "an offering for the sake of an offering," an attempt to "combine and create" in the celebration of life itself (103). The billowing yellow curtain can be read as a symbol for the fluidity of boundaries and the interconnectedness that underlies all things. It could also, however, be seen as a strict division, watched over by Clarissa, that opens only for those who have permission to enter. Commenting on Ellie Henderson's exclusion from the proceedings, Hermione Lee concludes that "Clarissa's 'offering', her 'triumph', her attempt to 'kindle and illuminate', on which the book converges, is seen as "hollow, trivial and corrupt" (106). I would argue, however, that the ambiguity with which the novel treats the (dis)alignment of its characters is also evident in its treatment of the party. It is given a troubled signification, embodying, it seems, two contradictory concepts simultaneously. Despite her attempts, Clarissa, as we have seen, is not perfect, and even her endeavor to provide an offering and to celebrate her love of life is necessarily somewhat embittered by her own egotism.¹⁴ Perhaps the party symbolizes the attempt toward interconnectedness, an attempt that is always necessarily troubled, always subject to the obstacles and impositions of proportion and alignment.

The alignment of the party with "proportion" and clock time is counterpointed by one of the most generative queer moments of the novel: the moment of affinity between

¹⁴ Indeed, she expresses similar concerns herself, describing a "monster grubbing at the roots," a sense that everything she values in life, "all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful," is "nothing but self love" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 11).

Clarissa and Septimus. This moment, like Septimus' encounters with Evans, symbolizes a partial breakdown of distinctions between the living and the dead. It arises when Sir William and Lady Bradshaw, guests at Clarissa's party, mention casually the sad fact of Septimus' death (156). The comment seems to disrupt the proceedings, even causing Clarissa to seek refuge in an empty room, struck by the disconnect between her efforts to "kindle and illuminate" and Septimus' tragic plunge from his window (156). Her retreat from the chaos of the party suggests a movement away from the motion at the surface and into the calm of the depths. Indeed, here, at a remove from the party and the "proportion" it can be seen to represent, she is able to feel a sense of kinship with Septimus. She thinks about the suicide, seeing the sequence of events, putting herself in his position: "He had thrown himself from a window. Up flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it" (156). Clarissa is able to imagine herself as Septimus, to see what he saw and to feel what he felt at the moment of his death. This identification suggests the fluidity of boundaries between subjectivities and even between the dead and the living.

Indeed, the permeable boundary idea suggested by various images in the text (the revelatory moment in which the world splits open, the gift waiting to be unwrapped, etc.) returns here. Clarissa describes "a thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed around with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved" (156). The "thing that mattered" or "treasure" symbolizes the vision of interconnectedness that permeates the novel (156). I see this as a version of

Woolf's "pattern" or "work of art," obscured by the trivialities, by the "cotton wool" of life, but becoming visible during moments of rapture or, at times, horror (*Moments of Being* 72). More extended access to these moments of connection is available, the novel suggests, in death itself. Clarissa figures death as "an attempt to communicate," as Septimus' attempt to access permeability and connection. Indeed, throughout the text Septimus has emphasized the necessity of communication (79). Death, here, is the ultimate means of crossing the boundary, of fully experiencing the interconnectedness below the surface of daily life. Clarissa returns to a description of a queer moment, echoing many instances throughout the novel, and contrasting the experience with the lasting affinities found in death: "Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (156). Death becomes the means of immersing oneself in the experience of disorientation, of letting go of categorizing practices entirely and finding an "embrace" in the interconnectedness that is made available by the breakdown of boundaries, in the sense of lasting affinity that not even a queer moment can provide.

While it represents the notion of underlying interconnectedness, the "thing that mattered" also symbolizes that which deviates from normative trajectories and is consequently suppressed. Connected most explicitly to the gift that Clarissa describes being given to her by Sally Seton, this image is caught up with notions of queer desire and the difficulties it poses to normative social structures. The "thing" is referred to in contrast with the "corruption, lies, chatter" that are central to the notion of alignment (e.g.

the efforts of Sir William to convert others to his philosophy of “proportion”). The connection between Clarissa and Sally is at once the process of unwrapping the gift, breaking down boundaries between inside and outside, between normative and non-normative, and the gift itself, a precious moment that becomes the focal point for Clarissa’s whole being and which must be preserved from the onslaught of “proportion.” Clarissa even speculates that perhaps it was Sir William himself who was indirectly responsible for Septimus’ action; by systemically slicing away the diversity and vitality of life, by, as Clarissa says, “forcing your soul” into a certain point of view, Sir William threatens the integrity of the “treasure” within (156-7). Clarissa describes him as “a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust,” who, labeling his patients with his diagnosing eye, strips away at one’s sense of connection and meaning and ultimately “make[s] life intolerable” (157). Here, the linear perspective of diagnosis and categorization is oppositional, even threatening, to the experience of “inner meaning” that is made possible through a queer orientation and the permeability of boundaries (between inside and outside, present and past, the dead and the living, etc.) that it entails.

Faced with the destructive consequences of Sir William and his philosophy, Clarissa is forced to recognize her own complicity in the proliferation of “proportion” (157). She sees herself as watching on the sidelines while men and women “sink and disappear” into “this profound darkness” (157). It is her “punishment” to see those who are precluded from the inner sanctum by the “wall of gold” disappear into obscurity while she remains poised on the side “in her evening dress” (157). These are the figures, I think, that

Foucault refers to as the “archive’s stray dogs,”¹⁵ those who fail to remain adequately in alignment and are consequently left behind by history, left to sink beneath the surface (qtd. in Freeman xii). Clarissa sees herself as complicit in their effacement, recognizing her own participation in the building up of the “wall of gold”: “She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success [...]. And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton” (157). It is interesting that Clarissa evokes a memory of Bourton here, and I see it as speaking to the contradiction within her self-concept. She recognizes, on the one hand, her own desire for success and advancement even to the detriment of morality, her own proximity to Sir William and his enforcement of “proportion,” and the divisions that such an orientation constructs. On the other hand, however, she welcomes the resonances of the past (e.g. her memories of Bourton), of that which is meant to be far below, breaking the surface and coming to light. While she undoubtedly values this “thing that mattered,” the sense of underlying resonance, she is also partially responsible, in her alignment, for its continued repression.

It is no surprise that these meditations on the notion of underlying connection and the resonance of the past inspire, for Clarissa, yet another experience of a queer moment. The sudden imposition of thoughts of Bourton disrupts her considerations of her implication in normative imposition, and yet again, plunges her back into the experience of her past. She describes herself “having done with the triumphs of youth,” “having lost herself in the process of living” and then, suddenly, “with a shock of delight,” coming face to face

¹⁵ This image recalls Woolf’s description of Septimus and Evans as “two dogs playing on a hearth rug” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 73). Taken in conjunction with Foucault’s phrase, this description emphasizes the non-normativity of Septimus’ connection with his officer. Furthermore, both Septimus and Evans become literally lost to history – by the end of the text they have been precluded from social coherence by, in Septimus’ case, madness, and in both cases by death.

with the joys of the past (157). Time seems to stretch and elongate here, as Clarissa, in a state of exquisite happiness, feels that “nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long” (157). She also sees the day collapsing into itself, describing simultaneously the “sun [rising]” and the “day [sinking],” which serves to break down temporal boundaries between the past and the present or the beginning and the end (157). Here, Clarissa refuses to acknowledge the logic of progression that is espoused by typical notions of temporality, seeing the sunrise (or birth) and the sunset (or death) as arising simultaneously, just as the past and present are able to run alongside one another within her consciousness.

Here, the catalyst for the temporal disruption is her own sense of kinship and connection with Septimus, as well as the sense of interconnectedness represented by his death. The breakdown of boundaries between the living and the dead allows for further connections to be forged between present and past, as well as for the disruption of Clarissa’s current sense of stagnation by the imposition of her recovered sense of youth. J. Hillis Miller has remarked upon the parallel motions of ascent and descent at the heart of *Mrs. Dalloway*, a notion that dovetails well with my own analysis of the fluid up-and-down motion of the waves. Miller sees a correlation between Septimus’ death, his plunge from the window and his consequent disappearance “beneath the surface,” and Clarissa’s own resurrection of sorts (100). Indeed, Septimus’ death gives Clarissa the opportunity to do what Septimus himself could not, to “look upon the dead.” Her capacity to identify with Septimus, to take on his perspective as she does, allows her to rise to the “pitch of intense life,” to see the underlying resonances beneath the “corruption, lies, chatter” of

her daily existence (Gamble 55). As usual, however, the moment is fleeting. The blind closes, and Clarissa's access to the pattern, to the "thing that mattered" is once again foreclosed. Her retreat into the small room, into the embrace of death, is momentary, and she once again feels the need to "assemble" and return to her guests (158). This moment of proximity to Septimus provides Clarissa with a glimpse of alternative alignments. She sees the destructive potential of "proportion" and clock time, recognizing her own complicity in their proliferation, and acknowledges that it is possible to go backwards, to immerse oneself in the depths of resonance that hold such potential for connection. Even when, leaving the little room, she returns to the surface, to the party, she is able to bring with her a sense of disorientation that sets the regulated environment slightly off balance. Like the motor car with the blind, her appearance at the party causes a ripple, "graze[s] something profound" (15) and inspires, for Peter, a sense of "terror," "ecstasy" and "extraordinary excitement" (165). Clarissa herself has become a figure of queer temporality; her temporary communion with Septimus and her subsequent return evokes the up and down motion of the waves, the permeable boundary between surface and depth that allows for the disruptive potential of affinity.

CHAPTER TWO

FORGING CONNECTIONS:

MULTIPLICITY AND PERMEABILITY IN *THE HOURS*

I. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS: INTERTEXTUALITY AND REVISIONING

J. Hillis Miller describes the project of *Mrs. Dalloway* as an exploration of the realm of interconnectedness that can be found in death, but also as the “revelation of this realm in words that may be read by the living” (100). In other words, the novel itself acts as a means of communication of interconnectedness. It provides access to what is behind the “cotton wool,” and to the potential for affinity and connection that underlies everyday experience (*Moments* 72). Through Clarissa and Septimus, *Mrs. Dalloway* dramatizes the experience of queer temporality and its capacity to forge connections across boundaries between such categories as the present and the past and the living and the dead. I would add, however, that literature does not simply point to this permeability of categories and boundaries, to the continued presence of the dead, but that it also has the capacity to enact such fluidity itself.

I would like to focus here on the capacity of texts to partially reanimate that which has been lost, to not only point to instances of spectrality or haunting but to be themselves haunted by past or disappeared texts. This has something in common with the “queer archive” concept which I outlined in my introduction, drawing on Elizabeth Freeman’s description of the reappropriation of literal refuse for the AIDS Memorial NAMES quilt. In Freeman’s example, material that has been rendered abject is mobilized in a project of

memorialization for an individual (presumably a victim of the AIDS epidemic) who has been lost and disappeared. Ann Cvetkovich, referring to gay and lesbian public cultures, also speaks to the necessity of these “unusual archive[s]” for representing experience that is effaced from or exists “in opposition to official histories” (7-8). Following from this, I posit that literary revisioning provides a means of building up an explicitly (inter)textual queer archive, one that draws on past texts as a means of encountering the dead and effaced and disrupting normative discourse.

