A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR RETHINKING LOVE BETWEEN WOMEN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LESBIAN NARRATIVE IN IRISH WOMEN'S WRITING, 1801 – 2017

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by

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Abstract

Lesbian existence was more or less absent from the Irish public arena until the 1980s, when David Norris began the battle to decriminalise homosexual acts. Following that event, female writers produced a plethora of literatures featuring openly lesbian characters. However, the lesbian subject, expressed implicitly, existed on the peripheries of Irish fiction long before then. This study examines the development of Irish lesbian narrative between 1801 and 2017 based on stages of Vivienne Cass's "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model" (1979). Beginning with the investigation of romantic friendships between women, *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* looks closely at the historical antecedents preceding the emergence of lesbian desire in early-nineteenth-century literature, and later examines to what extent women's performativity of female masculinity in selected *fin-de-siècle* writing can be read as nuanced references to lesbian passion.

The thesis then examines a variety of narrational techniques to demonstrate the development of lesbian narrative in the early twentieth century. It investigates the narrative's emphasis on *lesbian continuum*, and exemplifies adolescent lesbian characters "bracketing" heterosexually-centred narratives. As the focus of the analysis then shifts to post-war fiction, the project reveals the notion of *lesbian existence* in women's prose, and discusses how postmodernism aided Irish female authors in writing texts in which lesbian love occupies pivotal spaces.

With an advancement of lesbian politics at the end of the twentieth century, authors began to centralise lesbian characters and desire in an explicit manner. The concluding part of the thesis focuses on diasporic Irish lesbian writing from England, Canada, and Trinidad and Tobago. It demonstrates that, with the influences of globalisation, transnationalism, and transculturalism, the development of Irish lesbian fiction in diaspora represents another dimension of lesbian writing and lesbian politics.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

From Hesitation to Pride/Synthesis: The Journey of Irish Lesbian Narrative between 1801 and 2017

The personal interest in this area of study derives from my own voluntary national displacement caused by the inability to reconcile multiple identities in my country of birth – Polish, lesbian and Catholic. Polish lesbian politics and community are practically non-existent in a country predominantly governed by men, an unwavering power of the Catholic Church, and a new homophobic government and leading party. There only exist a handful of LGBTQI+ organisations, none of which are strictly lesbian. Women's roles in Polish society are still largely those of wives and mothers, and their position is still confined in large measure to the private sphere. Moreover, Polish feminism, which is classified as only in its second wave (Graff 103), does not include lesbian-feminism. The limited position of women in the public discourse, and the invisibility of lesbians in feminist ranks, strengthen stereotypes and lesbophobia, which often lead to acts of hate and even aggression. Therefore, the insubstantiality of translating the modern and sophisticated word "queer" into Polish worked in favour of many lesbians, who chose this identification in order to escape the derisive ring of the polish word "lesbian" [*lesbijka*] (Kowalska 329-330). However, this unfortunately also further emphasised the indiscernibility of Polish lesbian individuality. Taking all of this into consideration, the Republic of Ireland, where the visibility and a near-full acceptance of lesbians were improved in a short period of a mere few decades, became a source of my amazement and admiration. Preceding the 1970s, the two countries were quite similar in terms of religiosity, heteronormative patriarchy, and a hidden lesbian existence and politics, yet Poland is now a long way behind Ireland, and the rest of Western Europe, in granting its gay and lesbian citizens equal human rights.

In most Western countries, on the other hand, the arena of gay, lesbian and queer studies has gained a lot of publicity in recent years. In times when economically-developed countries grant equal marriage rights to their lesbian and gay citizens, and where homo-, lesbo- and transphobia begin to be reproached and, in fact, in many cases criminalised, lesbian, gay, trans and queer studies are thriving. A vast multiplicity of works on same-sex desire and gender and sexual dissidence are emerging frequently, where new theories, criticism, historical and geopolitical studies, to name but a few, implement and intersect with this vastly growing field.

The Republic of Ireland, specifically, which joined the European Union in 1973, decriminalised homosexual acts in 1993, and held a successful referendum on equal marriage rights to same-sex couples in 2015, is becoming an area of interest to many scholars. The country, which until quite recently, was considered to be a cradle of Catholic faith, and was known for its vast emigration following the periods of famine and economic depression, made huge economic advances in the era of the Celtic Tiger and opened its borders not only to non-Irish immigrants, but also to returning gay men and lesbians who were no longer afraid to exhibit their true sexual identities in Ireland (Emma Donoghue, 'Coming Home'). And, as it is so often the case, national literature was the fervent companion of these changes, reflecting, more or less overtly, influences of the new Irish economy, cultural hybridity, and, most importantly, LGBTQI+ politics.

Many Irish lesbian authors and their novels or short stories have been analysed in a vast number of texts by various scholars. These, however, concentrate either on one author, or a comparison of a few novels/short stories based on one given time period. Although Emma Donoghue, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, quotes and briefly describes lesbian prose and poetry written in Gaelic and English between 1745 and 1997, there has not yet been a complete work that has gathered and inspected in depth a wide range of prose by major lesbian Irish novelists written in English into a single work. *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* offers an examination of works and their authors, together with analyses of Irish historical and social context in a single volume.

For centuries, there existed a division between Irish, Anglo-Irish and Irish-born migrant authors and, given Irish history, such demarcation is unavoidable. Nonetheless, one of my arguments within this thesis is that, despite the geographical location, it is still possible to identify as Irish and have a strong emotional connection with the country of origin. Consequently, I will offer analyses of such writers as Anna Livia, who emigrated from Ireland, and Shani Mootoo, who was born and is ancestrally related to Ireland, but was raised in Trinidad and Tobago from her early infancy. Nevertheless, it is highly noticeable that these authors' works are clearly affected by Ireland, with its culture, traditions and its people. My study will provide an account of major female writers in *and* of Ireland, in whose works there can be found detectable traces suggesting the presence of lesbian desire. Other than concentrating on fiction emerging from within the borders of the Republic of Ireland, the final part of this thesis concentrates on the twentieth- and twenty-first-century diasporic lesbian writing. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, writing from England, Canada, or Trinidad and Tobago, allowed

Irish female authors to write about lesbian desire in an open manner. With the influences of globalism, transnationalism, and transculturalism, the development of lesbian fiction written from diaspora was quite distinct from works emerging from the Republic alone.

The stages of the development of Irish lesbian narrative that I put forth in *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* come from my reconceptualisation of Vivienne Cass's theoretical model of "Homosexual Identity Formation" (1979). She devised her model based on clinical questionnaire work with a number of Australian gay men and lesbians. Cass's theory is pioneering amongst other psychologists, who later proposed similar models: Coleman (1982), Minton and McDonald (1984), and Troiden (1989). Over the years 1985 and 1986, Sophie devised a model developed specifically for women, which opened the field for an emergence of biracial identity models of multiply-oppressed minority groups: Downing and Roush (1985), Morales (1989), Reynolds and Pope (1991), and Ossana, Helms and Leonard (1992). Additionally, in 1996, McCarn and Fassinger proposed 'A New Model of Lesbian Identity and Its Implications for Counselling and Research,' which, as its name clearly states, is based exclusively on the development of lesbian sexuality. Nevertheless, although my study adheres strictly to lesbians, with the final stages reflecting the development of lesbian fiction from diasporic and non-white backgrounds, the original model of Vivienne Cass proves to be most useful, as her verification of the consecutive stages of development fits the purpose of my investigation and portrays clearly the advancement of Irish lesbian narrative. Although the stages of the lesbian narrative's progression are not strictly correspondent with those of identity development, I found that their consecutive names, rather than their specific meanings, reflect concordantly the progression of an ever-growing lesbian presence in Irish texts by female authors.

Cass developed her model relying largely on the existing framework of interpersonal congruency theory of Secord and Backman, and Secord, Backman, and Eachus, which, as she states, was based on the interactions of homosexual individuals with their environment (Cass, "A Theoretical Model" 221). In order to be brought into a closer relation with the final stage of development, synthesis, the subject (or in my case, the text), would have to achieve congruency with an imagined perception of self and the social perception of self by others. In other words, the fiction needs to achieve an affirming view of itself in the eyes of its authors, as well as in the eyes of the readers. Thus, the Irish fiction that I chose to analyse as featuring lesbian desire, was to be congruent with three factors: the existing knowledge on women's same-sex intimacy

at each period of time, the state of the juridical law in terms of lesbian politics and censorship, and an anticipated perception of each text by the wider public.

Moreover, Cass emphasises that

> the development of private and public homosexual identities is recounted and portrayed as two separate but related processes. It is possible for [the subject] to hold a private identity of being homosexual while maintaining a public identity of being heterosexual. With increasing identity development comes a growing consistency between the two identities, giving rise in the final stage to an overall and integrated homosexual identity. ("A Theoretical Model" 220)

The interrelation of those two identities in Cass's model reflects succinctly the development of the consecutive stages of Irish lesbian narrative, where, at first, references to lesbian desire are subliminal, or even unconscious, in the second stage they become careful of disclosure but are certainly suggestive, and in the ultimate three stages become indicative of the lesbians' social relations with each other and, finally, with the broader social world. Although Cass's model adheres to both gay men and lesbians, and it does not take into consideration bisexual or transgender identities, I believe that it suits the purpose of my work, as my reconceptualisation can portray a clear pathway of development, thus underlining one of my main aims of this thesis, which is to exemplify the shifts in Irish lesbian narrative in relation to Irish history and lesbian politics.

The reformulation of Cass's stages is, furthermore, supported by close textual and historical analyses of the texts, where I do not concentrate solely on the development of Irish lesbian narrative per se, but also verify how the presence of lesbian desire is determined by historical antecedents and the state of (lesbian) politics in a given time period. I pay particular attention to symbolism, textual techniques and experimentation, in order to observe some characteristic patterns indicative of each stage. I also propose a new framework, within which each text can be contextualised theoretically – this is often supported by a reconceptualisation of the already-existing studies according to which I develop my original terminology.

Cass divided her model into six stages: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. For the purpose of my investigation, however, I chose to limit this number to five, which resulted from the merging of the last two stages and transforming their names, in

order to provide the most accurate image of the state of lesbian narrative at a particular moment in time and national politics regarding sexual relations between women. Therefore, the stage of confusion becomes the stage of hesitation, which is indicative of the texts' questioning, assuming and suggesting lesbian sexuality beginning from the early nineteenth century. The hesitation is portrayed in Chapter One as the supposed, although not intended attempts of writers to suggest women's fervent interrelations. Initially, it discusses the flourish and the first Irish case of romantic friendship of the Ladies of Llangollen that was rumoured to be more intense in its nature than those generally practiced at the time, and the chapter argues that the record of their relationship is the starting point of the analysis of New Woman writing, which came later at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it analyses incidents of cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering in the New Woman fiction that emphasised women's efforts at defying the prevailing gender roles and, as I argue, signalling their same-sex passion.

A more advanced stage of hesitation, at the turn of the twentieth century, begins to be more suggestive of implicit references to lesbian desire than in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. The alternative to heterosexual submissiveness can be observed in women challenging gender hierarchy, a feature which prevails in the New Woman descriptions of cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering characters. Furthermore, I propose that those actions of gender performativity, or of performing female masculinity, are also early representations of lesbian desire. Although the characters analysed in Chapter One are portrayed as heterosexual throughout the courses of their respective texts, there certainly are perceptible allusions to homoerotic desire, as Sarah Grand's Boy and Katherine Thurston's Max are not only women who impersonate men, but, whilst in character, initiate intense same-sex friendships, making them same-sex desiring women, although not lesbians in the exact meaning of the word as we understand it today. Chapter One also draws attention to either absence or inadequacy of men, a feature which, in fact, prevails in lesbian fiction to this day. This facilitates two further patterns of the first stage of development, the emergence of the lesbian phallus, that results from the absence of the male phallus in George Egerton's 'The Spell of the White Elf,' and the transformation of lesbian desire into situational heterosexuality in Sarah Grand's *A Domestic Experiment* and Rosa Mulholland's *The Tragedy of Chris*, where both heroines reluctantly accept male advances after failures in initiating same-sex relations with their chosen objects of desire; failures that were partially, but not predominantly, caused by the expectations of Irish heteronormative society.

The next consecutive stage, of comparison/exploration, 'marks the first tentative commitment to a homosexual self' (Cass, "A Theoretical Model" 225). Therefore, the comparison in Chapter Two refers to the impact of the availability and accessibility of lesbian writing from Western countries, such as England or France, which has undoubtedly influenced Irish female prose in terms of a more ostensible presence of female same-sex romantic attachment. The exploration, on the other hand, adheres to experimental textual techniques adopted by Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Molly Keane, which allowed them to include the subject of passion between women in their works. The chapter analyses several narrational tools, such as adolescence, *lesbian continuum, lesbian panic*, *de rigueur* lesbian presence, and lesbian desire "bracketing" the dominant heterosexual plots, in order to emphasise the authors' attempts at exploring lesbian sexuality in Irish female writing. The term "bracketing," specifically, through my reconceptualisation of Maud Ellmann's "shadowy third," plays a vital role in my analysis of the implementation of lesbian love within the discourse of Irish lesbian writing at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term refers to an implicit presence of lesbian desire that is interwoven into the peripheries of the otherwise heterosexually-centred texts. "Bracketing" does not only enter the subject of lesbian sexuality into the discourse of Irish women's writing in a more open and positive manner than New Woman writing but, as a matter of fact, bypasses Irish censorship in a very intricate way, and begins to invade the potential readers' subconscious by appearing as a secondary feminine character, yet indispensable to the plot of the text.

Before the lesbian narrative of Ireland progressed and began nearing towards the next stage, tolerance, it remained at the advanced stage of comparison/exploration until the late 1980s, as portrayed in Chapter Three. By advanced, I mean the appearance of more explicit references to lesbian desire, which were exhibited in the use of *lesbian existence*. Whereas references to the lesbian subject in Bowen's pre-World War Two fictions were sublime and predominantly concentrated around heterosexuality, the influence of the second wave of feminism around the 1960s and 1970s, and later postmodernism, allowed her to write about same-sex female attraction in a more open manner, with the cloistered and assumed lesbian passion at the centre of the text. Other writers of this later stage also implemented lesbian desire less implicitly and discussed lesbian affairs as more focal to the course of the novel, with Kate O'Brien situating her lesbian couple in the late nineteenth-century Italy, thus highlighting the importance of the concept of *lesbian existence*, Elizabeth Bowen entering the term "lesbian" into the discourse in *The Little Girls* (1964), and, finally, Edna O'Brien taking her Irish heroine

to Spain, to initiate and consummate her affair with a local girl. This advanced stage, therefore, with its bold representations of lesbian sexuality at its furthest end, paved the way for the emergence of the consecutive stages, where lesbian desire would be written about in an explicit manner, with authors discussing sexual issues and a development of an openly lesbian sexuality.

Stages of tolerance, acceptance and pride/synthesis are all encapsulated into Chapter Four, owing to the blistering advancement of Irish lesbian politics at the turn of the twenty-first century. As John McGahern observes in his interview for the *Guardian*, 'Ireland is a peculiar society in the sense that it was a nineteenth-century society up to about 1970 and then it almost bypassed the twentieth century' (McCrum n.p.). Whereas stages of tolerance and acceptance are interwoven into the last decade of the twentieth century, the combined stage of pride/synthesis emerges in the second half of the 2000s. In Cass's original theory, it is at the stage of tolerance where the subject becomes alienated (Cass, "A Theoretical Model" 229) because of acknowledging the differences between his/her own and others perception of his/hers sexual identity. Although the subject becomes more tolerant of their sexuality, he/she notices that the environment is not as acceptant, as the subject meets with contempt and disapproval from the larger social world. Accordingly, lesbian texts from the first half of the 1990s are concerned with the process of coming out, and although there is an observable transformation of the narrative to accommodate and prioritise the subject of lesbian desire, it still remains somewhat stigmatised.

Towards the end of the last decade of the twentieth century, the fiction begins to enter the stage of acceptance, as it advocates lesbian integration and accentuates its stand against lesbophobia. Therefore, the process of coming out, prevalent at the beginning of the 1990s, is transformed, and begins to be perceptible in forms of not only public coming out, but also a closer relationship with other representatives of the LGBTQI+ community. With the approach of globalism and transnationalism in the twenty-first century, lesbian desire began to be referred to not only directly, but also with a sense of pride and openness. Cass argues that it is at the stages of pride and synthesis when the individual begins to feel 'pride towards [own] homosexual identity' (Cass, "Testing a Theoretical Model" 152). Therefore, I re-appropriated those two final stages into a combination of pride and synthesis, as lesbian identity presented in Emma Donoghue's *Landing* (2007) portrays Irish society as generally accepting and inclusive, where issues of coming out and seclusion, prevailing only a decade earlier, disappear. In their place Irish women's writing experiences a bold presence of lesbians functioning nearly-equally alongside heterosexual members of the Irish society. At this point, the above-mentioned

division between the private and public homosexual identities is brought into line, and heterosexuals cease to be viewed in a negative light (Cass, "A Theoretical Model" 234); the contact between lesbians and heterosexual others increases, and the fiction moves closer to reconciliation – a congruency between private and public expressions of sexuality.

Nevertheless, although lesbian narrative has evolved through all the stages, that does not mean that the authors will never return to writing fiction indicative of any of the previous stages. As negotiations began to grant the 2015-marriage equality vote in Ireland, there appeared an ever-growing need for an even more categorical assertion of lesbian desire into the tradition of Irish writing. In order to achieve that, however, lesbian writers and communities must work tirelessly to eliminate the differences dividing lesbians across the world. That being the case, the final stage in my reconceptualisation of the model indicates the openness in representations of lesbian desire in Irish women's writing, which is concordant with emphasising the issues troubling lesbian communities across the world. Therefore, Chapter Five, which concentrates on lesbian fiction written from the Irish diaspora, centres on the movement away from the falsely idyllic notion of Lesbian Nation, and towards the inclusivity of racial, cultural and class disparities within lesbian communities. Moreover, the chapter argues that diasporic authors, such as Anna Livia or Shani Mootoo, who were not restricted by the austerity of Ireland with its dominant Catholic religion, censorship, and negativity towards lesbians, could concentrate in a greater measure on an emphasis of the development of lesbian integrity. Chapter Five describes the role of (queer) diaspora, cultural hybridity, and transculturality, and discusses the relationship between lesbians/lesbian fiction and the heterosexual majority of the nation.

However, there exist certain risks of applying a social science model to literature. Firstly, although the model proposed here is to adhere strictly to the development of lesbian fiction, it is at times interfering and overlapping with the (sexual) development of some of the characters, e.g. *Hood* by Emma Donoghue. Secondly, whilst the aim of the thesis is to portray the transition of writing between the consecutive stages, an anomaly in the form of a bisexual character in Mary Dorcey's *Biography of Desire*, for instance, caused an amalgamation of the stages of tolerance and acceptance. Lastly, the combined stage of pride/synthesis indicates that the process of development is not fully completed, nonetheless, this is mainly due to differences dividing the global lesbian community, which will be analysed in Chapter Five.

The period of time chosen for this thesis, 1801-2017, beginning with the analysis of Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and moving nearly a decade beyond Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), derives from its adherence to the development of Irish lesbian narrative. The discussion of the last decade, proposed in Chapter Six, takes into consideration recent changes concerning lesbian communities of the Republic of Ireland *and* Northern Ireland (which otherwise is not the centre of focus of *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women*), whilst noticing recent publications and suggesting anticipated ramifications of the stages proposed in this work. Therefore, the year 2017 is the concluding year, as I aim to highlight the fact that female *and* lesbian writing has still not reached the full synthesis, and thus remains at the stage of pride/synthesis, which is the last stage in my proposed model.

The journey from the stage of hesitance to pride/synthesis depicted in this work answers many questions regarding the formation of the lesbian narrative as we know it today, not only from the point of view of history, but also taking into account sociology, psychology, geography, cultural, queer, and lesbian studies. It considers the role of class and gender hierarchies, religion, nationalism, famine, emigration, and feminist and lesbian movements as intersecting factors in the creation of the lesbian literary subject. Furthermore, it offers a chronological as well as developmental structure to the process in question, which enables a clear and unencumbered experience of noting the historical shifts in Irish lesbian narrative, which inconceivably transformed lesbian fiction of the Irish Republic over the course of the past two centuries.

Chapter One

Covert Representations of Lesbian Desire in *Fin-de-siècle* Fictions by Irish New Woman Writers and the Historical Antecedents in Earlier Irish Literature: 1801 – 1910

Once two young girls of rank and beauty rare,
Of features more than ordinary fair,
Who in the heyday of their youthful charms
Refused the proffer of al suitors' arms, . . .
Their upper habits just like men's they wore,
With tall black beaver hats outside their door; . . .
With hair cropped short, rough, bushy, white as snow. (Prichard 14)

Lesbian connotations within the institution of eighteenth-century romantic friendships

Although works such as Plato's *Symposium* mention lesbian desire as early as the fourth century BC, and discuss it in the seventh century AD as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in the case of Ireland the evidence proves to be scarce.[1] The first widely-known references to lesbian desire in Ireland cannot be found until late eighteenth century, when the story of the famous romantic friendship of Ladies of Llangollen was published in the *General Evening Post* in 1790.[2] I see their intimate relationship as an initial representation of female discourse on sexuality in Ireland. Therefore, an examination of romantic friendships is crucial to the analysis of the New Woman movement for two reasons. Firstly, the qualities of romantic friends are adumbrative of those acquired by the New Woman a century later. Secondly, the emergence of the New Woman and the obliteration of romantic friendships seem to be coinciding at the time when relations between women began to raise serious questions that were seen as threatening to the hegemonic structure of Irish society. Therefore, this chapter will examine Irish women's fiction from the point of view of the stage of hesitation, which is the first stage in the development of Irish lesbian narrative. The stage is characterised by the supposed, but not confirmed, intention of an implicit representations of lesbian desire in Irish history and nineteenth- and early twentieth century literature, seen in textual instances of romantic friendships, as well as acts of cross-dressing and transgendering of its female characters. In its advanced phase, however, those instances become even more suggestive of implicit references to lesbian desire, as protagonists do not only challenge gender hierarchy – their same-sex desire is instead portrayed with the use of the lesbian phallus and situational heterosexuality, which show women who

desire women in non-generic terms that were proposed by the sexologists of this time period. The chapter will analyse the stage of hesitation, beginning with the case of the romantic friendship of the Ladies of Llangollen that dates back to the second half of the eighteenth century, which will be followed by an examination of the emergence of the New Woman movement at the turn of the twentieth century.

Although written accounts of the relationship of the Ladies did not appear until the late eighteenth century, it is important to consider their relationship as the starting point into what will become known as the New Woman writing, where woman-identified-women, through similar means of financial independence, wearing male garments, and surrounding themselves with female friends, will become models of "prelesbianism" that precede the modern taxonomies of lesbian sexualities and genders. The characteristics of the stage of hesitation, therefore, based on Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Edith Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Real Charlotte* (1894), and the two generations of New Woman writers, include not only women challenging the prevailing gender norms, but also their repudiation of the patriarchal and heteronormative system at that time. Lesbian desire at this stage is exhibited through representations of female masculinity, cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering of female protagonists. Additionally, the presumption of the presence of lesbian sexuality is strengthened by the emergence of the lesbian phallus in literature, which is a direct consequence of the absence of the male phallus. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde's trials and the popularisation of the negative perception of lesbians, the stage of hesitation is transformed. As a result, concomitantly with a wide criticism of women's masculine appearance, the New Woman authors begin to portray their characters as feminine who, not able to express their desire directly, resignedly revert to heterosexuality, which I theorise at the end of the chapter as institutional heterosexuality.

Undeniably, women always sought to form more intimate relationships with each other. The most popular form of attachment between women, most likely because of its acceptance and idealisation by the society, was the romantic friendship, which thrived in eighteenth-century Britain. Lillian Faderman explains that '[any] discouragement of romantic friendship seems to have been rare, not only because society believed that love between women fulfilled positive functions such as providing a release for homosocially segregated girls and unhappily married women, but also because men generally doubted that these relationships would be very enduring in any case' (77). Thus, it was not at all extraordinary for eighteenth-century women

to engage in romantic friendships, which only recently began to be considered in some cases as representations of modern lesbian relationships.

The history of romantic friendship dates back to the sixteenth century, although the first case was not recorded in Ireland until the late eighteenth century when the partnership of the Ladies of Llangollen became famous and iconic.[3] Eleanor Charlotte Butler (1739-1829), and Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831), later known as the Ladies, who were daughters of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, initiated their extraordinary passion at corresponding ages of twenty-nine and thirteen that occurred at their first meeting in Kilkenny Castle. Their meeting was followed by years of intimate correspondence that, inter alia, comprised of plans of their elopement: 'in their tranquil talks their ideas seemed to coincide and fit together . . . [and] they were slipping forward into another social epoch of which they were entirely unconscious pioneers' (Gordon 38).

Their first secret attempt to flee from their family homes took place on the 2nd of April 1778, when the Ladies, 'dressed in men's clothes' (Mavor 26), spent their first night together in an isolated barn. Sarah's worsening health, however, did not allow them to continue their journey and the two women resigned to return to their families after having been away for two nights. Although, in words of Mrs Tighe, the daughter of Lady Betty who was Sarah's guardian in Woodstock, 'there were no gentlemen concerned, nor [did] it appear to be anything more than a scheme of Romantic Friendship' (Bell 27), the Ladies' friendship and flight had apparently awoken feelings of uncertainty amongst their relatives as to its genuineness (Mavor 31). Shortly after Sarah regained her strength, the Ladies commenced with their previous plans, but this time openly, with an attempt to receive their families' blessings and an assurance of a continuation of their rents paid to their accounts, to leave for England on 3rd of May 1778, where they began a relationship that, in the view of society, replicated heterosexual marriage.

They settled in the Welsh village of Llangollen, whose name came to represent the Ladies and their relationship. Although many romantic friends wrote passionate letters to each other and, indeed, spent a lot of time in each other's company, it was never known for two ladies to live together. Thus, although not all romantic friendships had lesbian connotations, and many of them were most likely innocuous, the relationship of Butler and Ponsonby became celebrated because of an extraordinary attachment between the women, as well as because of their partial financial independence and a choice of clothing unusual for eighteenth-century women.[4]

In her book, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship*, Elizabeth Mavor offers an in-depth insight into the institution of romantic friendship based on the relationship of the Ladies that, in the eighteenth century, had thrived and celebrated its popularity, with increasing numbers of women devoting their lives to each other. Mavor asserts that the term "romantic" is to be understood as 'fanciful, whimsical, impracticable, [and] absurd' (80) and, especially in the case of the Ladies, a synonym for "retirement." It is only while considering the double connotations of the term "romantic," concomitantly taking into consideration the Ladies' dress code, seclusion, and devotion that resulted in their elopement, that the term "lesbian" forges its way to one's mind. Thus, the Ladies of Llangollen became the earliest documented representation of a lesbian relationship in Ireland. It certainly seemed so to Mrs Piozzi, the Ladies' neighbour, who in her diary, *Thraliana*, suggested that it is likely to be a case of sapphism 'whenever two ladies live too much together' (949). Taking into consideration all the circumstances that accompanied the kinship created by the Ladies, their lesbian desire seems indubitably likely.

Moreover, several studies suggest that romantic friends were often engaging in physical (sexual) contact, thus making Faderman's and Smith-Rosenberg's views that romantic friendships were widely idealised and considered "innocent" and asexual, both by the larger society and quite possibly even to the women involved, seem far-fetched and improbable. Susan Lanser, for example, quotes Bishop Jeremy Taylor, who insists that 'the love of friends [must] sometimes be refreshed with material & low Caresses; lest by striving to be *too* divine it becomes *less humane*' (108). Therefore, despite the lack of evidence for the Ladies' sapphism, I argue their extraordinary case of female attachment with a possibility of an unbiased analysis, and with an argument that the term 'lesbian' does not refer only to women's sexual activity between each other, but that it has a deeper intellectual and emotional meaning. Essentially,

> "lesbian" describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. "Romantic friendship" described a similar friendship. (Faderman 17-18)

Whereas the conviction of the Ladies' lesbian sexuality may evoke a considerable amount of ambivalence, I believe that their famous romantic friendship, unwillingness to marry, and partial financial independence, initiated an idea for such presumption. These exact qualities were adopted over a century later by the New Woman, who revolutionised the *fin-de-siècle* period. Moreover, I have taken an approach to posit the Ladies as the precursors and prognosticators of the New Woman movement in Ireland. Irish women writers at the turn of the century adopted Butler and Ponsonby's devotion to arts and emancipation from men by marking their independence and position in society through means other than marriage, as well as embracing their idea of wearing garments resembling men's attire, thus challenging the heteronormative perceptions of gender hierarchy.

The New Woman writers' representations of their critique of the dominant patriarchal system are manifested through their intricate use of cross-dressing characters, their female characters' challenges to gender norms, and even in their depictions of the natural landscape of Ireland. All these features contribute to my placing of the selected Irish New Woman authors' fiction at the developmental stage of hesitation of Irish lesbian narrative. It is at this stage that Irish female writers start to question the role of women within society, as well as transfer textually their doubts regarding sexuality and gender dualism, which results in early representations of female same-sex desire.

The New Woman was seen as opposing the institution of marriage and often remained single, surrounded by a close net of female friends. An extensive description of a New Woman is offered by Gail Finney:

> The New Woman pursues self-fulfilment and independence, often choosing to work for a living. She typically strives for equality in her relationships with men, seeking to eliminate the double standard that shaped the sexual mores of the time, and is in general much more frank about sexuality than the old woman. Dismayed by male attitudes or by the difficulty of combining marriage and a career, she often chooses to remain single; concomitantly, she comes to place increasing value on relationships with other women. . . . Furthermore, the New Woman tends to be well-educated and to read a great deal. Although not necessarily a woman suffragist, she is likely to be more interested in politics than the conventional woman. Finally, the New Woman is physically

> vigorous and energetic, preferring comfortable clothes to the restrictive garb usually worn by women of the era. She often has short hair, rides a bicycle, and smokes cigarettes – all considered quite daring for women at the turn of the century. (195-196)

These attributes often earned the New Woman a close association with a pathological model of lesbian. With the arrival of the New Woman in the 1890s, romantic friendships came to be frowned upon. In fact, Sally Ledger, in her ground-breaking work on the New Woman, asserts that these events occurred concurrently (128). The connection between feminism and lesbian desire, leading to the "morbidification" of romantic friendships and initiating the perception of the New Woman in homogenic terms, was made by Havelock Ellis in his 1897 *Sexual Inversion*, and upheld in a later work by Edward Carpenter in 1912. Carpenter, in fact, wrote that it is 'pretty certain that such comrade alliances – of a quite devoted kind – are becoming increasingly common, and especially perhaps among the more cultured classes of women who are working out the great cause of their own sex's liberation' (72). The New Woman project, considered from a literary perspective, was a vehicle for communication of women's issues that was linked closely to the *fin-de-siècle* decadence, since these authors, through their association with dissident sexual desires and the experimentation with form, violated traditional norms and values.[5]

Some critics attempted to divide the New Woman into two generations (Newton 283-284, Smith-Rosenberg, 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity' 264). Such distinction allows me to indicate clearly the development of Irish lesbian narrative in accordance with the development of the New Woman fiction. Therefore, similarly to Newton, I will classify the first generation of the New Woman to have been born between the 1850s and 1860s, and educated in the 1870s and 1880s. A vast majority of these women, amongst whom were Somerville and Ross, became active in the 1890s. The New Woman of the second generation was born in the 1870s and 1880s, and her literary career flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first generation of the New Woman sought personal and economic independence from men and was declared by Victorian sexual ideology as passionless and asexual (Newton 284), thus being considered to have engaged in what has been labelled by the heteronormative society as "innocent" romantic friendships. On the other hand, the change in appearance, means of financial support, and actions of women of the second generation that were aimed specifically at undermining the heteropatriarchal and male-defined traditional role of women in the society,

evoked much criticism in the phallocentric culture, and were deemed to be threatening to the hitherto prevailing gender structures.

The first generation of the New Woman was assigned asexual properties because in nineteenth-century Britain sex was seen purely as phallic, and thus impossible without the presence of the penis. Furthermore, sexologists of the time declared that intellectual women who used their minds and spent their youths, or even worse, their whole lives in colleges, did so 'at the expense of their reproductive organs' (Newton 284), effectively denying themselves sexual pleasure. The second generation of the New Woman, therefore, not only sought autonomy from men and fought against gender roles of mothers and wives prescribed to women, but also promoted education and effectively created their own discourse of sexuality, which rejected previous asexual characteristics (Smith-Rosenberg, 'Discourses' 264).

However, this was not without a response from sexologists, who, subsequently with the second generation's repudiation of its sexual purity, branded the representatives of the New Woman as "mannish lesbians" and announced them to belong to an "intermediate sex" (Smith Rosenberg, 'Discourses' 268). Following Krafft-Ebing's overgeneralised linkage of female cross-dressing and sexual "inversion," which was popularised during the reign of the first generation of the New Woman, Havelock Ellis, in 1896, preceding the emergence of the second generation only by a few years, *insisted* that women's love for each other *was* indeed highly sexual. Moreover, Ellis, when he made a distinction between "inversion" and homosexuality in "Sexual Inversion with an Analysis of Thirty-three New Cases," also equipped the New Woman of the second generation with the necessary terminology that allowed her to both categorise, as well as in some cases realise, her same-sex passions. Therefore, whereas the New Woman writers of the first generation did not provide their successors with a vocabulary or subjectivity that would accommodate their desires, and who themselves had to rely on metaphors created by the dominant, hegemonic language, the women of the second generation, although by then regarded as perverse and degenerate, were, at last, in a position to create their own sexual discourse.

Consequently, Somerville and Ross, whom I categorise to belong to the first generation of the New Woman, only make implicit allusions to female homoeroticism. But the prospect of change in representations of independence from men, as well as female desires, was approaching quickly. *The Real Charlotte*, through its clear portrayal of opposition against gender superiority, can be read as a herald of forthcoming presence of women's issues on the pages of the second generation of the Irish New Woman female writers of *fin de siècle*: Rosa

Mulholland (Lady Gilbert), George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright), Katherine Thurston, and Sarah Grand (Frances McFall).[6]

Henceforward, whilst analysing texts by the authors who have contributed considerably to the New Woman writings in Ireland, I will concentrate on the characteristics of the New Woman in their writing, as well as on sublime inclinations regarding their sexuality that is portrayed in their struggle for autonomy from men, and for authority in their own right. I will also argue that women's intentional transvestism was not only an indicator of their desire to enter the public sphere. By their rejection of traditional gender roles and their attempts to enter into the masculine world, they did not only threaten the conventional ideas about Victorian womanhood, but became eligible to privileges reserved solely for men, including sexual relations with women.

Irish New Woman in Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte*

Edith Somerville was born in Corfu in 1858, where she remained for the first ten months of her life before moving to Drishane House, Castle Townshend, County Cork. Violet Martin, born in 1862, grew up in County Galway. Both women were highly educated and shared a passion for arts. Despite them being second cousins, they were not introduced to each other until January 1886, when they were twenty-six and twenty-four respectively. Edith Somerville wrote that meeting Martin 'has proved the hinge of [her] life, the place where [her] fate, and [Martin's], turned over, and new and unforeseen things began to happen' (*Irish Memories* 125). Since their first meeting, similar to the Ladies of Llangollen, Somerville and Ross (Martin's adopted pen name) corresponded regularly and spent little time apart from each other. They wrote their first novel, *An Irish Cousin*, in 1889, which was followed by their collaboration on further thirteen works.

Here, however, I will concentrate on their fifth novel, *The Real Charlotte* (1894), whose features are a succinct exemplification of the first stage of the development of Irish lesbian narrative. This particular work is not, as opposed to novels by Ross and Somerville's successors, a representation of women's *cri de coeur*, since it does not comment on women's issues directly, and the representations of the above-mentioned cross-dressing are absent with the exception of two vague references. However, its non-heroine, Charlotte Mullen, is a straightforward depiction of the New Woman in the making: single, educated, and financially independent.

Charlotte, an unmarried woman, contradicts society's expectations of marriage in order to secure a financially stable future for herself by refusing impecuniosity through being personally responsible for her financial affairs. In terms of challenging the gender hierarchy that was so prevalent in Irish society of the time, Charlotte is the sole mistress of her servants and her Lismoyle house, Tally Ho, the provider for herself and her cousin, Francie, as well as the business advisor for her friend, Roderick Lambert. In other words, she possesses all the roles and functions that, especially within her class, were reserved undisputedly for men. Although she does not oppose the institution of marriage as such, since she plots to marry Francie to Christopher Dysart, who is the son of a wealthy landowner – Sir Benjamin, the reasons behind her actions are selfish and planned precisely to be beneficial to her business. Moreover, her ability to speak fluent Irish, as well as employing Catholic servants, counterbalances her willingness to maintain good relations with the Lismoyle-based family of English landowners. In this respect, a certain ambivalence felt towards the character of Charlotte reflects the juxtaposition of the two prevailing movements at this time – nationalism, and the women's suffrage.[7]

The above-mentioned uncertainty can be two-fold. On the one hand, it can represent Irish women's sense of national subordination, and on the other, the attitudes of Irish nationalists towards suffragettes, whose conception of the women's role was limited strictly to reproduction and, therefore, tied to the domestic or the private sphere. Since the creation of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association in 1876, the atmosphere around the women's vote had become heated. Furthermore, the refusal of women's citizenship rights, heightened by purposeful actions that aimed at questioning their Irishness, resulted in many Irish women having to make a choice whether they were to support the nationalistic, or the suffrage cause.[8] Many suffragettes were led to contradictory beliefs: that if they were to support the Home Rule, their cause would be taken care of once Ireland had been granted her independence; and that by supporting suffrage cause, which was seen as a foreign and mainly British influence (Kilfeather 101), they were being unpatriotic.[9] Despite many similarities between these two causes, they have often been considered to be in opposition. Suffragettes, reduced to the status of pro-British and anti-Irish, fought even more vigorously against male tyranny and discrimination. Therefore, women's sense of national belonging, strengthened by their diminished role in society, resulted in alternative ways of exhibiting their autonomy and independence from men that would allow them to be involved in decision-making processes concerning their country. The New Woman writers, who were challenging gender structures

and inequalities through the means of cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering characters in their fiction, often used a female-to-male transvestite to portray the ease with which any woman could politically become a man, given the presumption of her possession of the male phallus.

Somerville and Ross, conversely, strayed from such representations, and instead created Charlotte Mullen, whose social and political duality can be interpreted on many levels. Other than being an implicit portrayal of Ireland's affairs of the time regarding women and their position in society, in the context of a lesbian reading of the text, she can be considered to be a representation of the changing notions of sex and gender. Charlotte not only challenges the male-dominated hegemony by remaining single and taking care of her finances, but she also has a sensually feminine side that, in the majority of cases, is exhibited in her dealings with other women. When Roderick's wife, Lucy Lambert, loses consciousness in front of Charlotte, she '[begins] to realize again what [is] going on round her, [and becomes] conscious of [Charlotte's] hand chafing her own, a hand that [is] both gentle and skilful' (Somerville and Ross, *Charlotte* 270). Although the authors, as I have previously mentioned, denied their suspected lesbian sexuality, Charlotte, whose character appears 'alarmed and confused' (*Charlotte* 33), certainly allows a speculation and conjecture about a presence of lesbian desire, however faint, within the novel. The *fin de siècle* was a time when women, with the dissemination of girls' education as a result of the Intermediate Education Act in 1878 and the Royal University Act in 1879, as well as the popularisation of foreign literature, gained access to writings in other languages, many of them regarding sexuality.[10] Not surprisingly then, 'it was hinted that the bookshelves that [Charlotte's] own capable hands had put up in her bedroom held a large proportion of works of fiction of a startlingly advanced kind, 'and', it was generally added in tones of mystery, 'many of them French'' (*Charlotte* 44). These books could have covered a broad spectrum; nonetheless, they widened Charlotte's horizons and allowed her to perform gender in an adverse way by defying socially structured expectations of the role of women in Irish society.[11]

Charlotte Mullen stands to represent values that, despite their absence in the novel, will become key concepts in women's liberation movement. Feminism and suffrage are considered to be two contrary entities. Their joint cause, however, and the ideology behind them, such as the opposition to gender patriarchy, emancipation of women, and improving women's position in the public sphere, has positioned them in relation to each other, and, for some time, allowed for a close collaboration between the members of those two movements. *The Real Charlotte*

offers many examples of single women who became independent despite society's disapproval; the novel suggests that such women have earned their rightful place in their communities and in society, and therefore, should not be discriminated on the grounds of their marital status.[12] Somerville and Ross send a rather explicit message that marriage is not the only choice for women. Of course, as in case of Julia Duffy, for whom 'marriage had never come near her' (*Charlotte* 67), this independence may not be as financially lucrative when compared to Charlotte's. However, it provides Julia with self-fulfilment and satisfaction, since she 'had established a position as doctor and wise woman, which was immensely abetted by her independence of the ministrations of any church' (67).

Somerville and Ross not only used their characters to convey their position on what became known as "the woman question" later in the century. Their natural landscape 'that not even conventionality could deprive of charm' (218), as well as 'an intolerably mixed' (91) Irish society, are metaphoric portrayals of an austerity, stringency, and rigorousness of Ireland in terms of its treatment of women and other oppressed groups. Evident in the authors' writing is the presence of a nostalgic and bygone Ireland, descriptions of green land and water, as well as, to some degree, uncultivated and uncouth Irish people, that bring to mind the "wilderness" that is often associated with these terms. This can be representative of manner and behaviour, which is not yet affected, despite British colonialism, by foreign influences. Moreover, the ubiquitous presence of water indicates the movement away from *terra firma*, thus placing all the hitherto prevailing classifications and social divides in flux.

Furthermore, Christopher Dysart's fascination with photography can be symbolic of gendered role reversal. When developing the negatives, Christopher, himself being ''between the sizes', as shopmen say of gloves' (78), sees the reality in reverse: men are feeble, helpless, and incapacitated, whereas women are prosperous and powerful. A photograph, however, being a mirror image of the object, does not necessarily distort it – it simply transforms it whilst reflecting its true characteristics. Thus, the social structure in *The Real Charlotte* can be seen in a new context within women's literary discourse.

The Real Charlotte, in my consideration, heralds the approach of the second generation of the New Woman in a way that is indisputable – educated women, whose financial prospects have improved considerably, can now reject marriages and make their own choices regarding their living conditions. This, consequently, results in occupancy with another woman, thus allowing for a continuation of the soon-to-be frowned upon institution of romantic friendships. Somerville and Ross's portrayal of their male characters as either effeminate, unresourceful, or

disabled, indicates the authors' opposition to male domination. Christopher Dysart, for example, who, by rule, as the son of the rich landowner, should be presented as powerful, is instead shown to be 'not like other men . . . [whose] emotions themselves [have] a feminine refinement, but [lack] the feminine quality of unreasoning pertinacity' (421). Roddy Lambert, on the other hand, depends on women in financial matters, often seeking their advice and support, and the landowner and Christopher's father, Sir Benjamin Dysart, whose social position would usually indicate respect and power, is a wheelchair-bound invalid with dubious intellectual properties. It is this negative representation of Somerville and Ross's men that is further developed and transformed by their successors, the second generation of the New Woman, whose characters impersonate men and thus prove that without 'the impertinent intrusion of *sex* into everything' ('The Tenor and the Boy' 423), women can perform in the public sphere on equal terms with men.[13]

The second generation of the New Woman that adopted the male style of clothing was, therefore, under much more scrutiny than that of its predecessors. This was in large degree due to sexologists of the time, who, true to the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, were unable, or rather unwilling, to make a distinction between sex and gender, and, in order to preserve male dominance, labelled cross-dressing women as "inverts," and popularised an opinion that lesbians were 'failed and ridiculous pseudomen' (Moore 502).[14] Whereas the first generation of the New Woman was attributed asexual properties, and was considered to have engaged in what has been labelled as "innocent" romantic friendships, actions and dress code of women of the second generation evoked much criticism in the phallocentric culture, and were deemed to be threatening to the hitherto prevailing gender structures.

Many women, in my opinion, have appropriated themselves as men, or adopted male attire, explicitly to signal their attraction towards other women. In fact, Edward Carpenter, in 1912, observed that women, as a result of their oppression, had developed a rather strained relationship with men, which caused them to form alliances of their own. Faderman adds to Carpenter's view in a straightforward manner; according to her, 'many feminists [of the time] could and did find other women to live with and love, and thus became lesbians' (188). The existence of such close alliances, as well as representations of other possibilities that were not dependent upon the presence of men in women's lives, found reflection in literature. Therefore, taking these two points of view into consideration, I can identify two prevalent patterns amongst the texts of the second generation of the New Woman writers that I have chosen to analyse. Those authors posit their characters either as cross-dressing women who, mainly to portray the

dire need for gender equality, enter the public sphere in order to access privileges reserved solely for men, or present them to have a strong preference for female company, thus allowing for same-sex attraction to be ascertained within their respective narratives. I will offer a deeper analysis of those two patterns when discussing works by Sarah Grand, Katherine Cecil Thurston, and George Egerton.

Early representations of female cross-dressing in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*

One novel, however, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, although written in 1801 and therefore not included in the canon of the New Woman writing, introduces a character that offers both above-mentioned features. The novel's main plot, as befits the domestic novel, is concerned with Belinda's search for a suitable husband, as well as her romantic attachment to her host, Lady Delacour. However, the character of Harriot Freke, whose name itself indicates her "freakish" status within the narrative, is an exemplification of not only the two features that I have attributed to the fiction included in my analysis, but also of the developmental stage of hesitation.

Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), considered one of the most influential Irish writers, was amongst the correspondents of the Ladies of Llangollen. In her fiction, she often crosses boundaries of class, as well as gender, in order to portray issues concerning Irish society of her time. Despite the fact that Edgeworth refused her one and only marriage proposal, a reading of *Belinda* creates a strong impression of the author's support and celebration of the patriarchal system; Edgeworth has often touched upon matters of women's education, and many feminist readings have been applied to her texts.[15] These, however, with an exception of Lisa Moore, who in "Something More Tender Still than Friendship" offers an explicitly queer reading of *Belinda*, allude mainly to issues of women's education. The majority of Edgeworth's criticism, essentially discusses nationalism, race, and ethnicity, rather than gender and sexuality, thus creating an impression of prevalent heteronormativity regarding analyses of Edgeworth's works.[16] In order to emphasise lesbian qualities of *Belinda*'s narrative, I shall offer an analysis of the novel's famous cross-dressing antagonist, Harriot Freke.

Harriot Freke's cross-dressing is seen as a violation of men's presumptive rights over women, as well as a refusal of the organisation of sexuality in the phallocentric, patriarchal, and hegemonic society. The '*man-woman*' (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 71) only appears in the narrative a number of times, always clad in male attire, and often in the presence of other women whom

she tries to either lure away, debauch, or otherwise impact on negatively. In fact, Lisa Moore argues that the character of Harriot Freke exemplifies 'anxieties about how improper female friendship can lead women to usurp the positions of men' (507). Therefore, Harriot Freke, in male clothes which 'became her particularly . . . [, in whom] no common conjurer could have discovered any thing feminine about her . . . [,and who] had laid aside the modesty of her own sex' (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 17), is a representation of risks that await women who cross boundaries of sex and gender. Nevertheless, despite this initial role, Harriot Freke acts as an agent in presenting the possibility of refuting conventional femininity, thus compelling a reconsideration of generally established understandings of female friendship and attachment.

Whereas in *Max* the true sex and gender of its protagonist were not revealed until the final pages of the text, Harriot Freke's gender is exposed from the beginning – however, it is seen through a lens of her putative (sexual) preference.[17] Harriot's cross-dressing allows her to usurp, rather than just imitate or adopt, male customs and behaviours. She does not only 'tak[e] her hat off very manfully' (19), but she also engages other female characters in her "frolics," which she refers to as 'Fun and Freke' (16). When her first intimate friend, Lady Delacour, challenges Mrs Luttridge to a duel, since the latter 'wished . . . to be a man, that she might be qualified to take proper notice of [Lady Delacour's] conduct' (18), all four women in this scene, the duellists and their respective friends, appear in 'men's clothes' (19). In this passage, the imitation of men's customs is presented purposefully in order to criticise it, as well as to show the awaiting consequences to those who dare to cross those firmly drawn gender boundaries:

> The untutored sense of propriety amongst these rustics [a mob of onlookers] was so shocked at the idea of a duel fought by women in *men's clothes*, that I verily believe they would have thrown us into the river with all their hearts. Stupid blockheads! I am convinced that they would not have been half so much scandalized if we had boxed in petticoats. (19)

Lady Delacour, familiar with Harriot's ways and appearance, and influenced by 'the masculine superiority . . . of Harriot's understanding' (18), is not concerned directly with an uproar that her performance has caused. Despite the fact that her punishment for her actions is severe, as she gets wounded by her faulty gun and is nearly drowned by a horde of angry villagers, she finds consolation in 'Clarence Hervey's opinion that [she] looked better in man's clothes than

[her] friend Harriot Freke' (20). This incident posits Harriot as a highly influential character whose power cannot be weakened easily by either accidental bystanders' remarks, nor by society's opposition to her actions.

Harriot Freke's power of influence, however, portrayed in her intimate friendship with the aforementioned Mrs Luttridge and in her later seduction of Miss Moreton, is diminished considerably when Belinda refuses to comply with Harriot's advances (75), and when Edgeworth denies Harriot the chance to ever appear in male attire again: 'the beauty of legs spoiled, . . . she would never more be able to appear to advantage in man's apparel' (100). Although it may seem that Edgeworth has nipped the evil doings of Mrs Freke in the bud, Harriot's previous association with Mrs Luttridge and Miss Moreton most certainly indicates towards, however vague, a presence of lesbian sexuality in this early nineteenth-century narrative. This is depicted pre-eminently in Edgeworth's unconventional portrayal of these two women: Mrs Luttridge herself states that she 'has the misfortune to be a woman' (19), and she is 'almost as fond of power as of money: she talk[s] loud and fluently, and had . . . connected herself with some of the leading men in parliament' (18); Miss Moreton, on the other hand, is 'laughed at [her] prejudice in favour of the ceremony of marriage' (82). Furthermore, Harriot's decline of power, the direct effect of her inability to cross-dress, as well as her preposterousness as a suitable suitor for Belinda, evokes further possibilities for reconstruction of women's sexuality: 'Harriot Freke's male-parodic behaviour . . . links . . . ideas [of feminism, domestic and political revolution, and sexual freedom] to the possibility of female erotic agency directed not at men, but at other women' (Moore 505). Therefore, despite her main role in the narrative, which is demonstrative of dangers of inappropriate female friendship, I can see Harriot's disapproval of heteropatriarchy as representative of Somerville and Ross's position on women's rights: 'I hate slavery! Vive la liberté! . . . I'm a champion for the Rights of Woman' (Edgeworth, *Belinda* 74).

In addition to Harriot Freke's political views, it is also crucial to note the portrayal of men in the novel. Similarly to *The Real Charlotte*, male characters in *Belinda* play a tangential role, or are often absent, making the presence of heterosexual relationships marginal and, despite the concentration of the main plot around the conventional search of its heroine for a husband, rather insignificant and inconsequential. Lord Delacour, who is constantly being manipulated by his wife, is rather absent-minded and finds his only refuge in drinking away from home. Belinda's prospective suitors, on the other hand, Clarence Hervey and Mr Vincent,

are away a lot of time, and therefore are not contributing to the plot in a great measure, thus making it a woman-concentrated and populated novel.

In spite of Edgeworth's initial aim of the novel, and her inclusion of the cross-dressing character Harriot Freke, 'who swore that "it was charming fun to equip herself . . . in men's clothes"' (100), *Belinda* offers an unintentional introduction to the later fiction of the New Woman writers, where women's issues and the need for their emancipation are communicated through the actions of their cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering characters. Harriot's influential presence, accompanied by her presumed sexual preference, provides ground for my argument, in which I propose that Harriot and her "freakishness" became symbols of future literary representations of same-sex desire in Irish women's fiction, as well as marking the time of growing opposition towards romantic friendships. As I have noted before, cross-dressing and cross-gendering individuals were considered perpetrators of a criminal offence, since their presence was seen as threatening to the gender-divided power structure of Irish, or in fact any European society. Edgeworth's novel, therefore, complies with the previously discussed male vision of a lesbian as an "invert," a pitiful imitator and a grotesque "freak," who, in order to engage in sexual acts with other women, must be either physically deformed or mentally challenged. Such attitudes are especially discernible when Harriot's unnatural attachment to women is discussed by the novel's other characters with a noticeable note of horror, revulsion, and bewilderment, as well as in representations of Harriot's "frolics" which, similar to female "inverts" whose existence is ridiculed because of their failed attempt to become men, are not to be taken seriously. Interestingly, although not at all surprisingly, the passage depicting an indication of Harriot Freke's inability to wear men's clothes again, is the last time her character appears in the novel. She seems to cease to exist. This reinforces the stage of hesitation of the narrative's developmental model, as although not expressed explicitly, it can be supposed that Freke's transvestite identification surfaces the narrative as the early, cautious attempt of portraying lesbian desire.

Furthermore, Harriot's disappearance from the narrative heralds the approaching reconceptualisation of women's sexuality. Covert nineteenth-century same-sex desire, represented by Harriot Freke, has been popularised and equipped with the term that allowed women to identify their desires. Some scholars, following the lead of Jeffrey Weeks, believe that labelling women's same-sex passions as deviant enabled women's homoerotic desires to be self-identified. Lillian Faderman in particular, argues that the late nineteenth-century sexologists, such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, by branding many women

as ‘unnatural and depraved’ (Ellis 134), effectively labelled the notion of the hitherto prevailing understanding of same-sex love, and replaced it with the term “invert,” the modern lesbian, and thus created an opportunity for women to understand their (lesbian) desires.

Transgendering in Sarah Grand’s ‘The Tenor and the Boy,’ and cross-gendering in Katherine Thurston’s *Max* [18]

Since the institution of romantic friendship begun to be treated with suspicion, cross-dressing became more frequently criminalised. As Irish women were being exposed to feminist movements and literature from other countries, mainly England, the New Woman writers embarked on the mission to portray a variety of possibilities for women to enter the public sphere. An access to privileges that were hitherto reserved strictly for men, including romantic relations with women, is another characteristic of the stage of hesitation because, as I argue below, acts of female characters’ cross-dressing in selected texts can be seen as nuanced references to women’s homoerotic desire. Two novels in particular, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) by Sarah Grand, and *Max* (1910) by Katherine Cecil Thurston, portray their protagonists, the Boy and Max respectively, as cross-dressing characters who, in order to be able to become artists, as well as to escape from their unhappy marriages/abusive engagements, successfully recreated themselves as men. Although the two characters remain heterosexual throughout the course of their corresponding novels, their narratives can most definitely be analysed with the use of a feminist/queer lens. The use of language itself indicates the dire need for emancipation of women, whilst notions of same-sex desire are made visible by the action of cross-dressing. While this desire is not strictly lesbian, although with some allusions to Sapphic romance, it certainly indicates, as well as popularises, its existence, thus ‘the narrative enters a world in which desire . . . is the modus operandi’ (Clare L. Taylor 31).

