De/Construction(s) of Gay Men in Twenty-First Century British Theatre: 2001—2016

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For you, Jake

Abstract

This study gives critical attention to the representation(s) of gay men in twenty-first century mainstream British theatre. In doing so, this research furthers discussions surrounding the development of British gay theatre by exploring how gay playwrights de/construct gay characters in their plays. Focusing on Mark Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001), Alexi Kaye Campbell's *The Pride* (2008), Jonathan Harvey's *Canary* (2010), John Donnelly's *The Pass* (2014), and John Fitzpatrick's *This Much (or an Act of Violence Towards the Institution of Marriage)* (2016) as case studies, I propose that these playwrights reject the rise of homonormativity. In doing so, I argue these playwrights utilise the British stage to offer alternative narratives that focus largely on the (re)invention of gay identities through staging a dialogue between the past and present.

Using queer theory as a theoretical framework, I identify and explore three key themes that emerge from my analysis of gay narratives presented in my chosen plays that, in turn, shape the structure of my thesis: first, the importance of staging alternative queer temporalities to explore the past and present to create a better future, second, gay shame and its effect on the de/construction of gay identities, And third, the staging of queer utopias that challenge the notion of homonormativity for gay men. In the pages that follow, I explore the ways in which contemporary mainstream British gay playwrights construct their gay characters and their comment on gay identities.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 8

Setting the Scene 9
Gay Voices in Twenty-First Century Britain 17
Visibility in the Mainstream 21
De/Construction (Queer Readings) 28
Case Studies 34
The Way Ahead 44

CHAPTER ONE: BRITISH GAY (THEATRE) HISTORIES 49

Theatre Censorship 50
The Gay Liberation Front 60
'Gay Heroes' 63
In the Wake of AIDS 67
Towards a Gay(er) Millennium 77

CHAPTER TWO: QUEER TEMPORALITIES 80

Queer Temporality 87
Homocuriosity 90
Runaway Gays 110
Gays™ 122

CHAPTER THREE: FIVE PHASES OF GAY SHAME 135

Gay Shame 139
Phase One: Internalised Ambivalence 141
Phase Two: Societal Shame 146
Phase Three: Familial Shame 164
Phase Four: Gay Guilt 172
Phase Five: Gay Pride 178

CHAPTER FOUR: HOMONORMATIVITY, OR IS THERE A QUEER ALTERNATIVE? 190

Homonormativity 191
Gay Marriage 196
No Future: Sinthomosexuality 214
No Future: The Child 219
Queer Utopias 224

CONCLUSION 237

Gay Pasts, Presents and Futures 242
Gay Autonomy 245
Rejecting Homonormativity; Towards Queer(er) Futures 251

BIBLIOGRAPHY 257

The physical reinvention of the world is endless, relentless, fascinating, exhaustive; nothing that seems solid is. If you could stand at just a little distance in time, how fluid and shape-shifting physical reality would be, everything hurrying into some other form, even concrete, even stone.

—Mark Doty

Introduction

This study explores the construction and deconstruction (de/construction) of gay characters in twenty-first century British playwriting. Adopting a queer theoretical framework, this project interrogates the representation of gay characters in plays written by openly gay playwrights. Through a queer reading, this work investigates the narratives, characters and themes that are presented. This thesis reads the case studies alongside broader cultural narratives, politics, and societal developments, with the aim of establishing a deeper understanding of how gay playwriting illustrates, and responds to, cultural discourses surrounding homosexuality and gay identity in contemporary Britain. My research seeks to explore the novel ways in which plays about gay identity in contemporary mainstream UK theatre engage with temporality, and in what ways is this engagement significant for both theatrical representations of gay identity and for queer theory. To illustrate my argument this thesis draws on plays written by gay British playwrights that were produced at prominent subsidised theatres in England, namely: *Mother Clap's Molly House* (National Theatre, 2001) by Mark Ravenhill; *The Pride* (Royal Court Theatre, 2008) by Alexi Kaye Campbell; *Canary* (Liverpool Playhouse, 2010) by Jonathan Harvey; *The Pass* (Royal Court Theatre, 2014) by John Donnelly and *This Much (or an Act of Violence Towards the Institution of Marriage)* (Soho Theatre, 2016) by John Fitzpatrick.

This project draws on blended research methods through its combination of textual analysis of the plays with interdisciplinary sources from queer theory, theatre studies and cultural studies to analyse the representations of gay men on stage in the twenty-first century. In

particular, this study focuses on how gay playwrights in contemporary British theatre look to the past in order to (re)invent gay identities in the present and, in doing so, propose queer alternative futures. In so doing, this thesis argues that contemporary gay playwriting in Britain challenges homonormativity through its offering of nuanced representations of gay men, reflecting a shift towards increased gay autonomy and the ongoing construction and deconstruction of gay identity.

The selected case studies explored in this thesis map out gay experiences on stage and in so doing offer space for the characters, the writers, and the audiences to confront the tension between how gay men are often told to be and how they can be. The primary avenue for exploring this tension in British theatre, as argued by this thesis, is by looking at gay plays that are produced by publicly subsidised theatres that – in turn – document and provide space to analyse the nature of this cultural exchange to large audiences. Additionally, this thesis sheds light on the ways in which gay playwrights utilise gay male characters in their plays to reflect gay cultural politics in Britain.

Setting the Scene

During my time at university, I developed a keen interest in the emergence of gay British theatre. As I familiarised myself with the scope of research pertaining to representations of homosexuality in British theatre, I noticed large gaps between the years in which these studies were published. In order to offer a brief summary of the trajectory, I present writings on the explicit representation of (homo)sexuality in British theatre to illustrate the diachronic development of gay theatre in Britain in order to situate this thesis within the field. My intention is to establish and interpret a body of work that centres around the representation

of homosexuality in contemporary theatre and is explored in greater detail in the following context chapter. In doing so, my aim is to develop the current body of work pertaining to representations of homosexuality in twenty-first century British playwriting, and theatre studies more broadly.

One of the most notable earlier contributions to the field includes the work of Michelene Wandor, whose *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (1981), is primarily concerned with "the representation of sexuality in theatre during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s" (xv). Wandor's text is integral to the intersection of theatre studies and sexuality as it is one of the first scholarly works to discuss the relation between sexualities and British theatre histories. In her introduction, Wandor explains that her book "is for anyone who is concerned about the future of the theatre, and the way it represents half the population (women), half its audience (women) and aspects of homosexuality which have hitherto been suppressed or distorted" (xv). For this study, I am interested in building on the research in relation to the latter half of her quote regarding the concern of exploring aspects of homosexuality in theatre. Over a decade later, in 1992, Nicholas de Jongh "explores [the] neglected terrain" of homosexuality in theatre in his pioneering study *Not in Front of The Audience*. Through a chronological exploration, De Jongh "considers how the theatres of London and New York treated the subject of homosexuality and depicted homosexuals in the course of over half a century" (xi). Seven years after, in *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (1999), Alan Sinfield explores the ways in which British and American "theatre has been a particular site for the formation of dissident sexual identities" (1). Sinfield traces the representation of lesbians and gay men dating from Oscar Wilde to the end of the twentieth century and concludes that representation in theatre continue to challenge notions

of one's sexual potential. A year later, John M. Clum revises his text *Acting Gay* (1992) with his second edition *Still Acting Gay* (2000) and focuses on the relationship between American and British plays written by, and about gay men. Clum's second edition of his work also indicated the relevance of exploring the conversations around gay male representation. His study investigates the ever-changing gay culture and documents the history of the gay man in theatre. Studies such as those mentioned above trace the emergence of explicit representations of homosexuality on the British stage. In their conclusions, De Jongh, Sinfield and Clum all discuss the necessity and importance of continuing this analysis as gay theatre begins to enter the mainstream at the end of the twentieth century.

Writing in the twenty-first century – seven years later – Dimple Godiwala "traces one of the most pertinent issues that haunts British society and its stage: [...] alternative sexualities" (1) in her edited collection *Alternatives within the Mainstream: Queer Theatres in Post-War Britain* (2007). This is important because it suggests that the exploration of the construction of alternative sexuality in theatre may lead to increased acceptance and understanding of sexuality. In 2009, Andrew Wyllie explains that "increasingly in the 1990s it was sexuality in general that was under discussion, at the expense of the hetero/homo binarism that freighted the outlook of British society through most of the century" (108). Writing about Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998), Wyllie argues that "homosexuality [ceases] to be a fully engaged topic, in its own right, and instead [becomes] absorbed into a broader consideration of where sexuality, morality and commerce intersect" (109). This thesis re-centres homosexuality in contemporary British playwriting, highlighting the scope for homosexuality to be, in Wyllie's terms outlined above as 'a fully engaged topic in its own right'. In doing so, I explore how gay playwriting in the twenty-first century speaks

to broader socio-political contexts of being gay in Britain, such as discussions around gay temporalities, gay shame, gay pride, and gay marriage that emerged from my readings of the case studies, which, in turn, forms my analysis chapters in the pages that follow.

More recently in 2016, Stephen Greer, who builds on the discussions of Sinfield, Godiwala and Wyllie, "argue[s] that contemporary queer performance practice must be understood in terms of the conditions of its production" (ix). In his study *Contemporary British Queer Performance,* Greer focuses on a wide range of performance practices from the early 1990s to 2010. Greer pays close attention to the "modes of performance practice which have received relatively little attention in the past, in written histories which have tended to reflect the dominance of the dramatic text within the study of British performance" (ix). Catherine Silverstone explains how the "diversity of genres is one of the key strengths of Greer's book as he draws attention to performance practices, practitioners, companies, and organisers that have received comparatively little critical attention (e.g., Duckie), alongside companies and practitioners that are canonical in discourses on LGBTQ performance in the UK (e.g., Gay Sweatshop)" (127). Through addressing non-mainstream sites of production, Greer explains that he is "keen to emphasise the ways in which contemporary performance has operated within mainstream discourses and is engaged with structures and conventions of practice which it might still seek to critique" (198). Within the exploration of sites of production outside the mainstream, Greer draws on the work of Duckie (a performance collective) and their annual queer festival: "Gay Shame". As explained by Greer, "Duckie's Gay Shame events were offered as a counterpoint to mainstream Pride celebrations" (153). This indicates the importance of the call for critical attention towards gay representation and their cultural politics both within, and outside of the mainstream.

Duckie's creative aim is "to develop new models of community theatre that targeted an audience outside of its core LGBTQ base. Specialising in popular forms, arts, and variety for working class subcultures it has produced a programme of socially engaged clubs that generate a healthy arts and cultural scene for communities outside of the mainstream, or on the so-called 'margins'", as explained on their website. Interestingly, work around gay identities, subcultures and communities is being produced both within and outside of the mainstream. Moreover, in 2022, I worked alongside Duckie to produce a queer performance festival titled "Princess Picnic Promenade" at The Botanical Gardens in Birmingham, as part of Fierce Festival's Commonwealth programme to redress homophobia and racism in relation British history. Our aim was to host a series of queer performances around the Botanical Gardens and invite both queer and non-queer audience to peruse the gardens and learn about the histories of gay and queer identities in an alternative setting to mainstream theatre performance.

For this study, however, I am interested in the ways in which contemporary playwriting sits within and engages with mainstream discourse pertaining to the understanding of gay identities. Where Greer favours performance that sits outside of the mainstream, or at the edges, this study focuses predominately on playtexts produced in the mainstream that respond and engage with cultural discourses pertaining to gay men in Britain. In defence of my decision to focus on contemporary plays premiering in 'mainstream' subsidised theatres, I refer to David Edgar's article: "Playwriting Studies: Twenty Years On" (2013) to acknowledge

the importance of new writing[1] in Britain. In his article, Edgar traces the history of new writing in Britain and argues for its importance on the British stage. He writes that "whether the new writing of the post-war era is as great as that of any preceding period, it is notable that the project to make and keep theatre as a site for serious discussion of contemporary Britain has kept going for well over half a century". He explains how new writing has ebbed and flowed in history:

> from the first Royal Court generation via the revolutionary playwrights of the 1970s, the explosion of new women's writing in the 1980s and the in-yer-face theatre of Ravenhill, Kane and others in the mid-1990s, to the latest upsurge of young political playwrights today, the caravan seems to just keep bowling along (100).

In his defence of studying playwriting, Edgar explains how "many writers who had worked for the rapidly expanding touring and building-based fringe of the late 1960s and early 1970s began seeing their work performed in mainstream, patrician intuitions" (100). This is still evident in contemporary Britain, as shown through one of my selected case studies: Fitzpatrick's *This Much. This Much* first premiered at ZOO venues at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2015 and subsequently transferred to the Soho Theatre in London, in 2016. Edgar refers to many Arts Council reports in his article, one of which the "headline find was that new plays had increased from around 20 to 42 per cent of all theatre shows presented by the responding companies" (104). Moreover "half of the new plays were presented by ten theatres (including the National, the Royal Court, the RSC and major regional theatres in

[1] For this study, I adopt Sierz' definition of new writing as "belong[ing] to the category of text-based theatre, where an individual playwright is at the centre of the theatre-making process" (49). This definition chimes with my primary concern of exploring the gay narratives that emerge from gay playwrights.

Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds)" (104). Again, this is reflected in the selected case studies in this thesis as the plays under analysis premiered at The Royal Court, The National Theatre, Soho Theatre and Liverpool Playhouse. According to Edgar, one of the "most striking finding was that most new plays were now watched in auditoria with more than 200 seats. On average, between 2003 and 2008, nine out of ten attendances at new plays in the responding theatres were in main houses" (104). This finding resonates with my desire to survey gay plays that will be seen by mass-audiences and in turn present gay narratives to both the heteronormative audiences of the mainstream as well as new, queer audiences.

Edgar also acknowledges the tensions and resistance towards new writing in Britain. He explains that Peter Boyden had negative views towards the repertoire of new writing. "His thesis was that English theatre remained dangerously wedded to a post-war age and a core canon which the public no longer knew, citing an inexorably widening 'spectacle gap between subsidised theatre and sophisticated mixed-media, event-based culture'" (105). In his response to Boyden's claim, Edgar asserts that Boyden's contention "lay a presumption that text-based work was nostalgic and dusty, while non-text-based work was up-to-the-minute, trendy and popular" (105). In another one of his articles from 2005, Edgar goes further in his defence of new writing and writes "with all due respect to this work, it's clear to me that the work of writers like Ravenhill, Burke and Walsh – and, abroad, Kane – speak much more vividly and effectively to a wider audience than their non-text-based competitors" (306). More recently there has been a scholarly effort to break down the text-based/non-text-based binary. In *Text and Performance in Contemporary British Theatre* (2023), Catherine Love explains how "in the first two decades of the 21st century, the British theatre sector was

frequently framed as an artistic and ideological battlefield. On one side – depending on the preferred terminology – was 'new writing' or 'text-based theatre'; pitted against it was 'new work', 'devised theatre', or 'non-text-based theatre'" (46-47). Love outlines the definitions for the two sides of the binary that her study is exploring, she argues that "typically, 'text-based' theatre is seen to follow a national theatrical tradition of play and playwright-led drama, in which the integrity, authority and vision of the script is enshrined at the centre of the theatre-making process". Whereas, on the other hand, "'non-text-based' theatre usually describes work that is perceived to be opposed to this tradition – whether or not the work itself actually includes text" (47). For this study, however, I align myself with Edgar's defence of text-based work. He acknowledges

> that we are currently witnessing, not the death of the playwright, but of what looks like a renaissance. The continued vibrancy of new British playwriting – on a scale and of a quality unknown in any other theatre culture in the world – is a testament above all to the fact that British new plays have remained accessible to the people to whom they are designed to speak (106).

Edgar's article provides valuable context for my study through its focus on new writing premiering in larger subsidised theatres and emphasising the importance of text-based work. After tracing the historical trajectory of new writing in Britain, Edgar highlights its enduring significance as a platform for contemporary discussions of British society. In this context, my study highlights a continued desire for gay playwrights to respond to social issues pertaining to (homo)sexuality in Britain through their plays. Moreover, Edgar's defence of text-based work as speaking more vividly and effectively to a wider audience than its non-text-based

counterparts aligns with my thesis's focus on gay narratives to investigate the representation of gay men in contemporary British playwriting. In summary, Edgar's article provides valuable historical context for my study, highlighting the endurance of new writing in British theatre. His writing on the evolution and cultural significance of new British playwriting serves as a solid foundation for my project.

Gay Voices in Twenty-First Century Britain

The representation of gay men in British theatre has evolved significantly over the past sixty years, following the abolishment of censorship in the late 1960s. British theatre has proved to reflect the shifts in social attitudes towards homosexuality through plays that have explored gay narratives. From the emergence of explicit gay-themed plays in the late 1960s and 1970s, following the abolishment of censorship, to the exploration of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, and the diversity of the gay community in the 1990s, theatre has given attention to the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ rights as well as the complexities of gay experiences in Britain. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, there has been a shift towards a renewed interest in exploring the histories of gay subcultures and the gay rights movement, which is reflected by my chosen case studies. This thesis argues that British theatre continues to serve as an important site from which it is possible to explore the representation of gay men through the construction of gay characters within gay British playwriting.

In the introduction to his landmark edited collection *"We Will Be Citizens": New essays on Gay and Lesbian Theatre* (2008), theatre scholar James Fisher explains that "homosexual theatre merits much more scholarly attention than it has received in the direction of exploring and acknowledging trends and assessing the lasting value of the growing canon of gay-themed

dramatic works, productions, and performances, whether overtly political or not" (4). While the focus of Fisher's study is gay and lesbian representation in American theatre, I propose that a similar path can be traced in British theatre. This thesis is primarily about gay voices in twenty-first century British theatre and what they tell us about the articulations of sexualities and identities in contemporary Britain. In light of this, when speaking about a 'gay play' I am referring to a play that was written by an openly gay playwright and one that explores explicit gay themes and experiences. In contrast to Fisher, who proposes that gay theatre should be "understood simply to mean any play or performance in which the author or performer — whether gay or straight, man or woman — chooses to centrally explore an aspect of the homosexual experience in theatrical terms" (2), I place emphasis on the importance of exploring gay narratives that emerge explicitly from gay voices. My reasoning being that it is crucial to champion gay voices to challenge dominant cultural norms and heteronormative interpretations and assumptions regarding gay men and homosexuality. Through platforming gay voices and their narratives, British theatre will – in turn – move towards a more diverse and authentic reflection of gay identities and homosexuality more broadly. This is due to the necessity of gay stories being written by playwrights to share their lived experiences of themselves and their communities.

This thesis argues that the political potential of mainstream theatre is found in its ability to open new understandings of gay identities through prominent gay plays. Interestingly, in *Contemporary Black Playwrights: From Margins to Mainstream* (2015), Lynette Goddard notes that they "remember debating connections between plays and 'real life' and being reminded that plays are fictional portrayals of the world and should be analysed as such" when they were a drama student in the 90s (ix). They suggest that "it seemed to [them] to be

a privilege to be able to separate theatre from real life because [they] believed that [...] representations of black experience created imperative knowledge and understanding of our lives in the UK and globally" (ix). Consequently, they argue that at a minimum they like to view plays "as important tools for starting conversations about world issues and experiences" (ix), which is a position that I also adopt for this study. Through having gay voices in mainstream theatre, gay plays can enrich the theatrical landscape to highlight and platform gay voices and experiences that exist in Britain.

My choice to focus on gay male characters limits the scope of this research productively, as it is not possible to explore queer experiences in totality. My decision to focus on the representation of gay characters in contemporary gay playwriting is driven by my positionality as a gay man who grew up and lives in the UK, as well as by the idea that our identities are formed and reshaped through an amalgamation of our experiences. In a recent interview with Ravenhill (July 2023), I asked what he thought in regard to the importance of exploring gay male representation in twenty-first century British theatre. He replied by explaining that British theatre has moved towards a broader definition that he is made to feel "*should* include everything on the LGBTQ+ spectrum […] which has been good to move things forward and along". However, he also warns that he thinks that "there's a possibility that it is a little bit of an idealist idea instead of a realistic one, as a lot of gay male experiences are quite specific to gay men […] and do still happen". I am interested in exploring my case studies and the narratives that investigate and question gay experiences on the British stage. In doing so, my thesis is informed by my own navigation of queer culture and its communities, as a gay man. My analysis, therefore, is shaped by feelings, perceptions, and interactions with other gay men. More specifically, this thesis is informed by my own experiences of (gay) friendship,

love, sex, and grief, in addition to academic research. My position aligns with cultural theorist Stuart Hall's contention that identities "are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (4). Similarly, Florian Coulmas writes that:

> [e]very society constructs its own identity and perpetuates itself by maintaining and incessantly reconstructing it. Smaller units that integrate individuals as their members partake in this process, creating and recreating their identities that are in harmony or conflict with each other and the overarching national identity. On both levels, identity is a relational process of inclusion and exclusion (75).

In the context of exploring the constructions of gay voices in theatre, this implies that the representation and acceptance of gay men in theatre is subject to the changing perspectives of society. As societal attitudes towards homosexuality evolve, so too do the ways in which gay men are both portrayed and integrated into the theatrical landscape. Coulmas' quote can also be understood to highlight how representation and integration into the theatrical world is shaped by both inclusion (acceptance and recognition) and exclusion (discrimination and marginalisation). In line with both Hall and Coulmas, this study is interested in exploring the lasting effects that gay histories have on shaping present and future constructions of gay identities as they continue to evolve, as explored in my analysis of gay narratives and experiences offered in my case studies.

Visibility in the Mainstream

For this study, I am specifically interested in exploring subsidised gay plays in British mainstream theatre that were produced in nationally recognised stages such as The National Theatre, The Royal Court, Soho Theatre and Liverpool Playhouse Theatre. As such, when using the term mainstream, I am referring to the subsidised sector and not the West End, pantomime, or farce. My reason for this lies in my interest to explore gay narratives that have been publicly funded and produced on new writing stages. Moreover, my interest lies in these theatre's potential to attract both larger and often new audiences, as well as the different ways in which they can challenge and/or broaden public understandings and knowledges of gay men in Britain.

My approach chimes with Goddard's interest in the mainstream. They argue that "the context of British theatre and issues in British society are interconnected for understanding the mainstream profile and productions of plays by black British playwrights in the early twenty-first century" (207). Goddard's loose definition of the mainstream within their study accounts for plays "that were produced at prominent subsidised theatres in London". Moreover, they are interested in considering "the social and political conditions that augmented [Black playwright's] mainstream visibility" (ix). Through adopting this approach onto my analysis of gay British playwriting, I suggest that the gay narratives presented in my selected case studies have been offered to the mainstream to broaden the understanding of gay experiences in Britain. Goddard also argues that "mainstream representations of black experience [is] shaped to address dual audiences, the typical, predominantly white, middle-class theatre-going audience and the new, young, black and working-class audiences that are targeted to attend these productions" (11). I trace this approach onto mainstream representation of gay

experiences and the potential for its narrative to reach both typical mainstream audiences, as well as new, (young) queer audiences. In Goddard's study they assert how "representations of black experience can generate important knowledge and understanding of [their] lives in the UK and globally" (14). For this study, the case studies produced in these nationally recognised subsidised venues have arguably garnered considerable attention, highlighting their importance towards broadening and extending the knowledge of understanding of gay experiences in Britain.

Writing about mainstream theatre in Britain, John Bull begins his chapter by acknowledging that it is "such a major feature of the cultural landscape in Britain that it scarcely ever merits discussion as an idea, and yet it is significantly absent as an entry in the four most substantial contemporary dictionaries of the theatre". In light of this, he argues that "mainstream's apparent transparency as a concept is, however, highly problematic, and contentious" (326). Moreover, Bull explains how the mainstream "does not distinguish it[self] from commercial populist theatre – the pantomime, the accessible musical, the farce – any more than it does from the products of the subsidised theatre" (327). This is, in part, due the fact that "mainstream theatre is a constant, but it is a constant that is always changing in response to its changing context" (327). This definition is similar to Patrice Pavis' discussion of the mainstream in *The Routledge Dictionary of Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2016). Pavis suggests how "often a subculture, after resisting the dominant culture, ends up being recuperated by it" (131). Bull also refers to this characteristic of the mainstream to that of popular music, "in that it is continually altering its shape by assimilating elements originally conceived as alien, or even in opposition, to it" (327). In this sense, mainstream theatre is constantly adapting itself as a means to ensure its dominance in society. This can be seen

through its complex relationship with gay representation following the abolishment of censorship in 1968 – a history that I explore in greater detail in the following context chapter. The idea of the mainstream forever altering its flow is also imaginatively captured in Pavis' entry for the term, which states:

> [b]e that as it may, the mainstream is also where the stream is strongest, where, if caught in the middle, artist-swimmers are most likely to be swept away or drown. But it can also be the major trend in thinking, of a movement, of a medium, the sum of small streams that use the force of the mainstream to be defined in contrast with it and to progress by challenging it (131).

In *Making the Radical Palatable* (2016), Jacob Juntunen defends "the importance of mainstream theatre's role in reforming and redefining the dominant ideology in the United States, demonstrating mainstream theatre's crucial place of activism within the culture industry". I suggest that Juntunen's following contentions can also be applied to mainstream theatre in the UK. For example, Juntunen "advocates for a rethinking of the supposedly conservative nature of mainstream theatre" (3). In this sense, gay playwrights possess the potential to work to create and sustain an ecology that is more inclusive, diverse, and better represents the full spectrum of identity and experience in Britain through having their plays in the mainstream. To borrow Juntunen's contention, "mainstream theatre can integrate a palatable version of radical performance's politics into the dominant ideology" (4). Moreover, Fisher explains how "gays and lesbians found in the theatre a means of expressing their hidden lives; the stage proved to be a venue in which pleas for tolerance and demands for equality could be heard, and what academics refer to as 'teaching moments' could educate

both sympathetic and hostile audiences" (2-3). Similarly, I suggest that gay plays offer up the 'space' to witness and work through, process, and understand ongoing themes and current debates in relation to homosexuality through the narratives presented, that – in turn – inform cultural understandings of gay men. More specifically, I explore the ways in which gay playwrights utilise their voices – and make use of their distinct lived experiences – to construct these teaching moments for British audiences. I am interested in the ways that contemporary gay British playwrights write to educate or challenge cultural discourse through their narratives and constructions of their gay characters to *both* straight and gay audiences in the mainstream.

In the twenty-first century, mainstream British theatre has witnessed significant developments in its historical context and approach to gay representation, contributing to increased LGBTQ+ visibility, challenging societal norms, and promoting nuanced portrayals of gay identities on the British stage. In his turn-of the-century article, "Whatever Happened to Gay Theatre" (2000), Brian Roberts considers the "fluctuations in gay visibility, and asks what happened to the gay theatre that sprang to prominence in the 'eighties". Roberts comments that "ironically, as general awareness of AIDS increased, the reality of its effects on gay men seemed to decrease, in both the public and government consciousness, to the point where the subsidy provided to many AIDS charities has […since] been cut, in the misguided belief that the crisis is over" (177). Through this misunderstanding of assuming the crisis for homosexuals is over, Roberts explains how this led to "yet another example of the 'now you see us, now you don't' syndrome, where increased visibility leads to a paradoxical disappearance, which has been described as a 'de-gaying' process" (177). This can otherwise be understood as the assimilation of gay narratives that are in turn 'diluted' as they enter the

mainstream. In light of this, Roberts wishes to "consider the tension within gay subcultural production between the ideas of assimilation and the [gay] ghetto and those of confrontation and opposition" (179). Roberts goes on to suggest that work "influenced by the liberation politics of the early Gay Movement, by the oppositional politics of queer, or by the urge to create exciting live theatre which challenges our position, and which is created out of a gay sensibility – by which I mean a way of understanding the world from a politicized gay perspective" (179). Through my analysis, I am also interested in looking at the ways in which contemporary gay playwrights resist being assimilated into the mainstream and instead use their gay voice to interrogate the tensions related to the understanding of gay experiences – through their offering of narratives from their gay perspective. Roberts argues for the importance "to move beyond the ghetto of the gay subculture to challenge the drift into assimilation and invisibility by articulating the concerns of a gay minority through a politicized gay sensibility and a theatricalized voice which speaks to more than just a gay audience" (184). Through an exploration of gay works from the eighties up until the new millennium, Roberts answers his own question to claim that gay theatre in Britain "grew up and become more than the 'affirming gay drama'" (178). He also writes that gay theatre in contemporary Britain can be seen as a result of a "post-AIDS consciousness" (178). I am interested therefore, in investigating contemporary playwriting that exists within this consciousness that Roberts acknowledges.

Building on Roberts contention, Enric Monforte suggests that queer contemporary theatre has "inherited the legacy of the gay theatre produced in the post-Stonewall period [and] these texts have digested and transformed such an inheritance, adapting to their times and critically responding to them" (152). In doing so, Monforte alludes to queer contemporary theatre

moving in the direction that Roberts had called for in his article. For Roberts, the "theatre continues to be a place where vital issues within and beyond the gay community can be expressed in a range of forms – magical and moving, shocking and humorous, sensuous and thought provoking" (184). Historically, the portrayal of gay characters was often limited to stereotypes, where gay characters would often have unhappy or miserable endings that sometimes result in death, as explored in more detail in the following chapter. However, in recent decades, there has been a conscious effort to move beyond these stereotypes and present more authentic and multidimensional portrayals, which is explored in greater detail in my context chapter and is continued by my analysis of the chosen case studies investigating gay playwriting in contemporary Britain.

With the introduction of The Civil Partnership Act in 2004-5, same-sex unions were legalised in England and Wales, sparking open debate on homosexuality in public life and in mainstream cultural discourse. Godiwala suggests that "the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries have seen a sea of change in attitudes and laws pertaining to the practice of homosexuality in Britain" (2). She explains that

> homosexuality becomes recognised in its broadest sense of legality and thus enters mainstream discourse. At the current time, negative attitudes to homosexuality will linger in the social consciousness even as these newly recognised social groups emerge to take their place alongside the mainstream of heterosexuality to establish and determine new, equal status, inter-group relations (6).

For Godiwala, “legalisation [is seen] as most importantly a step toward *the social acceptance of groups considered minorities* (low-status groups with low self-esteem and increased inter-group anxiety”. Moreover, she explains that “low-status groups which have been without *a recognised voice* or agency and thus far powerless to exert an influence except on the fringes of social acceptance need legal and state recognition to live in a society of freedom, tolerance and equal rights” (6). Considering this, the representation of gay characters within the mainstream contributes to LGBTQ+ visibility as a means to build recognition between the characters (and the identities they represent) and the state. In doing so, British theatre can begin to work towards more authentic and diverse portrays of ‘low-status groups’ by serving as a platform for queer individuals to see themselves reflected on stage, fostering a sense of validation, and belonging. As the mainstream reflects dominant cultural, social, and political narratives and practices that shape the ideals, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours of society, it is important to create a shared sense of community and identity between individuals and groups in society. In this sense, I am interested in the ways in which gay playwrights construct and offer their narratives and gay characters to the mainstream and how they inform and extend cultural understandings of gay men in Britain.

There has been a tendency in the last decade for an increase of representation of gay identities in mainstream entertainment (Television, Music, Sport, and Film) to better depict and explore the wide spectrum of gay experience. For example, there is a stronger cultural desire for gay actors to play gay characters, as traditionally these roles would go to more recognised heterosexual actors. However, more recently it is preferred that actors with lived experience relating to the character should receive the role. This plays a vital role in normalising diverse sexual orientations and promoting their acceptance within society. Over

time, the dominant cultural narratives in relation to gay men in contemporary Britain has shifted. The most persistent ones that are very much present in contemporary society include the notion of gay culture or lifestyle that is prescribed by certain stereotypes such as the notion that gay men are promiscuous – an idea that I discuss in more detail when analysing my case studies. More recently, the narrative surrounding gay men has shifted to focus on issues of representation and visibility in mainstream culture. Arguably, this has been driven by the success of television shows such as *Queer Eye* (and its subsequent revival) and *Ru Paul's Drag Race*, which have helped to usher gay culture into the mainstream. There has also been a call towards the importance of gay histories, as explored through Russel T Davies' *It's a Sin* (2021), a drama series set in London during 1981 to 1991 that follows five friends during the HIV/AIDS crisis. In this study, I turn to mainstream British theatre to trace the extent to which the importance of looking to the past to inform the present and future is utilised by gay playwrights through their de/construction of gay characters to reflect the ongoing struggle for visibility, understanding and acceptance in the twenty-first century.

De/Construction (Queer Readings)

In his chapter, Monforte suggests that contemporary gay plays "can be said to bear witness to the complex, painful (de)construction of the homosexual subject" (152). He claims that "in the last decade, a number of plays have opened on British stages that scrutinize the complicated fashioning of gay/lesbian/queer identities. Monforte focuses on the ways in which Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Campbell's *The Pride* and Bartlett's *Cock* (2009) "pose relevant, thought-provoking, even diverging questions about queer identities both in present-day Western societies and in those belonging to times past". He draws on the thinking of Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks who have "studied the construction of

sexuality at different levels (medical, legal, social, cultural, historical, among others)" (152). Citing Foucault's seminal contention of "sexuality as an 'historical construct'" (153) and Week's claim of the individual being "'a product of social forces, an ensemble of social relations'" (154), Monforte notes the different ways in which (homo)sexuality and identities are constructed. In doing so, Monforte cites Weeks to explain that "when approaching homosexuality, what matters is not the inherent nature of the act but the social construction of meanings around that activity, and the individual response to that" (154). My thesis adopts a similar approach to the analysis of the de/construction of the homosexual subject through the representation of gay characters offered by gay playwrights. I am interested in identifying and analysing the different meanings associated the ways that the construction – and subsequent deconstruction – of gay characters offers new understandings and perspectives on gay identity in the British mainstream.

For this study, the term de/construction is predominately used to describe my three-pronged approach to analysing theatrical representation of gay characters. The first approach explores how gay identities in British theatre have been represented by gay playwrights through their *construction* of gay characters. Through this, I identify the ways in which gay playwrights respond to, or reject, cultural discourse pertaining to gay men. Secondly, I investigate how via that construction, gay characters are shown to be *deconstructed* throughout the play's narratives, highlighting the different ways in which their identity can be reshaped following new experiences, understanding and knowledges – as witnessed by the reader/audience. This allows for a consideration of the ways that gay characters are shown to be constant state of flux in response to the dramatic action unfolding in the playtext – and harks back to Monforte's use of his de/construction in his chapter. Finally, I deconstruct gay characters

through my own *readings* of them through the theoretical lens of queer theory and the lens of my own lived experiences as a gay man in Britain that both, in turn, shape the structure of the analysis chapters and thesis more broadly. As shown through my analysis, I argue that gay identity – as shown through the representation of gay character – is constantly going through a cycle of construction and deconstruction.

It is important to note that the term 'deconstruction' was famously theorised by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. The term has become synonymous with poststructuralist thinking and approaches to reading text. Derrida's concept of deconstruction refers to the ever-changing relationship between 'text' and 'meaning'. At its core, Derrida's deconstruction centres around the idea that language is unstable and that words possess multiple meanings. In *Of Grammatology* (1967) – where Derrida's ideas of deconstruction originated – he infamously claimed that "there is nothing outside of the text" (158). The translation of this quote is often misinterpreted to privilege only the text; however, Derrida rejects this interpretation and argues that everything is a text that can be deconstructed. In the entry for 'deconstruction' for Pavis' *Routledge Dictionary for Contemporary Theatre and Performance*, Pavis defines deconstruction as "a process that consists in undoing the text's hegemonic system, by multiple readings and shifting interpretations" (50). Whilst these perspectives of deconstruction chime with some queer theory approaches that I am sympathetic towards – I am instead using the term de/construction to refer to my own close readings of the construction (putting together) and the deconstruction (pulling apart) of gay characters in contemporary gay British playwriting and the interpretations and knowledges that emerge from this process, as explained above.

For Nicholas Royle, the term deconstruction is “an earthquake” that “is about shaking up, dislocating, and transforming the verbal, conceptual, psychological, textual, aesthetic, historical, ethical, social, political, and religious landscape. Its concern is to disturb, to de-sediment, to deconstruct” (25). Additionally, Steven Seidman writes how “[d]econstruction aims to disturb or displace the power of hierarchies by showing their arbitrary, social and political character (125)”. The idea of disturbing also resonates with the approaches and application of reading the representation of gay characters through the lens of queer theory. Seidman also suggests that “[q]ueer theory represents a powerful force in rethinking homosexuality as a culture and politics” (118). Similarly, this thesis reads the de/construction of gay characters via the lens of queer theory to explore the ways in which British contemporary gay playwriting can open up alternative and/or develop understandings of gay men via their constructed narratives and the ways in which these representations speak to dominant cultural discourse and theories surrounding gay men.

Queer theory is widely known to be unfixed and slippery in terms of its definition. My intention here, however, is not to pin down a singular definition but, rather, to offer an insight into how the ongoing discussions within queer theory can serve as a framework for my analysis within this study. Additionally, this thesis explores how gay playwriting can open up, challenge or update theorisations of gay men in queer theory. In the remainder of this section, I outline the ways in which perspectives from queer theory inform the queer readings of my case studies. This study draws on queer theory as a tool to examine the ways in which social norms, power structures and cultural narratives shape the representation of gay characters. To borrow Ruth Goldman’s description, this project draws on queer theory as “a theoretical perspective from which to challenge the normative” (170). Through a queer lens, I ‘read’ gay

characters in contemporary British playwriting to explore how their representation speaks to the cultural discourse pertaining to gay love, desire and expression that are often supressed or marginalised in a heteronormative society. This thesis explores different modes of representation for gay men in twenty first century playwriting. Through this, this study is interested in offering new ways of exploring gay characters and their relation to offering new readings of gay identity.

In her 1993 essay "Critically Queer", Judith Butler claims that:

> if the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favour of terms that do that political work more effectively (19).

David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Muñoz respond to Butler's assertion in the introduction of their edited collection *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?* (2005). They write that "the operations of queer critique [...] can neither be decided on in advance nor be depended on in the future. The reinvention of the term is contingent on its potential obsolescence, one necessarily at odds with any fortification of its critical reach in advance or any static notion of its presumed audience and participants" (3). This also reflects Lee Edelman's claim that queer theory is a "site of permanent becoming" (348). This idea chimes with the different ways in which gay characters within the selected case studies are

represented as being in a constant process of becoming through the deconstruction and construction of their identity. As through the play's narratives they are shown to move from one state of being or thinking about themselves as another, in a process that has no conclusion or end – always connected to a gay past and always looking towards a queer future. In this sense, each play and each gay male character upholds in practice exactly what can be said by Edelman regarding queer theory, – each "curves endlessly toward a realisation that its realisation remains impossible" (348). The scope of queer theory is fluid and ever-changing, constantly escaping definition and fixity. When drawing on queer theory to analyse the representation of gay characters in playwriting, there is opportunity to see the different ways to which these representations can subvert, disrupt, or challenge dominant heteronormative discourse to create multi-faceted representations of gay men. Through the use of queer theory and de/construction, I investigate how gay playwrights challenge dominant cultural narratives and offer a range of gay narratives. Ultimately, this thesis is concerned with mapping out new understandings that emerge from gay playwriting in twenty-first century Britain.

Similar to Edelman, Donald E. Hall describes queer theory's "disruptive potential – of never fully leaving behind the past", whilst working "toward a differing (not wholly different) future" as the driving force that "sustains queer theorizations and activisms" (71). As I go on to explore in more detail in my analysis chapter, this contention is echoed through my case studies as seen by the tendency for gay playwrights to look to the past to interrogate the present. Hall goes on to explain that through "examining texts of selfhood from the past, we are at the very least (and perhaps at the very best) empowered by an awareness that what we see before us today has not always been, does not always have to be, and may or may not

'be' for all people at the present moment" (184). Additionally, in *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (2004), David M. Halperin claims that "to live in the present is indeed to inhabit simultaneously a multitude of historical worlds" (21). With this in mind, my study seeks to explore how the construction of gay characters in contemporary gay playwriting can be influenced or shaped by gay histories and how their construction and deconstruction can be better understood through applying a queer lens. My chosen case studies provide the opportunity for fruitful analysis in this respect as the majority of the chosen texts shift between different time periods throughout their narratives. I argue that through this, gay British playwrights highlight the importance of history in relation to the de/construction of gay men in Britain, as represented through their gay characters. This approach to playwriting chimes with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assertion that "historizing and 'deconstructing' are ways of differently imaging our future as well as understanding our past" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 114). This idea is reflected in the recent tendency for the revival of twentieth century gay plays on the twenty-first century stage, which is explored in greater detail in Chapter Three. I am interested, therefore, in examining the narratives that gay playwrights offer up and the potential influence they might have in relation to future explorations of gay characters in the twenty-first century, as well as broadening queer theory's understanding of gay identity in the twenty-first century. To borrow Giffney's conclusion: "this is why we keep returning again and again to queer theory: for the promise of a future not defined in terms of the past, for the possibility of becoming other to ourselves" (26).

Case Studies

For this study, I have selected five gay plays from the fifteen-year period between 2001 and 2016, to map out the representation of gay characters in the mainstream from the new

millennium to when I began undertaking this research project. Most importantly for this study, most of my case studies were selected for the interest, exploration, and utilisation of history in relation to cultural understandings of gay men through the playwright's construction of their gay characters and narratives. This thesis is rooted in how gay identity and experience is shaped across the spectrum of time (past, present, future) — on everything from a micro level to a macro level — within lines, scenes, acts, plays, years, decades, generations, and centuries. I critically examine how a character is represented and how they think of themselves from one scene to the next. I argue that the playwrights' construction of gay characters draws attention to the similarities and differences between past and present constructions of gay identity to offer a space for deeper explorations and understandings of more varied and inclusive understandings of gay identities for the future. The majority of my chosen case studies jump between different decades in Britain within their narratives, allowing for the playwright's offering of varied perspectives on gay identities in Britain informed by the blending of the past and the present. In this sense, the narrative structure of my case studies further signals the importance of queer histories regarding the construction of gay character. My decision for selecting these plays aligns with my desire to critically analyse works that have premiered in recognised national theatres and received funding, thus indicating cultural interest and the potential to attract large audiences. Moreover, through my intergenerational sample, I am able to survey gay playwriting that premiered at different mainstream venues in Britain. There is also a crucial dynamic about the plays I have selected and the venues they were presented in — the representation of gay experience and narratives on the one hand, and the presumably different lived experience of the majority of audiences seeing those plays in those venues on the other.

Through examining mainstream productions, this thesis aims to offer insight into the dominant narratives and representations of gay characters in contemporary British playwriting and how they reflect broader social, political, and cultural issues. I am, however, acutely aware that all five of my playwrights are white cis men and therefore not fully reflective of twenty-first century Britain. This is strongly indicative of the limitations of mainstream theatre as an ecology itself, which is centred around white (often middle-class) men. Other plays that were produced in the subsidised sector that fall outside the remit of this study, as they do not explore the notion of time and gay histories are: Jonathan Harvey's *Out in the Open* (Hamstead Theatre, 2001); Mike Bartlett's *Cock* (Royal Court Theatre, 2009); and Jake Brunger's *Four Play* (Old Vic Theatre, 2016). Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of all of the gay plays produced during the 15-year period I am focusing on, it is indicative of the lack of diversity amongst gay playwriting within this timeframe. On the other hand, having the writings of notable gay playwrights like Ravenhill, Harvey, and Campbell on mainstream British stages paves the way for more diverse queer playwrights to step forward and offer their writing for mainstream engagement and consumption.

For example, in the wake of the rise of racialised violence and the subsequent Black Lives Movement in 2020, there has been a trickling of gay plays written by playwrights from the global majority finding their way on to the mainstream stage in Britain. For example, Waleed Akhtar's *P Word* (2022) explores the parallel lives of two gay Pakistani men – one of which is British and the other who is a refugee from Pakistan. Additionally, Danny Lee Wytner's *Black Superhero* (2023) was described by the Royal Court as "a long overdue depiction of the Black queer experience". More recently in 2023, Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* is being revived in London, Leeds, and Manchester with two actors from the global majority playing Ste and

Jamie for its thirtieth-year anniversary. Commenting on his new production, in the description of the play on Leeds Playhouse website, Director Anthony Simpson-Pike says:

> *Beautiful Thing* is an iconic queer story that holds a special place in so many people's hearts. Many people saw their own stories on stage and screen for the first time. In its 30th anniversary year, I feel excited for people who look like me to see their own stories reflected on stage too, to feel that same stirring of recognition in this seminal piece. Black queer people have always been around, this beautiful story of discovering your true self and falling in love belongs to all of us.