More specifically, the “gathering up of life’s outtakes” into a project of memorialization and homage is paralleled in the revisioning projects undertaken by Alison Bechdel in her graphic memoir *Fun Home* and by Michael Cunningham in his 1998 novel *The Hours* (Freeman xxii). Indeed, in *Fun Home*, as I will argue more thoroughly in the conclusion to this thesis, Bechdel builds up almost forgotten material and textual artifacts in an attempt to encounter the ghostly figure of her father, whom she figures as at turns both a closeted gay man driven to suicide and an authoritative tyrant. Intertexts come to signify, for Bechdel, not only the traces of the literary past, but also the raw materials out of which her unusual eulogy can be constructed, out of which her father’s complexity can be built up. For Cunningham, on the other hand, the primary intertext is *Mrs. Dalloway*, and arguably the most prominent spectre is Virginia Woolf herself. While I acknowledge that Woolf’s text is by no means forgotten or marginalized in a conventional sense – in fact, it is considered canonical – I would also suggest that the reworking of *Mrs. Dalloway* does seek to reanimate the literary past, to enter into dialogue, so to speak, with a literary ghost.

Indeed, revisioning projects are intimately bound up with the notion of the fugitive dead: the plunge into the literary past manifests, I argue, in the same way that, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa's memories are constantly revisited, and Evans, Septimus and indeed, *Fun Home*'s Bruce Bechdel, are partially raised from the dead. In short, the queer archive, and its textual counterpart, the revisioning project, can be seen as articulations of the fugitive dead: just as queer archives become projects of memorialization for those experiences and complexities that are foreclosed from conventional histories and categories, affinity with the fugitive dead, both in terms of the literary past (through revisioning projects) and of the past in general (through experiences of haunting and temporal disjunction), serve to open up considerations of non-normative connection and to disrupt conventional categories of valuation.

Further, revisioning projects can also be read as ghostly in that they are representative of the difficulty of connection. Just as Clarissa's past, even in its resurfacing, remains distinguishable from the present, just as communication with the fugitive dead is mediated (e.g. by the screen that separates Evans and Septimus), the connection between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway* is similarly uneasy and troubled. The imperfect connection between texts is analogous to the difficulty of encountering ghostly figures. Ghosts are necessarily elusive; they can never truly be accounted for, and encounters with them are often mediated. Similarly, *The Hours* is a version of *Mrs. Dalloway* that doesn't quite overlap with the original text. As I have mentioned, Woolf describes caves that connect her characters deep in the rock, an image that conjures the notion of resonance and sound waves, of experience that has its origin in a particular

subjectivity, but that goes on to arise in another. This metaphor of interconnected caves applies equally well to the relationships between literary texts. Robert Stam suggests that adaptations such as *The Hours* “should be seen as ‘readings’ of the literary text, and that ‘an adaptation is thus less a resuscitation of an originary work than a turn in an ongoing dialogic process’” (qtd. in Leavenworth 504). Revisioning projects, then, while they gesture toward a resurrection of the past, can never fully accomplish this end, nor should they aspire to. What is crucial to revisioning is a recognition that the connections forged between the new text and the originary text will always be partial and uneasy, and sometimes destabilized altogether, but that this difficulty can itself be generative in terms of a challenge to practices of categorization.

For example, Cunningham’s text plunges the reader immediately into a sense of temporal disjointedness. In titling his novel *The Hours*, he references the working title for Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. He positions his contemporary version as, in a sense, the manuscript for *Mrs. Dalloway*, the so-called “originary” text that served as the basis for *Mrs. Dalloway* itself. We are faced here with a return, then, not only to *Mrs. Dalloway*, but also to that which preceded *Mrs. Dalloway*. The notion of progress or change implied by the categories of “originary” and “new” is disrupted; once again the logic of progression through stages of development is destabilized. Cunningham takes the re-appropriation of discarded materials a step further, going back not only to a text of the literary past, but also to an earlier version of that same text which had ostensibly disappeared. In his retelling of *Mrs. Dalloway*, he also reanimates “The Hours,” and calls attention to the complexity of the intertextual web upon which each literary text rests. As

my analysis will demonstrate, he not only invokes the notion of the palimpsest, of texts building upon one another such that the “originary” is occluded, but also disrupts the linearity of this kind of trajectory by suggesting that the temporal place of this new novel is perhaps *before* the preceding text. In so doing, he opens up considerations of revisioning as more than simply a one-to-one ratio, consisting of one text bubbling up in another, but as an expansive interpenetration of temporal and textual categories.

While Cunningham’s reworking serves to disrupt temporal divisions, it also troubles the logic of generic conventions, blurring the line between the fictional and the real. The ghostly figures here are comprised not only of the 1923 novel but also of Virginia Woolf herself, translated into a character referred to at turns as Mrs. Woolf or simply Virginia. I mentioned the troubled connection between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, but it is worth adding here that this imperfect overlap also extends to the novel’s representations of Virginia Woolf’s life. Cunningham explicitly tells us that his character is not meant to be Virginia Woolf herself, that he does not presume to have the capacity to narrate her real experiences, but rather that the fictional sequences are based on the “outward particulars” of the modernist author’s life at the time that she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway* (qtd. in Sim 61). “Outward particulars,” or well-documented biographical facts, are presented alongside the imagined inner emotional life of Cunningham’s character. She sits on the borderline between reality and representation, in a way that, as Sarah Boykin Hardy observes, has “something in common with what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, for [it] blur[s] the distinction between history – in this case literary biography – and fiction” (406).

Perhaps the most well known fact about Woolf, the one that most informs her image in popular culture, is that she “walk[ed] into a river with stones in her pockets,” an event that Cunningham mobilizes in the Prologue of his novel (*Leavenworth* 506).¹⁶ While I will provide a more thorough analysis of this scene later on in the chapter, it is important to note that this instance of overlap between Woolf’s biography (the factual circumstances of her life and death), cultural persona (her image as literary “madwoman” and suicide victim), and fictional representation (consisting of the inner emotional and intellectual material created by Cunningham) is positioned as the event which sets the novel in motion. This scene, and the troubling of genre distinctions between literary biography and fiction that it represents, “hovers, ghostlike,” to cite James Schiff, over the narratives to come, informing them not only in their evocations of suicide but also in their explorations of permeability and interconnectedness in terms of genre and otherwise¹⁷ (“Rewriting Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*”).

Hardy draws a connection between the figures in this opening scene, those who are present during the moment of Woolf’s suicide, and the characters and motifs around which the later narratives will revolve. She sees a mother and child on a bridge over the river as representative of Laura Brown and her son, and the crossing trucks and soldiers as prefiguring the “postwar mentality” of the narratives as they unfold in the traumatic

¹⁶ In fact, the novel is bookended by scenes of suicide, a concept that I will explore in more detail through the lens of the fugitive dead.

¹⁷ It is worth adding to this conversation that *The Hours* also mobilizes categories of literary production and consumption, with each of the three protagonists representing a different figure in the literary process: Virginia Woolf as author, Clarissa Vaughan as character, and Laura Brown as reader. Cunningham demonstrates the degree to which these categories can become interlaced, with each narrative refracting through and even influencing the others. Just as he blurs the line between reality and fiction in the “Mrs. Woolf” sections, he also utilizes the text as a whole to explore how literary positions and tasks can be seen as parallel to one another.

contexts of “World War I, World War II [and] the AIDS epidemic,” respectively (405). I think it is especially telling that the troubling of genre represented in the prologue is intimately bound up with considerations of trauma and its representation in the novel. Indeed, Ross Chambers, in his analysis of AIDS writing and testimony, figures trauma and the witnessing writing that grapples with it as within a liminal space in terms of culture and genre, with genre here signifying not exclusively literary genres, but rather the governing principles, the unwritten rules, that determine intelligible social interaction within a culture (25). As I mentioned in the Introduction, trauma, for Chambers, is both outside of and unrecognized by cultural and generic convention and understanding, but also integral to the capacity of a culture and genre to define itself (e.g. insofar as it defines itself against the “other”) (24). Trauma, in its status as generically invisible, must be “relayed” by the act of witnessing, the task of which is to “bring about some acknowledgement of the unrecognized” (24). Given trauma’s difficult signification in terms of genre, it seems fitting that the evocation of the novel’s traumatic contexts in the prologue would arise out of the (literary) generic liminal space between biography and fiction. In other words, the prologue points to the difficulty of generic categorization that haunts Cunningham’s novel: the prologue is both generically ambiguous itself, sitting on the borderline between fact and fiction in its representation of Virginia Woolf, and it situates all three narratives within a traumatic context, evoking a more sustained notion of generic tension, liminality, and troubled connection or “relay.”

The Hours is a novel of disorientation, both in terms of temporal and generic concerns and in terms of its difficult overlap with the so-called “originary” text. Sarah

Boykin Hardy describes the relationship between the texts as one of “dispersal, disjunction, and play,” emphasizing the sense of disorientation that plagues any reader who is looking for a clear-cut correlation between the texts (401). Instead, elements of Woolf’s novel “bubble up into Cunningham’s on the level of image, event, character, and theme” (Hardy 401). Hardy also evokes Linda Hutcheon here, claiming that “these thematic reuses can collide as they overlap, challenging the possibility of a central coherent logic for the novel as a whole and enabling what Hutcheon might call an ‘uneasy, contradictory relationship of constant slippage’” (402). The sound waves that resonate through Woolf’s metaphorical caves can, it seems, collide with one another and become distorted. The project of reading *The Hours* is, then, comparable to an attempt to negotiate permeable boundaries; one must work to decode the images and events as they surface and resurface, passing between multiple subjectivities, temporalities, and texts.

Doubling and Multiplicity

The Hours can be seen as a textual double of *Mrs. Dalloway*, one that is itself concerned with doubling and replication, evoking as well as troubling the notion of the doppelganger. Rather than the symmetrical, clear-cut correlation that is implied by the categories of “new” and “originary,” Cunningham’s text suggests a multiplicity of antecedents and disrupts any attempt towards a clear-cut interpretation of the text as simply a double of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Within the text itself, Cunningham plays upon Woolf’s suggestion that Septimus and Clarissa are intended to be seen as doubles or inversions of one another, but expands this notion until his text is populated almost

entirely by doppelgangers, mirroring the characters of Woolf's text to varying degrees. Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway has her most explicit counterpart in Cunningham's Clarissa Vaughan, a contemporary New York woman who lives, it seems, the plot of Woolf's novel. Clarissa Dalloway also appears, however, in Laura Brown, a wife and mother in 1949 Los Angeles, and in Cunningham's Virginia Woolf, a character whose storyline is based on the circumstances of Woolf's life in 1923. The tripartite form also complicates the attempt to assign definitive counterparts – just as the intertextual web comprises (at least) three texts rather than two, the novel itself is composed of three narrative strands, once again disrupting an attempt towards symmetry or clear-cut doubling.

