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Julia Lindqvist: a Novel, and Writing the Unhappy Queer Ending

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Abstract

This thesis is composed of interlocking creative and critical components. Its purpose is to understand how I, a lesbian-identified author, might approach writing an unhappy ending for lesbian characters in my novel. In recent years, academic criticism has focused on reclaiming the unhappy ending as a 'political gift'. Meanwhile, in the mainstream media and on social media networked-reading sites, we find an alternative discourse, in which LGBT readers continue to express disenchantment with the disproportionate number of unhappy endings for LGBT characters.

Julia Lindqvist uses practice-based research to find answers (novel as thinking-machine), whilst the critical study provides a theoretical framework for the enquiry.

In *Writing the Unhappy Queer Ending*, I focus on five key works of fiction which have influenced my own creative practice: texts by Alan Hollinghurst, Emma Donoghue, Patricia Duncker, Sarah Waters and Patricia Highsmith. Revisiting the endings of these texts, I listen to what they have to tell me about the act of writing an unhappy ending. Contrasting the first draft ending of *Julia Lindqvist* with the final version, I discuss the ways in which this critical enquiry has influenced the ending of the novel.

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1. First-Person Prologue: 1993

I'm thirteen years old. For the third Saturday this month, I'm in Dillons Bookshop in the Ealing Broadway Centre. I have twenty minutes before I have to meet my parents and help them go round Safeway's, picking up fish-fingers, frozen peas, sherry and J-cloths.

I'm afraid this won't be enough time. I'm hovering by Home Wine-Making, next to Automobilia. These shelves have the best view of my prize: the 'Gay/Special Interest/Erotica' section, which is embarrassingly, shockingly out in the open in the middle of the shop, where anyone can see. I have to wait until there is nobody within ten feet. Particularly, I have to be sure that nobody I know is nearby. The Broadway Centre is where we all go at the weekend, to try on spaghetti-strap tops at New Look and make uncertain eye contact with the boys from St. Benedict's.

I flip casually through 'Fifteen Varieties for English Soil'. A woman is browsing the poetry section, poetically next to Gay/Special Interest; I wish her ill. Eventually, pursing her mouth, she moves on.

This is the closest I've ever been, in almost a year of planning. The only thing I know about myself is that I'm in love with a sixth-former at my all-girls' school. Before that I was in love with my cousin's girlfriend, who had long hair that swung effortlessly around her shoulders. I know the word for it: the worst insult you can use. I ought to be ashamed, but there's more to it. How I feel is my hated secret, but also my most secret source of joy.

Now I am two feet from the gay shelves. It's close enough to pretend to be half-turned back towards Travel. (If anyone asks, I'll say I'm planning for my Duke of Edinburgh Award.) Most of the spines are brightly coloured. Some of them have numbers in the titles: BOYZ 4 BOYZ, or WOMN 2 WOMN. There are some boring-looking dark green ones with titles like *She Drank from the Vine* and there's a book of Sappho and then one I don't know: *A Village Affair* by Joanna Trollope. It looks normal. Even so, at the tills the assistant won't make eye contact, and I know it's because she knows.

That afternoon, in the quiet pre-supper time, I'm curled up on my bed alone. From outside, you can smell the baking pavements of a London summer. Here between the pages of the book, the heroines are being discovered in their illicit affair by the (in my view) interfering husband. Crisis. I read faster and faster, always alert for footsteps in the passageway outside my room. The women talk about going to live in a farmhouse in the South of France. One of them, the married one, decides she can't be in a lesbian relationship, for the sake of her children. Even though they are in love, they must separate. One has a breakdown. The other drives off into the sunset.

I remember the dilemma. The book is all I have. I'll want to reread it to see what clues are there about how to be with another woman, to experience that rush of imagined feeling. But the ending confuses me. I can't see why they don't run off to Provence and start a life together.

It's the first time I really experience the disjuncture between how things evidently are or can be (it is possible to love and be loved) and how the world tells me I am (people like you don't get a happily-ever-after). In the years to come I'll see this motif over and over again, until I am sick of it and even a little bit sick *from* it. It turns out that books do have power. Unhappy endings can bleed beyond the pages; they can be contagious.