This is indicative of the recent move towards more diverse representation for queer people of colour in British gay plays. While it is not within the scope of this study – as these plays fall outside the time period I am looking at – I am very interested to explore the voices that have previously been left out of the mainstream until recently in future research and creative projects. In this respect, I have recently received Arts Council funding to develop as a queer South Asian playwright and will be working under the mentorship of playwrights: Waleed Akhtar, Iman Qureshi, and Mark Ravenhill; to develop my first play and redress the identified lack of queer South Asian voices in the mainstream and theatre ecology more broadly. For this study, however, my interest to explore the representations of gay men in the mainstream lies in my desire to critically engage with the dominant cultural narratives that have been put forward for mainstream audiences between 2001 and 2016.

Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House* premiered at the National Theatre in London in 2001. The play seeks to interrogate sexuality, gender identity and commerce in relation to the

construction of gay cultural identities in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Theatre reviewer Philip Fisher explained that the "decision of the National to stage a play that will be distasteful to many members of its regular audiences is brave and to be applauded". *Mother Clap's Molly House* is a play of two acts, with the first being set in the eighteenth century and the second mainly in the twenty-first. Act One begins after Mrs Tull's husband dies, which leaves her as the sole owner of their dress shop. As the desire for money heightens, Mrs Tull opens a Molly House[2] and begins making dresses and hosting parties for gay characters for profit. The second act takes place in the midst of a twenty-first century gay sex party, exploring gay characters' appetite for sex, drugs, and personal pleasure. As the second act unfolds, characters from the eighteenth-century bleed into the present. Through this parallel, Ravenhill highlights the similarities and differences between the gay characters in both eras. Ravenhill's play explores the historical links between gay characters of the past and those of the present in relation to the rise in commerce and the search for love – an idea that I explore in my analysis chapters in more detail. The comparison is made more apparent through several actors doubling across the centuries, which symbolises an intrinsic connection between past and present-day constructions of gay identities. On the back cover of the play text, *Mother Clap's Molly House* is described as a "a celebration of the diversity of human sexuality, an exploration of our need to form families, and a fascinating insight into a hidden chapter in London's history". Through delving into the unexplored histories of London, the importance of Ravenhill's play lies in its engagement with societal understandings of gay history offered to the audiences of one of the most prominent stages in London, The National Theatre's Lyttelton Theatre. As explained by Ravenhill in our recent interview (July 2023), one

[2] A term used in 18th- and 19th-century Britain for the meeting place of homosexual men.

of the most important things about *Mother Clap's Molly House* "was the number of bums on seats [as] you're guaranteed it's going to be seen by the masses […and] which playwright wouldn't want that?". Ravenhill explains, in the introduction to his collection of plays, that they are "not an attempt to study the world, pin it down and hand it over in a parcel for you. They're rather a guess, an approximation of what might be happening out there, and an invitation to you to go out and interrogate the world and your place in it" (xii). Ravenhill describes his play as a "fantasia on historical themes which […] asks fresh questions about sexuality and the marketplace" (x). Moreover, Monforte describes Ravenhill's play as being "concerned with the theme of parenting, the creation of families and the broader state of society" (166), an idea that I explore in Chapter Five.

In summary, I will analyse a play that celebrates the diversity of human sexuality, explores the need to form families, and provides insight into hidden histories is important because it contributes to societal understanding, challenges stereotypes, addresses relevant social and political issues, offers historical context, showcases artistic expression, fosters empathy, and provides educational and entertainment value. Such plays demonstrably shape cultural attitudes and promoting inclusivity and acceptance.

Campbell's debut play, *The Pride,* explores themes of identity, shame, and love in relation to the ever-changing attitudes towards sexuality in Britain between the late 1950s and the early twenty-first century. *The Pride* was produced in 2008 for the Royal Court Theatre and was performed in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs to critical acclaim, as signalled through being awarded a Laurence Olivier Award. As well as this, Campbell won the John Whiting Award for Best New Play and The Critics' Circle prize for Most Promising Playwright, further highlighting

his visibility as an openly gay playwright. In 2010, *The Pride* made its US debut in New York and was awarded the GLAAD award for Best New Play. Since then, Campbell's play has been produced in theatres worldwide as well as being revived in London at Trafalgar Studios in 2013, directed for the second time by Jamie Lloyd. *The Pride*'s multiple transfers and subsequent revival signify the play's relevance and resonance with mainstream audiences. Set in 1958 and 2008, *The Pride* presents two versions of Philip, Sylvia, and Oliver, who are all in their mid-thirties and played by the same actors in both moments. In 1958, Philip is a middle-class estate agent married to children's writer Sylvia. Oliver is an illustrator who is working with Sylvia on her latest book. The play opens with Oliver meeting Philip for the first time as all three characters get ready to go out in London. As the scene progresses it is made apparent through their dialogue and their silences that Philip and Oliver are sexually and romantically attracted to each other. During this first section, Campbell interrogates the ways in which his gay characters negotiate their sexuality in relation to the backdrop of the oppressive 1950s. In 2008, Oliver is a freelance journalist who has an unstable relationship with Philip and an addiction to anonymous sex. Sylvia is a mutual friend of Philip and Oliver, who supports them through the navigation of their contemporary gay identities. Through the oscillation between the socially repressive 1950s and the self-repressive twenty-first century, Campbell also offers up intrinsic links between the past and the present in relation to the formation of gay identities.

In an article for *The Independent,* Campbell explains that *The Pride* focuses on his characters' "sense of self, on their identities and confidence". He goes on to say that after watching "an endless parade of negative gay stereotypes who either ended up dead or doomed to a miserable existence" in theatre, he wanted to write a play that explored "the yoke that one

must throw off if one is to grow and ultimately to know oneself; the struggle generations of gay men and women have fought to feel a genuine sense of pride in themselves". Campbell also notes that the structure of his play emerged from his thinking about "cultural influences and the effect they [ha]d on gay identity over the years". Moreover, he explains his desire to "allude to a connectedness" between the two time periods. Writing for the *New York Times,* Ben Brantley describes *The Pride*'s form as "a diptych portrait of homosexuality then and now". Monforte suggests that "paradoxically, the outcome of the struggle for gay rights has produced a hedonistic subculture not preoccupied in the least with transforming oppressed identities and effecting more profound changes in society" (159), an idea that is also prevalent in Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House*. Campbell concludes in his article that the form of his play allows for the exploration of "how the personal and the historical are connected within the context of gay identity over the generations, and also to mine the territory of an individual's relationship to the society he or she has emerged from and what he has inherited from the ones that went before". This relationship between the personal and the historical is central to my exploration of gay character in this thesis.

Harvey's *Canary* is a three-act play that moves between the 1960s and the present day in order to explore the lives of two homosexual couples: Tom and Billy, and Russell and Mickey. In 1960s Liverpool, the characters Tom and Billy explore their homosexuality in secret before deciding to go off on their separate journeys. In 1980s London, the play follows two gay runaways – Russell and Mickey – who are in search for a place to call home. In 2010 London, Police Commander Tom and his family are dealing with the consequences of decades of secrets, grief, and shame. The play premiered at the Liverpool Playhouse in 2010 in a co-

production by Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, English Touring Theatre and Hampstead Theatre.

The name of the play references a quotation by gay activist Peter Tatchell, who once said that "women and gay people are the litmus test of whether a society is democratic and respecting human rights. We are the canaries in the mine" (qtd. in Harvey 3). Considering this as the driving force behind his play, Harvey explains that his passion to write it was born from his interest in "the gay experience" (*Canary,* "Introduction" 3). He writes about his desire to thank and remember "the lesbians and gay men who went before [him] and fought for the relative liberties" that he has today. Harvey argues that his play serves as a warning for the younger generation of gay men in that they "should not become complacent" (5). Through its non-linear progression of events in time, Harvey constructs a narrative that highlights the nuance of each relationship and the ripple effect that previous political events in history – most notably the impact of AIDS – have on the characters in his play. For my study, I am particularly interested in the different ways in which Harvey portrays the narratives and experiences of gay characters over a fifty-year time span. In my analysis, I also investigate Harvey's exploration of family in relation to the gay characters in his play. Considering this, I suggest that Harvey offers up an insight into how politics, society, history, and family work together towards the construction of his gay characters.

Donnelly's *The Pass* follows the professional career and personal life of Jason, a closeted Premiership footballer. The dramatic action of the play unfolds in three different hotel rooms spaced over the course of twelve years. Time, in this play, is framed through the mentioning of Jason's age in the stage directions at the beginning of each Act, thus reaffirming him as the

central character. It is through these temporal shifts that Donnelly explores three different 'versions' of Jason. The play explores themes of self-discovery, shame, and pride, specifically in relation to Jason's desires and performances, both professional and personal.

The Pass premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 2014. Following its success, Donnelly adapted his stage play for the screen in 2016. Donnelly was nominated for a BAFTA award in the category of Outstanding Debut by a British Writer in 2017. In an interview on the Royal Court Theatre's YouTube Channel, director John Tiffany explains that the "idolising of footballers […] has been going on for the past decade". He suggests that it draws attention to the "desiring" of these "idols in a heterosexual world". He describes the desiring of a footballer's "physicality" as opposed to just their "agility" in football, therefore highlighting a link between homosexual desire within a typically heterosexual sport. Writing for *The Arts Desk*, Matt Wolf describes *The Pass* as play "that traffics ostensibly in the world of football only to widen out into a corrosive study in psychic implosion and self-destruction". In another article from the same publication, Tom Birchenough explains that Donnelly's play "brings home the nuance of Donnelly's title, introducing the work's twin themes, football and sexuality", which is explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Fitzpatrick's *This Much* interrogates desire, truth, and self-discovery in relation to gay romantic relationships in the twenty-first century. Premiered in 2016 at the Soho Theatre in London, the play showcases the story of a gay couple as they navigate the rising pressures of homonormativity and, consequently, the institution of marriage now that it is an option for same-sex couples. *This Much* presents Gar's relationship with his long-term partner Anthony, his relationship with new friend Albert, and his relationship with himself. In her review for

Exeunt Magazine, Catherine Love proposes that the piece is about the "*idea* of what we want versus what we *actually* want". In his one-act play, Fitzpatrick has no scene numbers but instead labels his new 'scenes' with a new location. Through this structure, I argue that Fitzpatrick draws attention to the different ways in which 'moments' shown in the play – both on stage and off – shape Gar's sense of ideals, beliefs, and views on relationships, himself, and his future.

During an interview with Fitzpatrick in 2017, I asked him what influenced him to write his play. He explains that at its core, the play was about the "imprint of experiences [that] have shaped [him]" and how through identifying these instances, one can find "hidden parts of [one]self". Talking about his own gay identity – which, he comments, helped form the original basis of his characters – he said that his "*fucked-up-ness* in relationships was probably not just to do with [him] but was partly a symptom of growing up in a society which had historically criminalised and stigmatised those relationships". It is precisely this link between the construction and deconstruction of gay characters and (gay) histories that I investigate in my analysis chapters.

The Way Ahead

Following the queer 'readings' of my chosen case studies, I identify and explore three common themes. These formed the structure of my analysis chapters: first, the importance of queer temporalities in relation to past, present, and future constructions of gay characters. Second, gay shame and its effect on construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of gay characters. Third, challenging homonormativity and its effects on gay characters in contemporary British playwriting.

Chapter One examines events that led up to, and influenced, explicit representations of gay identity in British theatre following the Theatres Act 1968. The chapter maps out significant events in British theatre and history that have contributed to an increased representation of gay men on stage. Through drawing on this body of literature, the chapter offers the historical narrative – surrounding the representations of gay men – that contextually frames my thesis.

In Chapter Two I identify and analyse the relationship between queer temporalities and alternative subcultures that emerge in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride and Canary*. I draw upon Jack Halberstam's writing on queer temporalities and subcultures and Sedgwick's seminal notion of the closet to theoretically frame my chapter. Through this approach, I outline three emerging themes: 'homocuriosity', 'Runaway Gay' and 'Gays™'. Building on Sedgwick's oeuvre on the closet and homosociality, I propose a new term: 'homocuriosity'. Homocuriosity refers to the deep-rooted curiosity that is displayed by the gay characters constructed by Ravenhill, Harvey, and Campbell. I argue that this proposed notion of homocuriosity acts as a disruptive force that in turn draws away from the dominant pull of heteronormativity. In the first section, I argue that homocuriosity can be both productive and corrosive towards to the development and understanding of homosexuality. I explore how homocuriosity both leads to, and effects, homosexual policing, homosexual love, and homosexual violence. The next section in Chapter Two centres around Halberstam's concept of a "stretched out adolescence" (153). I argue that alternative queer spaces are created as a direct result of (young) gay characters exploring spaces away from their heteronormative familial home. I use the term 'runaway gay' to embody the desire and/or necessity for young gay men to leave their (parental) home to find shelter and the freedom to explore their

sexuality/identity within a newly found queer subculture. The third – and final – section builds on Halberstam's suggestion that for many young gays and lesbians "'labelling' becomes a sign of oppression they have happily cast off in order to move into a pluralistic world of infinite diversity" (19). I argue that through this rejection of identity categories and labels, these characters are written to ironically align themselves to their own collective identity group: Gays™. In this section, I investigate the representation of gay characters in relation to my offering of Gays™ as an identity and a subculture.

In Chapter Three, I synthesise contributions from *Gay Shame* (2010) – edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub – to establish a theoretical framework to identify and analyse notions of gay shame in *The Pride, Canary,* and *The Pass*. In doing so, I propose five phases of the representation of gay shame in these plays to better encapsulate and explain the processes of gay experience. These five phases of gay shame are: Internalised Ambivalence, Societal Shame, Familial Shame, Gay Guilt and Gay Pride. I am not suggesting, however, that these five phases of shame are the only phases nor that they occur in chronological order. Rather, I explore how these five stages of gay shame that I have identified can be used to further the understanding of gay characters in British playwriting. My readings of "shame" align with Sedgwick's assertion that: "transformational shame, is performance, […] theatrical performance" (*Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* 51). In this chapter, I present a range of examples that reflect Sedgwick's claim that shame harbours transformative possibilities.

The first three sections of Chapter Three focus on the process that shame takes regarding the formation of gay identities through internalised shame, shame inflicted by society and shame

cast by family. Gay Guilt explores the negative connotations that pertain to shame, highlighting the ways in which gay guilt has the faculty to inflict pain and violence, as shown through the narratives offered by these gay playwrights. I propose that these playwrights show how gay guilt can be a residual effect of shame and has the potential to deconstruct and construct gay identity. The final section, Gay Pride, interrogates the notion of pride in relation to gay shame. Through this, I argue that pride is not the absolution of shame, but a symbiotic associate of shame that work together with it to (re)shape gay identity. Through the offering of these five phases of gay shame and outlining their effect(s) on gay characters, I suggest that gay British playwrights create (a) pedagogical space(s) – through the gay narratives of their plays – to rehearse for a queer(er) future.

Chapter Four investigates the representation of homonormativity – the idea of constructing and enforcing a heteronormative matrix for LGBTQ+ identities and their communities – in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride*, *Canary* and *This Much*. The chapter explores the extent to which gay British playwrights challenge a homonormative matrix for their gay characters. In doing so, this chapter is divided into three sections: Gay Marriage, No Future and Queer Utopias. Each section explores ways in which gay characters in contemporary British theatre respond to different ideals belonging to homonormativity.

The first section, Gay Marriage, outlines the emergence of this institution, both on and off stage, in relation to homonormativity. In *The Drama of Marriage: Gay Playwrights/Straight Unions from Oscar Wilde to the Present* (2012), Clum explains that the issue of gay marriage splits the gay community "into the groups wanting the right to share in all institutions of [...] society (assimilationists) and those who want lesbians and gay men to be 'queer', outside of

and resistant toward such normative institutions as marriage" (8). Building on this, I analyse the ways in which *This Much* presents and explores this tension. The second section, No Future – separated in two sub-sections: Sinthomosexual and The Child – is structured around Edelman's theorisation of the sinthomosexual and its effect on reproductive futurism, the gay community and homonormativity. I identify and analyse the representation of sinthomosexuals and children in my chosen plays, in accordance with Edelman's thesis. The final section, Queer Utopia, emerges as a result of the first two. I synthesise José Esteban Muñoz's notion of a queer utopia and Jill Dolan's theorisation of hope and its relation to the construction of utopia. Through this approach, I explore and outline the mise-en-scène of gay utopian futures that are constructed in the final scene of each play, through their blending of past and present temporalities. I argue that through the final scene, each playwright "provides[s] us with access to a world that should be, that could be, and that will be" (Dolan 64). I conclude that utopian performatives in gay British playwriting push queer communities forward as they "render potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility not a fixed schema" (Muñoz 97). I suggest that through these performatives, contemporary gay British playwriting both challenges and rejects the rise of homonormativity.

Through these chapters, my thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted representation of gay characters in contemporary British playwriting, considering their engagement with queer temporalities, experiences of shame, and responses to homonormativity. I argue that these critical examinations contribute to a deeper understanding towards gay men and their communities in twenty-first century Britain.

Chapter One: British Gay (Theatre) Histories

To begin this chapter, I draw attention to one of the leading critics of the British mainstream: Michael Billington. In 2012, Billington wrote an article for *The Guardian* tracing the history of queer theatre, which he describes as "the accepted generic term for the gay theatre movement". For Billington, queer theatre is "one that embraces both men and women, that covers plays, musicals, cabaret and just about everything else, and which has been going strong in Britain and America for well over 40 years". His article centres around the question of whether or not "more writers could rise to the challenge of contemporary issues?". Through the analysis of my case studies in this study, I explore in more details the different ways in which gay playwriting in Britain rises to the challenge of representing the contemporary issues effecting gay men. Billington states that "what strikes [him] first of all is how theatre always reflects social conditions". In doing so, he explains that "while it would take too long to list everything, theatre radically changed along with social attitudes". This thesis in part seeks to map out the evolution of gay theatre in twenty-first century Britain.

In this chapter, I retrace the developments of gay theatre in Britain in relation to the shifts in the conditions and attitudes towards homosexuality. Taking a chronological order, I map out the significant events in British theatre and histories that led to an increased representation of gay men on stage. My intention is to explore the histories that in turn form the contextual foundation for my study. To do this, I present a body of literature that draws upon socio-political frameworks to underpin its discussion of the representation of gay men in British theatre, starting from the abolishment of censorship to the new millennium. My choice to begin at the end of censorship aligns with my desire to survey gay plays from the historical

moment when *explicit* representations of homosexuality were permitted to appear on the British stage – an interest that is central to my investigation of gay characters in contemporary gay British playwriting.

This chapter begins with a discussion of theatre censorship in British theatre and the effect it had on the representation of homosexuality on the British stage. Following its abolishment, I explore how the rise of the Gay Liberation Front championed further representation for gay men and the subsequent emergence of the 'gay hero' on the British stage. Following this, I trace gay representation in British theatre following the AIDS crisis and the implementation of Section 28. Finally, this chapter moves towards literature about the representation of homosexuality and gay men written at the beginning of the new millennium. Through this structure, I weave together these discussions in order to present the reader with a contextual narrative for gay theatre in Britain that precedes my chosen case studies for this thesis. Moreover, my aim is for this study to shed light on contemporary narratives that emerge from the analysis of theatrical representations of gay men in gay British playwriting between 2001 and 2016.

Theatre Censorship

For over 230 years (1737-1968), the Lord Chamberlain had the authority to veto new plays and choose which plays were permitted to be performed on the public stage, therefore administering censorship over British theatre. In *Theatre Censorship: From Walpole to Wilson* (2007), David Thomas, David Carlton and Anne Etienne "provide a clear understanding of the way successive governments used the subtleties of Britain's largely unwritten constitution to exercise a controlling influence over the theatre as a public institution" (5). Despite the role

of theatre “to give offence, to provoke and to push forward boundaries”, Thomas et al. writes that the “Lord Chamberlain considered it his duty to censor plays that might give offence and disturb the peace” (254). In his 2018 article for *The Stage,* Nick Smurthwaite traces the origins of theatre censorship and explains how it “has been around since Tudor times, when the powers that be considered theatre a potentially subversive and destabilising force”. Additionally, he explains that in 1737 the Lord Chamberlain was given the authority to review and consequently censor “any new works considered likely to corrupt or deprave” by Prime Minister Robert Walpole. As a result, the Lord Chamberlain was granted the right “to do whatever was necessary ‘for the preservation of good manners [and] decorum’”. Wandor writes that from 1843, the Theatres Act “empowered [the Lord Chamberlain to] demand changes in the text”, as new plays “could not go into rehearsal without his approval” (9). In so doing, “sexuality could not be represented in any way which was thought to violate ideas about ‘public decency’ and ‘privacy’” on the British stage (10).

Notably, any mention or indication of homosexuality within British plays were to be cut or their license denied under the surveillance and scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain, thus restricting explicit representations of gay characters on stage. In his chapter “The Trouble with Queers: Gays in Plays 1945-1968”, Ian Spiby explains that as far as the theatre was concerned, any open discussion of queer issues was hampered by the Lord Chamberlain’s establishment” (14). This meant that due to the restrictive constrains of censorship, “both the censorship of plays and the threat of prosecution then, led to playwrights being circumspect in dealing with queer themes which in turn leads to the question of codes” (15). Spiby claims that, before the abolishment of censorship, “gay characters and gay issues are hinted at but mostly it is what is not said that provides the information, rather in the way that sex scenes

in popular novels of the time were indicated by three dots". This, in turn, means that "the audience is left to work it out for themselves, and they will do this according to how well aware they are of the conventions under which the author is operating" (16).

In an article for *The British Library,* Greg Buzwell explains that it was not until the late 1950s that "the Lord Chamberlain's Office began to alter its stance" on representations of homosexuality on stage. This shift was influenced by "the publication in 1957 of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution", known as the Wolfenden Report. Explaining how the report came about, Buzwell writes that

> considerable discussion on the subject of homosexuality took place in Britain in the 1950s. The government had launched a crackdown on both prostitution and homosexual offences as part of a campaign against a perceived decline in traditional moral values. […] Given the scale of the issue and the growing sympathy for those against whom accusations were being made, the government set up a committee in 1954, chaired by Lord Wolfenden, to look into the laws relating to prostitution and homosexuality. The resulting report recommended the decriminalization of homosexuality on the grounds that, 'it is not, in our view, the function of the law to intervene in the private life of citizens or to seek to enforce any particular pattern of behaviour'.

It is important to note that this conclusion – with its emphasis on privacy – anticipates the current neoliberalist ideal of the privatisation of gay culture and its communities, a notion explored in Chapter Four in relation to the rise of homonormativity.

The change in policy was announced in a letter to the Theatre's National Committee published in *The Times* in a 1958 article titled "Homosexuality on the Stage, Censorship Policy Changed":

> [t]his subject is now so widely debated, written about and talked of that its complete exclusion from the stage can no longer be regarded as justifiable. In future, therefore, plays on this subject which are sincere and serious will be admitted, as will references to the subject which are necessary to the plot and dialogue, and which are not salacious or offensive (qtd. in Thomas et al. 166)

Thomas et al. outline how this change of policy "would in future permit productions of similar plays of artistic merit dealing with the topic of homosexuality. However, this did not imply that all plays that touched on homosexual themes would from then on be licensed" (166). As a result of these changes, "the new guidelines were as follows:

> (i) Every play will continue to be judged on its merits. The difference will be that plays will be passed that deal seriously with the subject.
>
> (ii) Plays violently homosexual will not be passed.
>
> (iii) Homosexual characters will not be allowed if their inclusion in the piece is unnecessary.
>
> (iv) Embraces or practical demonstrations of love between homosexuals will not be allowed.
>
> (v) Criticism of the present homosexual laws will be allowed, though plays obviously written for propaganda purposes will be judged on their merits.

(vi) Embarrassing displays by male prostitutes will not be allowed" (166).

What is clear from this lift is an indication of the Lord Chamberlain's disdain towards the explicit representation of homosexuality. For example, scenes of a heterosexual nature were permitted in a performance as long as they were "not be acted in bed"; however, homosexual love scenes "had to be cut completely" from performances (Wandor 10). Additionally, Sinfield writes that "it was believed that the Chamberlain's writ did not cover performances in private, for instance in a theatre club" (13). This led to portrayals of homosexuality in performances at members-only theatres, which did not need to go through Lord Chamberlain's approval. Thomas et al. note that "unlicensed plays were presented privately by dramatic societies, and later by theatre clubs, without any legal proceedings being brought against them, because in theory they were not presented for hire". This was possible as "the definition of 'for Hire' in section 16 of the Act was sufficiently opaque as to open up loopholes for enterprising theatre practitioners" (115). An example of this are three plays by American playwrights – Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1952), Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* (1953) and Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* (1955) – that were performed in private clubs despite being banned by the Lord Chamberlain "because they touched on the theme of homosexuality" (163). Helen Freshwater argues that "decisions were often informed by a strategy of repressive tolerance and a pragmatic attitude toward the system's numerous inconsistencies: private theatre clubs, which could perform unlicensed plays, were tolerated as the system's 'safety valve,' and outright refusal of a license was a last resort" (Sinfield 637). This highlights that playwrights, directors, and audience members were able to explore sexuality on the British stage, under the pretence of 'private' clubs to satisfy the censor laws.

Sinfield proposes that "the knowledge that theatre was under surveillance and operating at the boundary of the speakable was itself part of its fascination". He suggests that "if censorship was designed to supress homosexuality in theatre, then it was remarkably unsuccessful [as] it would be more true to say that it helped to give theatre the status of a thoroughly queer space" (13). Sinfield goes on to say that through "controlling irregular sexuality the Chamberlain did not eliminate it; on the contrary, he implied that it was always about to irrupt into visibility. He was helping to make theatre a place where sexuality lurked in forbidden forms" (16). In attempting to keep representations of homosexuality off stage, the Lord Chamberlain inadvertently increased a desire to stage portrayals of sexual dissidence in other ways, such as through private club performances.

Thomas et al. note that "it was not until May 1956, when John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre, that a new era began for the British theatre" (160). They explain that "thereafter, Osborne himself and other young playwrights began to produce work that seemed both exciting and innovative to contemporary audiences"[3]. As a result, "the output of these writers would involve a constant process of argument and disagreement with the Lord Chamberlain, which would by the late 1960s culminate in the abolition of theatre censorship" (160). A pivotal example in relation to the representation of homosexuality was Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* (1965), a play based on the true story of Alfred Redl, an Austrian military officer who was discovered to be gay and later blackmailed by Russian intelligence because of it. Thomas et al. writes that *A Patriot for Me* "was refused a

[3] As Dan Rebellato notes in *1956 And All That* (2011), this group of writers were labelled as "angry young m[e]n" (116-117). This term originated from George Fearon calling Osborne an angry young man, as explained by Rebellato. He goes on to explain that Osborne "was happy to popularise, and even claim authorship of this phrase" (117).

license by the Lord Chamberlain in August 1964 because of its homosexual drag ball sequence". They write that "[t]he play was subsequently staged as a 'private performance' by the English Stage Society at the Royal Court Theatre [and quote Osborne explaining] that 'in eight weeks 25,000 or 30,000 people saw *A Patriot for Me'"* (183). According to Sinfield, the Lord Chamberlain "did attempt to accommodate the play [but] he wanted to cut the bedroom activity and bits of explicit language". He states how the Lord Chamberlain was "determined to cut [the] whole of the drag ball", which is the climax of the play, where the upper rank officers appear in drag. Sinfield notes that "the ball raises the prospect of an effective gay subculture" (263), which – as I explore in Chapter Two – is an integral aspect of creating and nurturing a gay community.

Spiby suggests that Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* "became something of a cause célèbre and could be said to have contributed to the abolishment of stage censorship three years later". Spiby also notes that "several months later, […] Edward Bond's play *Saved* [was] again presented by the English Stage Society under club conditions" (33). Thomas et al. explain that Bond's *Saved* (1965) "was written with restrained fury. It offered an alarming exploration of the effects of social and cultural deprivation on a group of barely articulate young people living in South London" (186). The play was indicative of the fact that the young playwrights of England "no longer spoke the same language as those charged with controlling their output through censorship; and their divergent views of reality and life were so extreme as to admit of no compromise" (186).

In 1967, The Sexual Offences Act was passed. Weeks explains that the Act "decriminalised male homosexual activities in private for adults over the age of twenty-one" (175). Steve

Nicholson writes that a year later "in 1968, a new Theatres Act finally brings to an end an archaic and unique system of theatre censorship and control which has lasted for over 230 years" (5). The abolition of censorship has been labelled as one of the "most significant" events to occur in British theatre, since the complete removal of the Lord Chamberlain's powers meant that playwrights and directors no longer had to "submit a script for licensing" (Nicholson 79). De Jongh notes that, with the passing of this new act, "playwrights [became] free to discuss and depict what the censor would not tolerate" (90). He describes the new Act as releasing "playwrights into a virgin territory of freedom to speak, show and suggest" (xii). This virgin territory was led by "the youthful, leftist intelligentsia [that] had reshaped theatre to suit its concerns and had developed supportive institutions and resources – mainly with the State support promised under welfare-capitalism", according to Sinfield (267).

In their introduction to *Scenes of the Revolution* (2018), Kim Wiltshire and Billy Cowan explain that "the removal of [censorship's] power allowed a range of theatre-makers to create new types of theatre, devising and writing plays that could attack the status quo politically, plays that would no longer have to be approved by government to be produced" (3). Similarly, Thomas et al. note that "dramatists who had clashed repeatedly with the censor were now free to develop their ideas and ways of expressing them without having the irritation of knowing from the outset that they would face constant battles with the Lord Chamberlain over their choice of words, themes, and characters" (225). Additionally, "a new generation of writers was soon to emerge […] who have probed in their work complex patterns of experience with an imaginative and provocative use of words, deeds, themes, and characters" (225). This would lead the path for increased representation of homosexuality in British theatre, therefore allowing for explicit stage portrayals as well as the public emergence of

openly gay playwrights, directors, actors and producers. As summarised by Thomas et al, “in short, it was as if the abolition of theatre censorship opened a floodgate of theatrical creativity” (225).

Conversely, whilst its theme is not necessarily homosexual in nature, it important to note the struggle that Howard Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* (1980), as it is indicative that even after the abolishment of censorship controversial subject matters may still be challenged. This is made evident by Thomas et al.’s account of the struggle that Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* (1980), faced during its run at the National Theatre in London. As noted, “the play makes a provocative parallel between the behaviour of the invading Roman armies in Celtic Britain in 54 bc and that of the British army in Northern Ireland at the time the play was written” (230). They write how the scene that caused offence happened near the beginning of the play, where Roman soldiers come across “three naked Celtic men sunning themselves after a swim”. Thomas et al. explain that the Romans kill two of the men and “attempt to bugger the third, a Celtic priest”. However, “the attempted anal rape is not altogether successful. As the third soldier claims to have lost his erection” (230). Most notably, according to Thomas et al. it was Horace Cutler, Conservative leader of the GLC who walked out in some anger from a preview of the production and threatened to suspend the grant made by the GLC to the National Theatre” and “Mary Whitehouse […] a grammar schoolteacher” who took most offence. As a result, Whitehouse – despite never seeing the play – “resolved to take legal action against the National Theatre production” (231). As Whitehouse could no longer go through the Theatres Act, act, “the only avenue that could be pursued was a private prosecution under the 1956 Sexual Offences Act: this makes it an offence to procure by a male the commission of an act of gross indecency with another male in a public place” (231-

232). Consequently, “Michael Bogdanov, who had directed *The Romans in Britain* for the National Theatre, was served with a writ just before Christmas by Whitehouse’s solicitors in which he was accused of procuring an act of gross indecency by staging the homosexual rape scene in the production”. Thomas et al. write that “If found guilty, [Bogdanov would face] a possible prison sentence of up to two years” (232). A year later, following court hearings, the decision was to issue a “*nolle prosequi* [which] removed the threat against Bogdanov” (234). Following this, Thomas et al. write that “it took over twenty-five years before any theatre in Britain was prepared to mount a full professional production of *The Romans in Britain*. The first to do so was the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, which presented a production of the play, directed by Sam West in February 2006” (234).

In a similar vein, Smurthwaite suggests that although censorship has been abolished, the “total freedom of expression has yet to be achieved”. In a similar vein, Spiby closes his chapter explaining that “it would take [time for] playwrights of the period following the end of the Lord Chamberlain to begin to find a way through these difficulties and to present a more authentic picture of queer men and their lives” (34). Moreover, Buzwell writes that from this point on, “the battle for dramatists wishing to portray homosexual characters and themes was not to get their plays past the censor, but to have them accepted by audiences and the general public”. For the remainder of this chapter, I explore the ongoing battles for explicit representations of homosexuality and gay narratives within British theatre, following the abolishment of censorship.

The Gay Liberation Front

This section explores the birth of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) as a result of monumental events that continued to push for gay rights and representation. With that in mind, this section explores the gay narratives presented by British playwrights in the 1970s and the influence they had advancing gay representation in British theatre now that playwrights did not have to censor their narratives. The GLF was formed in 1970 by a group of gay men and women with the goal to publicly tackle personal and political issues surrounding gender roles, social equality and – most relevant to my discussion – the representation of homosexuality. The GLF was part of a wave of radical movements such as the May 1968 riots in France and the Stonewall Riots in New York the following year. In her 2018 article for *The New York Times,* Alissa J. Rubin explains that the movement in France, which resulted in the riots, was "not a political revolution in the way that earlier French revolutions had been, but a cultural and social one that in a stunningly short time changed French society". She describes how "both the women's liberation movement and the gay rights movement in France grew out of the 1968 upheaval and the intellectual ferment of the time". This shared desire to fight for autonomy was the basis from which the gay rights movement was conceived.

As history shows, the necessity for radical protests to advance social movements ricocheted across western societies. One of the most notable radical protests that ushered in the Gay Rights Movement were the abovementioned Stonewall Riots in New York (1969), named after a police raid at the Stonewall Inn. These riots saw gay men and women fight back in response to police brutality as well as the policing of their queer identities, harbouring support from gay activists. Stonewall marked a shift in the gay movement, reflecting a necessity to speak out and fight for change. The first GLF was subsequently formed in New York.

The British GLF – founded by students Bob Mellors and Aubrey Walters – was "in its early stages […] predominantly male" and "encourage[d] open and proud demonstration[s] of male homosexual relationships" (Wandor 18), following the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Sinfield explains that the "appellation of the Gay Liberation Front itself [signals] the decisive arrival of a group that had been ignored in the activist politics of class, race, empire and gender, but which had learned from those engagements" (293). As time went on, the political fight for Gay Liberation separated into female and male groups.

Similarly, the theatre company Gay Sweatshop – that emerged during the rise of the GLF – split itself in order to address different political goals. Sara Freeman argues that "Sweatshop's greatest legacy is the path it opened for artists to be able to speak to audiences in a project of mutual liberation" (162). Cowan explains that Gay Sweatshop "was at the forefront of gay political theatre in the UK" (161). Gay Sweatshop's first performance was *Mister X* (1975), which follows a series of challenges to the character Mister X, who throughout the play desires to "discard his pseudonym and 'come out'" (Cowan 161). The play concludes with the actor "abandoning his role and declaring his own name and address", therefore blurring the lines between the fictionality of the play and the stark truth of his gay identity, to which the audience "stood and cheered" in tears. Cowan writes that the "company's original objectives were about raising visibility and counteracting 'the prevailing perception in mainstream theatre of what homosexuals were like, therefore providing a more realistic image for the public'" (161). Arguably, *Mister X* was a pivotal moment in gay theatre, as Gay Sweatshop helped set in motion the acknowledgement of gay representation from the private to the public, both on and off the stage.

Wandor argues that Gay Sweatshop's male plays explored "sexual liberation and the freedom to break through the boundaries of masculine/feminine sexual stereotypes". In doing so, the male plays "confronted sexuality more directly than the women's plays, reflecting both the greater historical presence of gay men's social subculture, but also reflecting the fact that parenthood is not a direct option for individual men, and consequently some aspects of gay men's sexual culture place greater emphasis on casual and passing sexual relationships" (63-4). Drawing on Lee Edelman's concept of the sinthomosexual, I build on Wandor's statement around the idea of the history of gay men's subculture and the different ways in which gay man can choose their path in regard to sexual and familial development, in Chapter 4.

Wandor concludes her section on the Gay Sweatshop with the assertion that both men and women's work in this group "shared the polemical purpose of presenting gay experience with pride and encouraging other homosexuals by their example to find the courage to 'come out', to cease concealing their sexuality" (64). The idea of coming out was widely prevalent during the rise of the GLF and has continued to be a focal point of gay playwriting. In the third edition of *Coming Out* (2016), originally published in 1977, Weeks outlines the GLF's agenda as revolving around three concepts:

> first, the idea of 'coming out', of being open about one's homosexuality, of rejecting the shame and guilt and the enforced 'double life', of asserting 'gay pride' and 'gay anger' around the cry, 'out of closets, into the streets'. Secondly, the idea of 'coming together', of solidarity and strength coming through collective endeavour, and of the mass confrontation of oppression. And thirdly, and centrally, the identification of the

> roots of oppression in the concept of sexism, and of exploring the means to extirpate it (191).

Over forty years later, these three concepts are still relevant for gay playwriting and are subsequently reflected in my analysis chapters. The first, "coming out", is explored predominantly in Chapter Two, which focuses on the formation of gay characters and their subcultures as they emerge from queer temporalities. The second concept, "coming together", aligns with Chapter Three, where I outline five phases of gay shame and its effect on the construction and deconstruction of gay identity. Finally, the third concept, "the identification of the roots of oppression in […] sexism", is explored through the emergence of a new homonormative ideology for the gay community and how gay playwrights reject this notion through performances of hope, in Chapter Four. It is clear therefore that the aims of the GLF – as outlined by Weeks in 1977 – are still relevant today in contemporary gay British playwriting. This highlights the necessity for this research to be undertaken, as gay characters – and by extension gay men – are yet to be fully liberated.

'Gay Heroes'

This next section explores de Jongh's analysis of the "gay hero" that emerges from the work of the GLF. He explains that at a time when "gay theatre, created by gay writers, companies and audiences, was being sought [...] in Britain" (5), the gay hero was born. This shift in the representation of gay characters on stage reflects the changing attitudes towards homosexuals in British society. Following the rise of the Gay Liberation movement, de Jongh wrote that "the prime plays about homosexuality, in the mainstream […] examined and reinterpreted a past that had been refracted through the sensibilities of censorious

heterosexuals". This form of examining and (re)visiting the past in order to comment on the present and the future is still used in contemporary gay plays and is a central feature that underpins my analysis chapters and this thesis more broadly.

According to de Jongh, "a gay man may reveal his sexuality, but his identity is not necessarily accepted, or acceptable" (139). This reflects the ongoing societal tensions between the increased representation of homosexuality on stage and the predominantly heterosexual audiences watching these plays. Despite this, the 'gay hero' emerged and reflected "the idea of gay sensibility – those perceptions inspired by an individual's sense of being gay [...] as a new mode of gay positivism" (141). Gay hero plays are described by de Jongh as plays about homosexuality that were written and performed in "altered contexts [that] were fresh in theme and in ideology" (144). In his text, de Jongh identifies Martin Sherman's *Bent* (1979), Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1982) and Hugh Whitemore's *Breaking the Code* (1986) as three "key works in this new process" (139). All three plays were written from "a post-Liberation perspective", in that they are all about "rebellious homosexuals attempt[ing] to assert a homosexual identity and to live their sexual lives in societies that outlawed such sexuality" (de Jongh 139).

Sherman's *Bent* is one of the "most remarkable" gay hero plays "for the way in which it enabled the theatre to fulfil a rare function", that is, to give visibility to what has previously "been carefully obscured" from society in terms of gay representation on stage (de Jongh 145). *Bent* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre and follows Max's journey in Berlin as he is taken from his own home during the first phase of Adolf Hitler's regime (1933-1945) and imprisoned in a concentration camp. The play explores Max's trajectory from his private

hedonist lifestyle towards a public acceptance and claiming of his identity as a homosexual in the play's climax. Sinfield writes that *Bent* "has proved a significant exploration of [gay men's] part in great historic oppression, and of the conditions that may promote and thwart gay love" (307). He goes on to explain that the initial motive behind *Bent* was the fact that Sherman "saw a connection between the young homosexuals of Germany at the close of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of Hitler's regime". Through this relationship, Sherman "makes a series of comparisons between the politically unaware hedonists of Berlin in 1934 and metropolitan gay men in the 1970s" (147-8). A similar concept of highlighting the similarities and differences between gay men of the past and the present is invoked in the majority of the chosen case studies in this thesis and is explored in my analysis chapters.

In the climax of the play, gay hero Max publicly accepts his sexual identity – after denying it up until this point) – in the moment where he picks up his dead lover's "*jacket, with the pink triangle on it",* which was a signifier for homosexuality, as he walks towards the electric fence "*consuming the stage"* in a blinding light (Sherman 80). Returning to de Jongh, *Bent's* closing scene reflects his definition of a gay hero, in that the principal character of the play "battle[s] against the penalising forces of conformity" (139). Max's acceptance of his gay identity and the portrayal of his agency to take his own life as an out gay man removes the agency from the concentration camp's homophobic hold. *Bent's* production and its "world-wide success upon the commercial stage, is bright evidence of how social, economic and cultural change were beginning to transform the theatres of London" (de Jongh 145). This is reflected in having a mainstream actor, Sir Ian McKellen, cast as Max. This casting choice displays narrative of public integration and an acceptance of gay themes into the mainstream through the stark visibility of well-known and, therefore, respected actors. When McKellen was cast

as Max, he had still not come out as a gay man. In a 2021 interview with *The Independent*, culture reporter Ellie Harrison talks to McKellen. She writes that McKellen "revealed his sexuality to the public on BBC radio in 1988". Discussing life after coming out, McKellen said:

> I [have] never stopped talking about it since. Made up for lost time. It changes your life utterly. I discovered myself. And everything was better. My relationships with my family, with friends, with strangers, and my work got better as I wasn't hiding anymore.

McKellen's coming out, following his involvement in *Bent,* further illustrates the potential for gay theatre to offer teaching moments for both its heterosexual and queer audiences, to educate and advance understanding and the acceptance of alternative sexualities. An example of this can be seen in the positive impact *Bent* had on four heterosexual male reviewers who all applauded the staging of *Bent* after its premiere. These included: "Michael Billington of the *Guardian,* Sheridan Morley of *Punch,* Benedict Nightingale of the *New Statesman* and Steve Grant of *Time Out*" (de Jongh 153).

As indicated above, *Bent* transferred to the West End following a successful run at The Royal Court. Considering the positive reviews, as well as its transfer, *Bent* exemplifies how gay-hero plays mark a turn towards increased acceptance of the representation of gay men in British playwriting. Additionally, using the past – and more specifically gay histories – to comment on the present is a stylistic feature that my chosen gay playwrights draw upon in their construction of gay narratives in contemporary gay theatre. This suggests a return to post-

Liberation perspectives in the twenty-first century, as each gay playwright presents their own versions of rebellious homosexuals fighting against societal restraints.

In the Wake of AIDS

Following the post-liberation gay plays of the 1970s, the momentum and progression of gay British theatre had to re-route and slow down during the 1980s, as a result of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS was the "first post-second-world-war, world-wide epidemic whose dissemination has been particularly attributed to some forms of biblically anathematised sexual intercourse" (de Jongh 175). Sinfield adds that "while gay men are by no means the only people to be devastated by AIDS, they are the group whose identifying stigma – our way of doing sex – is specific to the transmission of the virus" (315). Similarly, de Jongh writes that

> [o]nce gay men had been stigmatised in the press, radio and television, by politicians and preachers, as the begetters and disseminators of a lethal virus, violent attacks upon homosexuals were theoretically condoned, and the incidence of violent attacks upon gay men increased in number both in Britain and America (179).

Writing about the representation of gay and lesbians in US theatre, Fisher writes how following the AIDS crisis, "homosexuality became a dominant — if not the dominant — topic" in theatre. He suggests that "an intense rise in homophobia beginning with the first AIDS cases was the downside of greater visibility for gays, although in both society and, particularly, in the theatre — images of gays broadened and deepened" (2). For this thesis, I am particularly interested in exploring the representation of gay characters in post-AIDS British drama to investigate the ways in which the images of gays broaden and deepen in Britain.