Katherine Thurston (1875-1911) has paid particular attention to gender hierarchy in her works, which could have been influenced by her own life experiences. In her divorce proceedings in 1910, her husband accused her of being dominating and complained that she was earning more money than him (“Divorce Case” 4). Her last novel, *Max*, however, was not just a result of her strong feelings regarding gender structure based on her previous marriage. In 1909, a year preceding the publication of *Max*, she believed that her fiancé, Doctor Alfred Bulkeley Gavin, was having feelings for one of his male patients. In fact, having later accepted

the fact of his infatuation with men, she dedicated *Max* to Gavin, having bestowed on him the nickname of "my little Max" (Standlee 145).

The figure of a female-to-male transvestite symbolises women's struggle against the definition of their prescribed roles in society, thus causing concern for the obliteration of the distinction between sexes. As opposed to Harriot Freke, Max and the Boy, later known as Claude, adopted male clothes and appearances in order to pursue artistic careers – Max desiring to become a painter, and the Boy to play his violin.[19] Their transformation is complete, and they do not disclose their real identities until the closing pages of the texts. The character of the Boy, however, is more complex, since his transvestism is a continuation of his previous experiences with cross-dressing as a child. The Boy, previously known as Angelica, is a twin sister of Diavolo, and since early childhood the two children enjoyed swapping identities and clothes, which they found utterly pleasurable:

> Angelica obtained the coveted pleasure of acting as page to Evadne, and Diavolo escaped the trouble of having to hold up her train, and managed besides to have some fun with a small but amorous boy who was to have been Angelica's pair, and who, knowing nothing of the fraud which had been perpetrated, insisted on kissing the fair Diavolo, to that young gentleman's lasting delight. (Grand, *Heavenly Twins* 61)

Although this passage can be read as a representation of Diavolo's playfulness, it is also an indication of Angelica's later cross-dressing, as well as the greatly desired pleasure that wearing men's clothes provides for her. As the Boy, she takes great care in her choice of garments; 'it was evident that the costume had cost him a thought, and if somewhat theatrical, it was certainly picturesque, and entirely characteristic' (436). The evident fetishism in this passage implores a premeditation with which the Boy desires to appear as a manly figure, despite his apparently 'effeminate' (380) features. He sees a necessity for 'both minds, masculine and feminine, [to be] perfectly united in one person of either sex' (403), in order to achieve the ultimate goal of opposing 'the whole social system' (168). In other words, Angelica found a perfect recipe to 'conform to [the society's] ideas while carrying out [her] own' (450). The same convincingness applies to Max, who states that 'we have all of us the two natures – the brother and the sister! Not one of us is quite woman – not one of us is all man!' (Thurston 118). This exhortation

supports Judith Butler's claim that gender is not reducible to biological sex, since gender is constructed culturally and through the repetition of stylised acts. She argues that there is a 'distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or the signification of that facticity' (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" 522). In other words, it is possible to perform gender independently of one's sex. Butler terms this as "gender performativity," a notion I will look at more closely in relation to trans-, cross-gendering and Halberstam's "female masculinity."

Female cross-dressing, male impersonation, and Boston marriages have been present in history for years.[20] In many accounts, one can find a recurring pattern of reasons for the willingness of women to be perceived as men. Those, other than my earlier argument of a purposeful signalling of same-sex attraction, range from the before-mentioned opposition to the prevailing hegemonic patriarchy in women's battle for equality, through attempts at improvement of their financial and/or career situation, to finally an access to "simple" male privileges such as gambling, or smoking and drinking in public.[21] Others exhibited preference for male garments to avoid restrictive women's clothing. Some women adopted male identities to join the army so that they could follow their husbands abroad. The most suitable example is the case of Christian Davis (1667-1775) who, in order to find her husband who joined the army abroad, enlisted as Christopher Welch. In fact, Christian enjoyed her army experience to such an extent, that she continued to serve as a soldier even after her husband's death, leaving her mother and children behind in Dublin to fend for themselves (Bonnie and Vern Bullough 101-103).

Taking these examples into account, there exists a possibility that many women, similarly to Max and the Boy, whose impersonation remained successful for long periods, adopted men's ways to such extent that they were often found either in (sexual) relationships, or marriages with other women. Of course, this was not always the case. Although cross-dressing is not always an indication of lesbian desire, taking into consideration these particular instances, lesbian connotations in *Max* and 'The Tenor and the Boy' become viable, and thus indicative of the stage of hesitation.

As per my earlier argument, cross-dressing women and the New Woman were often labelled as lesbians. Sally Ledger, in fact, extracts four pathological categories of the division of lesbians of the time proposed by Richard Krafft-Ebing. Whereas the first category included women who were responsive to the approaches of more masculine women, their appearance is described as feminine. The consecutive categories, however, designate a strongly masculine

self-presentation with a strong preference for male garments, and a fully developed inversion when a woman assumes 'a definitely masculine role' (Krafft-Ebing 333-336). This categorisation, unsurprisingly, has been regarded negatively by contemporary feminists who complained that it has been used 'to subvert women's attempts at emancipation' (Jeffreys 106). Nevertheless, despite a considerable amount of criticism, and an immense advancement in gay and lesbian politics, such simplistic, however altered, classifications exist to this day, exercised by homo-/lesbophobic religious institutions – mainly the Catholic Church – as means of indoctrinating its followers in order to escape the inevitable approach of secularism.[22] The Church is still trying to find ways to interfere with Irish politics; however, with the present influence of transnationalism and globalism, Ireland is now seen by some as a post-religious country (Heffernan and Kelpie n.p.). The testament to this claim are successful same-sex marriage (2015) and abortion (2018) referendums, where the power of the Church and its religious dogmas have been largely diminished by the popular vote.

However, before commencing with the search for further traces of female (homoerotic) sexual desire within those texts, it is important to pause and reflect on the textual background of these authors' motifs for the inclusion of transgendered characters in their novels. Grand's voice as the New Woman and her cry for gender equality are heard throughout 'The Tenor and the Boy.' The above-mentioned "theatricals" to which the Boy conforms are a representation of the possibility of women performing male roles in the society. Since social constraints surrounding women of the time have disabled writers to speak of their issues in an open manner, they reverted to the not-so-distant history, where women have been granted unlimited access to male empire through the means of changing their clothes. The Boy, once his identity is discovered by the Tenor, reflects views of the Irish New Woman by saying:

> You often hear it said of a girl that she should have been a boy, which being interpreted means that she has superior abilities; but because she is a woman it is not thought necessary to give her a chance of making a career for herself. I hope to live, however, to see it allowed that a woman has no more right to bury her talents than a man has; in which days the man without brains will be taught to cook and clean, while the clever woman will be doing the work of the world well which is now being so shamefully scamped. (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 453)

Grand's meaning is clear; women should not perpetrate tricks, and their sex should not be a factor that determines their value. Furthermore, the Boy's comment on women possessing intellect is an exemplification of one of the feminist agendas, pertaining to the accessibility of higher education to women.[23] At the time, the level of education offered to girls was a reflection of society's expectations of their futures. Grand highlights the limitations that this system poses to the whole country and its society, emphasising women's abilities to be equal to those of men. Grand professes that women should not only be treated as equal citizens – they should be allowed to exercise power from which they have been unfairly debarred.

In her New Woman novel *Max,* Katherine Thurston intensifies her character's search for equality in a similar way to Grand's. Maxine, a Russian princess, who under the name of Max escapes on an overnight train to Paris to become an artist, also stresses her need for independence that only "becoming" a man could grant her. Just like the Boy's, Max/ine's "gender-bending" portrays the thin boundary between men and women's ability to exercise power: 'I made myself a man, not for a whim, but as a symbol. Sex is only an accident, but the world has made man the independent creature – and I desired independence. Sex is only an accident. Mentally, I am as good a man as you are' (Thurston 188). The repetition of Max's opinion on the accidentalness of sex underlines the very position from which the New Woman authors wrote their novels in order to increase women's awareness of their abilities.

Nevertheless, crossing boundaries of gender poses certain risks of its own. The Boy and Max begin to glorify their images as men, and unconsciously develop male behaviours. In accordance with their wishes, they become men whom they so much detest – men who are too occupied in deriving pleasure and effectively take no notice of the women whom they treat with contempt and a preponderance of their superiority. Whilst the Boy and Max wish to position themselves on the same platform as men, they unconsciously mimic men's customs and behaviours, effectively leaving behind their own identities: 'it is a war, . . . a relentless, eternal war; for one nature must conquer, and one must fail. There cannot be two rulers in the same city' (Thurston 118). The "theatricals" to which the Tenor refers become a reality, as the actors in this gender performance are incorporated into their characters.

Although once discovered, both characters return to their previous identities of heterosexual women, the specificity of the Boy's continuous cross-dressing, and the particular care he pays to his appearance and behaviour to succeed in his passing as a boy, denies me from assuming his cross-gendering as the only possibility of gender transformation of his complicated, and to a rather large extent masculine identity: "the freedom from restraint, I mean

the restraint of our tight uncomfortable clothing, was delicious. I tell you I was a genuine boy. I moved like a boy; I felt like a boy" (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 456). Thus, the Boy does not just perform gender on the same terms as Max, or Harriot Freke for that matter; the action of cross-dressing makes the Boy *a* boy. In other words, for him to be a boy, is to have *become* a boy. Furthermore, the Boy does not seem to have any power over the emergence of his dominant masculine identity, "it was quite an impulse" (456); it ceases to become a choice and eventually becomes a stronger force from within. The Boy's constructed gender identity, through the constant repetition of acts, is 'a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution' 520). The fact of the persistence of gender performativity, which extends beyond theatricality, therefore, implies the masculine identification and undermines the notions of purely male masculinity, thus granting women access to the public sphere through, according to Halberstam, a politicised and often eroticised, female masculinity (233). However, as Judith Butler argues, gender performance is not in itself subversive (*Gender Trouble* 139). It is a process of repeated acts, as Angelica's and Max's cross-dressing, that confines 'no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 25). In this way, Butler distinguishes gender performance from gender performativity. She proposes that gender identity is constituted by language, which means that language is not preceded by any particular gender identity, and that subjects are effects rather than causes of their performative actions (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 145). Therefore, instead of considering Max's and the Boy's actions of cross-dressing as predetermined by their circumstances, it is useful to consider their gender identities as performative, which are shaped by the language and discourse and not vice versa.

This gender performativity on behalf of Max and the Boy forms the basis for my assumption of the presence of homoerotic desire, as well as a predicament in sexual terms, in these two texts. By successfully adopting their roles as men, both characters, with the aid of their effeminate features, initiate intense friendships with Ned Blake and the Tenor respectively. The Tenor and Blake are fascinated with both protagonists' physiques and personalities, thus allowing their desires to be exhibited within the texts. From the beginning of the novel, Blake is enthralled with Max; to him 'it isn't a question of fear [of what he may see in a man]; it is a question of . . . taste' (Thurston 35). The growing regard with which Blake begins to treat Max provides grounds for noticing certain ambiguities regarding the nature of their relationship. As

their friendship develops, so does the attachment between the two men. Similarly, the more the Boy visits the Tenor, the more an attachment the latter develops towards his night visitor, and 'it became one of the pleasures of his life' (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 399). He begins to desire those visits from the Boy, for whom he leaves an opened window. Here the window, just as the carriage on the Paris train is for Max, creates a form of a liminal space in which, or through which, the protagonists cross boundaries not only of place, but also those of class and gender.

Comparable to the texts that have been previously analysed in this chapter, so in 'The Tenor and the Boy,' as well as in *Max*, there is an observable attempt at their authors' portrayal of gendered role reversal and insignificance of men. The Tenor, for example, 'ha[s] no ambition whatever for himself' (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 406), he is depicted as a man who prefers domesticity and a casual employment as a local singer. He takes a keen interest in his garden (399) and is undecided as to the future of his career (406). Ned Blake, on the other hand, insists on making a home for Max, which includes cooking and decorating. Therefore, the Tenor's and Ned's actions and hobbies, which are traditionally ascribed to women, highlight their feminine features. In these specific instances, one can observe a premeditated action of Grand and Thurston to challenge the rigidly gender-divided structure of the society, as well as the prevalence of women's issues, which are also covertly inclusive of those of female (lesbian) sexuality.

Another aspect of these novels that I do find to be crucial in any queer reading of the Irish text with detectable signs of lesbian desire is the presence, or at times an absence, of the Church, that is often portrayed in a negative light. Although at this period in time the Church had not had as much juridical power as can be observed in the twentieth century, and given that its influence in the political sphere of Ireland was not of as dominant and despotic nature, I believe that it is still feasible to conjecture its position in relation to sexual minorities. It is interesting to observe that the question of religion is carefully omitted from Thurston's narrative. Whereas the Boy states openly that he does not 'believe a word of [religion]' (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 414), and he further marvels at 'how admirably [those God-fearing people] make religion part of their daily life in the matter of stretching a point and using the right of Christian charity to be lenient when a too rigorous adhesion to principle would injure their interest' (379), the narrative of *Max* in this matter is limited to Blake's short utterance that he 'can accept mysteries and miracles – I was born into the Roman Catholic Church' (Thurston 33). Inasmuch as this statement can be read as Ned's acknowledgement and a quiet acceptance

of Max's identity, its desultory and cursory manner regarding the Church, however, especially in comparison to the Boy's statement, can be seen as a reflection of the general attitudes of the larger society, to a great measure incited by the institutions of power, towards homosexual relations.

As I have noted, the presence of religion and the critique of the Church, correspondingly with representations of female homoerotic desire within the narrative, are notably different between 'The Tenor and the Boy' and *Max*. In the brief fifteen years between their publications, themes of lesbian desire had begun to be observed closely. This was largely an effect of Oscar Wilde's trials on charges of gross indecency that took place in 1895. Whereas it was possible for Grand to depict same-sex desire in 1893, making open references to historically documented female-to-male transgendering, Thurston found herself in an adverse social environment that was characterised by a 'renewed moral stringency' (Standlee 105).[24] Tina O'Toole also identifies these two works as being significantly different in their representations of homoeroticism:

> The newly available register to describe homosexual relationships, both in a covert and an overt way, may have enabled earlier writers to imagine stepping outside conventional heterosexual ties, as for example Grand had in *A Domestic Experiment* and would again in *The Heavenly Twins.* By the time Thurston was writing *Max* in the early years of the new century, the social world was a very different place. ('Nomadic Subjects' 86)

This statement, especially when considered in its relation to *Belinda* and a previous leniency towards female intimate friendships, clarifies that what seemed to have been acceptable to Edgeworth to write in 1801, and even for Grand nearly a century later, by 1910 had come to be considered an abominable crime that was subject to censorship more so than ever before. Although the Boy states that he is familiar with the severe consequences if he was to be 'caught masquerading' (Grand, 'The Tenor and the Boy' 169), in *Max*, Thurston seems to be at pains to stress the importance of keeping up pretences. The struggle between her willingness to portray Max's cross-dressing in acceptable terms, and the knowledge of the risks awaiting her for doing so, are especially visible when Max discovers Blake's attraction to a woman:

> I say 'I am not sufficient to you?' I have given you my friendship – my heart and my mind, but I am not sufficient to you? Something more is required – something else – something different! . . . I may be as interesting, but you do not inquire. Why? Why? Because I am a boy – she a woman! (Thurston 132)

Blake's only response to this is: 'Don't be fantastical! . . . We are not holding a debate on sex. If we are to be *normal* [my italics], we must declare that man and woman don't compare!' (132) Therefore, Thurston depicts how ties between persons of the same sex have been limited to the only socially acceptable status – the one of friendship, 'the love of the soul, but not the love of the body!' (162).

This "masquerade" in Grand's novel, however, implores something more than just a simple male impersonation for theatrical purposes. What the Boy does with such premeditation is, in fact, performing masculinity, which further becomes internalised with his gender identity, or, to be specific, transgender identity. At this point, it is crucial to distinguish the differences between cross-dressing, or cross-gendering, and transgendering, with special emphasis on how I am to use these terms for the purposes of my analysis of the texts. Cross-gendering is nowadays used as an umbrella term to include various sexual identities and behaviours, and it carries 'specific reference to a form of female masculinity, transvestism, and cross-dressing' (Clare L. Taylor 2). Transgender, on the other hand, is a term used to describe people whose gender identity or gender expression is different from the one associated with their birth sex. I will argue that these terms, somewhat similar in a broad sense, are in large measure dependent on gender performance and performativity, especially when considered in relation to the characters of the Boy and Max. Cross-gender and transgender are two adverse identity concepts, and therefore should be analysed from such distinctive perspectives. "Masquerading" in male clothes is not equal to adopting a male identity, so the idea of theatrical acting contrasts the actor's performance with the performative act that constitutes gender. Thus, Max's transvestism, which was created momentarily to fulfil his purposes of escaping Russia and becoming a successful painter, is 'performed' by the Boy on a regular basis, often daily, and reaches back to his childhood. Whereas Max is aware of his theatrical performance, the Boy performs gender as naturalised through his individual and habitual performative acts.

It is also necessary to consider that not all masculine women, or cross-dressing women, were early representations of lesbian desire as we know it today. Jack (Judith) Halberstam, in

the ground-breaking work *Female Masculinity*, proposes that gender, as well as sexuality, has various forms (50). They cannot be categorised simply into the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries' understandings of same-sex desire which, to some extent, have been proposed by nineteenth-century sexologists, and later limited by lesbian historians. Halberstam argues that sexual activity between women did not always indicate lesbian desire and that many masculine women did not exhibit any interest in same-sex sexuality. Before the insistence of the heterosexist forms of writing before the twentieth century, therefore, the same-sex desire was expressed and channelled through a variety of genders and sexualities, which Halberstam claims to be representations of modern female masculinity (13). Halberstam argues that not all female masculinities indicated lesbian desire, and, moreover, by ascribing lesbian properties to hermaphroditism, tribadism, or transvestism, modern critics deny the conditions of the emergence of modern masculinity (51).

Halberstam claims that female masculinity offers a wide spectrum of a variety of lesbian identities, distinct from the model of romantic friendships and mannish identification of lesbians in the *fin-de-siècle* period (50). However, it is also important to note that women's attempt to form, however nondominant, masculinities, specifically in the discussed here texts, defies not only hetero- and gender normativity, but also hegemonic patriarchy, as the destabilisation of gender systems poses a threat to the dominant structures of hegemonic masculinity and claims women's rights to public authority. Furthermore, this attempt unbinds gender from sex and sexuality, and thus by its rejection of the division between male and female signifies an early validation of the split between hetero- and homosexuality.

At the same time, however, Halberstam, in explaining the act of cross-dressing, states that 'sexual identity [is] not organically emanating from the flesh but as a complex act of self-creation in which the dressed body, not the undressed body, represents one's desire' (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 106). So the dress is, in some respect, analogous to gender. Therefore, for the purpose of analysing 'The Tenor and the Boy' and *Max*, I will insist that the respective characters of these two texts can be read as representations of female same-sex desire within the New Woman discourse, as their gender identities, through either gender performance or performativity, have impacted on, and altered, their sexual identities. Moreover, I will refer to the Boy as a transgendered character, whereas Max will remain an intentional and momentary transvestite.

Although Clare Taylor repeatedly alludes to the Boy as a cross-gendered character (24-56), and Bogiatzis identifies the Boy's cross-dressing as simply 'Angelica's decision to

masquerade as a boy' (53), I believe that an argument should be made that this term, especially in *The Heavenly Twins*, does not exist nor operate on equal terms with transgender, and that the Boy's masculinity should not be obscured by labelling it as transvestism. Nevertheless, despite those blinding differences, and the different terms under which the Boy and Max perform masculinity, both characters' cross-dressing plays a similar role in terms of the narrative – it disrupts the prevailing gender hierarchy and dichotomy, thus challenging and standing as a form of protest against the appropriation of social norms.

So what of lesbian desire? Is it possible to see any suggestions of lesbian love in these two texts? I will now return to what has been argued at the beginning of this section, namely that the representations of male homoeroticism in 'The Tenor and the Boy' and *Max* can be read as representative of an alternative lesbian sexual desire. Martha Vicinus, in her rather suggestive reading of *The Heavenly Twins*, argues:

> What looks like a form of man-boy love can be read as a groping toward an expression of lesbian love. The Tenor and the Boy have a stereotypical male homosexual relationship which serves to cover the pervasive lesbian eroticism of the situation. At a time when a modern lesbian culture was just beginning to define itself publicly, the well-established contemporary male culture could have been a source of inspiration, however indirectly. ('Turn-of-the-Century Male Impersonation: Rewriting the Romance Plot' 207)

Furthermore, since Max and the Boy have returned to their previous identities and genders, I find it feasible to reason that, as arguable as it may seem, acts of homoeroticism on their behalf were in fact performed by the women within them, thus making them homosexual women, although not lesbians in the full meaning of the word as we know it today. What allows me this assumption is the displacement of the phallus, which places in a void 'the requirement of fixed gender identity for sexual pleasure' (Vicinus, 'Turn-of-the-Century Male Impersonation: Rewriting the Romance Plot' 206). Judith Butler writes that 'the phallus is an imaginary effect . . . [, and] its structural place is no longer determined by the logical relation of mutual exclusion entailed by a heterosexist version of sexual difference' (*Bodies that Matter* 88). Therefore, the symbolic presence of the male phallus allows for Max and the Boy to journey between hetero- and homosexuality and disruptively redeploy categories of sex, thus challenging the binary

structures of gender and sexuality. In this context, the figure of "the boy" becomes more than just an avenue through which women can access male privileges; he stands to represent the tool that will allow for the break in the prevailing dichotomy of the gender-structured society, paving the way for future generations of writers who will revolutionise the literary world with characters such as Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), or Jane and Jessica in Molly Keane's *Devoted Ladies* (1934).

Moreover, the two protagonists' (lesbian) sexualities can be further assumed by the presence of the closet, which is a representation of their hidden identities, as well as desires. Whilst the Boy's suit is an item that appears from his wardrobe only at night, Max keeps the long streaks of Maxine's hair tucked away in a box. The pervasive function of the metaphorical closet plays a crucial role in establishing the narrative's stage of hesitation so prevalent in Irish women's literature of the *fin de siècle*. The authors' perceptible hesitation in revealing their characters' sexual identities surfaces the narrative in a metaphorical manner. Furthermore, in the case of Max, the closet portrays the reversibility of the action of cross-dressing that may be indicative of sexual, rather than gender, confusion. Therefore, the New Woman Movement in Ireland, a project that was already largely associated with notions of lesbian desire through its use of cross-dressing characters in its fiction, as well as its portrayal of women's sexual expression for each other, articulated not only its position of resistance to the patriarchal gender structure that was oppressive to women, but also introduced an implementation of intertextual same-sex desire that deconstructed the prevalent hetero-/homosexual binary. This further disrupted the prevailing notion of heteronormativity, which I denote in this chapter to be one of the main characteristics of the stage of hesitation in the Irish lesbian narrative's developmental model.

Indications of lesbian desire, the lesbian phallus, and distancing from the notion of *faute de mieux* heterosexuality

Faute de mieux homosexuality, or situational homosexuality, refers to same-sex activity incited by heterosexual deprivation, or, in other words, when a partner of the opposite sex is unavailable. It can be found in gender-segregated environments, such as prisons or boarding schools, where the participation is often involuntary (Adam 1197-1198).[25] In this section, I will argue that the notion of situational homosexuality transforms into situational heterosexuality; namely, that characters who cannot find a suitable same-sex partner, revert to heterosexuality

as means of fulfilling their desires, which are caused by, as opposed to *faute de mieux* homosexuality, homosexual deprivation. Institutional heterosexuality marks one of the final two characteristics of the stage of hesitation, as lesbian characters, at the beginning of the twentieth century, would start to be portrayed as feminine; this feature becomes predominant at the stage of comparison/exploration, and prevails throughout the remaining stages of development of Irish lesbian narrative.

Thus far, I have verified two prevalent patterns that are indicative of lesbian desire in the New Woman fiction. With the first pattern of cross-dressing, cross-gendering and transgendering characters already discussed above, I will now portray more detectable traces of female same-sex attraction in George Egerton's 'The Spell of the White Elf' (1893). George Egerton (1860-1945), born Mary Chavelita Dunne, is considered one of the most influential New Woman writers. 'The Spell of the White Elf' is a short story in her first collection entitled *Keynotes*. Born in Melbourne, Australia, Egerton was raised in Dublin, and she published *Keynotes* from Cork. Her fiction is written from a perspective of an outsider, which allows her to discuss certain matters from a different, and at times more open point of view. Although the story has been analysed widely from the perspective of its representations of motherhood, there are certain aspects that allude to same-sex desire between women in a considerable measure.[26]

The eponymous elf of the story is a little girl who was adopted by a woman whom the narrator meets on the ship travelling from Norway to Hull. The key word here is "adopted," and it indicates the absence of the male phallus, which presence is inevitable to perform the act of conception that results in having a child. In fact, the woman, who is "shockingly unladylike" (Egerton 14), is infertile, 'one of the barren ones' (15), thus already opposing the image of Mother Ireland – the quality so desired in Irish literature of the pre-Independence period. Therefore, other than portraying alternative routes for women to acquire children, "without the horrid man or the shame" (15), Egerton challenges patriarchal, nationalistic, and to some extent religious discourses, especially through her use of Biblical reference to the Immaculate Conception.

Furthermore, the absence of a male phallus in this story, as well as in other works discussed in this chapter, plays another, and probably the most important role in an analysis of the development of lesbian narrative within Irish women's fiction – it facilitates and provides the means for the emergence of the lesbian phallus. This feature, concomitantly with the institutional heterosexuality, becomes the concluding part of the stage of hesitation, as at this

point, the textual lesbian sexuality possesses another set of tools for its articulation, which is no longer based on the imitation of, and opposition to, dominance of men in the public sphere.

The lesbian phallus creates serious consequences for the power relations accumulated around the constructions of gender: 'when the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power; the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled. . . . The phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing, to reiterate, and exploit its perpetual vanishing as the very occasion of the phallus' (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 89). The power of the phallus is concurrently emphasised and diminished, thus permitting for a further exploration and expansion of gender-related issues on the literary scene. The term 'lesbian phallus' is accredited to Judith Butler, who analyses Freudian and Lacanian theories in order to portray their androcentrism and to offer a discourse on sexuality which is not bound by the rules of phallocentrism or heteronormativity.[27] Her chapter, 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,' undermines and deconstructs Freud's and Lacan's schema of sexuality, effectively obliterating its limitations. Freud, for whom the phallus was the idealisation of the penis, claimed that male genitals, 'the standard of erotogenicity' (Rosenberg 396), transfer their erotogenic status to other body parts, particularly the penis, thus making them its substitutes. Lacan's theory, which positioned the phallus as intrinsically male, also seems to be mirroring Freud, especially from the point of view of transferability of the phallus.

In response, Butler threatens oppressive gender norms by proposing the existence of the lesbian phallus, which dissociates the phallus from the penis by displacing its signifying power and destabilising the masculinist and heterosexual matrix. She insists that the phallus is transferable, and that it is not tied to any specific morphology nor body. The lesbian phallus, according to Butler, 'can be symbolized by an arm, a tongue, a hand (or two), a knee, a thigh, a pelvic bone' (*Bodies That Matter* 88). These body parts, not surprisingly, are demonstrative of lesbian love-making. By attributing the signifying power to women, or more strictly, to lesbians, Butler's lesbian phallus, read in the context of the New Woman fiction, undermines the presence of heteronormative sexuality in the narrative, thus creating a discourse that allows for the emergence of lesbian desire within the narrative.

Furthermore, the lesbian phallus questions male masculinity and proposes a reconceptualisation of prevailing gender norms. I cannot help but notice certain similarities between this concept and Halberstam's female masculinity, as Butler's lesbian phallus questions 'the putative 'originality' of the masculine' (*Bodies That Matter* 81). Halberstam's

view is invested primarily in an analysis of strictly non-male masculinities that are concentrated around the notion of identity rather than sexuality. Although Halberstam believes the lesbian phallus to be 'an intervention into psychoanalytic models of the gendered self' ('The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly' 357), I will argue that at the root of both these concepts, there can be found the same, or at least a very similar aim: to object to the homosexual-heterosexual binary, and to open up possibilities for a more inclusive discourse. Presently, however, my attention is concentrated on Egerton's portrayal of the foreign woman, towards whom the narrator develops an inexplicable attraction.

The narrator first sees the woman, whose name we never learn, before boarding the steamer. She is 'a tall woman with very square shoulders, and gold-rimmed spectacles. . . . She is English by her tailor-made gown and little shirt-front, and noticeable anywhere' (Egerton 14). Descriptions of the woman's appearance and attire point unarguably to the New Woman and her fashion seen as a solely English invention.[28] I would like to, however, concentrate on the narrator's observations regarding other aspects of the woman's appearance and behaviour – aspects that delineate female same-sex attraction. In this story, as opposed to previous works where the presence of the New Woman and gendered role reversal were the main components, there is a definite shift in the narrative towards an accommodation of lesbian desire, however indirect.

The storyteller observes the woman and admires 'her hair curls in grey flecked rings about her head . . . [, her] charming tubbed look . . . [and] a rare smile [that] shows her white teeth and softens her features' (Egerton 14). Within these lines, physical attraction is undeniable – the use of feminine objectives and an intensity with which those details are described resemble words that may be used by a lover. Furthermore, the narrator's fascination with the woman can indicate something more than just physicality or a physical longing; the reciprocal communication between the two women indicates mutual understanding – intense, soft, and often achieved on a higher spiritual level than mere verbal communication:

> We sat and talked, or at least she talked and I listened. I don't remember what she said, I only know that she was making clear to me most of the things that had puzzled me for a long time; questions that arise in silent hours; that one speculates over, and to which one finds no answer in text-books. How she

> knew just the subjects that worked in me I knew not; some subtle intuitive sympathy, I suppose, enabled her to find it out. (15)

It can be anticipated that the two women were discussing the position of women, taking into consideration the English woman's later statement regarding the hierarchy of power and financial arrangements within her marriage, 'positions are reversed, they often are now-adays. My husband stays at home . . . and I go out and win bread and butter' (15). But what were the questions perplexing the narrator? Could they have been discussing other, more intimate matters? Undeniably, the two characters develop a connection, which is only deepened the next day.

Their morning conversation is preceded by the narrator seeking out the woman. Knowing that the latter is 'a very learned lady; she has been looking up referats in the university bibliothek' (14), she positions herself near some books that she was sure belonged to the woman, 'I *feel* sure they are hers' [my italics] (14). The apparent ability to sense her travel companion, followed by a spiritual connection achieved the previous night, results in the narrator's willingness to initiate physical contact, 'I feel inclined to put out my hand and stroke hers – she has beautiful long hands' (15). The seductiveness of the English anthropologist and the narrator's newly discovered emotions towards a person of the same sex are an inclination of lesbian desire forcing its way through the narrative. Egerton reinforces the agency of women within the patriarchal discourse, thus re-imagining their sexual desires in order to oppose the restrictive Victorian classifications of women' roles and sexualities. As Tina O'Toole observes, 'Egerton frequently makes the point that such evasions around desire cause more attention to be drawn to sexuality than is often warranted' ('Keynotes from Millstreet' 152).

A similar, although to a lesser degree extraordinary intimacy between women, can be observed in Sarah Grand's novella, *A Domestic Experiment* (1891). Grand's narrative, largely inclusive of New Woman aspects, can also be regarded from the point of view of the stage of hesitation, where references to same-sex desire, however indirect, suggest the existence of the forbidden subject of female (lesbian) sexuality. Specifically, through its reconceptualisation of the traditional, heteronormative relationship, and its portrayal of society's opposition to changes that occurred in representations of female sexuality, the novella offers women an alternative in the form of a lover of their own sex. Therefore, the hitherto prevailing notion of *faute de mieux*

lesbian desire is transformed into the main female protagonist's conscious choice of a sexually defined same-sex partner.

A Domestic Experiment portrays Agatha Oldham who, being unhappy in her marriage, is presented with a choice between a male lover, Lord Vaincrecourt, and a female lover, Dolly Cartwright, who 'in a moment of mischief . . . force[s] her acquaintance on Agatha' (67). Although Agatha and Dolly's friendship does not transform into a full romantic relationship, it certainly poses a possibility for an inclusion of such attachment, and desire, in the future Irish female narrative. Just as Somerville and Ross prepared grounds for New Woman writers to touch on the subject of female oppression, so did Grand, as well as Thurston and Egerton, expand this possibility to accommodate the subject of female (lesbian) sexuality within Irish women's fiction. Grand's portrayal of the two women's relationship is undoubtedly different from a simple representation of acquaintance between friends: 'in the intimacy that ensued, their several natures had acted and reacted on each other, and strange as it may seem, while Agatha was acquiring some of Dolly's small vices, Dolly herself was improving under the influence of Agatha's stronger and nobler nature' (67). The interaction of two women's characters suggests a deeper connection and mutual understanding that leads to these women's extraordinary friendship, which in return offers them trustworthiness, happiness, and affection that they would not find in a relationship with a man. They both shock the community with their actions and altered appearances as they stray from any relations with men. Arthur Oldham, Agatha's husband, and previously lover to both ladies, is portrayed as a dull, boring, and uneducated man, not worthy of the women's attention. This feature, similar to portrayals of male characters previously mentioned in this chapter, is quite characteristic of New Woman writings of the time, as well as of the entirety of Irish lesbian narrative. Arthur's 'imbecility' (48) here is an indication of a possibility of a better alternative for women – an alternative that allows them to move away from *faute de mieux* lesbian desire and to initiate a journey towards a conscious choice of an educated and suitable partner that is not dictated by the constrictive notions of either sex or gender.

However, in *A Domestic Experiment*, and later in Rosa Mulholland's *The Tragedy of Chris*, this concept is transformed. Despite explicit representations of *faute de mieux* lesbian desire in these novels, such as inadequacy of their heroines' male partners or their inability to engage in opposite-sex relations caused by their difficult material situation, there are connotations of a more implicit kind. I will argue that Agatha's and Sheelia's same-sex desire is a result of their hidden passions rather than limitations imposed on them by the lack of a

suitable partner of the opposite sex. Thus, the characters eventually engage in what I shall call here *faute de mieux* heterosexuality, which is, in this case, incited by homosexual deprivation: Dolly's jealousy of Agatha causes their intimate friendship to fall apart, and Sheelia loses Chris, who dies following a long illness after being sexually exploited by a man.

Grand's portrayal of passion between Agatha and Dolly veers dangerously towards representations of female same-sex desire. Teresa Mangum suggests that 'the vitality of this relationship contrasts sharply with the lifelessness of Agatha's within her husband's domain' (46). Factually, many women who were limited to the domestic sphere and constrained within their loveless, heterosexual marriages, found relief in initiating homosocial friendships, which were often regarded as romantic. However, at that time, with the subject of homosexuality becoming more delicate, and often avoided, many wives were criticised for their extraordinary attachment to other women. Unsurprisingly then, following the famine, and having prospects for better remuneration, many Irish women decided to emigrate. Enhanced opportunities for employment resulted in mass migration of Irish, mainly young and single, women. Their newly acquired freedom, developed through their ability to work and make their own decisions regarding their marital status, has certainly been reflected in the numbers of women fleeing from Ireland that often outnumbered male emigrants, as well as in the numbers of married women who remained in Ireland. In 1901 only, over half of all women in Ireland between ages of twenty-five and thirty-four remained single (Bartoletti 185). These statistics, along with my previous arguments, are an attestation of women desiring an alternative to marriage that can be considered as their heightened interest in the same-sex activity.

Agatha's statement that 'getting up in the morning and going to bed at night with nothing accomplished in the interval – is not life enough for a woman' (Grand, *A Domestic Experiment* 26-27), is further strengthened by her actions, change in appearance, and her attitude towards her husband. Her rebellion marks an approach of the diverse conceptualisation of women's sexuality and free choices. She does not protest silently; although her manifestation suggests political connotations and Grand's means of communicating her opinions to a wider public, it also has a more important, at least in terms of my project, meaning. Agatha's carelessness as to public reactions to her behaviour (im)poses an invitation for expression of female sexuality in the public sphere, as opposed to private space within which she was fixed prior to her friendship with Dolly. Agatha, however, confronted by Dolly and accused of having feelings for the young Lord Vaincrecourt, terminates the friendship, and reverts to the confinements of heterosexuality that holds for her nothing but misery, disappointment, and unfulfillment. Dolly, on the other

hand, after losing her husband, devotes her life to other women, spending Mr Cartwright's money on 'homes where tired servants can go and rest' (242). Thusly, Grand's novella, in opposition to previous works where an extraordinary attachment between women was portrayed as dangerous, depicts risks that await women who remain in their unhappy marriages, despite having a more satisfying alternative in the form of another woman.

A similar attachment between two women is also described in Rosa Mulholland's 1903 novel, *The Tragedy of Chris* (1903), whose protagonist, Cecilia Fitzmorris O'Ryan, through the course of the novel known as Sheelia, pursues a two-year search for a Dublin flower girl, the eponymous Chris. Here, analogously to *A Domestic Experiment*, the main protagonist is faced with the choice between lovers of two sexes. Sheelia, whose devoted love for Chris is noticeable in her every utterance when the latter is concerned, refuses two marriage proposals, and only eventually settles to marry an English-born farmer, Connor O'Daly, upon gaining a painful knowledge of Chris's condition, and realisation that her beloved will not live to accompany her until the rest of her life. This choice, however, is dictated by Sheelia's fondness of Connor as her friend – she does not expose any attraction, be it physical or mental, towards him. Connor seems to be a sensible choice rather than the expression of passionate love: 'If I *ever* marry *any* man it will be Connor O'Daly' (Mulholland 312) [my italics]. Although the novel has not received an enormous amount of criticism, be it in lesbian or literary studies in general, a handful of critics have verified certain traces that can be conceptualised from the queer perspective.[29] Sheelia's social position, as an orphan from a workhouse, already places her within the novel's status as an outsider, which, in terms of sexuality, positions her outside of socially-dictated conventions, thus allowing her to express her affection that would normally meet with disapproval from the middle-class society: 'Sure we always knew you were something different from us' (313). In fact, she often '[shrinks] from telling . . . the story of Chris' (211), as she is aware that her devotion may be understood opaquely.[30] She can only confide in Connor, although 'with desperate effort . . . [and with] her cheeks burn[ing] even under cover of the darkness' (244). Connor, therefore, becomes the only keeper of her secret and the connecting agent between hetero- and homosexuality.

Furthermore, the language of the narrator exhibits a fundamental difference in depicting Sheelia's feelings for Chris, which is quite diverse from the language used to describe her relations with Connor: 'Could he ever comfort her – even turn her sorrow into joy? . . . She cared no more for him than the basket of cabbages that came out of his cart. Her whole heart and soul were absorbed in that erring or unfortunate girl whom she sought for with a fidelity

amounting to fanaticism' (267). The excerpt portrays in full measure Sheelia's devotion to Chris, concomitantly showing her disregard and, to some degree, repudiation of Connor's advances. Connor, however, is not the only man who meets with her disapprobation. Several times, Sheelia expresses her opinion of men whom she considers evil, emphasising her unwillingness to marry (298). An implicit inclination of lesbian sexuality can also be observed in other passages, where Chris shares the views of her fellow flower girls who only notice ladies as their potential customers, and often admire their appearance. This implicit high regard for well-presented women, and ignoration of men, can be seen as an early indication of Chris's same-sex physical attraction.

Although Chris and Sheelia's relationship is considered to be the case of a romantic friendship, which according to Donoghue, 'is never presented as sexual or in any way deviant' ('Lesbian Encounters, 1745-1997' 1104), the sole fact that the two girls live together whilst consolidating their incomes, and even fostering a child, could be considered as bearing a resemblance to a model family. Sheelia was brought up by women, and with women she spent her life, observing their collaboration and their making of homes for each other. Therefore, her readiness to create this safe environment for Chris, appropriates her in her own eyes as a suitable suitor for the young girl, making her preference for a same-sex partner evident. Upon Chris's death, Sheelia acts like a widow and only agrees to marry Connor after a respectful time of mourning (Mulholland 317).

Faute de mieux lesbian desire, therefore, is transformed into an uninviting prospect of *faute de mieux* heterosexuality that further evokes connotations of the fluidity of women's (lesbian) sexuality within restrictive Victorian society. I consider this divergent representation of female sexuality as the last milestone of the stage of hesitation in Irish lesbian narrative. The hesitation from portraying lesbian desire explicitly, manifested through the action of cross-dressing, the prevalence of female masculinity, the emergence of the lesbian phallus, and the transformation of the situational lesbian desire into situational heterosexuality, suggest sublime indications of lesbian desire in the texts of the New Woman writers. The consecutive stage of comparison/exploration, where Irish authors will be exposed to lesbian writings from other parts of Europe, predominantly England and France, will be discussed in Chapter Two, and based on works of Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, and Kate O'Brien. The chapter will observe a radical change in descriptions of lesbian desire in Irish women's writing, as well as exemplify those changes in accordance with the consequences of several military conflicts troubling Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century.

Irish lesbian narrative has come a long way from its more or less implicit representations in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries to a nearly deafening silence following Wilde's trials. Although lesbian desire will be addressed more directly in early twentieth-century fiction, the more explicit presence of lesbians will not improve the way of their reception, and perception, in Irish society. However, the accomplishments of the New Woman, concurrently with attainments of the first-wave feminists, transformed the narrative unchangeably. Lesbian desire, once having made its way to the pages of Irish women's writing, will now become its invariable part. Though years will pass by the time Irish society speaks openly about lesbian desire, and even longer until the stigma surrounding it will be replaced by an equality, the first steps, conducted by Irish New Woman writers have been made to accommodate female same-sex passions in Irish literature, thus making it accessible to wider audiences and effectively popularising the concept.

Notes

[1] Taking such distant dates into consideration, it is important to mention that although the term "lesbian" did not appear in sexology until the early twentieth century, for convenience, I will use it whilst referring to women-orientated women. Factually, previously, before the 1890s, homosexuality, or the "third sex", was referred to with the use of Karl Heinrich Ulrich's "urningism" (Kennedy 5), adopted in 1912 in *The Intermediate Sex* by Edward Carpenter with an English term "uranianism."

[2] A less well-known example is the brief mention of lesbian lovemaking in the mid-twelfth-century *Book of Leinster*, where two females are portrayed as engaging in 'lánamas rebartha (playful mating)' (Lacey 33).

[3] Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), social reformer and leading women's suffrage campaigner, is amongst some of the well-known Irish women to have been engaged romantically with another female, Mary Lloyd. Some evidence can be also found as early as 1730, in letters of Letitia Bushe, considered a talented artist of the time, to Lady Anne Bligh, which offer rather a suggestive reading of certain passages that may be indicative of sexual desire (Sean Connolly, "A Woman's Life in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Case of Letitia Bushe" 448).

[4] In the *General Evening Post* from the 24th of July 1790, beneath the heading "Extraordinary Female Affection," Lady Eleanor Butler is described as 'tall and masculine, she wears always a riding habit, hangs her hat with the air of a sportsman in the hall, and appears in all respects as a young man, if we except the petticoats which she still retains. Miss Sarah Ponsonby, on the contrary, is polite and effeminate, fair and beautiful' (n.p.)

[5] The New Woman writers were branded daughters of Decadence because of their openness in terms of human sexualities, and their opposition to the gender-dictated system. Whereas the New Woman posed a threat to the Victorian notion of femininity, the decadent and the dandy undermined the traditional definitions of masculinity.

[6] Although the features defining the New Woman have been present in literature prior to the 1890s, there exists a dispute as to the origins of the term. "New Woman" entered the language in 1894 when it appeared in the *North American Review*, in two articles written by Sarah Grand and 'Ouida' (Maria Louise Ramé). Whereas Grand's article, entitled "The New

Aspect of the Woman Question," has in fact used the phrase, 'Ouida' extrapolated it for the title of her essay.

[7] For the intertwining of nationalism and feminism in the nineteenth-century Ireland, see Coulter's *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women, and Nationalism in Ireland* (1993), Innes's *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (1993), Luddy's *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (1997), and Owens's *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement, 1889-1922* (1984).

[8] The campaign for the rights of women began to appear on the political scene in the 1820s. The first Irish woman generally acknowledged to have been campaigning for women's emancipation was Anna Doyle Wheeler who, in collaboration with William Thompson wrote *An Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825). For more information on Anna Wheeler see Dolores Dooley's *Equality in Community: Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler* (1996).

[9] Siobhán Kilfeather also recognises the interweaving of feminist and nationalist discourses as a point of ultimatum directed at Irish feminists (102). *Cummann na mBan*, in its 1914 manifesto, states clearly that it is their members' 'duty in all controversial matters to abide by the principles of nationality' (*The Field Day Anthology*, vol. V 103-104). The only organisation, founded in 1913 and led by James Connolly, that did accept men and women on an equal basis into its ranks was the Irish Citizen Army. In fact, one of their members, and Connolly's lieutenant, Constance Markievicz, was elected the first woman to the first Dáil Éireann in 1918.

[10] Mathieu François Mairobert's *L'Espion Anglois* (1779-1784) for instance, as well as texts by Diderot (1796), Casanova (1725-1798), and Brantôme (1665) were, at the time, among the most popular works on the subject of, or discussing lesbian sexuality. For more examples and details see Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981). Additionally, knowledge on homosexuality was further popularised by works of pseudo-psychiatrists, which included *Die Konträre Sexualempfindung* (1869) by Carl von Westphal, *L'uranisme: Inversion Sexuelle Congénitale* (1895) by Marc-André Raffalovich, *Das Konträre Geschlechtsgefühl* (1896) by Havelock Ellis, published in English under the title *Sexual Inversion* in 1897, and *The*

Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women (1912) by Edward Carpenter.

[11] The role of foreign books, however, will become a more prominent feature of the stage of comparison/exploration, which I analyse in depth in Chapter Two.

[12] Single women, especially from the middle class, were thought to be disadvantaged, since it was a widely accepted social expectation for a woman to be married and have a husband to provide for her.

[13] The insignificance or absence of men in the narrative, in fact, becomes a prevalent feature in the entirety of Irish lesbian writing, as I will demonstrate in the course of this thesis.

[14] Main contributors of such categorisation were Richard von Krafft-Ebing (*Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*), and Sigmund Freud (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, and "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"), who in their studies of human sexuality included not only homosexuality, but also specific cases of Lesbian Love (Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* 428-430).

[15] Edgeworth wrote of herself that 'as a woman, my life, wholly domestic, cannot afford anything interesting to the public' (*Chosen Letters* 449).

[16] For works discussing Maria Edgeworth's writing see Nash's *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth* (2006) or Kaufman and Fauske's *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and Her Contexts* (2004).

[17] Harriot Freke's sexual preference is, however, discernible to a careful and attentive reader through a certain amount of foreshadowing.

[18] Grand's 'The Tenor and the Boy' forms an interlude of her larger work, *The Heavenly Twins*, which concentrates primarily on the dangers of venereal diseases. This episode, however, is independent of the rest of the novel, and it was published as a separate piece in 1899.

[19] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, any indications of, so understood, sexual frivolity were being largely disapproved of, thus restricting even as trivial occupation as women's creative activities. As Bonnie and Vern Bullough write: '[women] could paint or sketch, but not too creatively and not in oils, which were too messy; they could play a musical

instrument, but not professionally; and they could only play instruments that did not require spreading their legs, pursing their lips, viscerally demonstrating their muscles, or messing their dress or coiffure (usually, this meant they played the piano)' (155).

[20] Boston marriages owe their name to Henry James who, in his 1886 novel *The Bostonians*, which was largely based on the relationship of his sister Alice with her life partner, Katherine Loring, depicted a long-term relationship between two representatives of the New Woman.

[21] For working class women, since they could not access many career opportunities, prostitution was often the only alternative (Walkovitz 15).

[22] I will concentrate on the interference of the Church in politics of the Irish State in Chapter Four.

[23] The National University of Ireland was established and opened to women in 1909. This was an effect of an arduous struggle of activists such as Isabella M S Tod (1836-1896), an active advocate of education for women, and Anne Jellicoe (1823-1880), who was committed to improving the education for women and girls. For more information, see Maria Luddy's *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (1995), Mary Cullen's *Girls Don't Do Honours: Irish Women in Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (1987), and Eileen Breathnach's "Women and Higher Education in Ireland (1879-1914)" (1980).

[24] Grand, in fact, references openly several examples of cross-dressing and cross-gendering:

> George Sand, for instance; don't you remember how often she went about dressed as a man, went to the theatres and was introduced to people, and was never found out by strangers? And there was that woman who was a doctor in the army for so long – until she was quite old. James Barry, she called herself, and none of her brother officers, not even her own particular chum in the regiment she first belonged to, had any suspicion of her sex, and it was not discovered until after her death, when she had been an Inspector General of the Army Medical Department for many years. And there have been women in the ranks too, and at sea. (Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* 170)

[25] Martha Vicinus, in her essay 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870 – 1920,' explores in depth girls' same-sex attachments, "adolescent crushes" (213), based on the example of boarding schools.

[26] See for example Marshall's *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (2007) or Harman and Meyer's *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminists Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction* (1996).

[27] "The Lesbian Phallus" offers a rereading of Freud's "On Narcissism" and *The Ego and the Id,* as well as Lacan's "Mirror Stage" and "Signification of the Phallus."

[28] Factually, and this links to my earlier observation of Egerton being an outsider, many New Woman authors were associated with England and, therefore, some of them were not included in the canon of Irish writers until as late as the 1980s.

[29] References to *The Tragedy of Chris* can be found in *The Field Day Anthology vol. IV* (Donoghue 1104), and in *Occasions of Sin: Sex & Society in Modern Ireland* (Ferriter 74).

[30] Sheelia's fears were not unjustified, as any signs of not meeting the society expectations concomitantly met with its disapproval. As Faderman argues, 'someone who both engaged in lesbian sex and rejected no other aspects of a female role *always* aroused societal anxiety' (Faderman 47).

Chapter Two

Lesbian Continuum and Lesbian Desire as Implicitly Encoded in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Molly Keane: 1927 – 1934

Many songs have been sung
of the Irish Revolution
of the men who have fought
and have died
But you seldom will hear
of the women's contribution
though they all struggled there
side by side
Now the time has come
to set this wrong to right
the story of our fight for liberty
In the forefront of the fight
despite history's oversight
Strong and true were the Women of Ireland (O'Sullivan)

The stage of hesitation, prevalent in the texts of New Woman writers, initiated a courage to discuss lesbian desire from a new perspective, where the New Woman would not be an imitation of a man, or a 'desexualised halfman' (Stutfield 837), but she would be performing female masculinity in order to access the public arena. The next consecutive stage of the development of Irish lesbian fiction, comparison/exploration, consequently portrays female characters who no longer resort to cross-dressing, but, in line with the trends coming from other countries, exemplify authors' experimental techniques that aim to depict lesbians as womanly, where they will occupy more central places in their respective plots. However, before this shift took place in the late 1920s, the development of Irish lesbian narrative encountered an unexpected halt following the trials of Oscar Wilde, as well as the onset of several military conflicts troubling Ireland in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century: the First World War (1914-1918), the five-day Easter Rebellion of 1916, also known as the Easter Rising, the War of Independence (Anglo-Irish War 1919-1921), and the Civil War (1922-1923). Although women's involvement in the guerrilla war fought in Ireland may have resulted in the limited productivity of lesbian texts, it nevertheless allowed women to reignite the spark of female

companionship as they formed alliances of their own, such as the relationships of Kathleen Lynn (a medical doctor and captain of the Irish Citizens Army) and Madeleine ffrench-Mullen (a suffragist and a veteran of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann), or Elizabeth O'Farrell and Julia Glenon, who tended to the wounded during the Easter Rising of 1916.[1]

This chapter will examine the period of intermodernism, or otherwise modernism at the time in between the two world wars, which, influenced by writings from the outside of Irish borders, addressed lesbian desire in a less implicit manner. Elizabeth Bowen's use of experimental techniques in her portrayals of lesbian desire, first exercised from the point of view of adolescence, and later "bracketing" the central heterosexual plot, will place Irish lesbian fiction at the stage of comparison/exploration, as Bowen, as well as Kate O'Brien and Molly Keane, are exposed to European fictions and cultures, and same-sex female attraction becomes more prominent and palpable, although still not overt. This stage, with its feminine lesbian characters, is indicative of not only a more prominent presence of the lesbian phallus, and the authors' emphases on the concept of *lesbian panic* and *lesbian continuum*, but, most importantly, marks the presence of female same-sex attachment by placing it on the peripheries of heterosexually-centred texts. In this way, the presence of lesbian desire is concealed enough from the harsh censorship laws, and yet at the same time becomes indispensable to the novels' plots. Despite its secondary presence in the narrative, however, the topic of lesbian passion begins to be noticed and mentioned by other characters, which emphasises, and consequently popularises, its existence. Furthermore, the portrayal of women's independence from men, including sexual independence, highlights the importance of women in a gender-bias society; an importance that was supposed to be further strengthened by their active participation in Irish military conflicts.

Although women played a very important role in the wars, their contributions were often diminished and even forgotten. A large emphasis was put on the idea of brotherhood, which worsened the relationship of women to the political realm, as their political status was 'permanently damaged by their exclusion as warriors and brothers, so much so that they disappear[ed] into the status of wives and mothers in the 1937 Irish Constitution' (Benton 148). Nevertheless, in the latest studies by Mary McAuliffe, it became evident that the number of female associations increased, with organisations such as the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) that openly admitted women and 'spoke a distinct language of sexual equality' (Benton 153), the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU), the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), or the branch of Cumann na mBan, Inghinidhe na hÉireann (the Daughters of Ireland), which included

women from upper *and* middle classes who had been involved in nationalist and feminist activism. Women's involvement on such a large scale certainly indicated their claim to the public sphere, and consequently to power, further strengthened by the enfranchisement of women over thirty years of age by the Representation of the People Act, and their eligibility to be elected to Parliament.

Women's activity during that time, however, was not limited solely to military organisations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the nationalistic and suffrage movements were closely intertwined, with women fighting for equal rights within the Free State. In fact, Margaret Ward argues that 'the impact of the First World War was devastating for both British and Irish suffrage movements, which divided into pro- and anti-war camps' (37). Whereas initially, at the beginning of the twentieth century, some suffragists insisted on their allegiance to Britain, soon vast numbers began to support the Home Rule in their belief that an independent Irish government would grant them the right to exercise their vote. In 1916, Forógra na Poblachta (Proclamation of the Republic) promised, at last, 'equal rights and equal opportunities' for men and women. After the partition of Ireland in 1921, this was echoed in the 1922 Irish Free State Constitution, which guaranteed that every person 'without distinction of sex . . . shall . . . enjoy the privileges and be subject to the obligations of such citizenship' (The Irish Free State Const., art. 3).