2. 'It Wants You To Be Sad': Theoretical and Cultural Contexts

Goodreads.com is a website which encourages readers to post their reactions to novels, and to rate them on a scale of one to five. For community member Laura, however, this isn't such a simple task. Writing about Sarah Waters' *Affinity*, Laura tells us how her frustration with the novel has clouded her judgement about its technical strength: 'This one is so hard for me to rate. I'm very bummed out re the ending. I'm angry' ('Laura', Goodreads: 2014).

Laura is not alone in her feelings. Although the overall star rating for *Affinity* is 3.71/5, which is relatively high for the site, other readers experience feelings of bleakness and even physical revulsion around its finale (Goodreads, 2014). Reader 'Sybil' comments that 'the actual conclusion […] appalled me' (Goodreads, 2012), whilst the novel's ending leaves other readers with a 'bad taste in [the] mouth' ('Kumari', Goodreads: 2013) and a 'sour stomach' ('Robin Lesher', Goodreads: 2013). Meanwhile, writing on Gingerbeer.co.uk, a community for self-identified LBTQ+ women, reader 'Lizard Just Lizard' comments:

> I loved loved loved this book until the ending. At which point I got so mad I
> chucked it across the room at the bookshelves which it then fell behind and stayed
> there for 2 years until I moved. I wanted to banish it forever.
>
> ('Lizard Just Lizard', Gingerbeer: 2008)

These reader testimonies make strange claims for the book. *Affinity* is a haunting Gothic novel about a disgraced spiritualist: the question of whether or not it is possible to cross the boundary between worlds haunts the novel. Although spiritualism is eventually disproved at the level of the plot, the book itself seems to have an uncanny haunting power of its own. Like a troublesome spirit, the book becomes something to be 'banished forever': 'When I closed the book, I had the strongest desire to open all the windows in the room' ('Siria', Goodreads: 2007). Reader S.S. goes further, and describes the novel as sentient and malign: 'This is a Victorian lesbian dark paranormal anguish-filled melodrama, and *it wants you to be sad*,' [my emphasis] ('S.S.', Goodreads: 2012). *Affinity*, a physical printed object,

does what the spiritualists in the novel fail to achieve completely: it becomes a place of contact between the material and psychic realm: a way for 'bad feelings' to leach out and contaminate the reader's imagination.

Few theorists working after the affective turn in criticism would be surprised at these reader claims about *Affinity* – nor would they necessarily see the 'bad feelings' it has provoked as negative. In *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich writes about the ways in which we can view 'cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions' (2003: 7) and as affective opportunities for all our ghosts to come back to haunt us. For her, there is nothing sinister or 'bad' about an ending that makes the reader feel unhappy. It is important to engage with 'the affective life of lesbian cultures' (2003: 11) in their fullest bandwidth. She is interested in 'the unpredictable forms of politics that emerge when trauma is kept unrelentingly in view rather than contained within an institutional project' (2003: 16). Further, she is 'dissatisfied' with 'responses to homophobia that take the form of demands for equal rights, gay marriage…such political agendas assume a gay citizen whose affective fulfilment resides in assimilation, inclusion, and normalcy' (2003: 19). Cvetkovich therefore takes issue with the idea of a 'model citizen' who is perfectly assimilated into dominant cultural models. It is important that texts leave space for those whose feelings do not 'fit', and who may stand outside the normalising emotional grid.

In *Feeling Backward* (2009), Heather Love compounds Cvetkovich's argument about the critical importance of remembering the past. She acknowledges the unhappy ending trope for gay characters:

> The history of Western representation is littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants. Those who are directly identified with same-sex desire most often end up dead.

(2009: 1)

However, like Cvetkovich, Love argues that flattening out the archive of bad feelings is futile and damaging: 'the challenge is to engage with the past without being destroyed by it' (2009: 1). The 'critical compulsion to fix' (2009: 3) everything must be resisted, and it is important to remember 'an account of the corporeal and psychic

costs of homophobia' (2009: 3). Like Cvetkovich, Love is suspicious of the grid that descends, permitting 'good', assimilative gay subjects, but crushing others:

> One may enter the mainstream on the condition that one breaks ties with all those who cannot make it – the nonwhite and the nonmonogamous, the poor and the gender-deviant, the fat, the disabled, the unemployed….