Social historian Allen M. Brandt, who was working in the mid-1980s, explains that "because AIDS is perceived as an illness intrinsic to homosexuals, it can be interpreted as their just reward for flouting the law of God, and by extension, when it afflicts others, this can be explained by homosexual perfidy" (Brandt qtd. in de Jongh 176). Through a generalised attitude adopted by a heteronormative society, "HIV and AIDS reopened the whole question of the legitimacy of gayness", which proves the fact that homosexuality and the existent of a gay community "still required justification" despite its public social progression post-1968 (Sinfield 314). It was believed that "bisexual males ha[d] formed one of those links between the principal sufferers from the virus and the heterosexuals; drug-addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals and prisoners [were] the other supposed and revealed disseminators" (de Jongh 176). This list highlights the marginality of those blamed by society for the spread of the disease. Sinfield suggests that "this is why so many plays depict it as a triumph when a sick or positive person and his partner succeed in making love in the face of HIV [, as] they repel the accusation that the virus has demonstrated gay love to be wrong" (315). Therefore, gay playwrights worked to support their gay audiences through their "(inter)personal dilemmas of bereavement, stigma, loss of health, and impending death" through representation in the theatre (Sinfield 317). This idea is explored further in relation to the five phases of gay shame in contemporary gay playwriting and its relation to the construction and deconstruction of gay identity in Chapter Three.

During the 1980s, the general understanding of gay experience in Britain became "overwhelmed by a consciousness of AIDS, and perhaps also by general depression provoked by the repressive government of the day" (Wyllie 100). Wyllie, here, is addressing the

implementation of Section 28 that was enforced in May 1988. Weeks explains that in the 1980s, the gay community saw "the first concerted attempts to roll back the achievements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, culminating in the passing of 'Section 28'" (*Coming Out* 237). He writes that Section 28 was enacted by the Conservative government under its Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher with the intention to "draw a line across the advance of the lesbian and gay community". Section 28 ordered that:

> a local authority shall not –
>
> (a) Intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
>
> (b) Promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship (qtd. in *Coming Out* 238).

Writing about this distinctively homophobic shift in British politics, Weeks suggests that "the validity of the lifestyles and values that lesbians and gays had carved for themselves in the previous decades, whatever their specific sexual needs and identities" was at stake (*Coming Out* 237). As Section 28 controlled the literature that could be studied in the UK – in a bid to control and supress pro-gay narratives – this legislation was said to have been put into place to "prevent the further activities of councils which attempted to 'glamorise' homosexuality" (de Jongh 178). Weeks argues that the "encouragement needed for an attack on the role of local authorities in 'promoting' homosexuality" was signalled during Thatcher's speech following her third election victory in 1987. In her speech, Thatcher claimed that "children who need[ed] to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay" (*Coming Out* 239). Consequently, Section 28 was issued under

the guise of protecting British children from the negative lure of homosexuality. In light of this, homosexuality was ushered back into the repressive margins of society. Considering this, explicit representations of gay narratives on British stages were hugely impacted by the restraints of Section 28 and the AIDS crisis. Moreover, De Jongh explains that "gay desire is a recognised fact of existence: gay love is not" (180). In the twentieth century, the notion of gay love was often presented by British playwrights as unattainable[4] and further fed into dominant discourse of the time that promiscuity was seen as an intrinsic characteristic of gay men.

In twenty-first-century gay British playwriting, the notion of pursuing gay love is often central to the overall narrative and plot – signalling a further shift in gay playwriting between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This signals a shift to gay playwrights offering narratives that explore new potentials for a queerer society. Similarly, Clum argues that the nature of gay drama "focuses on how gay people see the society which denies them an equal space rather than on how that society sees and polices them" (*Still Acting Gay* 222). This is to say that, rather than focusing on what is, gay drama instead focuses on what could be. Moreover, Clum argues that "on the stage as well as in the streets, [...] gay men affirm the value of queerness, of radical difference, as something not to be surrendered in the move to assimilation" (222). Clum's assertion is even more prevalent in twenty-first century Britain, amidst the rise of homonormativity. In the following paragraphs, I present and analyse the development of post-AIDS gay British playwriting as the new millennium approaches. Additionally, my analysis chapter continues this exploration between 2001 and 2016.

[4] E.g., Sherman's *Bent,* Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* (1979), Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and Kane's *Cleansed*

Despite the censoring powers of Section 28, gay British theatre managed to successfully stage a handful of gay plays in the 1990s. Kevin Elyot's *My Night with Reg* (1994) has been described as one of the most successful British plays focusing upon HIV and AIDS. Elyot's play premiered at The Royal Court Theatre and was later adapted for film, further signalling its relevance. *My Night with Reg* is unlike other plays that discussed AIDS and HIV, as it is a dark comedy about the fear of contracting the virus through sexual promiscuity. *My Night with Reg* follows a group of London gay friends in the mid-1980s, over the period of several years. Despite being in the title, Reg is absent for the whole play. As the narrative progresses, the audience/reader discovers that Reg is dying of AIDS. As well as this, the audience slowly finds out that Reg has had sexual relations with almost the whole friendship circle, including a vicar. As Sinfield emphasises, by the end of the play "everyone is either dead or in bad faith and very frightened". He describes Elyot's play as a "purposefully un-American, unheroic version of AIDS – wry and understated, furtive and thwarted, class-conscious, and virtually without uplift" (328).

Elyot's take on AIDS is completely different to the cluster of AIDS plays that emerged from the United States. A key reason for this alternative approach, as well as a "relatively muted British theatrical response" to HIV and AIDS compared to the United States, is that "the experience here [in Britain] has been different" (Sinfield 328). Sinfield writes that "relatively few Britons have undergone such an ordeal", and this is "chiefly because the initial transmission of HIV was slower and later". Sinfield continues, explaining that knowledge in Britain about "safer sex" (328), helped prevent the rate of infection and death. In his concluding statement on the matter, Sinfield acknowledges the fact that Britain has taken on the United States' experience

of AIDS as if it "has been ours" (329). He suggests that the reason Britain has not written or produced as much drama about AIDS is "because it has been done for us" by American imports. Sinfield warns that this approach is dangerous, as Britain "may be tempted to believe that [it has] passed through the crisis". Doing so creates a belief in those who "are older and uninfected" that "it was not so hard to survive" and "those who are younger may regard it as over and done with" (329). I am interested in Sinfield's caution to his readers at the end of the twentieth century and explore it further through my analysis of Harvey's *Canary*, looking at the tensions between younger and older gay characters.

In a bid to move away from plays written as a response to the AIDS crisis, "a distinct flurry of gay themed work" shifted the discourse of British gay theatre again in the 1990s (Sinfield 340). This shift, as explained by Dominic Shellard, "led to gay writers and playwrights, no longer content with half-hearted, apologetic depictions of the homosexual as an inevitable victim, going on the offensive" (194). This movement in gay theatre was one in which homosexuality was no longer seen as an issue that needed to be explained or resolved. Clum describes how, through this shift, "homosexual desire is a presence and gay characters don't have to talk about why they [a]re gay" (*Still Acting Gay* xv). This shift in gay narratives allows for the nuance of gay characters to develop and be explored further in gay playwriting.

A prime example of this change within the British mainstream can be found in Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* (1993). Harvey's play, which premiered at the Bush Theatre in London, follows the story of two sixteen-year-old boys living on a council estate in South London who discover their romantic feelings towards one another. According to Shellard, Harvey's seminal gay play "unashamedly appropriates the age-old boy meets girl, boy falls in

love with girl format and substitutes two teenage boys on a South London housing estate as the young lovers" (195). Through emulating a well-known trope, Harvey offers to the stage a gay narrative centred around gay identity for mainstream audiences. Harvey himself describes *Beautiful Thing* as a play that is "conventional in everything but the sexuality of its protagonist" (Harvey qtd. in Shellard 195). This normative take on a gay play is described by Clum as "unabashedly optimistic and romantic, a charming unlikely mix of comedy, sentiment, and urban realism that elicited joyful cheers from staid British audiences" (*Still Acting Gay* 228). The play's success on the mainstream stage, especially so soon after the AIDS crisis, signifies an increase in the representation of gay narratives within the mainstream. Clum suggests that *Beautiful Thing's* success "might just liberate young gay playwrights and, eventually, make British drama gayer and livelier" (229).

Harvey's decision to make his two gay protagonist sixteen-year-old virgins meant that he was able to "write a gay drama that eludes the spectre of AIDS" (Clum *Still Acting Gay* 228). As there are no sexual scenes in Harvey's play, he kept *Beautiful Thing* away from being grouped as part of the AIDS plays that focused on the 'curse' of gay sex. The age of his two lovers, Jamie and Ste, is politically important on a mainstream British stage as the "age of consent for homosexual sex [was] twenty-one" at the time. Clum argues that "the sweet love we have watched blossom is literally illegal in England" (229). Clum's statement alludes to the necessity for the realisation that homosexual desire – sexual or otherwise – exists and deserves to be staged in addition to the heteronormative stories of 'boy-meets-girl'. With that being said, the success of *Beautiful Thing* "does suggest that the mainstream [was] changing" (229). Sinfield writes that Harvey's play "makes rather shrewdly the case for regarding seriously and sympathetically gay feelings among young people" (340). A year after its

premiere, the age of consent for homosexuals was lowered to 18 in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994. It was further lowered to the age of 16 in the Sexual Offences Amendment Act of 2000. As shown throughout this chapter, gay representation in mainstream theatre has continued to reflect the changes in society's attitudes towards homosexuality. With this in mind, my study seeks to analyse the ways that mainstream gay theatre reflects and challenges societal attitudes towards gay men in twenty-first-century Britain as well.

The popularity of *Beautiful Thing*, following its transfer to the West End, led "to the creation of a film, which was acclaimed for its feel-good factor (the holy grail of nineties Britain) in 1996" (Shellard 195). Wyllie argues that *Beautiful Thing*'*s* transfer to the West End and adaptation for the screen is "a measure of the extent to which gay issues had previously been absent from the mainstream stage", which is why "critics attached such importance" to plays like *Beautiful Thing* and *My Night with Reg.* By 1994, the London press seemed to be "provoked by the cross-over success" of Harvey's piece. Some sectors of the press complained about the "alleged flood of gay plays" (Shellard 340). Moreover, Roberts notes that in 1994, Milton Shulman wrote a column in the *Evening Standard* under the headline: "'Stop the Plague of Pink Plays'" (175), in an attempt to (re)turn to gayness as an illness and something that should be avoided. Ironically, still to the present day plays like Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* are being revived and presented to contemporary audiences, further signalling their continued relevance. Wyllie warns that "by 1994, a move of male homosexuality to the mainstream stage was distinctly perceptible" (108). He offers up an excerpt from theatre critic Jane Edwardes to support his claim. In her article for *Time Out* in 1994, Edwardes claimed that

> it was the year in which gay dramatists and directors found themselves addressing a mainstream audience, not under a cloak of subterfuge as Binkie Beaumont and Noel Coward had before…Were these productions part of a pink conspiracy, a desire to exploit the pink pound, or could it possibly be that gay writers are simply writing the most exciting plays?" (Edwardes qtd. in Wyllie 108).

Moving away from being engulfed by the AIDS crisis and towards narratives that explore the many facets of gay identities, British gay theatre was gaining momentum in its movement from the margins into the mainstream. The gay man had "largely stopped being regarded as anything remarkable, to be either censured or pitied" in 1994, according to Wyllie. As time went on, the gay man continued to be assimilated into the mainstream through increased representation both on stage and on screen. Wyllie argues that that this shift in attitude is "clearly visibly in plays produced during the later 1990s" and cites Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) as an example. The play follows three flatmates who manoeuvre life through a flurry of transactions. Wyllie describes the play as offering "a critique of an exploitative, materialistic society, in which commodification of sex is just one among many sources of alienation" (108). Keeping in line with the movement of gay British plays exploring the nuance of gay identities, in *Shopping and Fucking* "the seamier sides of some gay lifestyles are depicted as a metaphor for an increasingly exploitative and materialistic society" (Shellard 196).

At the end of Ravenhill's play, the "original threesome of Mark, Robbie and Lulu are reunited in a hell of frozen suppers, exploitative sex and yearning for money. As a comment on the depravity and corruption of the late nineties, it is intentionally shocking" (Shellard 197). This

shock factor exemplifies the style of in-yer-face theatre, a term coined by Alex Sierz in his book of the same name. In-yer-face theatre describes certain shared features of mainstream British drama from the mid-nineties: drama that manages to "jolt both actors and spectators" out of their "conventional responses [, therefore] touching nerves and provoking alarm" (4). Shellard writes that as *Shopping and Fucking* "employs same-sex encounters as a negative rather than a positive metaphor without being concerned that this might stir up prejudice, it illustrates the new resilience of gay drama" (197). This indicates a shift towards gay playwrights wanting to showcase the complexity of gay narratives in mainstream theatre to highlight the wide spectrum of gay experiences that is available to write about. Furthermore, Ravenhill highlights the importance of exploring various facets of gay experiences and the freedom that comes from being able to comment on both the negative as well as the positive. This, in turn, will prompt cultural discussion around the representation of gay characters in the mainstream that will then shape societal understandings and attitudes towards the perception of gay men in Britain. Gay playwriting in the 1990s therefore signals a significant shift from the post-liberation plays, as playwrights like Ravenhill, Elyot and Harvey move away from narratives about 'gay heroes'. This then allows for the inclusion of varied gay narratives to be produced on the British stage, thus deepening the scope for the exploration of gay characters in relation to the *personal*, as well as the *political*.

In the wake of AIDS, Elyot's *My Night with Reg,* Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* and Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* showcase – in their own ways – the ongoing transformation of mainstream gay British theatre. Moving instead towards gay narratives that are entwined with social and cultural discourse in Britain. Wyllie notes that "this trend continued in the latter part of the 1990s, and by about 2000 the gay or lesbian play as such had perhaps

achieved all that it could for the time being" (109). Mainstream gay British playwriting is therefore moving towards exploring gay characters and their communities – not only in response to the spectre of AIDS but also to widen the representation of gay characters in twenty-first century British theatre. My analysis chapters are concerned with exploring the representation of gay characters on stage as they continue to evolve, thus highlighting the multi-faceted nature of gay identity and its changing relationship with society in the twenty-first century.

Towards a Gay(er) Millennium

Writing at the beginning of the 1990s, de Jongh stated that "homophobia is not what it was. Yet there remains a sense in which homosexuality remains the something that must not be shown in front of an audience" (190). As explained above, gay theatre – especially in the 1990s – fought for an increased and varied representation of homosexuality and gay identities. Gay theatre continues to fight for such representation, therefore through this thesis I aim to explicate just how twenty-first-century gay drama does that. This approach resonates with de Jongh's closing comment that we require "theatre of sexual candour, and a theatre demystifying homosexuality" for increased representation on a mainstream stage (190).

Writing at the end of the 1990s, Sinfield explains that "sexual dissidence has infiltrated theatre of all kinds, and one outcome is a body of play texts and a performing tradition that are still of extraordinary interest". As touched upon already in the case of Harvey's *Beautiful Thing*, many play texts that I have focused on through this literature review have been revived

in the twenty-first century[5], thus indicating the continued relevance of gay narratives on the British stage. This renewal of interest chimes with Sinfield's claim that "theatre has [always] been a key site for the cultivation of gay (…) identities" (349), as "the drama on the stage is intimate with the dramas of our lives" (353). Sinfield warns, however, that "we still have to worry about the tactics of discretion and disclosure, the stigma and pride of gendering the demands of diverse constituencies, [and] the negotiation between assimilation and difference" (353). These ideas that Sinfield lists are still important sites to address in contemporary gay playwriting and therefore investigated in the selected case studies for this thesis. Sinfield concludes that "we still need subcultural address – work that speaks to us on our own terms, as a constituency in our own venues" (350). Whilst British theatre is yet to have its own queer or gay playhouses that produce queer work exclusively, this study does align with Sinfield's call to focus on contemporary gay narratives that are written exclusively by openly gay playwrights. Additionally, this thesis argues that gay theatre in the mainstream harnesses the potential to address those that see themselves reflected on stage (queer audiences), but also to educate those who do not recognise or understand what is presented on stage (heteronormative audiences).

In his revised monograph, which was re-published at the beginning of the new millennium, Clum argues that "gay drama [offers] a chronicle of the impossibility, then possibility of male-male love, set against the social forces that made that love thorny, if not impossible" (290). He explains that "now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, there seem to be fewer external obstacles to love, particularly for middle-class men in Europe, Canada and the United States"

[5] *Shopping and Fucking* (Lyric Hammersmith, 2016), *Cleansed* (National Theatre, 2016), *My Night with Reg* (The Turbine Theatre, 2021) and *Beautiful Thing* (Leeds Playhouse, 2023)

(*Still Acting Gay* 290). As a result of this, gay drama in the twenty-first century has the potential to illuminate and portray the existing obstacles for gay love, as well as the continued battle for the existence and representation of gay identities. Clum suggests that gay stories "could, to some degree be anyone's stories", as "sexual orientation is only part of the picture", and that the "best recent plays about male-male love are both intimate works that explore variations on the theme of communication within different types of love relationships" (290). In line with Clum, I argue that gay British drama in the twenty-first century centres on narratives exploring gay histories, gay love and gay communities.

As shown through this context chapter, the majority of scholarly texts written around the topic of mainstream gay drama were mainly published in the nineties or in the first decade of the new millennium. Much of the focus of these texts understandably focuses on twentieth-century gay drama. This reflects the research gap my thesis aims to fill by extending the critical lens onto twenty-first century gay British theatre. In doing so, this study builds on the existing scholarly material written on the representation of homosexuality and gay identities on the mainstream stage.

My forthcoming analysis chapters, through their emerging themes, resonate with Clum's comment that "post-Stonewall gay drama is basically about finding a place on the dance floor, a place in society where a gay man can safely not act straight. It is about the experience of being gay as seen from inside. The situations are often the same as those shown in outside drama about gays, but the point of view is now that of a gay character" (*Still Acting Gay* 160). My subsequent analysis chapters and thesis more broadly works to answer Clum's concluding question: "we're out onstage and off. Now what?" (317).

Chapter Two: Queer Temporalities

Introduction

In 2018, theatre critic Jesse Green wrote an article for *The New York Times* discussing the history of gay theatre. Green divides his article into three 'acts': "The Party," "The Canon," and "Next," to discuss the past, present, and potential futures of gay theatre. Green's first act focuses on the revival of Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968), noting that gay theatre is "at a time when many of the classic gay plays are returning to the Broadway stage." With nearly half a century between the premiere of *The Boys in the Band* and its 2016 revival, Green highlights differences between the original production and its contemporary staging, particularly the casting. The original cast featured closeted gay actors, while the 2016 revival showcased "successful, openly gay men," including Jim Parsons and Zachary Quinto. Producer Ryan Murphy expressed that this casting decision was a "deliberate statement, meant to acknowledge how far the world has come since 1968," underscoring the shift in societal attitudes toward gay identity.

This surge of revivals of seminal gay plays is also evidenced on the British stage. In 2016, Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* was revived at the Park Theatre in London. A year later, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) saw its revival at the National Theatre on London's Southbank, with openly gay actor Russel Tovey playing Joseph Pitt. In 2021, Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* was revived at the National Theatre as well. Openly gay director Dominic Cooke directed this first professional production of *The Normal Heart* following its original European premiere at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1986. Cooke explained that Kramer's

play “is the rarest of things: a history play written by one of its key participants. It deals with the nature of political activism, the internal battle many LGBT people fight to feel worthy of love and, topically [post-2020], the refusal of those in power to face the reality of an unfolding health crisis”.

Mark Berninger’s definition of the history play, as “a play that deals with history,” is particularly useful here, especially his notion that history is “not fixed but subject to change and discussion” (37). This fluidity of history allows me to explore how *Mother Clap’s Molly House*, *The Pride*, and *Canary* respond to gay histories and represent gay characters within interwoven timelines. I argue that these plays reflect Berninger’s notion of history as a plural, interlinked narrative, allowing for an exploration of alternative queer temporalities within their dramatic worlds. Additionally, I explore how these temporalities, along with the use of ghosts as a dramatic device, serve to ‘haunt’ the present with the past, emphasising the ongoing relevance of history in shaping contemporary gay identity.

Benjamin Poore defines the history play “as a piece of writing for the theatre that engages with historical events or settings”. Poore suggests that “such plays inevitably, at the moment of their staging or revival, take on particular meanings for audiences, since theatre as a live, durational art form encourages spectators to compare the historical events depicted with their present historical moment” (42). Poore’s statement highlights how theatre’s live, durational nature encourages audiences to compare the historical events depicted on stage with their contemporary moment. This is especially relevant to plays about gay identity, as revivals or temporal shifts invite reflection on past struggles and progress in LGBTQ+ rights, making history feel immediate and resonant. By engaging with temporality, plays like *Mother*

Clap's Molly House, *The Pride,* and *Canary* critique and reimagine gay identity, using the past to inform and challenge the present. Additionally, Berninger explains that as space "is a very concrete category for drama […] the coexistence of past and present in the same space becomes a central feature of many new history plays" (56-57). Building on Berninger and Poore the theatrical space within these plays operates as a historical palimpsest, where alternative queer temporalities coexist, intersect, and clash. For instance, *Mother Clap's Molly House* interweaves the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, while *Canary* spans the 1960s to the early 2000s, and *The Pride* oscillates between the 1950s and the late 2000s. By examining these multiple timelines, I seek to demonstrate how contemporary gay plays in the UK not only represent gay histories but also critique the present through their engagement with temporality, highlighting the transformation in attitudes toward sexuality. I argue that these temporal shifts are not solely narrative devices but serve as critical reflections on how gay identities are shaped, both in the past and today. Green's assertion that "the classic gay plays are educational: reminding a complacent generation of the struggles and tragedies (and fabulousness) that underlie the glossy image of rapid progress" therefore resonates with this chapter's exploration of how contemporary gay theatre uses temporal frameworks to both educate and challenge its audiences. By returning to the past, these plays pave the way for a deeper understanding of gay identity and its ongoing reconstruction in British society.

Building on Berninger and Poore's conceptualisations of the history play, I will argue that these dramatic works offer spectators the opportunity to witness and learn from historical exchanges on stage. By examining how the past informs the present, and how playwrights navigate queer temporalities, this chapter contributes to an understanding of how contemporary British gay theatre negotiates the intersections of history, identity, and time.

Through my analysis of these plays, I seek to address the larger question of how temporality plays a critical role in the construction and representation of gay identity on the twenty-first-century stage.

In his article, Thomas Hescott observes that “gay theatre is at a crossroads”, which speaks to the tension between a rich gay theatrical history and the lack of contemporary works exploring gay culture with the same vigour. He writes that “there is a large constituency of directors and writers who are gay, but currently very few people in theatre with the appetite for chronicling and exploring gay culture and gay stories”. Hescott also suggests that gay theatre has “started to contextualise, and record [a gay] history” and uses his own play *The Act* (2013) and James Graham’s play *Tory Boyz* (2008), as examples. Both plays use 50-year leaps in time to contextualise the present through the past, thus exemplifying how temporal shifts allow gay histories to illuminate contemporary struggles—a theme central to my analysis. Similarly, Green emphasises the importance of maintaining a "gay voice" in theatre, defined by its “emotional”, “protean”, and political largeness, and argues the need for gay people to reinvent identity in every generation.

As Green and Hescott observe, the revival of these gay plays invites audiences to engage with both the history of gay identity and its evolving representations. This chapter, in alignment with the larger thesis, asks: in what novel ways do plays about gay identity in contemporary mainstream UK theatre engage with temporality, and how is this engagement significant for theatrical representations of gay identity and queer theory? In light of this, I investigate the queer temporalties that are presented within *Mother Clap’s Molly House, The Pride* and *Canary.* I argue that the queer temporalities that I identify are not merely historical

retrospectives; they actively negotiate the past and present, creating temporal dialogues that enrich understandings of gay identity by examining how the past is both remembered and reimagined in contemporary portrayals of gay lives through the construction of gay characters within the dramatic action. Through my chosen case studies, I argue that these temporal dialogues challenge dominant societal narratives while offering critical frameworks for queer theory. Mainstream theatre thus emerges as a vital site for deconstructing, reconstructing, and expanding representations of gay identity. Through my analysis, I identify the similarities and differences between the ways in which British gay playwrights (re)invent gay characters for the stage the twenty-first century British stage.

As *The Pride*, *Canary*, and *Mother Clap's Molly House* all employ non-linear structures to explore gay relationships across different historical periods, they illustrate the recent tendency for gay playwrights to use temporal shifts to highlight the interplay between past and present attitudes toward sexuality. *The Pride* alternates between the repressive 1950s, where Philip struggles with his attraction to Oliver amidst societal constraints, and the more liberated 2000s, where Oliver's relationship with Philip is tested by his addiction to anonymous sex. *Canary* spans the 1960s to the 2000s, illustrating the impact of historical events on two gay couples, Tom and Billy, and Russell and Mickey, emphasising how past struggles reverberate through time. In *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Ravenhill contrasts the eighteenth-century world of Mrs. Tull—who transforms her dress shop into a Molly House, a space for community and sexual freedom—with a 2001 London sex party. In a 2001 interview with James Cary Parkes for *Gay Times*, Ravenhill explains that "Molly Houses were not brothels, they were more like clubs [and] plenty of sex went on, but you didn't pay for it; you'd pay to get in, pay for the beer, but not for the sex" (32). These plays use interwoven

timelines to critique societal attitudes, demonstrating how historical struggles and triumphs inform contemporary gay identities.

Using Jack Halberstam's writing on queer temporalities and subcultures from *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) as a theoretical framework, my chapter is divided into three sections that have emerged from themes that I have identified to resonate throughout all three plays under investigation: 'homocuriosity', 'Runaway Gay' and 'Gays™'. The first is 'homocuriosity', which I argue is produced from the deep-rooted inquisitiveness constructed by the gay playwrights. I claim that homocuriosity is a feeling that presents itself before the consciousness of homosexual desire through an internal sense of curiosity. My proposed neologism 'homocuriosity' emerges from the homosexual inquisitiveness that I have identified to be displayed from my readings of the gay characters within the case studies. According to the OED, curiosity means the desire to know or learn. Considering this, I offer the term homocuriosity to describe the internal feeling through which gay characters are shown to explore their curiousness in regard to their initial navigation of their gay identity as well as their subsequent romantic relations. I am particular interested in how feelings of homocuriosity might differ across the queer temporalities presented and what this means in relation to constructions of gay identity.

With this in mind, I argue that homocuriosity offers the scope for gay characters to move away from heteronormative thinking and its reproductive conventions towards alternative queer temporalities. I explore this idea through the trajectory of closeted Philip's relationship with Oliver in the first section of *The Pride* to investigate how these events have an impact on alternative characters with the same name fifty years later. As well as this, I draw on the

secret relationship between Billy and Tom – the son of a superintendent – in the 1960s and the ricochet effect it has fifty years later, in *Canary.* Finally, I analyse the homocurious wandering of an eighteenth-century apprentice, Martin, and his fascination with the Moorfields, also known as "sodomites walk" (Norton 77), in *Mother Clap's Molly House*.

The next section, 'Runaway Gay', is influenced by my reading of what Halberstam describes as the "stretched-out adolescences of queer culture that disrupt conventional accounts of sub-culture, youth culture, adulthood, and maturity" (153). The notion of a stretched-out adolescence "challenges the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood" (153). Applying Halberstam's theory, I identify the term 'runaway gay' to represent the eighteenth-century mollies in *Mother Clap's Molly House* and their ways of life. For example, the ways in which they reject heteronormative societal norms. Runaway gays, I argue, reflect the desire and/or necessity for young gay men to leave their (parental) homes. Additionally, I examine what happens when openly gay Mickey in *Canary* and Tom in *Mother Clap's Molly House* venture off in search of shelter and freedom away from their familial homes.

Finally, 'Gays™' centres around Halberstam's idea that "young gays […] think of themselves as part of a 'post-gender' world and for them the idea of labelling becomes a sign of an oppression they have happily cast off in order to move into a pluralistic world of infinite diversity" (Halberstam 19). I investigate this concept through my analysis of the gay men that attend Josh's "sex party-orgy-underwear sort of thing" (59) in *Mother Clap's Molly House*. In this section, I explore Halberstam's claim that "the new emphasis on queer youth, can unwittingly contribute to an erasure of queer history" (179), through the representation of

Toby, a young actor in *Canary.* In doing so, I identify and explore generational tensions that are presented between gay characters that inhabit alternative temporalities and/or subcultures. Through this, I survey the gay characters that are constructed by gay playwrights to analyse the ways in which they are presented to challenge and subvert existing notions of gay identity.

Queer Temporality

According to Halberstam, queerness is shaped by "strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (1), offering a framework for understanding how queer lives disrupt conventional societal timelines. Halberstam's emphasis on "strange temporalities" highlights how queer experiences often operate outside linear, heteronormative life scripts—such as those involving marriage and child-rearing, as explored in more detail in my third analysis chapter. Instead, queer lives follow "other logics of location, movement and identification," which resist these normative structures. These temporal disruptions challenge the established rhythms of mainstream society, opening up alternative modes of existence and self-definition. Halberstam's assertion that queer temporality "disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding" (152) is particularly significant for my analysis. By breaking away from these linear progressions, queer temporalities unsettle dominant narratives, allowing for the representation of identities and experiences that do not conform to standard social expectations.

Halberstam's work thus serves as the theoretical foundation for my analysis, structuring the three sections of my thesis and guiding its development. On one hand, Halberstam

underscores the importance of studying "queer life modes that offer alternatives to family time and family life" (53), suggesting that queerness provides a way to imagine and inhabit temporalities untethered from traditional kinship and reproduction. This opens space for considering how gay characters in contemporary theatre navigate these non-normative temporalities. On the other hand, Halberstam notes that "not all gay, lesbian, and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts" but argues that what makes queerness compelling is its "potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (2). This dual perspective highlights the tension between assimilation and radical divergence within queer experiences, as explored in all three of my analysis chapters in different ways—through temporality, shame and/or homonormativity.

In light of Halberstam's theories, this chapter examines how each playwright constructs queer temporal spaces and alternative narratives for their gay characters. These narratives challenge heteronormative structures and reimagine the possibilities of identity and time. By engaging with the complexities of queer temporality, the plays disrupt linear historical progressions, foregrounding moments of rupture, reflection, and reinvention that offer fresh perspectives on gay identity and its representation on stage. Halberstam's insights thus provide a critical lens through which to explore the temporal dialogues embedded in the plays and their significance for understanding the intersections of queer theory, history, and identity.

In *Temporalities* (2013), Russell West-Pavlov writes that time "underpins virtually all aspects of everyday life, as even the term 'everyday' reveals" (3). He claims that "every 'thing' is in

fact a process; all these processes, taken together, make up the world as the sum total of its immanent 'times'" (3). I draw on Halberstam's writing to build on this as they explain how queer time "emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic". They go on to explain that "queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing" (Halberstam 2). I argue therefore that, although queer time may have been most visible in the wake of AIDS, it has always existed in and amidst normative temporalities for those who do not fit within (hetero)normative paradigms of 'everyday' life, thus creating alternative (queer) temporalities. From the production of queer temporalities, I explore the queer communities that emerge and the subsequent queer spatiality that they inhabit, such as nightclubs, saunas and – to an extent – the privacy of their homes.

Halberstam writes that queer subcultures "produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2). Queer temporalities will be utilised in my subsequent sections of analysis as "useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (both what has changed and what must change)" (4). West-Pavlov describes literature as a "fictive construct, an artifice which, in playful re-working of the putatively factual givens of reality, may point us to, indeed participate in the plethora of temporalities subsisting under the threshold of an all-embracing and coercive time" (10). I extend West-Pavlov's expression to the dramatic form of theatre. In doing so, I

aim to identify and evaluate the similarities and differences between the alternative temporalities, queer subcultures, and queer spaces that each play constructs in relation to my three sections. In her 2015 article for the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English,* Ute Berns writes that through "reconceiving the past and historicizing the present in its cultural transformations and global entanglements, [contemporary history] plays and performances bear witness to a significant 'plurality of temporalities'" (1). As explained in the introduction to this chapter, history is very much integral to the formation of gay theatre as it often draws on gay histories and contexts to situate its dramatic narratives, further highlighting the potential for audiences/readers to learn from history via gay plays. Returning to this idea, the following sections will explicate the dramatic moments in which the crossing of queer temporalities within the case studies react with and against one another, therefore constructing a commentary on gay histories, identity, and subcultures on stage.

Homocuriosity

Homocuriosity can be thought of as a feeling that gay men experience and navigate before they are conscious of feelings of homosexual desire; homocuriosity can be thought of as the 'spark' signalling towards the feelings of romantic chemistry between gay men. In my analysis of the gay characters in the selected plays, I kept returning to this idea of a sense of curiosity pertaining to gay men that, in turn, leads to an understanding of their sense of desire and related feelings. Initially, I adopted the term 'homosexual curiosity' but, as I continued with my analysis, the term felt too restrictive in regard to its definition and understanding. Homocuriosity, therefore, was born from my desire to encapsulate the active curiosity that I explore in this section specifically in relation to gay men (and potentially other queer identities). When working on my understanding and subsequent definition of homocuriosity

I kept returning to Sedgwick's term: homosociality. I argue, however, that although homocuriosity and homosociality are somewhat similar in their positioning, they are also distinctively different.

In the preface to Sedgwick's thirtieth anniversary edition of *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosociality* (2015), Wayne Koestenbaum explains that Sedgwick's writing on homosociality "made it possible to be pruriently inquisitive about the business-as-usual arrangements of patriarchy" (x). Writing at a time when homoerotic potentials were overlooked in close readings, Sedgwick offers up homosociality as a way to rethink the bonds between men. In the introduction to the book's first edition (1985), Sedgwick describes "male homosocial desire" as "a kind of oxymoron". She explains how her term homosocial describes "social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). Homocuriosity builds on and extends Sedgwick's definition in regard to its explicit transformative power of establishing and exploring a *feeling* that is explicit to gay identity, that develops into sexual and romantic desire.

For Sedgwick, homosociality does not "mean to discuss genital homosexual desire as 'at the root of"' other forms of male homosociality—but rather a strategy for making generalisations about, and marking historical differences in, the *structure* of men's relations with other men" (2). Writing about Sedgwick's key concepts and ideas, Jason Edwards describes homosocial desire as "Sedgwick's way of conceptualising the feelings bonding and dividing people of the same gender" (33). For Edwards, Sedgwick's "'male homosocial desire' refers to the entire spectrum of male bonds and potentially includes everyone from overt heterosexuals to overt

homosexuals" (36), whereas homocuriosity is *explicitly* positioned around the curiosity that emerges and following it, the desires, feelings, and bonding of gay men. Male homosocial desire, according to Edwards, is a phrase where "all three words are giving equal emphasis." In light of this, he proposes that "one might remember that, within patriarchy, some of us are first men who related primarily to men, and then that desire may be involved, as a sort of afterthought" (37). However, homocuriosity is very much about the lead up and exploration of gay curiosity with desire at the forefront. Through theorising and exploring the notion of homocuriosity in my analysis, I aim to highlight and unpick the feelings that emerge specifically from gay men – in turn offering up a new framework 'read' queer characters through.

Homocuriosity can be understood as an affect that drives towards homosexual desire. In *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth describe affect as arising "in the midst of *inbetween-ness:* in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (1). In this sense, homocuriosity can be thought of as a feeling that drives gay men to realise and act on their desires. This is reflected in my analysis of homocuriosity as I have identified three emerging themes amongst my case studies: homocuriosity resulting in policing, love, and violence. According to Gregg and Seigworth, affect "is the name we give to […] visceral forces". They argue that these forces "can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1). Similarly, Margaret Wetherell describes affect as meaning "something like a force or an active relation" (2). Considering this, homocuriosity can be understood as a

un/conscious force that drives gay men towards a deeper awareness of their (sexual) identity – as identified from the gay characters constructed in the case studies.

In *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre: Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage* (2021), theatre scholars Mireia Aragay et al. "reroute the current critical and theoretical interest in the feeling/theatre interface to address British playwright's theatre in the twenty-first century, by examining how affects are inscribed in the poetics of playtexts as well as in their iterations on stage in our historical conjuncture". In their introduction, they explain that their edited collection "seeks to mobilise a malleable understanding of affect, concerning both physiological sensations and psychological states, that is, affects, emotions and feelings" (3). Drawing from this, homocuriosity can be considered as a means to further understand the realisation and emergence of homosexual desire as a result of the 'spark', or internal feelings that emerge. Homocuriosity, is therefore presented as an affect that is inscribed by gay playwrights in contemporary gay British playwriting as a feeling that disturbs and challenges the understanding of homosexual feelings, as identified through my analysis of gay characters.

Aragay et al. "conceive affect as the capacity [...] to disturb and be disturbed" (3). Furthering this, I argue that homocuriosity can be shown to be both efficacious and detrimental towards the development of gay identities. Most importantly, homocuriosity is shown to also affect the deconstruction and reconstruction of gay identity, as I explain in my analysis of gay characters below. This can be positive in the sense that fruitful relations can emerge; however, homocuriosity is also depicted to have the capacity to result in negative consequences such as rejection, shame and/or (sexual) violence. I investigate the ways in

which Campbell, Harvey, and Ravenhill represent instances of – what I describe as – homocuriosity through their constructions of gay characters. Through this, I identify similarities and differences between their representation of the notion of homocuriosity and its result in homosexual policing, homosexual love and homosexual violence. I explore the shifts in representation and attitudes towards homocuriosity across time in regard to the plays' multiple staging of (gay) histories. This allows for a deeper understanding of how gay identity and desire have been constructed, challenged, and reimagined in different historical and cultural contexts. Through examining these shifts in my analysis, I aim to show how theatrical representations of homocuriosity—whether subtle or overt—respond to and critique prevailing societal norms, reflecting both the repression and liberation of gay desire across time.

As portrayed by Campbell in *The Pride*, the shared, unspoken desire between Philip and Oliver in Act One embodies the very essence of homocuriosity. The silence and secrecy in regard to acknowledging their homosexual desire for one another also perpetuates the ideology of the 'closet', described by Sedgwick as the "defining structure" for "gay oppression" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 71). This is evident through the opening scene of the play when they first meet. Philip is initially intrigued by Oliver and is somewhat aroused by his mystery. Oliver senses Philip's interest and flirts back through sexually suggestive comments such as "everything in full bloom", to which Philip replies "lovely", and immediately follows with "*a slight pause*" (Campbell 12). This seemingly casual interaction illustrates the notion of homocuriosity and how through the guise of conversation both characters are able to subtly indicate an interest in one another in a place where it is not safe to outrightly do so. The repartee between the two develops as the scene progresses, followed by even more playful questions, and pauses.

Philip: It's strange.

Oliver: What is?

Philip: When I opened the door?

Oliver: Yes?

Philip: You look familiar is what I'm saying.

Oliver: Yes, I thought so too (15).

Both characters communicate through covert dialogue which suggests a noticeable tension that later evolves into a guilt-ridden affair. To act on one's homocuriosity is to be influenced by public and private factors, such as location and the presence of others. For example, the presence of Philips' wife, Sylvia, is an example of homocurious policing. Her character's presence, both on- and off-stage, is a constant reminder of Philip's heteronormative façade. Due to her looming presence, both men must communicate through their silences as a way to perform their homocuriosity to one another. It is through these silences and social cues performed between the utterances that they are able to understand and pick up on each other's signals safely. This can be seen when "*Sylvia leaves the room and the two men are left alone*" and "*there is a pause and then they both begin to talk at the same time*" (*The Pride* 26), suggesting a rush of excitement as soon as the 'obstacle' between them is removed.

In Act One, Scene Three of *Canary* (set in Liverpool, 1962)*,* "*the lights come up on seventeen year told Tom, lying in bed with his mate Billy in the middle of the afternoon*", demonstrating the extent to which feelings of homocuriosity can lead to intimacy when in a private, undisturbed space. The scene, however, implies what had occurred between the two young

men through them both being in bed with no clothes on. I argue that despite there being no onstage physical obstacle, heteronormativity – as the social norm – still lingers as an onstage obstacle, signalling the oppressive 1960s. In this scene, Billy asks about Ellie, a girl that Tom is "courting" and eventually marries (*Canary* 18), suggesting an air of secrecy. This exchange acts as a reminder of the repressive laws surrounding homosexuality, both within the dramatic world of the play and in Britain during the sixties. Ironically, towards the end of the scene, there is literal homosexual policing by the action of the policemen crashing into the scene as Tom and Billy kiss and arresting them both. I argue that this interaction on stage portrays the implicit and explicit policing of homosexuality as a direct result of pursuing homocurious feelings and desires, which therefore reinforces the notion of needing to mask homosexual desire in public for safety.

Both of these examples above take place in the privacy of the characters' home. However, in Act One, Scene Three of *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Martin, a closeted gay apprentice, is walking up the "*Moorfields at night [as] men silently cruise up and down*" (*Plays: 2* 27). Rictor Norton explains, in his historical study of homosexuals in the eighteenth century, that Moorfields was an area "so popular […] it became virtually synonymous with homosexuality" (77). To a reader of the play text, it may not be entirely clear what is happening in the scene until Eros, the Greek god of love, begins to sing a song that alludes to sexual activity: "the prick of Eros' arrow's sweet / it enters swiftly in / and once sweet prick is known to man / his pleasure can begin" (*Plays: 2* 27). In the 2001 premiere of *Mother Clap's Molly House* at the National Theatre, director Nicholas Hytner staged the scene to make the action more explicit by having Eros' lines spoken over a dimly lit stage – almost in shadows – with men wandering up and down whilst pleasuring themselves. The mise-en-scène that Hytner offers up portrays

the potentiality for undisturbed and unpoliced homocuriosity. The sexual image of these wandering men is highlighted through fast-paced jerky movements of partially lit bodies standing in front of each other. Conversely, the lighting of this scene is used to reflect the shadows in which the wandering takes place, thus highlighting the necessary secrecy of homocuriosity among gay men in the eighteenth century.

All three playwrights illustrate varied trajectories of policed homocuriosity through the narratives and the construction of their gay characters. Two out of the three scenes occur within a private space, suggesting a disdain towards public homosexuality that is also implied through the constant policing of curiosity via characters that represent dominant heteronormative ideology, such as Sylvia and the policemen. The rejection of homosexual tendencies is also present in the one example that occurs in the public sphere of Moorfield, the difference being that the policing is drawn from an internal ideological response to homosexuality through the character Martin. Martin's internal struggle is highlighted shortly after his walk through the Moorfields and from being followed by Orme, another gay apprentice who "saw [Martin] up Moorfields" (*Plays: 2* 29). Martin denies this but Orme adds that he has seen Martin "up Moorfields a few times" and questions if he knows that it is called "sodomites walk" (30).

> **Martin**: I don't want to know about that
>
> **Orme**: Please.
>
> **Martin**: I don't want to know about you.
>
> **Orme**: Please. Don't say that.

Martin: I want to get on with my work. Not right. Men wandering in the dark. Thass all wrong (31).

This scene portrays the aftermath of Martin's homocuriosity in a public space, as it clashes into the private space of his workshop. Through this duologue Ravenhill illustrates the internal struggle with homocuriosity, which represents the notion of internalised homophobia and shame, which I go into greater detail on in my next chapter. Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill all portray the negative consequences associated with pursuing one's homocuriosity through their different examples of the policing of homosexuality. As shown through these examples there is a deep-rooted yearning for gay love that stems from acting upon one's homocuriosity across all queer temporalities featured in the plays. Consequently, in the following sub-section of my analysis I will present and discuss the outcomes that emerge from the pursuit of love, as a direct result of the gay characters' homocuriosity, as shown by contemporary gay playwrights.

Three scenes after Oliver and Philip first meet, Oliver arrives at Philip's house despite them both agreeing they "wouldn't meet" or "talk to each other" (*The Pride* 69). Through this duologue audiences are made aware for the first time that Oliver and Philip have been meeting in the off-stage dramatic world. This is shown through their broken communication and the ambiguity in their language, thus implying that they have been meeting in secret. Unlike their first meeting, Sylvia is not present within this scene as she is "staying with a friend". The two "*sit facing each other*", followed by a "*long pause*" (70).

Philip: What is it you want to say to me?

Oliver: That I love you.

Philip: Please don't say that again. I find it absurd.

Oliver: I have no choice. It isn't a choice.

Philip: We agreed. You said… I asked you not to talk like that.

Oliver: I love you so much.