Unfortunately, this was not going to be the case. Despite having achieved the right to vote for women over twenty-one in twenty-six counties, Irish feminism was brought to a standstill, as with the new political leadership there came new gendered restrictions and anti-women legislations. Between 1922 and 1936, not only were women banned from the public arena, but there were also attempts at revoking of some of their rights (McAuliffe 50). These included: the 1924 Juries Bill that allowed women to opt out from serving in juries, the 1925 Civil Service Amendment Act that permitted the government to withdraw women from some exams for Civil Service, which would partially prevent women from employment in Civil Service, and the 1927 Juries Bill which banned women from sitting on juries altogether. In 1928, the government introduced the Censorship Act, which forbade the importation of contraception, as well as 'books, magazines, [and] newspapers . . . regarded as indecent or obscene' (McAuliffe 63). In 1929, the Illegitimate Children Bill allowed the government to gain control over women's bodies and sexuality. In 1932, the Marriage Bar, which was not lifted until 1957 for primary school teachers and until 1973 for civil servants, required women to leave paid employment on marriage. The Irish Free State government also introduced the

Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1935, and the Conditions of Employment Act in 1936, through which it gained control over women's professional lives and managed to ensure that women would remain within the private sphere.

Not surprisingly then, women's writing of the time included references to the issues of war and political conflict, which is certainly true of works by Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1972). However, Bowen's writings, although inevitably inclusive of the images of war, are often seen as confined within the Big Houses of the closed environment of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and distanced from Ireland. Her heroines' experiences and portrayals, therefore, resemble those of women during the time of wars as seen by a patriarchal society – the "veiled rebels" (Steele 51-68). Steele uses this nomenclature to highlight how women's contribution in the time of war was diminished, and sometimes entirely overlooked by leadership. Often, women's activity was deemed invisible and non-existent to such an extent that it actually allowed them to engage in a heightened underground and against-the-law activity. Furthermore, the theme of isolation of the Anglo-Irish from the Troubles represents not only the ambivalent sense of national belonging, but predominantly the isolation of Bowen's adolescent characters within heteronormative society. The theme of "bracketing," nevertheless, will play one of the central roles in this chapter. At first, however, it is crucial to understand Bowen's background, especially in the context of the New Woman movement, as well as the contributions of sexologists that were discussed in the previous chapter, which changed attitudes towards sexuality in general, and homosexuality and lesbian sexuality in particular.

Elizabeth Bowen, the daughter of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, was born in Dublin in 1899.[2] Until the age of eight, she lived at Bowen's Court in Kildorrery, County Cork, with her parents, Henry Charles Cole Bowen and Florence Bowen. In 1907, after her father's death, Bowen and her mother moved to England where, in 1923, the writer married Alan Cameron. Reportedly, the marriage was never consummated and was described as 'a sexless but contented union' (Morrissy, *The Irish Times* n.p.). Thus, unsurprisingly, Bowen engaged in many extra-marital relationships, with both men and women. In 1930, eighteen years after her mother's death, Bowen inherited her childhood home. Despite never settling back in Ireland until 1952, however, she made frequent visits during which she was visited by many famous writers, amongst whom was Virginia Woolf.

Despite Bowen's profuse proclamations of her own sense of Irishness, her national displacement, incited by her Anglo-Irishness that made her neither English nor Irish, allowed her, just like George Egerton, to discuss and address certain issues from the perspective of an

outsider, as well as to look at Ireland from a different standpoint.[3] Perhaps as a consequence of this unique perspective, Bowen is one of three Irish female authors to allude to female (lesbian) sexuality in her fiction in the first half of the twentieth century. Although she did not use the term "lesbian" until 1964, when *The Little Girls* was published, it is quite noticeable that female same-sex desire is indisputably one of her main subplots.[4] Bowen's implicit references to lesbian passion create an impression that its existence changes the turn of the main events of Bowen's texts. In fact, many of her heroines who chose to conform to the compulsory, socially-inclined patriarchal heterosexuality did so precisely because of their full realisation of their desire and the need for such conformity in order not only to please society, but also to escape an imminent punishment and exclusion which was an inadvertent consequence of same-sex attraction.

Consequently, this restraint from portraying lesbian passions directly, carried on from the stigma of the last century that was initiated by the nineteenth-century psychologists and sexologists, finds reflection in Bowen's fiction. In her early novels, Bowen portrays her protagonists in their adolescence; young women, often orphaned, whose adolescent passions are directed at older women. Even though their same-sex passions may at times be less overt in the majority of Bowen's works, her characters, in my opinion, certainly make an impression of being fully aware of their desires that circumvent the narrative. The theme of lesbian attachment is prevalent in Bowen's, as well as Molly Keane's and Kate O'Brien's, post-war fictions, as their heroines achieve maturity and, thus, are more aware of society's heteronormative expectations. In many cases, they partly become similar to those older women with whom they were infatuated, and whose desires have to be suppressed in the aftermath of the spread of medical "knowledge," to use Faderman's term, which contributed to the understanding of same-sex desire as unlawful, degenerate, and abnormal.[5]

Therefore, the protagonists' processes of development in novels by these authors, which can be seen as representative of the stage of comparison/exploration of Irish lesbian narrative, form its own type of coming-of-age novel, picturing the characters from their early adolescence into adulthood that is concomitant with the authors' own developmental processes. Moreover, these processes can be divided into two consecutive stages, as I will argue that early pre-war and war fictions are actually novels of awakening. This division is based on these novels' authors' progression in age and experience, as well as the realisation of their respective protagonists of the futility of attempting to escape society's expectations and their own inability

to fulfil those expectations by 'find[ing] value in a world defined by love and marriage' (Rosowski 49). Thus, the novels are transformed into novels of experience.

It is the novel of awakening, however, with its young heroine, that is representative of the stage of comparison/exploration. At this stage, there is a visible shift between the characters' conscious awareness of their sexual desire as they are able to compare it with experiences of others and eventually to identify their passions. Unfortunately, this identification was also the reason for their self-alienation and isolation, as the foundation of the necessary sexual discourse to describe female same-sex desire was also concomitant with its complete obliteration. Thus, early-twentieth-century fictions confined their adolescent Sapphic characters within the heterosexual plot. However, in the late 1920s and 1930s, lesbian existence is more overt, and protagonists' passions for older women, teachers, or friends, are referred to with a newfound openness that was not available to writers of the nineteenth century. It is this restriction of lesbian presence in the heterosexual plot that will form the main basis of this chapter – lesbian desire "bracketing" the plot, or the presence of "the third," which will eventually become a tool for a postmodernist analysis of female texts. Such an approach, as Farwell argues, 'treats lesbian as a fluid and unstable term and the narrative as a powerful if not closed ideological system into which lesbians enter only to be entangled in a heterosexual . . . story' (5). This pattern is clearly visible, time and again, in fictions preceding the Second World War, when women's positions were unstable, and many of their rights were denied or revoked. Furthermore, the possibility of their refusal to conform to the greater good of the nation, expressed by a refusal to reproduce and an initiation of intimate relationships with other women, was gravely frowned upon and became a subject of taboo. Thus, textual experimentation of modernistic writing became a tool for interweaving lesbian desire into the otherwise heterosexually-concentrated narrative.

As I have already mentioned, Bowen's heroines in her early fictions are adolescent girls, who experience strong infatuations directed at older women. Here especially, it is noticeable how the discourse had been transformed following the *fin-de-siècle* period, and how the development of lesbian narrative progressed from the stage of hesitation to the stage of comparison/exploration. Firstly, Bowen shifts away from the representations of a lesbian as the New Woman, or a mannish lesbian, as she refuses the pathologized image of a butch lesbian, and the hitherto prevailing and dominant portrayals of transvestism, transgenderism, and *faute de mieux* lesbian desire. Although it can be argued that her characters appear to be boyish, they are certainly not presented as unwomanly. Through her depiction of feminine characters exhibiting same-sex attraction, Bowen challenges the stereotypical perception of lesbians, as

her portrayals of same-sex passion between women are not replicating heterosexual desire or gender roles, but are discovered through the adventurousness of adolescence.[6] Furthermore, by allowing her characters to achieve their sexual (lesbian) maturity throughout the course of several novels, Bowen repudiates that perception even further, as the lesbian desire of her adolescent heroines does not develop into heterosexuality in their adulthood, but is transformed into the conscious self-realisation of lesbian desire.[7]

The most accurate explanation for the movement away from such representations of lesbians can be probably found in *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Sedgwick, where she extrapolates two tropes of gender which were prevalent at the turn of the century: the trope of gender inversion, and the trope of gender separatism. The trope of inversion, *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*, which translates to 'a female psyche confined in a man's body' (Sedgwick 85), is indicative of transvestite and transgender persons who perform gender that was not assigned to them at birth. Of course, I only use the term "inversion" to indicate sexual attraction, although it has much larger implications, as gender identity is a complex notion that cannot be simply analysed from the point of view of an individual's putative sexuality, and it certainly cannot be assumed that crossing gender boundaries is indicative of same-sex desire and vice versa. The trope of gender separatism on the other hand, is the trope that became prevalent following the *fin de siècle*, as it concentrates specifically on the naturalness of same-sex attraction, thus repudiating the trope of inversion, which was predominant in fiction written prior to Krafft-Ebing's and Carpenter's theories on homosexuality. Sedgwick writes that:

> the persistence of the inversion trope has been yoked . . . to that of its contradictory counterpart, the trope of gender separatism. . . . Far from its being of the essence of desire to cross boundaries of gender, it is instead the most natural thing in the world that people of the same gender . . . should bond together . . . on the axis of sexual desire. As the substitution of the phrase 'woman-identified' for 'lesbian' suggests, as indeed does the concept of the continuum of male or female homosocial desire, this trope tends to reassimilate to one another identification and desire, where inversion models, by contrast, depend on their distinctness. (85-87)

This model does not only allow for the analysis of Bowen's fiction, but also has a further use in verifying the advancement of representations of lesbian desire in Irish women's writing in general. Namely, the first trope relates to the nineteenth century's portrayals of cross-dressing characters, who, by their gender performativity, indicated their putative same-sex desire. The second trope, on the other hand, with the emergence of the New Woman, as well as the acquirement of the necessary vocabulary to name precisely woman-to-woman passion, is representative of the early twentieth-century fiction. Here, authors depict their characters' movement away from imitating heterosexuality in expressing their desire, and, instead, 'place the woman-loving woman . . . at the "natural" defining center of their own gender' (Sedgwick 88).

Returning to Bowen, however, Patricia Coughlan, taking this particular excerpt into consideration, argues that it seems that initially, in her early fiction, Bowen has been using the former model of gender inversion to portray her lesbian characters, whom she presents as masculine in appearance ('Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen' 104). Thus, Coughlan rejects this theory in favour of Rich's *lesbian continuum* as the best tool for an analysis of Bowen's lesbian fiction. Adrienne Rich, in her essay entitled 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980), chooses the term *lesbian continuum* to describe 'a range . . . of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman . . . [and] to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women' (648). Therefore, the *lesbian continuum* allows Bowen to include, and concentrate on, interactions between women that can be indicative of lesbian desire, and yet ensure the safety of heteronormative writing. This aspect was important to Bowen, as she 'believed that her reading public would not welcome a sympathetic treatment of homosexuality' (Darwood 64). Thus, the *lesbian continuum* becomes not only the vital tool in the analysis of Bowen's texts, but also a determining factor heralding the transcendence of the trope of gender separatism, which began to dominate lesbian narrative in the first half of the twentieth century.

Firstly, although I also see the *lesbian continuum* as the most valid means of approach to Bowen, I must disagree with Coughlan for two reasons: while some of Bowen's characters may certainly create an impression of being masculine, specifically Sydney Warren in *The Hotel* and Marda in *The Last September*, I will show that their masculinity is not performed, as in the case of Max and the Boy, to indicate homosocial desire or to repudiate heteronormativity, but actually to challenge the notion of lesbian masculinity. Moreover, I see a clear distinction

between the two tropes of gender, the trope of gender inversion and the trope of gender separatism, as lesbian narrative shifted away from its implicit representations portrayed by the act of cross-dressing and towards the demonstration of affection and desire between women.

Secondly, the transformation of the discourse and the development of Irish lesbian narrative can be observed in the disappearing representations of the traditional New Woman. Bowen's female characters, true Anglo-Irish aristocrats, are no longer presented in pursuit of professional careers and financial independence, although Bowen's narrative still expresses strong and definite viewpoints on women's successful future without the necessity of marriage. With the exception of Sydney in *The Hotel*, and Louie in *The Heat of the Day*, who still consider future education and employment, other women of Bowen's novels, such as the protagonists of *The Last September* and *Friends and Relations*, are no longer concerned with defying social norms and establishing their position in society through the means of liberation and receiving independent remuneration. In fact, many scholars consider Bowen's novels as detached from reality, as she vaguely alludes to the difficult times in which her fictions are set. The Troubles, which eventually contributed to the disappearance of the Anglo-Irish, are a distant distraction to fun-filled days of inhabitants and guests of Danielstown in *The Last September*, and the Second World War offers only distant echoes of explosions in *The Heat of the Day*. Thus, Bowen's national displacement, which I have already discussed briefly, is explicitly detectable in her fictions. Her unwillingness to appear biased, strengthened by 'her acute consciousness of the conflict between her sense of personal affiliation to Ireland and her family allegiance to its colonial ruling class' (Johnson 209), allowed her to enter Irish lesbian narrative into the next stage of its development, the stage of comparison/exploration, as lesbians of the time, represented by her fictional characters, were also tormented with a profuse sense of exclusion. This stage represents the phase of Irish female narrative being influenced by feminist movements and writings from abroad. Although the sense of the characters' lesbian desire is heightened, the fact that it only constitutes a subplot, and overshadows the otherwise heterosexually-centred narrative, is caused by their 'geographical and social isolation' (Cass, "A Theoretical Model" 225), thus making their respective authors having to rely on, and beginning to imitate, text and techniques of their foreign contemporaries. Beginning with the theme of adolescence, present in *The Hotel*, *Friends and Relations*, and *The Last September*, I will demonstrate how the narrative transforms in the late 1930s, when Bowen's, as well as O'Brien's and Keane's characters, begin to express their lesbian desire consciously and openly.

Thirdly, as I have previously highlighted the fact that Bowen's heroines are often either half-orphaned or orphaned, the noticeable absence of the figure of the mother – albeit not mother-figure – suggests the movement away from the image of Mother Ireland. Although many of Bowen's critics and biographers claim that this absence was incited largely by the loss of Bowen's beloved mother, I also consider it a breaking point for young women, who now have a chance to create their own history – "herstory." They can be noticed for their own accomplishments, and not be judged and compared to their mothers. The encumbrance of the mother, the Irish "mammy," who is a significant figure in Irish culture, is, in lesbian fiction, replaced by adolescent girls who are now, at least to a larger extent, responsible for their own futures, and are expressing their sexual identities. Such increased identification of lesbian sexuality in Bowen's texts indicates the stage of comparison/exploration, as her fiction becomes analogous to texts of Virginia Woolf, whose heroines also come to realise, although more explicitly, their hidden same-sex desires.

Adolescent characters representing lesbian desire in Bowen's *The Hotel* and *The Last September*

The Hotel (1927), as Patricia Juliana Smith points out, was published in the year preceding the emergence of major lesbian novels such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness.* This sole fact further contributes to my placing of the early-twentieth lesbian fiction of Ireland in the stage of comparison/exploration of the development of Irish lesbian narrative, as Bowen, as well as other writers, owing to her Anglo-Irishness and friendship with Virginia Woolf, became influenced by such writings that were emerging from outside of Ireland. Lesbian desire becomes more prominent as Irish female authors compare representations of lesbians in fictions from other countries, and to a certain extent begin to experiment, as I will show in the case of Bowen, to place this desire in heterosexually-dominated narratives. The novel begins and ends with two women, Miss Fitzgerald and Miss Pym, whose characters can be seen as having a cunning resemblance to the Ladies of Llangollen (Coughlan, 'Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen' 116), and whose relationship is 'accorded the position of privilege traditionally reserved . . . for . . . heterosexual[ity]' (Smith 78). Effectively, such an opening indicates the concentration on women and their issues (Ellmann, *The Shadow Across the Page* 74), and emphasises their importance within the discourse, thus giving agency to the voice of women whose position is described according to the existing rules; yet, this is represented with such intricacy that the

lesbian continuum is so interwoven into the course of the narrative that it becomes its integral part.

The novel's plot takes place on the Italian Riviera, in the eponymous hotel, portraying interrelations between a group of English expatriates. The hotel itself is a depiction of the tight enclosure of Anglo-Irish society and the rules by which it dictates to its members (Ellmann, Foreword 1). The heroine of the novel, Sydney Warren, compares the hotel to a doll's house, where 'all the people . . . [are] doing appropriate things in appropriate attitudes as if they had been put there to represent something and had never moved in their lives' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 78-79). This sets the tone for the whole of the novel – Sydney feels a pressing disassociation with other characters (Ellmann, Foreword 1), and thus with the rest of society. Therefore, the passage demonstrates the pressing pretences and appearances that people are required to keep up to remain respected members of society. In the doll house, just like in society, everyone has a dedicated role; people are expected to conform to expectations and behave accordingly. These expected behaviours, in the context of Irish gay and lesbian history specifically, can be seen in the example of the four Irish heroes, Sir Roger Casement, Eva Gore-Booth, Elizabeth O'Farrell and Padraig Pearse who, despite serving their country during the 1916 Easter Rising, did not perform their Irishness in the expected way, and whose achievements and sacrifices, although not forgotten, have been diminished because of their queer desires.[8] Consequently, the widow Mrs Kerr, and the subject of Sydney's amorphous intentions seeks, in vain, '*something* [in books]. . . . I know, you see, there *has* to be something' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 17). But the reason why Mrs Kerr could not find anything in the books attests to the reason why Bowen had to interweave lesbian desire within the heterosexually-concentrated novel in the first place, and why, following the era of sexologists, references to such desire still had to be made reasonably covert. Nevertheless, her search for information is indicative if not of availability, then of the existence of texts that could have influenced Bowen, which invariably points to the narrative's progression to the stage of comparison/exploration.

The main character of the novel, who is resting after her hard year at a medical college, spends the summer with her hypochondriac cousin, Tessa, who, just as the rest of Sydney's family, has high hopes for the girl's prospective engagement. Sydney, with her male name, however, concentrates her attention and desires on Mrs Kerr, an older English woman who is 'one's one kind of woman' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 14), and whose influence on the young Sydney, as well as the latter's intense romantic feeling for her older companion, are indicated in the opening scenes of the novel:

> Sydney was silent, stung by a sudden suspicion that Mrs Kerr did not really believe in her tennis at all. If she did not exist for Mrs Kerr as a tennis player, in this most ordinary, popular of her aspects, had she reason to feel she existed at all? It became no longer a question of – What did Mrs Kerr think of her? – but rather – Did Mrs Kerr ever think of her? The possibility of not being kept in mind seemed to Sydney that moment a kind of extinction. (17)

From this scene onwards, the novel's plot is concentrated indirectly on interactions between Mrs Kerr and Sydney, and the young heroine's search for her true sexual identity. Similarly, in *The Last September*, which is set in Cork during the War of Independence, and is, in fact, Bowen's only novel set entirely in Ireland until 1955 when she published *A World of Love*, the arrival of Marda Norton disrupts the quiet life in Danielstown, and especially overthrows Lois's notion of love. Lois Farquar, who, similarly to Sydney, 'struggle[s] to find [her] own place in society' (Darwood 2), also experiences an attraction for an older woman, and discovers and explores her sexuality (Ellmann, *The Shadow Across the Page* 69). Although Lois herself is not yet aware of her sexual preference (Franks 114), Bowen emphasises her strong attraction for women through her indifference to men's amorous advances. This tension is heightened by Lois's self-awareness of the fierce scrutiny of (Anglo-) Irish society, also indicated within the opening pages of the novel, as the narrator stresses that Lois's 'life was very much complicated by not knowing how much of what she said had been overheard, or by whom, or how far it would go' (Bowen, *The Last September* 9). She thus feels compelled to correspond with young men but deep inside she knows that 'they [are] unimportant; besides, she only answered every third letter. These young men, concrete, blocking her mental view by their extreme closeness, moved shadowless in a kind of social glare numbing to the imagination' (13).

I must also insist that the attraction discernible both in *The Hotel* and in *The Last September*, other than representing the *lesbian continuum*, concomitantly depicts the lesbian phallus at work, the emergence of which I theorised in the last chapter. The lesbian phallus is a representation of lesbians' erotogenic zones that allows for the obliteration of the male phallus as the only tool of sexual pleasure for women. Furthermore, the lesbian phallus emphasises the intensification of woman-to-woman contact, which is not limited strictly to the stimulation of their sexual organs, and instead, concentrates on the sensuality of touch that evokes emotions. Namely, it is not only the 'sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the

giving and receiving of practical and political support' (Rich 648-649), but the presence of the lesbian phallus, which could be representative of any female body part, that makes its appearance in the slightest references to physical contact that has an immense impact on Bowen's young protagonists. Whereas the term *lesbian continuum* can be inclusive of any contact between women, as it 'obliterates the specificity of women who relate erotically to other women and fails to differentiate them from those who simply form close emotional bonds with women' (Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality Under National Socialism* 128), the presence of the lesbian phallus in Bowen's fiction leaves no doubt that the relations between women in her novels represent more than just friendships. An ecstasy that Lois feels when Marda puts an arm around her waist (Bowen, *The Last September* 123), or Sydney's inability to take notice of what is happening around her and losing the track of conversation when Mrs Kerr lays her hand on Sydney's (Bowen, *The Hotel* 178), are an attestation of a deep physical longing and a concomitant powerful pleasure derived from this barely noticeable physicality.

Bowen's approach to her protagonists' indecision as to their putative sexual preference is also considerably dissimilar to other novels of development. Lois and Sydney eventually revert to heterosexuality, which they see as necessary in order to avoid the all-seeing and judgmental eyes of society. The realisation of this necessity arises in both texts following moments of intense desire; the appropriation of homoerotic desire is imminent, as if even the slightest thought of another woman can be sinful, and thus orders women to compulsory heterosexuality. When Lois's intimacy with Marda in the old mill is interrupted by an appearance of an Irish rebel, whose presence, reiterated by his pointing a gun and thus verifying his phallocentric power, Lois '[feels] quite ruled out, there was nothing at all for her here. She had better be going – but where? She thought: 'I must marry Gerald'' (Bowen, *The Last September* 125). And later, when distraught Lois, standing in Marda's room after her departure, hopes that 'the carpet would burn with the house in a scarlet night to make one flaming call upon Marda's memory,' the similar realisation comes upon her: 'I must marry Gerald' (98). The repetition of the imperative 'must' in this phrase indicates Lois's awareness of the fact that her love for Marda is forbidden. Sydney, on the other hand, although refusing Milton's marriage proposal at first, also eventually acts 'business-like' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 143) when she sees that hers and Mrs Kerr's relationship does not have a future. She admits that she does not love Milton, but she does 'want to' (141). This phrase reinforces the previous use of the imperative verb, thus making clear the societal expectations of heteronormative relationships. The nature of this statement also implies the use of semantic similarities to portray how interchangeable

'must' and 'want to' are – Sydney sees the inevitability of keeping pretences and she tries her hardest to conform to compulsory heterosexuality.[9]

In addition to their early expressions of same-sex desire, Sydney and Lois clearly exhibit an actual displeasure at physicals encounters with men. Sydney believes that if she was to kiss a man 'she would be cut off from herself, as by her other emotions' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 49), and Lois "receives" her first kiss with 'inside blankness' (Bowen, *The Last September* 88-89) and disappointment (Lee 48), whilst wishing Gerald was a woman (Corcoran 51, Ellmann, *The Shadow Across the Page* 70). Although compulsory heterosexuality does not allow the reader an insight into the heroines' inner feelings when kissing, or, in fact, experiencing any other major type of physical closure with women, *lesbian continuum* ensures that certain pleasures from such imaginary contacts do not pass unnoticed.

Furthermore, the diminishing presence of men in Bowen's texts, which is quite similar to the New Woman's depictions, also bears emotional and political connotations. This can be observed particularly in last names of Bowen's male characters. Worthless Gerald Lesworth, whose tragic death from hands of rebels did not evoke heteronomous feelings in Lois. Or Leslie Lawe, the engagement to whom can only be seen as lawful, as Marda, familiar with the requirements of patriarchal heteronormativity, is not subjected to whimsical fancies of adolescence and makes the "sensible" choice of marrying a man. Thus, Bowen's male characters emphasise the independence and self-sufficiency of women in the context of challenging realist and heteronormatively-concentrated tradition of writings.

In fact, many of Bowen's male characters and suitors die in tragic circumstances, thus 'leaving operatic passion to the women' (Ellmann, *The Shadow Across the Page* 75): Gerald Lesworth is shot following his disagreement with Lois, Robert Kelway in *The Heat of the Day* dies by jumping/being pushed off a roof, and Max Ebhart in *The House in Paris* commits suicide. Although not all these men are suitors for the hearts of Bowen's protagonists, she makes a point of showing that if the lesbian relationship has no chance of survival, neither does its heterosexual counterpart (Smith 78). Furthermore, I believe that the quarrel and the eventual reconciliation between Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald in *The Hotel* offers an alternative not only to the failed relationship between Sydney and Mrs Kerr, but a happy lesbian ending for Bowen's consecutive novels:

It was wonderful to have somebody, always there, with whom one could discuss the most difficult phases of one's relationship . . . simply and frankly.

. . .

Emily turn[ed] her head and [said], 'Eleanor, do you remember the day when we – so nearly lost one another?'

. . .

'Emily…'

. . .

Hand in hand, reunited, in perfect security, they sat and remembered that day. (197-199)

However, what makes Bowen's fiction distinctively progressive in comparison to the texts of her predecessors, as analysed in my previous chapter, is that her protagonists' inner feelings are no longer noticeable only to the women who are directly involved. They are now communicated largely by other characters, thus making the assertion that lesbian existence ceased to be invisible to the wider society. In *The Hotel*, the intense friendship between Sydney and Mrs Kerr is discussed vigorously:

Tessa continued: 'Sydney is very affectionate.'

'She is very much … absorbed, isn't she, by Mrs Kerr?'

'I have known *other* cases,' said somebody else . . . 'of these very violent friendships. One didn't feel *those others* were quite healthy.'

'I should discourage any daughter of mine from a friendship with an older woman. It is never the best women who have these strong influences. I would far rather she lost her head about a man.'

. . .

'One wonders, indeed, why some types of women ever come out here.'

'Mrs Kerr? Oh, do you think -?'

'Mmm-mmm.' (60-61)

The use of italics to describe other relationships similar in nature to the one of Sydney and Mrs Kerr, as well as the suggestive silence following Mrs Bellamy's question, are very expressive techniques used by Bowen to portray lesbian desire. They are loaded with meaning, and yet indirect. In this way, Bowen communicates its existence to a wider public, since, very often, it is the unsaid that says more than words. As I observed before, authors were largely limited to subtle tricks of language of men to portray same-sex passion between women. Therefore, this particular excerpt portrays how Bowen's fiction advanced the narrative in terms of representations of lesbian desire and, consequently, existence. Even if the first part of the drawing room's conversation creates an impression of the ladies discussing the institution of romantic friendships, the use of italics, followed by the suggestive acknowledgment of Mrs Kerr's intentions, soon makes clear exactly what kind of relationships these women refer to. Here then, Bowen writes distinctively to emphasise lesbian desire that is no longer presumed, but addressed directly, although as of yet without the actual use of the word "lesbian." The acknowledgment of lesbian desire by other characters and members of society is another element of the stage of comparison/exploration, as Bowen explores the possibility of communicating the presence of intimate relations between women to her potential readers.

Bowen's textual experimentation, consequently, is not limited solely to this excerpt. Whereas many critics have paid attention to Bowen as the writer of modernism, whose movement away from realism is most prominent in her use of Gothic, sensationalism, and parody (Lee 49), her specific use of encoded textuality, albeit with some references to gender performance, is linked predominantly to the Irish Troubles, and 'the unconscious colonial guilt' (Franks 121) of the Anglo-Irish residing in Ireland at that time. It can be argued that Bowen's close friendship with Virginia Woolf, whose prose style is deemed to have influenced Bowen's own (Osborn 37), may have been one of the reasons for her choice of experimenting with encoding lesbian desire in her fiction, which is certainly a break from the late nineteenth-century representations of lesbians as transvestites. There are, indeed, many similarities between Louis and Rachel Vinrace of Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (Esty 258), as well as modernist literary methods deployed in Bowen's *The Last September* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (Franks 93). However, Bowen's technique of encoding lesbian desire is significantly different to the one present in Woolf's *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, as well as in works of her other contemporaries, such as Djuna Barnes, Radclyffe Hall, Renée Vivien, Natalie Barney or Colette, who used androgyny to encrypt lesbian desire.[10] As already mentioned, Bowen leaves behind the representations of lesbians as cross-dressers or transvestites, whose characteristics

were dictated in large measures by theories of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and instead, it seems, is influenced by Edward Carpenter, in whose opinion lesbians are defined by an 'inner nature [which] is to a great extent masculine' (138). Whereas Virginia Woolf allows her readers an insight into her protagonists' psyches by experimenting with the stream of consciousness, we cannot have the certainty that Bowen's characters exhibit masculine mentalities. Nevertheless, it can be argued that by including a lesbian character, the "third" presence to interfere with heterosexual relationships, Bowen developed her own technique of encoding lesbian desire within heterosexual plots.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Bowen's syntactic practices can be linked to modernism and modernity, it is in fact very difficult to place her within those rigid frames of categorisation.[11] Although the majority of her writing can be considered to be either 'middlebrow' (Brook 352), 'highbrow' modernistic (Wells-Lassagne 97), or even late modernistic (Thurschwell and White 2) prose, her representations of female relationships are most likely indicative of postmodernism. As Luke Thurston ascertains:

> Bowen is often seen as an exemplary artist of non-belonging, her work bridging the gap between literary Ireland and the English novel (or, it might be added, between modernism and conservatism, or even perhaps between patriarchal tradition of female writing); while the work always remains hybrid, irreducible to either term of the opposition. (9)

Thus, her sense of national belonging, or rather national displacement, transcends onto her writing, which, just like the dichotomy of Anglo-Irishness, is impossible to be separated or assigned in a peremptory manner. In fact, Thurschwell and White argue that whilst Bowen's writerly engagements are modernistic, her textual practices often indicate postmodernism (2), as Bowen, in addition to her experimentation with syntax, employs other stylistic practices to suggest the presence of lesbian desire. Effectively, it would not be wrong to assume that as far as lesbian desire is concerned, Bowen employs a postmodernist approach, which according to Farwell, 'define[s] lesbian as a figure beyond the phallocentric categories of gender' (64). However, I will offer a detailed discussion of early postmodernism in Bowen's fiction in Chapter Three.

Returning to *The Hotel* and *The Last September*, I also believe that it would be a case of a neglectful omittance to presume that Mrs Kerr and Marda were just passive objects of their young pursuers' affections. As mentioned above, these women's roles were diminished, and their actions restricted by the socially-dictated heteronormativity of which they were aware owing to their experience and maturity. Therefore, although on several occasions they seem to gladly accept adolescent, emotional, erotic, and affectionate advances, they do not do so openly, and their same-sex prospective relationships are destined to failure. Despite Mrs Kerr's and Marda Norton's denials of their desire, they are indisputably implying the presence of lesbian desire in their respective texts – Mrs Kerr is gravely distraught after Sydney's departure, and Marda cannot face going away without Lois.

In Bowen's texts, lesbian desire, which is presented on the part of her adolescent heroines or their older counterparts, only constitutes lesbian subplots that are interweaved, or, to use Farwell's terminology, encoded within the narrative (28). *The Hotel* and *The Last September* are predominantly heterosexually-concentrated texts, where Sydney's and Lois's lesbian adventures, despite their deep intensity, are only intermittences within a heteropatriarchal plot with the ultimate climax concentrated around their relations, as well as prospective marriages, with men. The portrayal of respective desires of Sydney and Lois in a less indirect manner is indicative of the stage of comparison/exploration, as Bowen attempts to introduce the subject to the heteronormative tradition of Irish writing.

Adolescent lesbian desire in Elizabeth Bowen's short stories

There are a number of short stories by Bowen that include references to lesbian homoerotic desire. However, two stories, in particular, portray the development of 'bosom friendships' (Baldick 359) and adolescent passions between girls in a boarding school environment in a relatively suggestive and explicit way (Morawska 47). The two stories, published three years apart, are interconnected: 'The Jungle' (1929) is a continuation of 'Charity' (1926), featuring Rachel as their main character. Although both texts, owing to their limited length, do not accommodate many characters, therefore making the relations between Rachel and her school friends their main plot, one might argue that they are seen as the smaller part of a larger collection, thus also qualifying as their characters' lesbian desire "bracketing" the otherwise heterosexually-concentrated plots of the remaining stories.

Both stories portray Rachel at the threshold of realising and exploring her sexual identity. The plot of the first story depicts the culmination of an event that is long anticipated by Rachel – Charity is to spend the night at her house. However, taken out of the setting of their school, Rachel, despite her long preparations, is lost for the choice of activities. There is a tangible tension between the two girls, which only becomes more charged when Rachel makes playful advances in order to get closer to Charity who is not quite sure of how to, or whether at all to receive them. She is afraid that someone might be watching: 'The expression was wiped off her face suddenly, leaving it blank: ''Do *listen*,' she snapped out, listening herself all over' (Bowen, 'Charity' 195). At this point, there is a transparent clash between adolescent playfulness, which may sometimes be misread as same-sex attraction, or actual lesbian desire, although not yet fully conscious, in the form of Rachel's forward boldness. Thus, Rachel's experimentation remains unsuccessful, leaving her even more confused, when at the end of the story Charity, feeling homesick and seeking closure, climbs into bed with Rachel.

The sleepover itself is also proclaimed a failure, as in 'The Jungle' we find out that Rachel and Charity are no longer friends. Nevertheless, Rachel is soon to discover the true calling of her ambivalent sexuality, when on the last day of term, she meets Elise, a Huguenot of French descent, who, six months younger than Rachel, is an opposite of the feminine Charity: she is fit, muscular, wears her hair short, and exclaims openly that she 'ought to have been a boy' (Bowen, 'The Jungle' 235). During the summer, Rachel discovers the Jungle, an overgrown place behind her neighbour's garden. She begins to dream about Charity, Elise, and the Jungle, concomitantly showing the work of the unconscious mind in her dreams, as well as portraying the transference of her affections from Charity to Elise (O'Connor 78). In the first dream, she finds an arm of a dead person reaching out to her from within the shrubs of the Jungle, which, in the second dream, she realises belongs to Charity, and herself to be the murderer. This is indicative of Rachel's later realisation of her desire, as she discovers 'some shadowy person always a little behind her who turned out to be Elise. . . . She wanted to run away, but Elise came up beside her and took her arm with a great deal of affection' (Bowen, 'The Jungle' 232).

The prohibitions regarding lesbian sexuality are not only represented by adults or the Church; they are compounded by the peer socialisation, as Rachel's new intimate friendship is being teased by Charity, who draws a mocking, defeminising picture of Elise wearing trousers, thus causing a short quarrel between the two friends. Similar to *The Hotel*, the reconciliation of the two girls at the end of the story is portrayed outdoors and accommodated by the nature to

which societal rules of appropriateness do not apply: as Elise lays her head on Rachel's knees and relaxes into sleep, 'the Jungle, settling down into silence, contract[s] a little round them, then stretch[es] to a great deep ring of unrealness and loneliness . . . as if they were alone on a ship, drifting out…' (Bowen, 'The Jungle' 241). By creating this metaphorical space in form of the Jungle, as well as the hill in *The Hotel*, and the old, abandoned mill in *The Last September*, Bowen accommodates the display of lesbian love as enshrouded by nature, which will often symbolise lesbian sexuality in her later works.

Although Bowen's characters are still in the phase of their adolescence, it cannot be forgotten that, in the majority of the texts, the objects of these young girls' affections were mature women, which negates the concept of same-sex enthrallment as a mere stage of youthful sexual experimentation. The presence of lesbian desire in the narrative, therefore, appears in many fictions of the 1920s, when it often caused scandals and increased the sales, as it did in the case of Rosamund Lehman's *A Dusty Answer* (1927). However, the later reactions to Djuna Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* (1928), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), and especially Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), are still an attestation of the negative reactions of society to homoerotic desire between women, which will appear time and again in, for example, fictions of Kate O'Brien. Thus, the growing interest in sexology, following the publication of Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* in 1927, and his contribution to Hall's novel's foreword, indicated the growing presence of lesbian existence in literary fiction, consequently becoming *de rigueur* (Rau 217). Essentially, *de rigueur* in the context of my work indicates that lesbian sexuality was required by the current fashion and became a customary feature of women's fiction of the time. In fact, an increasing interest in homosexuality, with emphasis on the exploration of the protagonists' sexuality, is one of the three themes that were predominant in writing of the 1930s. The writers' experimental techniques, and the ways of inclusion and exploration of the subject of lesbian desire in their texts, however marginal, suggest a large influence of other writers from outside of Ireland. Therefore, such awareness and curiosity regarding lesbian sexuality, and its increased presence in Irish women's writing, constitutes a feature that is predominant at the stage of comparison/exploration.

De rigueur presence of lesbian desire in the early-twentieth-century fiction

Lesbian desire at the stage of comparison/exploration became a recurring theme in all of Bowen's novels, which depict lesbian characters in a vastly more explicit way than was seen in texts by New Woman writers. In *The Last September*, Lois exclaims openly that she 'must be a woman's woman' (100). In *The Death of the Heart* (1938), Lillian speaks acquiescently about her love for her schoolteacher, Miss Heber, as well as her inability to have any feelings for any man (58). And in *Friends and Relations* (1931), Bowen's third novel published in 1931, the fifteen-year-old Theodora Thirdman, whose last name will be also a leading trope for the subject of the next section, exhibits an unquestionable and unmistakable attraction for another woman. The above examples followed the pattern of representing lesbians as adolescent girls, whose presence was by now been imprinted largely in Bowen's narrative. However, I have selected *Friends and Relations*, as well as *The Death of the Heart*, to feature in this section because, in addition to the definite presence of an adolescent same-sex female passion, these texts portray the shift of this presence away from protagonists to secondary, and sometimes even peripheral characters.

Although *The House in Paris* (1935) briefly portrays Naomi's same-sex attraction for Karen, the *de rigueur* presence of lesbian desire becomes a more explicit theme in Bowen's fifth novel, *The Death of the Heart.* Unlike in *The Hotel* and *The Last September*, or in 'Charity' and 'The Jungle,' references to adolescent lesbian desire can only be found in a couple of places in the text, their presence shows that the descriptions of same-sex passion between women is becoming recurrent in Bowen's fiction. Lilian, who is very feminine, still treasures the letters from her cello mistress. She admits openly that she had to be sent away from the school (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 51) exactly because of her infatuation with the said teacher, and is remembering fondly the occasion when 'one day at school when she had a headache, Miss Heber had rubbed with magnetic fingers Lilian's temples and the nape of her neck' (58-59). The character of Lilian, however, does not contribute to the main plot in any measure, and any notion of her soon fades away as Portia, the protagonist of the text, becomes entangled in her own search for a (hetero)sexual identity.

The same, however, could not be said about *Friends and Relations*' Theodora, the 'ghoulish lesbian' (Lee 65), who, despite her secondary presence in the novel, is nothing but the main intriguer of the plot (Lassner 54), which from the onset of the novel is already complicated enough. The text is heavily concentrated around twists and turns of heterosexual relationships, as well as an unbridled adultery and the falsity of the institution of marriage,

which threatens the patriarchal image of the family (Lassner 49). The novel is set in England and it opens, similarly to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, with a wedding – a ceremony which is to take place between Laurel Studdart, Janet's sister, and Edward Tilney. However, their relationship very soon becomes complicated as Edward, with mutuality, desires Janet, who is engaged to Rodney Meggatt. Bowen's way of describing the heterosexual marriage as ill-fated is not, however, limited only to this triangle. She emphasises how full of adultery, lies, and mistrust heterosexual relationships can be when she reveals that the mother of the cheating Edward, Lady Elfrida, was unfaithful herself. To make the matter even more complex, Bowen introduces the character of Theodora Thirdman who is clearly infatuated with Janet, and on whom she imposes her amorous intentions time and again. In fact, Theodora's name itself suggests that she is the third "man" courting Janet, the fascination with whom is shown within the first few pages of the novel: 'She felt an attraction to Janet and longed to find her' (Bowen, *Friends and Relations* 13). Furthermore, her last name also suggests her sexuality, as it resembles Edward Carpenter's belief that homosexual persons belong to a third gender (Darwood 63). This sets the tone for the rest of text and suggests that Theodora's lesbian feelings may become an obstacle, just like they did in Bowen's previous two novels, and disrupt the development of the heterosexual narrative. Theodora's obsessive jealousy over Janet's attention sabotages heterosexual couples and triggers the avalanche of disasters.

Theodora, with her 'large feet . . . [and] . . . [no] figure at all,' is a strong-minded and well-educated young girl, who is seen by everyone, even her own parents, as extraordinary, unsteady, and 'a little unusual' (Bowen, *Friends and Relations* 28-29). Thus, it is already expected of her to exhibit an unusual feminine behaviour for that time period, as it can be easily anticipated that she is not the subservient daughter fit for aristocratic circles. Not surprisingly, halfway through the novel, her amorous intentions intensify when she exclaims that she, in fact, loves Janet 'beyond propriety' (146). Of course, this could mean the socially-accepted norms of the appropriateness of expected behaviour, but it could also indicate the intended sexual activity that Theodora would like to engage in with Janet.

Furthermore, the presumption, or rather certainty, of Theodora's sexual preference derives from the fact that her desire, despite being concentrated on Janet, is not inclusive of just one person but indicates the possible attraction to other women as well. This can be seen in her proclamation of devotion to Janet, in which she compares her to her sister, Laurel: 'she's not really my type, . . . Janet has more personality; I'm devoted to *her*' (Bowen, *Friends and Relations* 43). Thus, it is here, for the first time in Irish women's writing, when lesbian desire

is at last depicted not in a form of a romantic friendship or attachment, an adolescent crush, or hidden under the umbrella of transgenderism, but as a conscious 'passion for women' (84). Therefore, the stage of comparison/exploration in this extract, through its more prominent emphasis on same-sex attraction between women, becomes distinct in comparison to the stage of hesitation, as Theodora declares her lesbian tendencies in a near-open manner. Furthermore, her feelings can no longer be explained in terms of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romantic friendship because not only does Janet not return Theodora's advances, but Theodora's attachment appears not limited to one person only. In fact, she quickly finds a suitable replacement for Janet, Marise, who is 'aloof, important, with a cool little air of sufficiency that discredit[s] marriage' (58). The narrator comments that it is not difficult for two women to live together, noting that they 'had perfected a system of half-allusion' (124), that certainly has double connotations as to the nature of their relationship. Although in this instance, the allusion could refer to the coveted lesbian activity under the term of a romantic friendship, it is more indicative of its correlation with the "illusion" that it creates as to its conduct. The fact that the arrangement of their relationship could imply a variety of possibilities, one of them being the alternative to heterosexual marriage, leaves the room for the potential readers' imaginations to presume that it could be more passionate than it is presented on the outside.

The peripheral existence of lesbian desire in *Friends and Relations* brings me to an analysis of an explicit lesbian presence in Bowen's narrative. The extent to which this presence begins to materialise itself in a more overt way is substantially progressed in comparison to the works from the turn of the twentieth century. Therefore, the fact that lesbian desire became an indispensable element of Irish women's writing, *de rigueur*, certainly points to the stage of comparison/exploration, and the period of time at which Bowen's extensive fiction is placed.

Lesbian desire as "the third" presence "bracketing" heterosexually-concentrated plots

Maud Ellmann, in her critical book on works of Elizabeth Bowen, *The Shadow Across the Page*, develops Freud's idea of the shadowy third and transforms the Lacanian *genesis of two*, to argue that Bowen's heterosexual couples are often haunted by another presence that establishes their relationships and, essentially, provides initial grounds for the formation of these relationships. In other words, predominantly in Bowen's fiction, no relationship is initiated without the presence of "the third," be it another character involved, or entangled, in

the main love affair, or an inanimate object thrusting its sounds and disrupting the evolution of the heterosexual plot. Ellmann proposes that Bowen's novels 'are always haunted by an absent third . . . [that] is the nothing that brings couples together but also tears them ruthlessly apart' (*The Shadow Across the Page* 8).

The episodic presence of Bowen's lesbians, which is 'either framed or superseded by heterosexual romance and marriage' (Rau 217), other than creating the sense of lesbian desire "bracketing" the main plot, also resembles Smith's notion of *lesbian panic*, where the characters, or the author, are unwilling to reveal their own same-sex desire, thus committing irrational acts, sometimes of violence, which are often harmful to those around them. *Lesbian panic* links closely to the concept of "the third," as well as to the theme of adolescence, as its sublimeness does not allow for the complete emergence of lesbian desire, but rather disrupts the narrative by its unexpected, haunting appearance, a phenomenon to which Terry Castle refers as the 'ghosting of the lesbian' (5). Bowen's textual experimentation with sensationalism, most likely incited by her friendship with Virginia Woolf, ensures that lesbian love in her novels is never fulfilled. In fact, it is often disrupted by either some tragic event or the sudden end of the novel that does not offer any clues as to its possible ending. As a result, lesbian desire remains implicitly hidden within the narrative, although explicitly unveiled sufficiently to be acknowledged and leave a long-lasting impression on the reader.

This is linked to my previous argument, which states that the censorship regarding works featuring lesbian desire has strengthened considerably since the Wilde trials in 1895. Therefore, the presence of a lesbian character in the fiction of the 1920s and 1930s Ireland is perceived rather as an effect of *de rigueur*. Bowen's lesbians, with the exception of Theodora, do not contribute to the narrative, and their actions are often deemed to be fruitless; but so are the amorous advances of their heterosexual counterparts. Therefore, Bowen offers her readers a certain sense of equality between those two sexualities, where neither heterosexual nor lesbian desire is fulfilled.

Furthermore, the connotations of the word 'third' in the context of lesbian presence in a text must also be considered, as it relates closely to the term "third sex," which has large implications to the notion of homosexuality.[12] Despite many misconceptions surrounding the term "third sex" in a lesbian context, such as its sole reference to hermaphroditism, transgenderism, or the contemporary theory referring to submissive or dominant sexual partners, the category of the "third sex" 'is first and foremost defined by an inability or lack of desire to unite with the opposite sex and beget children' (Wilhelm 111), which ironically

corresponds with representations of Bowen's lesbian heroines. However, their "third" presence is soon transfigured. They leave the stage of adolescence, and, similarly to the older women of their respective texts, have to abandon *Schwärmerei* at the cost of their *mentalité*, which, as a set of values shared by a community, in this case being the pervasiveness of heterosexuality, does not allow them to explore their sexuality and, instead, condemns them to adapt to society's expectations and to enter the uninviting prospect of heterosexual marriage. *Schwärmerei* refers to an irrational attachment which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, referred to young girls' adolescent fascinations with older women. A reference to *Schwärmerei*, found by Patricia Coughlan in her essay 'Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen' (113), can be seen in *The Hotel*, when Mrs Kerr's son, Ronald, in response to his mother's description of Sydney's fondness remarks: 'I thought you couldn't tolerate schärmerei' (Bowen, *The Hotel* 107).

Ellmann, in her theory of the shadowy third, also develops Levinas's "third term," which states: 'I do not exist solely with my neighbouring other, but with a multiplicity of others' (*The Shadow Across the Page* 202), and argues that "the third" presence 'shatters the "dual intimacy" of the lovers and reminds them of the "multiplicity of others"' ('Elizabeth Bowen: The Missing Corner' 73). This means that seeing faces of other people, some of whom entirely unknown, or even just being aware of their presence, awakens the need for justification of one's actions. Consciousness is thus disrupted by performing face-to-face interaction that precedes verbal communication, as it evokes an obligation to fulfill others' unspoken expectations. I believe, however, that this particular concept is most appropriate and applicable when intertwined with the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, who stated that 'hell is other people.' Namely, we see ourselves through the eyes of others, and our actions, constantly judged by others, are reflected in their opinion of us.

For Bowen's characters, (lesbian) sexual desire is dependent on an ethical relationship with others. Sydney's and Lois's actions and utterances, will, in their adulthood, become, like they did in case of Mrs Kerr and Marda, subjected to reason which, understood in Foucauldian terms as the opposite of un-reason, with sexual deviance and homosexuality being some of the aspects of the latter (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 38), stands to represent patriarchal society with its domestic and heteronormative expectations. Thus, the presence of "the third" assumes the role of a double agent: in form of lesbian desire "bracketing" the heterosexually-concentrated plot, but also in heterosexuality as the dominant value that surrounds the presence of lesbian characters within the narrative. This may seem to create an ambiguity as to the role of "the third," as the reader of *The Hotel*, for example, may never know whether Veronica, the

most popular of the three Lee-Mittison sisters, despite her indifference felt towards men (Rule 117), seeks actively for a husband because she can see the effect of Mrs Kerr on Sydney, or whether Sydney, observing Veronica's entanglement within the heterosexist construct, makes the choice to accept Mr Milton's proposal. Similarly, in *The Last September*, Lois becomes entangled in the relationship with Gerald as she is influenced by her best friend, Livvy, who, otherwise, is very devoted to Lois. However, I see this ambiguity as the necessary element granting the existence of "the third," as it does not only portray the juxtaposition of hetero- and homosexuality, but also the before-mentioned interdependence of one on the other within the narrative.

Lesbian desire, always present within the narrative and "bracketing" the heterosexual plot, can also be seen in Kate O'Brien's third novel, *Mary Lavelle* (1936). Although O'Brien portrayed male homoerotic desire in her other works of prose: *Without My Cloak* (1931), for which she received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Hawthornden Prize, and *The Land of Spices* (1941), it is in *Mary Lavelle* that she addresses the subject of female same-sex passion directly for the first time. Kate O'Brien was born in Limerick in 1897, to a Catholic, upper-class family. At the age of five, following the death of her mother, she was sent to a boarding school at Laurel Hill and, after graduating, attended University College Dublin. In 1926, she published her first play, *Distinguished Villa*, which began a string of further publications. She became a prolific and an established writer, who wrote not only novels, but also plays, biographies, film scripts, travelogues and travel books on Spain and Ireland, as well as literary criticism. She relocated several times, moving between Ireland, Spain, and England where, between 1931 and 1950, following the end of her marriage in 1924, she came across many homosexual men as well as independent lesbian women (Walshe, 'Invisible Irelands' 40, 43).

Walshe ascertains that this had had an immense influence on Kate O'Brien's dress code, which was deemed unacceptable for women of her class, and comes to the conclusion that O'Brien 'did have an identified lesbian lifestyle and dress code but she never defined herself openly as lesbian because of her education in Irish Catholicism and her own . . . family's conservatism' (Walshe 'Invisible Irelands' 41). However, her London connections did not only alter her attire; her work also came into conflict with the newly-formed Censorship of Publications Board in Ireland of 1929, which censored two of her novels: *Mary Lavelle* and *The Land of Spices*. Although these books were banned for their explicit sexual content, the case of homosexual and lesbian characters certainly was not unnoticed by the authorities (Donoghue,

'Out of Order' 41). Kate O'Brien's interactions with gay men and lesbians also point to the stage of comparison/exploration, as O'Brien, undoubtedly influenced by these acquaintances, wrote lesbian (and gay) characters into her fiction.

Mary Lavelle depicts its eponymous character who feels a strong need for independence and leaves her Irish hometown of Mellick and her fiancé John to work as a governess in Spain. She arrives in the Pyrenees, at the Areavaga family, to become a "Miss," as the governesses were referred to by the locals, and to undertake the teaching of English language to the three daughters of the family, a common arrangement in the 1920s. Owing to the nature of her employment, Mary soon becomes acquainted with other governesses whose lifestyle she perceives as both bewildering and enjoyable. Despite her masculine and androgynous appearance, or, as Coughlan proposes, 'a caricature of feminine beauty presented in masculinist constructs' (Coughlan, 'Kate O'Brien: Feminine Beauty, Feminist Writing and Sexual Role' 59-84), Mary is not the lesbian of the text, although it can certainly be argued that she is not ignorant of feminine beauty. This is easily observable in her admiration of Luisa, who is the wife of the son of her employers, Juanito, with whom Mary has a brief affair. In terms of lesbian presence, however, the secondary character of Agatha Conlon, a middle-aged Irish governess, deserves most attention; whereas her character is not crucial to the development of the plot, her presence and the same-sex passion she displays for Mary, similarly to works of Bowen, undermines the heterosexist tradition of writing.

Agatha, one of the strictest teachers on the island, does not confess her feelings for Mary until the closing section of the novel. Although her character definitely fits into the model of "the third" featuring this otherwise heterosexually-concentrated narrative, O'Brien, as opposed to Bowen, attempts to problematise lesbian existence as always having been present in history, and always "bracketing" the dominant heteronormativity. In fact, Mentxaka sees *Mary Lavelle* as belonging to a 'tradition of activist literature' that portrays lesbian desire in a way that is distinctive to the hitherto prevailing understanding of heterosexuality (66). This is especially observable in the change of dynamics in relations between Agatha and Mary, as after Agatha discloses her secret to Mary, tension seems to have eased and the two women actually talk about Agatha's confession with an openness that cannot be seen in any of the earlier works of Bowen: 'though no word more of emotion was said between them, [Mary's] voice and manner with Agatha had automatically become easier and more sisterly' (Kate O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle* 257).

Nevertheless, despite the presence of an openly lesbian character, it is clear that O'Brien's notion of lesbian desire is still largely influenced by medical knowledge of the 1920s,

as well as her own Catholic upbringing and the influence of the Church on lesbian politics and the politics of Ireland. Thus, Agatha, proclaiming her love for Mary 'with rosary beads in her hands' (245), is overshadowed by the presence of heteronormativity, Irish religiosity, and the dominating notion of lesbian sexuality as the demonized sexual orientation:

> [Agatha] 'I like you the way a man would, you see. I never can see you without – without wanting to touch you. I could look at your face for ever. . . . It's a sin to feel like that.'
> [Mary] 'Oh, everything's a sin!'
> [Agatha] 'I knew it was wrong; but lately I've been told explicitly about it in confession. It's a very ancient and terrible vice.'
> . . .
> [Agatha] 'So I fell into what my confessor calls the sin of Sodom.' (248, 259)

This excerpt is an undisguisable illustration of how the Catholic Church, as well as the theories of "inversion" affected lesbian discourse in the 1930s. In fact, O'Brien would not be able to write about an explicit lesbian relationship until the second half of the twentieth century, after Irish censorship was modulated. However, this was not just the case for Kate O'Brien; other writers also adopted this style of writing and a similar representation of their characters, which obscured the presence of lesbian desire mainly because of their opaque understanding of it. This can be seen, for example, in the famous *The Well of Loneliness* where young Stephen Gordon agonises deeply as she is not able to comprehend her same-sex desire as well as her sexual identity, leading her to suffer from a severe depression.