(2009: 9)

For Sara Ahmed, this concern with standardisation of modes of being is also political: 'stories of heterosexual romance proliferate as a matter of human interest' (2004: 424). This is to say that the repetition of heterosexual narratives works to assure a certain set of political outcomes. Ahmed writes persuasively of the close relationship between normativity and comfort. By being romantically 'normal' (i.e. heterosexual), we attain a level of affective compensation simply by moving through the world; citing Gill Valentine, Ahmed notes that *'the "heterosexualisation" of public spaces such as streets is naturalised by the repetition of different forms of heterosexual conduct (images on billboards, music played, displays of heterosexual intimacy etc.) (Valentine, 1996: 49 cited in: Ahmed, 2014).'* Conspicuous by its absence is the (successful) homosexual romance narrative; like Love, Ahmed feels that 'claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable' (2010: 11) at the expense of others. Key to Ahmed's account of happiness is the idea that happiness has somehow become entwined, in Western culture, with goodness: happiness 'allows the fortunate to think of themselves as good' (Bond Stockton, 2014: 104), instead of simply by luck or chance (happenstance). According to Claire Colebrook, this explains why we as a society may express anxiety around the taking of anti-depressants, or recreational drugs (Colebrook, 2007: 95). We view a 'happy life' as one which manages to achieve 'the subordination of pleasure and animality to self-definition' (2007: 82) – in other words, happiness must come through earnest effort – and so we may be uncomfortable with what we deem morally 'unearned' happiness (2007: 95). Like Love and Cvetkovich, Ahmed views the unhappy queer ending as a political gift, if only we can resist reading a sad ending literally. Instead, readers should cultivate 'an active disbelief in the necessary alignment of the happy and the good' (2009: 1). She argues for a revolutionary new citizen-category of 'affect aliens', who, 'alienated by happiness […] can create life worlds' (2010: 42) which do not respond to the usual categories.

For the queer author of queer fiction, the critical injunction to re-embrace unhappy endings might seem problematic, at least in part because of recent changes to the position of the author in the marketplace. After Bourdieu (1984), it is commonly understood that no author is an island: they occupy a position within a 'plurality of fields' (Thompson, 2012: 4) that, together, make up the cultural matrix of publishing. Latour has formulated authorship in terms of 'actor-network-theory' (Latour, 2005), which insists on the networked aspect of literary work. He argues that the author must be seen in terms of their surroundings, even down to the buildings in which they work:

> […] the first ANT [actor-network-theory] reflex should be to ask: 'In which building? In which bureau? Through which corridor is it accessible? Which colleagues has it been read to? How has it been compiled?'
>
> (2005: 183)

Like literary agents, publishers and booksellers, authors represent nodes of 'human', 'intellectual' and 'cultural' capital for the industry as a whole. Whilst the publishing process may be conceptualised as a series of links leading from author to agent to publisher to reader, as Thompson states, 'the publishing chain is not rigid' (2012: 18), and there may be confluence back up the chain from reader to author.

This is particularly evident since the advent of Internet-based changes to the industry, which have democratised access to the author and authorship. One such change is what Keen sees as a new form of reader and writer: the 'noble amateur', a user-generator of culture such as a book-blogger or self-published author (2007: 55). In parallel, Keen argues that the growth of book blogging and Kindle publishing has diminished the traditional cultural roles of agent, publisher and literary reviewer. For Fuller and Sedo, this new kind of engagement 'signals a resurgence of interest in sharing the experience of book reading with other people' (2013: 1). Alongside 'noble amateur' book blogging, there has been an evolution in book-based social networking, exemplified by the aforementioned Goodreads. As of 2017, Goodreads.com had accumulated 65 million registered users (Statista.com, 2017), writing about books independently of the traditional structures of tastemakers and

gatekeepers. The acquisition of Goodreads by Amazon in March 2013 created an 'outbreak of tension' from users (Albrechtslund, 2017: 3) which serves to illustrate the way in which Goodreads members prioritise community feeling. The fears they express centre around the potential commercial use of their data by Amazon, but also around losing feelings of solidarity: 'Sadness and regret at the loss of Goodreads as a 'home' is a typical reaction' (2017: 6). A part of this community feeling might be authorial engagement with readers, which is encouraged: 'writers and readers interact with each other and form intimate social relationships' (Nakamura, 2013: 1). Meanwhile, outside Goodreads, as Marwick and Boyd argue, social media sites such as Twitter allow authors to curate their public image more directly, independently of publicists and publishers who would traditionally intervene in communication with a readership (2011: 139-148). Whilst the author is offered more autonomy in managing their persona, Myers also underlines the hazards of this kind of porosity:

> Some of this attention may give the author a satisfying feeling of connection to an audience, while others may be almost bullying. Authors are caught up in a stream of social media attention whether they participate or not.
>
> (2016: 486)

Outside the reader communities, LGBTQ+ online communities have remained vocal in their reactions to the preponderance of unhappy queer endings. We might define an 'unhappy queer ending' here, after Smith, as an ending which features the sacrifice of homosexual happiness, often in favour of a heterosexual plot resolution (Smith, 1997). This kind of unhappy ending might be achieved by dissolving a homosexual romantic partnership and/or killing a homosexual character. In the case of the latter, deaths of lesbian and bisexual characters remain disproportionate to their representation. The website *LGBT Fans Deserve Better* argues that the year 2015-2016 was 'the deadliest for lesbian and bisexual female characters in TV', and that in total, queer women characters made up 10% of all character deaths in that timeframe, despite making up less than 10% of total character representation (LGBT Fans Deserve Better, 2016). Meanwhile, a GLAAD TV report underlined the ongoing tendency for queer women to die at the end of programmes, and states that 'broadcast TV "failed queer women, sends toxic message"' (Mitovich, 2016: 1). In terms of dissolving romantic happiness, a 2016 survey by the community website *Autostraddle* considered happy versus unhappy endings in US broadcast television. It

found that of 133 cases of lesbian and bisexual representation, only 29 could make a claim for 'triumphant story resolutions' or 'fitting and worthy send-offs' (Hogan, 2016).

In some cases, consumer dissatisfaction with the unhappy ending has directly influenced the behaviour of the author. Following the broadcast of an episode in which a pregnant black-British lesbian character died in car crash, the creator of *Last Tango in Halifax*, Sally Wainwright, was moved to issue an explanatory interview to lesbian periodical DIVA, in which she expressed surprise at the episode's poor reception from the lesbian community: 'I got an email from another friend saying, "Oh Sally, what have you done? There are few enough lesbians as it is!" (Duffy, 2015). As this reaction suggests, the death of the lesbian character here is more than the sum of its parts: it is not simply the fact of an unhappy ending, but the context of the unhappy ending as part of a disproportionate number of other such endings which prompts the response. In a later interview, Wainwright publicly admits her regret at this storytelling decision: "I found it hard and I regretted it. I wished I had found a better story" (The Mail, 2016). Lesbian-identified content creators are not exempt: the showrunner-screenwriter Harriet Braun was similarly called upon to justify the death of one of the characters on her drama *Lip Service* (Braun, 2012).

Contact between the public and the author is not new, but it is, perhaps, more possible than ever for an author to know just how their book has made a reader sad. Recent theorists such as Ahmed, Cvetkovich and Love may have gifted the author with the critical tools to understand their fiction differently, but the (this) author nevertheless operates in a matrix of competing interests. For Snediker, there is a critical gap between reading about theoretical positions of incoherence, and the lived experience of the same. It is one thing to read about the possibility of reclaiming an unhappy ending, and quite another to live it: 'my experience of feeling shattered lacked all the thrill of reading about being shattered' (2009: 6).

This study is an account of navigating conflicting feelings about the unhappy queer ending during the writing of my second novel. On the one hand, it has felt important not to betray my own teenage, affective investment in the possibility of a happily-ever-after; to acknowledge that at times, in queer life and fiction, 'delight was a little

boat on a sad sea' (Snediker, 2009: 5). However, in the years between sitting in my room secretly devouring *A Village Affair* and the present day, I have ventured into academic theory. Therefore, it has also felt important to respond to the theoretical possibilities of a wider emotional spectrum for queer writing, and to try to find a new way of thinking about unhappy endings.