This exchange can be seen to reflect Oliver's desire for Philip growing following his initial feelings of homocuriosity. This scene shows that Oliver has fallen in love with Philip and goes on to explain that "at night [he] can't sleep [because he] sees [Philip's] face [and] hears [his] voice" (71). The staging of the scene is suggested to be tense, as proposed by the stage directions indicating a "*pause"* between every couple of sentences. The lines in this scene begin short, delivered in a staccato pace that is very minimal, with many breaks and cut ins. This interaction indicates a fluctuation between the two characters as they verbally push and pull from each other through their duologue, much like how the two characters accept and reject their feelings for each other, and in turn their feelings towards their homosexuality.

As the scene progresses, Oliver confesses to Philip that he has been to other public places where gay men meet and cruise but admits that "it isn't the same" (74) because of his love for Philip. Philip continues to be dismissive of Oliver's confession of love, further portraying the character's internalised homophobia and subsequent desire to remain silent on his sexuality. I argue therefore that even without Sylvia's presence on stage, Campbell portrays Philip's inner struggle as he wrestles with pursuing his homocuriosity. This results in Philip "*strik[ing] Oliver across the face*", which is described as "*the reaction of a cornered animal*". Philip, however, immediately apologises after and "*begins to cry*", as "*he collapses into*

Oliver's arms and begins to sob like a baby" (80). This reaction suggests a vulnerability that Campbell portrays through his representation of Philip, in stark contrast to his aggressive behaviour, symbolising Philip's polarised attitudes towards homocuriosity and his subsequent sexual/romantic feelings for another man. Oliver comforts him and they "*kiss"*. Oliver "*tries to remain tender*", but Philip "*has been taken over by something else [and] there is something urgent, aggressive stirring in him"*.

Philip's barbaric response to Oliver's tender kiss can be seen as a rejection of homosexuality and his confusion with his strong sexual feelings towards Oliver. The scene culminates with Philip becoming "*violent*" as he "*throws Oliver down*" to "*mount*" and rape him (80). I suggest that this scene visually manifests Philip's internalised homophobia through the negative connotation of gay sex as primitive or beast-like. The imagery of bestial behaviour is also present in Ravenhill's writing, for example in Act Two, Scene Nine of *Mother Clap's Molly House*, through local farmer Lawrence. Lawrence explains to Tull, the 'mother' and owner of the molly house, that his "wife's insides got messed about with all that carrying and birthing […] [she] in't been worth fucking in years" (88). Lawrence explains that he "in't really bothered about lads [as] the only reason [he] […] fucks lads is cos woman's needy and whores want paying" (89). Through this seemingly heterosexual character, Ravenhill subverts the stereotypical thinking that gay men are unable to love, as in the case of Lawrence, he is not bothered by finding love, just "a hole" (89).

In his study on gay and lesbian representation in the twentieth century, Sinfield compares gay love with "sado-masochism" (307), through his analysis of Sherman's *Bent*. Arguably, his claim can is also reflected through Philip's desire to hurt himself, as well as Oliver, due to his inability

to accept his homosexual feelings. This is portrayed through the aftermath of the sexual abuse, in the way that Philip "*mechanically"* gets himself dressed and pours himself a drink. After another pause, and time to reflect, he orders Oliver to "leave and never come back" which, as seen with his previous breakdown, will hurt both himself and Oliver. The scene ends with Philip "*drinking his whisky and smoking his cigarette"* (*The Pride* 81), as the lights gradually fade to end Act One. This scene brings to the forefront Philip's internal disgust, paired with his lack of control towards his sexual desires. In this scene Campbell stages the potentiality for fatal consequences from acting upon one's homocuriosity, more specifically the negative repercussions for acting on homosexual feelings at a time when homosexuality is both illegal and rejected by society, thus further reinforcing its othering. Through the final mise-en-scène for Act One, Philip can be considered to be an embodiment of internalised homophobia through his anger towards his feelings of homocuriosity. Despite this, Oliver represents gay men's desire for love. Through the construction of Philip and Oliver in 1958, Campbell presents the potential duality and tension from both accepting and rejecting one's homocuriosity and gay identity more broadly.

In *The Pride,* Campbell utilises the stylistic feature of double casting so that the same actors play both the 1950s and 2008 versions of their character. Through his use of double casting, Campbell is able to further highlight the thematic and ideological links between the different time periods in relation to homosexuality and gay identity construction. Berninger claims that the use of role doubling in the past and present "enables a juxtaposition of numerous versions and interpretations of the past" (49). In a similar way, Campbell plays with the juxtaposition of physically representing the palimpsest of histories on stage through the double casting of Philip, Oliver and Sylvia in 1958 and 2008. Berninger goes on to explain that role doubling

"underlines the connections between the present and the past, as the doubled characters share traits" (49). In this sense, Philip and Oliver can be considered to carry the history of their past through to their present portrayals of different characters with the same name in 2008, strengthening the link between the past and the present. This idea is arguably reflected in Act One of *The Pride* where, in 2008, Oliver asks Sylvia to stay with him because he feels scared to be left alone. As this duologue goes on *"Philip enters in his 1958 clothes; a ghost. Sylvia can't see him, and neither can Oliver, but his presence, somehow, is felt. He emerges from the shadows"* (66). The superimposition of Philip's 'ghost' from 1958 'haunting' Oliver in 2008, alludes to the symbolic connection between gay identities and the importance that past events have on shaping gay identities in the present and potential futures.

In adopting the dramatic device of ghosts on stage, Campbell is also able to symbolise a spiritual connection between gay identities from history and the present – as shown in the scene above. I argue that Campbell's use of ghosts in his play highlights an historical link between gay pasts that are embedded in the representation of his gay characters. My analysis of Campbell's use of ghosts, resonates with Jeffrey Weinstock's argument that "the ghost functions as the paradigmatic deconstructive gesture […] [that] can thus disrupt the chronologies and topographies of dominant historical and socio-political discourses and suggest alternative, supressed narratives" (1). Building on the idea of ghosts representing alternative and supressed narratives, I suggest that by having Philip's ghost from 1958 haunt the 2008 scene of Oliver's breakdown, Campbell visually reminds the audiences of the homosexual suppression that was rife in the 1950s. In doing so, Campbell draws attention to the intrinsic link between the construction of gay identity and history through the blending of temporality via the double casting. This idea aligns with Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin's

assertion that “spectres and notions of haunting shed light on the complexities of memory and trauma [and] the changing relations between the subject and the collective” (2). I argue that this idea can be seen in *The Pride,* where Philip from 1958 haunts the scene. Through this, Campbell is able to compare Oliver’s struggle with his feelings towards his homosexual desire in 2008 with Philip’s struggle to accept his feelings of homocuriosity in 1958. In so doing, Campbell reinforces a direct link between two constructions of gay identity, albeit fifty years apart. This is further evidenced through the ‘haunting’ taking place immediately before the scene in which Philip sexually abuses Oliver in 1958. By having these two scenes directly lead into one another, the audiences are visually presented with the clashing and overlaying of two histories on stage—a historical palimpsest if you will. Through this, Campbell highlights the lingering effect that the previous scene has on the other.

Philip: Oliver.

Oliver: The voice.

Sylvia: What voice?

Oliver: The voice that says –

Philip: Oliver –

Oliver: You’re no good –

Philip: Oliver –

Oliver: You’re unlovable –

Philip: Oliver –

Oliver: This is what you deserve.

Pause. Philip stands back into the shadows (67-68).

The scene in which Oliver voices his anxieties and discomfort with himself in 2008, as Philip haunts the stage, draws a direct relation between the two characters and temporalities. That is to say that Campbell foregrounds the relationship between the past and present through the bonds between the characters in 1958 and 2008. In 2008, Oliver is addicted to anonymous sex, which adds strain to his relationship with his partner Philip. In 2008, it is Philip who craves Oliver's love and affection. Philip explains that "there's a part of [Oliver] that [he'll] always care about" (46), but he cannot deal with his addiction for sex and lack of compassion and love. In having this scene preface the abuse scene analysed above, Campbell portrays the formations of gay identities that are constructed in the present from past events through his gay characters. In 1958, Oliver was yearning for Philip's love, but in 2008, Oliver feels unfulfilled and gains satisfaction from anonymous encounters. By contrast, Philip in 1958 was violently dismissive of his love and sexual feelings for Oliver, whereas in 2008 Philip craves compassion, monogamy, and love – an idea that is explored in relation to the rise of homonormativity amongst gay men in my final chapter. Campbell illustrates varied desires as well as the complexity of homocuriosity across different temporalities.

The construction(s) of the characters, Oliver and Philip, both in 1958 and 2008, reflect how past experiences can re-shape present desires and behaviour. Philip, in 1958 and 2008, is constructed as a character who is tied to the social rules of each time. For example, Philip in 2008 desires a 'traditional' monogamous relationship and wants to get married, which I explore in my final chapter. Arguably, it is through this that Campbell dramatises the tension between social rules of the time in which the action is taking place and the characters' desires. This highlights that despite the similar feelings of homocuriosity and subsequent sexual urges, there is the possibility for varied reactions from an individual, as shown through Philip and

Oliver. Through these nuances, Campbell draws attention to the individuality and differentiated experiences of gay men in society. Consequently, I suggest that gay British theatre is moving away from narratives of gay identity as a collective towards more narratives surrounding an individual and the subsequent de/construction of their singular identities, in relation to their own desire.

This idea is also reflected through Billy's yearning for Tom's love in Harvey's *Canary.* Due to *Canary's* non-linear narrative, the audiences are made aware of Tom's marriage to Ellie in Act One, Scene Two, right before the scene, set in 1962, with Billy and Tom in bed together. Harvey utilises the non-linearity of the play to further the narrative along, as well as to highlight the connections between the past and present. In the first of the two scenes, Tom, the "Chief of Police", is cornered within his house with "fifty [journalists] outside with zoom lenses", following a rumour of a "love affair" (*Canary* 14-16). The scene then jumps forty-eight years back to a younger Tom lying in bed with Billy, thus, confirming the present accusation with past events. In this instance, Harvey begins with the image of Tom's rejection of homocuriosity immediately followed by a scene which shows the negative aftermath of pursuing one's homocuriosity, as explored above.

Canary comes full circle in regard to Tom and Billy's relationship, as at the end of the play Billy appears at Tom's house as a ghost and "*sits on the couch in prison clothes*", as they discuss what could have been had there not been any resistance from Tom towards his feelings of homocuriosity and his gay identity. This scene harks back to the idea of using the dramatic devices of ghost to highlight alternative, supressed narratives of what could have been through physical reminders on stage for the audience to bear witness to.

Tom: I wish I'd known you. More.

Billy: You didn't do it nearly fifty years ago. And you won't do it now. I'm probably never going to see you again so… […]

Tom: One of these days I might surprise you.

They stand and shake hands.

Billy: You won't. You'll never do it, Tom.

Billy leaves (99).

This duologue brings to light the difficulty in confessing and/or accepting gay affection in the past and how it carries its way into the future and keeps the two apart. Tom's refusal to accept Billy's love in 1962 can be considered to be an effect of the social pressures of heteronormativity, as well as Tom's shame as a result of his internalised homophobia, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter Three.

As with the other two plays, *Mother Clap's Molly House* stages the processes of pursuing gay love as a result of homocuriosity. Following on from their first meeting, in Act One, Scene Five, Orme returns to "*the tally shop*" to see Martin. Initially, Martin is dismissive of Orme's arrival and tells Orme that he cannot be there because "[Mrs Tull] don't want you here. She says you're womanish. Says you're a snare" (*Plays: 2* 41). Martin's reasonings are reflective of his rejection towards homocuriosity, as well as the societal attitude towards homosexuality. Martin himself does not say that he does not want to see Orme, but rather uses the policing of others to tell him to go. Orme explains that "all [he] thinks about is [Martin]". Similar to Oliver trying to get over Philip in 1958, Orme tries to get Martin "out of [his] head" by going

back to the Moorfields but admits that when "[he] close[s] [his] eyes", he sees Martin's face (41). This piques Martin's interest and Orme demands Martin to "speak true" to him in order to tell him "what's in [his] heart", to which Martin admits that he "don't know" before being interrupted by Mrs Tull shouting from off-stage, functioning as an interruption in the same way as Sylvia in *The Pride.* This intrusion from Mrs Tull illustrates the controlling aspect of a heteronormative society against the freedom to pursue one's homocuriosity freely, without shame or regret.

During the scene, "*Orme hides*" (42) whenever Mrs Tull comes on stage, showing the desire to evade societal judgment and follow through with his affection towards Martin, regardless of how right or wrong it feels. Once Mrs Tull has gone, Orme reappears "*in a dress*" from Mrs Tull's shop, which Martin orders him to "take off" (43), resulting in Martin chasing Orme around the shop. This scene begins playful and concludes with the two touching each other more sensually all over their bodies as they begin to wrestle. As the wrestling intensifies, "*they fall to the floor".*

> **Martin**: Not so strong now, eh, miss?
>
> *They lie still for a moment. They get the giggles.*
>
> Do you paint?
>
> **Orme**: No.
>
> **Martin**: But your skin is so fair.
>
> **Orme**: As ever Nature made it.
>
> **Martin**: And your browns are so fine.
>
> **Orme**: As ever Nature gave me.

Martin: And your lips are the reddest as ever I saw.

Orme: Nature too.

Martin: No. No. I'm sure you paint.

Orme: I tell you I don't. Come. Taste 'em and see.

Martin *kisses* Orme (44).

This is the first example in the play of two gay characters following their urges that emerge from homocuriosity, resulting in a positive representation of gay love. Following on from this, Orme renames Martin "Kitty" and himself "Butcher" (*Plays: 2* 44). According to Norton, "the molly subculture as a *unified subculture,* rather than simply a disparate collection of people and their behaviour, was reinforced by the communal use of a specialised dialect, a private lexicon whose terms were relatively unknown to the culture-at-large" (92). The "dialect" that Norton refers to still exists in the twenty-first century, through cruising amongst gay men and the resurgence of handkerchiefs being worn to signal different aspects of one's gay identity in a way that is discreet and safer to 'read' between gay men. In regard to the play, this dialect can therefore act as a protective barrier between the mollies' public-facing lives and their personal lives, in which they act upon their homocurious urges and sexual feelings.

Ravenhill explains, in his interview with *Gay Times,* that "it was popular to have a molly name, so you'd get a nickname like Kitty Fisher, Old Fish Hannah, Pomegranate Moll and Garter Mary" (32). Gay men are "affectionally christened" by the gay men who are already initiated within the molly subculture (Norton 92). Through renaming each other the mollies can escape from their contrived heteronormative lives as they choose to adopt female fictional identities whilst pursuing their homocuriosity and therefore their homosexual desires. Through

adopting faux female personas, the mollies are able to carry out their desires and partake in homosexuality activity in private, and without revealing their everyday male identities.

Martin, on the other hand, craves for Orme's love and affection much like Oliver and Philip from *The Pride* and Billy and Tom from *Canary*. At first, Orme is invested in the thrill of sex and the fun of dancing with other men and mollies. It is only when Martin goes to have sex with Lawrence that Orme realises his love for Martin, who he has affectionately named Susan.

> **Orme**: Susan love, I been a wrong un. I see that now. Susan? Them others? They was fucks and fucks is fucks but, Susan, you – Susan, I love you. And love's love. And it's all hurting and jealousy and wanting it and it's bloody awful and really I dun't want nothing to do with it – but I got it, Susan. Susan – I got love for you.

As shown above, Orme is completely open with his feelings throughout the play without any negative consequences, unlike Oliver from *The Pride* and Billy from *Canary*. It is through this honesty that Orme is given the space to explore his homocuriosity and in turn accept his love for Martin, which results in "*Orme and Martin kiss[ing] passionately*" (96). Following on from this, in Act Two, Scene Eleven, Orme agrees to leave the molly house to begin a new life with Martin. Continuing with the theme of honesty, Orme requests to be able to return from time to time "just for old times", to which they both agree upon because "it's what [Orme] wants" and they want each other to be happy (108). This decision is a complete rejection of a fully monogamous relationship, as well a significant shift away from a heteronormative model for romantic relationships.

I conclude, therefore, that the agreement to meet-in-the-middle, as represented by Martin and Orme, illustrates the necessity of balancing an understanding of one's desires. Additionally, it highlights the open pursuit of one's homocuriosity with the aim to seek sexual pleasure, homocurious satisfaction and love. This can also be seen in the final scene between the 2008 versions of Philip and Oliver in *The Pride*, where Philip agrees to let Oliver sleep on his sofa for a while as he sorts things out. This is followed by Philip explaining to Oliver that they have a "history of sorts" and, as the duologue carries on until the end, it is made obvious that they are both in the process of getting to a better place, together (*The Pride* 115). Philip's comment of their history is reflective of the palimpsest of their shared history with characters of the same names from fifty years ago, as well as the intrinsic link to the shared history that shapes their gay identities. Unlike the other two examples, Tom and Billy are unable to meet in the middle. Despite this, Tom begins to accept his homosexuality, as the play closes with him opening his front door to reporters and "*a hundred camera lights*", ready to come out (*Canary* 101). Through their gay voices, I argue that Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill present audiences with the potential possibilities – as well as the importance – of exploring one's homocuriosity in relation to the construction of gay identity. In so doing, these plays portray a trajectory of pursuing homocurious feelings and the subsequent shifts that lead to the creation of alternative queer temporalities and spaces.

Runaway Gays

Here, I explore Halberstam's notion of a "stretched-out adolescence" (153) as an alternative queer temporality that challenges heteronormative life scripts. This concept is particularly relevant to my analysis of how gay characters are constructed in two of the three plays under discussion, as it underscores a rejection of conventional markers of 'maturity' in Western

society such as marriage and procreation. Halberstam's idea of queer space—defined as "place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage" and the "new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics" (6)—is also central to this discussion. Building on Halberstam's contention, I explore how gay playwriting presents these spaces not only resist heteronormative expectations but also to operate as temporal constructs where gay characters carve out alternative timelines that coexist with, yet resist, dominant societal narratives.

Halberstam writes that "in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future" (152). In contrast, queer temporalities disrupt this normative progression by extending or subverting adolescence, prioritising different markers of identity and fulfilment. In my analysis therefore, I examine the consequences when this "dangerous and unruly period of adolescence" stretches into adulthood, as represented in the plays. This stretched-out adolescence often becomes a site of tension, resistance, and creativity, revealing how gay characters are shown to negotiate their identities outside the confines of heteronormative timelines.

By engaging with Halberstam's framework, I identify how the playwrights use queer temporalities to depict lives that refuse or fail to conform to normative expectations, reflecting broader societal tensions around the acceptance of queer identities. This analysis ties directly to my chapter's exploration of how temporality is constructed and represented in contemporary British gay theatre, offering insights into how these plays critique linear

narratives of progress and provide alternative frameworks for understanding queer existence – specifically (in this case) to gay men.

I propose the term 'runaway gays' to describe gay characters in the plays who reflect Halberstam's notion of a "stretched-out adolescence" (153). This terminology stems from my analysis of the plays, where characters embodying this extended adolescence are often portrayed as having physically or emotionally escaped their heteronormative familial homes. These characters, I argue, exemplify the intersection of queer temporality and spatial displacement, highlighting the necessity for young gay men to leave their parental homes to seek both refuge and the freedom to explore their identities within a queer subculture. This departure underscores the conflict between heteronormative domestic spaces and the queer counterpublics discussed by Halberstam, wherein alternative spaces can facilitate the development of queer subjectivities, as displayed by my chosen case studies.

Through my readings of Mickey and Russell in *Canary* and Tom, Martin, and Orme in *Mother Clap's Molly House*, I demonstrate how the concept of the runaway gay reveals the ways in which gay characters are shown to negotiate their identities outside of normative familial structures. These characters' journeys represent not only a rejection of heteronormative expectations but also a broader engagement with the idea of chosen families and subcultural belonging. This framing situates the runaway gay as a pivotal figure for understanding the spatial and temporal dynamics of queer identity, which are central to my thesis on how contemporary gay theatre constructs and critique gay identity and temporalities.

Halberstam argues that queer subcultures provide "an opportunity to redefine the binary of adolescence and adulthood that structures so many inquiries into subcultures. Precisely because many queers refuse and resist the heteronormative imperative of home and family, they also prolong the periods of their life devoted to subcultural participation" (161). This redefinition of the binary between adolescence and adulthood is central to the concept of runaway gays, who blur the distinctions between these life stages by exhibiting behaviours typically associated with adolescence. These characters challenge the normative expectation that individuals will 'grow out of' their adolescent indulgence in desires and pleasures as they mature and conform to the stability of adulthood and family life.

I argue, however, that runaway gays extend this period of adolescence far into their adult lives, not as a failure to mature but as a deliberate and adaptive strategy to thrive within queer subcultural spaces. This extended adolescence allows them to negotiate their identities and relationships in ways that reject heteronormative ideals. Moreover, I explore how, through this prolonged adolescence, runaway gays develop survival strategies to navigate the dynamics of queer spaces. At the same time, I examine the ways in which other members of these queer subcultures often capitalise on the vulnerability and liminality of runaway gays, revealing complex power structures within these spaces.

The idea of a runaway gay, as discussed above, is reflected by the young gay character Tom, as he arrives to his "first actual live-sex party" (65), in Act Two, Scene Six of *Mother Clap's Molly House*. Tom communicates his excitement at the beginning of the scene as he explains that he "only came out recently […] when [he] moved to London" (64). This portrays the abovementioned desire and/or the necessity for a runaway gay to leave their familial home

to explore their sexuality and to construct their gay identity. He explains how it has only been "two months", but he is "totally changed […] [because] there's Old Me and New Me" (64). Like Campbell's use of role doubling in *The Pride*, director Nicholas Hytner cast the same actor to play Martin in the eighteenth century and Tom in the twenty-first century. Reviewer Philip Fisher writes that the doubling of roles "helps the allegory of the eighteenth-century gay awakening to explain the lives of their twenty-first century counterparts". An example of this is highlighted in David Alderson's paper on Ravenhill*,* where he writes that Tom "accentuates the play's overt concerns with history" (*Postgay Drama* 877). This is reflected through Tom's comments when he explains that he "feel[s] like Old Me was living in the Olden days", as opposed to the "new me", that is "like totally Today" (*Plays: 2* 64). Through the character of Tom, Ravenhill draws attention to this historical link between the past and present.

Alderson notes that Tom is "key to the ways in which audience's attitudes are all conditioned" (877), positioning him as a character with whom a heteronormative audience is likely to sympathise, given his inexperience with the gay sex party. Building on Alderson's point, I argue that this connection stems from Tom's role as a newcomer to a queer space, allowing the audience to follow his trajectory as a runaway gay entering an unfamiliar subculture. Through Tom, audiences are introduced to this alternative queer space, paralleling how they first encounter the Moorfields through Martin in the eighteenth century. This is further accentuated with lighting in the performance of the play. As previously mentioned, in the London premier of *Mother Clap's Molly House* in 2001, the opening scene with Martin in the Moorfields was dimly lit as he navigated the space, whereas the sex party in 2001 London was brightly lit with a white flood. Moreover, both characters, typically played by the same actor,

serve as entry points for the audience, creating a physical and symbolic link between the historical and contemporary representations of gay identity.

This dual casting reinforces the historical continuity between Martin and Tom, visually reminding the audience of the evolving yet interconnected queer experiences across three centuries. As the narrative leaps from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, Tom becomes a character the audience identifies with, navigating his journey into a new queer space while grappling with his own naivety. Upon arriving at the party, Tom, already under the influence of drugs, admits, "I always feel better [with] new people [and] new situations [with] an E because naturally, [I'm] sort of introverted." He further reflects that the 'old him' never "had sex or took drugs" (*Plays: 2* 64).

Building on Alderson, I suggest that Tom's adoption of new behaviours—participating in sex parties and taking drugs—exemplifies how runaway gays adapt to inhabit queer spaces and subcultures. His awkwardness and lack of familiarity with this space parallel Martin's earlier struggles to navigate the Moorfields, highlighting their shared experiences as newcomers to queer subcultures. However, it is Martin who ultimately learns to negotiate his alternative queer temporality with Orme by the play's conclusion. In contrast, Tom's experience suggests that contemporary queer subcultures in Britain are more toxic and challenging to acclimatise to, underscoring the difficulties faced by runaway gays in adapting to these spaces. This analysis reinforces the idea that queer subcultures, while offering new opportunities for identity exploration, also present significant challenges that vary across historical contexts. By casting Tom and Martin as mirrors of one another, Ravenhill not only creates a bridge

between queer pasts and presents but also critiques the evolving dynamics of queer spaces in contemporary Britain.

This idea of having to learn and adapt as a runaway gay is also reflected in *Canary* by Harvey's representation of young, closeted Russell and his openly gay friend Mickey. Set in 1981, Act One, Scene Five of the play takes place in London's infamous gay nightclub Heaven. The on-stage dramatic world is symbolic of the nightlife that young gay men are normally associated with. Arguably, this is a space in which runaway gays spend most of their time. The nightclub is also suggested to be a significant queer space as it is the first space that audiences see Mickey and Russell in, after the first scene in Mickey's familial home, set in 1979. The scene opens with Mickey "*dancing on a podium by the dance floor* […] *lost in the music",* whilst taking "*a big snort of poppers*" (*Canary* 24). Much like in Ravenhill's play, the iconography of drugs in relation to runaway gays is again adopted by Harvey in his construction of gay characters. Young Russell struggles as he enters "*carrying two holdalls and a guitar case, looking most put out*" (24). The contrast between Mickey and Russell within the space illustrates the disparity between runaway gays and how differently they might adapt to their new queer spaces. Unlike openly gay Mickey – and Tom from *Mother Clap's Molly House* – Russell is coming to terms with his sexuality and still presents himself as straight. This, therefore, illustrates a degree of dissonance between his identity and queer spaces like gay nightclubs.

> **Russell**: Can we go please?
>
> **Mickey**: *(sings)* Didn't I boy, didn't I boy
>
> **Russell**: Mickey, there's no women in this club.

Mickey: *(sings)* Remember me as a big balloon

Russell: Mickey? Have you brought me to a gay club? (24)

The difference in attitude between the two is further displayed through their different reactions to having "nowhere to go" (24). On the one hand, Russell is worrying about not having a place to settle in now that they have run away from their familial homes. Mickey, however, proclaims to Russell that this is "part of the adventure" (24), with which Russell does not agree. This scene draws attention to the issues that runaway gays experience during their departure from their family homes into uncharted queer spaces. Through Harvey's construction of Russell and Mickey, he represents a runaway gay's desire to leave their oppressive familial home despite the financial restrictions of not being able to afford a place to stay. Considering this, runaway gays must learn to survive in their new queer spaces. This can be seen through Mickey securing "a bed for the night" (24) as an exchange for sexual favours. This transaction comes as a surprise to Russell, who is still coming to terms with being a runaway (gay).

Russell: Who with?

Mickey: This bloke I met in the toilets. He said we could go back to his. Come on, it'll be a laugh.

Russell: I can't believe the situations you put me in sometimes.

Mickey: Don't worry, straight boy, you won't have to do nothing. Leave that to me. You'll like him, he's posh. He's an opera singer. (25)

Returning to the notion of queer time, Halberstam describes "a different mode of temporality that might arise out of an immersion in club cultures or queer sex cultures," noting the emergence of a "queer urbanite within this temporality" (174). Building on this, I argue that Robin, a gay man described as "older than them, dressed like a clone [, with a] [b]ig moustache" (*Canary* 25), embodies Halberstam's queer urbanite. Halberstam explains that queer urbanites lack "the pacing and schedules that inhere to family life and reproduction [so they] might visit clubs and participate in sex cultures well into their forties or fifties on a regular basis" (174). In *Canary*, Robin's frequent presence in gay clubs, where he picks up younger men, highlights the diversity of experiences within queer subcultures, especially in relation to the younger runaway gays. Robin therefore represents the latter end of a stretched-out adolescence, continuing to engage in club scenes, sex culture, and drug use. As Halberstam observes, "the separation between youth and adulthood quite simply does not hold, and queer adolescence can extend far beyond one's twenties" (174). Rather than signalling stagnation, Robin's character illustrates the variation and potential toxicity within queer subcultures that runaway gays navigate.

One year after the club scene, in 1982, Russell and Mickey are living with Robin in exchange for sexual acts offered by Mickey. Act One, Scene Seven begins in Robin's place with Mickey being out, leaving Robin and Russell alone. Robin "*sits on the sofa and suddenly weeps*", as he explains that Mickey "treats [him] like shit", with which Russell agrees. Russell goes on to thank Robin and tells him how "kind" it is of him to "let [them] stay". Robin explains how money is not an issue for him and that he wishes Mickey could "be like [Russell]". Russell tells Robin that he is "really handsome", as a response to Robin calling himself "ugly" (*Canary* 29). This exchange brings into question a different way for runaway gays to 'survive' in the spaces

they inhabit. In this scene, Robin feels unappreciated by Mickey and uses forms of self-deprecation to elicit compliments from Russell before making an advance. Robin does so by asking if he can be "terribly forward [and kiss]" Russell (29). On the other hand, Russell feels as if his place at Robin's is under threat. Considering this, Russell wants to give into his own homosexual urges, as well as accept Robin's advances for financial security. This can be seen when Russell takes Robin's "*hand and places it on his crotch"*. Moments later Robin *"jump[s] on him"* whilst "*undoing his jeans*".

> **Robin**: Mickey's so independently prickly. Yet I see such innocence in your eyes. […] You want special treats? You wanna be my boy?
>
> **Russell**: I just want…
>
> **Robin**: Can't afford much on your meagre grant.
>
> **Russell**: I just want someone to look after me.
>
> **Mickey**: I thought that was my job.
>
> *They both jump out of their skin.* Mickey *has come in silently.* Russell *starts to pull his jeans back up.* (30)

Through this scene Harvey displays how a runaway gay can learn and re-perform the 'rules' of existing in such queer spaces, much like how Russell performs Mickey's old role. Mickey is annoyed by this as he has tried many times to "coax" the fact that Russell is gay out of him. He goes on to explain how he made sure "blokes [wouldn't] look at [Russell's] cock" in the toilet and how he "worked bloody hard" to look after Russell (32). Through this exchange it is made clear that Mickey is in love with Russell, which is reinforced as the play goes on. By the end of this scene, however, Mickey leaves Russell. In response, Russell explains that he "no

longer needs [Mickey]", therefore illustrating that Russell is able to "cut the apron strings" (33) and survive as a runaway gay by himself. This idea resonates with Halberstam assertion that "queers participate in subcultures for far longer than their heterosexual counterparts" (174), allowing runaway gays like Russell to learn and adapt to newly inhabited queer spaces.

Much like Robin in *Canary*, I argue that other characters find a way to capitalise on younger runaway gays in *Mother Clap's Molly House.* An example of this is the noticeable shift in Mrs Tull's attitude towards mollies once she realises that they can make her money, in Act One, Scene Five. At first Mrs Tull describes Martin wearing a dress as "queer sport" (52). As the scene progresses, however, Mrs Tull realises that she can save her dying business and profit from it by making dresses for mollies instead of whores. Mrs Tull thus claims that "whores are finished [so she's] moving into mollies". Explaining her decision, Mrs Tull states "for that is the beauty of business. It judges no one. [...] A businesswoman will never judge – if your money is good" (54). Soon after, Act One ends with Mrs Tull renouncing her name, as she proclaims that "from this day on all shall call [her] Mother" (55). This transformation into the mollies' mother offers a much-desired maternal figure for the runaway gays. She is able to offer care and comforts for young runaway gays/mollies outside the sphere of their family homes. Where Robin exchanges financial security and safety for sex, Mrs Tull instead exchanges her support and care for money. Similar to Robin, however, Mrs Tull exploits the vulnerable runaway gays by capitalising on their desire for shelter and acceptance. This is described by the chorus as "a marriage of purse and arse and heart" (56). This idea of the exploitation of and capitalisation on (runaway) gays is carried through into Act Two of Ravenhill's play, in which heterosexual coke dealer Charlie comments that "gays are still good for business":

> Not like before is it? Now it's your poofs know how to enjoy themselves, it's your poofs with the money nowadays. Poofs running the country now, in't there? Do all my business with the poofs. Well, you don't get the hassle, do you? *(To Tina)* Poofs pay for your piercings. (60)

Through using derogatory slurs to address his customers, Charlie represents the exploitation of gay men and displays the notion of gay men being accepted as long as they provide a financial benefit. Alderson argues that Mrs Tull's decision to open the molly house was "only the start of the play's focus on conflicts between commerce and morality" (875). This focus is then carried forward and continued in the twenty-first century by Charlie and the sex party. I suggest that Charlie and Mrs Tull reflect the neoliberal tendency to capitalise on queer identities for profit, which is something I explore in more depth in Chapter Four.

In conclusion, I argue that gay playwrights illustrate how runaway gays contribute significantly to the creation of alternative queer spaces as a response to the restrictive confines of heteronormativity. Through my chosen examples, I have demonstrated how runaway gays navigate the fluid boundaries between adolescence and adulthood, drawing on and advancing Halberstam's concept of stretched-out adolescence. These characters illustrate the ways in which queer subcultures can both empower and exploit individuals who exist in a state of flux. Furthermore, I have shown how the vulnerability of runaway gays within these spaces—whether targeted for financial or sexual gain—points to the complexities of queer temporality and its impact on identity construction. By exploring these dynamics, I draw attention to the ways in which my case studies engage with temporality to offer nuanced

insights into gay identity, challenging traditional narratives of linear development and highlighting the diversity of gay experiences within subcultural spaces.

Gays™

According to Halberstam, "it has become commonplace and even clichéd for young urban (white) gays and lesbians to claim that they do not like 'labels' and do not want to be 'pigeonholed' by identity categories" (19). Yet, I argue that this very rejection of labels ironically establishes a collective identity, which I term Gays™. This identity reflects a modern, urban subculture characterised by the active rejection of heteronormative ideals and a simultaneous alignment with behaviours deeply entrenched in radicalised sex, drug use, and shared cultural traits. Gays™, as I define them, represent a subculture that thrives on shared interests, memes, and online communities, perpetuating their own satirical and self-aware identity through platforms like Instagram and Twitter. In a society increasingly mediated by online spaces, these digital practices reinforce the existence of Gays™ as an identity category, even as they reject traditional identity labels.

In this section, I examine how Ravenhill in *Mother Clap's Molly House* and Harvey in *Canary* construct and deconstruct the notion of Gays™, reinforcing it as both an identity and a subculture. Through my analysis, I argue that Gays™ complicate the pursuit of pleasure and love within the gay community by fostering a hedonistic subculture that can alienate deeper emotional connections. Furthermore, I explore how Gays™ are shown to distance themselves from their queer history, creating intergenerational tensions with other gay characters in the plays. This tension underscores the broader challenges of reconciling contemporary gay

identity with its historical and cultural lineage, an issue central to the plays' engagement with temporality and theatrical representations of gay identity.

The first example comes from the aforementioned second act of *Mother Clap's Molly House*, where Ravenhill presents a queer space that is heavily immersed in sex and drugs. As the act progresses, the presence of sex and drugs reaches its peak in Scene Eight. I argue that this scene largely encapsulates the notion of Gays™. The scene – entitled "Pleasure" – depicts urban gay men hosting a sex party where "various men wander through in their underwear", with *"a porn video playing"* in the background (79). The stage lighting for this scene at the National's premiere contrasted heavily with that of Act One, Scene Three, where Martin wanders up the Moorfields: the 2001 scene is well lit in comparison to the dimly lit stage of the eighteenth-century scene. This juxtaposition draws attention to the different attitudes towards sex and drugs from the two temporalities.

Gay sex in the twenty-first century is unapologetically at the forefront, rather than being hidden away in the Moorfields or within secretive mollie houses. This is supported by the constant re-entering of Charlie, the heterosexual drug dealer, as he comes in and out of the scene. Unlike what happens in other heterosexual invasions of the gay space on stage, Charlie is unbothered by what he sees, as he "*stands awkwardly watching Phil and Josh fucking"* (81). Charlie's reaction is symbolic of how twenty-first-century Gays™ are slowly being assimilated into the mainstream, as audiences are watching a heterosexual character watch two gay characters have sex. This staging invites audiences to partake in the 'viewing', alongside Charlie. Charlie's reaction differs from the likes of *The Pride's* 1950s Sylvia, whose entrance would break up unspoken tensions, or the 1960s policemen in *Canary*, who arrest two men

for just lying in bed together, merely *suggesting* homosexuality. Charlie arguably highlights a shift in attitude towards homosexuality and I suggest this is due to an increase in acceptance, fascination, and commercialisation with Gays™, as they are slowly being assimilated into mainstream culture and society.

As Ravenhill's play progresses, the two temporalities begin to blend into one another – in relation to the visibility of naked male bodies. In the twenty-first-century scene, the stage is filled with men both in their underwear and completely naked, wandering across the stage. Prior to this, the men have been wandering on stage since the scene before which took place in the eighteenth century. This links with the idea of the stage as a historical palimpsest through the visual representation of the eighteenth-century bleeding into the twenty-first century. Mrs Tull, the figurative mother of the Molly House, orders the "mollies" to come. As she orders this, the host of the sex party, Josh, enters with Phil "*in their underwear"* (78) – thus symbolising a connection between the mollies of the eighteenth century and the Gays™ of the twenty-first century.

Through the blending of temporalities, Ravenhill illustrates the connectedness of gay histories on stage as the scene evolves from one sex party into another. Tull watches as "Phil *starts to fuck* Josh" and says "that's it. Go on. That's it. Pleasure 'til morning". Scene Eight then immediately opens with *"Phil fucking Josh"*, further reinstating a sexual connection between the pleasure of the mollies and the pleasure of twenty-first-century Gays™ (79). This scene is the first instance of visible gay sex on-stage, and it emerges from a scene set in the eighteenth century, suggesting that visible sex in the twenty-first century has been made possible through the sex-positive queer subcultures of the mollies in the eighteenth century. In

Hytner's production, the sexual acts occurred on the staircase towards the back of the stage but also behind a sofa that was set centre stage. On the one hand, this highlights a more accepting space for the display of gay sex. However, on the other hand also brings into light the unapologetic hedonistic sexuality of Gays™.

As the scene progresses, more sexual acts begin to appear and is dotted around the stage, creating a mise-en-scène of heightened pleasure in relation to visible gay sex on stage. Josh's partner, Edward, enters the scene "*with a camcorder*" and "*videos [Josh and Phil] having sex*".

> **Edward**: Oh yes. Always like to get the highlights on the camcorder, don't we Phil?
>
> **Phil**: Yeah.
>
> *More fucking. Edwards continues videoing* (80).

Caridad Svich describes Ravenhill's linking of "the gleeful, hedonistic brio of the eighteenth century's commercialised sex culture with the more insidious, dour, animalistic, fetishised rites of pleasure conducted for the camera's eye in the modern capitalist state" (93). This returns to the idea of contemporary gay culture being saturated in pleasure, as well as a desire to be on display. Building on Svich's analysis, I suggest that the meta-theatrical use of the camcorder in this scene thus reinforces the voyeuristic notion of the audience as spectators and consumers of gay sex, as they are directed towards watching Edward watch and record Phil and Josh have sex. Similarly, West-Pavlov explains how the "ubiquitous availability of digital recording technology in the form of digital cameras in ever-smaller dimensions means that every moment can be recorded and archived as if it was already past". He argues that

“this means that we experience our present through the lens of a digital camera, already imagining it in the moment of immediate presence as if, in the future, we would read it as past” (144). I suggest that this idea is highlighted by Ravenhill in the scene described above, which draws attention to Edward’s desire to capture the “highlights” in order to preserve and record the present for future consumption. Conversely, I suggest that with this scene Ravenhill is also showcasing the Gay™’s desire to re-appropriate their sexual culture as a form of liberation, which is an idea that I explore further in Chapter Four.

Gays™ are shown to establish a new sense of normality when it comes to recording and preserving instances of gay sex and subcultures, which reinforces their rejection of assimilation into heteronormative ideology. This process of documenting and archiving gay experiences becomes central to the identity construction of Gays™. West-Pavlov notes that this “paradoxical relationship between past, present and future [reaches] its postmodern apogee in what Derrida (1998) has named ‘archive fever’” (144). West-Pavlov’s observation aligns with Derrida's idea that archives serve as a repository of both memory and desire, wherein the past is constantly reinterpreted and reshaped through its engagement with the present. I extend this idea, drawing on Halberstam description of the archive as a “theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity” (169-170). This perspective is particularly relevant when examining Gays™, as through digital technologies they not only record their sexual practices and subcultural experiences, but also actively participate in constructing a collective, ongoing queer history for themselves. This process allows Gays™ to engage with their identity in a way that is both distinct from traditional narratives of sexuality and temporality, and resistant to normative representations of gay life. By using digital devices to archive their experiences, Gays™ create

an alternative history—one that is self-determined, fragmented, and at odds with hegemonic constructions of gay identity. Thus, I suggest that Gays™ are not merely passive subjects of an archive but active participants in its ongoing creation, using the archive to challenge and redefine the boundaries of their existence.

The construction of Gays™ by Ravenhill and Harvey is intricately tied to sex, drugs, and the rejection of heteronormative ideals, often leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and disidentification with a Gay™ identity in some characters. This tension reflects the notion that some Gays™ may feel that this identity is imposed upon them. This aligns with Giffney's definition of queer, which "points to fluidity in identity, recognising identity as a historically contingent and socially constructed fiction that prescribes and proscribes against certain feelings and actions" (3). Giffney's emphasis on the fluidity of identity underscores the constant cycle of de/construction as gay characters are ever changing, a theme recurrent in (contemporary) gay theatre.

A clear illustration of this is seen in Josh's roommate and ex-lover, Will. In Act Two, Scene Ten, Will asks Edward, "do you ever want to say: you're mine and I want you to myself and I can't stand this fucking around" (*Plays: 2* 102). Edward's reply, "oh no, no fun in that at all," followed by his departure to edit a sex tape of his partner with other men (103), starkly contrasts Will's desire for monogamy with Edward's reluctance to conform to traditional relationship structures. This tension reflects the broader conflict between wanting to belong to a community while rejecting its prescribed norms, echoing characters from different temporalities, such as Martin from the eighteenth century, Oliver from 1958's *The Pride*, and Billy from *Canary* in 1962.

The motif of desiring love and stability, even in sexually charged subcultures, resonates with Green's assertion in his *The New York Times* article that gay people invent themselves in every generation from what has come before them. The playwrights' portrayals of these evolving characters reveal the continuous reinvention of gay identities, as well as their shifting attitudes towards gay love, monogamy, and normative relationships. The representation of Gays™ in twenty-first century gay playwriting highlights this ongoing cycle of construction and deconstruction, suggesting that the potential for new forms of being, and ways of relating to both oneself and others, will always be in flux.

I argue that Gays™ are often shown by gay playwrights to be dismissive and out of sync with their queer histories. This idea is represented through Harvey's portrayal of young out-gay actor Toby in *Canary*. In Act Three, Scene Five, which is set in 2009, older Russell is "*in a hotel room, dabbing coke round his gums as he speaks on his iPhone*", with "*Toby, a younger boy […] who looks like Mickey"* (85). In having Toby resemble Russell's dead best friend, Harvey brings to attention the continuous link between different temporalities, as gay characters of the present reflect gay characters of the past.

> **Toby**: Fuck me.
>
> **Russell**: Now where did I put my jonnies?
>
> **Toby**: Jonnies? You call them jonnies?
>
> **Russell**: I'm an old man, have you got any?
>
> **Toby**: Babe, as it said on my profile. I'm into BB. […]
>
> **Toby**: I wanna catch your bugs baby.

Russell is stunned (85-86).

Halberstam writes that "queers who came out in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are fast approaching old age; these folks did not have the benefit of LGBT activism, queer activism, and so on, and their histories are important to an understanding of our present" (179). Harvey's representation of Toby above illustrates the ways in which the younger generation of gay men can be dismissive of their history, thus forming a tension between past generations of gay men and twenty-first-century Gays™. Toby's dismissive attitude toward the past, particularly toward AIDS, creates a palpable tension between the older and younger generations of gay men. Toby refers to AIDS as "an old man's disease [that is] so last century," a remark that prompts Russell to "lash out, knocking Toby's face" (*Canary* 87). Toby's physical resemblance to Mickey heightens the generational tension, as Mickey died from AIDS after contracting HIV. By presenting this moment, Harvey not only dramatises the dissonance between gays characters from the past and the twenty-first-century Gays™, but also invites a much-needed dialogue about the tensions between these generations. Through Toby's insensitivity, Harvey opens up a conversation about the importance of remembering and honouring the struggles of older generations, while also exploring the ways in which the newer generation grapples with their legacies.