It is also worth mentioning that despite some similarities, O'Brien takes quite a distinctive approach to Bowen in terms of presenting lesbian desire. Whereas I have argued that Bowen's narrative moves away from the Freudian representation of lesbians and woman-to-woman attachment, O'Brien's depiction of lesbian love is to a certain extent imitative of heterosexual affection. Nevertheless, although Bowen is the pioneer for entering the lesbian love into Irish female discourse, I argue that Kate O'Brien, by facilitating the necessary effect of (hetero)"normalising" this desire, exemplifies the narrative's placement within the developmental stage of comparison/exploration. This achievement is particularly valuable in the time following 1937 and 'the publication of an influential heterosexual fiction: the

Constitution of Ireland' (Donoghue, 'Noises' 179), which paid particular care to preserve and glorify the institution of marriage created by the Catholic Church and repudiating any other forms of sexuality.[13] The primary argument against same-sex relations is that the term "marriage" to which the Irish Constitution referred before the thirty-fourth amendment, was used in 'a unique opposite-sex bond, which by definition [could] not extend to same-sex couples' (Ennis 31). As a result, lesbian sexuality, the existence of which has become popularised by the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century's sexologists, had been concomitantly condemned by the State and its Constitution. Moved to the margins of society, and not even recognised in the way that male homosexuality was through its penalisation of sodomy, lesbian desire was communicated bravely through other channels and more open references, thus exemplifying the stage of comparison/exploration in the development of Irish lesbian fiction.

The dominant presence of lesbian desire in Molly Keane's *The Devoted Ladies*

In 1934, Molly Keane, under the pseudonym of M.J. Farrell, published her third novel, *The Devoted Ladies.* This lesbian parody of a Gothic novel, divergent from other works of her contemporaries, concentrates predominantly on the nature of the abusive lesbian relationship between an alcoholic widow, Jane, and her lover, Jessica. Nevertheless, their relationship is also disrupted by heterosexuality, which takes a hold of Jane who, being in remission from a serious case of alcohol poisoning, decides to marry George Playfair with whom she admits she is not in love but, similar to Bowen's novels, deems it to be the necessary decision, especially given the connotations of George's last name that implies the need for conformity with expected and lawful behaviour. The plot opens with a party in the London flat of a famous novelist and playwright, Sylvester, before moving to the familiar surroundings of rural Ireland. Whereas one of the supposed aims of Bowen's and O'Brien's novels, as I have argued, was to introduce *lesbian continuum* into the discourse, Keane's portrayal of lesbian desire is significantly different. By presenting Jane as the innocent party in her relationship, who is 'scared to death that [Jessica]'ll kill [her]' (Keane 12), Keane has taken the approach of keeping in line with the unfavourable image of the lesbian as 'predatory, possessive, promiscuous, jealous, sadistic, masochistic, unnatural, unhealthy, bitter, man-hating, masculine, aggressive, frustrated, cold, [and] over-sexed' (Goldstein 358). Still, despite this positioning of lesbians on the margins of society, Keane has achieved something that will not be repeated in Irish women's writing for

another twenty years – she shifts the focus from the heterosexually-concentrated plot onto the intricacies of female love, which becomes the central part of her novel.

Furthermore, Keane actually makes the subject of Jane and Jessica's lesbian relationship, despite Jane's brief affair with George Playfair, to be paralleled by another suggestive case of lesbian attachment. Once in Ireland, Jane and Jessica come to stay with Sylvester's cousins, one of whom, Viola, better known as Piggy because of her excessive weight, is irrevocably in love with her neighbour and childhood friend, Joan, to whom Piggy 'swore eternal Love and Loyalty . . . [and whom] Piggy adored and served' (Keane 116, 117). The presence of two connotations of lesbian desire in the novel, therefore, challenges the hitherto prevailing tradition and, instead, portrays heterosexuality as the uncomfortable presence that seems to be circumventing an otherwise lesbian-concentrated novel. It never becomes clear, however, whether Jessica will stop Jane from marrying George, or whether Jane will leave him for her lesbian lover, the option she had been considering on several occasions, as *lesbian panic* sets in again, and Piggy drives her car off the cliff, with Jessica by her side (242).

It has been argued that Keane created this negative image of the "English" lesbian, Jessica, to portray lesbian desire invading Ireland, which is representative of 'a conservative Irish nationalism that rejects English sexual modernity' (Bacon 99). Bacon argues that Keane is at pains to expose Jane and Jessica as outsiders, in order to emphasise the increasing insecurity of Anglo-Irish gentry in Ireland (105). Although this may be true, especially when taking into consideration the nationalistic and misogynistic legislations of the 1930s, the *de rigueur* presence of lesbian desire cannot be forgotten. For, as Keane said herself:

> I suppose I was rather curious and shocked by coming upon all that. Before then no-one thought anything of two elderly ladies setting up house together. I'd certainly never heard a murmur, though now everyone murmurs about everything. I was excited by finding out about lesbians and homosexuals. It was new. It made a subject. (Polly Devlin x)

Thus, taking into consideration the fact that the subject of lesbian passion and sexuality was very new for Keane, one can see why she may have chosen the approach of conceptualising the existence of lesbians and desire in Krafft-Ebing's terms, as well as portraying the defenceless,

American Jane as the prey for the masculine, manipulative, and violent Jessica.[14] Nonetheless, the effect of the novel is indisputable, as, possibly because of her narrow knowledge of the subject, Keane manages to shift the focus of the novel entirely onto lesbian (sexual) relations. In this way, although most likely unconsciously, she does not only continue the work of her predecessors and contemporaries and enters lesbian narrative into the next stage of development, but also begins a new trend in writing, which will be adopted by Elizabeth Bowen and Kate O'Brien in their later novels in the second half of the twentieth century.

As I already mentioned, the beginning of the twentieth century was a difficult time for Irish women, and an even more difficult one for Irish lesbians. The victories of the first-wave feminists, and the acquirement of the vocabulary to express lesbian passion, did not grant women a free expression of their sexuality, and neither did the 1937 Constitution. Despite many attempts of Bowen, O'Brien, and Keane to enter lesbian desire into the public discourse, Irish Censorship held a firm charge over the image of the woman, as well as the deviant sexual activities and orientations. However, the fiction of those three authors, in my opinion, became the foundation that initiated the development of lesbian narrative into the advanced stage of comparison/exploration, where the latter part would become especially predominant in the second half of the twentieth century preceding the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland. The post-war period would experience an even higher intensity concerning women's position in society, however, with an equally heightened interest and the flow of information, lesbian desire would become more explicit and frequent. Kate O'Brien would be able to develop her lesbian characters and depict a lesbian relationship openly, and other writers of this period would also be able to problematise and discuss female attachments in a more open manner, consecutively leading to the development of a discourse that would accommodate this desire freely and unquestionably at the end of the twentieth century, thus giving lesbians an 'autonomous female desire and agency' (Farwell 64).

Notes

[1] In fact, Mary McAuliffe claims that this role of lesbians, the "hidden history," is 'the story . . . about radical women making radical choices not just about politics, but about their personal lives,' and that '20-century Ireland owes a lot to Irish lesbians' (Sheehan n.p.).

[2] The term Anglo-Irish Ascendancy refers to a privileged, dominant social class in Ireland, whose members were descendants of the Protestant Ascendancy. Their main aim was to 'govern Ireland in the interests of England' (McConville 1). Anglo-Irish, also known as "New English," often, but not always, descended from the Protestant English settlers, and engaged in the English lifestyle, culture, and politics. The Anglo-Irish were the ruling minority of Ireland. The tradition of dominance of this colonial caste lasted for two hundred years, with its peak in the eighteenth century. Anglo-Irish families resided in what are now referred to as Big Houses, an example of which was Bowen's Court, the Irish home of Elizabeth Bowen, as well as Danielstown of *The Last September*. Following the establishment of the Free State in 1922, Big Houses were burned by the IRA, and their surviving owners were banished. By the 1980s, McConville argues, the Anglo-Irish had, 'as an entity, [entirely] disappeared' (1).

[3] In an interview for *The Bell*, in 1942, Elizabeth Bowen speaks about her sense of national belonging:

> I regard myself as an Irish novelist. As long as I can remember, I've been extremely conscious of being Irish – even when I was writing about very un-Irish things such as suburban life in Paris or the English seaside. All my life I've been going backwards and forwards between Ireland and England and the Continent, but that has never robbed me of the strong feeling of my nationality. I must say it's a highly disturbing emotion. It's not – I must emphasize – sentimentality. ("The Bellman: Meet Elizabeth Bowen" 425)

[4] The fact that the word "lesbian" was not generally used until the second half of the twentieth century is an attestation of the power of the Catholic Church over the politics of Ireland. It is also a confirmation of another reason, other than the detailed description of Maria's and Juanito's lovemaking, responsible for the censorship of Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle.*

Furthermore, it provides the evidence of the distinctiveness between England and Ireland, emphasising the stigma of Irish sexual minorities. The first use of the term in English literature can be found in William King's 'Ode to Myra' which, in 1732 referred to sexual relationships between women as 'Lesbian Loves,' and in 1736 as 'Tribades or Lesbians' (84-85). The poem, ironically, describes a hermaphroditic Myra who rules 'a social circle of tribades in Dublin' (Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* 55).

[5] For more information on the results of nineteenth-century sexologists' theories and their effects on lesbians, see Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men.*

[6] Nicola Darwood argues that, in fact, Bowen's novels are written in 'a post-Freudian context' (3), when issues of sexuality began to be treated with a certain dose of contempt, and the subject of which proved to be difficult to include in fiction. Bowen herself reflects on this:

> One cannot deny that, with the nineteenth century, a sort of fog did begin, in the English novel, to obscure vital aspects of life. It became more difficult to write greatly because it became less possible to write truly. There was facetiousness on the subject of class, squeamishness on the subject of sex (*English Novelists* 32).

[7] Freud, in his theory of 'Psychosexual Development,' states that homosexuality is an adolescent stage preceding heterosexuality:

> One of the tasks implicit in object-choice is that it should find its way to the opposite sex. This, as we know, is not accomplished without a certain amount of fumbling. Often enough the first impulses after puberty go astray, though without any permanent harm resulting. (229)

[8] These four heroes are the subjects of Brian Merriman's latest play, *Eirebrushed*, first staged for the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival in which he ridicules the 1916 Proclamation's establishment of the 'Republic of Equals' and portrays his characters'

achievements, and at times even existence, caused by their putative sexual desire. The story of Sir Roger Casement, in particular, caused a lot of controversy upon the discovery of certain parts of his private diaries that described his homosexual relations with men, which since 1950s began to be referred known as *The Black Diaries*. His diaries were pronounced to be faked by the British authorities, who produced them in order to ensure an unopposed execution of Casement. For decades, there persisted a belief, especially in Ireland and popularised by Irish nationalists, that his diaries were forged. However, on 12th March 2002, a fully independent forensic examination carried out by Dr Audrey Giles has reached the conclusion that the Black Diaries are genuine, and that each of the diaries has been written by Sir Roger Casement's hand. Nevertheless, there are still people who believe that the Dr Giles's assessment cannot be called 'a rigorous inquiry' (Martina Devlin, *Independent.ie* n.p.) thus, yet again, doubting its authenticity.

[9] The mill scene is probably the most theorised excerpt of *The Last September*; the interpretations vary between analyses of representations of charged sexual tension (Corcoran 51, Ellmann, *The Shadow Across the Page* 65), vampirism (Moynahan 84), cultural and political deprivation, as well as the waning power of Anglo-Irish (Lassner 41). The most accurate reading in context of the presence of lesbian desire, however, is offered by Nicola Darwood, as she ascertains that 'the violence which takes place at the derelict mill [either] forces Lois to reject the possibility of a relationship with Marda or, alternatively, provides the catalyst for Lois' recognition that adulthood beckons with its attendant questions of (hetero)sexuality' (40).

[10] For the detailed account of Bowen's contemporaries, please see Shari Benstock's book on *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, which she dedicated to lesbian writers residing in France during the interwar period.

[11] Scholars also placed Bowen in the tradition of the Anglo-Irish Gothic (McCormack 853), as well as the Anglo-Irish Big House novelist (Mooney 246).

[12] The term "third sex" was used in literature for the first time in 1835 by Théophile Gautier in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, where the heroine dreams of satisfying her double nature in order to be able to alternate between the two sexes, none of which she feels is truly her own, and exclaims that she is of a separate third sex that does not yet have a name. In 1899, Ernst Ludwig von Wolzogen published *Das dritte Geschlecht* (*The Third Sex*), in which novel he

refers to the New Woman as "neuter," as she tried to access privileges which were, at the time, accessible only to men. The term, used specifically in a lesbian context, appeared in Minna Wettstein-Adelt's *Sind es Frauen? Roman über das dritte Geschlecht* (*Are They Women? A Novel about the Third Sex*). Moreover, considered from the point of sexology, the term referred, predominantly, to homosexuality. In 1864, under the pseudonym of Numa Numantius, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs published a treatise, *Vindex. Sozial-juristische Studien über mannmänlische Geschlechtsliebe* (*Social-legal Studies on Sexual Love between Men*), where he wrote: 'We Uranians constitute a special sexual class of people, comparable to hermaphrodites, as sex of its own, coordinate as a third sex with that of men and that of women' (5). However, it was a German sexologist and gay rights' activist, Magnus Hirschfield, who popularised the term and used it favourably over "homosexuality" (10-14).

[13] The exclusivity of the Irish Constitiution can be particularly observed in the following excerpt:

> The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law. In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that Mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded. (Article forty-one of Bunreacht Na hÉireann - Constitution of Ireland, 1937)

[14] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who categorised lesbians into four types that resemble today's notions of butch/femme; the first category, representing femme, '[does] not betray their anomaly by external appearance or by mental sexual characteristics,' whereas a woman belonging to the fourth category, he wrote, 'possesses of the feminine qualities only the genital organs; thought, sentiment, action, even external appearance are those of the man' (262-264).

Chapter Three

Lesbian Existence in the Post-war Writings of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien: 1949 – 1988

> The lesbian is never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away and she is dire. (She has seldom seemed as accessible . . . as her integrating twin brother, the male homosexual.) What we never expect is . . . to find her in the midst of things, as familiar and crucial as an old friend. (Castle 2-3)

Since the lesbian fiction published in the first half of the twentieth century, representations of lesbian desire disappeared from the pages of Irish women's writing nearly entirely until the late 1950s, although some critics claim that it was 'from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s [when] Irish literature contrived to suggest that lesbianism did not occur in the Republic' (Antoinette Quinn 156) at all. Therefore, the development of Irish lesbian narrative came to another sudden halt. Fiction of the 1950s remained at the stage of comparison/exploration, only to progress to its advanced phase in the late 1960s, which accommodated the emergence of the second-wave of feminism, as well as the first use of the word "lesbian" on the pages of Irish women's writing. The phases of the stage of comparison/exploration, however, will intertwine concurrently until the late 1980s. This advanced stage of comparison/exploration, where Irish lesbian authors are still exploring the possibilities of lesbian textual territories whilst taking inspiration from writers from other countries, is characterised with a perceptible emphasis on the concept of *lesbian existence*, where the past presence of lesbians is entered into the discourse with the use of symbolism and historical fiction. Furthermore, the presence of lesbians, although still not entirely overt, becomes even more central to the course of the novel than it did in the first half of the twentieth century.

Following Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, which was banned shortly after its publication, there was a long break in Irish women's literary creativity.[1] Main reasons for that were the mass emigration, mostly of single women, a crippling economic stagnation, as well as the political repression of women. The last factor became especially evident following the 1937 Irish Constitution, which not only named the Catholic Church 'as the particular guardian of the people's faith, made the equality of citizens conditional on 'due regard' of sexual differences, [but also] gave the state the role of ensuring women should not have to neglect their proper role

in the home, and prohibited divorce' (Benton 166-167). In other words, Ireland was still a hostile place for women, where the Catholic church held powerful sway and men enjoyed complete power. This emphasis on the role of woman, and the concomitant demonization of deviant sexualities, was also strengthened by the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939, when the Nazis, whose credos evolved from the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), initiated a very explicit discrimination against homosexual people, prosecution of whom was often equal with punishments of other minorities and resulted in their expulsion to German concentration camps.[2]

Following the First World War, and the establishing of the Weimar Republic between 1919 and 1933, many lesbians joined homosexual groups, as well as forming their own, in order to repeal German anti-homosexual laws. In the 1930s, however, negative attitudes towards homosexual persons had been implemented by the NSDAP, and later adopted by the Nazis, who did not even need to develop a new ideology, as they were utilising and simply expanding on the homophobia that was already in place, as well as on the theories of pseudo-medical professionals from around the turn of the twentieth century. The aim of their anti-homosexual politics was to control the population through means such as scientific racism or eugenics, in order to preserve the Aryan race, where gay men and lesbians, because of their non-reproductivity, were perceived as endangering the future of German nation. The leaders of the Nazi Party were very clear as to their position on Paragraph 175A of the Reich Penal Code, which criminalised homosexual activity, bestiality and other forms of sexual deviance (Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality Under National Socialism* 45), and which later found a number of supporters, amongst whom was Ehrhard F. W. Eberhard, who insisted on the law's inclusion of lesbians (Shoppmann 6). It is estimated that approximately fifty thousand men were convicted of homosexual relations, and ten to fifteen thousand were sent to concentration camps (Schoppmann 10).[3] On 14th May 1928, the NSDAP has issued the following statement:

> Whoever so much as thinks of male-male or female-female love is our enemy. We are opposed to everything that emasculates our people, making it a plaything of the enemy. . . . This is why we oppose all illicit sexual acts, above all male-male love, because it robs us of our last chance to liberate our people from the chains of slavery under which they now suffer. (Klare 114)

On 2nd of August 1930, this declaration regarding illicit sexual relations was further strengthened by an article published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Nationalist Observer): 'We will see to it that . . . physical relations with . . . same sex will soon be characterized by law as what they truly are, that is, as contemptible aberrations . . . as the most serious of crimes, to be punished by hanging or expulsion' (n.p.). Thus, such postulations strengthened the already-existing stigmatisation of homosexual minorities into a lawful persecution, which set back the achievements of homosexual men and lesbians of the Weimar Republic, after its collapse in 1933.

Despite the fact that Ireland declared its neutrality in the Second World War, and that there is no documented evidence of persecution of homosexual minorities in Ireland, it can be argued that the impact of overseas influences was, in fact, undeniable, especially since Irish people were actively supporting allied forces in Ireland, as well as in Britain. It is believed that as many as two hundred thousand Irish people went to work in Britain during the length of the war, whereas nearly fifty thousand Irishmen volunteered to fight. Furthermore, the emergence of Irish fascist organisations, such as the Blueshirts, which by 1934 had nearly forty thousand supporters (Ferriter 416), may suggest that the anti-homosexual politics of the NSDAP could have had a considerable influence on the treatment of lesbians and gay men in Ireland, thus creating a climate of fear for sexual minorities.

Such open acts of hatred further strengthened the suspicions of female friendships, thus making women categorically more dependent on men. This new structure eliminated the actions of the New Woman writers and their efforts to modify the boundaries between gender roles. Not surprisingly then, fictions of Elizabeth Bowen from this time exhibited strong signs of *lesbian panic*, which was introduced by Patricia Juliana Smith to represent the narrative's implicit lesbian desire. Meanwhile, in Bowen's later fiction, the young and easily impressionable adolescent protagonist, along with her older seductress, temporarily give way to mature women whose search for their (sexual) identities resembles that of the fictions of Edith Somerville and Martin Ross.

Furthermore, the reversion of lesbian presence into the shadows of female narratives coincides with another important factor, which is an alteration of gender norms following the involvement of women in the public sphere during the time of military conflicts. The decline in availability of money and resources, along with the growing pressure from the Irish government which insisted that women's duties should be restricted to home and family, resulted in high numbers of young women leaving Ireland. The Eire census recorded a plummet

in the number of its inhabitants by nearly two hundred thousand out of its three million between 1946 and 1966. The majority of those emigrants were women who had left mainly for England not only in search of employment, but also to escape the abortion laws and to establish their social positions without having to marry.[4] This certainly found its reflection in literature and created a crisis in Irish women's writing (Stevens 181). women's writing, therefore, focused primarily on issues of marriage, home, and family (Smith 82). However, as Niamh Baker claims, the 'censorship or self-censorship . . . [that] led to an almost complete absence of lesbians' (78), was, nevertheless, not an obsolete absence of feminism.

Jane Rule reports that Bowen, after the death of her husband in 1952, returned to the theme of female relationships in her writing (115). However, I will argue that the subject of female same-sex desire had never disappeared entirely from her fiction, and that 'sexual overtones' (Coughlan, 'Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen' 121) are certainly detectable before that time. In 1949, Elizabeth Bowen published her sixth novel, *The Heat of the Day*, set in Blitz-blighted London in 1942. As I have already observed, issues of war and domesticity, further incited by the Censorship Act, altered significantly lesbian presence in the fiction of this period. However, Elizabeth Bowen yet again conducted textual, intertextual, stylistic, and narrational experimentation in order to incorporate female same-sex passion in her writing. Although the novel's heavily heterosexual plot is dominated by issues concerning the war, with personal and political treason as its central theme, the characters of Louie and Connie point marginally to the presence of same-sex female desire that is enshrouded and concealed in the corners of the narrative.

It is also worth observing how patriarchy and heteronormativity play a vital role in this text, that depicts its main character, Stella Rodney, being entangled between two men whose play for power dominates the plot. Stella lives alone in a characterless flat in central London, and is involved in a romantic relationship with Robert Kelway who is suspected of being a Nazi spy.[5] The reader acquires this knowledge during the visit of Harrison, who attempts to lure Stella into an entrapment of his own amorous advances in return for Robert's conviction. Henceforth, the narrative is preoccupied with finding out the truth about Robert, and Stella's (in)decision on which man she should put her trust in. She can either save Robert by prostituting herself to Harrison, the British counterespionage agent, or she can mistrustfully watch and spy on her lover, risking that his realisation of her actions might alter his behaviour and, if guilty, betray himself. Such contorted portrayal of heterosexual relationships is deepened by Stella's confusion. For she is no more of an expert when it comes to lying or dealings with men than

she was during her marriage to Victor, who was shamelessly cheating on her with his nurse. Following his death, Stella, in order not to be erased entirely from society as a subject whose existence can only function based on her compliance with the prescribed female domestic gender roles, instead chooses to be seen as a failure by letting people believe that she was the one to walk out on her husband, and not the opposite (Hoogland 134). In fact, Parsons argues that Bowen's 'heroines, attempting to express their perceptions of this world through the masculine language system, do not really fit anywhere . . . unable to correspond to the identity types available' (31).

The dilemma of Stella, who is 'caught in these (Jamesian) wheels of surveillance – watching the watched watch the watchers' (Ellmann 154), undermines the truthfulness of heterosexual interpersonal (romantic) relations, thus giving way for a sublime emergence of lesbian desire, which is coming into being in this new world of demolished surroundings. Personal cataclysms of the novel's characters now facilitate a chance to reconstruct themselves in terms of sexual curiosity and desire. Thus Louie, a young wife who lives in London on her own whilst her husband is fighting at war, is given an opportunity to experience an alternative love, a mirrored image of heterosexuality. To create this effect, I will use the mirror in Louie's apartment, which gives way for the emergence of a metaphorical mirror that will allow Bowen's characters to perceive the hitherto prevailing lives and norms from a different perspective. Shattered during the Blitz, the mirror produces an inverted reflection of reality, accommodating willingly the missing pieces of human desire, and attempts to create a new understanding of sexual normativity. Therefore, the first meeting of Louie and Connie, who became both introduced and intimate within the same two minutes, is also portrayed from the reverted perspective, as 'Connie happen[s] to *fall* upstairs' [my italics] (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 143). Furthermore, the image of the mirror produces another effect which is crucial to the development of a presence of lesbian desire within the narrative: it offers a possibility of an insight into the creation of a new sexual identity, and a new image of self within the discourse.

In *The Heat of the Day*, the traditionally male-centred genre of the spy novel is transformed into a female-centred plot (Lassner 125). Firstly, men's existence and importance are diminished and deemed insubstantial in Bowen's narrative, as Robert and Harrison share the same first name, as Harrison's first name is also Robert. Secondly, whereas the inadequacy of the ambiguous circumstances concerning Robert's death adds to the actual insignificance of his presence to the evolvement of the narrative, Harrison seems to have no identity at all – his role is dictated only by his attempts to seduce Stella and capture Robert. Even Stella's son,

Roderick, functions as an introduction to women's oppression and enslavement in the socio-symbolic order. However, his inheritance of Mount Morris, an estate in Ireland, is an attempted extension of the power of Anglo-Irish patriarchy that creates an impression that, at least for Bowen, certain rules imposed by society cannot be forgotten. Mount Morris reflects the presence of Irish society, invading the narrative and not allowing Louie's curiosity to discover a new sexual territory. Therefore, it can be argued that it is not Louie's asexuality, inexperience, or sexual immaturity that results in her pregnancy at the end of the novel, but the inability to explore her sexuality fully. In addition, the absence of her husband, Tom, as well as the mystery surrounding the identity of her baby's father, add to the notion of the insignificance of men.

Bowen's representations of women-loving women, despite the persecution of homosexual people in the time of war in Europe, is still consistent with her approach prevalent in her earlier texts. Although Louie and Connie eventually move in, and share a bed together, thus mimicking the structure of a heterosexual relationship, Connie is not a typical "mannish lesbian" that populated novels of New Women. Despite her uniformed role in the community, and at times behaving like 'an archetypal husband' (Hoogland 200) in her relations with Louie, Connie refutes the stereotypical image of a manly lesbian by appropriating herself in the feminine role, which represents female sensuality that is required in her service at the Air Raid Precaution. Hoogland expostulates that:

> the unorthodox same-sex relationship [with Connie] is clearly preferable to Louie's one-night stands. . . . It also suggests its confinement to a particular (lower) social class. The displacement of lesbian sexuality to a lower level in the cultural hierarchy is reinforced by its being shifted to a lower narrative level of the text: while haunting the edges of the novel's major plot, the lesbian "specter" surfaces directly only in one of the subplots. (200-201)

Although, as I have already identified, lesbian desire in Bowen's novels does not occupy a central space, Louie is portrayed at the stage of the search for her (sexual) identity, as she not only instigates an intimate friendship with Connie but also develops an attraction for Stella. The fact that her sexuality is not yet fully exhibited, even to herself, further emphasises the stage of comparison/exploration in the development of Irish lesbian fiction. Namely, although it is an

example of a subtle reference to lesbian desire, it is not explicit enough as to suggest the stage of tolerance, where sexual identity will become fully internalised.

Marginally older than characters from Bowen's previous novels, Louie's behaviour still bears signs of an immature infantility, especially in relation to other sexual subjects. Alone in London, with her husband fighting at the German front, Louie expresses her lonesomeness in a way which was not unusual in this period of time – she attempts to fill her time with acts of limited heterosexual physicality to replace the longing for her husband. Not surprisingly then, she readily forms a relationship with the masculine Connie, which alarmingly imitates heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, Louie's (sexual) curiosity can be observed in her keen interest in voracious reading of newspapers, a habit adopted from Connie, as she slowly begins to form her own opinions, and learns to question the structure of the surrounding world. The action of reading, which prompts female characters to begin to comprehend and explore a possibility of (their own) same-sex feelings and desire, points to the influence of writings from Europe and constitutes a feature of the stage of comparison/exploration, which is characterised by similarities in presence of lesbian desire in novels from Ireland and from the rest of the western countries, where love between women, by that time, appeared more and more frequently in literature.

Consequently, Louie begins to be 'drawn to girls and women in whom the same fermentation was to be felt' (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 147), and eventually, following a brief encounter in one of London's bars, becomes infatuated with Stella. It is not just a simple case of admiration of a fellow 'soul astray' (240), but a matter of 'deep yearning' (Coughlan, 'Women and Desire in the Work of Elizabeth Bowen' 121). The fact that Louie begins to question her desire becomes apparent, and cannot be misinterpreted, when she unconsciously makes her way to Stella's flat:

> Louie felt herself entered by what was foreign. . . . She felt what she had not felt before – *was* it, even, she herself who was feeling? . . . Here now was Louie sought out exactly as she had sought to be: it is in nature to want what you want so much too much that you must recoil when it comes. . . . Louie dwelled on Stella with mistrust and addiction, dread and desire. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 239-240)

However, just as her relationship with Connie does not develop into anything significant, neither does her short-lived obsession with Stella have any serious consequences in terms of the plot's progression. This theme seems to be repeated in Bowen's *A World of Love* (1958), which did not acquire much literary criticism in terms of its inclusion of lesbian presence. Nevertheless, the significance of inanimate objects that suggest the transition of the narrative's sexual identities persists, this time, in the form of the recurring presence of doors.

Door to the future of Irish lesbian writing: Elizabeth Bowen's *A World of Love* (1958)

Following World War Two, Bowen's writing underwent a certain metamorphosis. In fact, many female writers were 'alienated from the patriotic feminine ideal sentimentalised by popular ideology and disparaged by male-dominated literary enclaves. . . . They also tended to avoid explicit gender politics because any championing of women's rights contradicted the assumptions of government and media machinery' (Dawson 3). Despite the fact that the theme of "bracketing" and the presence of *lesbian panic* had always been prevalent in Bowen's novels, the style of her writing changed undeniably. Although the nature of her "hybrid fiction" often proved to be impossible to categorise (Wells-Lassagne 112), in order to be able to describe the shift from modernism to early postmodernism in her novels, the term 'intermodernism' appears to be the most convenient and useful tool. Intermodernism came to represent 'late modernism, . . . postwar literature, and the no man's land between modernism and postmodernism. . . . It applies to any and all artists who come between the modern and the postmodern, the aesthetic and the social high and low' (Matz 665). It is important to remember, however, that I only use this term to indicate the specific period of time, and that there are no clear boundaries between modernism and postmodernism, as postmodernism is, as Diane Elam laments, 'a rewriting of modernity, which has already been active *within* modernity for a long time' (15).

In fact, Irene Iglesias Pena argues that Bowen's fiction is not only indicative of late modernism, but that it also prefigures postmodernism. According to her, 'Bowen's ambivalent position as regards both currents is perhaps due to the chronological coincidence of her career with the transition from modernism to postmodernism' (Pena 56). Indeed, this can be most certainly said about Bowen's later post-WW2 writing, where elements of postmodernism can be observed in abundance. Namely, the techniques of irony, black humour, intertextuality, pastiche, fabulation, technoculture, paranoia, hyperreality and minimalism pervade the

narratives of *The Little Girls* and *Eva Trout.* In fact, it can be said that the 'inner death' of Portia in *The Death of the Heart* foreshadows Bowen's departure from modernism (Kitagawa 484).

Firstly, however, the above-mentioned texts portray their respective heroines in search of gender and sexual identities, which are posited against the social and cultural terms of material social relations. Whereas in *A World of Love* this search only begins to surface the narrative, in *The Little Girls* it takes up a shape and a form of a beginning of an inquisitive dialogue regarding women's sexuality. This is further intensified in *Eva Trout*, whose protagonist is not only seen as a lesbian character, but also as one who defies the patriarchal order by questioning the prevailing rules regarding sexuality *and* gender. Her familial situation, a keen interest in technoculture, as well as her single parenthood, as I discuss below, all exhibit features of postmodernism, whilst at the same time employing self-parody and self-reflexivity: '"girl" never fitted Eva. Her so-called sex bored her and mortified her; she dragged it about her like a ball and chain. . . . Also . . . thanks to her father . . . she had grown up apart from women' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 228).

Secondly, the fact that Bowen began to incorporate several textual modes and blend discursive styles and genres, situates her characters not only in the opposition to society, which symbolises oppressive power structures, but also advocate a postmodern context by challenging the prevailing norms of heteronormative and patriarchal writing. Her intertextual techniques of referring to poetry, letters, and diaries, as well as placing the missing gun from the coffer in *The Little Girls* into the hands of little Jeremy in *Eva Trout*, suggests her growing disregard to phallocentrism, and proposes the notion of *lesbian existence* that, through an interrogation of several modes of narration, attacks the dominant assumptions and misconceptions regarding lesbian sexuality and its presence in literature.

Finally, I believe that this last element is supported by an element of fabulation, which can be found in the storytelling in *The Little Girls*, as well as represented through Eva's fantasies. This feature allows Bowen to alter the reality of the invisibility of lesbians in Irish national literature and implement the missing presence of lesbian desire with not only references to history, but also by revisioning the ways in which lesbian desire has been hitherto (mis)constructed. In this sense, it is possible to verify that although Bowen's post-1960s lesbian narrative is no longer a textual disruption, it is nevertheless a disruption to the previous tradition of heteronormative writing, as it opposes the hitherto prevailing heterocentred narratives. Whereas she does not disclose fully and openly her characters' lesbian sexuality, the supposed looming presence of such sexuality and the use of the word 'lesbian,' certainly indicate the

postmodernist features, as it perturbs the heterosexual hegemony and refuses to acknowledge its power. The narrational innovations, according to Laura Doan, 'mobilize and animate a feminist political strategy of resistance, forcing and enforcing new mappings of the social and cultural order through feminist revision, reconsideration, and reconceptualization' ('Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern' 154). Therefore, whereas Bowen does not embrace fully the postmodern concepts of intertextual lesbian desire, she nevertheless initiates the transition of Irish lesbian fiction from late modernism into early postmodernism.

Kristin Bluemel verifies three key features of intermodernism: cultural, political, and literary. Whereas the first two categories refer to politically radical representations of working and middle class cultures, the literary aspect of intermodernism that applies to Bowen's fiction in greatest measure is the change in audience. With the publication of the popular-at-the-time genre of the spy novel, she aims to reach middlebrow or mass audiences (Bluemel 1). However, it is the use of inanimate objects that allows Bowen and her writing to leave behind the previous doctrines, and to take the presence of lesbians into the second half of the twentieth century. Allowing this shift, in my opinion, is the presence of doors that connect the remnants of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy at the beginning, and the vision of modernity and globalisation at the end of the novel. *A World of Love* depicts a complicated love triangle, or at times even a quadrat or a pentagon, between the members of the Danby family who are inhabitants of Montefort, the crumbling mansion in County Cork. The young protagonist, Jane, finds unaddressed love letters from Guy Danby who died in World War One, bringing to light an avalanche of past secrets and adultery.

Whereas Guy's letters can certainly be seen as the connection between the past and the present, linking the decline of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy with the movement of Irish society towards modernity, in the context of a lesbian reading of the text, it is the portrayal of multiple doorways that allows for the transition and development of lesbian desire between Bowen's earlier and later fictions. The action of the novel's characters being prompted to perceive the world from different points of view, and from different perspectives, resembles strongly Adrienne Rich's concept of *lesbian existence,* which, from this point onward, I will use as a way of analysing the presence of lesbian themes in Irish female narratives between the 1950s and the late 1980s.

According to Rich, 'lesbian existence suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and [the] continuing creation of the meaning of that existence, . . . [it] comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life' (648-649). She

further argues that *lesbian existence*, by its comparison to male homosexuality, is doubly stigmatised – firstly as a sexuality that opposes heterocentrism, and secondly, as a politically invisible entity. Rich, therefore, calls for an acknowledgment of *lesbian existence*, which is related to, and yet separate from male homosexuality, and insists on its individual historical presence. Bowen, I will argue, achieves the reiteration of *lesbian existence* not only by populating her novel with mainly female characters, but also with the use of symbolism. Looking into the past and the future through the number of doors and archways, which symbolise the vagina, Bowen's female characters, for now still involuntarily and unconsciously, participate in the creation of *lesbian existence* that will become a recurring theme in Bowen's, as well as in other writers', fictions. Furthermore, Jane's sole choice of a hiding place that aids her imagination to travel back in time, also largely resembles an image of the female phallus, which analogy to nature I analysed in Chapters One and Two, and which is long forgotten and hidden away from the eyes of society:

> Out through the kitchen door, into the yard . . . grass which had seeded between the cobbles parched and, dying, deadened her steps: a visible silence filled the place – long it was since anyone had been here . . . and above her something other than clouds was missing from the uninhabited sky. Nothing was to be known. One was on the verge, however, possibly, of more. . . . Some way along an elder grew leaning forward . . . forming a cave. . . . The girl, having reached the spot, without hesitation parted the branches and dived between them. (Bowen, *A World of Love* 43)

The cave, the silence, and the mystery surrounding it, as well the suggestion of entering a long-forgotten world, can be seen as a reference to the notion of Rich's *lesbian existence* that, despite having been known under different names, such as the romantic friendship, nonetheless did exist. Bowen's (lesbian) sexual landscaping throughout her fiction is a metaphor for the historical invisibility of lesbians, which Rich describes as the depravation of a political existence (649). Furthermore, the green cave, quite similar to the one in 'The Jungle,' as well as to those in Edna O'Brien's 'The Mouth of the Cave' and *The High Road*, offers an invitation to discover a new world of sexual (in)difference, where one's desire will not be met with contempt, criticism, condemnation, and conservatism.

In *A World of Love*, the process of Jane's coming of age features Bowen's favourite subject – a *rite de passage*, which is also indicative of the stage of comparison/exploration, as the heroine's sexual identity is not yet fully internalised nor exhibited, although with the use of symbolism and narrational experimental techniques, certainly becomes more prominent in comparison to the preceding stage of hesitation. This certain aspect, although not an immediately apparent one, is further reinforced by the presence of an archway, which Nicola Darwood sees as Jane's 'doorway into adulthood' (177). The recurring images of doors and archways was first noticed by Lis Christensen, who first assigns their sexual connotations in *The Heat of the Day.* However, it is in *A World of Love* where Christensen argues that those entrances 'contribute to the overall impression of the thresholds to be crossed and new worlds – new experiences, new loves, new lives – to be explored' (175). Thus, in the time of the decline of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and the presence of modernity looming behind the tradition, at least in terms of sexuality, lesbian desire becomes apparent, although still very implicitly. Same-sex female attraction, however, similar to *The Devoted Ladies* and *Friends and Relations*, can be found in a multiplicity of female relations. Not only do Jane and Antonia appear to be extraordinarily attached to each other, but Lady Latterly, a wealthy neighbour of Montefort's, treats young Jane as her personal prey and a trophy:

> Jane . . . was wondering how to be candid but not aloof when Lady Latterly, having come swishing in at the door behind her with no warning other than displaced air, swept an arm around her waist. The embrace, though intended chiefly to strike a note, was at first startling: the girl, inside the tightening arm, found herself being pivoted this way, that way, while the hostess waved round the company with her other hand. Greeting was thus cleverly sunk in showmanship – Lady Latterly was either defying [her guests] to look at the girl again in the new entrancing relationship she had with her. Loathing of the beginning of a party caused her, each time, to hit upon some device – and tonight, her triumphing air asked, what could one have hit upon that was better? (Bowen, *A World of Love* 59)

Lady Latterly's behaviour indicates her sexual frivolity and the presence of the lesbian phallus within this heteronormative narrative. It also depicts the representations of lesbian desire of the

time, which sublime indirectness, and yet a near-open forwardness, can be most likely verified at the stage of comparison/exploration in terms of Foucault's analysis of the "repressive hypothesis" (*The History of Sexuality* 10).[6]

Michel Foucault glosses that since the late seventeenth century 'it had been . . . necessary to subjugate [sex] at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present' (*The History of Sexuality* 17). The discourse about sex became highly controlled and censored, which were the exact factors that actually intensified this discourse. He dates the beginning of the repression of sexuality to the eighteenth century and the emergence of bourgeois society, which exercised power in order to suppress sexual discourse. Foucault further verifies that the topic of sexuality came to be studied in relation to the regulation of children's sexuality (27) and the population's numbers (26), and in other centres of discourse such as psychiatry, medicine and criminal justice (30-31), with the latter prohibiting certain kinds of sex, which proliferated the number of studies and, effectively, the discourse itself. As sex became an object of knowledge, it had also become scientifically scrutinised, and the people who controlled this knowledge, and effectively the discourse, were those associated with the governing institutions that were responsible for controlling the populations' (re)productivity. Nevertheless, as Foucault comes to list the extent of the multiplicity of discourses on sex, ranging from medical studies to criminal codes (33), he also admits that the rationalisation of controlling the discourse cannot be limited solely to economic causes (34).

The sexual discourse, therefore, incited by people's growing interest in the topic, increased. However, Foucault continues, the language has become highly controlled, which transformed the discourse entirely in the last three centuries. Nevertheless, the aim to reduce forms of non-reproductive sexual practices not only proliferated the emergence of "perverse" sexualities, which also included homosexuality (36), but essentially intensified their existence and multiplied them (48). As he concludes:

> We must . . . abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but . . . a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, [which]

> has ensured . . . the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities. (49)

Therefore, it can be said that Lady Latterly's "perverse" behaviour, and Jane's full awareness of it, despite being devoid of explicit lesbian desire, concomitantly indicate its presence and intensify the reader's reception, perception, and understanding of dissident sexualities. In fact, Laura Doan argues that for women and lesbian novelists, the medical literature was an astonishing source of information, which actually prompted women novelists to investigate, and write about, passions between women, as well as to 'demand and expect the impossible: acceptance, and indeed, ascendance' (*Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* 163). The traits of such enthusiastic experimentation, with its beginnings that can be found in works of Bowen as early as in the 1920s and the 1930s, and which I have discussed in Chapter Two, are also indicative of another kind of acceptance. Namely, I mean the stage in the development of Irish lesbian fiction which, prompted firstly by the stage of tolerance, will accommodate lesbian desire explicitly, and journey rapidly towards its consecutive stages in the mid-1990s, as I will portray in Chapter Four.

Inasmuch as female same-sex love did not entirely leave Bowen's fiction, *A World of Love* does indeed play the role of a bridge connecting Bowen's earlier and later novels, especially when considered from the point of view of the disappearance of *lesbian panic* and feminism. Although Bowen never considered herself to be a feminist, her choice of portraying her female characters to be more powerful than their male counterparts has created an impression of her strong views on gender division. As I have already pointed out, the post-war period proved to be a difficult time for Irish women, whose willingness to improve their career prospects met with male opposition (Maslen 22). This period, believed to have lasted for forty years between 1928 and 1968, therefore, is referred to as the abeyance of feminism, which could not develop not only because of the Second World War, but also because of the economic depression that was its immediate result. Although feminist and lesbian activism did not begin to fully emerge in Ireland until the 1970s, and it would be a case of a historically overgeneralised inaccuracy to assume that feminism could have been responsible for lesbian themes in literature, as it was often the general belief that all feminists were lesbians, and *mutatis mutandis*. Thus, not only did the abeyance of feminism result in the decline of fiction written by female authors, but the resurgence of female domesticity also attributed to the censorship, including representations of women's same-sex desire. Accordingly, Bowen still

refrains from explicit representations of lesbian love. Her first step using the already-existent vocabulary to describe same-sex relations between women is not made until 1964 when, in *The Little Girls*, she finally uses the word "lesbian." Moreover, the fact that she is the first Irish-born writer to do so, suggests that the theme was indeed present in her previous works, and that it would most likely recur in her later fictions.

The first use of the word "lesbian" in Bowen's *The Little Girls* (1964)

Whereas *lesbian panic*, especially in the abeyance period, seemed to have vanished, and women's writing strayed away from portraying lesbian themes in literature, Patricia Juliana Smith writes that the lesbian subtext reappears in the 1960s (101). Smith implies that *lesbian panic*, at last, finds its place in the central plot, rather than just constituting it as a sub-text, as it was the case of works analysed in Chapter Two. *Lesbian panic* is one of the major themes in Bowen's pre-war novels, where her characters seem to be so reluctant to disclose their (homo)sexual desires that they turn to commit 'irrational or illogical acts' (Smith 3) as they exhibit signs of panic at the thought of losing their hitherto accepted social identities. In her last two novels, Elizabeth Bowen returns to the themes of unarticulated, or semi-articulated, lesbian desire; she decentralises heterosexuality and displaces the romance plot, thus establishing *lesbian panic* as a primary mode of narratability (Smith 102). Smith further verifies that this shift in concentration of lesbian desire in the narrative is owed to a certain change in societal attitudes that allowed for this shift to take place, and for lesbian desire to be a more prominent feature in women's writing. Historically, the 1960s, with their development of gay and lesbian rights, were a time of sexual revolution. On 5th July 1967, homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales, followed by Scotland in 1980, and Northern Ireland in 1982. But homosexuality was still criminalised in public. In Britain, between 1967 and 2003, around thirty thousand men were convicted for homosexual behaviour (Bedell, n.p.), and the general atmosphere resembled the 1960s witch-hunts present in the USA, where lesbian and gay people were not allowed to undertake federal employment, congregate and purchase alcohol, and whose names were known by the officials organising frequent raids in pursuit of arrests.[7]

Thus, lesbian narrative, despite acquiring certain centrality to the text, still possesses remnants of heterosexual romance plot, which would be the case until the 1980s. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that lesbian desire yet again returned to its intensity in Bowen's first two novels. Whereas *The Little Girls* neither exemplifies nor develops a lesbian relationship as such, it

certainly makes reference to female desire, and introduces the noun "lesbian" into the discourse of Irish female writing. The novel, similarly to *A World of Love,* connects the past and present, whilst portraying the friendship of three girls, Dinah, Clare and Sheila, who also use their childhood nicknames from 1914: Dicey, Mumbo, and Sheike respectively. Whereas Jane's possible entry into adulthood is demarcated by the reading of Guy's letters and the crossing of the arch, which witnessed the breaking and the making of the marriage of her parents, in *The Little Girls*, the fusion of childhood into adulthood is concomitant with 'the onset of menstruation' (Darwood 178). From this moment onward, the reader knows that even when the narrative's juxtaposition with the retrospective past merges, the protagonists are entering, at least a physical, maturity. This highlights the inevitability of physical transformation, and thus introduces lesbian desire to be innate, and therefore not curable (Schoppmann 11), effectively challenging the hitherto prevailing misconceptions about lesbian sexuality.

The novel opens with Dinah who attempts to create a time capsule and collect items from her contemporaries, so their existence may be remembered by future generations. Yet again, Bowen uses the cave as the ultimate location for concealing the past, which prompts Dinah to find her old schoolmates in order to retrieve a coffer, which the three of them buried away in 1914. The fact that the contents of the coffer do not become fully known to the reader until the closing pages of the novel, suggests a further notion of conspiracy and secrecy veiling women's interrelations. Although the plot of the novel revolves around the friendship between the three, now middle-aged women, and the atmosphere of tension prevails, Clare, according to Jane Rule, is the only overt lesbian in the text (119). Whereas Dinah is a widow with two grown children, and Sheila is still married, Clare only briefly mentions her short marriage to 'Mr Wrong,' after which failure she returned to her maiden name (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 32).

In this penultimate novel, Bowen uses experimental techniques, which through the use of multiple names for her characters, bring out the otherness of the supernatural or the unknown, indicating lesbian desire within the narrative. As Bowen herself says: 'the novelist's imagination has a power of its own. It does not merely invent, it perceives. It intensifies, therefore it gives power, extra importance, a greater truth, and greater inner reality to what may well be ordinary and everyday things' (*Afterthoughts: Pieces about Writing* 114). Thus, the interweaving of the past with present and future, may be read as constituents of *lesbian existence*.

Furthermore, a detectable divide, as well as *lesbian panic*, are nearly palpable in Bowen's strenuous attempts to introduce lesbian love into the discourse. As a child, Mumbo

develops her own language, an action which can indicate her adolescent efforts to communicate her "otherness" to her childhood friends, which also implies Bowen's, as well as the rest of the canon's, textual challenge to convey and publicise lesbian sexuality in the modern context (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 38-39). However, as an adult she is still unwilling to admit her attachment to Dicey, and urges her not to 'rock the boat [and] unsettle [her]' (145), concomitantly acknowledging the intense aptitude of her feelings (Sturrock 86). Bowen, nevertheless, does not succumb to *lesbian panic* entirely, as eventually, she does face the challenge and has Dinah searching for the truth:

> [Dinah] '. . . boredom is part of love.'
> [Mumbo] 'That, I deny!'
> [Dinah] 'Well, of affection.'
> [Mumbo] '*That* I doubt.'
> [Dinah] 'Then you've no affections. – Mumbo, are you a Lesbian?'
> [Mumbo] 'Anything else, would you like to know?'
> [Dinah] 'I only wondered.'
> . . .
> [Dinah] 'Are you annoyed?'
> [Mumbo] 'Why? . . . All the same, you know, one can injure feeling. You are wrong in saying that I have no affections.'
> [Dinah] '*I* don't care what you are!'
> [Mumbo] 'This is the worst thing you have said yet.'
> [Dinah] 'But I care *for* you! . . . And you care for me – or so I had thought? I wanted you. I wanted you to be there – *here*, I mean. Whatever you think of yourself, you are very strong; and also, I thought you would understand. Who else am I to talk to, without frightening them? Stay with me for a little, can't you?'
> [Mumbo] 'Look, Dicey, what *are* you frightened of?'
> [Dinah] 'I hoped – . . .'
> [Mumbo] 'All your life, I should think, you have run for cover . . . Some of us have no cover, nothing to run to. Some of us more than *think* we feel.' (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 197-198; brackets mine)

This exchange is extremely important, as not only is a character confronted on the matter of their sexuality directly, but the dialogue actually enters the word "lesbian" into the discourse, thus enabling future generations of writers to address the subject in an open manner, and transform the tradition unalterably. Although Clare leaves, and the reconciliation does not take place until Dinah falls ill following their conversation out of fear of Clare's possible rejection (Sturrock 87), the novel has, similarly to *The Hotel*, an ending that allows for a presumption that the two women 'will now deal with the relationship the one has longed for, the other longed for but dreaded' (Rule 121).

Early postmodern lesbian fiction, and the obliteration of the theme of "bracketing" in the main narrative of Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout* (1968)

By the late 1960s, Elizabeth Bowen's writing began to employ various metanarratives that point unmistakably to postmodernism (Smith 114) and accommodate lesbian desire in an explicit manner. Marilyn Farwell argues that postmodernism treats same-sex female attachments through their strict entanglement in heterosexual or male plots (5), meaning that lesbian presence is marginalised within the narrative, which emphasises the lack of space for an accommodation of a lesbian narrative within the heteropatriarchal tradition and forms of writing. Whereas Farwell's argument does not search for factors that prevent lesbian narrative from emerging, but rather proposes a set of terms on which the existence of this narrative is dependent and destined to challenge the boundaries of the male/heterosexual writing tradition, the sole fact that any limitations should still exist in the postmodern era calls for the reconceptualisation of its inclusiveness of new, experimental ways of introducing lesbian desire into the postmodern discourse. The correlation between the postmodern and the lesbian, although seen as a set of contradictions (Palmer, 'Jeanette Winterson: Lesbian/Postmodern Fictions' 181), has been summarised by Judith Roof, who actually sees them as being parallel to each other ('Lesbians and Lyotard' 49). She states that 'their connection is . . . nourished by the haunting similarity of at least some of their cultural configurations [and that] . . . some critics . . . see the lesbian and the postmodern as categories that challenge centred logic and identity, the lesbian confronting heterosexuality and gender, the postmodern questioning subjectivity, knowledge, and truth' (49). All of these examples can be found in Bowen's ultimate novel, where her portrayal of lesbian attraction and sexuality opposes the pervasive gender norms, heterosexuality and, to some extent, male homosexuality.

Eva Trout or Changing Scenes (hereafter *Eva Trout)*, explores female sexuality with the use of grotesque representations of de-essentialised gender and sexuality. The plot of the novel begins with the twenty-four-year-old eponymous Eva who takes the Dancey family to see a castle, which was to be her fictional honeymoon destination for her imaginary wedding. This event dictates the tone for the rest of the novel, in which Bowen, through her employment of various metanarratives, attempts to assimilate Eva into institutional heterosexuality, the concept of which was analysed at length in Chapter One. When taking the connotations of Eva's last name into consideration, the events of the novel become clear from the onset. First of all, the biblical allusion to her first name is a suggestion of the role reversal of Bowen's previous seduced-seductress conundrum, thus implying that the main character, Bowen's first adult protagonist, would now adopt the role of the pursuer. Secondly, Bowen's choice for Eva's last name proposes sexual ramifications of its own, as the trout species is known for its gonadal sex reversal, especially in females that produce underdeveloped ovaries devoid of growing oocytes, and are thus unable to reproduce. Therefore, the novel, with an implied possibility of having a transgender identity, can be compared to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* that, albeit being first published in 1928, was only available to a wider public in its first popular edition in 1968, in the same year as *Eva Trout* (O'Toole, 'Angels and Monsters: Embodiment and Desire in *Eva Trout*' 171).

Eva's status is further complicated by her familial ties. The daughter of a wealthy businessman, Willie Trout, Eva is motherless since the age of two months, as her mother died during her flight after finding out about her husband's homosexuality and his relationship with Constantine Ormeau, who after Willie's suicide became Eva's legal guardian. Hoogland points out that the outcome of such an "inverted" family triangle, the 'contamination-range' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 177), results in Eva's psychosexual differentiation (Hoogland 220). The mirror from *The Heat of the Day*, which was to precondition the emergence of an alternative to heterosexual sexual identities, now becomes reality with the absence of Eva's mother. As she is not present to impose on her daughter the dissolution of the Oedipus complex in order to transform her lack of penis into a desire to have her father's baby (Freud, "On Female Sexuality" 77), this instead creates the negative Oedipus complex, which Sigmund Freud links to the development of (female) homosexuality (79).

Freud verifies five stages of psychosexual development of the child: oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital. It is at the third stage, however, normally occurring between the third and the sixth year of a child's life, when a child develops not so much a sexuality, but a sexual

preference. Although Freud's initial theory of the Oedipal complex referred mainly to boys, in his lecture on femininity, given in 1933, he adapted this phenomenon to also include girls. To begin with, therefore, the little girl is like a boy – she also desires the mother and enters the phallic stage after discovering pleasure from her sexual organ, the clitoris. At this stage, the girl has to perform two tasks; firstly, she needs to redirect her object of desire from her mother to her father, and, secondly, she needs to replace the main erotogenic zone from the clitoris to the vagina, which Freud deemed as the truly feminine organ. The little girl, effectively, not prone to, and thus not afraid of castration, abolishes her Oedipus complex and, once her feminine position is assumed, she replaces her penis envy with the desire to have her father's child. The same effect can also sometimes be achieved as the girl realises the lack of a penis in her mother, and thus she develops a profound unconscious hatred towards her female parent, and (re)directs her unconscious desire towards her father.