Furthermore, replications proliferate even within each narrative. Woolf's Sally Seton, for example, finds her counterpart in Cunningham's Sally, Clarissa Vaughan's partner, as well as in Richard Brown, Clarissa's former lover and best friend. In *The Hours*, Peter Walsh is reimagined as both Louis Waters and Richard Brown, and Septimus Warren Smith resurfaces in Richard Brown, Laura Brown, and even in the character of Virginia Woolf. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the parallels in characterization between the texts. We are faced here once again with the notion of caves. Seemingly separate subjectivities are intricately related with others beneath the surface; experience can be refracted through the depths and reappear within a different character in a different place, time, and even text. Maria DiBattista says that within *The Hours*, "the indivisible space of the self is, like time, unseated from its confining locality of 'here, here, here'" (qtd. in Hardy 403). What is typically considered to be whole and unified,

that is, the self and the experience out of which it is comprised, is here a more fluid entity that is prone to mobility across categories, and even to proliferation and multiplicity.

II. CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE SELF: PERFORMANCE, ALIGNMENT, AND THE ‘SECOND SELF’

Not only are characters from *Mrs. Dalloway* refracted and multiplied in Cunningham’s novel, but there is also a sense of doubling and multiplicity described within the text by the characters themselves. Each of the three protagonists describes a feeling that her self is not a unified entity, but rather a more troubled amalgamation of different, incoherent elements. However, the same difficulties that plague Clarissa Dalloway’s attempt to “kindle and illuminate” are also evident here. Clarissa Dalloway creates a “meeting-point” for the guests at her party, a gesture that suggests (e.g. through the exclusivity of the gathering) an attempt toward social coherence and status even as it seems to gesture toward interconnectedness and affinity (*Mrs. Dalloway* 32). The female protagonists in *The Hours*, Clarissa, Laura, and Virginia, are also often figured as internally conflicted – the social, seemingly unified self provides a mask of sorts for the incoherent and fluid self within, which, in what I would like to call a queer moment, occasionally finds its way to the surface.

Laura Brown, for example, sees an opposition between her married social self, or Laura Brown, and her old identity as Laura Zielski. She laments her transformation from single girl to married woman, equating it with a sense of loss and displacement: “Laura Zielski, the solitary girl, the incessant reader is gone, and here in her place is Laura

Brown” (*The Hours* 40). She takes on this new identity and resolves to act as a wife and mother would act, to take on the work of “creating [...] a world of order and harmony” (42). She constantly feels disconnected from her present identity, however, and, pausing on the stairs as she descends to meet her family, Laura Brown has the sense that she is “standing in the wings, about to go onstage and perform in a play for which she is not adequately dressed, and for which she has not adequately rehearsed” (43). The attempt to maintain the façade is especially strained when she interacts with her young son, Richie. Laura feels disarmed by his capacity to be “so entirely, persuasively himself,” to want and need with such innocent and unself-conscious sincerity (47). She sees herself in opposition to how she imagines other mothers must act, namely, according to a “body of rules,” and with constant access to “an ongoing mother-self to guide them in negotiating the days spent alone with a child” (47). Instead, she reflects that she “can’t always remember how a mother would act” (47), a statement which speaks to the perceived distance between her “inchoate, tumbling” self and the category of mother which she tries so hard to fit into (187).

Laura’s “inchoate, tumbling” self is represented most explicitly in her brief encounter with a kind of ghostly double, suspended behind her in the medicine cabinet mirror. She quickly dismisses the notion, however, assuring herself that “there is no one, of course; it’s just a trick of the light. For an instant, no more than that, she has imagined some sort of a ghost self, a second version of her, standing immediately behind, watching” (214). This ghost self represents, in my reading, an instance of the submerged Laura Zielski coming briefly to the surface, making herself briefly present in the day to

day life of Laura Brown. Unable to incorporate this “second self” into her sense of alignment (34), Mrs. Brown insists that “it’s nothing,” and turns her attention to the contents of the medicine cabinet (214). Before her are “the various lotions and sprays, the bandages and ointments, the medicines,” and “the plastic prescription bottle with its sleeping pills” (214). The contents of the medicine cabinet are comforting, I would argue, because it is a representation of her alignment, of her capacity to accumulate and keep track of the inanimate objects of the world. The ghostly face in the mirror has arisen outside of her control, while the items in the cabinet are all perfectly in place, just as she knew they would be.¹⁸ In order to keep up her alignment, she assures herself of the unreality of her vision and attempts, just as Septimus does in *Mrs. Dalloway*, to ground herself in her performance through an appeal to the supposed reality of objects, of the physical trappings of domestic life.

The sense of impersonation and disorientation that Laura experiences in her domestic role, as well as the implication of alignment that is associated with physical objects, is also evident in Clarissa Vaughan’s narrative. Clarissa Vaughan’s apartment acts as a microcosm of the attempt towards diverse interconnectedness symbolized by Clarissa Dalloway’s party. Louis Waters, who arrives unexpectedly before the party just as Peter Walsh does in *Mrs. Dalloway*, reflects upon the sense of artificiality that the apartment evokes. He imagines the perfectly vetted combination of belongings to be the product of painstaking work by an assistant on a movie set who is attempting to create a realistic portrayal of the occupants: “French leather armchairs, check; Stickleby table,

¹⁸ Indeed, her consistent use of the article “the” indicates that she is merely confirming the contents of the cabinet, rather than determining it for the first time – she sees “the bandages and ointments,” rather than simply “bandages and ointments.”

check; linen-coloured walls hung with botanical prints, check; bookshelves studded with small treasures acquired abroad, check” (127). While the apartment acts as a space for the coming together of diverse elements – the French leather armchairs and the “South American chest painted with leering mermaids,” for example – the sense of unity seems insincere and artificial, implying a sense of bourgeois-bohemian affluence (127). Just as Clarissa Dalloway polices the spatial boundaries of her party, the space of the apartment is similarly exclusive. Rather than a space of interconnectedness and fluidity, it becomes instead a space of categorization in which each item fits neatly into a category and can be checked off.

The sense of artificiality inspired by the apartment is not limited to Louis’ consciousness, however. Clarissa herself also regards her belongings, specifically those in her kitchen, with a sense of detachment and indifference, as though they and the apartment itself belong to someone else. She describes the “white dishes stacked pristinely,” and the “terra-cotta pots, glazed in various shades of crackled yellow,” but sees herself as “stand[ing] apart from them” (91). She recognizes that she has been “pretending to live in this apartment among these objects, with kind, nervous Sally ” (92). Just as Laura Zielski resurfaces within the consciousness of Laura Brown, Clarissa Vaughan feels in this moment the “presence of her own ghost” (92). She describes this entity as

the part of her at once most indestructibly alive and least distinct; the part that owns nothing; that observes with wonder and detachment, like a tourist in a museum, a row of glazed yellow pots and a countertop with a single crumb on it [...]. (92)

This ghost self doesn't care for material possessions, for the social significance of her apartment in the West Village or the terra-cotta pots it contains. It is detached from the anchoring potential of the world of objects. Amorphous and indistinct, it is the representation of potentiality and multiplicity, and evokes for Clarissa the feeling that in letting go of the "empty and arbitrary comforts" she could be "capable of anything" (92). In contrast to Clarissa's attempts to "build up," to create a life for herself amongst the cold, indifferent objects, is the "essence of Clarissa" herself, a treasure that must be preserved from the dissecting, categorizing eyes of the William Bradshaws and set decorators of the world. Just as Laura Zielski, the incoherent self that underlies Laura Brown's daily pretense, is liable to break the surface, so too is Clarissa Vaughan's double, the self that eschews the coherence implied by material belongings, and which sees the potential in refusing to "assemble," in abandoning a set trajectory (158). Both characters, while they project coherence and alignment, are much more complex than they appear, and are prone to encounters, whether or not they take them seriously, with the unintelligible, ghostly aspects of their selves.

The trope of the divided self, or of the ghostly double that occasionally makes itself present, is perhaps most palpable in a consideration of the "Mrs. Woolf" sections of the novel. Cunningham's Virginia, like the other two protagonists, evokes notions of performance, of the attempt to maintain an outwardly coherent social self. For Virginia, this appearance of alignment is also bound up with notions of sanity, a state of being which always, for her, "involves a certain measure of impersonation" (83). She even refers to herself, for example, as a fictionalized being, stepping into the role of the

“character who is Virginia Woolf,” a task which occasionally requires a great deal of effort (84). Just as Laura, when faced with the overwhelming sincerity of her son, often “cannot remember how a mother would act,” Virginia also has to “work to stay in character” during her interactions with Nelly, her servant who, like Richie, possesses an effortless capacity to be herself (85). Like Laura, Virginia is concerned by her own lack of facility in the administering of quotidian household tasks – she has difficulty interacting with servants, and cannot seem to wield the combination of firmness and kindness which comes so easily to her mother and sister (85).

This self that is so concerned with the appearance of alignment is placed in opposition, as with Laura and Clarissa, to the fluid, incoherent self. Here, however, Virginia’s ghostly double is posited as the locus for authorial inspiration; when it breaks the surface of her consciousness it brings with it a momentary access to the depths of interconnectedness and multiplicity that underlie everyday experience. Virginia describes it as

an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self. [...] It is more than the sum of her intellect and her emotions, more than the sum of her experiences, though it runs like veins of brilliant metal through all three. It is an inner faculty that recognizes the animating mysteries of the world because it is made of the same substance. (34-5)

Cunningham’s Virginia draws attention to the materiality of this entity, referring to it as a “substance,” and evoking Woolf’s notion of the “thing itself” that underlies and connects all things in a pattern of interconnectedness. Virginia’s capacity to write seems to be contingent upon her access to this faculty, and she contrasts the sense of inspiration brought on by her encounter with her “second self” with the uncertainty she feels without the presence of the ghostly double: “She may pick up her pen and follow it with her hand

as it moves across the paper; she may pick up her pen and find that she's merely herself, a woman in a housecoat holding a pen, afraid and uncertain, only mildly competent, with no idea about where to begin or what to write" (35). In this description, Cunningham invokes the unmistakable domestic image of a woman in a housecoat, an individual whose realm is limited to the contours of the home, who, unlike the "indescribable second self," is so easily placed within a given context. This contrast suggests to me that the capacity for writing and the capacity for recognizable alignment are placed in opposition. Virginia Woolf as writer is contrasted with Virginia Woolf as housewife; the creative potential contained within the "second self" is contrasted with the relative difficulty of maintaining the coherent self. Virginia is able, when she has access to the world's "animating mysteries," to simply "pick up her pen and follow it with her hand," as if the motion is coming from elsewhere. Literary generativity, here, is animated by the sense of interconnectedness with the world, and contrasted with the laborious process of remaining adequately aligned, of "stay[ing] in character."