The dissonance between Gays™ of the twenty-first century and emerging gays is also illustrated by Ravenhill in the scene between Will and newly out Tom. Tom talks to Will and tells him that he is "handsome". Will goes on to confess that Tom is not "his type", but if he wants to, he can "suck him off" (85). Eager to partake in the sex party, Tom "*starts to suck*

Will off". As this happens, Edward enters "*with the* camcorder" and this results in Tom feeling uncomfortable. Despite Tom's desire to stop, Will initially does not let him.

> **Will**: No. Don't stop. Don't stop!
>
> *Several more men come in.*
>
> That's it. That's good. Come on, everyone. Come and look. We're having fun in here. Oh yes. We're having a fucking fantastic time here.
>
> *Tom tries to pull away but Will pushing him down and holds his head hard* (*Plays: 2* 85).

I argue that the interaction between Tom and Will emphasises how some twenty-first-century Gays™ feel compelled to perform an identity that is heavily influenced by public documentation, voyeurism, and sex. Will's violent reaction mirrors Philip's frustrations in *The Pride*, but with a distinct twist: while Philip's discontent is rooted in internalised guilt, Will's frustration stems from the promiscuous culture represented by the sex party. His response highlights the pressure to conform to the prescribed behaviours of the contemporary Gay™ identity.

In this moment, Will's forced participation in sexual activities reveals the commodification of contemporary gay culture, where sexual acts become spectacles for the camera and the watching audience. Despite this, Tom's reaction stands in stark contrast to that of Oliver in *The Pride*—while Oliver passively submits to Philip, Tom actively rejects the situation, pushing Will off. This scene, I argue, serves as a key illustration of how contemporary gay identities can push back against the constraints of Gays™. Through this rejection, Ravenhill underscores

the potential for greater agency within gay identity, suggesting that individuals are not bound to perform identities defined by external expectations.

This idea can also be traced through Tom's final speech. In his speech, Tom articulates a rejection of assigned labels in favour of pursuing what feels right for him:

> **Tom**: This is all I ever wanted. All them years stuck at home listening to me dad: Fucking poofs this, fucking queers that. And I thought: you're history, you… That's history. And I'm the future. This is the future. People doing what they want to do. People being who they want to be. So why…? Why do you have to make it wrong?" (*Plays: 2* 86-87).

This monologue illustrates Tom's desire to break free from the limiting and judgmental views that have historically defined homosexuality. By stating that his father's prejudiced views are "history," Tom positions himself as part of a new, progressive future, one where individuals are free to define themselves outside the constraints of labels. His question, "Why do you have to make it wrong?" (87), challenges the societal and subcultural norms that enforce specific behaviours and expectations on gay men. Through Tom's words, Ravenhill critiques the prescriptive nature of Gays™, which is often tied to extreme sexual behaviours and voyeuristic documentation. Tom's rejection of these norms reflects a desire for a more fluid, self-determined identity that resists external categorisation. In this way, Ravenhill offers a vision for twenty-first-century gay men that allows for greater agency and personal freedom, moving away from the forceful identity of Gays™ and toward a more inclusive and autonomous model of queer identity.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how Campbell, Harvey, and Ravenhill construct and deconstruct gay characters across different queer spaces and temporalities, from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. Despite each play presenting unique settings and time periods, they share common thematic elements that highlight the fluid and evolving nature of gay identity. My first section explored the concept of homocuriosity, suggesting that it can generate alternative queer temporalities, but also exposing the dangers gay characters face when they act upon their desires. I showed how the spaces these characters occupy—whether private, public, disturbed, or undisturbed—shape their pursuit of homocuriosity. The second section focused on how runaway gays adapt to new queer spaces after leaving heteronormative, restrictive familial homes, revealing how they are often commodified and exploited for sexual or financial gain. Finally, my third section examined how twenty-first-century Gays™ reject traditional labels, only to construct new ones that still bind them to certain behaviours and expectations. As Halberstam argues, "at a time when heterosexual men and women are spending their weekends, their extra cash, and all their free time shuttling back and forth between the weddings of friends and family, urban queers tend to spend their leisure time and money on subcultural involvement" (174). Thus, suggesting that Gays™, in their radical rejection of heteronormativity, immerse themselves in subcultures that are saturated with pleasure and excess.

Ravenhill's distinction between gay characters across different temporalities reinforces this point. He suggests that eighteenth-century characters are "freer," unburdened by labels, and more willing to explore fluid sexualities, whereas twenty-first-century characters are "locked

into the world of gay," confined by modern expectations and representations. However, Ravenhill also acknowledges that both sets of characters are exploring the new possibilities offered by their respective eras (*Gay Times* 35). This constant cycle of identity construction and deconstruction reflects the changing attitudes towards sexuality, both historically and in the present.

Throughout my chapter, I have argued that gay characters, in their various forms, struggle to reconcile their identities within the spaces and times they inhabit. I suggest it is only through a shared acceptance of 'meeting in the middle' that the gay characters begin to find happiness. I argue therefore that the characters presented in these plays move beyond the past to reconstruct their identities based on who they are and what they want to be, therefore refuting Green's suggestion that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny". By rejecting the labels and behaviours historically imposed on gay men, these characters open a space for contemporary gay identities to gain agency, offering a deeper understanding of what it means to be gay—offstage—as shaped by personal desires and gay histories.

As Clum asserts, *The Pride* presents gay men "in a state of transition" that underscores the malleability of identity (*The Drama of Marriage* 200). This idea of transition highlights how gay identities are continually reshaped through time. Harvey's exploration of generational tensions and Ravenhill's depiction of the rejection of one form of gay identity and the beginning of another emphasises the continuous evolution of queer temporality. These playwrights suggest that exploring queer spaces, histories, and temporalities not only reflects the past but also imagines the future of gay identity.

In conclusion, Campbell, Harvey, and Ravenhill's construction of alternative queer temporalities and gay characters on stage facilitates a necessary conversation about gay histories and their role in shaping the present. By drawing on multiple temporalities, these playwrights use the stage to explore the tensions and possibilities emerging from the dialogue between past and present. As this chapter demonstrates, this dialogue is integral to the ongoing evolution of gay men and their experiences.

To further this understanding, the next chapter will focus on the ways in which emotions, feelings, and thoughts influence the de/construction of gay identity in contemporary British playwriting. This will explore how playwrights depict the emotional complexities of their gay characters and the profound effect these internal experiences have on the construction of identity. Aragay et al. write that "studying affects can [...] contribute to critically unpicking the various sensations, multiple intensities, diverse valences, (aesthetic) dissonances and interior processes that are at work in and that, at the same time, collide with pressures and energies of what [Lauren] Berlant calls the "*affective scenarios*" of twenty-first-century human life and culture" (8). In her text, *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Berlant's describes affective scenarios as "discourses we can discern claims about the situations of contemporary life" (9). These affective scenarios offer insight into the ways that emotions and affective experiences—specifically gay shame—intersect with larger cultural pressures, affecting the experiences of gay characters. Considering this, the following chapter will examine how gay shame, as a complex emotional and psychological experience, shapes the construction and deconstruction of gay identities in contemporary gay British playwriting.

Chapter Three: Five Phases of Gay Shame

Introduction

In March 2003, the international conference "Gay Shame" was held at the University of Michigan. Organised by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, the conference saw the coming together of about "fifty scholars, critics, writers, activists, archivists, students, journalists, and artists for two and a half days of public discussion, documentation, and performance", as explained on the conference's website. The purpose of the conference was to "confront the shame that lesbians, gay men, and 'queers' of all sorts still experience in society; to explore the transformative impulses that spring from such experiences of shame; and to ask what affirmative uses can be made of these residual experiences of shame now that not all gay people are condemned to live in shame" ("Conference on Gay Shame"). In 2010, Halperin and Traub transformed the conference presentations, discussions, and responses into a published edited collection entitled *Gay Shame*.

As discussed in Chapter One, the Stonewall Riots of 1969 marked a pivotal moment in the rise of the Gay Liberation Movement. From this historical juncture, "gay pride has been the rallying cry of a broad social movement for sexual freedom" (Halperin & Traub 3). However, as Halperin and Traub assert in their introduction to Gay Shame, the goals of this movement inherently grapple with the complex interplay between pride and shame. They argue that "the goals of gay pride required nothing less than the complete destigmatisation of homosexuality, which means the elimination of both the personal and the social shame attached to same-sex eroticism" (3). Yet, paradoxically, they suggest that the total eradication

of shame could undermine the very foundation of gay pride. They write, “gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to shame of being gay, and its very successes (to say nothing of its failures) testify to the intensity of its ongoing struggle with shame” (4).

I argue therefore that this dynamic tension between shame and pride forms a crucial lens through which contemporary gay identities are constructed and deconstructed on stage. In this chapter, I explore how shame operates as both a destabilising and generative force in contemporary British playwriting. By engaging with theoretical frameworks of shame and its relationship to pride, I examine how these affective forces shape the representation of gay characters in my selected case studies. This analysis highlights how shame not only complicates the pursuit of pride but also serves as a critical tool for understanding the fluidity and complexity of gay identity in the twenty-first century.

For Halperin and Traub gay shame “offers a refuge, a site of solidarity and belonging. It willingly embraces those queers whose identities or social markings make them feel out of place in gay pride’s official ceremonies”. They argue that that the queer community has “become proud enough that [they] are now unashamed of [their] shame, proud enough to confront the things about homosexuality that still have the power to make [them] feel embarrassed or abject” (*Gay Shame* 11). Through my analysis, I noticed how the dramatic narratives presented different in which gay characters are shown to navigate their shame throughout – which is explored in greater detail in this chapter. As a result, I argue that there is a benefit for the gay community to identify and acknowledge their shame as a means to reclaiming it in order to reshape, reconstruct and reimagine their gay identity. Halperin and Traub also explain that “gay shame represents an effort to construct a new grassroots queer

collectivity founded on principles on resistance to normalisation" (9). They write that "each reader of [*Gay Shame*] will draw independent, and probably different, conclusions about the extent to which shame can function productively as a solvent of identities, as a source of resistance to normalisation, or as a means of stabilising subject positions and consolidating discursive privileges" (15). This can be, in part, due to the subjective and personal nature of shame.

My aim for this chapter is to elicit and establish a theoretical framework from my readings and interpretations of the contributions in *Gay Shame* and apply it as a lens to read gay characters through, furthering the understanding of gay identities both on and off stage. In doing so, I utilise this framework to identify and analyse notions of gay shame – in relation to the construction of gay characters – as shown by Campbell in *The Pride*, Harvey in *Canary* and Donnelly in *The Pass*. Aligning my readings of *Gay Shame* with the transformational structure of five stages of grief, offered by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, I identify what I suggest are the five phases of gay shame. My decision to position shame in a similar way to grief stems from my understanding of shame as an emotion, a state of being, which bodes similarly to the effect of grief in the sense of its transformational powers of construction and deconstruction in regard to identity formation.

On their website, Kessler explains how "the five stages, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling". In adopting this structure to theatrical representations of gay shame, I investigate each proposed phase and its relation to the de/construction of gay characters presented in the three plays under

analysis. My intention is to establish the transformational effects that gay shame possesses, as well as to highlight the ways in which it can be both positive and negative, as identified and presented from the close readings of my chosen case studies through the lens of the theoretical framework that emerges from my reading(s) of *Gay Shame.*

The five phases of gay shame that I have identified, from *Gay Shame* and the case studies, in this chapter are: Internalised Ambivalence, Societal Shame, Familial Shame, Gay Guilt and Gay Pride. I am not suggesting, however, that these five phases of shame are the only phases, nor am I suggesting that these five phases move in a 'correct' chronological order. Rather, I want to offer up these five stages as a tool to identify and explore the transformational effects that gay shame has on the construction and deconstruction of gay identity, as shown by my selected sample.

The first three sections, corresponding to the three initial phases, focus on how homosexuality is silenced within *The Pride, Canary,* and *The Pass.* I investigate the ways in which Campbell, Harvey and Donnelly portray the different ways that homosexuality can be suppressed and/or effected by shame through a variety of influences on their gay characters, as well as by their society and their family. Gay Guilt explores they ways in which these playwrights illustrate the different ways that gay shame can draw out feelings of guilt, as well as the influence to inflict pain, as shown in their dramatic narratives. Finally, Gay Pride explores the nuances of 'pride' and its relationship with gay shame. It contemplates the representation of gay pride through the playwrights' depictions of gay characters and their relation to shame.

Gay Shame

Prior to the conference, the organisers sent a copy of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's formative essay "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*", to each participant (49-62). The participants were asked to formulate their response to gay shame using Sedgwick's essay as a theoretical springboard. Conference attendees responded with both theoretical papers as well as performance pieces, which can be found on a DVD that comes with the edited collection *Gay Shame.* For this chapter, my primary focus will be Sedgwick's essay itself, as well as the theoretical responses to it that are published in *Gay Shame.*

Sedgwick explains how the "shame-humiliation response" – a term coined by psychologist Silvan Tomkins – "represents the failure or absence of the smile of contact, a reaction to the loss of feedback from others, indicating social isolation and signalling the need for relief from that condition" (50). That is to suggest that the feeling of being shamed is born from a failure or absence of a desired response. Through this process of shaming, as offered by Sedgwick, I identify and analyse the shame-humiliation responses between the gay male characters and their family, friends and/or romantic lovers within the onstage dramatic worlds created by the gay voices of Campbell, Harvey and Donnelly through their playwriting. In doing so, my readings of "shame" within the plays will be in line with Sedgwick's assertion that: "transformational shame, is performance, […] theatrical performance" (51). As Sedgwick argues, "performance interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though, importantly, it is those things. Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and—*performativity*" (51-52). For Sedgwick, queer performativity is therefore

suggested to be considered as an effect of shame, that moves between the boundaries of the internal and external. In this sense, individuals may act in a certain way in a particular situation with the hope to evade or deflect the shame-humiliation process from occurring.

Drawing from Tomkins' psychological oeuvre, Sedgwick writes how "shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove" (51). Through this performative process that shame enacts, Sedgwick explains that "shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like stigma, shame is itself a form of communication". Gay shame can therefore be understood as failed communication due to the societal dominance of heteronormativity or, in other words, the failure of recognition, resulting in being othered. This idea aligns itself with Sedgwick's assertion that "in interrupting identification, shame too, makes identity" (50). Building on Sedgwick's contention of shame both disrupting and construction identity and applying it to theatrical representations of gay men, the focus of this chapter will be the examination of the transformational "double movement shame makes towards painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (51), as well as the effects that these movements have on the representation of gay identities on stage within contemporary gay playwriting. What is interesting to me, is the double-edge of shame being such a personal and subjective effect but also a feeling that propels a shared sense of relationality amongst queer people, specifically gay men for this study.

Sedgwick argues that "it has been all too easy for the psychologists and the few psychoanalysts working on shame to write it back into the moralism of the repressive hypothesis: 'healthy' or 'unhealthy', shame can be seen as good because it preserves privacy and decency, bad because it colludes with self-repression or social repression" (61). It is these nuances that I wish to examine in my analysis, with an aim to identify the ways in which gay shame can be both positive and negative – in relation to the construction of gay identities. In the following five sections, I present a range of examples – offered by gay playwrights – that reflect Sedgwick's assertion of shame harbouring transformative possibilities towards gay identities, in line with the five phases of gay shame that I propose.

Phase One: Internalised Ambivalence

Sedgwick explains how "for certain 'queer' people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that […] has its own powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities" (61). Sedgwick's assertion of the transformational energies that shame possesses is reflected in Campbell's portrayal of 1958 Philip in *The Pride.* As explained in the previous chapter, the notion of homocuriosity is represented through Philip as he embarks on an affair with his wife's friend Oliver. The silencing of his sexuality illustrates the transformative power shame has on the structuration of the identity he is portrayed to construct. Philip uses pauses and silences to communicate with his secret lover, Oliver. In doing so, I propose that through the silence between Philip and Sylvia surrounding his romantic attraction to Oliver, Philip reflects Sedgwick's claim that shame harbours transformative qualities in relation to his identity construction. This can be seen in Act One where Sylvia confronts Philip about his relationship with and opinion on Oliver.

Sylvia: How you detest him.

Philip: Why is it so important?

Pause

He has a manner to him, that's all.

Sylvia: A 'manner'?

Philip: That's all. (*The Pride* 51)

This discussion carries on throughout the scene and throughout the play, as Sylvia attempts to get her husband to admit his homosexual desires. During the constant questioning, Philip evades Sylvia's comments to the point where he ends up reacting negatively to men who are openly gay. In his chapter in *Gay Shame,* Douglas Crimp writes that "in this power of transformation, performativity functions both theatrically and ethically. Just as shame is both productive and corrosive of queer identity, the switching point between stage fright and stage presence, between being a wallflower and being a diva, so too is it simultaneously productive and corrosive of queer revaluations of dignity and worth" (71). The example above illustrates the way in which shame can be both positive and negative towards the construction of gay identities. It is positive in the sense of Philip being able to hide his identity through shaming others instead of accepting his own shame, which also alludes to the negative potential relating to Philip's desire to mask his identity as a result of his internalised homophobia. This idea is further illustrated later on in the same scene, where Sylvia asks "why it was that [Philip] seemed to take such a dislike" to her homosexual co-star Richard Coveley, who has just killed himself. Philip replies by saying that he found him "mildly offensive" and "effeminate" (*The Pride* 55). Philip's response portrays the toxicity that shame can have on gay identity. In this

scene, Philip is outwardly disgusted by other gay men's lack of shame, further supporting Crimp's idea of shame being corrosive.

In her chapter "Emotional Rescue", Heather K. Love reflects on her own relationship with gay shame. For Love, "shame took many forms, but it came out most often as ambivalence about [her]self and others like [her]" (256). The term ambivalence refers to having mixed or contradictory feelings towards something for someone. Love confesses that she has often "heard such feelings described 'internalised homophobia,' but [she] thinks this is an ugly phrase [and] strongly prefer[s] 'ambivalence'". Moreover, she writes that what further draws her to the word ambivalence in relation to shame is "that it isn't just bad: it's both bad and good [and] this is how it was with [her] gay shame" (256), similarly to the way that Philip is portrayed in the scene analysed above. To further unpack this two-fold approach to internalised ambivalence, Love explains that she "felt bad things about [her]self and others: contempt and self-contempt; pity and self-pity; and a range of boomeranging feelings, including disappointment, anger, alienation and embarrassment". As well as this, she confesses that she also "felt good things—and what is strangest, perhaps, [is that] many of these good feelings came directly out of the bad feelings" (256). This idea chimes with the Philip's use of the silences in *The Pride.* As through these silences he was able to hide his gay identity as a result of his shame (bad things), but he was also able to explore his feelings towards Oliver (good things). In a similar vein to Love, I have opted to adopt this term instead of internalised homophobia as a phase of gay shame to symbolise the two-sided positive and negative effects that internalised ambivalence is represented to have gay characters in my chosen case studies.

Additionally, Love argues that "rather than being a last lingering burden we need to throw off, [shame] is more like a stubborn material imprint—a mark". In this sense, the feeling of shame "is a psychic and corporeal reminder of what we need to change in order to render shame actually obsolete" (258). The first step to achieving this, would be to "think seriously about a range of negative affects produced by the experience of social exclusion: self-loathing, anger, sadness, fear, the sense of failure, envy, despair, longing, loneliness—or a resistance to community altogether (258). Love's formulation of internalised ambivalence in relation to homosexuality and Crimp's notion of shame being both corrosive and productive, go hand and in hand. Similarly, Ellis Hanson writes that "shame is not […] simply good or bad, not something that one could banish for the sake of a politics of identity, perhaps [it is] the key principle for queer identity in particular, and therefore a nexus for the communal connections, for the transformational political and artistic efforts, that have characterised that identity" (138). By interweaving the theorisations of Hanson, Love, and Crimp on shame, I construct a theoretical framework for analysing how Campbell, Donnelly, and Harvey portray the transformational effects of internalised ambivalence that I identify within their plays. This approach not only reveals the nuanced ways these playwrights navigate the complexities of shame but also underscores its pivotal role in shaping, challenging, and reimagining theatrical representations of gay identity, offering vital insights into the intersections of queer affect, identity, and cultural expression.

In Act One, Scene Five of *Canary* follows gay friends Russell and Mickey as they embark on a new life in London. As discussed in my previous chapter, Mickey flirts with a "posh […] opera singer" named Robin, in order to secure a place to stay for him and Russell in exchange for sexual favours (*Canary* 25).

Robin: Ooh it's my lucky night.

Mickey: Oh no, he won't be putting out. Bit of a fridge our Russell int you mush?

Russell: I'm actually straight so…

Mickey *and* **Robin** *laugh at this.* **Russell** *is stung* (26).

This exchange between the three of them portrays Russell's internalised ambivalence towards his gay identity as he presents himself as straight, which is similar to Philip in *The Pride*. Both Mickey and Robin laugh at Russell's retort, resulting in him being visibly annoyed. Through this scene Harvey illustrates the potentiality for internal shame emerging from the homosexuals, as well external shame from heterosexuals. This links back to Sedgwick's point that shame can be seen to be transformational, in the sense of openly gay characters shaming those that do not feel confident to be 'unashamed of their gay shame'. This can be seen through Russell's transformation throughout the play, from being a closeted gay man to becoming, towards the end of the piece, an openly gay celebrity who is proud of his gay identity and history.

This idea of shame being transformational is also represented through Tom, the closeted police officer in Harvey's *Canary.* In Act One, Scene Three, Tom is lying in bed with his secret gay partner Billy, who asks about "the girl from church" (18). Tom replies that his and Billy's relationship is just "messing around" and that "it's kids' stuff" (19), therefore displaying his feelings of shame towards their visibly romantic relationship. Unlike the previous example, this scene highlights the notion that shame can be negatively transformational, as Tom re-frames his relationship with Billy as a phase of adolescence that they will eventually grow out

of. This idea links back to my discussion on Halberstam's notion of a stretched-out adolescence in my previous chapter. The idea of a stretched-out adolescence challenges a heteronormative timeline, which allows gay men to explore alternative queer temporalities. In this scene, however, Harvey portrays the potential for gay men to utilise the idea of adolescence as a temporary queer space which lasts only until they return to a heteronormative space. This can be seen through Tom "messing" around with Billy until he felt like he had to marry Ellie (*Canary* 19).

Philip, Russell and Tom each embody different representations of ambivalence towards their sexuality and their shame. Although their methods of dealing with shame differ, I argue that their internalised ambivalence metamorphosises and becomes a permanent structure of their identity throughout the narratives of the plays. In this sense, the 'mark' of internalised ambivalence remains forever imprinted on the make-up of one's gay identity and is carried through the following phases of gay shame. This is a culmination of personal, societal, and familial pressures to transform oneself by using shame as a mask to deflect being shamed by others or to cover one's own shame towards oneself. Love asserts that "queer history has been an education in absence: the experience of social refusal and of the denigration of homosexual love has taught us the lessons of solitude and of heartbreak" (274). This absence of recognition, acceptance, and representation that Love alludes to is further explored in my next section, where I outline the second phase of gay shame: Societal Shame.

Phase Two: Societal Shame

Returning to Sedgwick's explanation that shame, through its performative processes, disrupts and influences identity-formation, I draw on anthropologist Deborah B. Gould's assertion to

support my analysis of societal shame. Gould writes, in her chapter for *Gay Shame*, that "individuals navigate the experience of nonrecognition in different ways, of course, but by virtue of living in a society that marks them as different, they tend to be familiar with the experience of refused 'identificatory communication,' to use Sedgwick's phrase" (222). Advancing Gould's contention, I argue that instances of non-recognition from society have both positive and negative effects on the construction of gay identities. In so doing, I suggest that the recognition of gay shame from society also induces subsequent identity-formation and transformational processes for gay men. Drawing on a range of examples from the three plays analysed in this chapter, I highlight how recognition and non-recognition of societal gay shame is shown to deconstruct and construct gay identity.

The transformational process of shame via societal recognition and non-recognition is rife in Donnelly's play. *The Pass* follows the career of Jason, a closeted Premier League footballer, spanning over twelve years and set in three Acts. Each act is set four years apart in three different hotel rooms: one in "*Bulgaria"* (11), one in "*Spain*" (46), one in "*England*" (71). This three-act structure allows for audiences to be presented with three different 'versions' of Jason. I suggest that each version represents the transformational processes of shame and its subsequent effect on Jason's gay identity – further strengthening the claim of shame's transformational affect. In having all the dramatic action take place in hotel rooms, Donnelly illustrates the societal changes, between the years, through this space. The hotel room, therefore, represents the transformation of Jason's gay identity as he moves up in his career and earns more and more money. Typically, a hotel room signifies a place of privacy and detachment from habitual life, whereas here the hotel room draws attention to the societal effects that shame has on Jason. The first instance of this is in Act One, where Jason and Ade

– Jason's team-mate and best friend – are in a hotel room the night before a qualification match.

In his book *Male Impersonators* (1994), Mark Simpson writes that "the grounds of men's anxiety are not just that they are being exposed and commodified", but that their bodies are placed in such a way as to "passively invite a gaze that is undifferentiated: it might be female or male, hetero or homo" (4). This idea applies to the varied idolisation of footballers. For example, both a heterosexual female and a homosexual male can sexually commodify a footballer, whereas heterosexual men can commodify footballers for their masculine physicality or talents as sportsmen. Simpson's claim is reflected in an online interview with Donnelly and director John Tiffany. Tiffany explains how his artistic direction for *The Pass* is rooted in "the idolising that goes on with football players [that] has been going on for the past decade or so [in] a heterosexual macho swaggering world". Donnelly adds that *The Pass* is very much about the "veracious appetite for your body, your physical prowess and your sexuality".

The beginning of the play presents two visibly masculine men in their "*underwear*" (Donnelly 11). The gaze that Simpson discusses is continuously displayed during Act One. Examples include audiences watching while "*Jason […] performs press-ups",* followed by Ade watching him "skip" (12). The scene juxtaposes stereotypically masculine actions with a heavily insinuated homosexual gaze. This can also be seen where Ade watches Jason takes a "piss" (30). As the scene progresses, they discuss topics considered typically masculine, such as sport, heterosexual sex, and porn. However, towards the end of the scene Ade tells Jason about the ways the other players talk about him.

Ade: They said they thought you were a bit suspect […]

Jason: How you mean?

Ade: Different […] a bit – you know

Jason: No, I don't know (42)

This dialogue makes visible the recognition of Jason's suspected homosexuality from society within the play and, therefore, recognition from audiences. This is furthered by the recognition from the characters themselves through the climax of the first Act, where Jason and Ade start play fighting resulting in Jason feeling Ade's "hard-on" (44). In the final exchange of this Act, Ade represents the potentiality for both recognition and non-recognition at the same time. As initially Ade is surprised and taken aback by Jason feeling his erect penis through his underwear. However, as the scene progresses, Ade reassures Jason that he is not scared by what has happened as he "*moves toward Jason [and] Jason gives him a deep cuddle*". Following this interaction, "*Ade shoves Jason off […] playful[ly]"*, which leads to Jason looking "*Ade square in the eye [to] gives him an Eskimo kiss – rub noses with him [and] strokes his cheek*". I argue that Jason diffuses the sexually charged situation with "*a couple of gentle friendly slaps"* (45)*,* as an attempt to shift the physical affection towards platonic play. In this exchange, Ade represents the double movement of recognition and non-recognition that gay shame enables. Ade's recognition of his gay shame comes from his initial discomfort that Jason felt his penis. However, Ade's non-recognition of gay shame comes from them both playfully shrugging the sexually charged interaction off. This scene also embodies the notion of homocuriosity, which is produced from the deep-rooted inquisitiveness that gay characters exhibit, as discussed in the introduction and in the previous chapter. Through the

representation of Ade's homocuriosity in this scene, he is both intimate and playful with Jason, suggesting a guise of friendship. This double movement allows both Ade and Jason to act upon their homosexual urges in a safe way, hidden from their shame. Ironically, both gay characters must initially recognise each other's gay shame to do this. This is illustrated by Jason's recognition of Ade's behaviour and choosing to leave the shower "*door open*", while "*Ade stares frozen"* (45).

In his edited collection *The English Premier League: A Social-Cultural Analysis* (2017), Richard Elliot explores the ways in which the English Premier League "provides an interesting and appropriate lens through which to explore a number of important issues as they relate to the study of football, sport and culture more broadly together" (6). Drawing from this collection, I explore the relationship between football and (gay) societal shame. Elliot explains how "in England, more people go and watch professional football in more divisions than in any other country in the world" (3). This highlights the extent to which football is deeply embedded in British society and, therefore, has the potential to have a significant effect on the perpetuation of societal shame around homosexuality.

In their chapter "Football, Homosexuality and the English Premier League: A Challenging Cultural Relation", Rory Magrath and Eric Anderson explain that "football allowed boys the opportunity to align their gendered identity with an extreme form of masculinity whilst simultaneously denouncing femininity and homosexuality" (152). Through this, the notion of societal shame surrounding homosexuality feeds its way from society into football culture and vice versa. Magrath and Anderson go on to say that "whilst no academic research examining attitudes toward homosexuality among professional football players exists, the

case of Justin Fashanu, who came out as an openly gay player in 1990, is clear evidence of homophobia in football" (152).

Discussing the events that took place following Justin Fashanu's coming out in his previous research study in 2016, Magrath writes that "the result was catastrophic: Fashanu faced backlash and vilification from his manager, fans, fellow players, and even members of his own family". Eight years after, Fashanu committed suicide. He still "remains the only openly gay active professional footballer in the UK to have come out and became something of an unfortunate trendsetter for gay men in football, symbolic of the often-fractious relationship between the two" (152). Coming out as gay in England's Premier League has proved to have severe repercussions, probably preventing present or future closeted gay footballers to do so. An online article by *Sky Sports News* in 2020 reported that Justin Fashanu was "to be posthumously inducted into the National Football Museum's Hall of Fame". This symbolises a shift away from shaming homosexuality in football and a step towards increased acceptance, albeit small. Fashanu's experience proves to be a key example reflecting the ways in which societal shame can have corrosive effects on one's life. In the conclusion to their chapter, Magrath and Anderson offer up why, despite the lack of academic studies, it is still frequently assumed that "football represents a hostile environment for sexual minorities". They suggest that it is:

> perhaps because of the belief that football is slower at embracing homosexuality than wider society; perhaps because of assumptions that football has not moved on from Justin Fashanu's time; perhaps because of the continued presence of homosexually themed chanting at matches; perhaps because it is tempting to overstate or

> exaggerate the impact of one small incident of homophobia when it is not expected. We argue that the most common claim is that the lack of openly gay English Premier League players equates to homophobia (160).

Building on the closing line of their list, I suggest that the lack of representation of openly gay English Premier League players reinforces the societal shame attributed to displays of homosexuality in a largely macho-heteronormative culture.

Silence associated with a footballer's (homo)sexuality is still heavily present within the English Premier League today. In June 2020, former Hull City AFC attacking midfielder Thomas Bettie became the "second Englishman to come out as queer" in the sport. In the article, he explains that "he could have gone down that road [of silence] but [he] found purpose in the challenge of speaking and being a voice for a community that until very recently petrified [him]". In a BBC article published online in 2019, Michael Baggs writes that "former Aston Villa midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger revealed he was gay after retiring from the sport". It is evident that footballers find it easier to come out once they are out of the public eye and free from the recognition regarding their sexuality and gay shame. In a recent article for *The Guardian* in 2021, Emma Kemp writes about Australia's A-League Premiership midfielder Josh Cavallo, who has become the "only known current male top-flight professional footballer in the world to come out as gay". In response to Cavallo coming out, male British footballers "past and present […] voiced [their] support". This suggests a desire to move away from the notion of societal shame attributed to football – specifically in Britain. One of the tweets by a European professional footballer reproduced in Kemp's article reads "the world of football is far behind and you [Cavallo] are helping us move forward".

Through the representation of Jason in *The Pass,* Donnelly presents an exploration of the ways in which the spotlight on a premiership footballer intensifies the toxicity of the societal shame imposed upon gay identities in Britain. Moreover, in *Understanding Celebrity* (2004), Graeme Turner suggests that the "contemporary celebrity will usually have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries; they will be highly visible through the media; and their private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives" (3). As part of celebrity culture, premiership footballers, their bodies and their life stories are on display everywhere in today's society, through television, the press, and the internet. This public interest surrounding a professional footballer's sexuality is also explored in theatre by Donnelly in Act Two of *The Pass*, reflecting the interest in exploring homosexuality and premiership footballers and their position in society.

Act Two is set four years later, when Jason is in a "*hotel room in Spain*" (46) with Lyndsey, a pole dancer. It has been established that in the qualifying match, Jason made the winning goal which resulted in his successful career. Audiences are made aware that Lyndsey has been hired by journalists to uncover the 'truth' behind Jason's sexuality, as "she adjusts the bag so that one edge of it is in line with the bed, facing it" (56), while Jason is away. As the scene progresses, Jason confronts Lyndsey and demands she empties her bag to show him where "the camera [she's] using to record this" is. Lyndsey argues back, threatening Jason with the police by asking "what [his] wife [would] think" (65). This is the first-time audiences are made aware that Jason is married to a woman, solidifying the notion that Jason's gay identity is hidden from the public eye, most likely due to the fact that he is now a premiership football player in the play. In the end, Lyndsey admits that she has been offered "a lot of money" to

see if Jason sleeps with her or not, thus confirming or denying the rumours in the media about his sexuality (67). Through this exchange, Donnelly portrays the way that Jason feels he must perform heterosexuality to prevent the recognition of his gay identity in society. This scene highlights the extent to which Jason will go to hide his identity, as a result of societal shame. Jason's masking of his sexuality for the sake of his professional identity resembles what premiership footballer Josh Cavallo expressed about the reasons that kept him from coming out for so long. In Kemp's article, Cavallo admits that when he was a closeted sportsman he had to "learn to mask [his] feelings in order to fit the mould of a professional footballer". Considering this, he explains that "growing up being gay and playing football were just two worlds that [had not] crossed paths before".

As a result of the transformational energy that gay shame possesses, Jason pays Lyndsey "double" of what she was promised to record a sex tape between them, in a bid to dispel any speculations and rumours concerning his sexuality (70). Lyndsey explains to Jason that she "doesn't think people care anymore" whether or not he's "gay" (70). Jason, however, argues:

> **Jason**: I'm an athlete. A warrior. I go out and do battle every week in front of a baying mob. I sell millions in merchandise, I embody people's hopes and dreams, I'm not gay. […] I can't expect you to get it. You can't begin to fathom the pressure I'm under
>
> **Lyndsey**: Pressure?
>
> **Jason**: So if there are certain requirements that I have to fulfil my role, if there are things I need to carry out that task, if I need to fuck a woman or a man or a fucking apricot for that matter, or have a wife and a kid to come home to, then that is what I do (71).

This duologue further encapsulates the double movement of shame, where the personal and the collective combine. On the one hand, Jason is depicted to be transformed by shame in order to fulfil his role – a heterosexual role – for the sake of his career. However, on the other hand, his personal identity is shown to dissolve for the sake of his image in society. This double movement supports my argument that shame garnered from society initiates the transformation of one's identity from the notions of recognition born from societal speculation, as highlighted by Donnelly's construction of Jason. The performative non-recognition that Jason imposes upon himself allows for the rejection of societal shame. Through this process, Donnelly depicts how Jason feels the need to construct his gay identity to one that is more palatable for his heteronormative 'fans'.

Returning to the AIDS crisis, Gould writes how "the trope of responsibility, then, played into the shame-saturated idea that gays, somehow undeserving, had to be 'good' in order to get a proper response to the AIDS crisis from state and society" (237). This idea of being 'good' can be seen as a direct result of the implementation of Section 28 by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. As explored in Chapter One, Section 28 sought to control and prohibit homosexuality. This is explored in Act Two, Scene Three of *Canary* where Harvey presents a scene between Thatcher and her Health Secretary Norman Fowler. In a private room in the House of Commons in 1986, Margaret and Norman are discussing research around the spread of AIDS. As the scene progresses, it is apparent that Margaret is less interested in preventing the spread of the disease and more interested in preventing the British public from "being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay" and asserts that she must "stop this" (52). Through the inclusion of this scene, Harvey is not only drawing attention to the

oppressive power of Thatcher during her time as Prime Minister, but also to how her oppressive power *still* haunts Britain today.

This idea is also reflected in Russell Tovey's 2021 interview with David Shariatmadari for *The Guardian.* Tovey plays Jason in *The Pass* and is an openly gay British actor who was born in the 80s. In his interview, he explains that he is "part of a whole generation of queer people who have section 28 in [his] blood". He goes on to say that for "a lot of people section 28 is still part of [their] psyche" and that they have "got self-hate that has been embedded in them by the government". The internalised societal shame that Tovey discusses is also present within *The Pass*.

The Pride, by contrast, offers up narratives that explore the potential for moving away from the restrictions of societal shame and the necessity to be 'good'. Campbell's portrayal of the effects that societal shame has on the de/construction of gay character differs from Donnelly. Unlike Jason, Oliver – both in 1958 and in 2008 – is depicted as largely unashamed of the societal shame that is inflicted upon him. As explained in my previous chapter, both versions of Oliver are constantly policed by others in the play. Campbell's representation of these twin gay characters illustrates the transformational energies elicited from recognising societal gay shame and its effect on the construction of their gay identity. Gould explains how, historically, "a proud gay identity [is] derived from gay respectability". She writes that "through the rhetoric of gay responsibility, pride and respectability [become] tightly linked" (237). I suggest that Campbell's portrayal of – the 1958 and 2008 versions of – Oliver is the inverse of the above. If a proud gay identity has traditionally stemmed from being socially acceptable and responsible, Campbell's representation of Oliver rejects the belief that gay respectability

warrants a proud gay identity. For the remainder of this section, I present the ways in which societal shame is represented by Campbell's construction of gay characters in *The Pride.*

The idea of gay men feeling the requirement to be 'good' – as explained above by Gould – in order to warrant respect and to deflect societal shame has arguably become embedded in the post-AIDS gay community. Campbell's representation of Oliver, however, subverts this notion. Oliver's narrative encapsulates the tensions that emerge from trying to be 'good' for society, as well as rejecting the monolithic view of living 'respectfully' as a 'good' gay in favour of personal pride and acceptance. The first example can be seen in the second scene of Act One of *The Pride.* This scene, which moves the action from 1958 to 2008, opens with Oliver "in his underwear […] with the Man standing over him, looking down at him" (*The Pride* 30). Interestingly, the "Man" appears towards the end of the first scene, with Philip, Sylvia and Oliver in 1958. The "Man" is wearing a "*Nazi uniform. He is invisible to them but on his entrance he brushes up close to them*" (29). As the second scene starts, 2008 Oliver shows subservience to this man as he proceeds to order Oliver to "lick [his] fucking boots" (31). The iconography of the uniform alludes to Nazi Germany and, therefore, to the persecution of homosexuality. The gay play that most famously draws on the symbolism of Nazi Germany in relation to homosexuality is Sherman's *Bent*, as discussed in Chapter One. Campbell goes one step further in his presentation of this theme, suggesting a link between oppression and homosexuality, through Oliver's interaction with this Man. As well as this, the mise-en-scéne Campbell constructs alludes to the way in which gay history 'haunts' gay men – as discussed in Chapter Two – through its symbolisation of (gay) shame. However, the imagery of this historical construction is soon juxtaposed with Oliver ordering the Man to "stop", as he

requests a “time out” (31). It is at this moment that the audiences are made aware that the man is actually a sex-worker, paid by Oliver to live out his sexual fantasies.

In this scene above, Oliver represents the rejection of the societal pressure to be a ‘good’ gay, thus portraying a construction of gay identity through the recognition of one’s gay shame in a positive light. Additionally, in subverting the historically oppressive symbolism of the Nazi, Campbell illustrates the potential to reclaim the historical shame associated with a gay identity. The tension between being a ‘good’ gay and using societal shame as a constructive tool for gay identity is explored further when 2008 Philip, Oliver’s boyfriend of a “year and a half” (34), walks in on Oliver and the Man. Entering from the offstage dramatic world into the private space of Oliver’s home positions Philip as a representation of the outside world or, in other words, society. Disgusted by what he has walked in on, Philip constantly repeats the term: “for fuck’s sake”, illustrating his resentment and the rejection of what is occurring between Oliver and the Man. Philip goes on to list Oliver’s ‘shameful’ actions, thus portraying Oliver as a bad person, proclaiming that the “man is wearing a Nazi uniform” and one “must wonder […] what’s next?” (38). Following the scrutiny and shaming from Philip, Oliver insists that he is not a bad person, but that he has an “addiction” for sex (45).

The suggestion that Oliver has an addiction for sex is somewhat flawed. Arguably this claim is rooted in Oliver’s refusal to succumb to the societal pressures of gay shame. In light of this, it can be said that Campbell draws attention to the deconstruction of gay identity through rejecting the recognition of shame from society. Following Philip’s shaming of Oliver, Oliver reveals that when he was younger his aunt said that “he was a good boy but a bit of a lost soul” (46). Her statement represents a familial recognition of gay shame that was enforced

upon Oliver when he was younger, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter. It also brings to the forefront the double movement of shame. These words were productive in the sense that they aided towards the realisation of Oliver's sexuality and his rejection of shame. However, they are also corrosive as they police Oliver, forcing him to hide and live out his 'immoral' fantasies in private, due to his desire to be considered 'good'.

The tension rooted within Oliver is portrayed through his interactions with Sylvia in the 2008 scenes. For example, in the fourth scene of Act One, Oliver explains to Sylvia that he depresses Philip because of his "anonymous sex thing". However, he goes into more detail and explains that being with Philip is "different" from "the other stuff, the park, the sauna, the internet" (59). He tells Sylvia that the "roleplay" and "kinky stuff [is] not serious. It's fantasy land", adding that

> **Oliver**: […] I was once looking through the personals in *Gay Times.* Long ago. Before Philip. And this one personal caught my eye. It went something like this: 'Gay man, thirty-three, non-smoker, into bondage, rape simulation, leather, rubber, chains, rimming, felching. Looking for romance. That's my life.
>
> **Sylvia**: And then you find someone.
>
> **Oliver**: Why do I have to choose? (63).

Sylvia's response to Oliver represents that of a heteronormative society, one that disregards the exploration of other sexual activities for the sake of respectability. Sylvia argues that she is on Philip's side and labels Oliver's kinks as "slut stuff" (59), signifying her recognition of societal gay shame as a result of Oliver's actions, as well as her refusal to recognise Oliver's

desires because they reject social norms. Oliver, however, rejects her claim and compares his other 'stuff' to "going to the loo" (59), suggesting his feelings that his sexual kinks are normative components of his identity as a gay man. Sylvia, therefore, embodies the non-recognition of gay culture from society, whereas Oliver represents both the recognition of his gay identity and a refusal to allow societal shame to silence and reshape him.

Oliver's refusal to be silenced by societal gay shame can also be seen in Act Two. Oliver calls Sylvia around after an altercation with "a man in a suit", whom he fellated in a bathroom stall. Oliver explains how this man's verbal abuse "was slightly more convincing than usual" (94). He explains to Sylvia that "upon completion there was a push", as his "Rolex […] caught [his] upper lip at an unfortunate angle". Oliver describes this as feeling like it was a "[get] out of the way, I have important things to get on with […] I'm taking my wife out to dinner" (95). This scene refers to a previous conversation where Oliver explains to Sylvia that somewhere inside him is a "feeling […] of betrayal". He explains that he feels like he is "both" the betrayer and the betrayed and the voice is telling him that "this is what he deserves", as he is, "no good" and "unlovable" (67-68). As this conversation unfolds, "Philip *enters in his 1958 clothes; a ghost. Sylvia can't see him, and neither can Oliver, but his presence, somehow, is felt"* (66).

As discussed in my previous chapter, the role doubling of Oliver and Philip across the 1958 and 2008 timelines establishes a temporal dialogue that intertwines the past and present in the theatrical representation of gay identity. Through this, Campbell evokes a historical haunting of gay respectability, with the closeted Philip from 1958—symbolising the oppressive pretence of respectability—imposing his legacy onto the unapologetically gay Oliver in 2008. This interaction thereby exposing the lingering tensions between these

temporalities and the desire to live a more 'respectable' life, which 2008 Oliver constantly rejects as he does not allow himself to be determined by societal shame. He explains to Sylvia that:

> **Oliver**: I kind of feel then that the only thing that matters is finding some meaning, some reason, something you can slap the face of brevity with. And say I was here. I existed. I was. And then I think that the only two ways to do that are through work and relationships. How you changed people. How people changed you. And how you held on. To each other. Or at least give it a damn good try. That's what defines your flash in the pan (98).