Nevertheless, Kaja Silverman suggests that this Freudian theory can be modified, and that a clear distinction can be made to differentiate the positive and the negative stages of the Oedipal complex that are dependent and based on cultural stimuli. Precisely, she states that:

> the subject is generally obliged to negotiate his or her way between two versions of the Oedipus complex, one of which is culturally promoted and works to align the subject smoothly with heterosexuality and the dominant values of the symbolic order, [whereas the other is] culturally disavowed and organises subjectivity in fundamentally perverse and homosexual ways. (120)

In his 1933 lecture, Freud replaces the notion of the "negative" Oedipus complex, and supplants and resituates it with terms of "preoedipal," or "pre-Oedipus" phases ("Femininity" 168), which refer to the little girl's initial passionate attachment to the mother. Therefore, although Hoogland expostulates that Eva Trout is not as much asexual, but that she 'had not acquired any sense of a recognisable sex/self, [and] had not been compelled to enter the Oedipal complex – negative or positive' (226, 227), I will argue that Eva's familial situation predisposed her towards developing lesbian desires. She does not only remain in the preoedipal stage, the negative variant of the complex that is associated with the child's homosexuality, but to follow Silverman's argument, Eva also assumed homosexuality as a norm whilst growing up. Furthermore, it can be also be said that Eva's character fits perfectly the postmodernist notion

of lesbian narrative, which, according to Susan Stanford Friedman, is 'inevitably pre-Oedipal and homoerotic' (179) in its nature. Therefore, the term 'lesbian' is no longer controlled by the rules of heteronormative writing tradition; instead, in its unpredictability and defiance, a lesbian does not only 'upset and unsettle heterosexual hegemony' (Doan, 'Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern' 138), but also, by ceasing to be a mere textual disruption, she 'refuses patriarchal insistence to read her relationship as a pale imitation of heterosexuality and affirms that it is something other than, perhaps even more' (Doan, 'Sexing the Postmodern' 145).

Eva's sexual and gender "confusion" is presented in the form of retrospective events that take place during her schooling, which returns to the themes of technologies of adolescence from Bowen's previous works. Eva attended two schools, where she developed intense same-sex attachments. The first establishment, situated *de facto* in the castle from the beginning of the novel, was an experimental school bought by Willie for Constantine's lover in order to keep him away. As the donor's daughter, Eva was appointed a large octagonal chamber, which she shared with Elsinore who fell life-threateningly ill after walking into the lake:

> What made Eva visualize this as a marriage chamber? . . . To repose a hand on the blanket covering Elsinore was to know in the palm of the hand a primitive tremor – imagining the beating of that other heart, she had a passionately solicitous sense of this other presence. Nothing forbad love. This deathly yet living stillness, together, of two beings, this unapartness, came to be the requital of all longing. An endless feeling of destiny filled the room. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 51)

Eva's longing for Elsinore, therefore, becomes apparent to the reader, as well as to Eva herself. Her sexual ambiguity does not go unnoticed by other children at the school either. The fact that Eva does not know how to respond when she is asked if she is a hermaphrodite (46), indicates her sexual fluidity.[8] What she does know, however, by asserting that she would like to be Joan of Arc (46), is that in times of 'an evolution of [new] attitudes' (Weeks, *Coming Out* 156) of the 1960s, she is not afraid to admit to her passions. She is prepared to accept the consequences, from the position of the seductress in her later life, and dislocates the configuration of sex, gender and sexuality in society (Smith 113). This differs significantly from Bowen's previous novels, as seen in Chapter Two, where the seduction was always conducted by older women.

It is at Eva's second school, however, where she finds her true desire, the teacher Iseult Smith. As an adolescent girl, Eva cannot find the appropriate language to indicate her amorous intentions, and, similarly to *The Little Girls,* chooses poetry to channel her feelings: 'O let my Soule . . . suck in thy beames/ And wake with thee for ever' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 60). This expostulation results in Iseult's *lesbian panic* – she changes the subject and begins to discuss the language of the poem, meeting with Eva's disapprobation and distress, and later causing her to say that Iseult was always too busy to exchange any 'sapphic . . . embraces' (171). This encounter, nevertheless, brings Eva closer to her teacher, and after her father's death a few years later, she wishes to become a paying guest of Iseult's, now Arble, and her unsuccessful husband Eric's.

Needless to say, Eva's presence at Larkins, the home of Arbles, creates not only tension between the married couple, but intensifies Eva's sense of abandonment and betrayal: '[Iseult] betrayed my hopes, having led them on. She pretended love, to make me show myself to her – then, thinking she saw all, she turned away. . . . [I wanted] to be, to become – I had never been. . . . I was *beginning* to be. . . . I was cast out from where I believed I was' (171). It is for this reason, the second rejection of her affections, that Eva decides to move to Broadstairs and begins, despite her imperviousness to the male hierarchy, her parodic mimesis of a normative, and pseudo-heterosexual, behaviour. However, this performance evidently points to the repudiation of phallocentric patriarchal rules of society, as Eva exceeds the hitherto prevailing binary frame of gender norms (Hoogland 246). Firstly, she creates a home without marriage, and illegally acquires a child, Jeremy, whom she raises by herself as his 'father as well as mother' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 208), thus establishing for herself a status of the phallic mother (Smith 120-121). Secondly, she initiates a relationship with Henry Dancey, twelve years her junior and a childhood friend, which is 'characterised by its performativity rather than its intimacy' (O'Toole, 'Angels and Monsters: Embodiment and Desire in *Eva Trout*' 175).[9]

Eva's choice of this grotesque mimesis is initiated by early postmodernism, which, by this time, dominated Bowen's writing. Its influence, in materialistic terms, can be seen for example, in Eva's modern and highly technological furnishing for her Broadstairs' home. Moreover, her preference of complying to certain norms in her own terms, her "defeminised" notion of domesticity, single motherhood, and sexual fluidity, place *Eva Trout* at the forefront of postmodern Irish female writing. Although Eva does tragically die by the hands of her own son in an unfortunate incident, and Iseult destroys the object of her *lesbian panic* as she is the one who plants the gun on Jeremy, the protagonist's death is not a condemnation of lesbian

desire. Rather, the ending of the novel offers an opportunity for its rebirth and reconceptualisation in women's own terms. Eva's death from unfulfilled desire, executed by a gun that symbolises a male phallus, stands as Bowen's final statement for the historical acknowledgment, serendipity, theorisation, and organisation of *lesbian existence*. It is a case history, in which 'time . . . lay[s] about like various pieces of a fragmented picture' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 41). Therefore, although the literal execution of the male prevalence imposed on the lesbian narrative may suggest its pervasive ownership of the plot, thus forcing Eva's lesbian desire to be seen as only marginal, the centrality of Eva's character, and her positioning as the lesbian subject of the novel that undermines gender structures, constitutes correspondingly with what Farwell would call a lesbian narrative (23). Namely, Eva's predisposition to readily initiate intimate relationships with both men and women, and her strong preference for the latter, usurps a dominant position for her lesbian sexuality, which repudiates the heteronormative relations with men, and emphasises the prevalence of women's romantic interrelations. As Judith Roof puts it: 'the lesbian's apparent challenges to heterosexuality and gender . . . simultaneously define a lesbian position and identity . . . [and] manage to define the lesbian as . . . liberating . . . and as the end result of a desirable overthrow of patriarchal . . . power' ('Lesbians and Lyotard' 51, 53). Therefore, the centralisation of a lesbian subject within the narrative places Elizabeth Bowen's late fictions at the forefront of postmodernism and at the stage of comparison/exploration, as lesbian sexuality is explored to a larger extent than it was the case at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Writing new traditions, lesbian-feminism and lesbian existence in Kate O'Brien's *As Music and Splendour* (1958)

At the time when Bowen's last work of fiction was published, feminist politics in Ireland were approaching a new turn of events. Nevertheless, before lesbian activism transforms the tradition of lesbian writing irrevocably, providing it with a new-found vigour and ferocity, it is important to take into consideration fiction written from another perspective, from Ireland, and verify its possible contribution to the state of affairs which were to take place a decade later. Kate O'Brien, despite the censorship of *Mary Lavelle*, which features a lesbian character, returns, twenty-two years later, to the theme of lesbian desire, based on the presumption that her previous text was banned because of its explicit portrayal of an overtly passionate heterosexual affair, rather than its inclusion of a lesbian theme. Furthermore, although published before Bowen's last two novels, in 1958, thematically *As Music and Splendour* fits

into the development of the narrative at the stage of comparison/exploration. O'Brien shifts away from the notion of *lesbian panic* and presents lesbian desire not as the demonised sexual deviancy, but as one of the sins comparable to other forms of sexual frivolity, adultery, and promiscuity. Although lesbian romance between Clare and Luisa only forms a subplot of *A Music and Splendour*, as the other half of the novel portrays Clare's compatriot, Rose's, heterosexual affairs, it addresses lesbian attachment from a new perspective, which seems to be a continuation of Agatha Conlan's unfulfilled passion in *Mary Lavelle*. Whereas Agatha, because of her religiousness, considers her same-sex attraction as sinful, O'Brien's portrayal of Clare challenges this view, as the author uses a number of techniques and themes, as well as structure, genre, voice, and writing style (Mentxaka 101), to present romantic relations between women without such contempt.

In Ireland, the repressive government of De Valera that imposed the Censorship Act, Article 41 and Catholic hegemony, and which prevented married women from undertaking employment (Franks 39), met with considerable resistance. While the feminists' base was undeniably marginalised, and while it is true to say that feminism was undoubtedly at the stage of inactivity following the achievement of its suffrage goal in the first wave, it is important to note that this period was, in fact, a preparation for the emergence of the future generations of feminists. For example, the Irish Housewives' Association (IHA), was established in 1942 with the aim to 'unite housewives, so that they may realise, and gain recognition for, their right to play an active part in all spheres of planning for the community, . . . to secure all such reforms as are necessary to establish a real equality of liberties, status and opportunity for all persons' (Tweedy 18). In 1949, IHA merged with the Irish Women's Citizens' Association (IWCA) that created a linkage with the older Suffrage Society of 1874. In fact, Franks points out that IHA had more members than any other women's organisations, and that their work delivered a basis for the emergence of the second wave of feminism in Ireland (40). Nevertheless, Linda Connolly urges us to 'realise that women's organisations of the abeyance period were moderate in their politics because of rigid constraints on women's participation in the public sphere, [as] they needed to be cautious to remain in existence' (*Social Movements and Ireland* 86). It is noticeable that the second wave was to enter Irish politics with double the strength, power, and consequently impact, as the result of this merger.

The second wave of Irish women's movement, as I have already mentioned, is dated back to 1968, and it is linked to the establishment of an *ad hoc* committee on women's rights.

On 31st March 1970, the committee achieved the formation of the First National Commission on the Status of Women to 'examine and report on the status of women in Irish society, to make recommendations on the steps necessary to ensure the participation of women on equal terms and conditions with men in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the country and to indicate the implications generally – including the estimated cost – of such recommendations' (Connolly and O'Toole 23). Its report to the Government published the following year, demanded equal pay and equal opportunities for women, as well as removal of the marriage ban, which had prevented married women from working in the civil service. During that time, two women's organisations mobilised to represent rights of Irish women: the Council for the Status of Women (later known as the National Women's Council of Ireland), and the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM), which was seen as more radical of the two, and whose controversial event known as the "Contraceptive Train" eventually resulted in its members joining other groups and taking parts in other campaigns.[10] By the end of the 1970s,

> the Irish women's movement had, in terms of its structure and organisation, evolved into a broad-based social movement with activists involved in a wide range of activities. While the collective action of pioneering organisations like the IWLM and IWU had scaled down by the 1980s, feminism . . . diffused more widely as a political discourse and as a network of mainstreaming organisations across Irish society. (Connolly and O'Toole 45).

Thus, the women's movement eventually accommodated the sexual liberation movement and lesbian movement in 1970s and early 1980s.

The first groups to address specifically the issues of gay men and lesbians were the Sexual Liberation Movement (SLM, 1973) and the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM, 1974). However, there was a little collaboration between the IWU (Irishwomen United) and the IGRM, and many lesbians preferred to work from within the women's movement. However, it took another ten years for the word "lesbian" to be used in the context of women's movement – in May 1978, the first Women's Conference on Lesbianism was held at the Trinity College Dublin. Despite the success of the event, this proved that Irish feminism did not have an agenda to fight for lesbian rights, and it prompted a proportion of women to work on different projects within their communities, often in liaison with gay men. Nevertheless, women did not have the same

publicity as gay men. In the 1980s, the Irish lesbian community still felt like 'an underground minority, a subculture whose members have been unwilling or unable to court publicity, because to do so may have invited violence, rape or even death' (Crone 61). This is certainly reflected in both works of Edna O'Brien, which will be analysed below, where the narrator of 'The Mouth of the Cave' is 'running . . . trembling . . . afraid,' and eventually chooses the metaphorical "safe" route 'even though [she] most desperately desire[s] to go the other way' (65, 68), and Catalina actually sacrifices her life for her "forbidden" love for Anna (O'Brien, *The High Road* 175).

Lesbian visibility improved in 1983, following a march of the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collectives on 19 March, which was a response to the Fairview Park killing.[11] Later, however, the lesbian and gay movements divided over the National Gay Federation's (NGF) retraction of their support of the Abortion Amendment. 'It was the last time that many [lesbians] chose to work in any official capacity in solidarity with gay men' (Crone 68). The beginning of the 1980s, therefore, experienced the emergence of solely lesbian communities in Ireland, when 'discussion groups, action groups, sprung all over around issues affecting women's lives: contraception, abortion, divorce, sexual freedoms including lesbianism' (Walsh 6). Although in the 1970s and the 1980s many lesbians either did not reveal their true sexual identities or emigrated in order to be able to express their desires, the effect of their emigration, as Connolly and O'Toole stipulate, engaged women in international lesbian politics that affected the Irish scene (187-188), which experienced growing numbers of lesbians coming out. In particular, Joni Crone's appearance on *The Late Late Show* in 1980, as the first lesbian to be interviewed on Irish national television, gave Irish women the courage to identify publicly as lesbians (Donoghue, 'Noises from the Woodshed' 169). Therefore, as a result of these events, and the unrelenting efforts of the activists of the 1970s and the 1980s, the Irish lesbian community developed, thus paving way for the emergence of lesbian desire on the pages of Irish women's writing.

As Music and Splendour depicts Irish-born Rose Lehane and Clare Halvey, and Italian Luisa Carriaga, pursuing careers of operatic singers in the 1880s Rome. During their stay at a preparatory school in France, Clare, very early on, develops feelings for Luisa, and, upon their arrival in Rome, it does not take long for the two women to initiate a passionate affair, which is repeatedly challenged and ridiculed by representatives of male hierarchy. These instances, however, rather than criticising lesbian desire, are the vehicle for Kate O'Brien's stand against

the persecution and invisibility of *lesbian existence*. The same-sex desire of Claire and Luisa, although closeted (Donoghue, ''Out of Order:' Kate O'Brien's Lesbian Fictions' 53), represents Zimmerman's "utopian lesbianism" (Inckle 56), which despite the women's alienation within the patriarchal society, is indicative of their non-violent unification and sense of community (Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women* 143-145). As Anne Fogarty writes: 'O'Brien resist[s] linearity and closure, and in so doing [she] create[s] the possibility of a lesbian continuum [and existence that stretch] beyond the pages of the text into an uninformed but definite future' (171).

First of all, Clare's love for Luisa undermines the rules of possessive heterosexual monogamy. In her conversation with Thomas, whose amorous advances she refuses on more than one occasion, she retorts his accusations of being 'unnatural, appalling' (Kate O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour* 212), and of Luisa's promiscuity by asserting: 'I don't know what sex you suppose me to belong to, but I can endure Luisa's life. I love her, you see' (212). Clare does not only defend Luisa's honour, but also points out, in a derogatory manner, the constraints of heterosexuality, which is portrayed on a number of occasions as destructive for other characters in the novel. Firstly, Rose's affairs, first with an aristocrat Antonio de Luca, and later with René Chaloux, end in fiascos. Secondly, Clare's and Rose's music teacher, Giacomo Buonatoli, is unhappily married to his despotic and alcoholic wife. Thirdly, even both of Clare's aficionados, Thomas Evans and Paddy Flynn, are also shown to suffer in their futile romantic and hopeless admiration. Moreover, similarly to Bowen's later fiction, there is a noticeable movement away from the presence of "the third," and from the theme of lesbian desire "bracketing" an otherwise heterosexually-concentrated plot, for which Terry Castle introduces the term 'counterplot' (66-91). In such counterplot, lesbian romance is no longer displaced by a heterosexual plot, but it exists correspondingly to it, often becoming its substitute (Fogarty 175-176). Therefore, whereas texts analysed in Chapter Two exhibit the prevalence of male-female relationships and only position lesbian desire in their margins, the majority of fictions published post-WW2 replace the heterosexual romance with a lesbian one, thus repudiating the hitherto prevailing tradition of heteronormative writing.

Additionally, Kate O'Brien takes the stance of positioning lesbian sexuality as being equal to heterosexuality. Although the narrator does not deny the sinfulness of lesbian love, she ascertains its impiety to be only as immoral and aberrant as its heterosexual counterpart:

> I am, I suppose, a sinner – certainly I am a sinner in the argument of my Church. But so would I be if I were your lover [Thomas]. So is Rose a sinner – and she knows it – in reference to our education and faith. You, who come out of Baptist chapels, don't know how clear our instruction is. Rose and I know perfectly well what we're doing. We are so well instructed that we can decide for ourselves. There's no vagueness in Catholic instruction. . . . You can argue as you like against my loving Luisa. But I can argue back all your unbridled sins. We all know the Christian rule – and every indulgence of the flesh which does not conform to it is wrong. All right. We are all sinners. (Kate O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour* 208)

In other words, O'Brien repudiates any attempts of defining of lesbian desire by appropriating a simple truth – that love is love, be it heterosexual or homosexual (Reynolds 111), and that all forms of sexual activity outside of procreative sex within marriage should be persecuted equally by the Church.

Furthermore, the writer adopts intricate techniques to channel her attempts at the portrayal of same-sex female passion in a positive light. Firstly, she parallels Clare's story with Rose's, and does not reveal Clare's lesbian identity until the reader becomes fond of her character and her admirable qualities, in order to diminish the sense of the difference between their sexual infidelities (Donoghue, 'Out of Order' 51). Secondly, she uses the art of operatic performance of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* to communicate and express Clare's and Luisa's desire for each other by placing it, metaphorically and literally, centre stage. In this way, she avoids the descriptive details of their relationship, and replaces them with language of music, thus escaping the harsh censorship laws. This motif also develops Terry Castle's concept of 'homovocality,' which, by combining vocal technique and theatricality, and performed *en travesti*, becomes a symbol of homoeroticism to its female audience (227).[12] Moreover, by having Clare wear male attire on stage to perform the part of Orfeo, O'Brien does not only allow her character to escape the constrictions of heteronormativity, but also asserts the need for the reiteration of *lesbian existence* as, through her 1880s setting and the act of performative cross-dressing, she highlights that lesbian sexuality is still being pathologised, and that its self-expression is restricted by the medicalisation of lesbians from the beginning of the century.[13]

Although Clare's and Luisa's Sapphic adventure ends after eighteen months, this caesura is not portrayed as the effect of their "sin," but rather as a conscious decision that characterises all relationships in general. Thus, O'Brien, contrastingly to Bowen, does not connect lesbian romantic attachment with pain, unhappiness, or even death from unfulfilled desire, but rather as a conclusion similar to the one from Gluck's opera – that love will eventually win and overcome all obstacles. The novel concludes with open futures for Clare, as well as Rose, proving that it is possible for women to have successful artistic careers, which is distinctively different from Thurston's and Grand's portrayals of women's professional lives in the *fin-de-siècle* period. This freedom of action, however, as O'Brien further ascertains at the end of *As Music and Splendour*, needs to become separate from Irish nationalism and its confinement of women to the private sphere of life. When Clare attends her grandmother's funeral in Ireland, she cannot imagine herself succeeding in the rural and strict reality of her old country ruled by Catholicism and, consequently, upon her departure 'Ballykerin end[s]' (Kate O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour* 350), which indicates the inability of Ireland to accommodate the presence of lesbian desire. Kate O'Brien's final piece, despite having been published ten years before Bowen's *Eva Trout*, is an important work that enters the idea of equality of lesbian sexuality into the lesbian-feminist discourse. Themes mentioned in this novel, along with fictions of Elizabeth Bowen's and Edna O'Brien's, will give ground for the emergence of an openly lesbian fiction in the 1980s, as well as relate and pertain to the feminist and lesbian activist agenda during the second wave of feminism since 1968.

Emerging from the cave and consummation of a lesbian relationship: Edna O'Brien's 'The Mouth of the Cave' (1968), 'Sister Imelda' (1981), and *The High Road* (1988)

Edna O'Brien was born in 1930 in the village of Tuamgraney, County Clare, to an alcoholic father Michael O'Brien, and a strict mother Lena Cleary O'Brien, whose unhappy marriage became a prototype for the failed heterosexual relationships in Edna O'Brien's fictions, along with her education in a convent school (Hosmer 273). Unable to attend university, but set on a literary career, upon meeting Ernest Gébler, a Czech-Irish writer, O'Brien eloped with him in 1951, leaving her parents and dictatorial rules of the Church behind – the marriage, however, did not last, and by 1964 she was in sole custody of her two children.[14]

Amidst these events, in 1958, O'Brien began to write and publish her short stories in journals and newspapers. Shortly after, she was offered £50 by the American publishing

company, Hamilton and Blanche Knopf, to write a novel, which she completed in three weeks. *The Country Girls* (1960), followed by *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964), evoked a plethora of negative attention, as the trilogy discussed young Irish convent girls, who, after being expelled from their school, move to Dublin where they explore their sexuality. The novel was not only banned in 1961; the priest at O'Brien's local parish condemned her and organised a public burning of her books, as the trilogy challenges Irish Catholicism, and, similarly to Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* and *As Music and Splendour*, discusses female sexuality which, especially following the war, was expected to be confined to the private sphere and highly controlled by the rules of hegemonic patriarchy.

Ten years after the publication of *As Music and Splendour*, and seven years after the censorship of her first novel, Edna O'Brien brought out her collection of short stories entitled *The Love Object*, with all eight stories discussing female desire. One story in particular, 'The Mouth of the Cave,' concentrates on same-sex female desire, and I consider it the breaking point in representations of lesbian desire in Irish female writing, as well as the shift in the stage of comparison/exploration, with a strong emphasis on the latter. The story depicts a nameless narrator who, whilst living on one of the Mediterranean islands, ventures out of her usual route and encounters a beautiful, young local girl dressing as she emerges from a cave. Flustered, and filled with trepidation at the emotions that this image evoked, the narrator runs away: 'Why am I running, why am I trembling, why am I afraid? Because she is a woman and so am I. Because, because? I did not know' (Edna O'Brien, 'The Mouth of the Cave' 65-66). Nevertheless, when she returns to her rented home to prepare a supper, she hopes that the girl will find her. Whereas the story remains inconclusive – the girl never shows, and the narrator never takes the alternative route again – it is filled with references to lesbian physicality, as well as the state of lesbian political affairs of the 1960s. Lesbian desire, at that point in time, can be referred to as, to use Terry Castle's terms, "apparitional" or "ghostly." Nevertheless, works of Edna O'Brien introduced in this chapter place lesbian presence at the centre of her narratives that redeploy it from the marginality of subplots in works of Elizabeth Bowen and from the half-plot of Kate O'Brien's last novel published during her lifetime.[15]

Although the second wave of Irish feminism started to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was not inclusive of lesbian issues until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when lesbians took matters into their own hands and began to form their own communities and, consequently, the lesbian movement. Thus, fictions prior to the 1980s, I will argue, feature lesbian desire that borders on imaginary, and is, therefore, only barely palpable, yet distinctive

and suggestive enough to herald the irreversible transformation of Irish lesbian narrative. Just as Elizabeth Bowen and Kate O'Brien used nature, art, and inanimate objects to signal same-sex female attraction and *lesbian existence* in their narratives, so does Edna O'Brien use setting, and especially the image of a cave, which serves as a symbol for a vagina, to facilitate the representation of desire. Each setting, moreover, leads its protagonists to take one step further, and proves to be a continuation of its forerunner, thus portraying the shift in smooth, consecutive stages.

In 'The Mouth of the Cave,' the narrator depicts her choice of 'the rougher' route of the possible two (65), as the metaphor for the beginning of self-realisation of her sexual desire and the choice between the declaration of her lesbian passion and the safe confinement of heteronormativity. In *The High Road*, however, Anna, also a visitor to Spain, decides to pursue her bodily ardour, and continues on her way through an obliterated *lesbian existence* to economic and technological modernity:

> There were steps but these were so overgrown with fern and wild asparagus that path and step had merged and at times it was a question of groping through the undergrowth. . . . There were paths leading off from our path, some to other secluded houses, some doubling back and connecting with paths that led to our village and some to still higher terraces that then seemed to straddle their way to meet the road on the opposite side, over which cars already glided and glittered. (12-13)

In this excerpt, the mystery surrounding female sexuality, symbolised by the overgrown garden, is juxtaposed with the inevitability of modernity and modern technology, which, with the emergence of the women's, as well as the lesbian movement in particular, would challenge the taboo surrounding the socio-sexual morality and the contemptuous attitudes towards lesbians.

But it is the presence of the cave in both texts, and the consummation of Anna's and Catalina's relationship in *The High Road*, which completes the transformation of lesbian narrative over the space of twenty years. Helen Thompson draws a comparison between Plato's and Freud's inscriptions of the cave and instigates that although 'the cave is a prison for women, O'Brien's cave is also a place of female sexuality . . . it marks the shift from heterosexuality and its confinement to homosexuality and its relative freedom and mutuality' ("Uncanny and

Undomesticated" 34-35). Furthermore, when considering the historical connotations of the word 'cave' itself, as well as its presence as a form of earliest human domesticity that adheres to prehistoric times, it is possible to extricate O'Brien's plea for implementation of *lesbian existence* in Irish literature. The metaphorical emergence of lesbian desire from the cave, I will argue further, was concomitant with the emergence of the second-wave women's movement in Ireland that allowed O'Brien to eradicate the use of her characters' imaginations to portray physical longing between women and to replace it with a sexual act.

As noted, the extent of lesbian presence and references improved with time, forming its own course of development. Whereas in novels of Elizabeth Bowen, *lesbian existence* was marginal, thus only featuring in what is referred to as a lesbian subplot, in Kate O'Brien's last novel, the lesbian relationship forms half of the text. Consequently, in Edna O'Brien's earlier fictions, same-sex female passion appears only as an imaginary product of her protagonists' imaginations, which, towards the 1990s, develops into the narrative that is concerned significantly with lesbian desire. Such transition emerges because of its concomitance with the development of the second-wave of feminism in Ireland. Bonnie Zimmerman, in fact, contends that lesbian fictions from the pre-feminist period portray their main characters' sense of unfulfilled desire, that often leads them into madness or suicide (*The Safe Sea of Women* 254), which I earlier identified as signs of *lesbian panic*. The texts published in the midst or aftermath of the second wave, subsequently offer a heightened frequency of descriptions of lesbian love and even physicality, which, most importantly, do not result in tragic consequences for the heroines.

Therefore, the depictions of an imaginary sex act from 'The Mouth of the Cave' consist only of the narrator's envisioning having a supper with the strange native girl, which resembles lesbian love-making: 'We would test them with our fingers. . . . She . . . might be more expert at it than I. One or other of us might bite too avidly and find that the seeds, wet and messy and runny and beautiful, spurted over our chins. I would wipe my chin with my hand. I would do everything to put her at ease' (66-67). The ending of the story, however, is unsatisfying, as the narrator realises that the girl will probably never emerge from 'the embracing dark, the sinner's dear accomplice' (67), which is an indication of society's hostile attitudes towards lesbian sexuality.

Similarly, simultaneous with the Catholic Church's interference in Irish (lesbian) politics, despite legislative separation of politics and religion in 1973, the fondness in 'Sister Imelda' does not amount to a conclusive development of female passion. Its narrator never

comes to express openly her desire for the eponymous nun, although there are several references to clandestine woman-woman identified feelings. One of those instances can be found, similarly to 'The Mouth of the Cave,' in the presence of food:

> She watched me eat as if she herself derived some peculiar pleasure from it . . . she was amused. It was one of the most awkward yet thrilling moments I had lived, and inherent in the pleasure was the terrible sense of danger. . . . [I thought] of the happiness that would be ours, . . . if we were away from the convent in an ordinary kitchen doing something easy and customary. It was clear to me that my version of pleasure was inextricable from pain and they existed side by side and were interdependent like the two forces of an electrical current. (119-120)

The narrator's association of consuming food with lesbian love-making, instead of imagining the actual act and identifying explicitly the real sexual longing, resembles the attitudes amongst lesbians in the late 1980s, where lesbian desire could exist only in their imaginations, as the trepidation to announce their sexuality was too overwhelming. By setting the story within a convent environment, O'Brien reinforces the hitherto prevailing society's prejudice against lesbians, who, at the time, were demonised by the Church and often confined to repent their sins in religious institutions, such as Magdalene Laundries, which housed the promiscuous "fallen women" of Ireland between the eighteenth and the late twentieth century.

The imaginary consummation of a lesbian passion in both stories is, in fact, the main vehicle for the progression of their respective heroines' own realisation of their enthrallment with another female. Whereas in 'The Mouth of the Cave' the narrator is actually presented with the opportunity to see a naked girl's body, the same privilege is not granted to the young girl in 'Sister Imelda,' as she stands against the boundaries imposed by society and the Church. However, it could be argued that O'Brien stretches the continuum to the girl's advantage, as she is being given the opportunity to experience another kind of attachment, one that exists on a higher platform than a distanced and non-verbal encounter near the cave. The development of her infatuation can be traced throughout the story, as it develops from its "ghostly" presence to a fully-conscious desire: 'I had no idea how terribly she would infiltrate my life, how in time she would be not just one of those teachers or nuns, but rather a special one almost like a ghost

who passed the boundaries of common exchange and who crept inside one, devouring so much of one's thoughts, so much of one's passion, invading the place that was called one's heart' (O'Brien, 'Sister Imelda' 115).

The fact that the story takes place over the course of several months, rather than just one evening like it does in 'The Mouth of the Cave,' allows for the convent schoolgirl's deeper exploration of her sexuality, as well as, to a certain extent, an appreciation of the female body achieved through fetishized fantasising. De Lauretis describes lesbian fetishism as a desire of 'a part or perhaps the whole of the female body, or something metonymically related to it, such as physical, intellectual, or emotional attributes' (228). The nun's body remains a mystery as it is hidden beneath a habit: 'standing close to her . . . I saw one of her eyebrows for the first time She saw that I noticed it and said did that satisfy my curiosity. I said not really. She said what else did I want to see, her swan's neck perhaps, and I went scarlet' (Edna O'Brien, 'Sister Imelda' 125). Therefore, the act of fetishizing on behalf of the narrator is metaphorically equivalent to physical contact, and consequently, consummation (Thompson, "Uncanny and Undomesticated" 32) that is a striking resemblance to the concept of the lesbian phallus, which offers alternative ways of approaching and understanding of lesbian love-making, which is not dependent on the male phallus.

In 'Sister Imelda,' the two women, nevertheless, take the imaginary aspect of lesbian desire further. In *The High Road*, however, published in the same year as David Norris's appeal to the European Court, which led to the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland in 1993, Anna and Catalina are finally able to consummate their passion, thus fulfilling the imagination of Edna O'Brien's previous heroines, as well as Anna's own previous attempt at tasting the forbidden fruit.[16] The attraction between the two women, which can be traced back to the beginning of the novel, is 'based as much on sympathy as sexual desire' (Norton 99). Although the portrayal of Anna and Catalina's lesbian relationship is significantly different from the one in Kate O'Brien's *As Music and Splendour*, as Edna O'Brien's Spain is depicted as a deeply Roman Catholic country that very much resembles Ireland, the narrative undermines the patriarchal religious order, at the same time implementing *lesbian existence*.[17]

Whereas the description of love-making is not as succinct and pictorial as in Mary Dorcey's collection of short stories, *A Noise from the Woodshed*, that was published only a year later, it entices, however, a vivid representation of O'Brien's nihilism and her position on lesbian invisibility in Irish society, which she challenges in various ways. The exchange of songs and stories between the two lovers, which, not accidentally, precedes their first physical

closure, can be seen as a tool to introduce women's rebellion against the dominating power structures. Catalina's native chanting, in which there are 'expressions of pain and longing that cut right to the bone of the heart, to the bone of the night' (Edna O'Brien, *The High Road* 152) is followed by Anna's ancient story about Medb, the legendary queen of Connaught, who led her forces in the battle against Ulster, and herself fought with weapons unlike other goddesses who used magical powers. Medb was known for her insatiable sexual appetite and murdering her sexual partners once she had used them to her advantage. The act of using art and history is a device for telling women's stories, "herstories," in order to communicate the insufficiency of lesbian existence in literature: 'that thread of sustenance that we craved, the invisible sustenance, not what we sought from men, something other, womanly, primordial' (Edna O'Brien, *The High Road* 156). Therefore, the employment of several other narrators within the protagonists' voices transforms 'the women's community into an autonomous narrative agent' (Farwell 22) that through its use of experimental postmodernist techniques, allows for the historical implementation of *lesbian existence* within the Irish feminist discourse.

The consummation of the lovers' relationship stands as a literary reiteration of women's needs that have been suppressed for a long time, which is concomitant with the emergence of lesbian desire on the political scene. The following morning, Anna and Catalina pour bottles of water over themselves, as an act of baptism 'in this new life and understanding' (Norton 99). This poses a serious threat to the religious order, as it ordains lesbian desire within the discourse without the Church's approbation. But even this seems minuscule when, minutes later, Anna describes to Catalina her reaction to her first bullfight, which, in my belief, summarises succinctly the emergence of *lesbian existence*:

> I bled for the entire week, in sympathy, with either the bulls or the horses or the young picadors or the strutting daring matadors, or the whole ritual which by its spectacle, its terror and its gore brought to my mind too vividly Christ's bleeding wounds and the women I knew, including myself, as if Christ was woman and woman was Christ in the bloodied ventricles of herself. Man in woman and woman in man. . . . I drank and ate and lived and perceived life the wrong way. . . . Our night was not something to fear . . . but to carry within us, not as a memory of debauch, but a constant . . . that one does not see, simply knows it to be there. (Edna O'Brien, *The High Road* 157-158)

By identifying men, as well as women and animals, to be victims of a social order, and by stating that Christ could have been a man as well as a woman, Anna realises that her whole system of beliefs was, up until that moment, subjected to lies of heteronormativity and Catholicism to which she felt obliged to conform. This statement, furthermore, undermines the hitherto prevailing jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in matters of gay and lesbian politics. Concomitantly with the emergence of lesbian activism and David Norris's court case that will grant the final decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland, the power of Irish religious institution has clearly been diminished, as many Irish people are moving away from faith and religion.

As I have already mentioned, although the novel, similarly to *Eva Trout*, ends in tragic circumstances, O'Brien saves her protagonist, and Anna is now left with a prospect of following the chosen path of her desire, which, at last, is not only named, but also conscious. To assert lesbian sexuality into the narrative, Edna O'Brien, yet again, uses symbolism that is indicative of the permanency of *lesbian existence*. In the events preceding Catalina's death, which is a result of the women's affair, the local villagers brand the lovers as lesbians with the use of the term "lesbos." The term, deriving from neither of the Mediterranean languages, refers directly to the act of love between women from Antiquity.[18] Although Helen Thompson argues that the indirectness of the word points to the inability of the villagers to understand lesbian desire ("Uncanny and Undomesticated" 38), I would rather argue that it is instead an attempt to introduce *lesbian existence* in terms conceivable to the public, as well as to the contemporary readers, that is unobtrusive and allows for a subjective, individual comprehension of the phenomenon.

This chapter portrays the advanced stage of comparison/exploration, as Bowen's fictions stretch beyond the representations of adolescent experimentation and transcend into future works of her successors. The act of rooting and implementation of *lesbian existence* in works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien thus allows for the development of lesbian narrative into its consecutive stages, where love between women will be discussed in an open manner, and where first steps towards tolerance, acceptance, and pride/synthesis of lesbian sexuality will be made to accommodate it within the Irish female narrative. Whereas, at first Somerville and Ross, and later the New Woman writers, served as the catalysts that eventually allowed for the narrational existence of lesbians to move away from the notions of cross-dressing and expression of lesbian desire as based on the mimicry of heterosexuality,

writers of the second half of the twentieth century introduced lesbian passion onto the literary scene ubiquitously.

The idea of lesbian desire had been entered into Irish fiction with the emergence of the lesbian phallus and the reconceptualisation of institutional heterosexuality in the *fin-de- siècle* period, as seen in Chapter One. The post-war Irish fiction analysed in Chapter Three, on the other hand, evolved from portraying lesbian passion as a narrational subplot of the heterosexually-concentrated plot to an indefinitely lesbian plot written in the Irish context and from the Irish perspective. Writings of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, and Edna O'Brien, evolved and transformed the advanced stage of comparison/exploration, and allowed for the shift of Irish lesbian narrative into the stage of tolerance, which would at last accommodate, although still reluctantly, lesbian desire and its central place to a lesbian plot. These writers, by embracing techniques such as 'intertextuality, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, the rewriting of history, and frame breaks as well as . . . questioning "grand narratives," . . . challenge[d] and subvert[ed] patriarchal and heterosexist discourse and, ultimately . . . facilitate[d] a forceful and positive radical oppositional critique' (Doan, 'Sexing the Postmodern' 138). Thus, their use of *lesbian continuum* and *lesbian existence* enter lesbian desire into the tradition of Irish writing and offer it as a substitute, rather than a subplot, to the main narrative. Consequently, the fiction of the 1990s, although at times still emerging from, and merging with, stages of comparison/exploration and tolerance, will expeditiously enter the narrative into its consecutive stages of acceptance and pride/synthesis, as I will discuss in Chapter Four.

Notes

[1] Solely between 1930 and 1939, twelve hundred books were banned in Ireland (Walshe, *Kate O'Brien: A Writing Life* 67).

[2] Although there are not many records left, documentation can still be found regarding prosecution of gay men and lesbians in Germany, France and Italy.

[3] However, there exist, although not many, documented cases of persecution of lesbians under Nazi regime, who were internalised under the conviction of "asocial" behaviour and their unwillingness to conform to the norms of gender (Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality Under National Socialism* 45). Those women were not branded by wearing pink triangles, which was the concentration camps' code for homosexuality, but, wearing black triangles instead, were placed in the camps' brothels, as a way of re-educating them back into heterosexuality, at the same time assisting the re-education of homosexual men. Further account and exploration of such cases in Germany can be found in Claudia Schoppmann's *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich*, and in Italy in *R/esistenze Lesbiche nell'Europa Nazifasiscista* edited by Paola Guazzo, Ines Rieder, and Vincenza Scuderi.

[4] It is estimated that 182 000 women, as opposed to only 61 000 men, emigrated to Britain in pursuit not only of higher wage packages, but also to take advantage of new leisure activities that were not available to them in Ireland (Walshe, *Irish Writers in Their Time: Elizabeth Bowen* 145).

[5] In the character of Robert, there can be found some perceptible autobiographical content, as Anglo-Irish Bowen herself played a role of a double agent during the war, reporting on the political climate in Ireland to the Ministry of Information in London (Walshe, 'A Time for Hard Writers' 102).

[6] Similarly, in 1921, the Director of Public Prosecutions advised Parliament not to include the subject of lesbian desire in the legislature, in order to avoid 'bring[ing] it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamed of it' (Sinfield 49). This, of course, in the time of New Women writings and their followers, even such as Elizabeth Bowen herself, had quite the opposite effect.

[7] An incident that took place in the Greenwich Village, New York, on 28th June 1969, when crowds of gay men and lesbian started riots upon their expulsion by the police from the local gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, often shortened to Stonewall, is seen as the event that prompted the future gay-liberation movement across the world (Lacey 245-246). In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality a mental disorder. Until 1973, it featured in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). In *DSM I*, in 1952, it was classed as a psychopathological and sociopathic disorder, and later, in 1968 in *DSM II*, homosexuality was listed under then sexual deviations (Spurlin, "Queer Theory and Biomedical Practice: The Biomedicalisation of Sexuality/The Cultural Politics of Biomedicine." Inaugural Lecture Series, Brunel University London, Autumn 2012, n.p.). One of the methods to "cure" homosexuality was with the use of lobotomy or electroshock therapy that endangered their health, denied human rights, and often disabled permanently the process of their resocialisation. The most known case in Britain is the one of Alan Turing, the talented mathematician who decoded the Enigma during second world war. He was convicted of gross indecency in 1952, and was given a sentence of either two years in prison, or to be chemically castrated, which meant to undergo an intensive psychological and hormonal therapy to "cure" him of his sexuality. He is thought to have committed suicide in 1954. However, in 2013, Turing received a royal posthumous pardon. His convictions would be cleared, along with another forty-nine thousand homosexual and bisexual men.

[8] It is important to remember, however, that the word "hermaphrodite" was commonly and alternately used with "lesbian" (Darwood 208).

[9] The fact that the issues of 'regulatory regimes of phallocentrism and compulsory *female* heterosexuality' (Hoogland 254) are strongly criticised in the novel, is seen in Constantine's distasteful reaction to Eva's sexual ex-centricity, albeit him being the only overtly homosexual character in the text. This statement, moreover, can also be useful if one were to postulate and hypothesise Eva's bisexuality, which through her manipulation of Henry denies all men the hitherto limitless access to women's sexuality.

[10] The "Contraceptive Train" event, organised in May 1971 by the IWLM, consisted of 47 of its members and other women travelling to Belfast, and attempting to bringing back to Dublin large quantities of contraceptives. Contraception, and even its advertisement, was banned in Ireland since the 1935 Censorship of Publications Act (Connolly and O'Toole 27).

Connolly and O'Toole argue, however, that 'the reaction created by the IWLM alerted Irish women, in a new way, to international feminist demands and illuminated, through publications and activism, in some depth, their significant grievances' (29). Thus, as the result of many members leaving the IWLM, between 1970 and 1975 a number of new women's organisations formed, amongst which were the Women's Progressive Association and the Women's Political Association (1971); Ally (1972); Action, Information, Motivation or AIM (1972); Cherish (1972); the Cork Federation of Women's Organisations (1972); Family Planning Services (1972); Adapt (1973); and Aid (1974).

[11] The case is known as the "gay bashing", which took place at the Fairview Park in August 1982; the result of which was that a young man, Declan Flynn, lost his life, and his oppressors received only suspended sentences, as the judge ruled that '*this* could never be regarded as murder' [my emphasis] (Connolly and O'Toole 182).

[12] Castle relates to her own enthralment with Brigitte Fassbaender, a mezzo-soprano, who, in her dual gender roles of both men and women, quintessentially sings about her love for women, thus indicating at best her homosociality, which is particularly appealing to her lesbian spectators. Furthermore, other female operatic singers became to be subject of lesbian subculture's fascination with opera – Mary Garden, Emma Calvé, Geraldine Ferrar and Kathleen Ferrier 'became cultural icons to lesbian opera fans' (Blackmer 558).

[13] In fact, opera has been recognised as an avenue for an expression of homoerotic desire since the seventeenth century. Through the means of cross-dressing performances, the baroque opera has been denounced decadent, as it often presented homosexual and lesbian narratives. By the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when the roles of male castratos began to be replaced by female singers, there was a number of operas written for mezzo sopranos that could have only been enacted by female operatic performers *en travesti* (Blackmer 556-558). These included Mozart's *le Nozze di Figaro* (1786), Gounod's *Faust* (1859), Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* (1874), Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881), and Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911). In the twentieth century, however, the operatic composers began to concentrate on new modes of representation of homosexual desire, examples of which can be seen in Richard Strauss's *Elektra* (1909), Berg's *Lulu* (1937), and two American operas written by the gay composer Virgil Thompson in collaboration with lesbian writer Gertrude Stein – *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) and *The Mother of Us All* (1942).

[14] Edna O'Brien, in her autobiography *Country Girl* (2012), admits that her 'reluctance to live in Ireland [originated from] its narrow-mindedness and robust censorship' (143).

[15] Two chapters of her unfinished novel, *Constancy,* were published in 1972.

[16] David Norris, in his attempt to decriminalise homosexuality in Ireland, first brought the Irish Gay Rights Movement's goals to the court in 1984. In order to present his case to the judge, he had to undergo a series of psychological analyses. An outcome of one of the findings was recorded by John R. Quinn in his article "The Lost Language of the Irishgaymale," which reads as follows:

> A stage was reached when the plaintiff, because of what he was referring as a result of his homosexuality, was referred to one of Dublin's leading consultant psychiatrists. After nine months of psychotherapy the psychiatrists advised the plaintiff that, in the interests of his mental and psychological health, he should consider emigrating to a country . . . where the law takes a more liberal attitude to male homosexuals. (555)

Despite this advice, Norris continued on his mission to accommodate rights of lesbians and gays in Ireland. A more concise account of this case can be found in Chapter Four.

[17] Ellis Hosmer Junior points out that although O'Brien's expulsion of Ireland, following her emigration to London in 1958, is reflected in her choice of settings, it is at the same time central to her fiction (274).

[18] Lesbos is the famous Greek island from the seventh century BC that was home to the poet Sappho, whose many lyrics focused on homoerotic desire. Thus, the name of the island provided the nineteenth-century term "lesbian" to indicate same-sex attraction between women. In the twentieth century, the island became a point of interest for many lesbians, amongst whom were Renée Vivien and her lover Natalie Barney, who visited Lesbos in 1904 (McIntosh Snyder 465), as have many lesbians since.

Chapter Four

Toward More Overt Representations of Lesbian Desire: 1989 – 2007

> The Ireland I live in now is so far removed from the Ireland of twenty years ago it might be a different country. And the Ireland of my childhood remembered from this perspective seems like another planet. (Mary Dorcey. Interview. O'Carroll and Collins 25)

As I have argued thus far, the development of Irish lesbian narrative began slowly, with the stage of hesitation displayed between the early nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth century, and the stage of comparison/exploration beginning to prevail in the late 1920s. With the appearance of lesbian activism within Irish feminist politics from the 1970s (the first group to address specifically lesbian and gay issues – the Sexual Liberation Movement – was set up in Dublin in 1973), however, the narrative began to develop more rapidly, and in the last decades of the twentieth century there was a perceptible shift towards the subsequent stages of tolerance and acceptance, with the stage of pride/synthesis becoming predominant at the beginning of the 21st century. Namely, fiction from the 1980s, addresses lesbian desire from, at first, a marginalised point of view, as writers started to converge in a mission to address 'delicate' subjects within Irish society, concomitantly undertaking the task of introducing alternative sexualities to the country's culture. The stage of Irish lesbian fiction during this time period, therefore, is invariably one of tolerance. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts (1993), however, progressed the representations of narrational lesbian love and characters into the stage of acceptance, which, shortly after, following the era of the Celtic Tiger (from the mid-1990s to the late-2000s), transformed into the stage of pride/synthesis. Therefore, the stage of acceptance is characterised mainly by the textual instances of public coming out, where the characters cease to be isolated and initiate contacts with other members of the LGBTQI+ community. The stage of pride/synthesis, on the other hand, features a bold presence of lesbians, who suffer from minimal lesbophobia and are otherwise portrayed as lawfully nearly equal to their heterosexual counterparts.

Does a woman, 'as she author-izes her "own" discourse, represent herself as "herself," or is she merely an effect of the Law at work?' (Meese 5). This chapter aims to be an attestation that Irish lesbian authors were, up to 1993, limited by the law, and that only with the amendment of the Constitution did the possibility of writing lesbian fiction become truly viable. Furthermore, following the second-wave of feminism in Ireland, the sudden outburst of the

third wave around 1990, an ongoing battle of David Norris followed by his eventual victory, and an approaching era of the Celtic Tiger, there was a noticeable shift in the social, political, and cultural spheres of Ireland.[1] In this chapter, I will analyse the main factors that attributed to these shifts, synchronously with shifts in lesbian writing.

To be able to discuss any changes that Irish writing and society have undergone, I must first describe the events that led to the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland in June 1993. It was a drawn-out and a time-consuming process; it had taken twenty years from the creation of the Gay Liberation Movement to reach official decriminalisation, recognised in law. Globalisation has played a very important role in the modernisation of peoples' thinking and perception of new factors, ideas, and events, one of them being lesbian desire with its final (or, at least, political) acceptance within society. The fact that homosexuality ceased being illegal, does not mean that it was not (as in fact, it still is) frowned upon by Irish society, especially by rural communities of Ireland where Catholicism has historically been more powerful than in Ireland's urban areas.

In 1977, David Norris, a lawyer and an active campaigner for homosexual rights, took a court action challenging the validity of Sections 11, 61 and 62 of the 1937-Constitution of Ireland, which criminalised sexual activity between men, be it in private or in public, and for which penalties varied between three years of imprisonment and a life sentence. Norris argued that the Constitution invaded several of his rights, including his right to privacy, which should have been secured by the Constitution (Connelly 321). After having lost the case both at first instance before the High Court and on appeal before the Supreme Court, Norris filed a complaint before the European Court of Human Rights stating that the Irish law violated his right to privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights. He won the case in 1988. Sections 61 and 62 of the 1861 Act, and section 11 of the 1885 Act were repealed and amended by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993, that made offences of buggery illegal only if committed with a person under the age of seventeen, or who is mentally impaired, in order to maintain protection for the young and the vulnerable.

Parallel to Norris's case, between 1973 and 1993, many gay and lesbian movements rose to power and achieved general recognition. The Lesbian Movement itself gained more members each day and made itself seen within the society, thus strengthening the visibility of lesbians. Lesbian activists fought alongside gay men in order to achieve the same rights, understanding, acceptance, and their rightful place amongst Irish society. Organisations, services, and unions for gay men and lesbians of Ireland began to be formed, amongst them the

first telephone gay and lesbian helplines such as Dublin Lesbian Line (1979) or Tel-A-Friend (1988).

Mary Robinson actively supported David Norris, and in a later course became his attorney. At the age of twenty-five, Robinson was the youngest law professor in Ireland. She was a campaigner for human rights and fought vigorously to improve the position of women and to abolish laws prohibiting homosexuality. In the early 1960s, during her stay in Paris, she came across homosexuality for the first time: 'I was astounded because I hadn't even heard that it was possible. And yet through literature and lifestyle in Paris, it was something that I took on board with great interest at the time' (O'Leary and Burke 20). Therefore, her 1967-graduation address was aimed at the necessity of changes that needed to take place in the Irish law; in this speech, she targeted issues that were not spoken about out loud before: divorce, contraception, suicide and, most importantly, the position of women in Irish society. She believed that these issues could be resolved by changing the law and overthrowing the old laws that were instigated, in large measure, by the Church: 'I was very angry at a lot of what the Church stood for at that time, at how religion could become power-play and oppressive, undermining the true sense of spirituality and the true ethical norms and standards that are the highest reaches of the human mind' (O'Leary and Burke 19). Her involvement was initiated in 1975 when she served as a legal advisor for the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform. She became the President of the Republic of Ireland on the 3rd of December 1990 and held her post until the 12th of September 1997.

In 1988, the European Court ruled that the law criminalising same-sex activities was contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular Article 8, which protects the right to respect the private life. In 1992, one year before the final decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland, Robinson invited the representatives of Irish Gay and Lesbian community to Áras an Uachtaráin (the official residence of the President of Ireland), which David Norris saw as a sign of 'the final act of acceptance, . . . being welcomed into the Irish family at last' (O'Leary and Burke 107). Robinson's involvement in Norris's case, followed by her presidency, have not only had a significant input into Ireland's European politics, but have also influenced the lesbian narrative in terms of a new-found openness with which lesbian authors could textualise their desires. I notice a perceptible correlation between Robinson's presidency and lesbian fiction that has emerged during that time; it was a time of change, and Mary Dorcey was the first lesbian author to take the opportunity to write about Irish lesbians openly. Despite the fact that her collection of short stories was published four years before the

legal decriminalisation, she celebrates and pays tribute to lesbian love through her voice that was no longer to be threatened by neither the censorship nor the law.

Breaking the tradition: *A Noise from the Woodshed* by Mary Dorcey

As I have argued previously, writing at this stage was characterised mainly by tales of coming out, which, in lesbian world, can relate to "rites of passage," giving grounds for the emergence, as well as heralding an approaching continuation and expansion, of Irish lesbian fiction. The first writer who was to revolutionise Irish lesbian fiction was Mary Dorcey, who, upon the most significant time for Irish sexual minorities, published her collection of short stories entitled *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1989). I recognise this collection as the turning point leading Ireland into an era of contemporary lesbian writing. When asked to summarise the most striking characteristics of Ireland at the time of her growing up, Dorcey replied:

> Silence. Repression. Censorship. . . . Nuns and priests everywhere. . . . Censorship of books and films. Fear and suspicion surrounding anything to do with the body or the personal life. The near total repression of ideas and information. A Catholic state for a Catholic people. (O'Carroll and Collins 25)

Mary Dorcey was born in Dublin in 1951. Whilst living in Paris she first came across women whom she suspected to be lesbians. After her return to Ireland in 1972, she began to attend meetings of the Irish Women's Movement, served as a founding member of Women for Radical Change, Irish Women United, and the Irish Gay Rights Movement. She is viewed as a forerunner of the lesbian and gay rights movement and the precursor of lesbian writing in modern Ireland. Dorcey writes poetry that 'is informed by the struggle to articulate lesbian sexuality' (Monahagan 37) and, indeed, her writing celebrates lesbian love because it is 'so exciting, so passionate, so time-consuming, so addictive, that once started there will be no getting people away from it' (O'Carroll and Collins 31). However, she is known mainly for her groundbreaking collection of short stories *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1989) that was awarded the Rooney Prize in 1990.

Subjects of Dorcey's collection of short stories are stigmatised Irish women – battered wives, victims of homophobia, patriarchy, religion. 'All of the stories reflect the tensions in

Ireland between the older values of the conservative and primarily Catholic state and the newer feminist theory and practices that Dorcey and her fellow activists sought to promote' (Casey, "Mary Dorcey" 64). Furthermore, Dorcey's stories portray the transition of Irish women from ordinary housewives to passionate lesbians. 'A Noise from the Woodshed' is the opening story of the collection with the following stories addressing the themes established in the title story. 'A Noise from the Woodshed' has been 'chosen to open the collection because it depicts both in its form and content the rush of possibilities open to women when they leave the well-worn path of social expectations far behind' (Casey, "Mary Dorcey" 65). Dorcey's attitude towards Irish society is evident in her writing. She uses the second-person narrative and thus allows her readers to become 'the experts of the mass media [to] transmit the required values' (Dorcey, 'Introducing Nessa' 157): 'Of course there are other possibilities. . . . All of these things have happened and will again to you and others in this place or that. Any of them probable, none remarkable in itself' (Dorcey, 'Sweet, Practiced Endings' 176-178). Dorcey's stories, therefore, not only highlight the historical presence of lesbians, but state evidently that personal *is* political, and that by changing the society's views her lesbian fiction can also change those of individuals:

> The traditional border-lines between psychology on the one side and political and social philosophy on the other have been made obsolete by the condition of man in the present era . . . : private disorder reflects more directly than before the disorder of the whole, and the cure of personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of the general disorder. (Marcuse 21)

This approach is also adapted in the later course by other Irish lesbian writers in their struggle to stabilise the position of lesbian relationships in private and political spheres of Ireland.