Once again, we can see a kind of interplay between surface and depth, between Virginia's performance of domesticity, her "ordinary" self, and her "inner faculty," her incoherent and indescribable self. Just as Clarissa Dalloway pauses before plunging into the experience of interconnectedness inspired by the morning air, Virginia pauses and sips her coffee, savouring the "singular experience" of "waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked" (34). The writer's domestic self, sipping coffee and contemplating the upcoming novel, gives way to the "second self" as it breaks the surface. The vacillation here between these selves, is, I would argue, an

articulation of the permeable boundary concept. Virginia's capacity to recognize the interplay, to welcome the fluidity of her self-concept, is what inspires her authorship. Indeed, this notion draws on Woolf's own descriptions of her writing, which I mentioned in my Introduction, in which she describes a "token of some real thing behind appearances," reimagined in Cunningham's "substance," that inspires her to "discover what belongs to what" in the realm of words (*Moments* 72). Woolf sees what is concealed by outward "appearances," what is beneath the performance of alignment, and mobilizes this interplay in her writing. The ordinary self and the creative self are able to come briefly together; the "second self" is able, on occasion, to rise to the surface and to disrupt the performance.

III. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SELVES: THE QUEER MOMENT OF THE KISS

I would like to posit that the moments I have described above, in which the protagonists of *The Hours* come into contact with their ghost-like "second selves," can also be seen as queer moments. I would argue that, in *The Hours*, queer moments are figured as instances in which characters (or different elements of a single character) come into contact with one another, when boundaries between aspects of the self or between individual selves become permeable. When this occurs, there is often a sense of temporalities brushing up against one another, of the parallel lives of the protagonists coming briefly together in a similar moment of disorientation.

The moment of the kiss, which is refracted throughout the novel and acts, in each narrative, as a moment of contact and connection, is an important touchstone for the three

narrative strands. This moment evidently has its origins in the kiss between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton, the moment of ecstasy that Woolf's Clarissa carries with her and constantly returns to for the remainder of her life. In *The Hours*, the kiss is similarly endowed with the capacity for temporal disjunction – just as its memory constantly resurfaces in the consciousness of Clarissa Dalloway, the memory of a similarly clandestine kiss is often revisited by Clarissa Vaughan. This kiss is, however, not explicitly out of line in the same way as its predecessor. While Clarissa Dalloway experiences this moment of singular connection with a woman, Clarissa Vaughan's moment of ecstasy is rather one of heterosexual connection; the kiss, which took place one summer at a beach house, was with her best friend Richard Brown. Switching the genders of Sally and Richard indicates a challenge on the part of the novel not only to heteronormative time, but also to homonormative¹⁹ time, both of which “naturalize the development through conventional life stages” (Haffey 152). Indeed, the stagnation that Woolf describes in Clarissa Dalloway's marriage is also present in the relationship between Clarissa Vaughan and her partner, Sally. The emphasis here is not on the gender or sexuality of the characters, but rather on the attitudes towards time they espouse and how such attitudes of linearity and progress can be challenged by moments of incoherent connection between partners of varying genders. The significance of the kiss is that it disrupts and challenges the narrative of progress, that it “exist[s] outside an imaginable,

¹⁹ Lisa Duggan, who coined the term “homonormativity” in her 2002 article “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” defines the term as: “A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (179).

scripted future” (Haffey 152), and that, consequently, it conjures a feeling of infinite possibility, that “anything could happen” (*The Hours* 95).

While Haffey emphasizes the capacity of the kiss to represent a departure from normative temporality, I would like to add that despite its promise of unknowable futurity and its disruption to typical alignment, the moment of the kiss is localized both spatially and temporally for Clarissa. She repeatedly credits the house at Wellfleet with the events of the summer, the kiss included: “It was the house, really, she thinks” (95); “It was the house” (95); “It was the house and the weather – the ecstatic unreality of it all – that helped turn Richard’s friendship into a more devouring kind of love” (96); etc. Here, Clarissa emphasizes the role of the house, the isolated and unfamiliar setting, that brought them out of their typical roles – “three undergraduates who smoked joints and argued in the dormitories at Columbia” – and into a space in which what was previously thought possible could be revised and expanded (95). The notion of “unreality” pervades their experience at the house, and is bound up with the experience of disorientation that arises from being out of line, from the vacillation through a suddenly permeable boundary. Indeed, the setting also evokes Clarissa Dalloway’s past at Bourton, as well as Woolf’s own experience at St. Ives, both of which represent a respite from the pressures and expectations of daily life, a space in which boundaries between categories can be rendered fluid. All three settings, St. Ives, Bourton, and Wellfleet, are conceived of in terms of permeability: Woolf describes her moment of ecstasy when, in the liminal space between sleep and wakefulness, she watches the blind move back and forth in the breeze (*Moments* 64-5); Clarissa Dalloway constantly remembers the blind at Bourton (*Mrs.*

Dalloway 35), as well as the window that she throws open to greet the morning air (3). These images are translated, in *The Hours*, into that of the glass door at Wellfleet. Clarissa is described as “walking out of a glass door, still sleepy, in [her] underwear” (*The Hours* 199). The moment of connection implied by the kiss, the moment when two subjectivities come together, is given a very specific locus for Clarissa, one that is already imbued with the signification of permeability and vacillation, where uneasy connections can be forged across categories.

The kiss is also given a specific temporal locus for Clarissa. She sees it as a past event, one that continues to inform her experience of her present but which is, for all intents and purposes, over. Cunningham describes her enduring memory of the moment, stating that “what lives undimmed in Clarissa’s mind more than three decades later is a kiss at dusk on a patch of dead grass” (98). He describes the “perfection” of the moment as stemming from the fact that “it seemed, at the time, so clearly to promise more” (98). “Now,” he continues, “she knows: That was the moment, right then. There has been no other” (98). Clarissa is able, from her perspective of three decades removed, to contrast the feeling of the moment, the sensation that everything was ahead of her, that this was simply the “beginning of happiness” and perfection, with her sense years later that it was, in fact, the only instance of happiness that she was ever to experience (98). Just as Clarissa Dalloway is able to recognize the distinctions between the fresh morning air at Bourton and the plunge onto the streets of London years later, Clarissa Vaughan is able to revisit the memory of the kiss with a kind of temporal distance. Rather than delving entirely into the past and collapsing the distinctions between temporalities, both Clarissas

can maintain a recognition of temporal categories and seem to welcome the vacillation and uneasy connection that this entails.

By contrast, Richard Brown, Clarissa's best friend and one-time lover, has a different relation to the temporality of the kiss. For him, distinctions between temporal categories are fluid and changing – he sees the past, present, and future not as a continuum but as interpenetrated, even as entities that can multiply and expand. The novel figures Richard as an atemporal figure, a character for whom typical boundaries and notions of alignment are almost entirely irrelevant. I think it is important here to situate Richard in terms of the critical discourse on AIDS, a diagnosis which places him outside the bounds of normativity in terms of temporality and otherwise.²⁰ Ross Chambers' analysis of witnessing and testimonial figures AIDS as an "epidemic of wrongness," describing it as "a lived experience of disruption and untimeliness" (253). HIV/AIDS registers here as a distortion, here, of the typical, measured progression of day-to-day life; it changes the experience of being in time through a sensation of what Chambers terms "temporal disjunction" or, more specifically, "suspension"²¹ (254). Richard is "perpetually surviving a trauma that is never over," in which the notion of before and after is destabilized,²² and in which time becomes unhinged from categories of present and past – Richard describes himself, significantly, as having "fallen out of time" (62). Because he is "still surviving," he is not only temporally "out-of-joint," but also

²⁰ I am thinking in terms of what Eric Michaels' refers to in his HIV/AIDS memoir, *Unbecoming*, as "tidiness," a concept which I will address more specifically as we go on.

²¹ This notion of suspension recalls Clarissa Dalloway's momentary pause on the curb before the plunge into the streets of London, as well as Septimus' suspended stasis in the face of fluidity and flux, and, like these instances, is also associated with liminality, with the permeable boundary between spheres, here figured as life and death as well as present and past.

²² See Chambers' discussion of "Auschwitz time"

suspended in the liminal space that characterizes survivorhood as “an experience of being, somehow, still alive although already dead” (43). Richard, as a person living with HIV/AIDS, can therefore be read as a figure of that which is incoherent, as a point of intersection for categories of temporality as well as for the living and the dead.

While Richard attempts to communicate his sense of disjunction to Clarissa, her temporal perspective, as I have argued, remains rooted in linearity. In a brief dialogue with her, he advocates for the multiplicity of the present moment, describing the moment of the kiss as a kind of never-ending experience that continues to reverberate through multiple presents, while she seems at turns to placate his odd ideas and to reassert practicality:

“You kissed me beside a pond.”

“Ten thousand years ago.”

“It’s still happening.”

“In a sense, yes.”

“In reality. It’s happening in that present. This is happening in this present.”

“You’re tired, darling. You must rest. I’m going to call Bing about your medicine, all right?” (66)

Rather than accepting Richard’s notion of the duality of the moment, of the multiplicity of the category of “present,” Clarissa exaggerates the moment’s past-ness, emphasizing its status as ancient history (“ten thousand years ago”), as an instance that can never be re-experienced. She then dismisses Richard’s ideas entirely, citing his illness and exhaustion, and turns the conversation to the practical matter of medication. While Richard is able to experience the fluidity of temporal categories, seeing the past and present as simultaneous (“We’re middle-aged and we’re young lovers standing beside a pond. We’re everything at once. Isn’t it remarkable?” [67]), Clarissa is consistently

figured as a figure of clock time. She attempts to regulate Richard's behaviour, reminding him to take his medication and to rest, and repetitively insisting on his timely arrival at the party and ceremony: "The party's at five, do you remember? The party's at five, and the ceremony comes after, at eight, uptown. You remember all that, don't you?" (61). She takes it upon herself to take care of the practicalities of Richard's existence, to keep temporal categories straight, when he himself is unable or unwilling to do so.²³

While, for Clarissa, the moment of the kiss exists in the narrative's past, for the other two protagonists, Laura and Virginia, the moment is contained within the narrative present. This recalls Richard's notion of the multiplicity of temporal categories: while the moment is past for one character, it is simultaneously present for the other two; while it is past for the currently middle-aged Clarissa, it is present for the young Clarissa standing beside the pond. The moment exists in multiple presents and pasts, refracting between subjectivities, and arising in unpredictable, disorienting ways. While the moment of the kiss acts as a signpost of temporal connection, of instances in which multiple temporalities overlap, the moments are not identical in each context. Rather than moments of total temporal transparency, or of the collapsing of time, they are rather indications of partial overlaps and uneasy connections, or of the multiplicity and proliferation of temporal categories. While Clarissa's experience of the kiss forges a connection between Richard's subjectivity and her own, it also occurs within a specific temporal and spatial context that challenges alignment and allows for new and surprising

²³ This difficulty of communication between Richard and Clarissa also speaks, I think, to Chambers' larger discussion of the ethical task of witnessing to "bring about some acknowledgement of the unrecognized" (24), or, in other words, to "relay" the sense of hauntedness or liminality experienced by the survivor, a process which is necessarily mediated and precarious (37-8). Here, Richard is the witness, the writer, who attempts unsuccessfully to make Clarissa, the reader, aware of the continued ghostly presence of the past.

interconnections. The other two kisses, between Laura and Kitty and between Virginia and Vanessa, on the other hand, occur within more conventional spaces.