Through Oliver's lines, Campbell offers up an exploration of the thought process behind using societal shame as a driving force for a positive construction of gay identity. Through his recognition of gay shame, Oliver feels that he now has something to prove to himself, to his friend and to society. In doing so, Oliver explains how through this new construction of his gay identity and from following his feelings and desires, he is finally able to fulfil his 'flash' in life with clarity.

Interestingly, the representation of Oliver from 1958 also embodies the representation of 2008 Oliver and the ways in which the character recognises societal gay shame and uses it to positively transform and construct his identity. The historical link between both versions of Oliver reinforces the historical relationship between gay identities and the transformational affect that societal shame possesses in regard to the reconstruction of gay identity. This idea

is represented in Act One, where Oliver confesses his "love" for Philip after a four-month affair.

> **Oliver**: I couldn't… I know we said… but I couldn't…
>
> **Philip**: You couldn't do what?
>
> **Oliver**: All my life I've been waiting for some sort of confirmation that I'm not alone.
>
> **Philip**: Yes.
>
> **Oliver**: When it comes, when that confirmation comes, you can't... I can't – I had to come here. And see you. I'm sorry [...] I love you so much.
>
> **Philip**: Stop saying those words.
>
> **Oliver**: At night, I can't sleep, I see your face. I hear your voice.
>
> **Philip**: Stop it. (71)

This duologue highlights the tension between Oliver and Philip in 1958 and brings to the forefront the difference between their feelings towards being gay. In this scene, Oliver illustrates his ability to recognise his homosexuality in regard to the gay shame he felt previously. Philip, however, portrays the refusal to allow his identity to be positively transformed by shame, instead it paralyses him. Philip labels their feelings as a "deviation" (72), as Oliver explains that he went to a gay sauna. George Chauncey writes that he wants to "challenge the assumption that all pre-Stonewall gay men lived in shame and to argue instead [...] that the truly remarkable thing about 1950s queers was their refusal to play the role assigned to them by the hostility of their own time and the condescension of history" (278). Both Oliver and Philip depict the tension between the attitudes of their time and accepting their identities. Chauncey explains how during the Gay Shame conference he "tended to

invoke shame as if it were a natural and universal state, [as] we all experience shame; we were all shamed as children; we are all ashamed of our bodies, our sexual desires, our sexual practices" (278-9). Considering this, I argue that Philip and Oliver illustrate the different relationships that gay men can have with shame. On the one hand, Oliver is portrayed to acknowledge his shame and utilises it to construct himself, whereas Philip is instead shown to be destabilised by his shame. Chauncey's claim that "some men [...] were paralyzed by shame, others rejected it, others revelled in it, and still others felt it not at all" (282), supports my analysis of the different ways that shame can affect gay identity, as shown through my chosen sample.

Oliver told Philip that he went into a gay sauna and he "didn't care, he needed to go". He continues to explain that his "whole being craved it"; however, once he engaged with another gay man there "it was as if he wasn't quite there". He tells Philip that "it was over in a couple of minutes. But it was as if [he] wasn't really [him]self" and that he felt like a "bystander". Through this, Oliver compares sex with strangers in the gay sauna to his sexual interactions with Philip and explains that "isn't the same" (74). Oliver states it is as if him and Philip spoke "the same language", to which Philip replied that he doesn't "feel the same way" and how it was "simply a mistake [...], a moment of weakness" (75). This exchange highlights the disparity and nuances of different responses to societal gay shame in the way that it can be used to deconstruct and/or construct gay identity. This analysis echoes Chauncey's suggestion that, "if shame is to be a productive concept, we need to carefully specify distinctive kinds of shaming processes and their effects, and above all to distinguish the latter from the former" (282). Moreover, in this section I have illuminated the processes represented by gay playwrights of societal shame in relation to the varied constructions of their gay characters.

Continuing to draw from Chauncey's contention of needing to specify the different kinds of shaming processes and their effects, the next section of analysis focuses on the process of familial shame and the effects it has on gay identities, as represented in my selected case studies.

Phase Three: Familial Shame

David Caron states that the "first conscious image of oneself that young homosexuals 'make' *as homosexuals* is one of guilt and separation from the family, a domestic fall from grace in which we realise that we were not exactly made in our parents' image". Caron goes on to explain "this 'extant' shortcoming generates the first instance of gay shame and, from then on, posits identification as discontinuity and difference from the family rather than as continuity and sameness *with* the family" (129). In other words, the recognition and non-recognition of gay identity in relation to how family inflicts the notion of familial shame on an individual. In the following examples, I analyse the representation of the different transformational effects that familial shame can have on gay characters from the selected case studies in this chapter.

The idea of familial shame is illustrated by Harvey's *Canary* in the relationship between policeman Tom and his father, the Superintendent. The first and only time that audiences are presented with Tom's father is in Act One, Scene Eight. The character is not given a name, being referred to as "Tom's Father" within the play, thus signifying a lack of emotional attachment as well as an absence of familiarity. The scene takes place in a police station "*at a desk, which has a wastepaper basket beside it*", with Tom's father "*reading through [Tom's] statement"* (*Canary* 33). The minimal staging of this scene highlights the sparsity of the

relationship between Tom and his father. The disparity between them is further accentuated by the dramatic irony of audiences being aware that Tom is in the police station due to the fact he was caught in bed with a man. As the scene begins, Tom immediately tells his father that he is "sorry"; however, his father reminds him that he has "not asked [him] here as [his] son, but as a fellow policeman". Tom explains to his father that this situation "has brought shame on [his] mother", his father and "the [police] station" (33). Tom's reaction illustrates the recognition of the shame that is cast upon him by his family, as well as society. Through this, Tom decides to reassure his father by telling him he is "going to propose" to Ellie, his girlfriend (34). This promise to lead a heteronormative life represents the transformational effects of familial shame on Tom and how his gay identity is deconstructed accordingly.

As the scene progresses, Tom's father states that the police will "make sure that bastards locked up", referring to Billy. In doing so, Tom's father ensures that his son will not be locked up as he himself does "not want [the] shame" of his son being accused of being gay (33). To deflect any shame cast upon himself or his family, Tom's father makes it apparent that he is going to place the entirety of the blame on Billy and destroy Tom's original statement.

> **Tom's Father:** Tom, what is the point in you going to prison for something you didn't do? (*beat.)* Might I trouble you for a light?
>
> **Tom** *nods and hands him a cigarette lighter.* […]
>
> **Tom's Father**: We are going to take these notes. And do the only thing we can do with them.
>
> *He sets fire to the papers. He drops them, alight, into the wastepaper basket* (34).

The mise-en-scène portrays the physical destruction of the truth, as well as the reinforcement of the weight that familial shame has on gay identities. Tom's father goes on to explain that "a good fire will cleanse and purify [and] it will burn the waste away" (34), thus suggesting that Tom can utilise the familial shame to reconstruct his identity in order to live 'correctly' as a heterosexual man in society. This is furthered by Tom's father as he "*picks up a pen from his desk",* and "*rewrite[s] the statement".* The pen – often considered as a symbol of the phallus and, therefore, patriarchal authority – highlights the transformational affects that family can have on gay men. This is made apparent as Tom's father ironically tells his son to "be honest" (34), illustrating Tom's helplessness and his desire to conform to heteronormativity by succumbing to the shame imposed on him by himself, his father and society.

In his chapter in *Gay Shame*, Caron examines the provocative question of "what kind of community could be grounded in feelings of shame" (120). This inquiry suggests that shame, far from being solely corrosive, can serve as a foundation for collective identity and solidarity. Building on this, I argue that the gay community is deeply rooted in shared experiences of shame, mediated through both recognition and non-recognition. Caron's assertion that "what produces a community in shame is its memory" emphasises the importance of collective historical and cultural memory in shaping a shared sense of belonging. This memory, he argues, is "always a collective process" (129), which underscores the communal aspect of processing and sustaining the experiences of shame.

Caron further explains that "a community in shame is one that can be neither naturalised nor positioned as dominant because it is consciously defined by the active and persisting memory

of its own negativity" (129). This conceptualisation aligns with the idea that a community grounded in shame resists assimilation into dominant societal norms and instead embraces its marginality as a point of identity and critique. In Act Two, Scene Nine of *Canary*, this notion is embodied through Tom, whose personal shame surfaces in his secret actions and their consequences. Tom loses track of his son Mickey while "showing Steve from next door the Datsun cherry" (65). The subtext of this scene heavily implies that Tom is engaging in secret sexual relations with his neighbour, a reading further reinforced when Ellie notices his "shirt's ripped" (66). The physical and metaphorical rupture of Tom's appearance signals the exposure of his hidden desires, and the shame associated with them. This is made even clearer as Tom later confesses his feelings to Ellie, revealing the tension between his internal struggles and his outward responsibilities.

> **Young Tom**: I'm dying Ellie. Every time I step foot through the door. I see monsters at the bottom of our garden.
>
> **Young Ellie**: It's called married life, Tom. I don't see why you think you've got a right to be any happier than the rest of us.
>
> **Young Tom**: I don't love you Ellie.
>
> **Young Ellie**: Get a backbone, Tom! (66).

In this moment, Tom becomes a microcosm of Caron's theorised community—a figure marked by the persistent memory of his own perceived negativity. His experience illustrates how shame operates both as an individual burden and as a connective tissue for shared identity within the gay community. By dramatising such moments, *Canary* not only reflects the enduring presence of shame within queer histories but also foregrounds the ways in

which shame shapes and complicates theatrical representations of gay identity. This layered depiction highlights the importance of understanding shame as a complex and transformational force within queer narratives, challenging audiences to engage with its dual potential for alienation and solidarity.

Ellie's refusal to acknowledge Tom's unhappiness and his attempt to articulate his lack of love for her illustrates the way familial shame can enforce silence through denial. By performing non-recognition, Ellie silences Tom's recognition of himself, effectively denying him the agency to voice his truth. This dynamic is further complicated by the shared memories between Ellie and Tom, which serve as both a foundation for their present and a barrier to change. Ellie's use of familial shame exemplifies the deeply ingrained power of familial expectations, as she attempts to shame Tom back into silence, perpetuating the cycle of repression.

The profound embodiment of familial shame becomes even more striking towards the end of the scene. Ellie's departure leaves Young Tom alone, a symbolic moment of abandonment that underscores the isolating nature of shame. Present-day Tom's emergence from "the shadows" as Young Tom asks, "when will it end?" signifies the haunting presence of shame across time. While present-day Tom offers hope that it can end "tonight," Young Tom's rejection—telling him to "stay away from [him]" (66)—forces the older self back into the shadows. This interaction encapsulates the inextricable link between past and present in shaping gay identity. Harvey's staging of this dialogue visually and narratively underscores the cyclical and intergenerational impact of shame. The present-day Tom, embodying knowledge

and foresight, is rejected by the younger Tom, still constrained and confused by familial shame.

Caron's observation that "shame […] can never be a thing of the past in that it stubbornly refuses to stay in the past" (127), aptly captures the dynamic Harvey portrays here. The shame inflicted upon Tom—by his father, his wife, and even himself—becomes internalised and woven into his sense of self. This shame does not remain static; instead, it is transmitted across generations, resurfacing in Tom's interactions with Mickey, his gay son. However, Harvey introduces a crucial divergence in Mickey's narrative. Unlike his father, Mickey resists the force of familial shame and refuses to deconstruct his gay identity. This resistance marks a significant shift, as Mickey's character represents a potential alternative to the historical trajectory of shame-driven repression.

Canary opens with a scene that illustrates an attempt to inflict familial shame upon "*sixteen year old* Mickey", as he dances in his mother's "*wedding dress"* in the front garden. Ellie threatens him and says, "wait till your father gets home", in a failed attempt to shame him (*Canary* 11). As the play progresses, more instances of Ellie's shaming are highlighted. For example, in Act One, Scene Four, Ellie's daughter, Melanie, explains how her mother told her that her "brother [was] dead" and then "carried on as if nothing had happened". As well as this, Ellie lied about the way in which Mickey died to her daughter. Melanie was told that he died by falling of his "moped in Tring"; however, it is later found out that her brother died of AIDS (22). It is not until Act Two, Scene Eleven that it is revealed that Ellie and Tom are Mickey's parents, as they visit him in hospital in 1984, but Ellie "*remains frozen"* at the door (69). Ellie's rejection of Mickey, to the point of total non-recognition illustrates how familial

shame towards gay identities can have fatal consequences for family relations. This idea is reflected through Ellie being unable to go through the door to sit next to her dying son.

In Act Three, Scene Two, Tom goes to visit his sick son in hospital in 1986. Unlike Ellie, he explains that he doesn't "care anymore" about people knowing that his son is gay or is dying from AIDS (75). This scene shows a breakthrough in Tom's feelings of gay shame and internalised ambivalence. Arguably, this is a result of the double movement of recognising his son as a proud gay man, which allows him, in turn, to construct his own identity. This is made more apparent as Tom listens to Mickey proudly say he "wants [him] to say [Mickey] died of AIDS". Mickey explains that he does not "want euphemisms [as he is] disappearing into silence and [does not] like it. [He] wants to be screaming". Through this duologue, Harvey represents the identity constituting effects of familial gay shame in Tom's recognition of his son's proudly constructed gay identity. This results in Tom wanting to tell his son that he "gets [him] more than [he will] know" (76). Dramatic tension from this scene is drawn from the audience's knowledge that both Tom and Mickey are gay. This tension continues to build as Mickey explains to his father that:

> **Mickey**: The night I told you I was gay. You threw up. I heard you. In the back garden. By the dahlias.
>
> **Tom**: I wasn't repulsed by you. How could I be?
>
> **Mickey**: You got in the car. And went driving. But you took off so fast. Like you wanted to drive yourself off a cliff.
>
> **Tom**: It was a shock. I was so wrapped up in me and my problems. I never even considered that you might be too. […]

Mickey *doesn't understand*

Mickey: I might be what too? (77).

This exchange links to Caron's abovementioned assertion that shame refuses to stay in the past, as through this familial shame Tom is forced to face his own internalised ambivalence. In acknowledging this, Tom recognises himself within his son's gay identity. However, just as Tom is about to come out to his son, Mickey "*screams out in agony"* and passes away (77). This scene highlights the transformational potential of gay shame to construct identity through recognition, even though Mickey and Tom have so far led very different lives. By contrasting Tom's entrapment in familial shame for the majority of this life with Mickey's ability to transcend it at a much younger age, Harvey offers a nuanced exploration of the ways gay identity can evolve beyond the constraints of inherited shame. This alternative provides a glimmer of hope within the play—a vision of a gay identity less burdened by the weight of familial expectations and internalised negativity. Harvey's depiction not only emphasises the persistent and intergenerational nature of shame but also gestures toward the possibility of transformation and liberation within queer identity. This portrayal is critical for understanding how theatrical representations of gay identity can interrogate the past while imagining alternative futures, positioning Harvey's work an essential contribution to understanding gay identities in contemporary British theatre. Moreover, this scene draws into orbit the fateful consequences of internalising gay shame to the point of being susceptible to intense pain and *guilt*.

Phase Four: Gay Guilt

In her essay, Sedgwick argues that "the conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt is that shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is, whereas guilt attaches to what one does". She goes on to write that the "implication remains that one is *something in* experiencing shame" ("Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity" 51). In other words, shame influences one's identity, whereas guilt relates to one's actions. However, shame and guilt can *both* slip in and out of Sedgwick's description, implying that both can influence one's identity *and* actions. Therefore, I have identified guilt as a phase of gay shame, as I suggest that guilt is a key emotion in the experience of feeling gay shame. Additionally, gay guilt can be seen a factor in the deconstruction and construction of gay identity through the transformational process of shaming, as represented by Harvey, Campbell and Donnelly. In the following section, I highlight the ways in which gay guilt can be seen as a residual effect of gay shame, as well as how gay guilt – just like gay shame – possesses transformational effects on the construction of gay identities through the representation of gay characters in my selected case studies.

In Act One of *The Pride*, Philip reacts violently to Oliver's display of affection despite the fact that he has told him that they "shouldn't meet" (*The Pride* 69). Oliver does not back down in his attempts to win Philip over by confessing his love for him as the scene progresses, but Philip replies by rejecting the notion of gay men being able to love and labels their relationship as a "deviation" (72). As explained in the previous chapter, Philip attacks Oliver in the scene after. This draws attention to the negative affect that gay guilt has over gay characters. This scene aligns with Caron's description of shame being "overwhelmingly powerful", especially in its ability to "make us relive it at the most unexpected moments" (128). Caron's assertion

reflects the overwhelming guilt that Philip feels after attacking his lover. The anger displayed represents the continual shame that Philip feels towards his gay identity.

This tension between Philip's recognition and non-recognition of gay shame leads him to a doctor, who offers 'treatment' to eliminate his homosexual "tendency". The doctor refers to his sexuality as a "pernicious enemy" and as a "*perversion*", to which Philip "*says nothing*" (*The Pride* 104). This exchange illustrates the way in which gay guilt – a by-product of gay shame – leads Philip to a point of complete non-recognition of his sexuality and a desire to deconstruct himself completely. The therapy consists of using a drug "inducing vomiting" whilst looking at "pornographic […] homosexual content" (104), to avert arousal and displace it with a feeling of discomfort and nausea. As the scene progresses, it becomes apparent that Philip's main concern is whether or not he would be able to forget the "other feelings" (106). These other feelings that Philip wishes to exterminate are the love for Oliver, something he told Oliver that he did not feel. Through Philip's determination to reconstruct his identity, Campbell represents the transformational effects of gay guilt.

In Act One, Scene Ten of *Canary,* Campbell represents another instance of conversion therapy, under different circumstances. Contrasting with Philip's eagerness to be 'treated', Billy is forced to attend conversion therapy as a result of his trial for being caught with his lover Tom. Due to Tom's father shaming Tom into rewriting his account of what happened between him and Billy, the judge at the trial labels their love as "one of the most heinous crimes" (*Canary* 40). In response to this, Billy pleads guilty to being a homosexual but not to the other charges. The judge explains that he will "take pity" on the defendant, but Billy rejects this as he argues that "there is nothing wrong with me". At the end of the scene, Billy

is given the option of having his "disease cured" or go to prison, yet the judge forces him to choose treatment (41). Billy's reaction to the charges can be associated with Hanson's assertion that "shame teaches but will not be taught" (140), as Billy refuses to deconstruct his gay identity as a result of the judge's disapproval. Unlike Philip in *The Pride,* Billy rejects external shame for his identity; however, the judge – a signifier for society – will 'teach' Billy shame through conversion therapy.

In Act One, Scene Twelve, Billy is "*in an iron bed drinking a bottle of Guinness*" as *"psychiatrist,* Dr McKinnon, *sits nearby in a chair*":

> **Billy:** I didn't attack him.
>
> **Dr McKinnon:** What did you do?
>
> **Billy:** We made love.
>
> **Dr McKinnon:** Interesting way of describing it (*Canary* 43).

Throughout this duologue Billy rejects the shame that the psychiatrist is trying to enforce upon him. The doctor offers him another drink and explains that the "drug [that he] administered reacts with it", and that soon Billy would be "vomiting profusely and have crippling diarrhoea". Much like the description of conversion therapy in *The Pride*, the treatment to which Billy is subjected works by associating discomfort to the watching of "a slide show of various naked men and semi naked men". A recording of Dr McKinnon repeating "dirty filthy queer. Dirty filthy queer. Dirty filthy cock sucking queer" runs while Billy "*starts to be sick over himself*" (44). As the scene comes to an end, Tom's voice singing "mournfully" is played (45). The act of Tom singing juxtaposes melancholy to the conversion scene, as the

last time audiences were presented with Tom singing the same song was after him and Billy slept together. The song also represents Tom's guilt over what is happening because of his actions, as well as the imposed shame forced upon Billy by the doctor.

Tom's guilt and the after-effects of Billy's treatment are represented in Act Two, Scene Two, where Tom takes Billy to a bedsit. Billy explains to Tom that "he lay for three days in [his] own piss and shit", all because Tom "stood up in a court of law and said [Billy] attacked him". Tom replies saying, "you've changed", and Billy "*starts to cry*" (48). This duologue enacts the tension between Tom's guilt and Billy's anger towards the attempts to shame him for his gay identity. Ironically, in defying both the judge and the doctor's shaming, Billy's identity has been constructed through their recognition of gay shame rather than his own. After declining Tom's request for a kiss, Billy explains how as "they stuck electrodes in [his] head", he had "hoped [that Tom would] be waiting for [him]". Instead, Billy finds out that Tom is getting married, and he orders Tom to leave, as he tells him that he "fucked [him] up". The scene ends with Billy going to the bathroom, on his own, as he says to Tom, "what do I do now? Sink or swim?" (50).

Hanson argues that "pride and shame form a perilous dialectic in which they are ever in danger of trading places", in the sense that "shame is invariably assaultive" (137). This resonates with Billy's action towards the end of play in Act Three, Scene Seven, where he "*returns home from a club with [Tony], a guy [that] he has picked up*" (*Canary* 91). They both continue drinking together and Billy comments that his "drink of choice used to be Guinness", in reference to the conversion therapy he went through. Billy "*runs his hand over* Tony's *chest"* and squeezes his nipple "*hard"*, to which Tony responds positively.

Billy: Shall we tie you up? Hey? Lock you up and throw away the key?

Billy *ties* **Tony** *to the chair with his scarf.*

Billy: What's your name?

Tony: Tony.

Billy: Tony. Well if it's all right, Tony, I'll call you by your proper name. Doctor McKinnon.

Tony *flinches* (92).

Billy explains to Tony that he recoiled and threw up, shortly after he first saw him in the club. Billy's reaction aligns with Hanson's assertion that "shame embraces [...] like a siege, a suffocation, [...] preferring to bide its time until it is most unwelcome and then make a dramatic entrance" (134). Tony argues that "it was a lifetime away", and it that it was just "his job" (*Canary* 94), but Billy explains that he "lives up here" as he "*indicates towards his head"*, portraying the mental torture of shame and its corrosive effect on his state of mind. This scene reflects Halperin's claim that "one's very personality or character is 'a record' of the history of the ways that the emotion of shame has structured one's relations to others and to oneself" ("Why Gay Shame Now" 42). This is made apparent through Tony's guilt from remembering his methods of trying to inflict shame on Billy in the past. This inner turmoil with one's history of shame can be seen as Billy "*kneels and cries*", before stepping forward and plunging "*the breadknife into* [Tony's] *chest*" (*Canary* 94-95). This visceral scene articulates the relationship between shame and guilt, as well as displaying the everlasting mental effects they have on those who harbour them.

This relationship between shame and guilt is also represented in Act Three of *The Pass*, where Jason invites Ade to his "*hotel [suite] in England*" (Donnelly 74). Through the final act of the play, Donnelly visualises the ongoing tensions between Jason's gay shame and his gay guilt. Jason's gay shame comes from his refusal to recognise his gay identity. Jason's gay guilt is born from his refusal to accept what happened between him and Ade the night before their qualifying match. It has been revealed that because Jason refused to pass the ball to Ade, Ade's career as a professional footballer was taken away and he now has a plumbing business. This is made apparent by Ade questioning why after "they didn't renew [his] contract" Jason treated him "like [he] was dead" (99). He explains that in "twelve years" he has not heard from Jason and demands to know "why [Jason asked him] here" (113). Jason replies:

> **Jason**: […] I wanted you to fix up my villa
>
> You wanted a view. A view
>
> It's yours, Ade. The villa. I want you to have it. You could live there. I could visit. We could look at the view [...]
>
> You're the last thing I remember of any value (113).

Ade feels as if this gesture is pity in response to the guilt that Jason feels for his successes. However, it is through gay guilt that Jason is shown to finally be able to come to terms with his sexuality and recognise his gay shame. This supports my assertion that both gay shame and gay guilt possess transformational effects on gay identities. This idea is reflected in the final exchange between the two, which is also the final exchange of the play.

> **Ade:** Did you [give me a handjob before the match] to get in my head?

> **Jason**: There's this room. They use it to see if astronauts can cope with space. [...] It's completely silent. They give you a chair 'cause you can't hear your own footfall and it does your balance. There's no such thing as silence. Your own heartbeat. Your own hair growing, your skin – your scalp makes a noise as it shifts. Like bugs crawling across your brain. This white noise. It's deafening
>
> **Ade**: I just want a straight answer, did you do it to get in my head?
>
> **Jason**: That's what I'm telling you. I don't know (115).

By my interpretation, Jason's monologue about the deafening sound of silence alludes to the inescapable weight of his gay guilt and internalised ambivalence towards his own gay identity. There is potential to argue that Jason could be thought to instead be intentionally dismissive as a way to avoid the question as he has no real reason. This would suggest that Jason is solely a selfish egotistical celebrity. However, I argue that Donnelly is instead drawing attention to the complex and isolating weight that internalised ambivalence and guilt can have on one's idea of self. This is supported throughout the play, as Jason has never given a straight answer, as he has never allowed himself to be vulnerable, unlike the way he is with Ade. Through this scene, Donnelly visualises the journey, as well as the moment where Jason finally recognises his shame and his guilt and for the first time voices it. In this recognition, I suggest that Jason is finally able acknowledge his gay identity with a sense of honesty, which in turn depicts the fifth phase of shame: pride.

Phase Five: Gay Pride

Gay pride, I argue, is intrinsically bound up with shame, forming the foundation for what I term the fifth phase of gay shame. This argument builds upon Halperin and Traub's assertion

that shame is “by definition the very opposite of ‘pride’, at once its emotional antithesis and its political antagonist.” They observe that “gay pride has generated considerable dissatisfactions of its own among some of the very people it has aimed, or claimed, to benefit,” highlighting the unresolved tensions within the discourse of pride. Crucially, they propose that “gay pride has never been able to separate itself entirely from shame” (“Beyond Gay Pride” 3), suggesting therefore that gay shame and pride are two sides of the same coin. My analysis advances this theoretical framework by moving beyond the binary opposition of pride and shame to examine how these concepts interact dynamically within theatrical representations of gay identity. By engaging with the performative nature of theatre, I argue that the stage becomes a unique space for dramatising the inextricable connection between shame and pride, revealing their transformational potential.

This section delves into the interplay between gay shame and pride, emphasising their co-constitutive relationship and exploring how they shape and redefine the gay characters in the plays under analysis. Through this, I aim to demonstrate how contemporary theatre not only reflects but actively interrogates the emotional and political complexities of gay identity. By foregrounding the embodied, temporal, and relational dimensions of shame and pride, my work highlights the ways in which these affects disrupt, construct, and ultimately transform theatrical representations of gay identity. This approach not only deepens the understanding of gay shame but also extends its application within queer theory and theatre studies, offering a nuanced lens through which to view the evolution of queer identities on stage.

Halperin’s reflections on the "Gay Shame" conference provide a critical framework for understanding the duality between gay pride and shame, which is central to the analysis I am

conducting. His assertion that the conference was not intended to ""demolish gay pride [or] even less to return us to a state of shame or to promote shame instead of pride" ("Why Gay Shame Now" 44), but rather to interrogate the aspects of queer sexuality, history, and culture that have been overlooked or repressed by mainstream gay pride politics, is pivotal. By stating that "the political imperatives of gay pride have tended to repress" certain facets of the queer experience, Halperin draws attention to how the dominant narrative of pride often glosses over the complexity of shame and the way it operates within queer identities (44). This repression, according to Halperin, points to a crucial blind spot in the mainstream celebration of gay pride, one that can overlook the painful histories of shame that continue to shape the lived experiences of queer individuals.

Furthermore, Halperin's critique of institutionalised gay pride as "too proud to acknowledge" its repressive quality within gay communities emphasises the importance of recognising and grappling with the history of shame that underpins the pursuit of gay pride (44). This observation aligns with my analysis of the plays, where I examine how the characters' experiences of shame are often entwined with their attempts to assert pride, and how this struggle plays out on stage. Halperin's insistence that "the only kind of gay pride that is endurable […] is a gay pride that does not forget its origins in shame" further supports the notion that pride, as it is understood and performed in contemporary queer culture, is inextricable from its relationship to shame (44). It is only through acknowledging and confronting this foundational shame that a more authentic and enduring form of 'pride' can emerge.

Through the lens of these critical reflections, I investigate how the selected plays represent the intersection of shame and pride in the construction and deconstruction of gay identities. By applying Halperin's theory, I highlight how the characters in these plays wrestle with these opposing forces, demonstrating the complex ways in which shame informs and shapes their experiences of self-acceptance and pride. In doing so, I build upon Halperin's argument that gay pride, when detached from its origins in shame, risks becoming shallow and disconnected from the lived realities of queer individuals. My analysis seeks to unravel this tension and explore how contemporary gay theatre stages the transformative potential of shame in relation to the development of pride.

Halperin argues that "without that intimate and never-forgotten relation to shame, gay pride turns into mere social conformity, into a movement […] with no more radical goal than that of trying to persuade straight society that [gay people] can be good parents, good soldiers, good priests" (44). Moreover, he states that "gay pride makes sense to [him] only in relation to shame, and it is only by returning to confront what still has the power to make us ashamed that we can meaningfully continue the work of gay pride" (45). This is to say that rather than 'sanitising' homosexuality to the point of achieving heteronormativity – or homonormativity (as I explore further in my next chapter) – one can utilise notions of gay shame to further the progress of gay pride, thus creating a critically progressive future for the gay community.

Elisabeth Ladeson suggests that "gay pride is pride at lack of shame, which is problematic, as in fact is all pride, yet let us not forget that pride is, for good reason, one of the deadly sins" (108). However, through my analysis, I critically challenge Ladeson's view of pride as a negative component of shame, particularly in relation to the construction of gay identity.

Ladeson's perspective overlooks the crucial role that pride plays in transforming and empowering individuals within the queer community. This is in contrast to Michael Warner's assertion that gay pride "entails a theory of shame as a thing of the personal and collective past—shame about shame, if you will" ("Pleasures and Dangers of Shame" 287). Warner explores how the act of staging shame allows individuals to form new relationships and self-understandings, suggesting that "we paradoxically create new relationships insofar as we can school ourselves not to be ashamed of our shame—a project that of course disappears the second we persuade ourselves that not being ashamed of our shame requires us to be proud" (296). This approach highlights that the rejection of either shame or pride—both integral to the queer experience—fails to recognise their interconnected, transformational qualities. By embracing both, rather than dismissing one for the sake of the other, I suggest that we can better understand the progressive potential of these emotions within the construction of gay identity.

This idea is pertinent to my analysis of the final scene in *The Pride,* in which Sylvia, Philip and Oliver sit on a "*park bench*", with an "*opened bottle of champagne"*. In the off-stage dramatic world, there are "*lots of noises from the Pride party – whistles, shouts, music. The sound of celebration*" (*The Pride* 107). The mise-en-scène brings together the off-stage pride of being unashamed of gay shame with the on-stage dramatic action of two gay characters discussing how "the world [tells] you what you are", and how the generations before "have fought against [this]" (109). The closing scene of *The Pride* alludes to a sense of caution in relation to working through gay pride and shame.

Oliver: Do you believe in change?

Philip: Do I believe in change?

Oliver: We're lucky really, aren't we?

Philip: Lucky?

Oliver: I mean, think about it. The freedom. What we have.

Philip: What freedom?

Oliver: All these people who were mute. Had been mute for hundreds, thousands of years.

Philip: Most of the world still is. Mute.

Oliver: I know. Which makes it all the more…

Philip: All the more what?

Oliver: Important. I think I mean. Not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. For us. If you follow me (112).

I argue that this duologue underscores Barry D. Adams' comment on pride as "a name for that necessary and important remedy to oppression, of resisting the shamers' attempt to disempower and asserting one's right to be" (305). Here, Adams suggests that pride serves as a response to the negative forces of oppression—specifically, the societal attempts to shame and disempower marginalised individuals. In essence, pride can be seen as an act of defiance—an assertion of one's identity and autonomy in the face of external attempts to diminish or invalidate it. This is evident in the scene where Oliver and Philip agree to give their relationship another go, as they "*continue to look out*" onto the Gay Pride celebrations paying close attention to all the queer people "in love" and labelling the older gay men as "survivor[s]" (*The Pride* 116). This scene highlights the ways in which both pride and shame

can be transformational and are shown to be vital tools for resisting societal stigma and discrimination

I apply this rhetoric to the final scene of Harvey's *Canary*, where *"sixteen year old* Mickey *[is] running into [his] front garden in his Mum's wedding dress. Sixteen year old* Russell *runs after him dressed in a multicoloured frock"*, all while older Russell *"watches […] from his garden"* (*Canary* 100). This scene represents the recognition of both Mickey's and Russell's shame. This scene is a repetition of the opening scene, with a slight but significant change in the sense that in the first scene Mickey is scolded for dancing in his Mum's dress and "*stops spinning"* (11). In the closing scene, however, Mickey does not stop and spins with Russell while everybody watches. It is through the alteration in this scene, that allows Harvey to draw attention to the potential of re-constructing one's identity in response to recognising shame and feel able to be proud. These two final scenes also chime with Hanson's assertion that "failure makes identity political", as well as "making it sexy [as] it shows the cracks in idealisation and renders identity politics an inexhaustible resource for shame" (133). Building on Hanson's claim, I conclude that from having moments of failure throughout both these plays, Campbell and Harvey are able to illustrate the transformational effects of shame and its relation to pride. Arguably, it is through these 'failures' that the characters are afforded the space in their dramatic worlds to deconstruct and construct their gay identities.

As shown in the previous two examples, recognising pride in relation to shame has the potential to positively transforms one's identity. This is represented by the construction of both Russell and Tom in *Canary,* as both characters – through recognition of their shame – manage to reconstruct their gay identities in reflection of gay pride. This idea chimes with

Chauncey's explanation that "it won't do to assert that [gay men] all lived in shame, that they all must have been governed by shame, no matter what they did or said about themselves, for that would reduce the state of shame to a tautology and give us no purchase on its manifestations and dynamics" (282). Through my next two examples I want to highlight the pedagogical qualities that shame possesses and how it has the potential to result in feelings of pride.

The first example of this is represented in Act Three, Scene Four of *Canary.* Russell has come to visit Mickey, who "*lies very sick, wearing an oxygen mask*" (81). As the scene progresses, Mickey gets worse as he "*gasps for air"*, and they are all *"unsure if he has died*". This causes Russell to stand up and say, "I promise. I'll change. I'll be out, proud. I'll do it [...] I'll make you proud Mickey. Fuck ''em. I'll change the system, not me. [...] I'll be the most famous gay actor in the world!" (82). Through the recognition of his own gay shame, Russell identifies his desire to change and his desire for pride. Harvey shows how through this recognition, Russell is able to construct himself as a proud open gay man, in order to make a change. This idea is also reflected by Tom, in Act Three, Scene Eight, where he finally comes out to his wife and daughter after Russell leaked news to the press that he was gay. Tom "*takes a piece of paper from his pocket and reads*":

> **Tom**: I know that certain stories have come out to light about my relationship with William Lynch and the death of my son from AIDS in 1986. Because of my catalogue of lies for the past half a century my family is now suffering greatly. My son's biggest fear was disappearing into silence. He wanted to be screaming, even when he was tulips. And so I must not go coyly, head bowed. I do not regret who I am, but I do

> regret my deceptive behaviour over the years. And it is because of this deception that I forthwith offer my resignation to the police force. I have misled the public too long, I have misled those I love longer. It's time to be honest. Because tomorrow we're tulips (99).

Tom's speech and act of realisation embodies the transformational effect that pride can have on one's identity, in relation to recognising one's shame. As demonstrated in the plays discussed, pride emerges as both a by-product and a response to shame, illustrating the complex interplay between these emotions. I conclude that pride cannot be understood as a state wholly divorced from shame; rather, it is intricately bound to it, shaped by the very experiences of marginalisation and internalised negativity that give rise to it. In this way, pride functions not just as a reaction to shame but as a transformative force that facilitates the recognition and acknowledgment of gay shame. Through this process, pride becomes a catalyst for the reconstruction of gay identity, as the characters in these plays demonstrate. By embracing both pride and shame, individuals can undergo a critical reconfiguration of selfhood, reclaiming agency and autonomy in the face of societal pressures.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined the five phases of gay shame, which emerged from my readings of the theoretical writings within *Gay Shame.* I have shown how the transformational effect that shame enacts through its double movement towards deconstructing and constructing gay identity and how it is portrayed in *The Pride, Canary,* and *The Pass*. The first three sections focused on the role that shame may take in regard to the formation of gay identities. This has been shown through instances of internalised

ambivalence, shame inflicted by society and shame cast by family. Through these phases, I have illustrated how shame can be both productive and destabilising for identity constitution. The final two phases, Gay Guilt and Gay Pride, focused more closely on the form that shame can take – whether it be the residue of guilt or the driving force of pride. Through this exploration, I conclude that shame is a process, an ongoing cycle of identity destruction and subsequent construction.

As shown, all three playwrights share similarities and present differences in terms of the representation of gay shame in their plays. What was most clear was the reoccurring theme of shame in relation to loneliness and the negative response to homosexuality. All three plays under analysis centred around issues of isolation and the sense of being marginalised from moments of recognition and non-recognition of gay shame. This suggests that shame harnesses the ability to both seclude an individual and to include an individual in a collective, as established through my links to Gould. This double movement of shame is made more explicit on stage, for audiences to observe, digest, repudiate and embrace, thus highlighting the intrinsic link between shame and theatre.

Neil Bartlett's essay in *Gay Shame* connects to this notion by suggesting that theatre enables audiences to "watch performers act out either things that [they've] dreamt of doing but don't dare do, like kill people or fuck people. Or things that [they] think on some subliminal level that [they] have done or have been accused of doing. As [they] watch [the actors], [they] share their crime, [they] share their shame" ("Plunge Into Your Shame" 340). Here, Bartlett highlights the cathartic process of recognition and identification that occurs between audiences and actors. Audiences, through watching these performances, are invited to

confront their own shame by recognising it in the characters on stage. This dynamic mirrors the recognition of shame discussed throughout my analysis, where shame becomes not just a personal experience but something collectively shared and processed. Bartlett further theorises that "the idea is that you can go into your shame, and, by performing your own shame to excess, you heal yourself [and] empower yourself" (345). For Bartlett, this process is not merely theoretical but an embodied, visceral experience—an act of performing shame that paradoxically transforms it into a source of empowerment. By engaging with these embodied performances of shame, both on stage and in the audience, theatre becomes a transformative space where shame can be acknowledged, processed, and understood.

This sensation Bartlett refers to can be used as a tool for recognising gay shame and addressing gay guilt, while also constructing a gay identity informed by gay pride. Gayle Rubin, in "A Little Humanity," notes that "gay pride was a great idea, one that should be credited with many profoundly important positive results" (370). I argue that gay pride on stage can be leveraged to reconstruct personal notions of internalised gay shame or, as Bartlett suggests, "to heal, is to reposition gay pride as a continuum, as a process" (345). Rubin further supports this by emphasising the need to consider humility alongside pride and shame, acknowledging that "whatever we do today will be critically assessed when it becomes part of the past (if not before). History makes fools of us all, sooner or later. We can only hope it is later and do our best to ensure that the positive contributions outweigh the collateral damage" (371). This perspective aligns with Love's assertion that "contemporary critics tend to frame the past as the unique site of need. But we might understand the work of historical affirmation not as a lifeline thrown to those figures drowning in the bad gay past, as it is often presented, but rather as a means of securing a more stable and positive identity in the

present" (259). As I discussed in the previous chapter, the staging of queer temporalities reveals the relationship between past gay histories and present-day identities. Love's claim underscores Bartlett's idea that the phases of shame form a continuum, and by reflecting on history, we can inform and improve a queer(er) future.

The idea of a queer future, or rather the staging of queer utopias as a response to the rise of homonormativity, is explored in my next chapter. In the following chapter, I continue to show how gay playwrights in contemporary British theatre offer up an exploration of the relationship between the past and present on stage. More specifically, it examines how gay British playwriting presents a pedagogical space to rehearse the deconstruction and construction of gay identities through their gay narratives, as a resistance to homonormativity and as a call for queer utopias. I turn to Love's contention as my closing remark for this chapter: "proponents of gay pride talk as if the main problem we face is shame, but shame isn't the problem: homophobia is" (258).

Chapter Four: Homonormativity, or is there a Queer Alternative?

Introduction

Neoliberalism is considered to be "a slippery concept meaning different things to different people", as explained by Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie Macleavy in their edited collection *The Handbook of Neoliberalism* (2016). In this chapter, I adopt their definition of the term, which refers to "new political, economic, and social arrangements within society that emphasise market relations, re-tasking the role of the state, and individual responsibility" (2). In doing so, I explore the representation of the effects of neoliberalism on social arrangements between gay characters in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride, Canary* and Fitzpatrick's *This Much*. Springer et al. explain that neoliberalism has "become a means of identifying a seemingly ubiquitous set of market-oriented policies as being largely responsible for a wide range of social, political, ecological and economic problems" (2). In light of this, I investigate how the neoliberal policies of privatisation, consumption, and assimilation are reflected in the construction of gay characters and the broader narratives of my selected case studies. Through their engagement with temporality, I explore how these plays navigate the intersections of past and present struggles with neoliberal ideologies and homonormativity, reflecting the tension between personal identity and societal pressures. Furthermore, I analyse how Ravenhill, Campbell, Harvey, and Fitzpatrick respond to these 'inclusive' neoliberal ideologies through the evolving portrayal of gay characters, questioning the promises of assimilation and the implications for gay identity in a changing cultural landscape. I argue that through the playwrights' engagement with temporality these plays challenge the notion of a linear progression toward equality, highlighting instead the cyclical nature of

struggle, resistance, and transformation – in relation to gay identity. Through these depictions, my analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how contemporary gay playwriting interrogates the impact of neoliberalism on gay identity, offering significant insights for both theatrical representation and queer theory.

Neoliberalism, as an ideology, is best described by Manfred B. Stager and Ravi K. Roy as one of "three intertwined manifestations" (37). These are: "(1) an ideology; (2) a mode of governance; (3) a policy package". Ideologies are considered "systems of widely shared ideas and patterned beliefs that are accepted as truth by significant groups in society" (37). Moreover, Lesley Hoggart explains that "ideologies of collectivism and social responsibility gave way as the citizen became the consumer" (150). Thus, she argues that neoliberal ideologies "sought to defend the 'traditional' nuclear family and criticised those who were outside that norm (such as lone mothers) and those who challenged the norm (such as feminists)" (149). As well as the two examples mentioned by Hoggart, the nuclear family is also threatened – or, for a better term, queered – by the existence of homosexuals. Despite this, twenty-first century neoliberalism presents itself as an *all*-inclusive ideology, most prominently through the (sexual) politics of homonormativity.

Homonormativity

This chapter is primarily concerned with the representation of homonormativity in gay British theatre and the different ways that my chosen playwrights respond to the ideology through their narratives and (gay) characters. My approach, understanding and exploration of homonormativity within the case studies chimes with Sharif Mowlabocus' account of the ideology in *Interrogating Homonormativity: Gay Men, Identity and Everyday Life* (2021), as

homonormativity “not so much resid[ing] in any one place or personage, but instead flow[ing] through contemporary culture” (13). He describes the politics of homonormativity as “a product of late capitalism and neoliberal philosophy” that frames “the lives and practices of gay men” (6). In the conclusion of his study, Mowlabocus offers up final reflections of his thoughts surrounding homonormativity and the ways in which it could be considered and explored. He argues that

> homonormativity *exists* and the concept of homonormativity continues to be relevant in discussions of contemporary LGBTQ culture and politics, but especially gay male culture. At the same time, homonormativity does not reside in any one specific act or identity, but operates in a far more insidious fashion, infiltrating gay male culture and the relationship between gay men and mainstream society (227).

In particular, my analysis draws attention to the ways in which gay playwriting can expose the complexities of internalised homonormativity, such as characters who, knowingly or unknowingly, aspire to align their identities with mainstream ideals while grappling with their own desires for subversion, community, and difference. In so doing, I build on Mowlabocus's argument by showing how the intersection of gay identity and mainstream norms is not just about external pressures but also an internal, often unspoken negotiation within the gay community itself. Furthermore, examining the representation of these conflicts in gay playwriting can provide a platform to critique the ways in which gay male culture both resists and succumbs to the influence of mainstream societal expectations, offering insights that are valuable for queer theory and the ongoing discussion about the limits and potential of homonormativity.