'A Noise from the Woodshed' represents the beginning of the new era. It is considered to be a groundbreaking story as it addresses the often-disruptive lesbian desire within the domestic sphere. Norris's victory the previous year had impacted Irish lesbian writing in a considerable measure. Since 1993, lesbian fiction in Ireland commences to portray women working and living together, forming women's communities and engaging in political work. This image resembles strikingly Zimmerman's concept of Lesbian Nation, where lesbian lovers dream of 'the possible world in the making' ('A Noise from the Woodshed' 9). It is important

to emphasise that I use the term "Lesbian Nation" to portray an imaginary lesbian mecca rather than the actual concept itself, since lesbian separatist groups have largely failed because of their utopianism and exclusive whiteness with no place for multiculturalism and diversity amongst lesbians. Although in 'A Noise from the Woodshed,' this place is only just beginning to be visible through 'where a window might have been if there had been a window' (6). The story is a statement of *lesbian existence* long before now, as 'there had been other noises before' (15). Characters of the story question '[whether] it had just begun or if it might have been going' on [for longer but people] 'might . . . not have noticed' (15). The presence of the taboo that veiled lesbian sexuality until now is emphasised by the sounds of lesbians making love, a sound previously unheard of in Irish fiction. Dorcey's voice, the metaphorical 'startling noise' (15), brings to the surface women's hidden desires whilst breaking away from the tradition of heteronormative writing and openly introducing lesbian desire to Irish literary fiction. Furthermore, the nationality of the two lovers is an implication that it is time Ireland followed successes of the United States in approaching an understanding of lesbian desire and sexuality. Dorcey's detailed description of women's lovemaking, as well as an implication of an ever-existing lesbian presence, which, as analysed in Chapter Three, began to be reiterated in the works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien, challenged the hitherto prevailing covert references to same-sex female desire.

The use of unconventional narrative is transcended into other stories from the collection. Dorcey shifts between second- and third-person's narrative whilst, as in the case of 'The Husband,' deploying the male narrator to portray his wife's lesbian affair. Throughout the stories, there is an observable sense of impatience; the noises from the woodshed are escaping their confined, 'unlit spaces' ('Introducing Nessa' 133). Lesbians are 'coming clear from years of camouflage . . . every day casting off layer by layer the outworn pretences: weakness, passivity, dependence on men – centuries of artifice sloughed away – the quick, vital core released' (137). Their independence is being regained, they are crossing fearlessly borders of homogenous and heteronormative territories to announce their presence, as 'anything is better than being ignored' ('A Country Dance' 58), anything is better than being 'up to [their] knees in decaying refuse . . . alone, lonely and lovelorn' ('A Noise from the Woodshed' 16). The irrepressible need for change in societal attitudes becomes apparent in Dorcey's use of language, where the Kristevan semiotic and symbolic realms are intertwined. What lesbians used to express through their bodies has now found a way to be articulated through their writing.

'A Noise from the Woodshed' can be most accurately analysed with the use of the Kristevan "semiotic chora" (Ingman 61) and "thetic break." Julia Kristeva reformulated Lacan's theory of the imaginary and the symbolic orders by making a distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Whereas the symbolic represents communicative, patriarchal discourse, and is 'the horizon of the "universal" bond with other members of [the] group [that] is rooted in the signs and syntax of [a] national language' (Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* 268), the semiotic is not limited by the structure of language and is 'transverbal: it is made up of archaic representatives of drives and the senses' (269). The semiotic is characterised by non-verbal communication that comprises of tone, gesture, and rhythm, and is linked to primary processes and the bodily drives which Kristeva observes to be mainly anal and oral. The symbolic includes the traces of the unconscious from the earlier semiotic phase prior to the constitution of the subject through the acquisition of language. Drives are instinctual and pre-lingual body impulses or instincts, which Freud has reduced to two primary drives: the life and the death drives. The life drives primarily seek pleasure, although the reality principle, as opposed to the pleasure principle, may cause the pleasure to be diminished or postponed as it considers reality. The death drives, on the other hand, are the instincts to return to the quintessential state of being that precedes birth. Essentially, both life and death drives can be seen as a flow of pulsions that are accumulated in the "chora," which derives from the Greek word for a womb. Therefore, Kristeva forms her argument that a child's acquisition of language and the use of the symbolic communication is a reflection of observed gestures, behaviours, and speech, and the child develops ways of communication that are no longer connected with its mother's or his/her own body. Thus, the "chora," the flow of energy from the bodily drives, is disrupted as the child ceases to communicate through an inarticulate expression of its drives, which become repressed, and acquires the ability to use language upon its emergence into the symbolic world of culture. However, as I argue later, traces of the semiotic remain as the subject shifts constantly between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Similarly, lesbian writers leave the confines of silence, which in writings of their predecessors was exhibited by covert references to lesbian desire, and shift, metaphorically speaking, towards the symbolic communication and open representations of lesbian sexuality and existence. The consequence of this inevitable emergence of lesbian themes and characters in Irish female literature, similar to an entry of the child into the symbolic, is the Kristevan "thetic break." The pulsing rhythms of Dorcey's prose fade, as lesbians try to develop ways of verbal communication within society. As lesbians cross the threshold of symbolic

communication, they are forced to verbalise their existence through the convention of symbolic discourse that is accepted socially. And just like the child prior to the symbolic – whose early articulations are pre-symbolic and pre-verbal babblings – lesbians herald their coming with first holophrastic utterances in the form of incoherent and unintelligible noises (from the woodshed), similar to the child who develops early gesticulation until he or she learns the way to communicate through the use of language. Since the return to the semiotic, despite the consciousness' constant movement between the semiotic and the symbolic, lesbians seem to emit an infant's babble in the earlier stages; symbolic communication is not yet defined by linguistic structures and it no longer resembles the hypnotic rhythms of the "chora." Before lesbians learn how to communicate with the wider society, and if I may allow myself a presumption of their being *allowed* to communicate their existence to the wider society, they are limited to noises that are yet not verbally clear. This presumption can also explain the covert references to lesbian desire in the past, since the kinetic functional stage of the semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign and verbalised linguistic communication.

Moreover, since the semiotic, as it is anterior to sign and syntax and has no social signification, lesbians, who cultivate the marginal and unspoken, must enter the patriarchal symbolic structure, which is a social effect, a phase of social identification and, therefore, linked to social laws pertaining to patriarchal power and social constraints. Lesbians' basic drives become removed and are further constrained by the social code as they enter into mainstream society – their "thetic break" is characterised by voicing needs other than those of pleasure. The hitherto prevailing social establishment is disturbed, or even subverted, as lesbians begin to seek social recognition. As lesbian articulations affect dominant/hegemonic forms of language and symbolic structures in order to accommodate lesbian difference, the semiotic disrupts the symbolic more generally, and the language of the social order and of lesbians is transformed, as lesbians begin to communicate openly their existence to the larger social world. Therefore, Dorcey's use of symbolism, such as the presence of reoccurring themes of water, is used to signify the turning point in Irish history, a time of change, starting with Norris's victory that granted the final decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland. The river's flowing water represents a cleansing process for Irish lesbians, there are now no boundaries to keep lesbian desire covert, there are 'more and more women . . . crossing the river' ('A Noise from the Woodshed' 13), 'the thing is catching, infectious' (12).

Following the success of her first collection, Mary Dorcey published another short story – 'Scarlett O'Hara' (1990). Within its pages, she mentions lesbian activism, the attitude of Irish

society towards lesbians and the crucial timing. Despite the fact that her contribution of prose into Irish literary canon is not prolific, she is considered to be an influential and much-admired writer of this form. In 'Scarlett O'Hara,' Dorcey aims at denying reductive stereotypes and clichés present in Irish society of the time. The phrase 'time [which is] of the essence' is repeated several times throughout the story; it is an analogical time to introduce lesbians amongst homosexual stereotypes and to emphasise their existence in spite of general beliefs: 'We don't use that word [gay]. . . . That's the men's expression. We say lesbian. . . .' ('Scarlett O'Hara' 204). Mary Dorcey explains her approach in an interview with *Irish Literary Supplement*, where she considers 'writing about the lives of women who are involved with other women' (Owens Weekes 18) as challenging current stereotypes of lesbian literature. She is of an opinion that 'writing about gay sexuality in certain clichéd forms has become popular, . . . [whereas] writing outside those conventions is still threatening' (18). As in her previous stories, Dorcey comes to present her audience with an introduction of (and to) lesbian desire. Her character speaks openly about issues that circumvent in Irish society when considering the topic: 'the nation [is no longer able] to turn a blind eye, let [lesbians] to get on with it as long as [they keep] it quiet' ('Scarlett O'Hara' 184); the hitherto prevailing silence is now disturbed by the noises from the woodshed. Dorcey, therefore, continues a new tradition initiated by Edna O'Brien in *The High Road*, which does not acquiesce to the hitherto prevailing restrictions concerning the marginal presence of lesbians within the narrative, as observed in chapters Two and Three – lesbian desire begins to occupy a central space that, essentially, is one of the characteristics of the stage of tolerance.

Since the publications of 'Scarlett O'Hara' and *A Noise from the Woodshed*, more writings of similar nature and openness started to appear on Irish literary scene. As I have committed to adhere to the chronological order of appearance of these works, I will continue consequently with *The Kiss* by Linda Cullen, published by Dublin Attic Press in 1990. *The Kiss* 'addresses how lesbianism affects the lives of two young successful Dublin women who have shared a close friendship since childhood and suddenly find themselves in love with each other' (Pelan 8). With great intensity, Cullen describes an affair between Helen and Joanna, whose childhood and teenage friendship develops into a romantic relationship. Cullen, contrary to her predecessors, goes further in terms of shifting the plot away from the domestic, and into the public sphere. The two characters leave the confines of Joanna's house to consummate their relationship in the outside world. This is not to say that the breaking of domestic sphere's boundaries is straightforward and unproblematic. The abyss between rural and urban parts of

Ireland, which could be compared to domestic and public spheres, is illustrated distinctly in the character of a Donegal cottage owner, whose property Helen and Joanna rent when they escape away from friends and family who began to notice their new-found emotional and physical bond (Cullen 76). The older lady reveals her disapproval and is horrified, as she expects that Helen is staying in the house 'with a man – *out of wedlock*' (80). The "unthinkable" truth does not even cross her mind. The stage of tolerance in terms of Irish lesbian writing is, especially in this context, clearly visible. Joanna comes to terms with her own sexuality, however, the need to be tolerated is exhibited by reactions of mainly older and rural (as these were in strong opposition to accepting homosexuality as a consequence of dictatorial rules of the Church) members of Irish society.

Of course, the concept of tolerance is dependent on those who are doing the tolerating, as well as on those who are being tolerated (Zimmerman, *Lesbian Histories* 771). Tolerance, in context of LGBTQI+ studies, represents inclusive sexual and gender citizenship, where a diverse range of citizens have an entitlement to pleasure, and where no consensual sexual practices are grounds for legal, institutional or interpersonal harassment. However elusive and insufficient this tolerance may be, it creates, on some level, an imagined sense of comfort, one that is determined by the larger social world. As Jeffrey Weeks contemplates, 'the idea of sexual citizenship has many features in common with other claims to citizenship. It is about enfranchisement, about inclusion, about belonging, about equity and justice, about rights balanced by new responsibilities' ("The Sexual Citizen" 39). In reality, however, many gay and lesbian activists were forced, just like Helen and Joanna, to deploy an assimilationist strategy to demonstrate the resemblance to heterosexuals in order to be tolerated (Zimmerman, *Lesbian Histories* 771). This political tolerance is applicable unequivocally in the context of Ireland, where gay men and lesbians were merely tolerated instead of being fully accepted. At least that was the case until 1993, when societal attitudes towards lesbians were challenged to undergo an altered way of perception initiated by the full political acceptance of lesbians and gay men in Ireland.

The decriminalisation, however, did not leave the power relations intact. The conflict between marginalised groups and the ruling institutions often resulted in the loss of power of the latter. Foucault argues that 'every intensification, every extension of power relations to make the insubordinate [marginalised groups] submit can only result in the limits of power' (*The History of Sexuality* 225). Indeed, at the threshold of Ireland entering the twenty-first century, the support for these institutions was supported rarely, as the State had lost its authority

to silence and conceal the subject of lesbian sexuality that began to arise with a heightened frequency.

The narrative of post-decriminalisation: Emma Donoghue – queering the *Bildungsroman*

From this point onward, I shall refer to writings by Irish lesbian authors as "post-decriminalisation" lesbian fiction, as I would like to emphasise and make a clear distinction between "pre-" and "post-decriminalisation" narrative. Simply, whereas the "pre-decriminalisation" texts were subject to censorship and, therefore, references to lesbian desire had had to be covert, works published around 1993 were accessible to the general public. I will argue that it is in this period when Irish lesbian fiction undergoes a transformation and shifts slowly to enter, in the second half of the last decade of the twentieth century, the subsequent stages of acceptance and pride/synthesis. The best portrayal of the initiation of this transition can be seen in Emma Donoghue's short story, 'Going Back' (1994). Although at the time there were (and, as I already mentioned, still are) places in rural Ireland where lesbian sexuality was frowned upon and not spoken of, despite its regular appearances in media and popular culture, Emma Donoghue's story does not concentrate primarily on these negative feelings. Simply, it pays a tribute to the change in Irish law and (the underway) change in the way of thinking in the majority of Irish society – or at least its urban communities.

Emma Donoghue was born in Dublin in 1969. Her mother is a primary school teacher, and her father, Denis Donoghue, a literary critic. Alongside Mary Dorcey, Donoghue is considered an exemplar of contemporary Irish lesbian fiction. In accordance to Jeffers's categorisation of Irish 1990s novel, Donoghue 'magnifies gender construction and sexual preference; [her writings] often present formerly marginalised groups or individuals: gays, children, battered women, the urban poor' (Jeffers, "Trends" 2). She has created her lesbian writings in various genres, including the short story, the coming-out novel, the psychological novel, the historical novel, and the campus novel. She has successfully established Irish lesbian and, to some extent, Catholic identities within her works.

Donoghue's short story, 'Going Back,' portrays two Irish immigrants in London: a lesbian – Cyn, and a gay man – Lou. The story touches upon many feelings that young gay men and lesbians of Ireland experienced at this time. In many conversations that the two characters have, they often mention Ireland, mostly reminiscing about their unhappiness. Donoghue, however, does not limit herself to describe only those feelings. The story illustrates difficulties

of coming out, the first female president of Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church, and most importantly, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts. It demonstrates the pretences that the two characters had to keep to be 'respectable' and for their 'reputations [to be] saved' ('Going Back' 208). The fact that Cyn has not returned to Ireland once since she left in 1980, implies that her attempts to come out in her youth were unsuccessful, therefore, she has made the decision to emigrate. Lou, however, visits his parents on a regular basis, where he lives a lie and is not willing to reveal his sexuality, as this has already caused his withdrawal from a seminary. Yet he is the one who insists that Ireland is changing, and that Cyn and he should revisit and witness its 'growing up' (221). Cyn, whose name most likely derives from her cynical approach, is dubious. She does not feel that she would ever fit in: 'I felt more of an exile for twenty years in Ireland than I ever have in the twelve I've been out of it' (211). She comes to terms with losing her national identity for a greater cause – her sexual identity. Furthermore, Cyn states that she does not remember ever having been asked if she wants to be Irish in the first place, which can be seen as an exemplification of a mutual refusal of national identity. This seems to be an unexceptional matter when dealing with diasporic identities; an individual's sense of hurt transcends into hate towards one's country of origin. Even though Cyn admits that, as a lesbian, she was 'never illegal' (220), the stigma and the feeling of being the society's outcast still pervades in many lesbians.[2] The story leaves the two characters on the verge, permitting them the choice whether to go back or not. However, it also leaves them filled with hope and, just like in 'Scarlet O'Hara,' the feeling of an imminent time of change, as 'Dublin has its very own Pride March now' to celebrate the decriminalisation of homosexuality (220), and 'a female president up in the Park' (221).

I consider this story to be a sort of prelude to Donoghue's next two novels, as all three works have been written at a breaking moment for Irish lesbian writing upon its entrance into the stages of gender and sexuality realisation. Moira E. Casey argues that 'Going Back,' *Stir-fry*, and *Hood* 'directly engage with the cultural climate in Ireland surrounding homosexuality at that historical moment' ("If Love's a Country" 67). *Stir-fry* and *Hood* address Irish lesbians at the point of coming out, however, under different life circumstances of their protagonists. Additionally, the fictive exploration of a contemporary Irish lesbian identity had been the most innovative feature of Donoghue's first two novels. *Stir-fry* (1994) is a campus novel, which depicts its main character, Maria, who comes from an unknown village and starts a course at University College Dublin (UCD). I, however, will analyse *Stir-fry* from the perspective of a lesbian *Bildungsroman*, where the process of developing and realising the protagonist's identity

is not held in a traditional manner, but her maturity is achieved through the process of coming out and accepting her new sexuality (Jeffers, *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies and Power* 88). *Stir-fry,* as well as Donoghue's next novel, *Hood,* is an ingenuous portrayal of a transparent lack of acceptance within Irish society towards lesbians, thus creating particularly difficult circumstances for the characters to not only be accepted, but also to accept their own and, as in case of *Stir-fry,* newly discovered sexualities. Maria's difficulties on her way to self-discovery and self-identification can be most accurately analysed with the use of *Bildungsroman.*

Bildungsroman is a term signifying the novel of formation or education. The subject matter of the novel is the development of the protagonist's (typically gendered male) growth and character in the passage from their childhood or youth into maturity (Gazda 87). The process of development usually involves the recognition of the protagonist's identity (Träger 70) or a development of an artistic consciousness that leads to the creation of a fully crystallised personality. *Bildungsroman* shows the spontaneous development of the individual against the background of a certain era, where the process of educational and intellectual development of the protagonist is often influenced by certain institutions or other characters that are often distant to the protagonist and stimulate the hero according to their intentions (Gazda 87-88). The protagonist undergoes many trials and enters various environments where he/she meets new people whose influence can be either harmful or beneficial. In the classical type of *Bildungsroman,* identity is defined as the individual selfhood that is achieved through growth and social experience. Wilhelm Dilthey, who had introduced the term to the critical vocabulary by employing it in the 1870-biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and then popularising it in *Poetry and Experience,* had specified five essential components of *Bildungsroman* that include the author's personal experiences, the protagonist's gender, individualism or uniqueness, and psychological maturation that culminates in their full self-realisation of the self's potential.[3] In the 1990s, there appeared a modern type of the genre that, as it introduces sex into discourse and makes it its central theme, transformed the traditional genre into a sexualised *Bildungsroman,* where the protagonist's maturity is achieved through accepting his/her sexuality. In *Stir-fry,* the qualities of the traditional and sexualised *Bildungsroman* have been transfigured to accommodate and promote the lesbian context, thus creating the lesbian novel of development, or the lesbian *Bildungsroman,* which, according to Sally Munt, 'has an explicit pedagogic function, to instruct the reader in the complexity and contemporaneity of lesbian identity' (17). The genre, therefore, which traditionally portrays the psychological development

and the process of self-discovery of the main character, at the same time subverts the heterosexual discourse of the heteronormative *Bildungsroman* by focusing on the heroine's sexual development and the self-realisation of her lesbian sexuality.

Maria, *Stir-fry*'s heroine, is a conjectural lesbian whose initial loneliness in the heteropatriarchal society is induced by her deliberate lack of heterosexual friends, excluding her college peer, Yvonne, as well as by her dissimilarity to the majority of female society, which is manifested in her negative feelings towards men, 'men-repugnance' (Donoghue, *Stir-fry* 27). Predictably, as a *Bildungsroman* protagonist, Maria moves to Dublin to receive higher education. Her geographical journey from countryside to the city symbolises her movement away from Irish patriarchy towards the lesbian world where the process of "coming-out" provides 'a point of exit from mainstream heterosexist culture' (Jay 28).

To present the blinding contrast between the traditional and the lesbian versions of *Bildungsroman*, I will use Jennifer Jeffers's reformulation of Dilthey's five constituents of the genre. Firstly, the young protagonist of *Bildungsroman* is traditionally a male, whereas in *Stir-fry* we are dealing with a female protagonist. To adapt this element, the protagonist of *Stir-fry* negotiates gender difference and experiences gender inferiority. Furthermore, Maria's journey concentrates on her adolescence and education, much like in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, that results in an affirmation of her sexuality. Secondly, the protagonist usually presents an individualism or uniqueness. This quality is again transferred into a lesbian context, as Maria's uniqueness is portrayed through her refusal to engage in heteronormative behaviours. Her individualism is especially vivid when compared to Yvonne, who is the voice of homogenous and homophobic Irish patriarchal society. This contrast is strengthened when Maria changes her physical appearance by cutting her hair, the act of which in particular, is seen by Yvonne, for whom looking "straight" is of great importance, as a stereotypical feature of lesbian sexuality. Maria's atypicality also involves articulation of her difference in terms of sexual preference. She is 'wedged into that . . . "abject space" . . . of being neither heterosexual nor homosexual' (Jeffers, *The Irish Novel* 98). Therefore, her uniqueness is revealed further by the inadequacy of her first lover (a male), which creates a sense of her inability to decide on her sexual desire (195), and, in effect, delays the promulgation of her sexual preference. Thirdly, the author's personal experiences influence the narrative, and indeed 'Maria's eventual coming out colludes with the novel's biographical element' (Jeffers, *The Irish Novel* 92-93). Donoghue textualises female desire against the heteronormative tradition of writing. Her rejection of silence that she manifests by writing an openly lesbian fiction, presents her protagonist's

uniqueness, as well as her own. Fourthly, the protagonist must undergo a psychological maturation, a journey, to, fifthly, come to the full self-realisation of one's potential. Maria's achievement of psychological maturation, followed by her development, allows for her 'movement . . . from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty' (Jeffers, *The Irish Novel* 94), which is portrayed in her final realisation of her sexuality. Therefore, Maria's journey is completed, her coming of age/coming out process has established her as a mature character, who is conscious of her (sexual) identity.

Regardless of the classification, however, whether *Stir-fry* is categorised as the lesbian novel of development, the lesbian *Bildungsroman*, or the coming-out novel, it generates larger implications for literature and gender studies, and questions the properties of the genre, whilst exemplifying the transformation of the narrative to accommodate and prioritise the lesbian context. Furthermore, the possibility to reformulate *Bildungsroman* shakes the foundations of all literary genres, and thus, literary theory in general. It opens prospects for the creation of new, and the obliteration of old, literary genres. Just as the term "queer" is impossible to define in strict terms, queering any literary text defies the possibility of its precise categorisation. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland allowed for the emergence of more than just "openly" lesbian texts – it permitted lesbian writers to initiate the formation of a new Irish literary canon that is not obligated to follow conventions of the previously prevailing hegemonic and male-dominated literary tradition.

Leaving aside the problem of categorisation, another important factor that signifies the stage of tolerance in Irish lesbian narrative is Maria's emergence from the closet that, to this day, is 'a defining structure for gay oppression' (Sedgwick 7). This action symbolises the knowledge that this emergence imposed upon the society. The knowledge requires reaction: to know is to acknowledge. Donoghue's novel, therefore, is a representation of an undeniable, however ignorant, acknowledgment of lesbian presence within Irish society.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable shift in the narrative from the previous stages. Donoghue concentrates on the processes of Maria's emotional and psychological development whilst presenting other features of *Bildungsroman*. The events, for which Donoghue deploys the third-person narrative from Maria's point of view, are presented in an objective manner without the use of subjective comments. Events are depicted in a simple way with the use of dialogues, and the narration is not in any way experimental, as if Donoghue did not intend to distract the readers' attention from the social and psychological problems – the protagonist's "emotional stir-fry," discussed in the novel by introducing innovative techniques. In this way,

she stresses the importance of these problems and aims to present them in an authentic manner by referring to everyday language in an Irish context.

Post-decriminalisation Irish lesbian fiction has shifted its narrative to address other issues than those before the decriminalisation. It is concerned primarily with the process of coming out, presenting the individual's perennial struggle of self-discovery and self-realisation (although this process can never be complete or final). There are no covert references to lesbian desire; it is here, in the open, unwary of society's reaction, and facing courageously the consequences of its emergence. The course of "leaving the closet" is prevalent in the works of the first half of the 1990s.[4] Donoghue tries to avoid the conviction that lesbophobia is brought upon lesbians by themselves. Valentine argues that to "come out" of the closet is to call it simultaneously into being; paradoxically, 'coming out of the closet does not demolish it but threatens to reinforce the closet's prevalence, thus reinforcing the marginalisation and invisibility of homosexuality in society' (157). Furthermore, Maria's emergence from the literal and metaphorical closet can be understood, at this particular stage in Irish lesbian writing, as representing the end of an enforced silence of Irish lesbians:

> Maria's hand skimmed across the polished wood of the wardrobe, which was interrupted with scratches. She tried the intricate metal handle, half of which came off in her hand; as she was fitting it back into its hole, the door swung open. . . . Shutting her eyes, Maria let her fingertips follow the clothes . . . Perhaps ten minutes passed in this way, with her breath getting deeper and the slow boom of he heart the only sound. Then Maria reached under her nightshirt and touched herself for the first time since she could remember. . . . [At] the sound of a key in the front door . . . bending low, she slid out of the wardrobe without too much disturbance, and shut it softly behind her. (Donoghue, *Stir-fry* 183-184)

At this point, Irish lesbian writing is heading towards the subsequent stage of acceptance, where it will be ready to share and manifest its representations of lesbian desire. *Hood* (1996), Donoghue's next novel, other than presenting lesbian identity from a slightly different perspective, seems to be continuing the individualities of her characters, and is, just as *Stir-fry*, concerned with the process of coming out of its protagonist. However, Donoghue

shifts her plot into a darker sphere, where her main character, Pen, grieves the death of her long-term partner, Cara. Pen's coming out seems to be more advanced than in the case of *Stir-fry*, as Pen has already undergone the first two stages of lesbian identity development process, therefore, her self-identification as a lesbian is already completed. Her process of coming out, in this instance, is taking place on other levels, as she discloses her sexual identity to her friends, family, colleagues, and incidental members of society. Pen's story of development is complex; unlike Maria, she does not achieve maturity or sexual realisation but, instead, faces difficulties of coming out in an austere Irish Catholic environment. Furthermore, Pen's identity development is parallelised with the process of grieving, where the stages of the grieving process can be identified in accordance with those indicated by Kübler-Ross (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance).

The plot of *Hood* plays a minor role and is dependent on the psychological experiences of its heroine. Psychological motifs are related closely to social and moral elements as Pen is entangled in various relationships and social dependences. The action is a sequence of psychological events to which other events are subordinated. Additionally, the fact that the plot is condensed within a space of a week makes Pen's experiences more vivid, and the consecutive stages of grieving that she encounters can at times be observed within one paragraph. Through encapsulating the plot and its events in short spaces of time, as Pen is forced to return to work only three days after Cara's death, Donoghue emphasises the need for a formal recognition of lesbian partnerships in state institutions. Additionally, Donoghue's attempt to illustrate lesbian individualism is portrayed in Pen's resistance to being identified with lesbians, Cara's friends, when she attends Cara's wake, and her further refusal to their invitations, as Pen seems to be resisting all these social practices in order to maintain her individuality.

As opposed to Donoghue's first novel, *Hood*'s protagonist is a much older and insular character. However, there is a noticeable continuation of the plot and the characters from *Stir-fry*.[5] Whereas Maria's disentanglement evolved around her process of coming out, the plot of *Hood*, despite Pen "leaving the closet" on many other levels, 'appears to advocate lesbian integration in mainstream Irish society, not through a denial of difference, but through mutual understanding and acceptance' (Antoinette Quinn 164) which, in compliance with Cass's model, begins to enter the stage of acceptance. What is more, Cara's death is used as a metaphor to present 'a cry against homophobia on the part of heterosexual society and separation on the part of the lesbian community' (Antoinette Quinn 164-165). *Hood,* by denying Pen to grieve Cara openly, repudiates lesbian otherness by intersecting elements of theory and fiction that

refer obliviously to traumatology, and concomitantly protesting silently against Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act.

Bisexuality in Dorcey's *Biography of Desire*

Publication of Donoghue's *Hood* was followed by Mary Dorcey's *Biography of Desire* (1997). *Biography of Desire* (hereafter *Biography*) was Dorcey's first and only attempt at writing a novel. The time in which *Biography* was written allowed Dorcey to discuss everyday problems of Irish lesbians on an even bigger scale than in *A Noise from the Woodshed.* Here, she problematises the still-existing resistance of the Irish law towards lesbians by introducing her bisexual character, Katherine, who fears to lose custody of her children. In Ireland, the first of very few legal cases to award guardianship of her children to a lesbian mother took place in 1992. Despite that, women encountered many difficulties in order to become legal guardians in same-sex relationships. Whereas the law of Ireland may have been influenced by the ever-growing pressure from the policies of the European Union, rural societies, until this day, exhibit transparent resistance, if not a repugnance, toward the notion of same-sex parents, which would result in the destruction of the image of the mother as 'the guardian of the great majority of citizens' (Irish Const., art. 44, removed in 1972), and was also one of the main arguments in the opposition of equal marriage rights in 2015, which, for example, issued "VOTE NO" posters depicting a heterosexual couple with a baby, clearly pointing that parents must be of different sexes.

The text has regular intervals of Katherine's agonising fear of losing her boys. She realises that if her husband, Malachy, had brought her to court and was to sue her for custody of their two sons, Ben and Luke, in an austere Irish reality there would be no doubt which of them 'would be considered the more respectable parent by the law' (Dorcey, *Biography* 65). 'While [she] openly flaunt[s] this abnormal liaison' (20), her 'extraordinary behaviour . . . destroy[s] the happiness of [her] husband and children' (20). As 'the State . . . guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State' (Irish Const., art. 41) Katherine, therefore, recognises that 'her affection for [her] own sex' (Dorcey, *Biography* 153) jeopardises her chances of victory.[6] Despite the fact that the judiciary is supposed to be allocating custody whilst having children's best interest in mind, and where parents' sexual orientation should be irrelevant, many lesbian mothers feared to reveal their sexuality. As little as ten years prior to

the publication of *Biography*, it was common for lesbian mothers in Ireland to be ordered to "cure" themselves of their "lesbianism" that, consequently, diminished their chances of winning custody, as in the eyes of the Law, they were then seen not only as unfit and "morally wrong" guardians but also as mentally ill. In addition to this, the issue of lesbian motherhood did not only concern lesbians. The representation of the limited notion of family and kinship exemplifies the understanding of those relations in heteronormative ways, therefore, addressing social normativities more broadly than only affecting particular social groups alone.

However, Dorcey primarily presents the story of Katherine Newman's sexual development and portrays her as a bisexual character who instigates a relationship with a Dublin lesbian, Nina Kavanaugh. Dorcey's portrayal of lesbians is rather controversial, as she notes that all of their previous relationship included men. She emphasises that society and the Church were not to blame in this case; rather, she makes a point, although an unconscious one, that all humans are born predisposed to bisexuality, and only later, through experiences and conscious choices, we make a decision regarding the path of our sexualities. Furthermore, this stance not only highlights the importance of bisexuality within the LGBTQI+ movement, but also presents lesbian sexuality in a new light, which is not oppressive towards bisexual members.

Katherine is portrayed as a wife, teacher, mother, and a lover. Her character emphasises how the difficulties she encounters make her a strong individual in Irish society. Even the dark reality of being in a same-sex relationship in Ireland cannot convince Katherine to choose another path:

> I remember you trying to talk me out of it. Return to the straight world. . . . You said society made it so difficult at times, that you thought you'd give it up. That the intensity between women lovers made you nostalgic sometimes for the ease of life with men. You talked of the sense of relaxation you had in their company. The sense of social acceptance. You wished you could retreat sometimes to this safe harbor of public approval. Ah – the fruits of acceptance; the careless, unthinking, complacent reward for being normal. You wished you could take refuge in normality. . . . (Dorcey, *Biography* 46)

Despite having been given a "fair warning," 'it didn't make a blind bit of difference' (47); Katherine does not believe Nina for a moment and refuses to regress to heterosexuality. Loving Nina allowed her to accept, and to take pride in her sexual identity, thus allowing for the shift from the stage of tolerance into stages of acceptance and, finally, pride/synthesis.

The representation of Irish society in Dorcey's work is a vivid one, and it reflects unmistakably the attitudes concerning lesbians in Ireland in the 1990s. I do not think that Dorcey created Katherine to appear confused; instead, she has been written meticulously into the novel in order to introduce basic human emotions pertaining to women's and lesbians' struggle in patriarchal Ireland. In some respect, through Dorcey's use of a bisexual character representing the stigmatised Irish sexuality, and thus challenging the prevailing permeable binarism of either heterosexuality or homosexuality, her novel can be considered an anomaly in the growing canon of Irish lesbian fiction.

Dorcey's inclusion of Katherine's character exemplifies the dire need for the theorisation of bisexuality within queer theory. Katherine has been, by many, identified as bisexual. Dorcey, however, avoids defining Katherine's sexuality. Her presentation of Katherine's bisexuality is limited to a simplistic mixture of hetero- and homosexuality that transgresses through a lesbian infatuation. Bisexuality, without a concrete definition suited for a variety of purposes and uses, proves to be problematic for queer theorists who often dismiss, devalue or exclude bisexuality altogether. Interiority that in this context is understood as a form of permeable binarism that results in creating false dichotomies (James 223) and "bisexual erasure" (Hemmings, "What's in a Name? Bisexuality, Transnational Sexuality Studies and Western Colonial Legacies" 21). Most understandings of bisexuality are based on the notion of compulsory monosexuality, that considers bisexual desire to be a failure in becoming fully gay or lesbian (Chiang 374-96). Hemmings and Cixous call this binary into question. Clare Hemmings proposes that bisexuals play roles of 'double agents' – their sexual fluidity granting them access to both worlds: homo- and heterosexual ('Resituating the Bisexual Body: From Identity to Difference' 131).[7] In addition to this, Cixous metamorphoses their existence as a bridge connecting these two worlds (254). Instead of trying to categorise Katherine in terms of her bisexuality, I will continue to analyse the novel from the perspective of its shifting narrative, which is not to say that by any means I want to diminish the existence of bisexuality amongst gay and lesbian communities. However, it should not go unnoticed that Dorcey transforms the tradition of Irish lesbian writing by introducing bisexuality.

Katherine's character, therefore, other than accentuating a prerequisite for the theorisation of bisexuality, plays two other roles. Firstly, the imaginary court case, and the concomitant feeling of her newly-found desire being scrutinised and judged, creates connotations of a plea for an acceptance of bisexuality within heterosexual as well as lesbigay communities, which, similarly, can be translated to a previous invisibility, and later marginalisation of lesbian desire in Ireland's political forum. This positioning of Katherine as

a peacemaker allows for an exploration of the second purpose of her bisexuality – the aforementioned role of a bisexual person acting as a "bridge" that connects worlds of heterosexuality and lesbian desire (Cixous 254) is used by Dorcey to allow other sexualities to be included within the canon of Irish lesbian fiction. Her attempt results in the strictly lesbian narrative being invaded by a heterosexual desire that offers both textual and sexual disruption to Irish lesbian texts: 'Whereas with Malachy . . . I had these strange protracted period of resistance to him. I'd fluctuate from passion to some kind of revulsion . . . How could he have abandoned me to this? I wanted . . . him . . . [to] make me love you' (Dorcey, *Biography* 320,323). Here, similar to 'A Noise from the Woodshed,' semiotic communication disrupts the symbolic discourse. The flow of the narrative, as well as the prevalent sexuality of lesbian fiction, are disturbed, as Dorcey, through Katherine's reminiscence of her past, discusses heterosexual desire.

Nevertheless, I find this disruption to be crucial at this particular point in time: Dorcey, by her intricate inclusion of a politicised bisexual identity, facilitates, however unconsciously, the approach of the last stage of the development of Irish lesbian fiction – pride/synthesis, which will not crystallise fully for another decade. Katherine's sexuality, other than emphasising the need to end the political exclusion of bisexuality, eases the transition between the stages. For now, however, in the last decade of the twentieth century, Irish lesbian fiction has entered the stage of acceptance. According to Cass's original theory, in this stage, the individual continues contact with other gay, lesbian and bisexual people, and develops an awareness of the enormous incongruity that exists between the person's increasingly positive concept of self and an awareness of society's rejection of non-heteronormative sexual identities. The person feels resentment towards heterosexuals and may devalue many of their institutions, such as marriage, gender structures, or specifically in case of Ireland, the sacred image of the family created by the Catholic Church. Similar, in *Biography of Desire*, all of the above features are represented in Catherine's immersion in her new-found sexuality, and critique of the hegemonic, patriarchal and religious power structures that prevent her from keeping her children.

Furthermore, being in a same-sex relationship immediately composes Katherine as a member of lesbian community. What is diverse from other novels by lesbian writers, however, is the absence of misandry. Katherine, despite having fallen in love with a woman, feels envious of men:

> I don't hate men. On the contrary, I've spent most of my life loving men. . . . And yet it was women I loved most. From the first it was they who held mystery and fascination. Women who lured me. Women who fired my imagination. Women who must stay behind in the kitchen who could not be trusted elsewhere. Is this why, so many years later I would fall in love with a woman and fall from grace. Fall from power. Fall from exemption. (97, 99)

The above passage, other than just showing struggles of bisexuality in Katherine's inability to come to terms with her present sexual preference, challenges to this day existing gender norms that have been imposed on Irish society by the State and the Church. *Biography* is an explicit portrayal of gender constraints that entangled Katherine from her early childhood, with her character being representative of all females coming of age in homogenous Ireland. Whilst men have everything, 'what they [wish] for they [can] accomplish' (99), women '[have] nothing but their kitchens' (99). The world belongs to men, they are free to 'smoke their cigarettes and exchange profound ideas' (97). The norms are being challenged through Katherine's envy of men's independence and privileges, as well through her desire for women – 'the sweet smell of their hair, the brush of their skin . . . the sudden heat and softness of their flesh [and] the laughter in their voices' (96). In the above passage, Dorcey abolishes the psychoanalytic idea of "penis envy"; women do not want, and never wanted to be like men, at least in the physical sense.[8] Lesbians, therefore, do not want to love women as men do. They want to love women how only women can. The passage exploits concomitantly women's desires for gender equality, sexual preference equality and, especially in a bisexual context, the desire for a superfluity, an excess of physical desire. It is now transparent that it is, indeed, the 'time of the essence' (Dorcey, 'Scarlett O'Hara' 204), which allows for a final shift in the narrative in terms of challenging gender structures. The establishment of norms and expectations through stereotypes dictated by the society is changing, and is, at last, beginning to see gender as an equal construct, although the issue of gender discrimination still exists in certain parts of Ireland. In the brief three years between publications of *Hood* and *Biography* there was a rapid shift towards other values: the need to be accepted, and the concomitant feeling of being accepted, at least to some extent, changed the course of the narrative thus allowing it to contemplate on more complex dilemmas of Irish lesbians of the late 1990s.

Dorcey's narrative itself, follows its diversity from *A Noise from the Woodshed*. It shifts from Katherine's first-person narrative to an omniscient third-person narrator that is used to

present events concerning the character of Nina. Similarly to the collection of short stories, Dorcey uses this technique to emphasise the difficulties that the characters' sexualities may present. The majority of the novel, however, is dedicated to the voice of Katherine whose monologue, enclosed in a form of a diary, forms an individual account of her developing sexuality. Some of the elements typical of Irish lesbian fiction are still present in *Biography*. These, however, are not as formidable as in the works of Dorcey's predecessors. The institution of the Church in the novel is no longer presented as the despotic power; rather, it is shown in the main characters' atheism despite having attended convent schools or having been raised by the nuns. With the power of the Church diminished considerably, Dorcey does not find it necessary to justify her characters' loss of faith as, especially in terms of globalisation and concentration on material rather than spiritual values, it is perceived as self-explanatory.

Senator David Norris, in his essay "Homosexual People and the Christian Churches in Ireland," states that it is 'the unusually homogenous nature of [Irish] society [to assume] that to be Irish is to be white, heterosexual and Roman Catholic' and, therefore, the terms "Christian" and "Homosexual" or "Irish" and "Homosexual" [are] not mutually exclusive' (31). To this day most of the main public service providers, from health care to education, are under the jurisdiction of the Church. The Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) forbid discrimination in many areas of employment. However, section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act allows for religious organisations, medical and educational institutions, in order to maintain their religious ethos, to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. As it stands, more than ninety-three percent of primary schools, and more than fifty percent of post-primary schools in Ireland have a religious patron, with a large number of hospitals still being governed by religious bodies.[9] This being said, self-identification in terms of mainly national and social belonging, as well as religion and sexuality, proves to be a highly problematic issue for the majority of Irish lesbians.

Merging of social, national, religious, and sexual identities

Even the individual nation-state as an object of analysis in itself is problematic. The search for one's national belonging is often owed to the notion of nationalism. However, nationalism, in its hegemonic form, can also indoctrinate and dominate people's thinking and behaviour to such an extent that certain groups, which do not fit into its invented idea of national harmony, are frequently excluded. Nationalism, therefore, can also sometimes be seen as the

main cause of creating problems for identifying with one's national belonging, or indeed, being refused a place in the national imaginary. With the precise case of Ireland in mind, I find Partha Chatterjee's contributions especially valuable. He constructed a division between imperial nationalism and the political nationalism that was created by anticolonialist nationalists long before separating from the imperial power. Postcolonial nationalists segregated their culture into two domains – material and spiritual. Firstly, they "imagined" the nation into being in the spiritual sense before readying it for the political contest. The spiritual domain bears essential markers of cultural identity and it is associated with family, ancestry, culture, and religion. Furthermore, the spiritual domain, in opposition to the material domain, is considered feminine and is associated with the domestic sphere (Chatterjee 126). The material domain, on the other hand, is associated with the economy, technology, science, and statecraft, which is gendered as masculine. Whereas the coloniser proved its superiority over the material domain of the culture of the colony, and the post-colony agreed on the need for modernity (although still rejecting the colonial rule), the greater has become the need to preserve the spiritual sphere from any alien intrusion. Nationalists in postcolonial nations, in assuming that lesbian desire is a Western invention, instantaneously rejected it and perceived it as an invasion of the spiritual sphere of national culture. This type of nationalism could be classified as hegemonic nationalism, with its aggressiveness, chauvinism, fascism, and discrimination against minorities (Wirth 725-729).

Some scholars, however, shed a different light on this issue. Benedict Anderson, for instance, who unlike certain Marxists, is of an opinion that nations and nationalisms are products of modernity that were invented in the West and later forced upon the rest of the world, understands nation as an imagined community, a value that cannot be defined strictly by speaking the same language or having similar beliefs of living within the country's borders. Anderson, who, *per viam*, comes from a long line of nationalists in Ireland and still holds an Irish passport, sees the concept of national community as a purely fictional notion. He believes that a nation is a socially constructed political community that is imagined by individuals who perceive themselves as members of that group in opposition to the nation's outsiders. He purports that nationalism is a policy of threatened upper classes and the way of governments to control nations, initiated through, *inter alia*, popular mass media and compulsory education. He also states that the idea of an imagined community is based mainly on the common social identity that, through its deep psychological bond, creates a feeling of a 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 7), and that this factor precisely is used for State control. This control of population and its numbers can also often be exhibited in an exclusion of minority

communities, such as the LGBTQI+ community. Therefore, the insularity of Irish nationalism, which, despite secularism, was further served by the authoritarian Catholic Church, can be seen as one of the reasons why lesbians refused self-identification as Irish and chose to be perceived as communal, however oppressed, rather than national members in the past.

National identity, on the other hand, often refers to a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language. However, it is much more of a complex concept. Omar Dahbour, for instance, makes a distinction between two types of national identities (17). He provides the reader with 'strict' and 'loose' definitions. The 'strict' definition is intertwined closely with the cultural heritage and ancestry, whereas the 'loose' definition is a combination of a particular conception of personal identity, political community, and a morality and individuality (Poole 53). I support the latter definition, which is further explained and analysed by Walker Connor, who defines the nation as a 'group of people who believe they are ancestrally related' (xi), and implies that it is the "psychological bond" and the feeling of unity that plays the most important role in the creation of national identities.

Developing Anderson's opinion, that nations, nation-ness, and nationalism are difficult to define, I want to highlight the role of the Catholic Church in Irish nationalism, and how the Church interfered not only with the political sphere, but also with the spiritual aspect of Irish culture. The two modern versions of Irish political nationalism can be distinguished into Irish Catholic or Republican nationalism (people living in the Republic of Ireland who want to espouse anti-colonising nationalism and are in favour of the unification of Ireland), and Irish Protestant or Unionist nationalism (people living in Northern Ireland who do not want to be separated from Britain). Religion has always had a major influence on the community. Lesbian identity especially, 'is a rapture to the morality brigade attached to conservative agendas' (Kalra, Kalhoon and Hutnyk 63). Kathryn Conrad recognises the fact that Irish orthodox Catholicism has always demonised homosexuality; therefore, homosexuality was always troubling for the notions of nationalism and 'Irishness' (125). She also instances David Lloyd who states that until recently, both colonial and the New Irish State excluded homosexual and lesbian narratives from the field of literature (125). Therefore, I will be examining how the 1993 decriminalisation of homosexual acts has influenced the retraction from their previous actions.

The Catholic religion was a forming element of Irish identity and it played an important role in forging the unity that was necessary for nationalism's attainment in Ireland. Thus, 'Catholicism was successfully conjoined with Irish nationalism . . . by the need for nationalism to have some widely accepted source of identity in society' (White 48). Therefore, the Catholic

Church and nationalism have become until recently reliant on each other and through the Church's interference in nationalistic politics, it became two inseparable and co-dependent institutions.

Ireland, with Catholicism as its main religion, opposed largely to any threats to the notion of "the ideal family" that is to be consisting of a man and woman, husband and wife. Therefore, minorities, and in particular gay men and lesbians, were being demonised as anti-Irish. Having said that, it is understandable in what measure lesbians must have been stigmatised to identify themselves as Catholics and as Irish, since they had to overpower the two, closely intertwined, dominant forces: the Catholic Church, and the nation-state. Even though the Catholic Church is losing its power over the domestic, political, and public spheres of Ireland, and as I have stated before, Ireland is slowly shifting into post-religiousness, it is still widely believed that many lesbians have renounced their faith in the name of their sexuality. Presently, Ireland is thought to have entered the new millennium with an open-mindedness characterised by its younger generation. In the 1990s, however, it was a different matter. Political representatives, manipulated by religious authorities, were still under the influence of their predecessors' actions and continued to be in opposition to any changes, the perfect example being the opposition to the amendments of sections 61 and 62 of the Sexual Offences Acts.

In addition to the complexities of self-identifying one's nation, sexuality, and religion, the major impact of self-recognition was ignited by the sense of social identity. A person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or a group, therefore, dictates one's social identity. Consequently, a common social identification that is held by a group of individuals forms a social group. Therefore, persons who are similar to each other and fulfil group expectations are included within this group whereas, consecutively, those who differ are excluded and are thus perceived the abject members of the discriminated group: outcasts. Likewise, a lesbian circle or religious community or a group, welcome those similar to them and, respectively, refuse others. Furthermore, according to Tajfel and Turner, there exists a continuum between personal and social identities, and 'shifts along this continuum determine the extent to which group-related or personal characteristics influence a person's feelings and actions' (298). The self becomes assimilated to the perceived within the group stereotypes and, therefore, is more likely to exhibit behaviours typical of that group that, as a result, influences behavioural intentions of the self. Therefore, on the assumption that Irish Catholics form a wide social group, one's self-identification with this group dictates the development of certain social

identity. This can be translated into an unconscious and mutual hatred towards sexual minorities that only began to disappear under the influence of the process of globalisation and its advancements on human rights, resulting in creating grounds for multiplicitous acceptance. This identity merging is Donoghue's metaphorical emotional stir-fry that, in *Landing*, is presented by the use of cultural dislocation.

Transnationalism in Emma Donoghue's *Landing* (2007)

Landing is significantly different in comparison to Donoghue's previous lesbian novels. It does not deal with the process of coming out; instead, it moves onto discussing a lesbian relationship in transnational scenery that refers to the heightened interconnectivity and multiple interactions that link people across the borders of nation-states. The influence of the transnationalism on the narrative of the novel is indicated in the initiation of the main characters' relationship that takes place at the airport, in, as Casey observes, 'a sort of in-between state' ("If Love's a Country" 70). Whereas in the mid-nineties, the process of coming out was of great interest to writers and readers, over a decade later the narrative has made a substantial shift into the modern world and, consequently, the next developmental stage of pride/synthesis. Donoghue observes that 'lesbian writing is not particularly known for its stylistic or structural experimentation; we're getting noticed for the new things we're saying, not for how we're saying them' (Thompson, "Emma Donoghue" 175). Consequently, this is exactly what she does – she experiments with new themes that have occurred in lesbian existence in Ireland, by portraying present attitudes and making a noteworthy comparison to twentieth-century Ireland. Irish society is no longer portrayed as homo- and lesbophobic; as an alternative, Donoghue's characters move freely around the globe, making love and attending gay weddings. Male homosexuality, lesbian sexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality merge, forming a sense of long-awaited equality and happiness. Yet again, Donoghue is a pioneer of her profession, this time bringing Irish lesbian women's writing into the last and final stage of development of lesbian narrative – pride/synthesis. Although the original phase states that heterosexuals who are not supportive are still devalued, the general intense anger at heteronormativity softens, and there is a recognition of heterosexuals' trustworthiness that creates an atmosphere of reciprocal collaboration.

As with any other theory, there exist risks of inconsistency. In *Landing*, heterosexuals, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, seem to be living harmoniously alongside each other. Having

said that, the aforementioned interdependence does not exclude racist and homophobic events that still make their appearance in the twenty-first-century Irish society of *Landing* (186-191). These, however, are of a minor importance to the plot's development and are ridiculed by its characters (35), as the novel primarily 'problematises both points of origin and assumptions about whiteness and Irish identity' (O'Toole, "Cé Leis Tú? Queering Irish Migrant Literature" 139).

In the past, as illustrated in Chapter Three, many Irish lesbians, at some point in their lives, have felt the need to emigrate, mainly to the UK, on the grounds of their sexualities[10]. This trend is now in full reversal, with many displaced Irish diasporans returning to Ireland. Ireland has noted an increased tendency for its emigrants to return to their roots, particularly between the mid-1990s and 2000. 'When we were at college, . . . didn't it seem like everyone we knew was moving [away from Ireland]? But then the minute the Boom happened, most of them came rushing home' (Donoghue, *Landing* 292). Additionally, there is a contradistinction in the number of LGBTQI+ community members' rural to urban migration. Whereas it is still widely considered that, as Síle observes, 'queers should head for the biggest city they know and stay there' (231), it is of a clichéd nature with many gay men and lesbians moving to rural parts of Ireland. Although 'nothing's spelled out' and their neighbours would 'rather not receive a wedding invitation,' they 'get on grand' (231) and are generally accepted. In order to accentuate *Landing*'s globalised nature, Donoghue places her characters 'doing the time zone tango' (238) between Dublin, Ireland and Ireland, Ontario. This wordplay diminishes the feeling of great distance and makes the world a smaller place, a place in which distances and borders do not exist, where her characters are 'citizen[s] of the world' (301).

The novel, therefore, is best analysed from the perspective of transnationalism. The term "transnationalism" seems to be accurate in terms of assigning a new, imaginary space without the use of territorial claims and borders, as it concentrates on issues of mobility and border-transcending processes. In *Landing*, national boundaries are being displaced as Jude and Síle travel continuously in order to decide on their final destination. The choice here, contrary to previous reasons for migration, depends strictly on one's emotional attachment to the place of origin rather than old-fashioned patriotism. Mr Donohoe, in his August 2014 statement for The Irish Times, observes that in

> old ideas of patriotism, such as blind loyalty and unquestioning obedience do not sit well with [the Irish], and for good reason. History shows that powerful institutions like church, state or business must be challenged and scrutinised, so that they work for the common good, and not their own interests. To do otherwise can lead to scandal, corruption or dysfunction. (Collins, *The Irish Times* n.p.)

Transnationalism in *Landing* is a result of the interconnectedness of the world as a consequence of global capitalism. It emphasises here the emergence of social process in which two women establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Donoghue 'explores . . . the subject of desire across distances of various kinds: generational, cultural, [and] even spiritual' (Brownrigg 18). Despite the fact that the importance of immigrant groups in transnational activities has been limited, it is nevertheless significant in terms of development prospects for nations and communities. Transnationalism, especially contemporaneously, does indeed play an irrevocably crucial role in hybridising processes of contemporary societies. Síle and Jude, therefore, become representatives of the new generation of queer transmigrants that Donoghue has written in 'an attempt to critique or reshape the homeland' (O'Toole, "Cé Leis Tú? Queering Irish Migrant Literature" 139). I must stipulate that when I refer to transnationalism, I have in mind the creation of a new social space and 'the ways that the everyday practices of ordinary people, their feelings, and understandings of their conditions of existence, often modify those very conditions and thereby shape rather than merely reflect new modes of urban culture' (Michael Smith 493). This is especially true in a lesbian context, where the power relations are being shaped in resistance to dominant hegemonic and patriarchal power structures, and where the transnational subjectivity is often acquired through the rejection of the concept of affiliation as the basis of identity. Here, I would like to return to the previously discussed theory of Benedict Anderson who, with his notions of "imagined communities" and "print capitalism," seemed to have reached out far into the future. The influence of the print in the era of capitalism, strengthened by inventions of the twentieth century, such as telecommunication and technology, as well as rendering of, and resistance to, the nation-state in the phase of globalisation, seem to be at the centre of the novel's long-distance relationship. General assumptions about national belonging, as well as identity, ethnicity, and sexuality, are reversed through its cosmopolitan, lesbian, and of an Indian-origin main character, Síle.

Furthermore, transnationalism is perceptible in the language of the novel. Donoghue equips her characters with the means of modern communication, information technology, and cheap air travel, to emphasise the existence of glocality and its influence on transnational queer subjectivity, as well as general perception and reception of lesbians. An ease with which the long-distance relationship between Canada and Ireland is pursued, implicates positive impacts of the era of the Celtic Tiger and a sudden improvement of Irish economy that resulted in globalisation. Civil society is to be understood here as 'the voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions that form the basis of the functioning society' (Murphy 2) that at the local level are responsible for community's developmental processes. The Celtic Tiger, Ireland's participation in the EEC (later the European Union) affairs and opening its borders to allow fluid migration of workers, resulted in the creation of hybrid cultural identities. All these issues have been included in *Landing* that shows the contemporaneity of Irish society through the eyes of its excursionist – Síle. The borders between various identities and labels in *Landing* become fluid as its characters change their sexual preferences (Donoghue, *Landing* 42), geographical locations, and marital statuses. Donoghue reports intrinsically issues afflicting Ireland of the time – racism, homophobia, and paedophilia in the Church.