Laura Brown, for example, experiences this moment of connection in her own kitchen, the space in which she has spent the day preparing a cake for her husband's birthday. She is interrupted by the unexpected visit of her neighbour, Kitty, and the two women share a brief moment of contact and intimacy. This moment, like the kiss between Clarissa and Richard, is figured as being a respite from typical alignment, an escape from the emphasis on progression and futurity that structures Laura's days. She recognizes in Kitty a similar sense of masked incoherence, a constant attempt to "assemble" and present a unified face to the world, concluding that "they are each impersonating someone" (110). The moment of the kiss, however, seems to stand in opposition to the hours and hours of "enormous work" that they undertake every day (110). Just as the act of writing, for Virginia, is facilitated by the resurfacing of her "second self" and the interconnectedness it represents, the moment of connection between the two women seems almost organic, outside of the self-conscious state of performance and assembly. In contrast to the tremendous effort she makes in her constant attempts toward alignment, Laura's encounter with Kitty seems outside of conscious thought: "Without quite meaning to, without deciding to, she kisses Kitty, lingeringly, on top of her forehead" (110). They are aware of their actions – "they both know what they are doing" – but the part of themselves that is constantly vigilant, constantly aware of alignment, recedes into the background (110).

It is interesting that this moment of connection seems to develop out of a recognition of their respective attempts to align themselves with heteronormative social structures and goods. Rather than manifesting out of isolation from normative categorizations, as it does for Clarissa and Richard, the kiss between Laura and Kitty is born out of an understanding of mutual adherence to performance and normativity. It arises out of a sense of sameness, an acknowledgement of oneself in the other, and results in a bridging of gaps in more than just a physical sense. In essence, the boundary between the two respective selves becomes permeable, and contact between them is achieved. The connection is not absolute, however; in contrast to the other kisses in the novel, this is referred to as a “not quite kiss,” a moment of uneasy physical contact that gestures towards total interconnectedness, but cannot quite get there (110). Despite the similarities between the figures of Laura and Kitty, their mutual efforts to “kindle and illuminate,” their subjectivities do not quite overlap. Indeed, after the connection is broken, when Kitty pulls away, both women attempt to explain away the incident, reasserting the difference between them and returning to the logic of cause and effect: “It is Kitty whose terrors have briefly propelled her, caused her to act strangely and desperately. Laura is the dark-eyed predator. Laura is the odd one, the foreigner, the one who can’t be trusted. Laura and Kitty agree, silently, that this is true” (110). Both women, rather than occupying the same space of interconnectedness, a space beneath the guise of coherence and alignment, are suddenly rescripted into easily separable categories. Kitty is cast as the innocent victim and Laura as the perpetrator.²⁴

²⁴ It is interesting that even in this attempt to become realigned, to invent a logical progression of cause and

While the kisses between Clarissa and Richard and between Laura and Kitty gesture toward the notion of interconnectedness, it seems that neither are able to maintain the connection for long. For Clarissa, the moment is so localized, so divorced from the experience of day-to-day life that it cannot hold its ground after the return from Wellfleet. The feeling that “anything could happen” is quickly replaced by the logic of progression that propels city life, and that structures her relationship with Sally. For Laura and Kitty, the moment of connection occurs in a space of alignment, rather than in a space of isolation, but also cannot be maintained. The moment of “not quite” fluidity is broken by the reassertion of social categories and by the emphasis on the polarization of difference.

For Virginia, however, the kiss, though equally brief, seems to provide a more effective disruption to normative practices. Because it occurs in a conventional setting, it is disruptive to rather than isolated from the realm of performance and alignment in both spatial and temporal terms. Indeed, the kiss occurs between Virginia and her sister, Vanessa, behind the back of the servant, Nelly, who stands for domestic competence and alignment:

Nelly turns away and, although it is not at all their custom, Virginia leans forward and kisses Vanessa on the mouth. It is an innocent kiss, innocent enough, but just now, in this kitchen, behind Nelly’s back, it feels like the most delicious and forbidden of pleasures. Vanessa returns the kiss.
(154)

effect, Laura is still scripted as the incoherent one, as the foreign, outsider figure that threatens the social order. Laura is not only out of alignment in her position as instigator, as the one who possesses queer desire, but also in the fact that she is explicitly racialized. Because of her dark eyes and slightly “foreign” appearance, she is not able to appear in line in the same way that Kitty is. Indeed, Kitty is described as belonging to a subset of women who, while they were “not quite beautiful,” were nevertheless gifted with the privilege of wealth and confidence, as well as a certain social facility that is categorically denied to Laura (102). There is a sense that, even though they are each playing a part, Laura’s performance is not so adept as Kitty’s; her incoherence is closer to the surface.

The kiss is a stolen moment of connection and pleasure that can only take place outside the view of the regulating force. It disrupts the typical familial interactions – Cunningham specifies that “it is not at all their custom” – and has a touch of something not quite innocent about it. Just as Peter in *Mrs. Dalloway*, free and unencumbered on the streets of London, imagines himself as a child escaped from his watchful nursemaid, Virginia and Vanessa see their connection here as similarly mischievous and forbidden. Just as, for Clarissa, the kiss arises out of a feeling that “anything can happen,” that the governing laws of cause and effect have faded away, this kiss between Virginia and Vanessa recalls Peter’s similar sense of total liberty from social expectation. The kiss is, also, explicitly returned. Unlike Laura’s encounter with Kitty, the boundaries between subjectivities are able to come fully, albeit briefly, together.

This kiss also troubles distinctions between temporalities. While Clarissa is unable or unwilling to take on Richard’s perspective, to see the multiplicity and permeability of temporality, Virginia’s descriptions of her moment of connection echo Richard’s own. Richard sees himself and Clarissa as simultaneously middle-aged and as young lovers, while Virginia sees herself and Vanessa “one moment” as “two young sisters cleaving to each other, breast against breast, lips ready” (116). “The next moment,” she continues, “[...] there are two middle-aged married women standing together on a modest bit of lawn before a body of children” (116). As Kate Haffey elucidates in her article, the kiss that is gestured towards by the “two young sisters” is completed, decades later, by the “two middle-aged married women” (156). The middle-aged women, having progressed through the narrative of their lives in relative alignment

(as evidenced most explicitly by Vanessa's children and the continuity they imply), are nevertheless able to return to a past moment, to forge connections between one another and between the categories of present and past. Haffey claims that "this kiss, therefore, is a moment that is able to break through the barriers of time and collapse the distinction between the child and the adult" (156).

I would like to add that the moment is able not only to connect the adult Virginia to her past, but also to connect the "Mrs. Woolf" and the "Mrs. Dalloway" sections through this invocation of temporal permeability and disjunction (e.g. Richard's descriptions of the disorienting temporalities of the kiss are echoed by Virginia). It is also able to forge connections between greater texts as well. Indeed, Cunningham is careful to emphasize the connections between Vanessa and *Mrs. Dalloway's* Sally Seton, claiming that the former may have been the inspiration for the latter, at least in terms of certain eccentric character and behavioural traits – cutting the heads off flowers and floating them in bowls of water, for one (*The Hours* 82). The kiss between Virginia and Vanessa is figured implicitly, then, as the inspiration for the textual kiss between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton. Once again, Cunningham plays with temporal categories, positioning his novel as before the ostensibly "originary" text, as, in fact, the inspiration for it. This moment is not only disruptive within the realm of *The Hours*, but also in the logic of progression that ostensibly characterizes the relationship between the texts themselves.

I would like to posit that these moments of connection – both the encounters with the incoherent second self and the instances of physical connection between characters –

act as disruptions to normative, linear notions of temporality and progress. They surface within the experience of the characters as moments in which linear progress is interrupted and challenged. They are concerned with the permeability of boundaries between subjectivities and temporalities, as well as the negotiation of alignment and incoherence within the complexity of the self. The moments are not exact duplications of each other, however. Just as Richard's categories of temporality encompass multiple, diverse and contradictory notions of the present, moments of encounter between selves and subjectivities resurface in different ways within each of the three narratives. While the moment of the kiss is, for all three protagonists, a moment of reevaluating possibility, of acting against what social regulation would dictate, it manifests differently, in different contexts and at different narrative times, for each character.

IV. CONNECTIONS WITH THE DEAD: GHOSTS AND SUICIDES

Furthermore, the queer moments I have described, both the encounters with the “second selves” and the instances of the kiss, among others, are bound up in Cunningham's *The Hours* with the notion of death and the capacity for interconnectedness to which it provides access. I have outlined the ways in which the text approaches the uneasy connections forged between aspects of the self, as well as between differing subjectivities, but it is important to add that each narrative also revolves around the notion of suicide and its evocation of the fragile, permeable boundary between life and death. All three narratives are concerned with the presence of that which has been lost and disappeared, in the form of literal ghosts as well as the resurfacing of past events.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the “second selves” of the characters are constantly referred to as spectral, “ghostly doubles” whose presence surrounds, and even, in Virginia’s case, overtakes the protagonists. The permeable boundary between life and death that these encounters evoke comes to a culmination in the novel’s multiple instances of suicide, or the movement from life to death.