In this chapter, therefore, I argue that Ravenhill, Campbell, Harvey, and Fitzpatrick challenge the ideology of homonormativity in their playwriting and in doing so challenge its infiltration within the dramatic worlds presented to mainstream audiences. I map out and investigate the different ways that each case study does this through the following sections. The first section, Gay Marriage, outlines the emergence of this institution in the UK and its links to neoliberalism, as well as examining how gay marriage is represented within *This Much* and *Mother Clap's Molly House*. The second section, No Future – separated in two sub-sections: Sinthomosexual and The Child – adopts Lee Edelman's theorisation of the sinthomosexual and its effect on reproductive futurism, the gay community and homonormativity, as a theoretical framework. My analysis across these two sections explores the alternative 'goals' that are presented for gay characters in the case studies in place of striving for the ideal of marriage. In other words, it interrogates the shift – as represented by contemporary gay playwrights – from the political to the personal; from gay marriage to submitting to jouissance (pleasure). The final section, Queer Utopia, emerges as a response to the first two sections and centres around the idea of queer futurities. For this section, I draw on Jill Dolan's theorisation of hope and its relation to the construction of utopia. In so doing, I argue that Campbell, Harvey, Ravenhill, and Fitzpatrick utilise queer utopian performatives to offer the hope for a queer utopia, as an alternative to the rejected ideology of homonormativity.

Homonormativity is most famously defined by Lisa Duggan as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions — such as marriage, and its call for monogamy and reproduction — but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture

anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179). To put it more plainly, it is the thinking that queer identities should assimilate to the structures of heteronormativity. Moreover, Mowlabocus explains that Duggan's definition of the term homonormativity "claims to speak on behalf of the centre, the rational and the reasonable. It allegedly represents a 'silent majority' of lesbian and gay people who (it alleges) are less interested in revolution than in being allowed to live a 'regular' life alongside their heterosexual neighbours" (22). After the initial readings of my selected case studies, I noticed that aspects of homonormativity – such as marriage, monogamy and/or reproduction – were key themes of exploration.

As pivotal elements of heteronormativity, marriage, monogamy, and reproduction sustain neoliberalism's drive to uphold the notion of the nuclear family. These 'themes' are rooted in neoliberalism's desire to sustain the monolithic power of heteronormativity, further indicating a call for gay identities to align with the ideology of homonormativity. For Sealing Cheng, "neoliberal transformations thereby shape not only the world we live in, but also the idea of being human – and thereby, being sexual" (228). Additionally, Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson explain that "Duggan fears [...] the public sphere is shrinking to a neoconservative rendition of sexual politics" (18). It is important to note, as outlined by Mowlabocus, that "homonormativity does not reside within any one specific practice. Rather, it infiltrates, shapes and frames practices in order that their meanings become fixed, their structures rigid, and their queer potential obfuscated" (226). In my analysis therefore, I investigate and analyse the different ways that contemporary gay playwrights respond to these infiltrations through the construction of their gay narratives and characters.

Duggan's coining of – and challenge to – homonormativity is a direct response to "contemporary conservative" Andrew Sullivan's proposed 'liberal' sexual politics (184). In *Virtually Normal* (2011), Sullivan offers the "'Third Way' [as] a new approach", which he argues sits neatly between conservatism and liberalism (qtd in Duggan 184). Duggan argues however that Sullivan's justification for the Third Way is born from a position that sites "homosexuality [as] an involuntary condition (created by both nature and nurture at a very young age) in a fixed minority of the population". Sullivan claims that that the Third Way "appeals to nature", as heteronormativity is "one of the oldest traditions of thought in the west" (qtd. in Duggan 184). Heteronormativity as an ideology reflects the dominant structures in society that control and perpetuate sexual norms. Sullivan's Third Way represents his disregard for queer identities that deviate from the neoliberal norm, further marginalising gay identities. Similar to Duggan, I position myself in opposition to Sullivan's idea of the Third Way as it removes agency from gay identities in a bid to align them within a heteronormative matrix. As well as this, the Third Way imposes homonormative ideals on gay communities as their dominant ideology. Sullivan theorises what he describes as "natural variation", saying that "the homosexual person might be seen as a natural foil to the heterosexual norm, a variation that does not eclipse the theme, but resonates with it" (qtd. in Duggan 185).

Arguably, Sullivan's stance is toxic for a queer community, as it positions any subversion from what is considered homonormative as a 'variation', thus binding homosexuality to heterosexuality. Moreover, Sullivan proposes heteronormativity as a suitable ideological fit to achieve state neutrality. Duggan argues that Sullivan aims to "construct a new public/private distinction that mobilises gay equality rhetoric on behalf of a miniaturized state and constricted public life, confined to very few policy decisions, coupled with a vast zone of

'private' life dominated by 'voluntary' economic and civic transactions, however conglomerated, oligarchic, and unaccountable" (188). This is problematic for gay identities as it establishes restrictive parameters for what is considered acceptable. Cheng explains that "the gay marriage movement has championed ideals of domesticity and privacy under narrowly defined ideas of equality and freedom, over other ways of organising intimacy and sexuality, and side-lining progressive politics of social and economic justice" (228), further illustrating the highly contested nature of Sullivan's Third Way and its alignment with neoliberalism (and, therefore, production of homonormativity).

Sullivan divides his primary focus between two issues, "gay access to marriage" and "the military". According to Duggan, this is in an attempt to "[demobilise] the gay population to a 'prepolitical condition'", reflecting his mission to neutralise homosexuals into alignment with heteronormativity. Sullivan suggests that marriage is "not simply a private contract", but also a "social and public recognition of a private commitment" (187). Sullivan's implication further perpetuates his desire for a standardised queer community to be acknowledged, accepted, and assimilated into a homonormative matrix. In opposition to Sullivan's desire to 'sanitise' the queer community – under the guise of a liberal position – I investigate the ways in which my chosen playwrights respond to homonormativity in relation to their gay characters through the three analysis sections of this chapter: Gay Marriage, No Future, and Queer Utopias.

Gay Marriage

In 2013, the Marriage Bill was passed in the United Kingdom. Following its royal assent, same-sex marriages were legalised in the UK in March 2014. As outlined on the British Government

website, the Marriage Bill legally allows for “same sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies”, “same sex couples to marry in religious ceremonies” and the opportunity for “civil partners to convert their partnership to a marriage, if they wish”. In their 2017 article for *BBC News* about the British Social Attitude survey, Rachel Schraer & Joey D'Urso explain that “the proportion of the British public who say they approve of same-sex partnerships has soared over the past 30 years”. This highlights a shift towards the acceptance of same-sex relationships in twenty-first century Britain. From this survey, it was noted that there was a decline in positive responses following the AIDS crisis and the introduction to Section 28 in the 1980s. However, the statistics also indicate a “steady and rapid rise from the early 1990s [that] reflects a wider trend of social liberalisation”. In 2016, the “group of people answering that they thought same-sex partnerships were “not wrong at all” almost quadrupled from 17% when the survey started in 1983, to 64%”. According to the official estimates, “about 60,000 people were in same-sex marriages” by 2016, which saw gay men and lesbians receive the same rights as heterosexuals in regard to laws around property, finances, healthcare, as well as the recognition of their love. Further highlighting the importance of marriage to British society, the then Women and Equalities Minister Maria Miller is quoted on the government website stating that:

> [m]arriage is the bedrock of our society and now irrespective of sexuality everyone in British society can make that commitment. It is a wonderful achievement and whilst this legislation may be about marriage, its impact is so much wider. Making marriage available to all couples demonstrates our society’s respect for all individuals regardless of their sexuality. It demonstrates the importance we attach to being able to live

> freely. It says so much about the society that we are and the society that we want to live in.

In the introduction to their edited collection, *From Civil Partnership to Same-Sex Marriage: Interdisciplinary Reflections* (2015), Nicola Barker and Daniel Monk describe both the Civil Partnership Act (2004) and the Marriage Act (2013), as "important legal, social and historic landmarks". They explain that the recognition of same-sex relationships "has become a key site of political contestation, rich in symbolic, material and cultural meanings" (1). On the other hand, same-sex relationships also "represent a problematic and ambivalent political engagement with the institution of marriage" (1). In a similar vein, Weeks discusses the disparity in reactions to the legalisation on same-sex marriage in his chapter – "Liberalism by Stealth? The Civil Partnership Act and the New Equalities Agenda in Perspective", for Barker and Monk's volume. Weeks suggests that "the debates over same-sex relationships have a way of casting a glaring light on the nature of society and cultural attitudes", underlining "the legacies of the past, the confusions of the present, but also the possibilities for the future: about what sort of society we want to live in" (32). Despite this, he also acknowledges that "for many radical critics civil partnership and related legislation carried with it the danger of separating off the respectable gay from the unrespectable, the stable couple from the promiscuous, and of imprinting new normativities onto the LGBT community" (35). Here, I present and analyse the different ways in which Fitzpatrick, Harvey and Campbell respond to gay marriage – now that it has become an option for gay men – through the construction of their characters.

For Weeks, the "goal of legitimising civil partnerships or same-sex marriages […] is better seen as a form of struggle for recognition than a ruse of power". He admits that civil partnerships – and now gay marriages – "may indeed express values which are complementary to a form of neoliberalist government" ("Liberation by Stealth?" 41). Irrespective of this, he goes on to argue that neoliberalism had very little to do with the turn towards legalising same-sex marriages. In doing so, he proposes that it is rather the "developments and shifts within the wider social world, including the changing patterns of relations, which in a sense [makes] marriage less crucial than in the past as an anchor of social life" (41). I argue, however, that marriage is still as crucial as ever for maintaining social order. With this in mind, I argue that the move towards the legalisation of gay marriage reflects homonormative tendencies and their desire to absorb gay men into the mainstream through a promise of recognition and equality. Week claims that striving for 'ordinariness' "is not the same as assimilation or normalisation" but, rather, "in a quiet way, the very meanings of formal relations are being transformed". He proposes that we are "in the midst of a major transformation of intimate life – and civil partnerships and equal marriages are crucial components of this historic shift" (41). To some extent I do agree that 'ordinariness' is an important factor towards the acceptance of queer identities. However, I would also argue that this 'ordinariness' would, in turn, exclude or further marginalise alternative queer identities that do not neatly align to the homonormative matrix.

In *The Drama of Marriage: Gay Playwrights/Straight Unions from Oscar Wilde to the Present* (2012), Clum explores the representation of marriage in modern and contemporary British and American drama. For the most part, the book "examines works […] about heterosexual relationships" but, most importantly for this chapter, "it is written from the point of view of

a gay male individual and […] focus[es] on depictions of marriage by gay playwrights" (1). In his text, Clum explores how "marriage has been presented as an ideal, an impossibility, and a measure of the morality and limitation of the parties involved" (1). Furthering this argument, I explore gay marriage as a homonormative 'ideal', which reflects a neoliberal desire to integrate queer communities into a homonormative matrix. For Clum, marriage is a "state to which most aspire, but it is always a problem and a process toward an unattainable ideal" (2). More directly, British scholar Catherine Donovan expresses in her 2004 journal article for *Feminism and Psychology* that she is:

> against same-sex marriage (or any same-sex partnership legislation) for two main reasons. First, the place in UK society of marriage as a privileged legal and emotional contract reinforces inequalities between people depending on the way they organize and live their personal lives. Second, I believe that the model of love represented by marriage should not be held up unquestionably as the idea to which we should all aspire (25).

In my analysis below, I examine how Fitzpatrick and Ravenhill not only critique but respond to Donovan's opposition to same-sex marriage by exploring the complex and often contradictory roles that romantic love and partnership play within their writing. By incorporating Clum's perspective on marriage as a rejection of Sullivan's claim that this institution is the key signifier for an accomplished and 'complete' society, the following section challenges the conventional understanding of marriage as the ultimate signifier of social accomplishment, shedding light on alternative narratives that might disrupt this normative ideal.

In his study, Clum refutes Sullivan's argument that "the symbolic power of marriage […] is even deeper than that of citizenship, even starker than that of military glory, even clearer than that of public space". As explained by Clum, Sullivan describes marriage as "the institution where public citizenship most dramatically intersects with private self-definition" (qtd. in Clum 7). Sullivan's position on gay marriage can be considered largely representative of the dangers of homonormativity for gay identities. By presenting gay marriage as a key signifier for reaching gay 'completion', homonormativity seeks to assimilate and cleanse gay identities that are otherwise considered alternative within a heteronormative society. Homonormativity, therefore, embodies a neoliberal desire to fully assimilate gay identities into the mainstream and in doing so refutes any alternative, under a guise of acceptance for *all.* Clum emphasises how issues surrounding gay marriage split the gay community "into the groups wanting the right to share in all institutions of [...] society (assimilationists) and those who want lesbians and gay men to be 'queer', outside of and resistant toward such normative institutions as marriage" (8). In this section, I investigate how Fitzpatrick represents the tensions surrounding gay marriage in *This Much*, as outlined in the debate between Clum and Sullivan.

This Much follows Gar, a graphic designer in his early thirties, and his attempts to navigate his adulthood as a gay man in twenty-first century Britain. More specifically, the play follows Gar's relationship with his partner Anthony and his liaison with Albert, his secret sexual partner. Fitzpatrick does not assign scene numbers or acts to his play, but rather sets the scenes apart with scene locations such as "*A Corner Shop*" (1), "*The Apartment*" (3) and "*A Public Place*" (7). For the sake of clarity, I have numbered the scenes in chronological order as

they appear in the text. Through this structure, Fitzpatrick is able to draw attention to 'moments', both on- and off-stage, that shape Gar's beliefs and views on relationships, family and marriage. I argue that through his play's construction, Fitzpatrick interrogates homonormativity and its subsequent effect on his gay characters.

Scene Four of *This Much* is set in Gar and Anthony's apartment, symbolising a space of domesticity and privacy. In this scene, Anthony discusses his desire for the future, a future that neatly aligns with Sullivan's Third Way. Through this scene, I suggest that Fitzpatrick is constructing a space to unpack notions of homonormativity within the dramatic world of the play.

> **Anthony:** I want like a house and a load of kids and a nice big car to take them to soccer practice. […]
>
> **Gar:** You're such a typical gay. We don't even approach the practicalities, it's just a nice image.
>
> **Anthony:** No.
>
> **Gar:** Of course. It's just about fitting in. Recreating the same shitty image of family we came from (Fitzpatrick 15-16).

Gar's labelling of Anthony as a 'typical gay' in response to his desire for a house and kids underline homonormative ideals. The aspiration to strive to maintain a nuclear family is highly reflective of heteronormativity. The irony in this, however, is that these ideals are now being labelled as 'typical' for gay men as a result of the rise of homonormativity. This blurring of dominant ideologies in both heterosexuality and homosexuality is largely illustrative of the

effect that homonormativity has on the gay community. Gar argues that Anthony wants to replicate the "same shitty image of family [they] came from" (16), aligning Anthony's values with the idea of the nuclear family and therefore of hetero- and homonormativity ideology. Expressing this position, Sullivan believes that "our battle, after all, is not for political victory but for personal integrity. In the same way that many of us had to leave our families in order to join them again, so now as citizens, we have to embrace politics if only ultimately to be free of it" (qtd. in Duggan 189). Sullivan argues that embracing neoliberal politics and assimilating to heteronormative values will depoliticise the gay community, therefore allowing previously exiled gay men the opportunity to return home. Yet this, in effect, somewhat reverses the progression of gay pride. Moreover, Sullivan's standpoint is highly problematic as it negates any gay identity that challenges any aspect of homonormativity and provides privilege to those gay identities that construct themselves in relation to the prescribed new normal. This idea is supported by sociolinguist Lucy Jones' analysis of the normalisation of gay identities when she explains that "identities held by gay men and lesbians have become mainstreamed or assimilated with heterosexual norms" (55).

Additionally, Gavin Brown describes that "gay public life and 'the democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissidence' are increasingly judged against a privileged form of gay life that attempts to replicate aspects of state-endorsed heterosexual primacy and prestige located in the home and related consumption practices" (1499). Thus, the gay community is increasingly policed through the dominant lens of neoliberalism and its championing of homonormativity in society as a privileged ideal. I argue that this is problematic as it unpicks the positive shift towards the increasing acceptance and representation of gay men. It follows that it would be more beneficial for the gay community

to propose gay marriage as an option rather than as an ideal to strive towards. This idea chimes with Duggan's conclusion:

> This New Homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: 'equality' becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, 'freedom' becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the 'right to privacy' becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life (190).

Here, Duggan highlights the multiple ways in which homonormativity infiltrates and regulates politics, policies, and societal norms in order to implement an apparently 'neutral' neoliberal state as well as to prescribe a new set of ideals for gay man to strive towards. As the conversation progresses between Gar and Anthony in Scene Four, Gar questions Anthony:

> **Gar**: Would you commit to being with me forever even if on our honeymoon I got bitten by a mosquito and was mentally disabled for the rest of my life?
>
> **Anthony**: That doesn't happen.
>
> **Gar**: Yes it does. It happened to a neighbour of mine.
>
> **Anthony**: That's not the point.
>
> **Gar**: Plan for the worse, hope for the best. It says, "in sickness and in health". (Fitzpatrick 16)

As both the scene and their conversation draw to a close, Gar impulsively asks Anthony to marry him. Through this, Fitzpatrick offers an insight into the realities of marriage, as opposed to the supposed ideals. In doing so, I argue that Fitzpatrick ironically queers traditional notions of marriage through demystifying its very essence by challenging its fundamental foundations – such as the vows – that are typically accepted as gospel. This scene draws attention to the tensions involved in prescribing commonly heteronormative ideals to gay couples, as shown through Gar's questioning of the traditional vow in sickness and in health. Moreover, Anthony's "*silence*" as a response to Gar's questing of the ideals of marriage suggests a sense of doubt from Anthony, despite his dreams of gay marriage (16). In his defence of marriage, Sullivan argues that marriage "provides an anchor, if an arbitrary and often weak one, in the maelstrom of sex and relationships to which we are all prone. It provides a mechanism for emotional stability and economic security" (qtd. in Duggan 188). Sullivan's description of marriage draws attention to the 'functionality' of marriage in both an emotional and practical sense. This aligns with Cheng's assertion that "neoliberal transformations reshape ideas and ideals about the self and erotic life, marriage and the family, that are fundamental to changing regimes of governance including citizenship, national security, and global order" (234). In other words, marriage can be seen as a "strategy for privatising gay politics and culture for the new neoliberal world order" (Duggan 188), under the false pretence of equality and liberal politics. Duggan argues that "instead [of equality] we have been administered a kind of political sedative—we get marriage and the military then we go home and cook dinner, forever" (189). This debate is reflected by Anthony ignoring Gar's question about whether he would be there in sickness and in health, demanding instead that they "write [their] own vows" (Fitzpatrick 16). Arguably, his reaction embodies the concern for the way he is viewed

by others rather than for the actual prospect of marrying his partner, which triggers Gar to lash out and continue his attack against the institution of marriage:

> **Gar**: So, you're not really thinking about it are you? It's just us gays and our images. The perfect image. Mum and dad, people at school, everyone... I might be gay but otherwise everything is as perfect as can be.
>
> **Anthony**: Straight people do the same. They have a perfect image of what they want and they go for it...
>
> **Gar**: But they don't hang on to it when it hasn't turned out. They roll with it. They get used to the reality of it. I don't think you could handle the reality of it.
>
> **Anthony**: Neither could you.
>
> **Gar**: No. Not right now... but at some stage... I just don't want to be a parody of a straight family (Fitzpatrick 16).

This interaction reinstates the tension between Gar and Anthony in relation to their opposing views on gay marriage. As Cheng points out, although "the right for same-sex couples to get married and have families like 'everyone else' has been celebrated as a measure of sexual progressiveness in the twenty-first century," this celebration remains contested. Cheng argues that "such jubilation was premature and, in fact, reproduces some of the fundamental inequalities in neoliberal structures" (234). The emphasis on marriage as a key marker of equality, according to Cheng, fails to address the systemic inequalities that persist within neoliberal frameworks. Specifically, the celebration of gay marriage ignores "heteronormativity and the system of privileges that remain embedded in the institution of marriage in ways that continue to marginalise same-sex couples and alternative intimacies"

(234). In other words, by focusing on same-sex marriage as a symbol of progress, society overlooks the ways in which the institution of marriage itself continues to reinforce dominant heterosexual norms and marginalise non-conventional forms of intimacy, thus limiting the scope of true sexual liberation.

In the following scene, Gar is with Albert in "*The Apartment*" while Anthony is away visiting his mother. At the beginning of the scene, it is suggested that Gar and Albert have had sex, as the scene begins with "*both he and Gar* [...] *getting dressed*" (Fitzpatrick 17). Having this scene directly follow Gar's proposal to Anthony draws further attention to the aforementioned tension between Gar and Anthony.

> **Gar:** […] Nobody wants to be that in love do they. It's all about proving something. Like showing your independence from society or showing your family or friends that you're ok without them. Or you can do better. Or at the very least it's saying "look this person endorses me. I am a worthwhile human being to get to know". We have these long-term partners who are meant to understand us and grow with us and all that. [...] People get married and then twenty years later they find themselves living with a stranger. That doesn't happen with friends. The ones who don't last… probably shouldn't last. It's sort of like free market love. If it's not working. If you don't really want to keep in touch. You just don't.
>
> **Albert:** What does this mean?
>
> **Gar:** This is the flat I share with my "partner" (18).

Gar's comment on 'free market love' – on love as a transaction – presents a preferred alternative to marriage, thus moving away from its link with neoliberalism, as well as the performative fulfilment and pleasure that emerge from marital commitments. Through this, Fitzpatrick offers a queer alternative to marrying for the optics of others and marrying instead for love. Clum describes marriage as an "economic and social contract, often negotiated by parties other than the marrying couple, to a lifelong commitment, to an attachment based on love, honour, and obedience, to a commitment with no real contract and no clear end date" (*The Drama of Marriage* 7). I argue, however, that through his construction of Gar, Fitzpatrick instead suggests that an alternative to marriage can be love between two people without the performative paraphernalia. Through this, Fitzpatrick challenges the notion homonormativity through his construction of Gar. As well as this, Fitzpatrick highlights the desire for gay men to want the performative public display of a wedding and marriage, as portrayed through Anthony. While Gar's proposal to Anthony exposes the performative aspects of homonormativity, there is also the 'performance' of getting married with a proposal and then a party (wedding). On the other hand, there is the 'performative' act of marriage within the official ceremony, as both a lawful and public symbol of love, stability, and union.

In the introduction to their edited collection, *Performativity and Performance* (1995), Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick propose that "one of the most fecund, as well as the most under-articulated, of such crossings has been the oblique intersection between performativity and the loose cluster of theoretical practices, relations and traditions known as performance" (1). Additionally, Cristina Delgado-García explains how the differences between performativity and performance are often misunderstood: she writes that "the notion of performativity as defined by Judith Butler's work in the early 1990s is not equivalent

to the concept of performance" (59). With this in mind, I outline below different working definitions of performance and performativity, in order to draw out the theatrical and philosophical implications that arise from the representation of marriage and weddings in the plays under examination.

Sarah Salih states that Butler "explicitly connects her use of the concept 'performativity' to the speech act theory of J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (1955) and Derrida' s deconstruction of Austin's ideas in his essay 'Signature Event Context' (1972)" (63). Salih defines performativity as a concept that "has specific linguistic and philosophical underpinnings" (11). Butler's most influential definition is that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (xv). To describe her notion of performativity, Butler draws on the performance of a wedding and explains that it can be understood as a ritual that enacts the marriage between two people through the performative utterance of 'I do'. Butler goes on to explain that such "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (173). In line with this, Sedgwick claims in her chapter – "Around the Performative" – that the "marriage ceremony is, indeed, so central to the origins of 'performativity'" (70). Therefore, a wedding enacts the notion of a marriage through its performative nature.

Clum describes a wedding as "the first and most public performance of marriage" and as "a complex event, both real and symbolic" (*The Drama of Marriage* 2). For Elin Diamond,

"performance is always a doing and a thing done". She explains that, on the one hand, "performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)". On the other hand, "it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field" (1). The performative, for Diamond, "assert[s] the possibility of materialising something that exceeds our knowledge, that alters the shape of sites and imagine other as yet unsuspected modes of being" (2). Additionally, the study of performance – in this case, a wedding – opens up "a contested space, where meanings and desires are generated, occluded, and of course multiply interpreted" (4). Clum suggests that the attendees are, "in some sense, participants [as] a marriage ceremony is, after all, a performance of a contract between the couple and the community represented by those who witness the contract" (3). Fitzpatrick's allusion of Gar and Anthony's gay wedding in Scene Eight queers the public legitimation of the 'act' and, therefore, also highlights importance of publicity and participation.

Although the wedding is heavily discussed throughout the play, Fitzpatrick never stages it as performance, but rather explores what happens after the main characters are married.

> *A hotel suite.*
>
> ***Gar** is opening a bottle of champagne and there's some wedding cake with the figures on it. **Anthony** is looking at pictures on **Gar's** camera. They are both wearing tuxedos.*
>
> **Anthony:** You look handsome in this one (Fitzpatrick 25).

In this scene, Fitzpatrick draws attention to the deconstruction of the 'ideal' of not only a wedding but also of being married. The play alludes to the off-stage event of the wedding through photos taken on Gar's camera, the very same camera that was used to take explicit pictures of Albert in the previous scene. I argue that the camera throughout the play symbolises the 'public eye', as it follows Gar's actions unbeknownst to Anthony. By having Anthony flick through the photos on Gar's camera, Fitzpatrick builds dramatic irony through the anticipation of Anthony coming across pictures of Albert "*taking his cock out"* (10) in Scene Three. According to Parker and Sedgwick,

> one of the most ineradicable folk-beliefs of the married seems to be that it is no matter-of-fact thing, but rather a great privilege, for anyone else to behold a wedding or a married couple or to be privy to their secrets—including oppressive or abusive secrets, but also the showy open secret of the "happy marriage" (11).

In place of the normative joy-filled post-wedding scene, Fitzpatrick instead offers up a scene working through Gar's deepest secrets that he has been trying to hide. Fitzpatrick does this through the dramatic build-up of tension with the ongoing anticipation of Anthony discovering Gar's infidelity. It is not until Anthony "*puts the voicemail on speaker*", so they can listen to messages from their families, that he discovers a voicemail from Albert. After hearing the voicemail, "Anthony stands there for a moment. He goes towards the bathroom door but then stops himself. He picks up the cake and starts to eat it/throw it on the floor" (28).

Through the non-chronological order of the play, audiences are constantly aware of the 'hidden' aspects of Gar's life. This structure helps Fitzpatrick deconstruct the notion of a 'happy marriage'. According to Parker and Sedgwick, as the "most conventional definition of a play, marriage is constituted as a spectacle that denies audiences the ability either to look away from it or equally to intervene in it" (11). Fitzpatrick's play offers an exploration into what Parker and Sedgwick describe as the "possible grounds and performative potential of refusals, fractures, warpings of the proscenium of marital witness" (12). Through this, I argue that Fitzpatrick breaks the illusion of marriage and instead draws attention to the unattainability of happiness and satisfaction that is culturally promised through marriage in its relation to gay identities. This is further reflected in the destruction of the cake, which mirrors the breaking down of the characters' relationship as well as the play's rejection of marriage as an ideal. Typically, a wedding cake symbolises the pinnacle of a wedding celebration; however, in this scene the cake is being eaten for comfort and ruined in anger. The remainder of the scene shows the tension within the now newly married couple reaching its climax, as the grooms' clashing views surrounding gay marriage are again exposed.

> **Gar**: I really. I really wanted to be married to you. To have the picture perfect... I figured there's nothing to lose... But it feels... it feels like we have to try too hard. It feels fake.
>
> **Anthony**: If you're never going to take your life seriously then nobody else will.
>
> **Gar:** [...] You know I said about Gays having their images... well I actually have this image and... you're just not it... not all of it... you're definitely some of it... but you're not all of it and I've been waiting for so long for it to be perfect... I'm not sure I can settle (31).

In this exchange – and in the play more generally – Fitzpatrick challenges the notion of homonormativity and its effect on gay men through his representation of gay marriage. Diamond argues that performance "is precisely the site in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be investigated" (5). I suggest therefore that through his construction of Gar and subsequent deconstruction of the ideal of marriage, Fitzpatrick offers an antithesis to Sullivan's Third way and homonormativity. In addition to this, Fitzpatrick offers up Gar's preferred method of 'marriage' as a transaction of love.

Despite Ravenhill's play predating the legislation on civil partnerships and same-sex marriage, I propose that Ravenhill also challenges the notion of gay marriage through his construction of gay apprentice Orme in *Mother Clap's Molly House*. Moreover, the fact that Ravenhill investigated these themes before the legislation was passed, further reinforces (gay) theatre as a critical space for advancing discussions within queer theory, as it can provide an opportunity to engage with and challenge dominant cultural narratives about identity, intimacy, and belonging. Through such representations, theatre contributes to the destabilisation of fixed notions of what constitutes a 'proper' or 'acceptable' queer life. This can be seen in Orme's response to his partner, Martin, wanting to marry him in their games that they play in the molly house. Orme explains to Martin that they "must fuck who [they] will", because if not they "[m]ight as well be Man and Wife like [the] rest of the world" (*Plays: 2* 71). Orme does not only represent the rejection of homonormativity but also provides an alternative understanding of what it means to be married. This is reflected through Orme's invitation to Martin to "have another. Have a score. I'll love you all the more" (71). Martin agrees to Orme's proposal and allows him to stay at the Molly House "for old times", on the

promise that he will return "to [Martin] tomorrow" (108). Through this interaction, Ravenhill illustrates that marriage has the scope to be subverted in order to work for alternative relationships that deviate from a heterosexual norm. As a result of this subversion, Ravenhill explicitly challenges the rise of homonormativity, as Orme refuses to adhere to its rules and regulations—in place for an alternative model of his own choosing.

No Future: Sinthomosexuality

In this section I argue how the alternative 'ways' that Gar and Orme are shown to represent by Fitzpatrick and Ravenhill chime with Edelman's theorisation of a sinthomosexual. In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), sinthomosexuality is described as the "site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a jouissance that rends it precisely by rendering it in relation to [the death] drive" (38). Edelman here is describing the ongoing tension between gay men and their disruption to an optimistic vision of the future (fantasy of futurism) through a sense of overwhelming pleasure (jouissance). Edelman suggests that this pleasure is so intense in its nature that it tears apart and disrupts this heteronormative vision and links it to the death drive. The death drive represents an instinctual desire for self-destruction and in the context of Edelman's quote, he is suggesting that the intensity of pleasure is connected to the suggested destructive tendencies of gay men that in turn disrupts an optimistic future.

Chris Coffman notes that Edelman's "coinage echoes [Jacques] Lacan's concept of the sinthome, which refers to the unique form that jouissance – ecstatic pleasure that goes beyond desire to engage the Real and the drive – takes in each subject (58). Moreover, in his coinage of the term, Edelman connects the "sin" of homosexuality to "the dismantlement of

reproductive futurism" (39). In this sense, sinthomosexuality brings into visibility the "force of enjoyment that desire desires and in doing so reveals […] the enjoyment's infiltration of, its structural implication in, the very law of desire that works to keep jouissance at bay" (86). Coffman writes how Edelman "proposes that queers should bring this strategy to bear on the fantasy that animates reproductive futurism by embracing the despised figure of the sinthomosexual" (58). As reproductive futurism preserves and upholds the privileges of heteronormativity, the sinthomosexual therefore can be understood as a subject that – in turn – rejects the notion of reproductive futurism in the name of enjoyment and fixation on their own pleasures. In this following section therefore, I investigate the ways that Edelman's notion of the sinthomosexual can be identified in Fitzpatrick, Campbell, and Ravenhill's construction of their gay characters. In doing so, I explore the alternative ways of living as represented by these gay playwrights and argue that it is through this that they reject the idea of ascribing to homonormative ideals.

I argue that Fitzpatrick's construction of Gar reflects the sinthomosexual's full submersion into his jouissance (enjoyment). Following Gar's infidelity, he explains to Anthony that their marriage "feels fake", and that he "wants to sleep with other people and it's not because [he's] a horrible man who just wants to be a slut and it's not because [he] doesn't believe people can be monogamous"; rather, he argues that "the ideal […] is not true" (31). Gar's desire for a non-monogamous relationship rejects homonormativity, the ideology in which people "adopt and perform romantic and sexual relationships (1) of only one type over the life course (i.e., monosexuality), (2) with only one-person long term over the life course and concentrated in the institution of marriage (i.e., monogamy), and (3) focused on reproduction and nuclear families" (Mathers et al. 937). Before Anthony uncovers the truth about Gar

cheating, he asks Gar if he wants to "sleep with other people", to which Gar replies, "sometimes yes I do" (Fitzpatrick 12). Following this conversation, Anthony has to "sit down", as he is having "trouble breathing" (13). Anthony's reaction – and his sudden movement away from the conversation – represents the discomfort and anxiety surrounding the idea of being (sexually) open in romantic relationships. As explained previously, Anthony's desires reflect the aims of homonormativity. Moreover, both him and Gar represent the tensions between homonormativity and an alternative way of life, sinthomosexuality. A similar dynamic is embodied in Campbell's representation of 2008 Oliver and Philip in *The Pride*:

> **Oliver:** The anonymous sex thing. He said it depressed him.
>
> **Sylvia:** Okay.
>
> **Oliver:** So I told him it's not the same thing. I mean, when we're together…when I'm with Philip, that's different. But you know the other stuff, the park, the sauna, the internet, whatever, that stuff…
>
> **Sylvia:** The slut stuff.
>
> **Oliver:** The slut stuff, thank you, that's not the same. It's kind of like going to the loo. Only with someone else (59).

Much like Gar, Oliver represents the sinthomosexual's gravitation towards jouissance, eliciting negative responses from those who embody normative ideals pertaining to relationships, such as monogamy. For Edelman, Sinthomosexuality "finds something other in the words of the law, enforcing an awareness of something else, something that remains unaccounted for in the accounts we give of ourselves, by figuring an encounter with a force that loosens our hold on the meanings we cling to" (*No Future* 86). I suggest that this "other"

that Edelman mentions is represented through Oliver's need for anonymous sexual encounters, and I propose that the "awareness of something else" that Edelman references is the same calling to jouissance that Oliver describes to Philip in a previous scene:

> **Oliver:** […] And I'm walking by the pub and it's as if this voice is calling my name. […] So I walk in. […] And there's this guy there…and he's not even good-looking. […] And he's got a look in his eyes and he's looking at me as if he knows my name too […] and next thing you know I'm actually standing next to him and he's telling me he's married and his wife's at her mother's for the week and he's kind of talking to me and rubbing his groin at the same time. […] and the next thing I know we're in a cubicle and I'm on my knees (*The Pride* 45).

Through the pursuit of their pleasures, both Gar and Oliver represent the abovementioned 'encounter with a force that loosens our hold on meanings', which Edelman argues is an intuitive relationship with sexual desires, and the willingness to act on it. In Oliver's case it is his exploration of his sexual desires and kinks. For Oliver, these feelings are a part of his gay identity, however for others these are seen as toxic traits. In both plays, this 'awareness of something else' is negatively received, as reflected by the reaction from other characters. In *The Pride*, for example, this idea is challenged by the 2008 version of Sylvia. Through this, Campbell highlights society's reinforcement of heteronormative ideals and its policing of homosexuals, an idea that was explored in Chapter Two. As well as this, both Gar and Oliver's desire for sexual enjoyment and freedom is challenged by their gay partners. This draws attention to the restraining qualities that homonormativity has on gay identities regarding sexual jouissance. Additionally, the disagreements between different gay characters and their

partners highlights the tensions that exist in this respect not only between society and gay men but also between gay men themselves. Through these relationships, both Campbell and Fitzpatrick present the struggle between gay identities in response to the rise of homonormativity in twenty-first century Britain, as well as its alignment with its sister ideology, heteronormativity, which it helps to perpetuate.

In other words, I suggest that through their plays, these gay playwrights present alternative queer ways of living in opposition to homonormativity. In *Mother Clap's Molly House,* Edward explains to Will in Act Two, Scene Ten, that "there is no fun" in being in a monogamous relationship and he would much prefer to remain open and regularly attend sex parties (103). Edward's statement also embodies Edelman's notion of sinthomosexuality. This idea of sinthomosexuality, based on the insistence on fulfilling one's jouissance, is reflected as well in Orme's proclamation that "we must fuck who we will" because he "gets bored so easily" (71-72). Monforte explains that Will and Edward work "as a mirror image of that composed by Martin and Orme in the eighteenth-century section, with Martin willing to create a more committed relationship and Orme refusing to do so, eventually staying in London and carrying on with the hedonistic lifestyle of the molly house" (157). I propose that the construction of these characters draw attention to the tensions surrounding the rise of homonormativity in Britain. With this in mind, I argue that Fitzpatrick, Ravenhill, and Campbell queer the proposal of a homonormative matrix and offer up a wider scope for the existence and acceptance of alternative gay identities through their plays.

No Future: The Child

To return to Edelman, there is a connection between the 'sin' of homosexuality and the destruction of reproductive futurism. He argues that "reproduction makes clear that jouissance that has been missed – has been spoiled or, better, fucked up – so jouissance can only fuck up the very logic of reproduction" (*No Future* 60). With this in mind, I analyse the representations – or indeed, absence – of children within *Canary, Mother Clap's Molly House* and *The Pride* and draw out the ways in which it resonates with Edelman's thesis.

According to Edelman, the figurative Child embodies the "citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good" (11). This future share "governs our investments in the Child as the obligatory token of futurity" (12). Gay men therefore possess a potentiality to reject this notion of futurity through their choice to not reproduce, according to Edelman. Today, many gay men choose to reproduce, however, the gay characters in these plays do not. I suggest that this decision reflects the gay playwright's rejection of homonormativity and reproductive futurity.

To explore this further, I analyse Campbell's construction of Sylvia and her relationship with her closeted husband, Philip. In Act Two of *The Pride,* Sylvia mentions that their doctor "couldn't identify a reason [why they] couldn't have children", to which Philip keeps snapping "for God's sake Sylvia" (53), in a bid to not fully engage with the conversation. This suggests an air of secrecy, as well as a sense of awareness from both characters of the truth on the matter. In Act One, Campbell illustrates Philip's (closeted) homosexuality through his covert flirting with Oliver and then, fifty years in the future, Campbell explores the second versions of Philip and Oliver (played by the same actors) in a gay relationship.

> **Sylvia:** […] I started to question why I wanted it so much. A child. Why it meant everything to me. The desperation […] and I thought it's natural, it's because I'm a woman. To be a mother […] but then I realised that there was something else. I wanted a child because I was frightened of us being left alone, Philip (53).

The Child, much like the one that Sylvia craves, "marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity" which, according to Edelman, is "an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to [the] compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism" (*No Future* 21). Campbell construction of Sylvia highlights her loneliness as a response to being married to a gay man, as well as the fact that she feels like a failure by not performing her prescribed roles as both a wife and a mother. In *Canary*, Ellie represents the strong desire for the "narrative of reproductive futurism" (21). This is made clear through her disowning her gay son precisely because he could not fulfil the reproductive narrative that would allow Ellie to have grandchildren and achieve her nuclear family dream. It is only through Ellie's dream sequence that it is revealed that she is Mickey's mother and that he died from AIDS. Audiences learn that Ellie "committed the worst crime [by turning her] back on [her] son [Mickey]" (68), but by the time she realises this, it is too late.

The negative connotations of Ellie's desire to fulfil the narrative of reproductive futurism, despite her unhappy marriage to a closet gay man, is represented through their gay son and his eventual death. The symbolisation that Harvey constructs with Mickey aligns itself with Edelman's assertion that "what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively – to insist that the future stops here" (31). Here,

Edelman is drawing attention to his idea that gay men are not necessarily directed towards any specific goal or external outcome, but instead are interested in self-expression and self-affirmation no matter what an uncertain future may hold – especially in regard to moving away from a reproductive timeline. Moreover, Edelman claims that "[queerness] choose[s], instead *not* to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of a projective identification with an always impossible future" (31).

In *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Ravenhill explores the problematic side to jouissance: commerce. In "Commerce and Morality in the Theatre of Mark Ravenhill" (2010), Caridad Svich writes that "as always with Ravenhill, the tension in his work exists in the simultaneous embracing of pleasure and commerce and an utter disdain for them" (93). This idea chimes with Ravenhill's construction of an eighteenth-century whore, Amy. After finding out she is pregnant, Amy decides to not keep the child as she feels that it would ruin her business and, therefore, her future. This highlights how the rejection of reproductive futurism does not only align with homosexuals but also with those who queer the heteronormative paradigms of monogamy and reproduction for the sake of pleasure and/or commerce.

In Act One Scene Four, Amelia, another prostitute, labels Amy as a "stupid girl", because she is "spoiled goods" and her "price [is] halved" (*Plays: 2* 38) now that she is pregnant. In her article, Svich writes that "sex is the constant field where all transactions are played out in Ravenhill's theatrical world. It is the source of enquiry and the act that defines who we are at any given moment, how we give ourselves to someone else, and what price we pay for doing so" (95). My analysis builds on Svich's argument by expanding on how Ravenhill's portrayal of sex as transactional not only explores the personal cost of sexual identity but also critiques

how individuals are valued in economic terms, particularly in relation to their bodies and what they can provide. This scene, in particular, highlights the negative effects of defining a person's 'worth' through commerce and financial gain, showing how the commodification of bodies can diminish the inherent value of human connections. This idea is further illustrated through a subsequent scene, where Amy is hesitant to return her dress to Mrs Tully's shop, as "it is drenched in blood" (50), signalling her unsafe abortion. Here, the red-stained dress visually symbolises not only the loss of her child but also the marking of Amy as both a woman and a mother who has chosen to prioritise economic survival over motherhood. By examining this image, I further the argument that Ravenhill critiques the societal expectation for individuals to navigate these complex intersections of sexuality, economic value, and social judgment. This not only builds on Svich's view of sex as a site of transactional power but advances the conversation by showing how this dynamic operates within the constraints of the neoliberal capitalist framework, adding a layer of critique on how economic pressures shape personal identities.

Ravenhill carries forward the idea of women rejecting their maternal desires for their deeper desire for commerce from Amy in the eighteenth century to Tina, who "*is covered in piercings*" (57) in the twenty-first century. Tina's boyfriend Charlie tells the gay men at the sex party that if she ever had a child, "the poor fucker would have to fight through half a ton of ironwork just to get out of her" (58). With this in mind, Charlie dubs her the "iron lady", playfully suggesting a link between Tina and Thatcher, as well as signalling Tina's rejection for reproductive futurism in favour of capitalist ideals of excess. Moreover, Alderson writes that the "Thatcher reference consolidates the play's suggestion that capitalism erodes maternal instincts" (259). The link between Amy and Tina is furthered through both characters typically

being played by the same actor, thus signifying a symbolic connection between identity constructions in the past and the present. As the second act of the play (and gay sex party) unfolds, Tina's labia piercing begins to bleed, which results in the visual of "blood [trickling] down [her] leg" (62). As the act progresses, the vivid imagery of Tina's bleeding becomes more apparent to those within the dramatic world as well as to the play's audiences. The imagery of women's blood reinforces this connection between Amy and Tina.

To conclude this section, I propose that Campbell, Harvey, and Ravenhill illustrate the rejection of reproductive futurism through their construction of female characters and their unfulfilled desire for children. For Campbell, the idea of reproductive futurism is jeopardised by the lack of love and happiness between Sylvia and Philip. This lack indicates gay men's effect on futurity, in relation to children. Harvey, on the other hand indicates the guilt associated with having gay children and the assumption that they remove any chance of reproductive futurism, through Ellie's disgust and shame for her child's sexuality. Finally, Ravenhill explores the rejection of reproductive futurism as a movement towards the desire and/or necessity for commerce, which reflect capitalist ideologies. I suggest that all three playwrights – through their construction of sinthomosexuals as well as the female characters I have analysed – also deconstruct the notion of reproductive futurism. Through this, I argue that Campbell, Harvey, and Ravenhill challenge the idea of a child in its symbolic reference to the future, in line with Edelman's thinking. Following this, I suggest that these playwrights highlight the necessity to work towards alternative futures for queer(er) identities instead of the repetition of the cycle of history, as shown in the plays' many connections to the past and in this thesis more broadly.