It is worth noting that in this study, in common with Cvetkovich, Love and Ahmed, I use a variety of terms to describe myself and the reading public, including 'gay', 'lesbian', 'LGBTQ+' (to designate a spectrum of sexualities and lives falling outside the heterosexual) and 'queer'. Where a source has self-defined as any of these terms, I have followed their lead: for example, in the case of the GLAAD TV report quoted above ('broadcast TV "failed queer women, sends toxic message"'), I will speak about these same women in the terms of the original quote, i.e. as 'queer'. Elsewhere, I resist using the label 'queer' as a synonym for 'lesbian, 'gay', 'bisexual' – it is perfectly possible to live as one of these categories of people and yet not identify as in any way 'queer'. Indeed, to use 'queer' without a sense of specificity risks flattening its political usefulness: 'normalising the queer would be, after all, its sad finish' (Butler, 1994: 21).

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich argues for the building of 'emotional and personal life into models of political life and its transformation' (2003: 48). Assembling her archive, she states that 'ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge' (2003: 8). She therefore justifies the reinsertion of what is personal and affective into her political discourse. The methodology for this study is similar in texture: I (re)visit a selective archive of queer works which have informed my creative practice. I will re-read the endings of these key texts, and demonstrate how they influenced my thinking around the ending of *Julia Lindqvist*. These re-readings represent new knowledge in that they present original critical thinking on the chosen texts, but also generate knowledge which inflects my practice as an author. The scope of the study is limited to include only the five key texts which speak to me most loudly as past influences; in the final chapter I discuss areas for further investigation.

In the first chapter I attempt a creative re-reading of the ending of Donoghue's story cycle *Kissing the Witch*. I consider why I disagree with critics who feel that the ending is uplifting, arguing instead that it is disappointing to read a lesbian fairy story without a 'happily ever after'. The text is re-examined, to suggest that what may initially look like an unhappy lesbian ending can be re-interpreted in the context of the cyclical overarching narrative, 'rescuing' a happy romantic ending for the lesbian protagonists.

The second chapter considers the ending of Duncker's novella, *The Arrival Matters* (1998: 119-197). I question why, although the novella ends with a queer character's death, the story has never felt like an unhappy ending to me. I examine the ways in which the text 'stages' death according to its structuring metaphors of performance, and how this leads us towards a concept of a 'good death' for the main character.

The third chapter examines the ending of *The Line of Beauty* in the context of style. Published in 2004, *The Line of Beauty* is a chronicle of gay life in London in the 1980s: in a book that is itself beautifully written and lauded for its prose style, the protagonist Nick Guest is obsessed with how he is seen and with a certain idea of beauty. I argue that, whereas some critics see the ending of *The Line of Beauty* as epitomising style over substance, for me, they are indistinguishable. The novel dramatises this coming-to-personhood *through* style, rather than in spite of it, and therefore ends at a jumping-off point, on a note of possibility. The novel's setting in 1987 also puts it at a critical moment in the history of HIV epidemiology: Nick's possible infection occurs on the cusp of the availability of AZT, a therapy which would transform HIV management.

Returning to Waters' *Affinity*, I consider how the novel is situated in multiple genres, including romance and Gothic thriller. On the side of the Gothic, I argue that Waters uses the well-worn concept of the lesbian ghost as a kind of red herring for readers; I further argue that readers react to the novel as a 'failed romance', and are therefore disappointed by the ending.

The study of five authors ends by asking where books can really be said to end. I revisit the scene of 1950s lesbian pulp fiction, and study the 1984 edition of

Highsmith's *Carol*, to which an author's note was appended. Just after the famously happy ending of the novel, in this note, Highsmith disavows the identity of 'lesbian author' – thus, a textual happy ending may be subverted due to paratextual material, including authorial persona and interventions.

In Chapter 8, I consider how the insights drawn from re-reading these five endings influenced the ending of *Julia Lindqvist*. This is achieved by reading an early version of *Julia Lindqvist*'s ending (Appendix 1; Hitchman 2017b) against the final draft of the novel.