Although I discuss *Landing* from a transnational point of view, when approaching an analysis of its characters, it is vital to make a distinction between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Whereas the plot of the novel is a result of transnational movements, to classify Síle as an economic migrant would be a major misconception, because although transnationalism was used initially to describe movements, it now refers largely to economic migration. Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is characterised by a more sophisticated border crossing. Bauman enables new insights into distinguishing these two terms by deploying the images of the tourist and the 'vagabond' (93), where the latter refers to transnational people and the former represents intellectual individuals who demonstrate 'an openness towards divergent cultural experiences' (Hannerz 239). Since Síle's dislocation is voluntary and dictated by the country of origin of her partner, as well as influenced by the nature of her employment and the Celtic Tiger that transformed Dublin into a successful metropolis, she can be most accurately analysed with the use of a cosmopolitan lens. This approach, permitting to distinguish these two adverse definitions, allows for a clearer understanding of the consequences of transnationalism on the Irish lesbian narrative. Undeniably, the increased influx of immigrants, as well as returning Irish nationals, has played a crucial role in the shaping of the lesbian narrative of Ireland. The progressive way of perception of sexual minorities is the biggest

victory of the transnational movement for the Irish LGBTQI+ community, as the hitherto prevailing Irish insularity gives way to the Europeanised general mentality and lesbian authors follow their foreign predecessors in portraying their characters as inclusive sexual citizens of the world.

Despite Donoghue's own migration in 1990, I do believe that it is 'the timing of the essence' (Dorcey, 'Scarlett O'Hara' 204) that contributed to the rapid development of lesbian writing in Ireland. In 2007, the Irish lesbian novel resembles writings of Irish-born expatriate, Shani Mootoo, for whom lesbian sexuality and cultural hybridities have been the main themes, and especially transparent in her first book of short fiction *Out on the Main Street* (1993), which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter that will deal specifically with Irish lesbian texts written from diaspora. I believe that gay men and lesbians living in diaspora form their own queer spaces and claim sexual citizenship, where they can exercise freely their (sexual) citizenship rights. As Yasemin Soysal writes:

> The idea of the nation becomes a trope of convenience for claims to collective rights and identity. Even groups that may not fit the classic definitions of a nation refer to themselves as such: gays and lesbians claim a "Queer Nation." . . . In this universalizing flux, the ways of 'doing identity' . . . become standardized exercises, with common themes and modes of presentation. (161)

In terms of transnationalism and allegoric references to Ireland's development, as well as being influenced by her own diasporic experiences, Donoghue creates two parallel settings that seem to be interdependent of each other - Dublin, Ireland and Ireland, Ontario. In this instance, however, Donoghue, quite ironically, portrays the Canadian town of Ireland as a representation of rural Ireland in the future context. Concomitantly, Donoghue's characters can be interpreted as the representation of two different Irelands. Whereas Jude symbolises the old Ireland, the cosmopolitanised Síle, with her neoliberal feminist approach, is an embodiment of the new globalised Ireland. Themes present in *Landing* are a reflection of Irish societal behaviour concerning homosexuality and lesbian sexuality. Transnationalism, through its unreserved flow of information and ideas, has allowed for a modernised and acceptant perception of lesbians within Irish society. Furthermore, a transnationalistic approach in *Landing* emphasises the need to abolish the domination of a Western modernity that marginalises non-Western sexualities.

The cultural heritage of Síle represents a challenge against the predominance of a Western hegemonic model of sexuality politics. In this way, Donoghue insists that the inclusion of diverse sexual identities in lesbian discourse is necessary to achieve a more-inclusive international queer community that will enable lesbians to see themselves as a part of a global community, where their commonalities will not be denied by race and nationality alone (Altman 84).

Furthermore, transnationalism and globalisation seem to have changed Irish people's attitude towards Catholicism, as its absence in Donoghue's novel is highly noticeable. In fact, Ireland is already seen by some as a post-Catholic, or post-religious country. In the 1970s, almost ninety percent of Irish Catholics attended Mass at least once a week. Today, this number has decreased by sixty-five percent. In addition to this, in Dublin itself, only two or three percent of self-described Catholics go to church on a regular basis (Potter n.p.). I need to emphasise, however, that these numbers refer only to practising Catholics as, according to the Central Statistics Office, there are in Ireland still nearly four million registered Catholics, of whom over three and a half million are Irish (Census 2011). Deborah Potter has also noticed an accelerated decline of the Irish Catholic Church. Whereas the cause of this cannot be ascribed to only one factor, such as the Church's sex scandals in recent accusations clerical paedophilia, it is, however, an undebatable end of the alternative religious society within Ireland, an alternative state within the state. The Church's influence has begun to wane further with the decreasing number of Irish Catholic Priests. In 1984, there were 171 ordinations, whereas twenty-two years later, in 2006, the number has plummeted drastically (McFadden n.p.). According to the Irish Catholic Directory (2008), if current trends continue, Ireland could lose over sixty percent of its priests by 2028. This shows the disappearing homophobic tendencies in Irish national culture, which in the past used to be incited by the preaching of the Catholic Church.

The narrative of Irish lesbian fiction has undergone an unrecognisable transformation; the authors do not only discuss lesbian desire openly and fearlessly - they are celebrating lesbian love with a newly found courage and aim to discuss lesbian lives from a different perspective to the one from twenty years ago. While Ireland has only recently granted equal marriage rights to same-sex couples (May 2015), and is still waiting to add discrimination protections for LGBT teachers in the Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act, the development process of the Irish lesbian novel, at least in terms of adapting it to Cass's model, seems complete. With the final stage now provisionally achieved, Irish lesbians face other challenges, away from the literary field alone.

Notes

[1] The term "Celtic Tiger" was first used on 31st August 1994 by Morgan Stanley bank, which 'compared the Southern Irish economy to the East Asian 'tiger' economies' (O'Hearn 21).

[2] What Cyn refers to is the political invisibility of lesbians, as the before-mentioned acts 61 and 62 of Irish Constitution only criminalised homosexual acts between men.

[3] In terms of Irish literature, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce is an exemplary model of masculinist *Bildungsroman*. Joyce, in portraying his protagonist's development, follows strictly the tradition whilst adhering to the five essential components of the genre. Furthermore, this masculinist tradition is exhibited in the very title itself.

[4] In Donoghue's *Hood* (1995), Pen's metaphorical sexuality is also closeted by hiding a "Technically a Virgin" badge in her wardrobe.

[5] Cara replaces the polygamist butch Jael from *Stir-fry* and, equally, monogamist femme Ruth is replaced by Pen, the main character of *Hood*.

[6] It is also worth noting that the Cabinet has backed the vote to remove article 41.2 of the Constitution of Ireland, which emphasises the role of the woman as supporting the 'common good' of the Irish State, as well as binding her to the her duties 'in the home' (Irish Const., art. 41.2). The referendum, likely to be held in conjunction with the referendum to delete the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution, was to be held on the 26th October 2018. However, the Dáil's committee agreed the beginning of September that first the Bill must through pre-legislative scrutiny, and is thus postponed until 2019.

[7] However, Hemmings's statement should be neither simplified nor undertheorized; her 'double agent' is to be read as the producer and the carrier of knowledge, as she proposes 'a way of theorizing bisexuality in conjunction with and contingent upon other desires, behaviours and identities, rather than as a separate, discrete identity' (Hemmings, 'Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives: Emergent and Contingent Relationships' 14, 19). What Hemmings, therefore, suggests, is that the figure of the 'double agent' not only disrupts the notion of compulsory monosexuality, the notion of being either heterosexual or homosexual, but that in its exclusion from those two worlds it is actually more queer and more radical than just being gay or lesbian, as it undermines the structural processes of sexual identity formation, and deconstructs the

bipolar framework of sexuality and gender (Hemmings, 'Resituating the Bisexual Body: From Identity to Difference' 129-130).

[8] According to Freud, the "penis envy" is 'an envy culminating in the wish, which is so important in its consequences, to [become a] boy' (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 61). Amongst many interpretations of his theory, Karen Horney and Simone DeBeauvoir provide contradictory explanations of this challenge. They claim that women only desire the social and symbolic significance of the penis (Horney 5, DeBeauvoir 43).

[9] The former minister of education, Ruairí Quinn, has promised to wrest half of the State's primary schools from Catholic Church control. Up to 2013, the Church has not handed over a single school. In the same year, the Dáil passed a bill, which aim is to end the discrimination of LGBT teachers and amend the provisions of Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act, however, to this day, the proposed legislative amendment has not been officially recognised by the State.

[10] The 1995 GLEN/Combat Poverty research demonstrated that 60% of Irish emigrants for the reason of their sexuality (Connolly and O'Toole 186-187).

Chapter Five

Lesbian Writing from Irish Diaspora: 1982 – 2008

> Women have left Ireland in search of life opportunities, sexual liberation and career advancement, to give birth and to have abortions, as a means of personal survival and of contributing to the survival of their families in Ireland. They have emigrated to escape difficult family circumstances, heterosexism, Catholicism and the intense familiarities and surveillances that have marked Irish society. . . . They have left voluntarily and involuntarily, by chance and because others were leaving. (Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* 1)

Irish women's migration and queer diaspora

The theme of diaspora has been a thread that reoccurred in previous chapters in the analyses of works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, and Emma Donoghue. These authors, however, have always had a strong link with their country of origin. Therefore, whereas the first four chapters of *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* investigate the development of Irish lesbian narrative based mainly on fiction from the Republic of Ireland, this chapter will examine texts of writers whose diasporic experiences enabled them to discuss lesbian desire more openly and earlier on, as they were subjected neither to censorship, nor to the contempt of Irish patriarchal heteronormativity. However, it will also portray how writing from Western countries towards the end of the twentieth century, such as England or Ireland, created a worldwide interconnectedness and thus broadened the writers' possibilities, effectively allowing Irish lesbian narrative to represent a more globalised approach towards lesbian desire. Nevertheless, in the 1980s and early 1990s, at a time when lesbian writing from the Republic was concerned with issues of coming out and accommodating lesbian desire within the tradition of female lesbian writing, Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo were discussing problems of inclusivity encountered within already established lesbian communities.

In the 1980s, Livia emphasises the conflicting disparities of age, race, ethnicity, class, social status, and position, whereas Mootoo, in the 1990s and 2000s, touches upon subjects of nationality, transculturality, and gender performativity troubling lesbian communities. This chapter, divergent to the previous four, will not concentrate on the development of lesbian narrative as such; rather, it will attempt to portray the distinction from the previously presented model of the narrative's progression in terms of the writers' diasporic positioning from Ireland, which resulted in lesbian desire being discussed not only in a more open manner, but also from different perspectives, which actually problematised issues encountered by lesbians around the turn of the twenty-first century. It will, firstly, delineate Irish women's migration before

investigating queer diaspora. Secondly, it will illustrate how distance from Ireland allowed Anna Livia to discuss issues affecting and disturbing Lesbian Nation and lesbian community of the 1980s, and thirdly, based on Shani Mootoo's fiction, it will discuss how queer diaspora and hybridity shaped lesbian diasporic writing and reshaped Irish lesbian literature in non-Western societies at the turn of the twenty-first century.[1]

Gayatri Gopinath, in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, argues that the hitherto prevailing queer sexualities had always been limited to men (11). Hence the need to make the connection between Lesbian Nation and queer diaspora is extremely crucial, since it challenges the prevalence of gay white men in queer diasporic discourse and emphasises the presence of lesbians within queer diasporic communities. The chapter, however, will portray the shift away from Lesbian Nation in Livia's work towards the inclusivity of queer diaspora, which allows Mootoo to emphasise the need for the inclusion of non-white lesbians in the tradition of queer writing.

In the period between the Irish Potato Famine (1845–1849) and the Second World War, five million people left Ireland, mainly for England, Canada, the United States or Australia (Davis 19-20). However, migration for seasonal employment was also common before that period. It is estimated that since the end of the eighteenth century, over one million Irish people emigrated to the United States and Canada, and a further six hundred thousand left for Britain (Braa 208). During the post-famine period, Irish migration began to differentiate itself from other countries, as the majority of Irish migrants were women. In fact, it was predominantly young, single women who emigrated from Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century (Adams 223-224, Diner 30-42, Nolan 63, Schrier 3-17).[2] One of the reasons for such large numbers of women leaving Ireland was dependent largely on the availability of land for marriage. Whereas it was necessary for men to have land in order to get married, women married for a dowry paid to their families (Connell 111-119, Kennedy 145-148). However, as the access to land or dowry was reliant on the parents' decision and prosperity, as well as on an obtainability of land, prospects for marriages were limited. Therefore, the majority of Catholics, in whom the Church incited more profound religiosity after its assistance during and after the famine, remained in celibacy for all their lives (Radosh 283), especially since the Church conveyed so much shame and guilt about human sexuality and pre-marital sex. Therefore, those children who were not selected for marriage because of the shortages of the land or dowry had a choice between sexual inactivity or emigration (Inglis 9-37). This undoubtedly posed another reason why young women decided to escape the oppressive confines of the patriarchal, Catholic

society, which in the twentieth century also began to regulate pregnancy outside of marriage and thus women's sexuality (Garrett 330-343, O'Carroll, *Models for Irish Movers: Irish Women's Emigration to America* 18), and why 'Ireland became a place that women left' (Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* 2).

There were three major waves of Irish emigration in the twentieth century, each of which was highly populated by young women in their rejection of family life: the 1920s/1930s, the 1950s/1960s and the 1980s (O'Carroll, *Models for Irish Movers* 145). After the 1930s, most of Irish women's migration was to England, where they often undertook low-paid factory or pub work. Between the 1950s and 1980s, however, the level of education of Irish migrant women was much higher, and many of them came from the middle class 'to escape from repressive legislation and economic hardship in Ireland. . . . They have come through the years of the feminist movement and [brought with them] expectations of equality of opportunity' (O'Carroll, *Models for Irish Movers* 12). This can be explained by the fact that with the obtainability of more books from abroad, as I observed in Chapters One, Two, and Three, women became aware of possibilities, not necessarily solely financial, which were available to them outside of Ireland. Diaspora, therefore, is undoubtedly marked by gender, which means that although economic causes, such as employment opportunities, may have been initially the main motive for Irish women to emigrate, this changed with time, and around the mid-twentieth century other social causes began to play an equally important role. Thus, as an alternative to marriage, Irish women chose emigration as a way of emancipation from patriarchy, which considered women's migration as threatening to the image of their purity, and as undermining their national and religious identities (Ryan 45-67), given that the traditional Irish family was endangered by the women's search for better opportunities and liberation abroad.

In the 1980s and 1990s, women who became more open about their sexuality were proclaimed as sexual transgressors and were brought to courts and public attention in order to be shamed. Although Breda Gray sees such punishment, especially in the mid-1990s, as having a rather opposite effect, as more and more women gained the courage to express their sexuality, the numbers of women emigrating during the 1980s, unfortunately, proved that many could not withstand being exposed to public scrutiny (*Women and the Irish Diaspora* 29). Furthermore, this also suggests that many of these women were most likely lesbians, since public shaming would reveal their sexuality, an event that, of course, many tried to avoid at all costs. The latter statement emphasises the interrelation of Irish women's migration and queer diaspora, as many lesbians left Ireland in order to be able to escape both contempt and prosecution. In fact, until

as late as the 1990s, many Irish gay men and lesbians believed that they were expected to emigrate, as their sexuality was incompatible with Irishness (O'Carroll and Collins 1-10).

Categories of migrancy and diaspora are deeply interrelated; the concept of diaspora, originally used to illustrate the movement of the Jews, was extended by postcolonial theorists to represent the dispersal from colonised countries (Radosh 95-96), whose participants maintained a collective memory about their homeland (Hickman 9) and developed their own distinctive cultures. James Clifford implies that the diasporic discourse in postcolonial terms that emerged since the 1960s is now 'loose in the world for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications, and transport – a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and travelling within and across nations' (307). Its heuristic potential can be, in this instance, used for a variety of experiences such as travelling between not only geopolitical, but also cultural borders (Hickman 9). Diaspora, therefore, provides a space that is inclusive of identification with the country of origin and the country of arrival. In an Irish context, it 'highlights multi-generations, multi-connections . . . a global imagined community of Irishness, and the contradictory relationship between the 'homeland' and [the host country]. It also undermines nation-state identities and profiles hybrid identities and it challenges assimilation paradigms' (Hickman 16).[3] This means that the experience of identifying as Irish is different for each individual, depending on their social status, religion, colour, as observed in Chapter Four, or other historical motives, such as reasons for the dispersal itself.

Those varieties of diasporic identification are best portrayed using Robin Cohen's model, who proposes that diaspora can be distinguished into five categories: victim, refugee; labour, service; imperial, colonial; cultural, hybrid, postmodern; trade, business, professional (Hickman 9). Although this categorisation can be disproved, as it fails to examine the trans-ethnic commonalities and relations, I will, nonetheless, analyse lesbian diasporic identity from the postmodern, hybrid perspective that can be reconceptualised into the notion of queer diaspora. This type of diaspora, therefore, which is united against various social inequalities, proves to be most useful once juxtaposed with Livia's initial understanding and portrayal of Lesbian Nation that was later transformed into the notion of a queer diasporic community, which, similar to Lesbian Nation, also stretches across national borders.

Queer diaspora entails the creation of queer spaces within the already ethnically defined diasporas, and it refers to the transnational and multicultural web of connections of queer communities. In opposition to the restrictive Lesbian Nation, queer diaspora not only problematises, but also recognises differences within the group (Fortier 185). Frank Mort, for instance, writes about a 'well-established homosexual diaspora, crossing nation states and linking individuals and social constituencies' (202-203), whereas Simon Watney describes his diasporic experience as:

> our direct experience of overseas travel, as well as of queer culture and its constitutive role in our personal lives. Few heterosexuals can imagine the sense of relief and safety in which a gay man or lesbian finds in a gay bar or a dyke bar in a strange city in a foreign country. Even if one cannot speak the language, we feel a sense of identification. Besides, we generally like meeting one another, learning about what is happening to people 'like us' from other parts of the world. (61)

Despite the fact that his account of travelling is definitely diverse to the one of a compulsory dispersion and is thus indicative of an experience of a privileged, white gay man, it undoubtedly depicts the sense of coalition of queer individuals in diasporic queer spaces, where they can feel safe and accepted. In fact, the common tendency for lesbians, as well as gay men, who decided to emigrate as a means of emancipation from their respective restrictive societies means that they consider their emigration as not leaving, but coming home. Queer diaspora provides gay men and lesbians with spaces for sexual identification and expression that is independent of borders and boundaries. In Britain, for example, the Irish Women's Centre, established in 1983, meant that the identities of 'Irish and woman, Irish and feminist, Irish and lesbian could be supported and legitimized' (Gray, 'From 'Ethnicity' to 'Diaspora': 1980s Emigration and 'Multicultural' London' 73).

Nonetheless, queer diaspora does not provide the space for a development of preconscious queer desire; it denotes the expression, rather than an emergence, of queer identities. Emma Donoghue wrote that in the period preceding the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland it was only ''abroad' . . . where risky sexuality [could] be explored' ('Noises from Woodsheds' 165). The [Western] location, therefore, does not alter identity

(Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 6). Instead, it allows for a sexual identity to surface, as the individual may no longer be subjected to homophobia, discrimination, and sometimes even criminalisation in their home country. However, even located elsewhere, queer sexuality was often deemed as non-Irish, and thus excluding gay men and lesbians from the migrant ethnic cultures of the place of the host country.[4] As a result of this, gay ghettos and cruising grounds became the places of expressions of migrant queerness (Binnie 142), as individuals begin to attempt to create a community that is based on similarities as well as differences (Hall 245). In this context, these gay ghettos often become avenues for the formation and emergence of queer communities and queer diasporic spaces.

Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, by adopting imagery of queer diaspora in order to portray lesbian sexuality devoid of discrimination, succeed in remodelling the homeland and place of arrival into queer spaces that permit 'identification, affiliation, and communication across class and racial boundaries . . . that would inevitably fall outside traditional place-bound readings of Irish diaspora' (Madden 193, 175). In the Irish context, therefore, queer diaspora represents minoritised lesbian sexualities that were hitherto undertheorized and often historically omitted from traditional as well as gay diasporic discourses. Accordingly, for the purpose of my argument, I will adopt the notion of queer diaspora as a space from which Irish-born female authors could write freely about lesbian desire, and which equipped them with the possibility of addressing the female-loving-female issues in a direct manner, and with the use of an infinite, non-restrictive vocabulary. As Gopinath suggest, 'suturing "queer" to "diaspora" . . . recuperates those desires, practices and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries' (11).

This chapter does not use the term only in relation to the Irish-born authors' opportunities to portray lesbian desire explicitly; it also employs it as a counterpart of Lesbian Nation. The word "queer" in queer diaspora includes a variety of lesbian sexualities that would not be permitted in just simply gay or lesbian diasporas. The use of the umbrella-term "queer" opens new inclusivity, quite distinct from the restrictiveness of Lesbian Nation, as queer diaspora dislocates the assertive categories of "gay" and "lesbian" (Gopinath 13). The juxtaposition of queer diaspora and Lesbian Nation offered in this chapter allows for the imagining of lesbian desire across national and cultural borders, often characterised by, but not limited to, queer hybridity. Its intention is to portray how lesbian narrative depicts the politicisation of lesbians of colour and from a variety of backgrounds not only to oppose heteronormativity, but in order to become more inclusive, and to emphasise lesbian presence

within queer communities of the world. Moreover, it aids the reconsideration of lesbian desire and national belonging in the global context, as both Lesbian Nation and queer diaspora are independent of national borders, and, despite some limitations, aim to form coalitions of queer women from across the world. At the core of all Livia's novels, owing to her own emigration, stands a comparison of various countries and issues that national displacement causes within the lesbian community. Following the second wave of feminism in England, which, similar to Ireland, included lesbian activism, Livia is at pains to point out the disparagements between lesbians that were once insignificant as their shared interest in sexual revolution used to be the determining factor to their success. The disappearing of this shared sense of a united lesbian community, to which Jill Johnston, who coined the term in 1971, refers to as Lesbian Nation, is the focal point in the majority of Livia's fiction. Lesbian Nation, argues Bonnie Zimmerman, 'is a separate lesbian space inhabited by a community of women who share lifestyle, a set of beliefs, an ethic, and a culture. . . . The lesbian community is a space, or a group of people, or even a concept, within which the individual lesbian feels herself welcome and at home' (*The Safe Sea of Women* 120, 121). As mentioned in Chapter Four, the concept of Lesbian Nation has failed because of its privileging of white women (Zimmerman 177); it is the idea of an ideal lesbian community, however, a community where 'the lesbian individual may feel a sense of camaraderie with other lesbians, a sense of support, shared understanding, shared vision, shared sense of self "as a lesbian," vis-à-vis the outside world' (Krieger 92) that Livia seems to be problematising the most. Queer diaspora, therefore, offers the heterogeneity of which Lesbian Nation was devoid.

Lesbian Nation and lesbian separatism

Probably the most prolific writer of lesbian fiction writing from diaspora was Anna Livia, who is often omitted from the canon of Irish writers and is only considered to have 'an Irish background' (Donoghue, 'Lesbian Encounters, 1745-1997' 1090). Anna Livia Julian Brawn (1955-2007) was born in Dublin and spent her early childhood in Africa, where her father worked as a filmmaker. In 1970, the family moved to England, where Livia graduated from University College London, and later worked at Onlywomen Press that, at the time, was the only lesbian and radical feminist press in Britain. In the early 1990s, she moved to Berkeley, California, to complete her PhD in French linguistics. During her writing career, and later as an academic, Livia published six novels, four collections of short stories, and three scholarly books on language, gender, and sexuality. Her fiction is largely influenced by her own experiences of

diaspora, coming out, homelessness and living in mixed-sex houses and squats, as well as by a sense of lesbian inequality within the larger society, and within its own community. She published her novels in the space of seventeen years, between 1982 and 1999 and, although the development of lesbian fiction based on Cass's stages is not the intent of this chapter, one cannot help but notice a certain pattern of progression. Whereas her first novel emphasises the existence of Lesbian Nation, her later works argue for an establishment of a lesbian community that, unlike Lesbian Nation, will be inclusive to lesbians of different ages, races, social positions, cultural backgrounds, and ethnicities.

Her first work of fiction, *Relatively Norma*, was published in 1982 by the Onlywomen Press. It is Livia's only book where the main narrative is distant from issues of lesbian equality; at that time, Lesbian Nation was still unified in its common cause for acceptance, as it was regarded as a refuge by the wider society (Sayer 462). Therefore, *Relatively Norma* concentrates on the issue of lesbian otherness in relation to the rest of heterosexual society and vice versa. Zimmerman suggests that the title of the book itself points to the division between the two sexualities: 'all concepts of normality are relative, not because homosexuality is normal and natural, but because heterosexuality itself is weird and crazy. Who among us, gay or straight, is capable of defining what is or is not normal?' (*The Safe Sea of Women* 43). As the protagonist of the novel, Minnie, travels, just like Livia herself did, to Australia to visit her mother and sisters to come out, the overt representations of lesbian desire pervade the narrative, which constantly questions and ridicules the dominance of heterosexuality.

Minnie, the London-based lesbian, hides her sexuality 'very well and her family accepted her as an honorary heterosexual. . . . [However, she is] waiting for her disease to show' (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 17, 22). The partition between hetero- and homosexuality is so great that, at the time, many gay men and lesbians expected expulsion from their family homes; in fact, Minnie waits for 'her family to throw her out' (22). However, this is not the stance which Anna Livia has decided to take in her novel, as Minnie's eventual confession meets with her mother's full approval, and is, in fact, dismissed and deemed as predestined (177). As the title of the novel suggests, an emphasis is placed on portraying lesbian desire as the better option in the existing binary. What Livia presents her readers with, therefore, is the notion of homonormativity, which, as Lisa Duggan explains, is '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' ('The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism' 179).

Although the term 'homonormativity' is devised to represent the presence of homosexual relationships perpetuating class, race, gender and social hierarchies, it is also used as the counterpart of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, as a hegemonic system of social norms, is an assumption of clear sex and gender boundaries and the possibility of initiating (sexual) relationships between the only two available options, and constructs heterosexuality as superior and natural to all other expressions of sexuality. Homonormativity, on the other hand, instead of assuming a putative homosexuality, conscious or unconscious, in every member of society, concentrates on the need of conforming to heteronormative institutions to achieve acceptance in the dominant society. It denotes the privileges offered to queer individuals and institutions who "assimilate" and become part of the dominant heterosexual culture in exchange for receiving visibility and rights: homonormativity is 'a politics [of] . . . consumption' (Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity' 179). It also addresses the issues already present in the queer community, such as white privilege/ racism, sexism, bi- and trans-misogyny. Therefore, by placing lesbian sexuality at the top of the ladder, Livia emphasises the concept of a coalition of lesbians of different races and cultural backgrounds, as it is useful in the battle of eradication of the dominance of gay white men within queer discourse.

Time and again, Livia's characters highlight the (un)importance of men and the need for lesbian separatism.[5] The narrative dives in and out of the concept of the significance of men, which is dependent on the speaker. Beryl, Minnie's mother, and thus a representative of the older generation, believes that men can be useful to a certain extent:

> [Beryl] liked men, personally, but that was because she had learnt how to handle them. It was convenient to have a man around to mend fuses, put up shelves, or take a look at the record player. They did not, on the whole, wash up or clean, but this was because they were incapable of doing anything without an obvious goal. Cleaning was repetitive and boring. Men, too, had noticed this, but, lacking inner resources, they needed a lot of stimulation. You could give them one-off tasks to do, and they seemed to enjoy that, but could not think ahead to when the paint brushes or tools would need putting away. (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 141)

Beryl's conviction demarcates gender roles that were ascribed to women by hegemonic patriarchy. However, it is also perceptible that those imprinted values are not in line with her own opinion, and that men, without women's initiative and guidance, are incapable of completing even the simplest tasks. Thus, Beryl, heterosexual and a representative of the older generation, emphasises the novel's title: that normality is indeed relative – norms are changing, and the dominance of women is more and more palpable in every aspect of life.

The issue of lesbian separatism became known to the general public after the year 1970, when in the United States seven women confronted the North Conference of Homophile organisations about the need to extricate women from the gay rights movement. Del Martin, one of those activists, wrote an article entitled "If That's All There Is," which acclaimed the gay movement as sexist, and expressed the need for a strictly female, or even more, a strictly lesbian liberation. This form of separatist feminism, known as lesbian separatism, claimed that 'as long as women still benefit from heterosexuality, receive its privileges and security, they will at some point have to betray their sisters, especially Lesbian sisters who do not receive those benefits' (Bunch 8-9). However, in later years, Sarah Lucia Hoagland, as she makes a distinction between a lesbian subculture and a lesbian community, writes about the potential of lesbian separatism to develop healthy community ethics based on shared values (60).

Furthermore, the role of men as the tools in women's hands is also expressed by Minnie herself, who, although she believes that some men 'have their own unique contribution to make' (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 23), reduces them to the status of sperm producers. Such attempt at the reversal of gender roles allows women to enter the public arena and to develop their own, independent communities, whilst confining men to the domestic sphere. In *Relatively Norma*, newspapers write about adolescent boys who, in order to replicate menstruation, 'cut themselves open once a month so they can bleed like *normal* people' [my italics] (23). This clearly demarcates the division between men and women, and in particular between gay men and lesbians. Moreover, as the private begins to be influenced by the political sphere, this gendered role reversal brings to mind a reiteration of the feminist slogan "the personal is political," which undermines the hitherto prevailing family values and the solely domestic and reproductive role of women. Livia returns to the obliteration of this conception in her third novel, *Bulldozer Rising*, where she frees women of this obligation by introducing artificial wombs (88).

Livia's articulation of the reiteration of women's power, and thus of the necessity to create feminist and strictly female political networks, can be seen in the imagery of the word

from which network derives – needlework. It 'represent[s] the way women connect disparate elements into a varied and colorful whole' (Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women* 133), and it is portrayed most clearly in the event of the novel's lesbian-feminists' gathering at a marketplace. Threatened by the police '(sex: male)' (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 126), they fight them with womanly weapons: 'A roomful of invisible women sat knitting their way into an invisible we(b) which wove around the hall in glorious twists of colour growing centimetres per second in long woolly tentacles' (187-188). The we/web symbolises the networking of women's communities that stood against and defied the patriarchal power, which demarcated 'the beginning of a women's community' (198). This excerpt is also the reiteration of the strength of Lesbian Nation, whose foundations begin to crumble away in Livia's second novel.

In fact, Bonnie Zimmerman states that *Relatively Norma* 'with its fantasy ending and its inclination towards female separatism . . . propose[s] . . . lesbian tactics [that] involve the creation of a separate world' (*The Safe Sea of Women* 135). One of those tactics is the repeated variation of words "woman" and "women," portrayed in several possibilities of their conjugation and pronunciation: 'wimmin,' 'wombon,' 'womon,' 'womben,' 'wumin,' 'wymyn,' or 'wyming' (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 78-81). Firstly, this list resembles the term "womyn's lands," a term that has been used in the United States to describe communities of lesbian separatists who decided to withdraw from heterosexual entirety. Secondly, the number of possibilities demarcates the abundant multiplicity of such establishments.[6] The novel, therefore, does not only offer an invitation for lesbians to create their own and inclusive communities, but it reinforces the creation of a safe lesbian networking, distinctive and independent of the heteronormative order: 'Heterosexuality [isn't] normal, there [isn't] a normal life for it to be' (Livia, *Relatively Norma* 55).

Shortly after the publication of *Relatively Norma*, the notion of Lesbian Nation became a strain on lesbian-feminist writing, as the once idyllic setting of the reimagined isle of Lesbos began to be signified by the exclusive whiteness of its members. In order to become more inclusive, Lesbian Nation needed to become ethnically and racially diverse, especially in terms of identity politics. The movement of radical feminism, therefore, was in conflict with its two major tenets: the unification of all lesbians based on similarity of sexuality and gender, and the acceptance of differences that may arise as the outcome of those – class, age, race, or physical ability (Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women* 166). Therefore, whereas Livia's first novel is rather utopian in its representation of the lesbian community, her own diasporic experiences made her aware that in order to avoid the mimicry of male imperialism, her portrayal of Lesbian

Nation must negotiate the terms of its inclusiveness based on similarities as well as differences, even though this could result in its dissipation into smaller, polychromatic communities.

Such position is transparent in Livia's, as well as Shani Mootoo's, later fictions, as both writers attempt to place their culturally diverse characters within a wider lesbian community. As one of the characters from 'Little Moments of Eternity' observes, 'all lesbians [are] foreigners; though it might sound exotic to be different, it is hard to have no country, and even the community [lesbians] make, [they] call it a 'ghetto', in case [their] need for it shows through' (Livia, *Incidents Involving Warmth* 70). This existence of ghettos, 'the ruins of the world' (Livia, 'In the Ruins of the World,' *Saccharin Cyanide* 57), instead of a unified place of belonging, arises time and again in works by lesbian writers from across Irish lesbian diaspora. Anna Livia further extrapolates her view of the disparities in the countless lesbian communities by describing a 'planet of water and song, harbour for aliens from countless galaxies, countless timezones . . . the planet of song where both of us and all are alien' ('In the Ruins of the World,' *Saccharin Cyanide* 57). The metaphor of aliens and galaxies transforms Lesbian Nation into what Bonnie Zimmerman refers to as 'a microcosm of the dominant culture' (*The Safe Sea of Women* 175). By imposing the views of white Western lesbians upon the rest of community, Lesbian Nation becomes what it is trying to distinguish itself from: a female version of a patriarchal imperialist nation.

As Lesbian Nation becomes more of an imaginary concept rather than an achievable target, Livia's fiction begins to concentrate on the unification of lesbians as part of a wider, globalised society. *Bulldozer Rising* (1988), therefore, depicts a resistance force of "oldwomen," of various ages, backgrounds, classes, social statuses, and nationalities, who have decided to live above the prescribed age of forty-one. Whereas Mary Dorcey and Emma Donoghue concentrated on equality between men and women, and in later fictions between heterosexual, lesbian, and gay persons (Dorcey's *Biography of Desire* and Donoghue's *Landing* – both analysed in Chapter Four), Anna Livia, a decade earlier, emphasises inequalities troubling lesbian community that must be addressed first, before lesbians can come together as a whole and assimilate into the wider society: issues of race, age, ethnicity or multiculturalism. Issues that recur and reappear frequently in Livia's *Accommodation Offered* (1985), as well as in Shani Mootoo's *Out on Main Street* (1993) and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), both of which will be discussed later in relation to diaspora, hybridity, and multiculturalism analysed from the perspective of postcolonialism.

Age inequality that Livia describes in *Bulldozer Rising* takes a form of portraying one of the "oldwomen," a fifty-five-year-old Karlin, in a relationship with much younger, androgynous Ithaca. The two women do not only remain together despite Karlin's age, but also maintain to find a common ground despite their different social positions in an organised society, the structure of which very much resembles the rigoristic rules of the hegemonic patriarchal order:

> A city of scarce resources requires of its inhabitants a jigsaw fit: the antagonistic harmony of the parts which perfects the harmony of the whole. A muscle flexes, another will stretch: without either, the limb fails to function. Zappers stride and nellies trot, the different pace permitting staggered use of walkways. Youngmen it behoves to barrow and billow; demure youngwomen space for a thrusting strut. First principles of concavity and convexity. (Livia, *Bulldozer Rising* 44)

By depicting the city as a well-oiled machine, Livia ridicules its orderly structure in the larger context of the novel. The aim of *Bulldozer Rising* is to emphasise the exclusion of old and invalid members of the society that, in reality, can symbolise sexual minorities and the inequalities between the younger and older generations of lesbians. By positioning her characters in the science fiction genre, Livia further accentuates the very preposterousness that may lead to the ruin of the whole lesbian community: a nuclear explosion caused by the young citizens who could not find a way of communication with older women. At the climax of the novel, only a handful of women survive – this symbolises the division of lesbian sisterhood into smaller communities that, without a reconcilement, will not have any power to survive within the dominant society.

Apart from drawing close attention to issues of equality within the lesbian community, Livia also engaged in writing in postmodernist genres other than science fiction. In *Minimax* (1991), she adopts the parody of lesbian Gothic to draw attention to the age divide between the lesbian community, as well as to negate the misconception of the femme/butch paradigm, or the generic, decadent image of a lesbian in pre-Butler sense before she made the distinction between gender and biological sex. This was especially interesting to readers of the time, as the 1980s and 1990s witnessed attempts at re-evaluation of this stereotype (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic*

111): lesbians of *Minimax*, instead of visiting barber shops 'now go to the ladies' salons and have their nails done and their cuticles removed' (Livia, *Minimax* 13).

Actually, between the 1970s and early 1990s, butch lesbians disappear from lesbian-feminist fiction, as their practices are seen by lesbian-feminists as replicating heterosexuality through the perpetuation of sexual oppression against their partners (Shelley 93, 97). Furthermore, butch lesbians were seen by some critics as diminishing and obscuring feminine identifications (Martin 105), leading to the appropriation of an image of a lesbian as the masculine tyrant, consequently returning to the generic misapprehension and stereotypical perception of lesbians (Halberstam, 'Between Butches' 58). Livia's fiction, therefore, rearticulates female masculinity/butch and femininity/femme in order to underline the disentanglement of sex and gender, and to disseminate the butch/femme cliché which she depicts as 'a viable sexual practice' (Roof, '1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme' 33) rather than a mere travesty of heterosexuality. Her aim, therefore, allowed by her diasporic positioning, is to move away from the stereotypical perception of lesbians as imitations of men, and portray the butch/femme paradigm in a new light. Such approach would not be possible in fictions emerging from the Republic of Ireland; at the beginning of the 1990s, lesbian desire was just beginning to be addressed, and it was concerned largely, as mentioned in Chapter Four, with issues of coming out.

Furthermore, Roof suggests that butches were often compared to men to show that lesbian-feminism strived for coalition amongst lesbians against heterosexual patriarchy and the stereotypical characterisation of lesbians ('1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme' 30). As a result, in the second half of the 1980s, issues of racial, class, ethnic and sexual differences dominated the scholarship of lesbian studies, and consequently lesbian fiction. Judith Roof writes that 'once racial differences are acknowledged as producing real and viable differences among lesbians, the door is open for a reconception of lesbian politics that no longer insists on homogeneity as a political requisite, but rather on an acknowledgment of differences as a political necessity' ('1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme' 33). This decidedly marks the moment in Livia's fiction, at the end of the 1980s, that witnesses the movement away from lesbian separatism towards the coalition of lesbians within a much broader queer community. By the 1990s, the distinction between sex and gender, as I mentioned above, was theorised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble.*[7] The terminology of queer replaced the limiting ring of the word "lesbian," which was characterised with the association of racial

and ethnic differences. The term queer, Sue-Ellen Case proposes, 'cut[s] across differences . . . [and] claims multicultural representation' ('Toward a Butch-Feminist Retro-Future' 217).

Whereas the use of this terminology is especially beneficiary in case of my analysis of Livia's and Mootoo's lesbian fictions, the word itself must not be romanticised into being a tool for cutting across differences of all lesbian and queer communities, despite a reconciliation of lesbian studies with queer theory. In fact, many lesbians oppose the term "queer," as it denies them political individuality and specificity for which lesbian-feminists and activists fought for decades. Similar to Biddy Martin, I also see the use of "queer" as an opposition to lesbian-feminism and failed efforts of creating alliances between lesbians and gay men (104-105); however, in this chapter I use the term restrictively in the sense that coalesces lesbians of all ages, races, and, in particular, genders. "Queer," therefore, considered from this point of view, and in relation to an analysis of diasporic fiction, conjugates the commonalities and individualities of each female member, including male-to-female transgender and transsexual women who desire other women.

As I have argued in my previous chapters, Elizabeth Bowen, through incorporating ideas of *lesbian continuum* and *lesbian existence* in her fiction, already converged on the mission of refuting representations of lesbian desire as mimicking heterosexual relationships, by portraying all her female-loving characters as feminine. Anna Livia, however, incorporates those techniques by introducing historical iconic lesbian figures, Renée Vivien and her ex-lover, Natalie Barney, as vampire characters. This allows not only for a disintegration of the heteronormative perception of the image of lesbians, but also for a disruption of the notion of the institution of heterosexual marriage, and thus religion: 'Christ crucified a clumsy reference to the menstruating woman. Think of all those beautiful female heads rising superbly from between their lovers' thighs, mouths dripping with menstrual blood. Triple taboo: no oral sex, no sex during periods, no female to female sex' (Livia, *Minimax* 112).

The metonymy of the word blood, which can symbolise death as well as birth, or menstruation, represents 'a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where death and femininity, murder and procreation, cessation of life and vitality all come together' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* 96). Julia Kristeva terms abjection as a source of horror, which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (4). It refers to the human reaction caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other. In terms of the psychosexual development, the abject represents the moment when a child is separated from its mother and

begins to comprehend the gap of difference between itself and the Other, in this case, the mother.

Kristeva believes that the infant begins to develop its own "I" in the transition stage phase between the semiotic and symbolic realms, prior to or upon entering the mirror (thetic) phase. The abjection aids the subject to reach its subjectivity. In order to do so, the child must at first renounce its identification with its mother, so the first object of abjection is the maternal womb and, by extension, the mother herself. A female vampire, whilst drinking woman's blood and taking pleasure herself, concomitantly initiates the woman into a new, immortal life. Barbara Creed compares this imagery to the scene of birth (61), a new beginning. The juxtaposition of crossing boundaries of life/death and pain/pleasure breaks the above-mentioned triple taboo, and further strengthens the position of lesbian desire as iconoclastic to the heteronormative order. Furthermore, this pre-Oedipal scenario draws attention to the barriers that divide lesbians' generation with the generation of their mothers. The blood-sucking ritual, as well as the state of an ecstatic catharsis for both participants, demarcates the new beginning for human and non-human/mother and daughter, in which the mother ceases to be the object of her daughter's abjection, thus representing a coalition of lesbians of all ages.

However, Kristeva's abject always remains bordering on the self's consciousness. In case of maternal abjection, the impending presence of the abject is intensified, as the self is torn unconsciously between the concomitant need to reinstate its identification with the mother, as much as it longs to distance itself from her in order to achieve/maintain its own individuality. In adulthood, the fear of losing subjectivity is transformed into trepidation of being deprived of forming a chosen individuality or identity. Therefore, the subject of maternal abjection, especially when the figure of the mother is metaphorically replaced with one's motherland, plays an important role in consideration of lesbian diasporic fiction. This is specifically the case in the twenty-first century, where queer individuals, in a similar way to characters from Emma Donoghue's story 'Going Back,' begin to initiate exercising their sexual citizenships from within the borders of their country of origin, as well as in the country of arrival. Livia's innovative techniques and genres, as portrayed above, refer to lesbian sexuality as well as physicality. Diaspora plays an important role here, not only in terms of Livia's own national displacement, but mainly because issues and themes discussed in her works are so distant from the perception of lesbians in Ireland that she is able to re-articulate lesbian desire in ways that are permissible only to outsiders. Livia, in fact, shows how living in diaspora, despite a lot of stigma connected with the subject, allows one to redefine the self's sexual identity to emerge

on different terms to those prevailing in the country of origin.[8] In *Accommodation Offered*, for instance, one of Livia's three main characters, Sadie, who is described as 'a homeless derelict, a lesbian, a foreigner' (63), finds that many years of national displacement and comparison to other countries taught her to appreciate the freedom of expressing her sexual identity that she has found in England, and she is ready to call this strange country home. Queer diaspora, therefore, at last allows lesbians the freedom and safety of domesticated lives, often away from restrictive laws of their countries of origin: 'women were unpacking rucksacks. . . . They were replacing sleeping bags with cotton sheets, . . . waking by reflex not wrist alarm' (Livia, *Accommodation Offered* 52).

Minimax, Livia's fifth work of fiction, is a continuation of peripeties of characters from *Relatively Norma.* Ten years later, Minnie again visits her mother and sisters in Perth, Australia. On this occasion, however, she does not have to hide her sexuality. In fact, she admits: 'how wonderful to be a lesbian. I never want to be anything else as long as I live' (Livia, *Minimax* 89). She books a return trip through New York, where she is to meet her beloved author, Natalie Barney. Although Minnie is aware that Barney died in 1972, she does not question her existence. This brings the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* and the New Age constructs of lesbian desire together, at the same time reinstating the concept of *lesbian existence*. Paulina Palmer believes that this gives Livia an opportunity to compare the decadent image of lesbians with the one produced in the 1970s and 1980s:

> "Natalie, do you have any communicable diseases?"
> "Communicable? What, pray, is an incommunicable disease? One which doesn't bear speaking of, like piles? Or one which one doesn't dare to speak its name, like homosexuality?"
> Minnie was about to object that piles were called haemorrhoids these days and homosexuality had been struck off the disease list, but . . . she decided to throw a rope. (Livia, *Minimax* 157)

Moreover, *Minimax* reveals affinities between those two periods of time (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 110). Nea, Vivien's and Minnie's friend from San Francisco, finds that, despite a considerable age difference, the two women have many common interests, many of which lead to the figure of Sappho. This does not only neutralise the inequalities within the lesbian

community, but also, as I have mentioned before, draws attention to the historical presence of lesbians: 'most families have at least one [lesbian] in their cupboards, dancing with the skeleton' (Livia, *Minimax* 52). However, the elimination of inequalities within the lesbian community also means smoothing out the inequalities between sexes and genders within the wider society, thus inviting the prospect of assimilation that was implausible and uncompelling to the lesbian separatists of Lesbian Nation. Domestication of lesbian relationships becomes similar to the one of the heteronormative order: 'being a lesbian was becoming a very common or garden affair, it seemed . . . homogeneity . . . means . . . [that] everyone is getting more like everyone else' (Livia, *Minimax* 44, 139).

As already observed, Anna Livia's fiction is a transgressive tool not only in highlighting the differences and suggesting affinities within the lesbian community, such as age or social position. In large measure, it also concentrates on issues of national belonging, race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, as all of the above are the limiting factors to achieving equality within lesbian communities, as well as in the wider society. *Accommodation Offered* (1985), Livia's second novel, incorporates the pressing need for the obliteration of those disparities by encompassing into its plot three lesbians of different ages, nationalities, and statuses.

Whereas in *Relatively Norma*, Beryl, Minnie's mother, emigrated to Australia to escape her abusive husband, one of the main protagonists of *Accommodation Offered*, Polly, leaves Ireland to move to England with her new husband, whom she married for financial reasons and under the pressure of Irish tradition, which imposed marriage on young women as the only option of securing their futures: 'my father's firm was doing badly . . . and I didn't have any other suggestions' (Livia, *Accommodation Offered* 9). Thus, once her marriage proved to be a failure, she decides to explore her sexuality further and answers a newspaper ad to meet with a woman (15). Upon meeting Margot, who is also Irish, Polly embarks on a journey to consolidate identities of her newly-discovered sexuality and her sense of national belonging. Her search for identifying her sexuality is demarcated by long hours spent in various London libraries:

> In one of those books that falls open on "Oral sex can be satisfying for either partner", and under "Lesbians" it said, "Mutual Masturbation". Well, we didn't do that. . . . I didn't want a sex manual that would tell us where to put what, we'd worked that one out on our own, but something that would say we weren't first, that other women did it too. [Margot] . . . showed me . . . a

> yellow hardback with HOMOSEXUALITY . . . down the spine. We flicked through it . . . "promiscuous lesbians … comparatively rare birds … particularly dangerous … dominant, forceful personalities … weaker, more pliant women …" Far worse than "Mutual Masturbation". "The butch or 'dyke' type, swagger along in men's trousers and parody the normal male … exhibitionistic minority … more discreet deviant … (25, 26)

The fact that Polly comes across the thirty-year-old *Homosexuality: Its Nature and Causes* by D. J. West, which was first published in 1955, reflects, despite the Women's Liberation and the toils of lesbian activism, the need for a distinctive acknowledgment of the varieties of lesbian sexualities by the larger society, as well as for a rendered historical presence of lesbians. Moreover, Polly's inability to identify with any definitions, highlights, similarly to *Minimax,* the common misconceptions about lesbians caused by their invisibility and misrepresentation in official discourses.

These shortcomings of information in Polly's search are regulated by "the Assumption," which can be read, similar to the city from the *Bulldozer Rising*, as the equivalent of heteronormativity that is, in large measure, ordained by the Church. It is a patriarchal institution that dictates the desired modes of life and behaviour, of which a compliance to is awarded remission and compassion. Consequently, the "deviants" of West's definition will be, in line with the Church's preaching, not forgiven.[9] Although Livia's fiction was never indicative of being iconoclastic, the connection between the strict rules and the Church, as well as the dominance of men within the religious institution, cannot remain unnoticed:

> The right side. The Assumption. According to the Assumption everyone was white, middle class and heterosexual, aged about forty. They were also male. Of course the Assumption knew that some people were working class, black or homosexual. They were also female. But if a person was walking down the street his skin was 'flesh' coloured, his suit expensive, he had half an eye out for pretty girls and probably voted C of E [the Church of England]. People were men. (50)

Livia's stance on sexual or religious identities, however, is not the main focus of the novel. Whereas her other works of fiction are largely concerned with societal inequalities within the lesbian community, *Accommodation Offered* deals predominantly with other categories of social identities, such as a sense of national belonging that, positioned outside of one's place of origin, becomes central to the creation of diasporic identity.

As I already mentioned, Polly's migration was a result of her financial situation, as well as Irish societal expectations regarding women. She represents all Irish women who emigrated in order to escape the parochialism and insularity of Ireland. Therefore, once in England, Polly can embark on becoming a PhD student, as well as on initiating relationships with other women. Although the Irish diaspora dates back to the times of the Great Famine, when between 1845 and 1849 over two million people were estimated to have left Ireland, the new generations of Irish people, and especially women, are motivated by the freedom of their chosen countries of arrival.[10] Along with globalisation, however, where the flexibility of labour markets enhances motives of migrants even further, Ireland is still experiencing large numbers of emigration.

Hybrid queer identities in Shani Mootoo's 'Out on Main Street' and *Valmiki's Daughter*

Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo both discuss the problematic identity formations within diasporic queer hybrid settings. Discussions of ethnic and cultural hybridity emerged in the eighteenth century in the context of interracial contact and fears over the contamination of white European bodies as a result of colonisation and migration, and again in the wake of decolonisation movements (Brah and Coombs 3, Kraidy 318). It was in the twentieth century, however, when the term adopted an entirely new meaning owing to the formation of postcolonial African, South American and Asian cultures in the West, and, in the latter half of the century, from the development of national diasporas across the world. Homi Bhabha was the first person to disintegrate the concept from its previous racial meaning.

In his analysis of the relation between the coloniser and the colonised, Bhabha emphasised their interdependence. He developed his concept of hybridity from analysing transformation and translation of language, placed alongside cultural theory, to describe the construction of cultural identity. Bhabha's hybridity, therefore, denotes the emergence of a new cultural identity formed by the colonised or, in postcolonial contexts, diasporic subjects in their place of arrival in the West. Those new identities are created in what Bhabha terms the "third space." It is a space that 'initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration

and contestation' (Bhabha 1-2). It accommodates the articulation and production of new cultural meanings that obfuscate the extent of existing boundaries, thus providing the displaced subjects with new politics of difference.

Nowadays, in times of globalisation, the terminology of hybridity is changing, as the term does not allude solely to postcolonial interactions, but it expands its reach to signify diasporic practices in dominant cultures (Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" 329). In its recent usage, 'hybridity appears as a convenient category at "the edge" or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration' (Kalra, Kalhoon and Hutnyk 70). Hybridity, as the integration of cultural bodies, is now known to deconstruct the inequities of race, language, and nation (Yazdiha 31). In terms of Irish migration, hybridity allows lesbians to be more open about their sexuality, whilst retaining their cultural heritage. The sense of lesbian integration is stronger, and Irish lesbians are no longer stigmatised in terms of coming out, as well as in the terms of self-acceptance, which effectively results in acceptance and pride of being lesbian.

The fiction discussed in this final part of the chapter accommodates diasporic and hybrid queer identities, or identity formations, that struggle with incorporating various subject positions, such as class, race or gender. Stuart Hall terms diasporic culture as characterised 'not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity' ('Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 244). This is certainly true, as such an approach undoubtedly celebrates difference and ethnicity, de-centralises ethnic or religious totalitarianism, and allows us to create an image of diaspora whose foundations are built on celebrating differences. Recently, however, critics have embraced the idea of rejecting the concept of hybridity as a defining process of creating of diasporic identities, as Bhabha's concept of hybridity has been criticised for disguising cultural differences. Instead of placing cultures within a set special context, the concept of hybridity offers a global solution to transculturation within dispersed communities. Sissy Helff, in particular, believes that hybridity does not seem to be the most accurate term to discuss postcolonial experiences and forced diasporas of marginal society members (Helff, "The Missing Link" 191). Whereas the concept adheres to colonial/imperial and postcolonial concepts, migration studies scholars purport that Bhabha's term is too restrictive and instead suggest the use of terms such as transmigrancy and transculturality. Both of those terms describe cultures and cultural encounters, and allow for new, transcultural

imagery characterised by heterogeneity (Helff, "The Missing Link" 191). Thus it seems that the assertion of hybridity as a postcolonial condition runs the risk of de-locating and de-historicising cultures from their particular temporal contexts.

Whether cultural hybridity is seen in Bhabha's terms, or whether it is termed as transmigrancy or transculturation, it is an unnegotiable aspect of (queer) diaspora. The cultural diversity of all places bears a mixture of cultures and beliefs from various backgrounds. Combined with the notion of queer, as in the case of characters of Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* as well as 'Out on Main Street,' diasporic hybridity, whether acquired or inherited, poses complications, confusion, and even shame. The notion of queer itself is hybrid in the sense that lesbians and gay men, whom Alan Sinfield considers to be an ethnic group, also need to fight for their rights of inclusion within the society: 'recognition that race and ethnicity might be constructed, hybrid and insecure, but yet necessary, has obvious resonances for lesbian and gay cultural politics . . . for [queer]subculture, is certainly hybrid' (Sinfield 200). Whereas Livia's fiction was confined to multinational Britain and Australia, Shani Mootoo's writing takes her readers to multiculturally-varied Canada and Trinidad and Tobago. Consequently, her fiction incorporates the binary notions of straight/queer, white/coloured, and citizen/migrant, to represent the multiplicity of identities and subjectivities of lesbians of colour in a foreign setting, which is translated into a division in diasporic writing between white and non-white, as well as Western and non-Western authors.