Queer Utopias

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), Muñoz responds to Edelman's assertion that the "future is the province of the child and therefore not for the queers by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope". Muñoz argues that "queerness is always in the horizon" and "not here yet", because "if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon" (11). That is to say that queerness represents the "longing that propels us onward", shifting from Edelman's claim of no future to queerness as "an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine the future" (*No Future* 1). I explore how *This Much, Canary, The Pride* and *Mother Clap's Molly House* oscillate between present and past temporalities to construct their narratives, and by doing so present alternative economies that oppose homonormativity – most notably through their closing scenes. The term "alternative economies" is borrowed from Leopold Lippert's study, where he investigates the "radically unconventional environments explored in recent American gay drama" (43). He describes alternative economies as "more communitarian and more imaginative forms of being and belonging" (49). By exploring the inclusion of these queer alternative economies in my chosen plays, I show how gay British playwrights offer up an alternative to homonormativity through their construction of queer utopias.

To underpin my analysis, I draw on Dolan's theorisation of utopian performatives in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (2005), which argues that "spectators come to the theatre not only to witness, not only to passively consume, but also to participate by actively imagining other worlds" (97). This notion positions theatre as an active, participatory medium, aligning with Monforte's explanation of how "the spectator, through watching and

listening, has the potential to embody the 'total presence of another' and become a witness to the events represented on stage" (153). Monforte, drawing on the writings of Dori Laub, suggests that spectators are provided with the opportunity to "become a part to the creation of knowledge de novo. […t]he blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (153). Together, these theories establish a framework for understanding the transformative potential of theatre, wherein the interplay between witnessing, participation, and imagining enables audiences to engage with new understandings of identity and experience. This framework resonates with my assertion in the introduction of this thesis that contemporary gay plays offer 'teaching moments' for their audiences, weaving together Dolan's performative utopia, Monforte's embodiment of presence, and Laub's concept of co-creating knowledge as tools for analysing the pedagogical and imaginative possibilities of gay theatre.

Lippert outlines how "through the momentary community created in the ephemeral economy of theatre production, social bonds emerge that allow for a rehearsal of alternative and often radically different conceptions of citizenship and cultural belonging" (51). This idea underscores the potential of theatre to foster collective imagination and challenge dominant societal norms. Borrowing from Lippert, I argue that the queer utopian performatives present in the plays under analysis create spaces that offer "a powerful antidote to the individualist mantra of neoliberal culture" (51). Through their staging of alternative economies and reimagining of queer belonging, these plays actively contest the constraints of homonormativity, providing audiences with opportunities to envision more inclusive and diverse futures. According to Dolan, the utopian performative as a "messy attempt to seek out human connectedness, rather than a grandiose, fixed vision of one perfect future or one

fixed idea of a better life" (136). Her emphasis on connectedness rather than perfection aligns with Muñoz's assertion that "queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future," and that queerness entails a "rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). Lippert's claim further complements these ideas, suggesting that "through [theatre's] very evanescence emerges a constant and paradoxically continuous rehearsal space for the imagination and acting out of alternative, decidedly utopian economies" (51). Together, these theories illuminate the potential of theatre to disrupt fixed notions of identity and belonging, offering transformative possibilities for queer communities. By engaging with queer utopian performatives, the plays under analysis rehearse alternative futures and challenge the limiting ideologies of the present.

Monforte suggests that "plays have the potential to interpellate spectators by nudging them into sexualising – and perhaps, inevitably, queering – their spectatorial positions, prompting them to ask themselves questions about their own sexual identities as well as to interrogate established assumptions of sexual and gender identity over time" (154). Similarly, Dolan writes that utopian performatives connect "the present and the past and point toward [the] future through the utopian performatives they use to illuminate their meanings" (153). I propose that the final scenes of *This Much, Mother Clap's Molly House*, *The Pride* and *Canary* offer a queer alternative to homonormativity that in turn, borrowing Dolan's words, "provide us with access to a world that should be, that could be, and that will be" (64). These scenes therefore exemplify how gay theatre can serve as a critical space for envisioning futures that resist assimilationist pressures, instead embracing fluid, expansive, and inclusive forms of queer identity and belonging. Through their staging, they reimagine and rehearse a utopian

possibility that challenges restrictive norms and inspires new frameworks for understanding queer temporalities and communities.

In the final scene of *This Much*, Anthony walks in on Gar and Albert kissing just after agreeing to give Gar a second chance. In this scene, "Anthony *picks up the camera and begins taking pictures of them*" rather than stopping them or saying anything. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the camera represents society's scrutiny of Gar's life. However, through this utopian performative, I argue that the camera shifts instead to symbolise a new utopian lens, a lens that captures a range of gay identities, allowing an acceptance for the sinthomosexual and their desire for sexual jouissance. Additionally, this utopian performative illustrates a subversion of homonormative ideals pertaining to monogamy. At the end of the scene, Anthony tells Gar he wants to "be something other" as he begins to "*wrestle [with him until] it turns into a dance* […] *slowly swaying* […] *like it's the first dance at their wedding*". This is followed by Albert taking "*the camera* […] *[and] throw[ing] a handful of confetti over them [while] tak[ing] a picture of himself with* Anthony *and* Gar *in the background"* (45). Fitzpatrick's final scene aligns with Dolan's claim that "Utopia can be a placeholder for social change, a no-place that the apparatus of theatre—its liveness, the potential it holds for real social exchange, its mortality, its openness to human interactions that life outside this magical space prohibits—can model productively" (63). This idea resonates with Anthony's willingness to shift his position on love, sex and marriage. This shift also represents a shift from homonormativity towards a queer alternative.

According to Dolan, "utopia is always a metaphor, always a wish, a desire, a no-place that performance can sometimes help us map if not find. But a performative is not a metaphor;

it's a doing, and it's in the performative's gesture that hope adheres, that communitas happens, that the not-yet-conscious is glimpsed and felt and strained towards" (170). This idea of hope as a performative is reflected in Campbell's construction of the final scene of *The Pride,* between the 2008 Oliver and Philip. The final scene unfolds on "*a park bench*" (*The Pride* 107), in a stark contrast to the rest of the play, where most of the scenes occur in the privacy of the characters' homes. The shift from the private to the public reflects the constant shifts of representation and acceptance pertaining to gay identities. It also reflects a move away from the neoliberalist idea of privatisation and a further rejection of homonormativity. In this scene, Oliver asks Philip if he "believes in change" (112), and they discuss how they are going to move forward and try to mend their relationship. During the scene they talk about an old gay couple that they can see (off-stage). They describe them as being "in love" and "ninety-five" (117). The inclusion of the gay old couple reinforces the potentiality for a queer future. This resonates with Dolan's assertion that "experiences of utopia in the flesh of performance […] might performatively hint at how a different world could feel" (62). The final setting of the play, for Monforte, "becomes deeply significant as a platform for the vindication of rights still not acquired, the honouring of past gay figures and the experimentation of new forms of relationality". He adds that by having "1950s Sylvia [close] the play, Campbell offers up a sign of hope in times to come, highlighting the connection between the suffering taking place in both temporal planes, whilst pointing at a more congenial future" (162). This idea also lends itself to my analysis of the inclusion of characters from the past in the present as a way of signalling change for the future.

Muñoz argues that

> utopia is an ideal, something that should mobilise us, push us forward. Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganisation, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a then and a there that could be and indeed should be (97).

This is reflected in Act Three, Scene Two of *Canary*, between a father and his son:

> **Mickey:** But I dreamt. I dreamt that one day I'd walk down a street with my lover and we'd hold hands and no-one'd snigger. I'd switch on the TV and see grown men kissing. Adverts for condoms in the breaks. I dreamt that one day a kid could come out at school and that'd be ok. That dream kept me fighting.
>
> **Tom:** I have one big regret. That I never told you. […] I never hated you Michael. I envied you.
>
> *Mickey doesn't understand* (*Canary* 76-77)

This scene represents the fraught relationship between different generations of gay men and the potentiality for queer progression. Mickey never finds out that his father is gay, but through this scene audiences are presented with a narrative that follows Tom and his 'coming out' to himself, his family and, finally, the public. Muñoz proposes that "heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them" and that "all [queers] are allowed to imagine is barely surviving the present" (106). Harvey's construction of Tom's gay identity – and its trajectory – throughout *Canary* represents a beacon of "hope and affect" for audiences (Muñoz 106).

Muñoz explains that "utopian performativity is often fuelled by the past" and that the "past, or at least the narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and past to critique presentness" (106). This interplay between temporalities highlights how the past can serve as both a critique of and a bridge to envisioning alternative futures. This idea is reflected in the final scene *of Mother Clap's Molly House*, when the boundaries between the eighteenth and the twentieth century begin to blur, suggesting a queer continuum that challenges linear conceptions of time. As past and present bleed into one queer space, the gay characters on stage all "*start to take their clothes off [while] the music turns into techno [and] the molly house becomes a rave club as the light fades to nothing"* (110). Muñoz argues that "it is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things. It is in this very way that the past is performative" (28). Through this final scene Ravenhill draws attention to the still existing links between the eighteenth-century gays and the twenty-first century gays, as they merge into one frenzied rave.

Monforte describes the ending of the contemporary aspect of Ravenhill's play as "utterly bleak". He argues that the ending of the play, "merging the two worlds by making the molly house become a 'rave club', underlines the striking similarities they share – both are moral vacuums pervaded by lack of commitment and the urge for instant satisfaction of desire, all this in a capitalist framework (early and late, respectively) in which bodies become commodities" (158). Building on Monforte's analysis, I suggest that while Ravenhill critiques the commodification of bodies and the moral void created by capitalist structures, the queer

utopias offered by theatre go further by not only highlighting these pitfalls but also envisioning queer alternatives. These utopias resist the urge for complacent assimilation into capitalist frameworks and instead provide a space to interrogate the complexities of change, balancing optimism with caution. This idea also reflects Lippert's description of theatre and the "ephemeral nowness performance can galvanise and channel creative energies in ways few other art forms can" (50). It is through these moments in theatre that readers and/or audience members are able to view the utopian performatives on stage as a sort of 'rehearsal' for new imaginings of queerer futures. This also resonates with David Román's assertion that theatre "allow[s] for a process of exchange—between artists and audiences, between the past and the present—where new social formations emerge" (1-2).

Dolan writes that "in theatre, we can experiment with these imaginative visions, breathe life into the golems of possibility, move bodies and create images and sounds in ways that let spectators feel the material potential of living in a social world rearranged by valuing peace and harmony, instead of war and strife" (95). Her claim aligns with Muñoz's assertion that utopian visions "can be defined in terms of their function as inspiration… allowing content and form to be more fluid" (95). This idea can be seen through Ravenhill's merging of the past and the present in *Mother Clap's Molly House* as one big rave. In doing so, Ravenhill blends the constructions of gay men from the eighteenth century with the constructions of gay men from the twenty-first century. Moreover, Monforte suggests that Ravenhill's problematisation of "stable and monolithic gay identities […] propos[es] instead a definition of sexuality as multiple, mutant and unstable" (166). Considering this, I suggest that bringing all characters onto a utopian 'dancefloor' highlights the constant flux of gay identities. The utopian performative of the final scene in *Mother Clap's Molly House* is one that represents

the intrinsic relationship between gay history, the present and the ways they can affect a queer future. As discussed in my previous chapters, this relationship is made even more explicit as the actors who play the eighteenth-century gay characters also play the characters in the new millennium. This draws attention to an immediate connection, made visible through the performance of the same bodies on stage shifting between characters in the final scene.

Muñoz proposes "queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (16). The final scene of *Canary* also brings the past into the present to construct a utopian performative that illuminates new queer paths for the future. In this scene, "*sixteen year old* Mickey *[is] running into [his parents'] garden in his Mum's wedding dress*" with "*sixteen year old* Russell" as the present-day Russell watches, along with Mickey's parents (100). The final scene is a repeat of the opening scene, however, in this utopian performative younger Russell "*runs after"* Mickey in a "*multi-coloured frock"*, instead of standing and watching from afar, and Mickey's mum watches for a while rather than stopping him straightaway.

> *They both stand their spinning.*
>
> **Russell**: Why are we doing this?
>
> **Mickey**: To try and catch up with this world. The world spins (100-101)

Through Harvey's revisitation of the first scene of the play at the end, the utopian performative presented reflects Muñoz assertion that "utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be" (35). *Canary* offers

up a misè-en-scene of what can be, in relation to what it was at the beginning. Through this alternative economy, Harvey gestures towards queer alternatives by offering a reconstructed version of the very first scene to highlight the transformational aspects of queer utopian performatives.

These final scenes are what Dolan describes as "transforming moments", which are also understood to be "utopian performatives that imagine and embody the world in 'what if' rather than 'as is'" (88). These are the moments where audiences are invited to "believe in utopia" and, according to Dolan, "these are the moments theatre and performance makes possible" (62). This aligns with Muñoz's claim that the utopian performative is something that is "always in process, always becoming, emerging in difference" (112). I argue that utopian performatives in gay British playwriting reinforce a necessity for queer communities to look forward to a queer future. Through these utopian performatives and their plays more widely, I argue that Ravenhill, Harvey, and Campbell actively dismantle the constraints of homonormativity and expose its impact on gay men. Lippert writes that theatre which produces an "affective and aesthetic surplus that ventures beyond the functionalism of neoliberal consumer capitalism [...] points to the multiple and queer possibilities to experience alternative economies of desire, belonging and community" (58). This transformative potential is powerfully realised in the final scenes of each play, where these alternative possibilities are both envisioned and embodied.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined and explored the effects that homonormativity has on the social arrangements for gay men in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride, This Much*, and

Canary. I have shown the ways in which each playwright has responded to the notion of homonormativity in British society and its effect on gay identities. In so doing, I have drawn attention to the ways in which contemporary gay playwrights not only reflect but also critically engage with the pervasive forces of homonormativity within both individual and collective gay identities. By examining how these playwrights confront or subvert the rigid structures and expectations of homonormativity this chapter (and thesis more broadly) uncovers the subtle yet significant ways in which theatre can act as both a site of resistance and a tool for reimagining gay identity, offering new narratives that challenge the obfuscation of queer potential. This analysis, therefore, contributes to the ongoing conversation in queer theory about the complexities of identity formation and the potential for artistic expression to disrupt dominant cultural norms. I argue, therefore, that Ravenhill, Campbell, Fitzpatrick and Harvey all reject the notion of homonormativity through their narratives and de/construction of gay characters, in relation to gay marriage, sinthomosexuality and the figurative notion of the child.

In the first section – Gay Marriage – I have shown how both Fitzpatrick and Ravenhill challenge the notion of holy matrimony. Fitzpatrick does this through his de/construction of Gar and Anthony's relationship and the performance of their wedding – or rather – what happens after their wedding. Here, he draws attention to the performative connotations of being 'happily married' and rejects it in place of Gar submitting to his own pleasures and desires, for the most part. Similarly, Ravenhill proposes that the notion of marriage needs to be subverted or reworked to suit alternative relationships – such as Martin and Orme's – as they deviate from a heteronormative model. Ravenhill challenges homonormativity through Orme's reluctance and subsequent refusal to subscribe to its rules and regulations. There are

moments, however, where Ravenhill represents a desire for monogamy as shown through Will in the twenty-first century scenes.

This leads on to my next section – No Future: Sinthomosexuals – where I present the alternative ways that gay characters from my chosen plays reflect Edelman's theorisation of the sinthomosexual. Through this, I have shown how Ravenhill, Fitzpatrick and Campbell highlight the potential for submitting fully to one's pleasure as an alternative in place of prescribing to homonormativity. Moreover, I highlight how gay playwrights reject homonormativity and its ideas pertaining to monogamy in favour of alternative ways for sexual and personal exploration through their characters Gar, Oliver and Edward. Similar to Ravenhill, Campbell also highlights the desire for monogamy as constructed through the 2008 version of Philip.

In my next section – No Future: The Child – I argue that Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill portray the rejection of reproductive futurism through their construction of female characters and their queering of their longing, or lack thereof, for children. As well as this, I suggest that Fitzpatrick, Ravenhill and Campbell queer the proposal of a homonormative matrix and offer up a wider scope for the existence and acceptance of alternative gay identities through their gay characters in their plays. All three playwrights therefore deconstruct the idea of reproductive futurism through their construction of sinthomosexuals, as well as some of their female characters. In line with Edelman's thinking, Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill all challenge the idea of the child and its symbolic reference to the future. I argue that these playwrights argue for the necessity to rethink the futures for queer identities – in opposition

to homonormativity. In doing so, I propose that my case studies provide queer utopias to highlight the potential, as well as the necessity, for queer alternatives.

My final section – Queer Utopias – explored the final scenes of *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride, Canary* and *This Much* in relation to what Dolan describes as "transforming moments" (88). These moments, I argue, reinforce the necessity for queer communities to work towards building a more inclusive future, as opposed to the homonormative matrix proposed by neoliberalist sexual politics. This aligns with Monforte's suggestion that these moments within gay plays "create a dissident space where spectators – both gay and straight – can hopefully negotiate their own sexual identities and defy dominant discourses and regulations, create new, more heterogeneous, ultimately less constraining ones" (166).

From my exploration of the tensions surrounding homonormativity, I have shown the ways in which my chosen playwrights reject a desire to assimilate and thus sanitise queer communities under the pretence of a 'liberal' contemporary sexual politics. I have proposed that, instead, the playwrights offer up queer alternative economies that symbolise hope and queer utopias. I conclude, therefore, that queer alternative economies provide insight on the necessity to challenge homonormativity, in relation to gay identities.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the representation of gay characters in contemporary British playwriting through investigating the ways in which plays about gay identity engage with temporality. Through this, it has made three key interventions: an identified desire to look to gay histories of the past to critically intervene with present understandings of gay identity that – in turn – inform a queerer future; a move towards the exploration of an increased gay autonomy as shown by the construction of gay characters; and the rejection of homonormativity. In so doing, it advances knowledge of gay men in Britain, through the depiction of gay characters and narratives offered in twenty-first century gay playwriting. Moreover, it builds on the body of literature that has previously explored the representation of gay men examined in the introduction and chapter one, such as: de Jongh (1992), Sinfield (1999), Clum (2000), Godiwala (2007), Fisher (2008), Wyllie (2009), and Greer (2016). As well as this, it advances the understanding of gay and queer identities in queer theory, such as: Sedgwick (1990), Edelman (1995 and 2004), Duggan (2002), Halberstam (2005) and Muñoz (2009). In the following sections, I will set out these key interventions in more detail.

In 2014, the internationally renowned queer activist, feminist and scholar bell hooks was on a panel titled “Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body” with other leading voices in Black feminism and the LGBTQ+ community at Eugene Lang College, The New School for Liberal Arts in New York City. While discussing her own queer identity with the other panellists, hooks defined queer as

> not [just] being about who you're having sex with, that can be a dimension of it, but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.

hooks' contention speaks to the ways in which queer identity is not solely defined by sexual relations, but also by how queer identities exist and navigate society. When thinking about gay identities, therefore, it is important to consider that sexuality is only but one aspect of identity formation, with other facets being the different ways in which gay men navigate the spaces and relationships they exist within and between. This thinking mirrors the core argument in my study and can be seen through the analysis of gay characters that are constructed within the dramatic narratives that are offered by my selected case studies, building on the oeuvre of queer theory that explores the nuances of queer identity.

This is made evident as through my analysis it is clear that hooks' definition of queer can be traced and advanced in my proposed idea of homocuriosity. It supports and motivates runaway gays and the way they are shown to have a desire to find a queer place to live and thrive. It also shapes and transforms the cultural construction of Gays™, through their fluctuating relationship with their gay identity and their attempt to move away from socially constructed labels. At the same time, hooks' definition is also clear in the five phases of gay shame in the ways that through shame, gay men are in a constant flux of constructing and deconstructing their gay identity – as shown by the case studies under analysis. For example, in *The Pass,* Donnelly's depiction of Jason – a gay (initially closeted) footballer – is presented across a span of twelve years, drawing attention to the different ways that shame can affect the de/construction of gay identity. Finally, the notion of inventing an elsewhere is similarly

reflected in the playwrights' rejection of homonormativity for gay men, as well as being the driving force behind contemporary gay playwrights' desire to stage hope-fuelled queer utopias to imagine queerer futures.

This study pays critical attention to the representation(s) of gay men in twenty-first century British gay theatre. As detailed in my introduction, I refer to gay theatre as plays written by openly gay playwrights with narratives centring on representations of homosexuality. This research has shown the ways in which contemporary gay playwrights represent gay characters in their plays, and, in doing so, highlight their relationship to and reflection of gay cultural politics in Britain. Through my close readings of Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Campbell's *The Pride*, Harvey's *Canary*, Donnelly's *The Pass*, and Fitzpatrick's *This Much*, I have argued that these playwrights reject the rise of homonormativity through their depiction of alternative ways of being, as explored through the de/construction of gay characters represented. As Mowlabocus notes, homonormativity "[defines] the ways in which gay men should behave, act and operate as privatised sexual citizens" (7). As the exploration of the sinthomosexual and the rejection of gay marriage in chapter two shows, my analysis draws light on the ways that gay playwrights have shown that gay characters – and by extension gay identities – can exist in ways set by themselves rather than from being prescribed by society, thus moving away from the parameters that Mowlabocus notes to exist within the operation of homonormativity. In so doing, I draw attention to the ways that gay playwrights call for the (re)invention of gay identities through offering up a dialogue between the past and present, in order to construct queer alternative futures.

My thesis began by exploring the central question: *how are gay men represented in twenty-first century mainstream British theatre?* What became clear and evident was that my research question evolved and specifically investigated *the ways in which plays about gay identity in contemporary mainstream UK theatre engage with temporality, and in what ways is this engagement significant for both theatrical representations of gay identity and for queer theory*. To answer this, I read my case studies through a lens of queer theory, as well as de/constructing the representation of gay characters to investigate the different ways that gay playwrights constructed and deconstructed their gay characters in their narratives. My interest in queer theory stems from "its insistent opposition to normalizing, disciplining social forces; with its disruptive politics of subversion; and with its opposition to both the straight and gay mainstream" (Seidman 131-132). Building on this foundation, my thesis investigates how gay identities, as portrayed by gay playwrights through their characters, actively resist and critique the social forces of both heteronormativity and homonormativity. By analysing these representations, my thesis advances discussions within queer theory, contributing new perspectives on the complexities of gay identity and its intersections with broader societal structures. Interestingly, as this thesis took shape this question threw up as many more questions as answers and my study has therefore expanded as a result.

Originally, I was interested in the ways that gay playwrights might challenge homonormativity through their narratives, however following my initial readings of the case studies I noticed other themes that emerged such as their tackling of gay shame and queer temporalities. Additionally, I explored and applied the notion of homonormativity to theatre studies, a task that had not previously received much critical attention. As a result, I conclude that gay playwrights – as indicated by my case studies – seek to challenge a homonormative matrix for

gay men. This research project draws attention to the challenges that gay playwrights present through their construction of gay characters, thus portraying the tensions between gay men, society, and politics.

Through my first chapter – and contextual framing – for the study, I presented a selection of academic texts that explored the representation of gay identity in British theatre. I explained how most of these texts were published in the nineties or at the beginning of the new millennium – with a focus on twentieth century British drama. Building on this literature, I offer this study as a furthering of its discussions and in order to contribute new knowledge(s) to the field of theatre studies through continuing the exploration of the representation of gay men into the twenty-first century. Through this research, I have begun to answer the question that Clum poses at the end of his study from 2001: "we're out onstage and off. Now what?" (317). Similarly, my study stands as a response to other theatre scholars such as De Jongh and Sinfield, both of whom assert the importance of continuing the analysis of gay men in theatre as they enter the mainstream. This research shows a considerable shift towards focusing on the nuance of gay identities within gay narratives in contemporary gay British drama. I argue that the change in representation of gay characters in mainstream British theatre can in turn feed the cultural narratives surrounding gay identities in Britain.

As shown through my research, I argue that this shift reflects further understanding and acceptance of homosexuality in British society and the subsequent acknowledgment that gay identities are moving away from being an 'issue' or an illness to become valid identities that exists within society. I suggest that this shift has set down the foundations that will pave the way for the exploration and inclusion of a variety of gay narratives – and identities – to be

shared on the British stage – as already seen with aforementioned plays more recently premiering at subsidised mainstream venues like the Royal Court e.g. *The P Word* (2022) and *Black Superhero* (2023). The representation of gay identities in contemporary British theatre thus reflects a desire to shift to an exploration of the nuances of gay characters, moving away from the collective issue of homosexuality towards the investigation of the *personal* and *political* issues relating to gay men in Britain. That is to say that the gay playwrights I have analysed show a tendency to explore gay characters as individuals first (reflecting the neoliberal shift to sexual politics), and then explore the ways in which these gay characters interact with others and/or their communities (as a resistance against neoliberalist sexual politics). This is clear, for example, in Fitzpatrick's *This Much* and Ravenhill's *Mother Clap's Molly House* through their gay characters Gar and Orme and their challenging of the status quo within their respective dramatic worlds. As mentioned in my context chapter, twentieth-century gay characters presented in plays like Sherman's *Bent,* Churchill's *Cloud 9* and Kane's *Cleansed* saw homosexuality as an issue that needed to be solved. However, twenty-first century gay characters are significantly more fleshed out. The remainder of my conclusion will be split into three sections, each presenting an exploration of the key interventions that emerged from undertaking this project and of how they have shaped my thesis overall.

Gay Pasts, Presents and Futures

An argument that runs throughout my thesis is the way in which contemporary gay playwrights look to the past in relation to the present, in order to offer up possible queer(er) futures and nuanced constructions of gay identities through their characters. Drawing on Berninger's idea describing the theatrical space as a "historical palimpsest" (57), I propose that through the blending and crashing of gay histories offered by Ravenhill, Campbell and

Harvey especially, these playwrights highlight the similarities and differences between past and present constructions of gay identities, in relation to the ways in which the characters occupy their spaces. These playwrights also show an interest in turning to history for teaching moments. For example, in the blending of the eighteenth century with the twenty-first century in the final scene of *Mother Clap's Molly House,* as well as the comparisons between the fifty-year gap between 1958 and 2008 in *The Pride.* Through this, gay playwrights offer up their gay characters to be deconstructed, unpacked, and analysed through the blending of histories in their plays. In doing so, they present the impact that queer histories have on the construction of gay men in contemporary Britain as explored in their plays.

I argue that gay playwrights further emphasise the intrinsic link between the past and the present through their dramatic use of ghosts in their plays. In Chapter Two, I suggest that the employment of the dramatic device of the ghost also signalled an affective connection between gay characters from the past and present – as highlighted most notably in Campbell's *The Pride.* I suggest that Campbell's inclusion of ghosts from the past in his play acts as a means to both 'haunt' and remind audiences of the historical connection deeply embedded in the constructions of gay identity. I go on to argue that it is through these nuances that Campbell draws attention to the significant shift towards an attention to the individuality of gay men in relation to their own differences, as opposed to the narratives that filled the twentieth century, which situated homosexuality as a collective societal issue that needed to be solved. I suggest that this alludes to the necessity for complex readings of gay men in twenty-first century plays as we move towards future analysis. In doing so, I reject Green's conclusion in his article that "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Or to put it more gaily, you are what we were". Through this rejection, I highlight a move towards increased

gay autonomy – as shown by contemporary gay playwrights – as each case study illustrates different ways that gay characters can learn from gay pasts to create queerer futures.

I conclude, therefore, that through exploration and blending of alternative queer temporalities and subsequent constructions of gay characters in their plays stage, contemporary gay playwrights highlight and present necessary conversations relating to the representation of gay identities and their relation to gay histories. Through this, I argue that each playwright constructs a historical palimpsest onto the British stage in order to effectively stage a dialogue between the past and the present. Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill offer an exchange between gay histories and its relation to the de/construction of gay identities in the present through their dramatic narratives to inform new constructions and understandings of gay identity.

More broadly, I suggest that this idea is reflected in the recent tendency for canonical gay plays to return to the British stage – as explored in my second chapter – which also speaks to hook's contention of a queer desire "to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live [in]". In 2017, The National Theatre in London staged the revival of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991), followed by Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985) in 2021. As well as this, in 2016, London's Park Theatre staged the UK premiere of Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968). Also returning to the British stage were Kevin Elyot's *My Night With Reg* (1994), in 2021, and *Coming Clean* (1982), in 2019. The desire to bring back the voices of gay playwrights from the past – and reinstating the importance of their narratives exploring gay identities – both supports and reflects my overarching argument for a necessary return to the past for the historical and cultural exchange that is integral to inform

the (re)invention of gay identities in the present and therefore construct quee(er) identities for a more inclusive future.

Gay Autonomy

This thesis has argued that contemporary gay playwriting calls for a move towards increased gay autonomy, as identified through my analysis of gay characters in my case studies. In the *Trouble with Normal* (1999), Warner suggests that an increase in sexual autonomy for queer identities – and therefore gay men – has opened up the possibility for "new freedoms, new experiences, new pleasures, new identities and new bodies" to be explored (12). Through this study, I offer new possibilities of gay identity that Warner alludes to, through my exploration of 'runaway gay' and Gays™. Additionally, I provide new ways to identify and analyse gay identity through 'homocuriosity' and the five stages of gay shame. In doing so, my work builds upon Edelman's contention that queer theory represents a "site of permanent becoming" (348), by demonstrating how gay identity, as represented in these plays, exists in a perpetual process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Through this lens, I argue that playwrights use their works to illuminate the fluidity of gay identity, showcasing characters who continually reinvent themselves to assert greater autonomy and resist fixed categorisations. By linking Edelman's notion of "becoming" with the evolving portrayals of gay identity on stage, my analysis advances the understanding of how queer theory can inform and challenge contemporary representations of sexuality.

Through the identification and subsequent interrogation of queer temporalities presented in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride* and Canary, I have explored the alternative subcultures and themes that emerge. Drawing from and building on Halberstam's writing in *In a Queer*

Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (2005) to theoretically frame my argument, I have offered three sections for analysis: 'homocuriosity', 'Runaway Gay' and 'Gays™'. In doing so, I drew attention to the ways in which Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill de/construct their gay characters as well as their relation to the representation of gay identities in twenty-first century Britain. Accordingly, I suggest that although each playwright draws upon different queer temporalities and spaces to highlight lessons to be learnt and in doing so offer new ways to (re)invent one's gay identity.

Advancing Sedgwick's notion of homosociality, I theorise and offer my own neologism: 'homocuriosity'. The first section explores my theorisation of homocuriosity and the ways in which it relates to and highlights the potential for alternative queer temporalities to emerge. This is demonstrated, for example, in Ravenhill's play which began with Martin's fascination of the Moorfields that in turn led to his journey towards exploring his gay identity with his newfound subculture of the mollies, as the play progressed. Homocuriosity, I argue, references the deep-rooted feelings of curiosity that is shown to be embodied within gay characters offered up in the plays under analysis. Through this, I suggest that homocuriosity can be seen to act as a disruptive force that pulls gay men away from heteronormativity and towards queer spaces and relationships, therefore strengthening the argument for a heightened gay autonomy. Moreover, I show the ways that homocuriosity is both beneficial and potentially detrimental towards the development of gay identities. Through my analysis of homocuriosity I identify and present the different ways that homocuriosity can lead to and effect homosexual policing, homosexual love and also homosexual violence – as explored in my chosen plays. Additionally, I claim that homocuriosity can be considered to be the feeling that if often the first instance of raising awareness of gay autonomy as the step before

homosexual desire. This awareness would therefore lead to new constructions of gay identity with recognised feelings of homosexual desire. Looking forward, I would welcome further explorations of homocuriosity in relation to representations of gay men, thus expanding its academic understanding and application. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore whether homocuriosity is integral to the construction of other queer identities, such as lesbians and/or bisexuals. This might be possible by exploring plays such as Laura Wade's *Tipping the Velvet* (Lyric Hammersmith, 2015) for example.

The conception of runaway gays, as explored in Chapter Two, further supports my argument of a shift towards a stronger sense of gay autonomy. I argue that my offering of the term 'runaway gays' embodies Halberstam's notion of a stretched-out adolescence. Through my close readings of *Canary, Mother Clap's Molly House* and *The Pride*, I have identified gay characters, such as Mickey and Russell from *Canary* and Martin, Orme and Tom from *Mother Clap's Molly House,* that reflect Halberstam's idea through their shared desire to escape their heteronormative familial homes. I also suggest that through their necessary departure from their familial homes, runaway gays (re)construct their gay identities in queer spaces that offer them such freedoms. In my investigation of runaway gays, I go on to argue that alternative queer spaces are – in part – created through the necessity for certain gay identities to exist and navigate within, in place of their familial homes. I have shown the way in which runaway gays are in a constant flux between adolescence and adulthood.

Through my theorisation of runaway gays, I have highlighted how these characters are required to adapt and learn different modes of existing in order to thrive in the spaces they inhabit – the same notion proposed by the hook quote presented at the beginning of this

conclusion. Additionally, I note that runaway gays are in danger of being targeted for financial and sexual profit (see for example my analysis of Mickey and Russell in Chapter Two), due to their vulnerable positions as young gay men who require food, shelter and a sense of safety.

Returning to Warner's contention that a heightened sexual autonomy leads to new identities, I offer up and explore the construction of the notion of Gays™, also presented in my second chapter. By contributing a new theoretical framework – that of Gays™ – I respond to a cultural tendency for (mostly) young gays to reject identity labels and in doing so ironically constructing their own collective group. It has been commonplace on social media and within online communities to parody this as a cultural construction of a stereotypical gay man – typically middleclass and white. I investigate the construction of Gays™ as both an identity and a subculture, reflecting Halberstam's writings on the "young urban gay" (19). In chapter Two, I argue that in a radical move against heteronormativity and a desire to set themselves apart from the status quo, Gays™ fully immerse themselves in subcultures and communities rife in sex and drugs – as they see them being reflective of contemporary gay identity.

Through my analysis, I draw attention to the link between the construction of Gays™ and their relationship to sex, drugs and rejecting heteronormativity as a way to reclaim gay autonomy against heteronormative ideals such as monogamy and marriage – an idea further reflected by gay playwrights' rejection of homonormativity. Conversely, I identify the potential for gay men to feel unsatisfied with their prescribed identity and in turn rejecting it in favour of their own desired gay identity, of their own construction – further highlighting a move towards gay autonomy.

Additionally, I pay attention to the potential detriment that the existence of Gays™ has on gay men and their communities, most notably through Gays™ dissociating themselves with their queer history under the pretence of gay autonomy. Gays™ are often out of sync with their queer histories, as shown by the playwrights' representation of characters in relation to this trend and their tensions with older gay characters in the plays – see for example my analysis of Harvey's depiction of the relationship between Toby and Russell in Chapter Two. In exploring this idea, I argue that Harvey portrays the generational tensions that arise from the construction of Gays™. Furthermore, this signals the importance in having gay voices in mainstream theatre through the gay playwrights and their lived experiences to argue and present deeper explorations of gay identity. Gay playwrights, therefore, are arguably better equipped – with their lived gay experiences – to offer narratives pertaining to a call for increased gay autonomy to the cultural discourse that exists within the mainstream surrounding gay identity.

Weaving together theoretical contributions from the 2003 conference Gay Shame and its subsequent edited collection of the same name, from 2010, I establish a framework to identify and investigate notions of gay shame in *The Pride, Canary* and Donnelly's *The Pass.* To do this, in Chapter Three I outline five phases of gay shame and their relation to the formation of gay identities in twenty-first century British theatre (Internalised Ambivalence, Societal Shame, Familial Shame, Gay Guilt and Gay Pride). This is not to say that these five phases are fixed or the only phases to exist, nor am I claiming that these stages operate in the order I explore them in my chapter. Rather, these five phases of gay shame interrogate the different ways in which gay shame effects the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of gay identity – thus suggesting, again, a shift towards gay autonomy through the different ways that the

gay characters are shown to construct their gay identity within the dramatic worlds of the case studies.

My theoretical understanding of shame largely resonates with Sedgwick's contention that "transformational shame [...] is performance, […] theatrical performance" ("Shame, Theatricality and Queer Performativity" 51). In line with this, I offer up a range of examples that echo Sedgwick's assertion of shame possessing transformational potentials and their application through the performance of gay characters in the plays under analysis. As such, I interrogate each phase and its relation to the de/construction of gay characters that are presented by Harvey, Donnelly and Campbell. In doing so, this thesis shows the transformational nuances that gay shame elicits, as well as drawing critical attention to the ways in which shame can be both positive and negative.

The first three phases of gay shame that I offer centre around the different processes that shame takes up in relation to the re/construction of gay identities: internalised ambivalence, shame imposed by society, and shame enforced by one's family. Through these, I analyse the way in which each playwright portrays each of these three sections in relation to the representation of gay identities – as explored through their gay characters. The fourth phase, Gay Guilt, interrogates the negative – and often violent – feelings that resonate from feelings of shame. Through this, my research shows that gay guilt possesses the power to inflict pain and violence on oneself as well as others. Additionally, I suggest that gay guilt can be thought of as a by-product of gay shame and thereby grants the transformative facilitation for re/constructing one's gay identity through it. The final section, and phase, that I offer explores the notion of gay pride and its intrinsic relationship to gay shame. I argue that pride cannot

be considered as the complete absolution of shame but instead as a facet of shame that works in balance with it. This is evident, for example in Harvey's closing scene in *Canary* where Mickey is spinning in his mother's wedding dress. This is a repeated scene from the beginning of the play, where Mickey "*stops spinning"* (11) when he is seen. However, in the closing scene Mickey does not stop and instead continues to spin while everybody watches. I suggest that much like gay shame, gay pride also possesses the transformative potential to re/construct one's gay identity in favour of gay autonomy. Most importantly, through my theorisation of these five phases of gay shame, I highlight the ways in which gay British playwrights utilise the opportunity to offer a rehearsal space to theatrically explore the potential de/construction of one's gay identity, further supporting a move towards gay autonomy.

Rejecting Homonormativity; Towards Queer(er) Futures

This project initially emerged from my interest to explore the rise of homonormativity in Britain and its relation to the representation of gay men in contemporary British theatre. My aim was to investigate whether British gay playwrights challenge or perpetuate a homonormative matrix for their gay characters. In response to the research undertaken for this study, I conclude that Campbell, Harvey, Fitzpatrick and Ravenhill reject a homonormative matrix for gay men – highlighting ongoing tensions between gay characters and homonormativity. In summary, I argue that Ravenhill, Campbell, Fitzpatrick and Harvey reject the rise of homonormativity through their representation of gay characters within the narratives of their plays – in relation to gay marriage, sinthomosexuality and the symbolic notion of the child. I propose that gay British playwrights construct queer utopian performatives to present potential queer utopias as a response to the rise of homonormativity.

I examine the results from my investigation into the representations of homonormativity in *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride*, *Canary* and *This Much* in three parts: Gay Marriage, No Future and Queer Utopias. Through these areas I have interrogated the ways in which gay characters in twenty-first century British theatre are represented in relation to the rise of homonormativity. Through exploring academic research and subsequent lines of thought from the fields of sociology, geography, politics, and theatre studies, I build on the limited research available which explores the effect of homonormativity on theatre and performance.

In relation to my study, I offer up a critical exploration of the impact homonormativity has on the representation of gay men in contemporary British theatre, as mapped out below. The first section, Gay Marriage, surveys the similarities and subtle differences between the ways in which Fitzpatrick and Ravenhill present and challenge the notion of gay marriage in British theatre. Through this, I show how Fitzpatrick's representation of Gar and Anthony's relationship and their differing attitudes towards the 'ideal' of marriage highlights the performative connotations of the neoliberal idea of a 'happy couple'. In doing so, I draw attention to the ways in which Fitzpatrick rejects this idea, in favour of submitting to one's own pleasures – suggesting a move towards the acceptance of alternative queer identities in direct opposition to the rise of homonormativity. Similarly, I argue that Ravenhill offers up the notion of gay marriage as an idea that requires some subversion from its heteronormative origins, in order to be reworked to fit around queer alternative relationships – such as Martin and Orme's, which moves away from a heteronormative matrix. I propose that Ravenhill both

challenges and rejects a homonormative matrix through Orme's blatant refusal of its social regulations.

The second section is framed around Edelman's theorisations of the sinthomosexual and their relation to reproductive futurism, gay autonomy, and homonormativity. Split into two parts, I identify and explore the ways in which representations of gay characters in my chosen plays reflect Edelman's notion of the sinthomosexual as well as the figural notion of the child. Through my analysis, I draw attention to the different ways in which Ravenhill, Fitzpatrick and Campbell present Edelman's idea of submitting and indulging fully in one's jouissance – again offered as an alternative to adopting a homonormative matrix in relation to the construction of gay identities. In doing so, I highlight the ways in which Ravenhill, Fitzpatrick and Campbell reject the rise of homonormativity and its ties to heteronormative ideologies, such as monogamy and marriage. Through this, I argue that they present gay characters who are more open to the idea of exploring alternative ways to navigate one's (sexual) identity.

Similarly, in the second part of this section, I suggest that all three playwrights reject reproductive futurism through their gay characters exhibiting aspects of Edelman's notion of the sinthomosexual and from the female characters in their plays, in relation to their desire for, or lack of children. Keeping in line with Edelman's theorisation of the child, I argue that Campbell, Harvey and Ravenhill queer the symbolic notion of the child and in doing so reject the child's signification for the future. Instead, I argue – again, in line with Edelman's thesis – that gay men possess the autonomy to plan out and work towards their own futures away from the ties of reproductive futurism and the notion of the child to represent ideas of futurity. I argue that this offers up the scope for gay men to rethink and reframe their futures

against the rise of homonormativity and the assimilation of their gay identity. I conclude that gay playwrights provide queer utopian performatives within their gay plays to explore potential queer futures, as well as the need for queer(er) alternatives.

Through the theoretical synthesis of Dolan and Muñoz's writings on the ideas of queer utopias and hope, I offer the final section of analysis: Queer Utopias. In this section, I present the ways in which the final scenes of *Mother Clap's Molly House, The Pride, Canary* and *This Much* utilise queer utopian performatives as a symbolic construction and performance of hope and a promise for queer(er) futures for gay men, and queer identities more broadly. Through their staging of queer utopias, I suggest that gay playwrights in contemporary British theatre reflect a tendency of moving towards more inclusive and diverse constructions and imaginings of gay identities in place of homonormative ideals informed by neoliberal sexual politics. I propose that it is through the construction of gay utopian futures in their closing scenes that each playwright "provides[s] us with access to a world that should be, that could be, and that will be" (Dolan 64). I conclude, therefore, that the utopian performatives offered in gay British playwriting offers the stage as a rehearsal space to explore and navigate potential future imaginings of gay characters, narratives, and identities. This idea builds on Muñoz's writing on queer utopias and the ways in which they "render potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility not a fixed schema" (97).

To conclude, my research presents the idea that such queer alternatives highlight the necessity to strive for change within queer communities and, in doing so, to challenge the rise of homonormativity. Through my exploration of the representation of gay identity in mainstream British theatre, I have shown how there is a considerable shift towards

heightened gay autonomy; a shared tendency and desire for gay men to look to the past in order to better (re)invent/(re)construct one's gay identity; and finally, the rejection of homonormativity and the offering of utopian performatives as potential re-imaginings and rehearsals for alternative constructions of gay identities, in favour of queer(er) futures for gay men.

While this study has focused on the significance of theatrical representations of gay men in contemporary gay playwriting; it would, however, be productive to analyse other identities that exist within the queer community in future projects. It would also be fruitful to explore alternative modes of theatre production and curation outside of mainstream establishments. This is work that I am undertaking in my current role for Fierce Festival, a Birmingham based arts organisation that specialises in queer activism, festivals and live performance in alternative venues and spaces. In addition to alternative sites of theatre production, I am also interested in exploring alternative representations of gay men in contemporary British theatre – which extends beyond what I have identified as the privileged (white) male that was predominant in mainstream theatre in the period that I am looking at (2001-2016). This attention to a more diverse representation of gay men on the twenty-first century stage is something that is currently embedded in my own creative practice. I am currently writing my first play which is centred around my experiences as a queer working-class Muslim man, thus examining the intersection of race, class, sexuality, and faith. As mentioned, I have been awarded Arts Council Funding to develop my creative practice with established playwrights: Mark Ravenhill, Waleed Akhtar, and Iman Qureshi. Through their mentorship, they will guide me through the research and writing of my first play drawing from their own experiences and practice.

Finally, on a note of queer futurity, this study has only begun to explore one portion of queer representation in mainstream theatre. As there are plenty more to look into, this thesis has started this work through its invited critical response on one aspect of queer representation in contemporary gay playwriting. My hope for the future, is that more studies surveying the spectrum of queer identities on the twenty-first century British stage will begin to emerge—thus furthering the understanding of queer identity.

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