Indeed, in addition to her ghostly double, another somewhat spectral presence for Clarissa is Richard himself, the novel’s representation of Septimus Warren Smith who, like his literary counterpart, plunges to his death from a window. Richard’s apartment, which is described as having an “underwater aspect,” positioned metaphorically beneath the surface, can be seen as the realm of interconnection between life and death, a version of the room in which Clarissa Dalloway senses her connection with Septimus. It is initially totally cut off from the bustle of the city, existing in a parallel universe of sorts, populated with items that have long ago sunk beneath the surface. The chair that Richard insists on keeping, for example, is itself described as “insane,” or as belonging to someone who, “if not actually insane, has let things slide so far, has gone such a long way toward the exhausted relinquishment of ordinary caretaking [...] that the difference between insanity and hopelessness is difficult to pinpoint” (58). The chair is a physical representation of being out of line; it is a piece of useless refuse, an item that should have been long ago lost and forgotten, but which Richard refuses to part with. It represents Richard’s own “hopelessness,” or, as I read it, the lack of investment in typical futurity and progress that is often associated with insanity and death. The decrepitude of the chair and of the environment in general resonates, I think, with Ross Chambers’ readings of

Unbecoming, the testimonial by Eric Michaels. Even the title, *Unbecoming*, conjures a sense of the degeneration and collapse that characterizes the apartment. The insanity of the chair stands in opposition, I want to suggest, to what Eric Michaels’ refers to as “tidiness,” and Chambers defines as that ideology which “seeks to eradicate [...] everything that is regarded as a form of cultural dirt” (73). The literal dirtiness and degradation of the apartment represents Richard’s lack of adherence to the normative imperatives of sanitization. Further, “tidiness” functions, as does Sir William Bradshaw’s “proportion,” through a “logic of separability” that relies on strict categorization and division for a sense of intelligibility (87). While Chambers sees Michaels as “untidy” in his shifting signification as both a white AIDS patient and an Aboriginal,²⁵ I read Richard as “untidy” in his ghostly capacity to live within multiple temporalities simultaneously, and to occupy the liminal space between life and death.

While Richard occupies the space of the lost and forgotten, the metaphorical realm of death, Clarissa seeks to break the boundary between the deathlike feel of the apartment and the world outside, opening the blinds to “let in a little light” (57). As the light falls around the room, Richard’s face “seems to rise up out of the darkness like a sunken sculpture hauled to the surface” (58). Here, Richard and the realm he inhabits is made to literally “come to daylight”; the permeable boundary signified by the blind sets in motion a kind of vacillation between the realm of life, or the outside world, and the realm of death, Richard’s apartment which is likened to the “hold of a sunken ship” (56). This

²⁵ Chambers’ reads the photograph of Michaels that serves as *Unbecoming*’s frontispiece in terms of syllepsis – Michaels is seen to embody simultaneously a PWA and (albeit unintentionally) an Australian Aborigine. This syllepsis, according to Michaels, “breaks the tidiness rule that items of a paradigm cannot co-occur”: for example, “a white AIDS patient is not an Aboriginal” (87).

vacillation, and the interconnectedness between realms that it represents, proves to have unexpected and tragic consequences. With the apartment flooded with light, Richard sees an opportunity to enact the interconnectedness that the chair represents, to literally pass through the fragile barrier. Even his physical description, in this moment of triumph, is comprised entirely of contradictions:

He looks insane and exalted, both ancient and childish, astride the windowsill like some scarecrow equestrian, a park statue by Giacometti. His hair is plastered to his scalp in some places, jutting out at sharp, rakish angles in others. His inside leg, bare to midhigh, blue-white, is skeletal but with a surprisingly solid little fist of calf muscle still clinging stubbornly to the bone. (196)

With one leg on either side of the windowsill, Richard is located right in the centre of the permeable boundary, and the liminal space he occupies is translated into his physical as well as his mental state. Cunningham also returns here to a description of the chair, describing it as “leaking stuffing at the seams,” and seeing it as a representation of the “the essential shoddiness of mortal illness itself” (197). The inside material of the chair, the stuffing, is passing through a boundary into the outside in the same way that Richard, prompted by the incoherence (or “shoddiness”) of his illness is prompted to pass through the permeable boundary of the window. Both the chair and Richard are figured as occupying a liminal space, as halfway between the inside and the outside, or between the spheres of life and death.

The transition is complete, however, when Richard gently lets himself fall from the windowsill, passing from one realm to the other, and landing on the concrete below (200). This vacillation between spheres is akin to the interconnectedness that is found in death. Indeed, it is Richard’s desire for fluidity and permeability that prompts his suicide.

Clarissa Dalloway sees Septimus' suicide as an act of preservation, an attempt to hold on to the treasure of interconnectedness in the face of Sir William Bradshaw and the violence of categorization and diagnosis. Richard's death is a parallel act of affirmation of incoherence, a celebration of fluidity that stands in opposition to the bearing down of the "party and the ceremony, and then the hour after that, and the hour after that" (197). Each figure takes the plunge in an effort to hold on to the sense of interconnectedness, to embody the notion of the permeable boundary that Sir William Bradshaw and, in *The Hours*, Clarissa herself, appear to threaten.

Suicide arises somewhat differently in Laura Brown's section of the novel compared to the Richard and Clarissa section. While she does not literally undertake the act, she does seek an escape from the trials of domestic life, from the performance that she tries so hard to maintain. Driven from the apartment by restlessness and a cake that "isn't what she'd hoped it would be" (143), she makes a solitary trip from her home to downtown Los Angeles, to a "large, clean, unremarkable" hotel (146). Alone in the hotel room, she feels as though she has entered a dream, as though the frustrations of her attempts toward alignment have somehow "cease[d] to matter" (149). She feels, as Clarissa does during her experiences of queer moments, a sense of infinite possibility, that she "could do anything she wanted to, anything at all," that, in her retreat to the hotel, she has escaped the pressures and expectations of life (150).

Indeed, she refers to the hotel room explicitly as the realm of death, imagining that "Virginia Woolf herself, the drowned woman, the genius, might in death inhabit a place not unlike this one" (150). The hotel room becomes akin, I think, to the little room into

which Clarissa Dalloway escapes her party. The communion, in this case, is not with Septimus Warren Smith, but rather with Virginia Woolf herself. Indeed, Laura has sought out this place of solitude in order to read *Mrs. Dalloway*, to connect with the mysterious, departed author with whom she feels a kind of affinity. It is fitting, then, that the passage from the novel she reads has to do with an underlying sense of interconnectedness, with Clarissa Dalloway's expansive, mist-like subjectivity (150-1). The hotel room is bound up with notions of connection, of an inexplicable bond between Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf, and the fluidity and permeability that the possibility of death engenders. Laura contemplates the act of suicide, realizing, as if for the first time, that "it is possible to die," that "she could decide to die" (151). While she is not ready to relinquish her hold on life, to abandon her children and her husband, she finds "comfort in facing the full range of options; in considering all [her] choices" (152). The escape from linear trajectory provides a sense of potentiality, a feeling that "anything could happen," which includes, it seems, the plunge into death and interconnectedness.

The notion of suicide is dramatized most explicitly in the novel's prologue, in which a third-person narrator describes the suicide of Virginia Woolf herself. This instance of suicide is the most explicit articulation of the permeable boundary between life and death, of the movement from surface to depth, and the interconnectedness that is found therein. This passage is where we find the first mention of the now familiar "second self," the incoherent version of Virginia who resurfaces within her consciousness. Here, it takes the form of a headache bearing down on her, an indescribable entity that threatens to take

over her being,²⁶ and is placed in opposition to the well-intentioned efforts of Virginia's husband Leonard and her sister Vanessa. She contemplates returning home for their sakes, to "*perform* that final kindness," but ultimately decides against it (5 italics mine). The struggle to remain in line, to continue the performance that her husband and sister would expect and desire from her, amounts, for Virginia, to a life of captivity. Just as Clarissa Vaughan becomes, for Richard, an administrator of the practicalities of healthcare, Leonard and Vanessa act as similarly regulatory figures for Virginia. Both Richard and Virginia decide to break free from regulation. Virginia, for example, intentionally relinquishes control of "the character who is Virginia Woolf," and sinks into the river in a motion that is described as "involuntary" (5). Just as during the writing process she allows the "second self" to overtake and inspire her subjectivity, even moving her pen across the page, here, she allows the incoherence to take over, pulling her down into the river's depths.

Indeed, Virginia's suicide literally enacts the transition from surface to depth, from the space of alignment and performance to the realm of interconnectedness. She sinks below the surface of the river, borne by the current, and comes to rest against the piling of a bridge. Here, at the river's bottom, she is able to feel the vibration of the world around her. She has entered the realm in which distinctions between subjectivities have dissolved, and the resonances of her surroundings make themselves felt in her own body. Above her, a scene is taking place between diverse subjectivities – a mother, a child, and

²⁶ The descriptions of the "second self" here are strikingly similar to Septimus' mediated connections with Evans in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Virginia hears voices around her, "muttering indistinctly just beyond the range of her vision," and any attempt to apprehend them is met with evasion: "behind her, here, no, turn and they've gone somewhere else" (*The Hours* 4). The "second self," or the ghostly articulation of her own incoherence, is like Evans, below the surface, and encounters with it are necessarily mediated.

a group of soldiers – with whom she is able to connect: “All this [the scene above] enters the bridge, resounds through its wood and stone, and enters Virginia’s body. Her face, pressed sideways to the piling, absorbs it all: the truck and the soldiers, the mother and the child” (8). While beforehand her experiences of interconnectedness were necessarily fleeting and mediated (e.g. she was unable to fully apprehend the voices, the moment of contact with Vanessa was brief and behind Nelly’s back, her instances of literary inspiration were unpredictable and arbitrary, etc.), she is now able, from her new vantage point, to fully experience the resonances, to occupy the space in which everything comes together.

V. LITERARY GENERATIVITY

Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, both in its immediate narrative content and in its implications of intertextuality, is concerned with the permeability of boundaries between spheres, both temporal and textual, and the disruptive effect that it can have on attempts toward categorization and alignment. As a textual project itself, Cunningham’s novel is also concerned with the capacity of literature to enact these kinds of disruptions, the capacity of text and writing to forge connections between diverse subjectivities, temporalities, etc., and to provide access, however brief, to a sense of interconnectedness. Mary Joe Hughes describes *The Hours* as comprised of themes from *Mrs. Dalloway* that are allowed to “ripple out in wider and wider circles” (“The Hours and Postmodern Artistic Representation”). The notion of literature rippling outwards, or, to return to a familiar metaphor, refracting through caves, recalls Woolf’s own treatment of the

Shakespearean dirge in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The surfacing of “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun...” in various subjectivities throughout the novel points to the capacity of literature to forge connections across space and time. Cunningham expands on this idea, using the connective capacity of literature as the basis for his own heavily intertextual novel.

Indeed, I think *The Hours* suggests a degree of association between the interconnectedness that is found in death, in the gathering up of the lost and discarded in a kind of queer archive, and the capacity for literary generativity (or the ability of literature to embody and inspire interconnectedness) that pervades the three narratives. As I have outlined, the faculty that takes over Virginia, that drives her to write, is the same faculty that ultimately drives her to take her own life, to sink into the realm of incoherence and connection. The project of literature in *The Hours* is figured, I would argue, as a queer attempt to forge connections, whether between aspects of the self (e.g. Virginia’s vacillation between the “ordinary” and incoherent selves), between characters (e.g. the moment of exquisite contact in *Mrs. Dalloway* that refracts through *The Hours*), or between the living and the dead (e.g. Laura Brown’s reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the communion with Virginia that it engenders). In this way, literature is not only figured as an attempt to recuperate what has been lost – Richard’s writing, for example, is described as “prolix lamentations over worlds either vanishing or lost entirely” – but also as an entity with the capacity for resonance across space and time (65).