Shani Mootoo was born in Dublin, in 1957, to a white Irish mother and an East-Indian-Caribbean father, where they remained for three months after their daughter's birth before returning with her to Trinidad. Mootoo, who therefore grew up in Trinidad, moved to Canada at the age of nineteen, where she received her BA and MA degrees in Fine Arts and English and Theatre respectively. Between 1994 and 1999, Mootoo lived in New York, creating and exhibiting her visual and video art. Mootoo's close association with Canada can be seen clearly in her poems "All the Irish I know" and "All the Hindi I know" (*The Predicament of Or* 95, 96). The poetry illustrates Mootoo's limited knowledge of Hindi vocabulary and culture, which effectively points to her strong link with her new Canadian citizenship. She commemorates that in her childhood she only knew her version of Trinidadian English, and in her late twenties she was actually deprived of her Trinidadian citizenship, as she was not allowed to hold the dual Trinidadian-Canadian citizenship owing to the fact that she was born in Ireland.[11] In fact, Mootoo feels strongly about her Canadianness, as it allows her to take a stand against

discrimination of lesbians in Trinidad, as well as elsewhere, and to represent the queer minorities of diaspora (Helff and Dalal, "The Quest for an Identity" 74). She states:

> The stories I write, the art I make all speak of the desire to break and simultaneously to braid given identities, to make transformative leaps into . . . a self-defined "other." . . . It is through my writing . . . that . . . I dare . . . to attempt to purse [my] lips and blow at the borders of lesbian identity, create new spaces where . . . the inequalities and discrimination of genders within lesbianism itself get addressed, and where that multiplicity of genders is celebrated. (Mootoo, "On Becoming an Indian Starboy" 83, 94)

This statement does not only portray Mootoo as an advocate of LGBTQI+ rights – it argues, similar to the novels of Anna Livia, for a positive approach to the differences between lesbians across the world. Thus, Mootoo creates an image of queer diaspora, whose foundations are based on celebrating the differences.

She is, as she refers to herself, a 'multiple migrant,' and this certainly finds reflection in her writing as well as in her art. In her first work of fiction, *Out on Main Street*, the characters of the title short story experience feelings of a concomitant national and sexual displacement. Asvin Kini argues that diaspora in 'Out on Main Street' is 'not inherently nostalgic for times gone by and places left behind, but rather is formed in relation to the material, racial, gender, and sexual dynamics of colonialism, indenture, nationalism, and globalization' (186). Thus, the story, portraying a lesbian Indian character in Canada, engages with cultural practices in diasporic context whilst exemplifying other reconfigurations of the term, such as sexuality and gender.

In the story, published in 1993, the setting, an Indian sweet shop on a Canadian main street, could signify the hybrid queer third space, which the narrator and her girlfriend Janet, both descendants of Indian labourers and Trinidadian migrants, visit sporadically to buy *meethai*. "Kush Valley Sweets," as a contact zone of changing power relations between genders, sexualities and nationalities, is 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (Pratt 6).[12] Factually, within the short twelve pages, Mootoo reconfigures dichotomous

notions of lesbian/heterosexual, Indian/Indian-Caribbean, white/coloured, male/female, and encapsulates issues of gender performativity, as well as those of sexual, ethnic, national, class, and cultural/linguistic disparities. Those, however, seem to be disrupted and in constant flux, as power relations shift constantly to allow the emergence of the 'new ways to conceptualizing the self and others' (Gopinath 167). Moreover, the connection between images of eating sticky delicacies and the lesbian act of lovemaking further evokes the association of the sweet shop with the queer contact zone, where the protagonists' desires of homeland, tradition, and sexual desire, should all become fulfilled at once. Queer diaspora in this context is associated with the combination of a free expression of sexuality with one's cultural origin, thus providing queer migrants with the sense of inclusion and self-acceptance, which may not have been possible in their place of origin.

First of all, class, national, racial, cultural and linguistic inequalities can be seen in the narrator's description of herself and Janet:

> We is watered-down Indians – we ain't good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think 'bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news . . . Mostly, back home, we is kitchen Indians; some kind a Indian food every day, at least once a day, but we doh get cardamom and other fancy spice down dere so de food not spicy like Indian food I eat in restaurants up here.
>
> . . .
>
> Yuh ask [Indian store clerks] a question in English and dey insist on giving de answer in Hindi or Punjabi or Urdu or Gujarati. . . . And den dey look at yuh disdainful disdainful – like yuh disloyal, like yuh is a traitor. (Mootoo, 'Out on Main Street' 45, 48)

The narrator's insistence on the categorisation of Indians already portrays that, even at the end of the twentieth century and in a foreign country, the caste system is still the ruling element in dividing *varnas* and *jatis.*[13] However, it is the issue of authenticity that plays a more important role. The unnamed narrator feels inferior compared to other Indians, as her multiplicious diasporic positioning is preconditioned by her ancestors who were labourers brought to Trinidad during the colonial indenture between 1845 and 1916: 'I used to think I was a Hindu

par excellence until I come up here and see real flesh and blood Indian from India' (47). Although the narrator's textual creole dialect and accent may suggest the putative Indian authenticity, this is soon disproved in an encounter with the shopkeeper at "Kush Valley Sweets," with whom she argues over the terminology of sweets. His victory over the narrator's knowledge of Hindi, however, is short-lived, as the authenticity of the shop's proprietor himself is soon undermined and disproved when he is challenged on racial grounds by two white Canadian customers. As a result, power relations shift back in favour of the narrator as the shopkeeper has to admit reluctantly that he is from Fiji and not India. Anita Mannur suggests that, despite their initial hostility against each other, this binds the narrator and the shopkeeper, as they now identify in unison as immigrants of both colour and Indian descent (45).

Secondly, the portrayal of the lack of a defined ethnic identity in the narrator and her girlfriend can be observed in the comparison of her own family and ascendancy to the one of Janet's, as they were one of the first families to convert from Hinduism to Presbyterianism. Janet's knowledge of the origins of certain Hindu customs is vague, and her name itself is the result of her mother's defying the traditional Indian ritual, which, instead of being performed by a reverend of the mission, Janet's mother decided to undertake herself. This does not only problematise the fixity of Hindu culture, but also emphasises the multiculturalism of Trinidad as well as Canada, thus pointing to the heterogeneity of the culture that is infused with diasporic discourse, and Mootoo's emphasis for the need of coalition based on difference and dispersion.

Lastly, Mootoo's text questions discourses influencing the construction of diasporic queer identity by shifting the power relations from heterosexual to lesbian, and from male to female. Gender and masculinity/femininity are disrupted as the narrator bases her gender performance on the femininity of gay men:

> Walking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant, tend to make me look like a gender dey forget to classify. Before going Main Street I does parade in front de mirror practicing a jiggly-wiggly kind a walk. . . . I jiggle and wiggle in mih best imitation a some a dem gay fellas dat I see downtown in Vancouver, de ones who more femme dan even Janet. (Mootoo, 'Out on Main Street' 48, 50)

Whereas the racist incident imposed by the white males bonds the customers of the café as Indians/foreigners, the power relations shift again after their departure – the shop owner and his brothers, back in their familiar environment, return to the roles of sexist males, imposing their staring glances and touches on their female clientele. This establishes a gendered unity that replaces the previous unanimity, and women begin to solidarize against male tyranny. However, their unison is short-lived, and clearly based on the presumption of the narrator's and Janet's heterosexuality, as the arrival of two white lesbians, friends of the narrator and Janet, soon realigns their solidarity with the proprietors: 'well, all cover get blown. If it was even remotely possible dat I wasn't noticeable before, now Janet and I were over-exposed . . . instead a any recognition of our buddiness against de fresh brothers, I get a face dat look like it was in de presence of a very foul smell' (57). It can be assumed, therefore, that the narrator's willngness to achieve class privilege is manifested in her attempts at "passing" as heterosexual, feminine, and Indian (Wall 11-13), which points to the multiplicity of areas of affiliation to nonnormative sexuality.

The fact that the story ends with a rhetorical question: 'So tell me, what yuh think 'bout dis nah, girl?' (57), leaves the reader with a choice of 'the recognition and acceptance of the difference of the other rather than through an attempt to narcissistically mirror the self in the other' (Gopinath 189). Essentially, Mootoo's own diasporic experiences, similarly to Livia's, allow her to position lesbian desire across more than just one location. She discusses it from a global point of view, where an individual, concomitantly with homo-/lesbophobia, has to face other barriers conditioning the power struggle of self-identification. Whereas the short story is set in Canada, Mootoo's third novel, *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), is an astute testimony of what fate meets sexual "deviants" in Trinidad.

The embodiment of the consequences awaiting lesbians in Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* is seen in its minor character, Merle Bedi, who was banished from her family home and now lives on the streets trying to survive. It is said of her that her prostitution is actually a better option than her same-sex desire and that it 'might cure her' (Mootoo, *Valmiki's Daughter* 23). In fact, homosexuality in Trinidad is still illegal. Men can expect a lifetime in prison for the crime of sodomy, whereas lesbians are subject to the maximum of five years of imprisonment. Furthermore, homosexual people who are not citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are denied the right to entry. Not surprisingly then, characters of *Valmiki's Daughter* hide their desires and do not discuss them publicly, excluding even their closest friends or family members. However, the connotations of the androgynous name Merle, as it can be given to a

man as well as a woman, crosses the boundaries of gender and sexuality, and symbolises knowledge, intelligence, and wit. Therefore, Merle's existence on the streets, even though she is a social outcast, is not portrayed as hopeless. Rather, it can be supposed that her knowledge gave her freedom, which she would not be able to experience had she stayed at her upper-class family home to fulfil her daughterly duties of becoming a wife and a mother. Merle Bedi is a constant reminder of the consciousness of Valmiki's daughter, Viveka, whenever the latter fantasises about women.

The novel comprises of two stories of same-sex attraction of first Valmiki, and then Viveka. Valmiki's story constitutes an introduction to later events of Viveka's affair with her French lover, Anick, who is married to the son of their family's friends. It can be said that by the juxtaposition of characters of different sexes and ages, Shani Mootoo challenges and calls for the revision of the Trinidadian laws introduced by the "buggery" (Section 13) and "gross indecency" (Section 16) acts of the 1986 Sexual Offences Act, which have only been strengthened in the year 2000. Additionally, such stance reinforces the notion of modernity and globalism, especially when considered from the point of view of the close proximity of Trinidad to countries of North America, where the LGBTQI+ rights are some of the most advanced in the world, and where the laws of Trinidad and Tobago seem outdated and barbaric.

Valmiki Krishnu, a respected doctor of one of four Trinidadian major municipalities, San Fernando, works hard to earn himself a title of a womaniser in order to hide his same-sex passion, of which he became aware in his early adolescence. Societal and familial pressures prove to be so insistent, that after graduating from medical college in Canada, Valmiki decides not to pursue an affair with the love of his life, Tony, but instead returns to Trinidad to fulfil his expectations of becoming a husband and a father, and congratulates himself about what it 'publicly confirm[s] about him' (Mootoo, *Valmiki's Daughter* 69). With time, however, the duty that he feels towards his family recedes, and yet again he pursues to initiate sexual relations with a man. Although when he eventually finds a companion with whom to share his desires, Saul, he makes sure that this part of his life remains a secret. Therefore, upon his realisation of Viveka's feelings for Anick, he begins to worry that his daughter may have to face a similar existence of denial and shame.

Anick, a French citizen who met her husband, Nayan, in Canada, and moved to Trinidad to allow him to pursue his career in the family cocoa business, had had previous intimate relations with women. It is interesting to see Trinidadian homophobia at work, as Nayan's attitude towards Anick's past changes from fascination to disgust as the couple moves from

Canada to Trinidad (233). To avoid shame, Nayan forbids his wife from any contact with people who may accept, or even encourage her 'sexual deviance' (252). The status of a newcomer allows Anick to describe her own, as well as Viveka's and Valmiki's, sense of exclusion and entrapment within their own desires by comparing Trinidad to a prison, from which there is no escape (177). Truthfully, when Viveka and Anick's relationship becomes known to some of their family members, the former is aware, just like her father was, of her obligations:

> She had a glimpse of who she was, of what her desire looked like for her: she wanted to feel again and again all that she had with Anick. . . . But with this ephemeral knowledge came another thought: the dreadful possibility of losing her family. Which was greater, she wondered – to be all that you were, to be true to yourself, or to honour one's family, one's society, one's country? (326)

Other than evoking the threatening notion of heteronormative nationalism, this description of a portrayal of one's inability to merge their national and sexual identities is very similar to the one described in Chapter Four, where Irish women could not incorporate identities of a social, national, religious and sexual sense of identity. However, whereas the battle for an all-inclusive identity is already more or less resolved on the pages of Irish lesbian fiction, as Ireland enters into a new era of globalisation and transnationalism, Mootoo's characters revert to (compulsory) heterosexuality in order to protect themselves and to preserve their families' good names.

Just as Ireland needed generations of writers to emancipate lesbians from their narrational invisibility, so do other authors from non-Western countries have to endure their sufferings in order to accommodate, and speak freely of, lesbian sexuality. 'Going away won't solve a thing for us' (335) says Viveka, mirroring Mootoo's own views, as she realises that although emigration may resolve the predicament of a queer individual, it will not be sufficient to save the entirety of Trinidadian queer population. It is a role of the author, as the queer migrant, to convey their message to the wider public, and to reiterate and highlight the differences in the LGBTQI+ politics between their country of settlement and the country of origin. Therefore, writing from diaspora is an important aspect of lesbian writing, as it allows one to invent worlds and scenarios in which writers' creativities imagine possible realities: 'I am interested in fixing things and making them beautiful. Suddenly I can see the possibilities

in how you can use words and I get trapped in that. . . . I can fix and I fall into . . . exoticising my own landscape' (Helff and Dalal, an interview with Shani Mootoo from "The Quest for an Identity" 81). Viveka's remaining in Trinidad signifies her stand against its gender and sexual oppression, which 'becomes a way of . . . working to dislodge its heteronormative logic' (Gopinath 14-15). It is her conscious decision to overturn the dominant heteronormativity of Trinidad by battling it from within its source, and Mootoo's encouragement to lesbians to remain in their countries and fight for their rights, especially countries where lesbian desire is still outlawed either by their respective governments or heteronormative social structures.

Although written in 2008, *Valmiki's Daughter*, owing to its Trinidadian setting, is not as progressive in terms of representation of lesbian equality as writings about Ireland were at that time. Compared to Emma Donoghue's *Landing*, for example, Mootoo's second work of fiction highlights the advancement of homosexual and lesbian laws empowering LGBTQI+ communities in Ireland, in line with, if not ahead of, other Western countries. The time of the economic boom in form of the Celtic Tiger, aided by globalisation and interdependency, created a new Ireland, which became a country of immigration, rather than emigration. As a result, Ireland now hosts nationals from over hundred and ninety countries and is considered to be as inclusive and as multicultural as the US, England or Canada (Onyejelem 71). Therefore, the *Landing*'s intercultural lesbian relationship of Silé and Jude does not seem at all controversial as the one of Viveka and Anick's and, in fact, it exemplifies the possibilities of transcultural lesbian relations across the globe.

The diasporic experiences of Anna Livia and Shani Mootoo, as well as Emma Donoghue, who by the time of writing *Landing* was already living in Canada, allowed those writers greater freedom to discuss and problematise issues encountered by lesbian communities. Although in the 1990s, when the lesbian community began to reinvent itself leaving the notion of Lesbian Nation behind, questions of racism and stigmatisation are still troubling lesbians across the globe. However, globalisation and transculturation help us to imagine the lesbian world without borders and to overcome the sense of displacement and stigmatisation felt by so many queer diasporians in general, and by lesbians in particular. Nearing towards the second decade of the twenty-first century, with more and more countries legalising gay marriages, and with more and more people fighting for LGBTQI+ rights across the world, lesbians should not be divided, but should be able to connect on the grounds of their shared sexuality. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes: 'As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my

own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)' (102). Therefore, it is not just the fiction written from the Republic of Ireland, but also from outside its borders, that is crucial to the ongoing negotiation of lesbian identity within the State, as Irish migration reinvents and rearticulates the notion of lesbian desire across Irish and global histories.

Notes

[1] The term Lesbian Nation was coined by Jill Johnston in *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (1973). She proposed to build the nation of lesbians in order to portray her disagreement with the anitilesbian branch of the women's liberation movement, as well as her conviction of the oppression of lesbians by heteronormative institutions (Sayer 461). Lesbian Nation, however, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, soon became to be criticised for its exclusiveness and class hierarchy.

[2] Amongst all migrants aged fifteen to thirty-six, sixty-six percent were women, and out of all ages leaving Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century, women constituted fifty-three percent (Diner 32).

[3] In her 1995-speech to the Houses of the Oireachtas, the President of the Republic of Ireland, Mary Robinson, stated that:

> Our relation with the diaspora beyond our shores is one which can instruct our society in the values of diversity, tolerance, and fair-mindedness . . . the women of our diaspora represent not simply a series of departures and loss. They remain even while absent, a precious reflection of our growth and change, a precious reminder of the many strands of identity which compose our story. . . . We need to accept that in their new perspectives may well be a critique of our old ones. ('Cherishing the Irish Diaspora' n.p.)

This shows that Irish people, despite being divided by migration, also benefit from transnational connections initiated by the departees. Although Robinson did not express specifically ramifications of diaspora for women, it can be presumed that whilst the image of the family was still strong within Irish society, globalisation and transculturality, especially in the approaching era of the Celtic Tiger, made the emancipation possible not only for those who left, but, effectively, also to those who remained.

[4] An example of such exclusion was the refusal to admit Irish-born gay men and lesbians to take part in the St Patrick's Parade in New York City in 1992. The ban was only lifted in 2016.

[5] Livia names all her male characters John, which is 'partly a response to Australian men always calling women Sheila' (Anna Livia Interview, *Off Our Backs* 10).

[6] Some of those communities consist of as few as a couple of members, others, such as Alapine in North America, stretches across three hundred acres, have up to twenty inhabitants with another fifteen who plan to relocate once they retire (Kershaw, n.p.).

[7] Butler's distinction between sex and gender also aims, elsewhere, to distinguish butch-femme and lesbian desire from heterosexuality. She writes:

> Of course, the political need to specify lesbian existence and desire requires that the line be drawn somewhere: heterosexuality is over there, and lesbianism is over here. A butch is not man, does not want to be a man, but is a woman who wants her women a certain way. A lesbian femme is not straight, and is not in love with straightness. There is certainly relief and exhilaration in such statements: it gives a certain integrity to the butch and to the femme, installing them both unambiguously in a lesbian world, sealing off that world from its heterosexual other, staking territory. ('Afterword' 228)

This statement distances butches from men, and from the perception of the butch-femme relation as mimicking heterosexuality, and, at the same time, appropriates the radical visibility of lesbian femmes through the conformity of their gender.

[8] Emma Donoghue is of a similar opinion. In her 2018-interview, she talks about how moving to Canada allowed her to re-invent herself as a writer, as she left certain constraints behind in Ireland:

> I might have felt the bonds of that smaller society more tightly around me. When I was in Ireland I always felt like a lesbian writer, because that was the

> new and difficult subject in my work that was the one thing that people commented on. Staying in Ireland would have made me hyper-aware about the gay things in my work. Being gay is so easy [in Canada]. That has enormously boosted my energy for so many writing projects because I never felt pigeon-holed. Canada offered me this possibility to be free from identity politics. I didn't have to be a lesbian writer or tick all the boxes of being an Irish writers – I could just be a writer. . . . Canada is a really international place, it's made up of layers and layers of immigrants. I found that quite liberating. (Armstrong, an interview with Emma Donoghue for *Independent.ie*, n.p.)

[9] There are a handful of passages in the Bible to proclaim homosexuality as sinful – there are two in the Old Testament (Genesis 19, and Leviticus 18 and 20), and three in the New Testament (Romans 1:18-21, Corinthians 6:9-10, and Timothy 1:8-10).

[10] Robin Cohen categorises the post-famine migration as one of the five types of 'victim diasporas,' which result after a traumatic event. The other four 'victim diasporas,' according to Cohen, are the Jewish, the Armenian, the African and the Palestinian diasporas.

[11] The Irish Consulate General, after Mootoo's reading of "All the Irish I know," said to her: "Madam, whether you like it or not, you were born in Ireland, and you are Irish. There is nothing you can do about that. Or at the very least it would not be easy to renounce your Irish nationality. Ireland does not easily give up its citizens, you know" (Mootoo, 'On Becoming an Indian Starboy' 89).

[12] The word "kush" in Kush Valley Sweets in Hindi and Urdu means happy, which is used concurrently with the word "gay," therefore, the sweet shop, essentially, is marked as a queer contact zone (Kini 193).

[13] *Varna* and *jati* are the two most proximate terms to portray the caste system in India. *Varna* means "colour" and groups people into four classes: the Brahmins (priestly people), the Kshatriyas (administrators and warriors), the Vaishyas (merchants, tradesmen and farmers), and Shudras (labouring classes). Convergently, *jati*, which means "birth," are people who form more flexible social groups.

Chapter Six

Some Conclusions: Into the Future of (Irish) Lesbian Writing

> [Although] the achievement of marriage equality surely and irrevocably propelled us further along the road [,] there is more to be done, for the work of dismantling the entire architecture of homophobia is still not complete. (McAleese xiii-xiv)

In Ireland, matters of sexuality were repressed and only considered viable from the reproductive point of view of heterosexual marriage. All other representation of deviant sexualities were, therefore, effectively subjugated and demonised. Sections 61 and 62 of the Offences Against the Person Act (1861), and the Criminal Law Amendment, known as Labouchere Amendment (1885), declared that 'any act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour, and punishable in the same manner as any such act committed by male persons' ("Commons Amendment" 567). In 1921, the House of Lords decided not to amend the anti-homosexual Criminal Law to include acts of "gross indecency" between women because they were afraid that the very fact of mentioning it might spread the unspeakable 'most disgusting and polluting subject' (567).[1] And just as Foucauldian *repressive hypothesis* suggests, repression of sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, ironically, eventually met with an explosion of sexual discourses in Ireland (Walsh 63).[2]

In England, these laws were abolished by the Sexual Offences Act (1967), which provided limited decriminalisation of buggery and indecency. In Ireland, however, these prohibitions were still maintained, highlighting the invisibility of lesbians in the political arena. Therefore, women's writing about women's sensuality deserves a special consideration in the reclaiming of women's (lesbian literary) history. Women authors became inimitable companions of Irish (her)story, re-materialising visibility and interrelations of women and lesbians. From representations of the eighteenth-century romantic friendship, through the explicit references to lesbian physicality, Irish lesbian narratives of the twenty-first century developed immensely, and begin to cut across differences of class, race, and culture.

Although a literary text can be classified as lesbian regardless of the author's gender or sexuality (Lewis 26-27), fiction analysed in this study is written solely by women. I deploy the term "lesbian" alongside "narrative" to denote content that is suggestive of women's emotional and sexual attachment. Since the existence of lesbian desire was, as I have mentioned above, excluded from the national political discourse, it is of high importance to give lesbians, at long last, voice and freedom of expression. Also, there is a certain sense of intimacy and closure in

women's fiction about women: 'the woman writer – because she can speak of, for, to, and from the female; of, for, to, and from the feminine – has a wider choice of genres in writing about women in general. She also becomes more existentially plausible if she chooses to establish any sort of community among them' (Stimpson 88). This indicates that lesbian fiction is predominantly, although not exclusively, woman-specific. Moreover, lesbian writers, as women who write primarily for women, have a deeper sense of women's sensuality and sexuality, which, in my opinion, equips their texts with more credibility, as well as allows potential readers the possibility of self-identification with the characters.

For centuries, Irish women wrote about loving women and, undoubtedly, their literary successes not only reflected, but also contributed to the state of Irish lesbian politics. Some Irish female authors included in this thesis wrote from within Irish borders, and many of them contributed to the plethora of lesbian fiction from hundreds of miles away from Ireland. Some of them lived and live Ireland, some of them remained in Ireland only for a short time, whereas others have never touched the Irish soil and maintain their connection only through familial links. Yet, despite all these differences, they are all joined in a common goal – to enter lesbian desire into the discourse of Irish literature, which was hitherto dominated primarily by men.[3]

Irish lesbian fiction has undergone a magnificent transformation in the past two centuries. *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* concentrates on a near-entirety of Irish lesbian writing, as my aims are to portray the significant changes in the writing that openly introduced lesbian narrative to the pages of Irish women's writing, the progression of which was deeply interrelated with the narrative's dependency on Irish nationalism, politics and the interference of the Catholic Church in Irish national politics. I found that in response to Irish hegemonic power structures, the novelists, beginning in the nineteenth century, had to write about lesbian desire in a more or less implicit manner. However, towards the end of the twentieth century, following the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland, lesbian writers, who were no longer restricted by the censorship laws, began to problematise the stigma resulting from the attempts at consolidating religious, national and sexual identities. In order to portray the change in representations of lesbian desire in Irish lesbian fiction over the past two centuries, and share reoccurrences of certain trends and themes, I formed a reconceptualisation of psychological stages of the lesbian and gay identity development model created by Vivienne Cass that represent the stages of development of Irish lesbian narrative. However, my research is not limited solely to Irish history. Rather, I placed it as a point of reference and a baseline around which the narrative, with its several issues and themes, evolved. My analyses of the

texts propose a variety of concepts aiding the reader in an analytical and philosophical approach to my study. My intention was to investigate nationalistic, sociological, geographical, geopolitical, and sexual concepts in relation to the increasing visibility of lesbians in Irish women's writing. In addition, I aimed to problematise their existence from a theoretical point of view, which concentrated not only on literature, but also on aspects of human identity that are encapsulated within it.

This project is an attestation of the existence of lesbian passion in Irish writing, dating back to the nineteenth century, and concentrating primarily on prose fiction published between the early nineteenth century and the present. Since it covers such an extensive time period, rather than adhering strictly to chronological order of publications (although this is kept within appropriate time frames), the development of Irish lesbian narrative is instead categorised into five stages, which are based on Vivienne Cass's "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model" (1979). Therefore, the first four chapters do not only follow consecutive time periods, but also propose stages of the fiction's development, which are largely dependent on the visibility and overtness of references implicating the presence of lesbian characters and/or lesbian desire in the text.

The before-mentioned reflection on lesbian politics in fiction also mirrors the societal attitudes towards passions between women. The development and presence of lesbian desire in works of Irish female authors, therefore, is a manifestation of issues circumventing Irish society in regards to lesbian love. Although, as I have attempted to show, works of these writers do not solely reflect the development in a change of perception towards lesbian sexuality over time; in fact, this process, concomitant with the stages of the fiction's development, does not become apparent until the mid-1990s. Thus, women writers were not only joined in the mission to overcome male privilege and heteromasculine bias in the canon of Irish writing, but also attempted to enter the subject of lesbian love onto the pages of their works.

Moreover, this study is a verification of (historical) antecedents facilitating the emergence of the lesbian literary subject. As I have argued throughout, Irish female writers in whose fictions there could be found traits and qualities of lesbian passion, paved the way for their successors in experimenting with their language, settings, and characters, to introduce, include and accommodate lesbian desire within the canon of Irish literature. In order to achieve this, they deployed a range of techniques and themes, some of which lasting to this time, to defy the male, heteronormative tradition of writing prevailing in Irish fiction.

Beginning with the eighteenth century, women's avid relations began to be conveyed with the use of the concept of the romantic friendship. Although this institution was not necessarily deemed to be lesbian in all cases in the way that we understand it today, there were certain factors that certainly point to female passionate ramifications. The most well-known case of a romantic friendship in Ireland was one of the Ladies of Llangollen. Their choice of clothing and way of being in the world prompted future generations of female writers to enter the subject of women's (lesbian) sexuality into the discourse. Maria Edgeworth, who was one of the Ladies' correspondents, began the tradition with inventing the character of Harriot Freke, who, together with her male attire and (financial) independence from men, became a prototype of a cross-dressing secondary character that, in my view, initiated a representation of dissident sexualities/genders in Irish women's writing of the *fin de siècle*.

Cross-dressing, however, similar to women's fight to secede from the constraints of the private sphere to participate in, and enjoy, privileges hitherto reserved solely for men, did not, as I have argued in Chapter One, indicate directly women's same-sex desire. Nevertheless, with the use of certain vocabulary, symbolism, imagery and literary techniques, texts by two generations of the New Woman writers, as well as their successors, exhibit certain patterns that are prevalent to this day. Firstly, the acts of transvestism in works of Sarah Grand and Katherine Cecil Thurston, although not implying lesbian desire as such, are certainly indicative of homoerotic desire, as their cross-dressing/cross-gendering and transgendering heroines initiate very intense friendships with men, which signifies their homoerotic passion. Their symbolic possession of the male phallus, moreover, allows them to begin to redeploy and challenge the binary categories of sex and gender.

Secondly, as romantic friendships and the New Woman movement met with criticism in the pseudo-medical literature that branded their participants and representatives as "inverts," some writers began to stray away from the masculine representations of their female characters and began to portray them as feminine women. Namely, Sarah Grand, as well as George Egerton and Rosa Mulholland, deployed the tool of the lesbian phallus and the concept of institutional heterosexuality to indicate mental and physical lesbian attraction within their texts. My concept of institutional, or *faute de mieux*, heterosexuality is, in fact, the prevalent method signifying lesbian desire in the entirety of Irish lesbian fiction to the present day. Although the concept is similar to the one of compulsory heterosexuality, I argue that the two are distinct from each other in terms of power relations between a patriarchal society and the lesbian subject, as well as in terms of a literary portrayal of lesbian desire. Whereas compulsory

heterosexuality is assumed *and* enforced by heteronormative society, institutional heterosexuality highlights the heroines' intended choice of a same-sex partner, and their inability or failure in finding or acquiring one. *Faute de mieux* heterosexuality is conveyed by the writers' negative portrayal of men, with their physical appeal, importance and even presence expressively diminished in the course of the narrative. Beginning with the prose of Maria Edgeworth, whose literary productivity dates back to the nineteenth century, Somerville and Ross as the representatives of the first generation of the New Woman, to contemporary lesbian writers, such as Emma Donoghue, men's significance is unmistakably modulated, thus giving the centre of their respective plots to women, making women's fiction homosocial and, effectively, homoerotic. Furthermore, by situating men on their respective novels' peripheries, and highlighting their inadequacy in courting their heroines, the New Woman writers facilitated the emergence of the lesbian phallus, which not only undermined the genderly-structured power relations, but also permitted an expansion of sexuality issues by including gentle and sensual physicality between female characters.

Thirdly, I observed that the use of symbolism played a significant role in channelling the presence of lesbian desire in Irish women's writing. Frequent images of nature, buildings, and objects often referred to female same-sex intimacy. Overgrown gardens and paths, for instance, indicated protagonists' covert sexual passions for other women in Bowen's *The Hotel*, *The Last September* or *A World of Love*. However, it was the symbolism of doors and film negatives/mirrors in Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte*, Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and, again, in *A World of Love*, that progressed the representations of lesbians in literature by grounding lesbian sexuality in Irish (literary) history, and undermined, or, through the symbolic portrayals of mirrors, proposed alternatives to, heteronormative order. Furthermore, the act of consummating sweet fruits in Edna O'Brien's short stories 'The Mouth of the Cave' or 'Sister Imelda,' symbolises the act of consummation of the protagonists' lesbian passions. This suggests that in times of strict censorship and a negative reception of lesbians in society, writers invoked suggestive images relating to lesbian subjectivity and sexuality in order to portray their characters' clandestine, fervent passions for other women.

Around the time of Ireland's military conflicts, women's literary proliferation was significantly diminished, and Irish women's writing, threatened by anti-homosexual laws, continued to depict lesbian sexuality in an implicit manner. However, authors deployed new methods of its conveyance to claim and reinvent lesbian history. Thus, historical novels, as well as themes of crossing between past and the present, did, and still contemporaneously feature,

lesbian main or secondary characters that occupy sub- or half-plots, in which the significance of heterosexual relationships is largely ridiculed and often doomed to failure. With the use of *lesbian continuum*, Elizabeth Bowen transcended the trope of gender separatism, a step which allowed her to introduce the theme of lesbian passion to the tradition of Irish writing. *Lesbian existence*, on the other hand, can be seen in later works of Bowen, as well as Kate O'Brien, where the retrospective narrational techniques imply the importance of placing lesbian desire in the past, in order to grant it a rightful place in Irish (historical) literature.

The presence of the Catholic Church and its interference in Irish national politics proved to be another recurring theme in lesbian writing. Whereas in the New Woman prose the subject of religion was diminished, and, in fact, often omitted or mentioned with vague disregard, as the years passed, there appears an increased interest of writers in attempts at consolidating Irish lesbian, religious, and national identities in women's writing. Kate O'Brien, for example, situated Agatha Conlan's lesbian love epiphany right outside a Spanish church, to bring forward the issue of the Church's demonization of lesbians. Edna O'Brien, on the other hand, set her short story in an Irish convent, where the young protagonist's object of affection is a nun, and where all the hitherto prevailing barriers of professional, religious and intimate appropriacy are crossed, as the nun and the unnamed teenage narrator are torn with feelings of guilt and shame.

Shortly following the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland, Emma Donoghue, in her openly lesbian novels *Stir-fry* and *Hood*, explicitly criticises the Church for its exclusion of lesbians from the public spheres of family lives, employment, and even religious rituals, such as a loved one's burial. Furthermore, the presence of churches and convents abroad and in Ireland creates a powerful juxtaposition between the internationalism of the former, and an intense, patriarchal nationalism of the latter (Ingman, *Irish Women's Fiction* 112-113). In terms of a lesbian reading of a text, this aids the reader in an understanding of the authors' motives to suggest the presence of lesbian desire in an either more or less explicit manner in their respective fictions. Whereas Agatha could freely admit to loving Mary, the nun's young adorer's infatuation could only be portrayed with the previously-mentioned deployment of the lesbian phallus, *lesbian continuum*, and symbolism. The power of the Church, therefore, played an important role in the prevention of the emergence of lesbian writings, as its (op)position was always clear on the subject, together with its disapproval and condemnation of dissident sexualities. It was only following the post-decriminalisation period, which was concomitant with Ireland 'abandoning religion faster than almost every other country in the world'

(McKittrick n.p.), that encouraged Irish lesbian writers to take a firm stand against the Church's demonization of lesbian sexuality, both historically and recently.

Lastly, the theme of emigration, beginning with early works of Elizabeth Bowen, constitutes the ever-present factor in Irish lesbian fiction. However, its importance and implications began to be widely discussed only in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, when lesbian desire could have been at last spoken of in an open manner, and when matters of national belonging and religious and sexual identification made their appearance in works of Emma Donoghue, Anna Livia, and Shani Mootoo. This problematisation of lesbian issues within their own communities allowed those writers to shift away from the notion of the restrictive and separatist Lesbian Nation, and towards a more inclusive notion of queer solidarization and integration, however, as I note below, without losing the emphasis on the distinctive lesbian identity and individuality.

I believe that the boldness of New Woman authors, such as Sarah Grand, Katherine Cecil Thurston, or George Egerton, initiated the tradition of lesbian writing for their twentieth- and twenty-first-century successors: Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, Mary Dorcey, and Emma Donoghue. Although the number of publications of lesbian fiction has indeed decreased, following the publication of Emma Donoghue's *Landing* in 2007, the nature of lesbian writing changed, as it is no longer restricted by the laws or the general contempt of Irish society. Modern lesbian novelists, consequently, began to place their lesbian characters in the past or other countries, and present them as deriving from different cultural and racial backgrounds. Moreover, the issues of a teenage lesbian sexuality and identity commenced, appearing in fiction for young adults (Geraldine Meade' *Flick,* 2011), thus expanding the horizons of their readers and producing a plurality of literatures.

Lesbian writers, therefore, are not limited solely to portraying modern representations of lesbian desire. Quite on the contrary, they go above and beyond to reiterate the concepts of *lesbian continuum* and *lesbian existence* that were present in early works of Elizabeth Bowen or Kate O'Brien. Emma Donoghue, probably the most prolific writer of Irish lesbian fiction, published and edited a number of historical lesbian novels and short stories, effectively reclaiming Irish lesbian history, as the historical presence of lesbians becomes better known and documented, thus rooting its presence in the tradition of Irish writing. This is also seen in works of Irish female and lesbian authors whose works were not analysed in this study. Namely, whereas Maura Richards (*Interlude*, 1982) and Linda Cullen (*The Kiss*, 1990) posit lesbian relationships at the centres of their respective plots, or Aoibheann Sweeney (*Among Other*

Things, I've Taken Up Smoking, 2007) incorporates it into the novel of manners, Emma Donoghue, on the other hand, returns to the theme of implementation of lesbian desire and its adverse varieties in the literary past, as she writes about a cross-dressing Jenny (*Frog Music*, 2015), or bases her novel on the real events pertaining to the eighteenth-century Sapphists (*Life Mask*, 2004). Furthermore, in the period between pre-decriminalisation and early 2000s, several collections of short stories, not predominantly lesbian, featured works and memoirs of Irish female writers whose texts I have analysed in this thesis. These were, for example, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl* (1986), *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing* (1989), *In and Out of Time: Lesbian Feminist Fiction* (1990), *Alternative Loves: Irish Gay and Lesbian Stories* (1994), *Ladies' Night at Finbar's Hotel* (1999), *Love Alters: Lesbian Stories* (1999) also published in the same year under another title of *The Mammoth Book of Lesbian Short Stories*, and *The Anchor Book of New Irish Writing* (2000), as well as many others. The fact that the latter part of this list includes works of lesbian authors printed alongside heterosexual stories, often written by men, suggests an advanced stage of the development of Irish lesbian narrative.

Diasporic lesbian writing, on the other hand, challenges national borders and subverts national bonds. Through the processes of transnationalism and globalism, lesbian fiction in diaspora connects lesbians of all nationalities, races, ethnic backgrounds and classes. Recently, when the Schengen agreement was threatened by the influx of immigrants from other continents, and as the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland faces a reinstatement following Brexit, it is vital to emphasise the importance of diasporic and migrant writing as the re-appropriation of lesbian existence across the world. This poses serious implications for the future of Irish lesbian writing, as lesbian writers now, more than ever, will be attempting to maintain the interconnectedness of lesbian communities. Moreover, diasporic lesbian writing will most likely, in my opinion, thrive, owing to the need of the reinstatement of lesbian presence and independence across the world. Lastly, the emergence of new writings could ensure the future of lesbian studies through a reconciliation with queer theory, after these two concepts came to be often intertwined by the modern processes of defining sexual theories. Transnational and diasporic lesbian fiction, whether written from within or outside of the borders of the Republic, celebrates their similarities as well as differences, whilst placing an emphasis on lesbian sexuality, a fact I highlighted briefly in Chapter Five, and thus defying the concept of a 'post-lesbian' era. In fact, Jack (Judith) Halberstam visualises the interconnectedness of those two fields, and refers to it as "a queer lesbian studies":

> ‘Queer’ in this context performs the work of destabilizing the assumed identity in ‘identity politics.’ However, by continuing to use and rely upon the term ‘lesbian,’ we acknowledge that identity is a useful strategy for political and cultural organizing. ‘Lesbian’ is a term that modifies and qualifies ‘queer,’ and ‘queer’ is a term capable of challenging the stability of identities subsumed by the label ‘lesbian.’ (‘Queering Lesbian Studies’ 259)

In this respect, *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* helps to modify “queer,” as it concomitantly places an emphasis on lesbian individuality without denying queer terminology. Although my work is not inclusive of male-to-female transgender and transsexual subjects, it nevertheless opens a discussion and invites a similar reconceptualisation of trans fiction that could not be limited solely to transgender studies, but also included in queer *and* lesbian studies. Therefore, such approach ensures the interdisciplinarity of those three fields, at the same time preserving their distinctiveness.

The beginning of the twenty-first century, therefore, witnessed a vast number of personal memoirs, in which Irish women began to feel free to testify their lesbian relationships of the past. The best-known example is probably an autobiography of Nell McCafferty, a feminist and lesbian activist journalist and novelist, who, in *Nell* (2004), describes her fifteen-year-long affair with Nuala O’Faolain, who is also a famous author and a scholar.[4] Although McCafferty was always open about her sexuality, she decided not to publish her book until the death of her mother: ‘I would have to await her death before I could write openly about being gay’ (383). Although it is important to notice the apprehension with which McCafferty, in her memoir, approached the issue, as it was still mildly influenced by societal attitudes of the older generation, it is also perceptible that the homophobia that persisted in the 1980s’ stories of Mary Dorcey is no longer present in McCafferty’s work, and coming out to a larger public is instead dictated by one’s personal discretion rather than fear. However, what really began to challenge the prejudice of Irish society was the vote of over a million Irish people to grant equal marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Marriage equality in Ireland is a result of an over two-decade-long battle of activists, politicians and the LGBTQI+ community. Although Ireland’s decriminalisation of homosexual acts was passed relatively late, compared to England, Scotland or Northern Ireland, which decriminalised homosexuality in 1967, 1981 and 1982 respectively, marriage equality proved that Ireland has come a long way since 1993. Namely, the Republic of Ireland was the first

country in history to approve marriage equality by popular vote. The referendum's astounding result was 62.3% voting for and 37.7% voting against extending civil marriage rights to same-sex couples. The battle for decriminalisation, won by Senator David Norris in 1993, gave new courage to the Irish LGBTQI+ community, despite the introduction of the Civil Registration Act in 2004, which Part 1.2.2 (E) explicitly stated 'an impediment to marriage if . . . both parties are of the same sex' (Civil Registration Act 2004: Number 3 of 2004, 10).

On 26th of April 2004, the Revenue of Commissioners received a letter with an enclosed Canadian marriage certificate of Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan, who claimed 'allowances as a married couple under the Taxes Consolidation Acts,' and two days later, the Registrar General office were given Katherine and Ann Louise's claim to confirm their Canadian marriage as legally binding in Ireland (Mullally 54). Rejections from both of these institutions prompted Zappone and Gilligan to take their case (later known as the KAL case) further, and it came before the High Court on 3rd of October 2006. The KAL case, rejected by the High Court, is considered to be the first step towards extending the definition of "marriage" in Article 41 of the Irish Constitution to include same-sex couples. In March 2011, Labour and Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish) formed a coalition government and began to negotiate the government's formation, with a promise of progression of LGBTQI+ rights in Ireland. Aided by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Marriage Equality and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), the coalition's new Constitutional Convention was to consider the 'provision for same-sex marriage,' and it was scheduled to be discussed in April 2013 (Healy, Sheehan and Whelan 2-3). The result of the Convention was to persuade the Government to hold a referendum to allow civil marriage for same-sex couples, which took place successfully on 23rd of May 2015.

Nonetheless, conquering the ultimate stage of development, pride/synthesis, similar to marriage equality, does not translate into the end of the journey for Irish lesbian writers. However important, equal rights for Irish lesbian and gay citizens are only one of the first steps towards the complete synthesis. The achievement of the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland (2015), which states that 'marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex' is not concomitant, as I have stated above, with the cessation of the creativity of Irish female authors, especially those in Northern Ireland, whose rights have not been honoured by their government in a similar manner.

Therefore, owing to the extent of this thesis, and to the purpose of presenting the chronological development of lesbian narrative from the Republic of Ireland, one of the

limitations that I have encountered was the necessity to omit works of Northern Irish lesbian authors. It has been nearly a century since Ireland was divided in 1922; a century, to which a similar model of development of lesbian narrative could possibly be adapted. Especially recently, as Northern Ireland struggles to follow the success of the Republic in changing the law to accommodate equal marriage rights to same-sex partners, it would be beneficial to this body of work to concentrate on voices from the six northern counties, making the project a true reflection of Irish lesbian fiction pertaining to the whole island.

In Northern Ireland, there are many studies devoted to highlighting homophobic tendencies. Some of them purport that, especially, there is a visible trauma surrounding lesbians, indicated by social exclusion, discrimination, deprivation, 'suffering, surviving and surpassing' (Plummer 15). Northern Irish lesbian politics are now significantly underdeveloped compared with the rest of the UK or Ireland, especially considering that, initially, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Northern Ireland preceded the Republic of Ireland by nearly a decade. Northern Ireland is now the only country in the British Isles' region that has not extended civil marriage rights to same-sex couples. As Patrick Corrigan, the director of Amnesty Northern Ireland programme, stated: 'Northern Ireland is now the last bastion of discrimination against gay people in these islands' (Ferguson n.p.). The main reason for this is the opposition of Northern Ireland's leading political party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which has become well known for its homophobia. In 1978, for example, the founder of the DUP, Ian Paisley, ran the campaign "Save Ulster from Sodomy," with the main aim to oppose the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland. Recently, Paisley's son, also a member of the DUP, expressed his view that homosexuality is 'immoral, offensive and obnoxious' and stated that he finds gay men and lesbians 'repulsive' (Fenton n.p.). Another DUP politician, Jim Wells, argued that children raised by homosexual or lesbian parents are more likely to be abused or neglected. Thus, whereas the Irish Republic's politics used to be influenced by the Catholic Church, nowadays, Northern Irish conflict occurs between its government and the LGBTQI+ community, purely based on the disagreement between republicans and loyalists (Fenton n.p.).[5]

Shannon Yee describes the difficulty of being gay in Northern Ireland in her unpublished script for *Troubles*:

> In Northern Ireland . . . there is a sort of trauma that stays with you. There's a cognitive dissonance there for gay people. You want to be part of a family, you

> want to be part of a church, you want to be part of society but if they know you as you really are, they won't accept you. But you really want to be accepted. So you play a parallel game in your life. (n.p.)

That parallel game is the surpassing, or "passing" as straight, in the Northern Irish society. Often, lesbians conform to society's expectations and marry men and have their children before coming out (Quiery 18). Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further studies on Northern Irish women's literature that improves the visibility of women, especially lesbians, although Caroline Magennis rightly observes that 'representations of homosexuality in Northern Irish fiction are notable by their absence' (120). One author, however, Hilary McCollum, has taken in her hands the legacy of Northern Irish lesbians and recently published her second novel, *Golddigger* (2015), which is set in times of the nineteenth-century Irish famine and introduces lesbian love into the discourse of Northern Irish lesbian writing. She describes, with meticulous precision and intensity, the peripteries of Frances Moriarty and Kitty Gorman, who embark on a journey to escape hunger and begin a new life together. As McCollum wrote in her introduction: 'I am grateful to those who are reclaiming our lesbian and gay history, both imagined in fiction, and real. I believe these (hi)stories are important in giving us a sense of ourselves' (n.p.). Therefore, although this thesis discusses in depth the changes and transformations in lesbian writing from the Republic of Ireland, the last hundred years of lesbian history and writing from Northern Ireland still remain to be investigated further.

In addition to the absence of Northern Irish lesbian fiction, the proposed model of development of lesbian narrative also posed certain limitations. Namely, stages of tolerance, acceptance and pride/synthesis, encapsulated in Chapter Four, seem to have amalgamated after the decriminalisation of homosexual acts. After 1993, when lesbian fiction began to advocate lesbian integration and its opposition to lesbophobia, it represented concomitantly stages of tolerance and acceptance, with the latter being deeply complicated by the representation of female bisexuality in Mary Dorcey's *Biography of Desire*. However, I intended to keep the chronological appearance of works in my study as intact as possible, despite having to classify *Biography of Desire* into two merging stages, as this approach offered an improved and advantageous simplicity of reference, especially in the context of psychological and sociological studies.

For this reason, I suggest that despite this anomaly, the stage of tolerance could be ascribed between the publications of Dorcey's *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1989) and

Biography of Desire (1997), with the stage of acceptance emerging in 1994 and characterised by the process of a public coming out in Emma Donoghue's *Hood.* Consequently, the combined stage of pride and synthesis emerges in the first decade of the twenty-first century, where transnationalistic approaches to lesbian desire in *Landing* (2007) present Irish society without issues of homo- and lesbophobia in urban areas. Again, the combination of those two stages here seemed to be more viable at this point for two reasons: firstly, the dilemma of Northern Irish equal marriage rights for lesbian couples still remains unresolved. Secondly, the complete stage of synthesis cannot be reached until queer communities, in the first instance, address differences dividing its representatives, and begin to include lesbian authors in the canon of Irish writers. Lesbian and queer communities, to represent their rights, must first connect with each other before being able to connect and communicate effortlessly with the rest of heteronormative society.

Furthermore, the developmental model proved to be unsuitable in the discussion of the diasporic fiction in Chapter Five, which followed its own pattern of progression, beginning with the presentation of repudiation of the sense of Lesbian Nation in Anna Livia's narrative, to addressing the issues of lesbians of colour, working classes and older lesbians. However, although the chapter does not follow the proposed process of progression from the earlier chapters, I found that the inclusion of diasporic writing was necessary to portray the entire journey of the development of the lesbian character within Irish lesbian narrative.

Nevertheless, Cass's theoretical model of gay and lesbian identity formation, which I adapted to serve my study in order to develop a taxonomy of stages in the development of Irish lesbian fiction, proved to be a useful tool in the sense of chronology and developing characteristics adhering to consecutive stages. It helped me to portray the Irish lesbian narrative's progression within a structured paradigm that would be beneficial for future studies in Irish women's lesbian writing. My personal intention, on the other hand, was also to juxtapose and draw similarities between the body of the lesbian narrative and the lesbian body and identity, as both the lesbian narrative and the lesbian body follow a similar route of progression throughout their respective periods towards the expression of lesbian sexuality. Such embodiment of lesbians within fiction does not only place (or position) *lesbian existence* in the canon of Irish literature more firmly, but it draws attention to the material existences of lesbians whose toils and personal experiences of battling against lesbophobia formed the grounds for the emergence of lesbian writing in the first instance. I believe that *A New Framework for Rethinking Love between Women* answered many important questions regarding

lesbian writing of Ireland and that the model of development, despite the above-mentioned limitations, worked in favour of the central purpose of my research.

My investigation implements, primarily, the existing research as a presentation of a corpus of lesbian writers in and of Ireland, where – as opposed to other contributions in this field – a range of Irish lesbian authors and their works are gathered in one volume. The history, evolution and change in perception of lesbians in the last two centuries are gathered into a single work, as the thesis introduces Irish lesbian texts, investigates how the narrative evolved over time, and examines thoroughly the works that were included in this emergent canon. My overview of all major works by Irish lesbian writers in chronological and developmental order is highly beneficial, as the study does not only consist of literary analyses, but also studies social changes and historical antecedents that had an impact on the development of Irish lesbian writing.

Moreover, my work may aid future researchers, as well as readers, to consider Irish lesbian fiction from three perspectives. Firstly, lesbian fiction of Ireland is presented as an ever-changing process, always in flux. Although, as I argued previously, the final stage of the developmental process is nearly complete, the uncertainties of belonging and expressions of sexualities created by modern-day politics, as well as the writers' reiteration of *lesbian existence* throughout the past few centuries, could add to a proliferation of works from a range of styles and disciplines, thus creating an entirely new canon of lesbian writers. Secondly, this study offers an alternative from a chronological systematisation, as it proposes a possibility of cogitating separate periods of time from the developmental stages' point of view. This grants an understanding of lesbian fiction in terms of not only periods in time, but it also enables an examination of the separate lesbian-specific stages signified by those periods. Most importantly, however, the stages proposed here invite a similar analysis of lesbian texts from other countries, as this would undoubtedly give an overall view of the development of lesbian fiction across the world and incite an emergence of a comparative set of cultural and racial lesbian studies.

The research included in this thesis is qualitative, as I aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of social behaviours and their reasons. Finally, I believe that my work, through its interdisciplinarity and historical and political approach, as well as discussions on postcolonialism, postmodernism, social and queer theory in relation to lesbian writing, adds new knowledge to numerous fields of study, such as lesbian, Irish, queer, postcolonial and feminist studies. The fact that this body of work does not merely introduce theory to fit into a

framework, but instead uses a variety of multi-disciplinary critical approaches to represent the consecutive stages of development, makes it a useful apparatus to examine lesbian literatures, identities *and* sexualities, with an aim to begin an interdisciplinary dialogue that reaches towards a transgression and subversion of the hitherto prevailing single-faceted theories.

I would also like to return to my personal motivation for conducting this study and propose a new project that would concentrate entirely on Poland. As Ireland and Poland, until recently, were quite similar in the sense of their national religiosity and the interference of the Catholic Church in the national politics, it would be interesting to see the point at which Ireland began to stray away from covert representations of lesbian desire, and predict and situate in time a similar occurrence for Poland. At the same time, I hope that by the time it is completed, I will have seen an improvement in perception of lesbians by Polish society, where women-desiring women will no longer be confined to the margins of society (Majka-Rostek 201-202).

The entirety of my study, other than concentrating solely on academic methodology, offers an insight into historical and modern societies and their approaches to lesbian desire, as well as an analysis of lesbian sexuality and its development throughout the time in literature. Nowadays, with the influence and the impact of interdisciplinary studies, literature cannot be perceived merely as a fictional creation. Nevertheless, it should also not be studied and translated from a strictly analytical point of view. First of all we must remember the *people*, the authors, feminists, and lesbian activists, whose own lived experiences prompted them or other writers to share with us their perspectives and views of the world, often despite many restrictions and dangers. For, if we were to rely only on historical and theoretical knowledge, we would never truly experience the compelling and multiple works of art that comprise literature.

It is, *inter alia*, why I proposed the analogy of lesbian literature to the lesbian body, and adapted a psychological developmental model to analyse and represent both, as one is indispensable to the other, as well as to the future of literary *and* lesbian studies. As creative writers and as academics, we must respect and face the changing nature of our fields, as well as preserve old traditions and develop new trends whilst retaining personal histories and lived experiences.

‘I hear stories. It could be myself telling them to myself or it could be these murmurs that come out of the earth. The earth so old and haunted, so hungry and replete. It talks. Things past and things yet to be’ (Edna O’Brien, *House of Splendid Isolation* 3).

Notes

[1] In his speech, the Earl of Desart, argued to remove the clause of "gross indecency" between women:

> It is very disagreeable talking of these things, but we all know the sort of romantic, almost hysterical, friendship that are made between young women at certain periods of their lives and of its occasional manifestations. . . . Suppose there was a prosecution . . . the results would be even more appalling. It would be made public to thousands of people that there was this offence; that there was such horror. It would be widely read [causing] a perfect outburst of that offence all through the country. ("Commons Amendment" 572-573)

[2] (Homo)sexuality transformed into discourse, as Michel Foucault argues, 'to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish causal pleasure, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation' ('The Perverse Implantation' 683). In this way, the government could control not only the numbers of population, but also, incited by the Catholic Church, the morality of its citizens.

[3] Women's fight for gender unbiased books is still ongoing, as the publication of the *Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* (2017) caused much controversy, since it is heavily male populated and only included four women, none of whom are lesbian poets. The anthology features thirty poets and covers the period between the seventeenth century and the present. Two hundred and fifty academics and poets signed a pledge refusing to take part in genderly unbalanced events and publications, stating that the book 'leads to a distorted impression of our national literature and to a simplification of women's roles within it' (Flood n.p.).

[4] O'Faolain also mentions her relationship with McCafferty in her own memoir, *Are You Somebody?* (1996), however, she does not describe it with as much intensity and details as her ex-partner.

[5] Emma Donoghue describes how the hitherto dominant religious Catholic ideology ceased to be the factor preventing her public coming out:

> It is a time of transition and confusingly rapid change, a time in which it has been immensely exciting to be out as an Irish lesbian writer. Reactions have varied from great warmth, through naïve surprise, to pulpit-thumping (my sister went to Mass the day after I appeared on television, and heard me denounced from the altar as a danger in this time of AIDS). ("Coming out a bit strong" 87)

Therefore, it can be noticed that, despite the Catholic Church's unwavering stance on homosexuality, coming out is not considered to be a traumatic experience, as Ireland has assumed a more broadly European and post-Catholic approach concerning matters of homosexuality (Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* 19).

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