Furthermore, *The Hours* also enacts this queer project of connection and disorientation that it attributes to literature in general. It is temporally ambiguous, positioning itself both chronologically before and after *Mrs. Dalloway*; it refuses to be

labeled as simply a retelling or a double of a previous text, insisting instead on multiplicity and complexity; and it dramatizes countless instances of fluidity and permeability between categories such as alignment and incoherence, present and past, and life and death. Each character has a sense, during certain moments, that “anything could happen,” that the role that one has been given, the script that dictates the trajectory of one’s life, could easily be thrown away (95). This is, I would argue, the central conceit of *The Hours*; in refusing categorization itself (e.g. as a clear-cut double of Woolf’s text), it advocates for the sense of infinite possibility and connection that can arise out of a disruption to linearity and normativity. It provides access to a sense of potentiality and multiplicity, a vision of the world in which one can encounter, as Richard does, countless iterations of the present moment, in which one can be put in touch, like Virginia, with the “animating mysteries” of the world.

CONCLUSION

RECAPITULATING, REVISIONING, REFRAMING

This thesis has considered the uneasy connections formed both within and between modernist and contemporary works. I have drawn on theorists such as Ahmed, Freeman, Edelman, and Love in order to establish the existing discourse on temporal (non)normativity, centering particularly on the idea of the queer moment as disruptive. The central idea of my thesis is the antithesis between the “line,” or the normative trajectory that would seek to categorize and sterilize the diversity of human experience (symbolized by Sir William Bradshaw’s “wall of gold” and devotion to “proportion”), and the troubled connections that can be formed across these perceived divisions. A key consideration has been the necessity of mediated connection, symbolized by the recurring images of the curtain and blind. In my readings, boundaries between entities (i.e. texts, bodies, subjectivities) do not collapse entirely, resulting in a kind of bland homogeneity. Rather, diversity is maintained as distinctions become more permeable, allowing for the queer interplay and interpenetration of such categories as past and present, the dead and the living, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, etc.

While my project has utilized a number of key binaries such as these, it is not intended to reassert the primacy of attempts toward categorization, but rather to demonstrate the capacity of characters and texts to vacillate between spheres or even to rest momentarily on the borderline, thus emphasizing the difficulty of clear-cut distinction. Indeed, my project is full of hybrid characters and entities. In *Mrs. Dalloway*,

both Clarissa and Peter register as ambiguous in terms of “alignment” and disruption, and each is capable of embodying either side of the dichotomy. In *The Hours*, each protagonist is given to encounters with her “second self,” and acknowledges the incoherent complexity of her own self-concept. Just as Clarissa Dalloway cannot say of herself “I am this, I am that,” we too cannot form definitive diagnoses of the characters or of the texts themselves (*Mrs. Dalloway* 7). The permeability of boundaries is such that momentary connections are able to form between diverse aspects of the self, between characters (e.g. in the physical contact of the kiss as well as in the more metaphorical contact symbolized by the resonances in the caves), between the living and the dead (e.g. between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus, as well as Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf), and between texts (e.g. Woolf’s novel “bubbling up” unpredictably in Cunningham’s), ultimately destabilizing attempts at classification.

These moments of difficult connection, when seemingly separate entities come tentatively together, can be read as queer not only in their frequent evocation of same-sex contact but also, as Kate Haffey puts it, in their capacity to “exist outside an imaginable, scripted future” (152). For example, in forming connections with the figures of the fugitive dead – the events of the past, lost and discarded items, and the ghostly figures of those who are literally deceased – the texts imply value in that which has been disavowed from considerations of the “social good” (*Queer Phenomenology* 21). Just as queerness is posited as a site of negativity that doesn’t presume to offer an articulation of the “social good,” these connections, which find their textual expression in revisioning or queer archival projects, represent an alternative modality, one that exists independently from

and in spite of normative categories of value. Following from this, my thesis argues that the function of these queer, connective moments is to disrupt and destabilize the notion of progress that shapes typical conceptions of a life, narrative, or text, and to provide an instance, however brief, in which one can be called upon to reconsider categories of valuation that place such great emphasis on futurity.

While these disruptions undoubtedly manifest within the realm of the text, my thesis also seeks to address the metatextual implications of the fugitive dead concept, which I have gleaned from Heather Love. I would therefore like to conclude with a more extended exploration of the notion of revisioning, which can be read as a textual example of this uneasy or mediated connection with the fugitive dead. I have already addressed revisioning in relation to Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, which plays upon Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, both invoking and disavowing the notion of the textual double or clear-cut retelling. However, I would like to posit that Cunningham's project is representative of a trend in contemporary literature by queer authors: the construction of a text that explicitly recalls a work or works from the literary past, drawing on it for inspiration even as it complicates it. Contemporary texts that can be read in this light include Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, Yann Martel's *Self* and Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home*, which I will use to help frame my concluding thoughts on revisioning. My intention here is to demonstrate how the concepts I have elucidated in this thesis, namely, the queer challenge posed to normative temporality by the resurfacing of the fugitive dead, can be mobilized in contemporary literature in various ways and across multiple forms. It is important to note that although Cunningham's text precedes Bechdel's by a

number of years, I have no interest in creating an argument that would indicate any definitive “progress” from the first text to the second. My point is not that Bechdel’s project is in any way an improvement upon Cunningham’s, as this would simply be a reassertion of the kind of progress narratives that my thesis seeks to challenge. Rather, my analysis of *Fun Home* demonstrates that ghosts can crop up in multiple forms, resurfacing just as powerfully in the reproduced photographs of a graphic memoir as in the tripartite narrative of three housewives.

I. *FUN HOME*: REVISIONING AS MEDIATED CONNECTION

Bechdel’s text is perhaps a more literal dramatization of the encounter with the fugitive dead than is Cunningham’s. It consists, on a basic level, of an attempt to reconstitute that which has been relegated to the past; it is at once a recollection of Alison Bechdel’s childhood and adolescence and an attempt to encounter the figure of her absent father, with “absent” signifying both the disconnect that marked his interactions with his family and the literal absence brought about by his early death. The project that Bechdel undertakes here is at once a eulogy for her father, an attempt to come to terms with the circumstances of his death, and a testament to the tentative connections between a father and daughter who are figured as inversions or translations of one another.

The reconstitution of her father’s past is guided to a great extent by a plethora of intertexts. While Cunningham’s text is interested, as I have shown, in a certain degree of disjunction and complexity, Bechdel takes this notion of complication even further. She distances herself from any one literary antecedent, building up her memoir from countless

materials. Not only does she structure her work around relics of the literary past – each chapter centres on a different “canonical” text – but she also incorporates all kinds of texts, painstakingly reproducing such items as “family photographs, a police report, diary pages, court documents, calendar pages, newspaper headlines, a strip of photo negatives, handwritten and typed letters, [...] and more” (Rohy 341). Just as the text is constituted out of seemingly incongruous materials – which range, for example, from Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* to Roadrunner cartoons – it also provides just as complex a portrait of Alison’s father. While Bechdel spends much of the text considering her father’s identity as a closeted gay man in the rural Midwest, she does not allow his life to be reduced to the basic attribute of his homosexuality. The intertexts – the literary works and the archival materials – provide Bechdel with the raw material with which to construct a portrayal that does justice to her father’s complexity. His identification with Fitzgerald and the perfectly constructed, Gatsby-like mystique of his library cast him as a ‘nineteenth-century aristocrat,’ while the police report that indicates his misconduct with a high-school-age boy demonstrates a potentially more troubling aspect of his personality. These, taken together with, for example, the photograph of him as a university student in a woman’s bathing suit, among countless other artifacts, render him wholly uncategorizable. Bechdel draws upon the archive of her father’s life to piece together a hybrid figure, one that is resistant to easy definition, but, like the text itself, is rather multi-faceted and diverse.

While the intertexts structure and inform Bechdel’s memoir, I would argue that their function in this text is not to act as literary precursors, but rather to create a project

of revisioning that takes as its primary antecedent the narrative of Bruce Bechdel's life; they come together to "combine and create" in the same way that Clarissa seeks to bring individuals together as an offering of sorts (*Mrs. Dalloway* 103). Just as Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* bubbles up in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, here, in *Fun Home*, elements of the father's life arise in the daughter's memoir. Bechdel unearths the physical traces of her father's existence, painstakingly reproducing each material and document and offering her own comments throughout. It is important that her perspective as the narrator is at a remove both from the character Alison, her own childhood and adolescent self, and, evidently, from the perspective of her father at various stages of his life. She is piecing together the narrative from clues and speculation; the return to the past is therefore not complete, but is rather mediated by the self-conscious interpretation of the present-day narrator. This is a project of revisioning, then, that, like *The Hours*, develops out of disjunction; the resonance of the past is undoubtedly felt in the present, but the sound waves are somewhat distorted, and the two narratives don't quite overlap. Like Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughan, Bechdel ultimately maintains the distinction between temporal categories.

The text expresses a great deal of anxiety regarding this difficulty of connection, dramatizing Alison's childhood struggles with the problem of the signifier/signified. Influenced by the silences and secrecy that pervade her household, she becomes increasingly concerned about the capacity of language to adequately represent reality, and seeks to "close the gap" between them (Lemberg 133). The medium of visual images becomes, for young Alison, a means of "sutur[ing]" this gap (*Fun Home* 142); cartoons

become a strategy for negotiating the “endless slippage between signifier and signified” (Bechdel qtd. in Warhol 10). I read cartoons here as a means of forming a mediated connection between the spheres of reality and language. Faced with the difficulty of translating her real experiences into the written word (e.g. in her diary entries), Alison finds solace and pleasure in her capacity to draw. Jennifer Lemberg comments on a particular series of images in which young Alison rocks back in forth in her chair, bringing herself to orgasm while drawing the figure of a basketball player: “While drawing the picture has not itself caused her to orgasm, the caption makes it so that the reader encounters these two acts almost simultaneously, their connection made explicit” (134). Lemberg concludes that the basketball player functions as a “surrogate” (*Fun Home* 170) for Alison’s “queer identity,” and that her drawing provides her with a means of signifying “feelings she cannot put into words” (134). It is no coincidence, then, that the difficult narrative of her father’s life and death is translated not into a typical, written memoir, but rather manifests in the graphic memoir form. I would like to posit that the struggle of representation that Alison describes in *Fun Home* can be read as a comment on the strategy for the project as a whole, namely, the use of images and cartoons to “close the gap” between the amorphous narrative of her father’s life and the perceived inadequacies of written representation. Bechdel’s connection with her father, or the absent, lost figure of the fugitive dead, is mediated not only by the temporal distance between the narrator and the events of the narrative, but also by the graphic novel form. The text is imbued, even on a formal level, with an anxiety regarding the difficulty of connection, dramatizing attempts toward mediation through the visual medium.

Indeed, the representations of Alison and her father, both visual and otherwise, throughout the text demonstrate a disconnection between the two. As Jennifer Lemberg states, the images that begin and end each chapter often depict Alison and Bruce Bechdel “occupying the same space yet engaged in separate pursuits” (137). They are even described as wholly conflicting: Bechdel employs the antiquated term “invert” invoking its historical defining of the homosexual as a “person whose gender expression is at odds with his or her sex,” to describe each figure, implying that they embody the inverse or opposite not only of their assigned gender, but also of one another. Their relationship revolves around continuous conflict over such seeming trivialities as barrettes and velvet, with Alison “trying to compensate for something unmanly in him” and Bruce “attempting to express something feminine through [her]” (98).

Despite their often oppositional characterization, Bechdel explores the capacity for their identities to come uneasily together. Referring to Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*,²⁷ she evokes the image of two paths that seem at first to be “diametrically opposed,” but are later “revealed to converge – to have always converged – through a vast ‘network of transversals’” (102). This evokes an image of multiplicity and proliferation, of experience from one subjectivity becoming distorted and reemerging in an altered form in another. Alison and Bruce Bechdel, despite their perceived opposition, become two parallel articulations of the concept of “inversion”; they are connected precisely by the qualities that would code them as opposites. That father and daughter are not replicas but constituted through transversal coding is particularly evident in the two

²⁷ Proust’s seven-volume opus also centres around the fluidity of boundaries between present and past, and can also be read in terms of the fugitive dead. Indeed, Bechdel discusses the resonance of the original French title, *A la Recherche de Temps Perdu*, in terms of the difficulty of recovering the past (119).

parallel images of Alison and her father, respectively, that close the fourth chapter of *Fun Home*. Bechdel reveals that her photograph had been taken by her lover, and wonders if the same is true of her father, foregrounding the importance of the queer relationships to the parallelism of the images. While their queerness or “inversion” is ostensibly what sets them at odds, with each embodying the opposite gender role from the other, it is also their queerness that serves to connect them. Bechdel describes their connection as one of translation, enumerating the similarities between the photographs: “The exterior setting, the pained grin, the flexible wrists, even the angle of shadow falling across our faces – it’s about as close as a translation can get” (120). I read these two images as a visual representation of the mediated connection between father and daughter – the photographs are strikingly similar, presumably both in origin and in appearance, but there remains a degree of tension between them; the overlap between Alison and Bruce is necessarily incomplete, mediated by the mirror or, in this case, the lens of the camera.

The mediated connection between Alison and her father is further grounded in the visual medium by the “centerfold” picture of the text, which is a reproduction of a photograph of Roy, Alison’s childhood babysitter and her father’s lover. The image depicts a scantily clad Roy in a hotel bedroom, presumably the room that he shared with Alison’s father on a family trip to the seaside. Bechdel describes the “ethereal, painterly quality” of the picture, acknowledging that it is “beautiful,” and reflecting upon the “trace” of her “father’s illicit awe” that “seems caught in the photo” (101). In an interview with Hillary Chute, Bechdel describes the importance of this particular photograph to her project:

It was a stunning glimpse into my father's hidden life, this life that was apparently running parallel to our regular everyday existence. And it was particularly compelling to me at the time because I was just coming out myself. I felt this sort of posthumous bond with my father, like I shared this thing with him, like we were comrades. I didn't start working on the book then, but over the years that picture persisted in my memory. It's literally the core of the book, the centerfold. (1006)

The photograph represents an articulation of commonality with her father and even inspires a sense of comradeship and understanding that was largely absent from their relationship during his life. It is interesting that while the photograph evokes a sense of the parallelism that marks their respective lives, it also serves to emphasize their differences. Indeed, while Bechdel acknowledges that she identifies with her father's "illicit awe," her appreciation of the photograph is aesthetic rather than sexual. Despite their "shared reverence for masculine beauty," they nevertheless have very different "objects of desire" (*Fun Home* 99). The photograph serves as a touchstone for the connection between father and daughter, but is nevertheless unable to truly bring them into contact with one another. Instead, it serves as a mediating force in their relationship, acting as the object of desire for each of them, but emphasizing the degree to which their perspectives do not quite overlap. Indeed, the photograph seems to occupy the liminal space between them, and, as Ann Cvetkovich argues, "sit[s] uncomfortably within ambiguous distinctions between the erotic and the aesthetic, the past and the present, the father's sexuality and his daughter's" ("Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*" 117).

These moments of ambiguity or uneasy connection abound in *Fun Home*, and serve, to quote Bechdel, as the "core of the book." The narrative revolves around the difficulties of the father/daughter relationship, and is fraught with instances of uneasy

translation, of mirror images that cannot quite see eye to eye. I would like to posit that this incomplete reflection of one subjectivity in another parallels the textual relationship between *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway* and between *Fun Home* and the literary and archival antecedents out of which it is comprised. The relationship of Alison and her father can be seen as itself a representation of *Fun Home*'s textual project – the attempt to effectively connect with and represent that which has been lost and disappeared, namely, Bruce Bechdel himself.

Despite its highlighting of the difficulty of this recuperation project, *Fun Home* also explores the generativity of projects such as these, advocating for the continued exploration of ghostly resonance, and demonstrating the value of the troubling of normative temporalities. Indeed, the last panel of *Fun Home* echoes the very first, positioning young Alison and her father in a swimming pool, the child about to leap into the arms of the adult. Bechdel's narration positions her father as Icarus, likening his suicide to Icarus' fall: "he did hurtle into the sea of course. But through the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt" (232). Here, the end of the narrative mirrors the beginning; the text comes almost full circle as the narratives of Alison and her father reflect back on one another in a mirror image that reimagines Bruce's suicide as Alison's plunge into a swimming pool. Here, she is the one who delves into the realm of death, seeking, through her textual project, to connect with her father and to explore the resonances of the queer past. Bechdel crafts a text that both dramatizes and exemplifies the possibilities of connection, that both attests to and breaks down the seemingly irreconcilable differences between father and daughter as well as

between past and present. *Fun Home* represents an articulation of the fugitive dead concept that is particularly striking in its evocation of mediation and of the generative capacity of attempts toward connection. Taken together with projects such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, it attests to the infinite potentialities of the past, to the diverse ways in which resonances may be attended to, and to the capacity of literature to demonstrate and embody alternatives to normative narrative trajectories.

II. OUTSIDE THE FRAME: TEMPORALITY, GENDER, GENRE

While my thesis takes as its central metaphor the concept of the “line” or of the linear trajectory, it may also be helpful in terms of implications to consider the notion of the frame, of how lives and texts are framed as intelligible or coherent. Judith Butler explores the concept of the frame, how it can be seen to constitute the “recognizability” of a life and how, through its breaking, the norms out of which it is structured can be called into question. I think her discussion of framing resonates closely with my own considerations of the fugitive dead; the figures of the lost and disappeared exist outside the frame, and encounters with them serve to disturb the carefully maintained boundaries between inside and outside, or between those who are recognizable and those who are not. “What,” Butler asks, “is this specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating at its inside and its outside?” (12). How can we address this tension on the borderline? Butler employs the term “apprehension,” which evokes connotations of unease, as well as the attempt to pin down or capture, to refer to these encounters, an association which connects well with my figuring of the fugitive dead as

haunting, uncanny, and elusive. She also claims that such moments “can become the basis for a critique of norms of recognition” (5). I see a connection between this notion of apprehension and critique and my own claims that queer moments offer a respite from and a challenge to linear normativity. Indeed, my thesis and the work it does in terms of (dis)alignment, can be read as an articulation of Butler’s frame concept. My focus in this thesis has been on temporality, specifically on how “particular orchestrations of time” function to maintain intelligibility (e.g. progress narratives), as well as how these trajectories can be disrupted (e.g. in the experience of queer moments) (Freeman 3). I would posit that these specifically temporal frames represent simply one facet of larger systems of intelligibility and effacement that structure what Butler refers to as “domains of the knowable” (6).

Indeed, my thesis brings up other framing mechanisms, including the concepts of gender and genre, for example, and suggests the means by which they can be challenged, just as temporal frames are. I mentioned that the texts I have chosen to consider are often populated by doubles or doppelgangers: Clarissa and Septimus, Septimus and Richard, Richard and Sally, and Alison and Bruce Bechdel, to name a few. I think it is crucial to add to the conversation that the genders of these pairs are ostensibly contrasting, and, therefore, that the identifications and affinities that the texts build up between them may serve to deconstruct the seemingly solid boundaries or frames of the gender binary. The texts mobilize ostensibly oppositional gendered categories in order to demonstrate that both the boundaries between subjectivities and between genders may not be so clear-cut.

Generic conventions are similarly troubled in these texts. Indeed, if we conceive of genre more generally, as Chambers does, as the set of norms that determine intelligibility within a culture, then the concept of genre may be intimately bound up with the notion of framing: both work to enclose that which is recognizable, foreclosing those lives and experiences that are “out of bounds” (24). More specifically, literary genre functions as a framing mechanism itself, presenting textual material within certain contexts and conventions that ensure its coherence. The texts that my thesis explores, however, are prone to generic difficulty: *The Hours* can be read as a generic hybrid, amalgamating textual material and convention from fiction and biography, as well as resurrecting in part Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. *Fun Home* uses the genre of the graphic memoir, a strategy for representation that hovers on the borderline between the textual and the visual and points to the difficulty of signification that pervades the memoir itself. Genre here serves to illuminate the tension on the borderline between frames (e.g. between fiction and biography) as well as the difficulty of framing strategies themselves (e.g. graphic memoir as a strategy for framing intelligibility that points to its own liminality).

Considerations of gender and genre can be taken together with the work that this thesis does on temporality in order to explore how intelligibility is framed, and how these frames can be disrupted or damaged. This thesis is concerned with what exceeds or eludes intelligibility, with what is outside the frame, and how it can be encountered or, as Butler puts it, ethically “apprehended.” The fugitive dead, or all those figures who have been effaced by an emphasis on progression and futurity, can be heard in such diverse

places as London on a June morning, a hotel room in 1940s Los Angeles, a box of photographs, a literary revisioning project, and an AIDS memorial quilt. I would encourage further scholarship to take up the baton, as in Chambers' process of relay, and to explore other ways in which that which exists outside of normative frames, in terms of temporality or otherwise, can be encountered. While these connections may be difficult, mediated, or uneasy, it is crucial to learn to inhabit Avery Gordon's "domain of turmoil and trouble," to welcome disorientation, and to listen to the voices of the spectres (xvi). My hope is that such inquiries and explorations may serve to call into question the emphasis on linearity and categorization that structures normative interactions, and to consider the ways in which the "logic of separability" that Chambers identifies may be challenged by a logic of connection that fosters affinity, celebrating rather than disavowing the voices (and the resonances) of the lost and disappeared.

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