3. Misremembering the Witch

....Years later, finding the text again, I'm re-reading the last lines of Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* with a kind of low-level incredulity:

> And what happened next, you ask? Never you mind. There are some tales not for telling, whether because they are too long, too precious, too laughable, too painful, too easy to need telling or too hard to explain. After all, after years and travels, my secrets are all I have left to chew on in the night.
>
> This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your mouth.
>
> <div align="right">(1998: 211)</div>

'The Tale of the Kiss' closes Donoghue's collection of feminist reversionings of fairy tales. In Donoghue's revisions, thirteen traditional stories, ranging from 'Beauty and the Beast' to 'Rapunzel', are re-told from the perspective of a female character. 'The Tale of the Kiss' reimagines 'The Little Mermaid' from the point of view of the sea witch and it now looks like this: a young woman comes to the cave of the wicked witch. The witch has bargained with the girls' parents to give her marital and psychic freedom. As payment, the witch asks for a kiss, which the girl gives her and then skips away. The witch, smitten, resolves to go down to the village and find the girl the very next day: 'I would ask her to come live in my cave and learn all I knew and teach me all I didn't. [...] I would say the word love' (1998: 211).

Why incredulity? I've misremembered the ending. It's been fifteen years since I was given a copy of *Kissing the Witch*. In the interim, I've bought it as a gift countless times, especially for the heartbroken or forlorn. If you had asked me how the collection ended I would have quoted for you this passage, always remembered by me for its lyricism:

> Her finger was spelling on the back of my neck.
> [...] So then she took me home, or I took her home, or we were both somehow taken to the closest thing.

Re-reading the text, I find these are actually the closing lines of from the beginning of the thirteen-story cycle, 'The Tale of the Shoe' - a retelling of *Cinderella* in which the fairy godmother, not the prince, gets the girl at midnight. In the years between readings, I'd somehow grafted this happily-ever-after onto the end of the collection.

There's a positive critical consensus surrounding the ending of *Kissing the Witch*: the last line of the text is a way to 'multiply the possible stories that may exist' (Orme, 2010: 127). By denying the reader a happily-ever-after ending, Donoghue is inviting them to use their own storytelling power: 'The witch's final declaration is a gift that presents a choice: what will YOU do with the stories?' (2010: 129). Harries agrees that the end of the collection passes on storytelling power to the reader: 'The frame dissolves or vanishes; the reader's voice carries on' (Harries, 2010: 135). Martin agrees that the collection as a whole 'encourages individualistic responses to fairy tales and emphasizes the reader's agency' (Martin, 2010: 6) - all the stories in *Kissing the Witch* focus on women who make their own decisions and establish their own freedoms. The collection therefore ends with the kiss the book has promised us ('I leave it in your mouth'). The reader, like Sleeping Beauty, is kissed awake; unlike Sleeping Beauty, with the prince looming over her, it's to a plurality of possibilities (2010: 22).

Re-reading the last lines of the 'The Tale of the Kiss', I don't want to say the word *love*. Orme sees a redemptive move in the line 'there are some tales not for telling', as it encourages us to look outside the matrix of existing narratives: 'if not all stories are for the telling, then what stories have we been missing all along?' (2010: 127). What's here is only a partial telling of the narrator's life, necessarily incomplete. Yet I find that I'm hearing, in 'there are some tales not for telling' and 'too hard to explain', a touch of the-love-that-dares-not-speak-its-name; in 'never you mind', a vague echo of don't-ask-don't-tell; something difficult in the 'laughable' and 'painful' history of the witch. For Martin, the ending is open: situating 'the act of narrative as interactive and continuous rather than isolated and closed' (2010: 14). To my mind, the ending may be textually open (to the reader, who may indeed be

invited to continue in her own idiom), but crucially, it isn't open to the character we identify with, the witch.

In the penultimate line, the narrator adopts a position of telling of events from a future point: 'After years and travels, my secrets are all I have left to chew on in the night' (Donoghue, 1998: 211). This final image of loneliness and secrecy presupposes that whatever else may have happened, the witch and the girl didn't have their romance. Indeed, we already know this, because of the recursive structure of the collection. Each story ends with an appeal to another character in the tale to tell their own life, and each new tale opens with an epigraph: 'Will I tell you my own story? It is a tale of (a rose, a kiss, a voice)…' [see Figure i.]. So the witch has already appeared as a secondary character in the previous story, 'The Tale of the Voice', before telling her own story in 'The Tale of the Kiss' – and here, she is alone, and as Harries notes (2010: 135), she looks very much like the image of the traditional witch from the fairy tale: 'She was everything I half expected: a stoop, a stick, a wart on her nose, a whisker on her chin' (Donoghue, 1998: 178). For other critics, the last line is a kiss, an opening to plural readings through a queering of the traditional ending of the fairy tale. For me, there's something vaguely unpleasant about the idea of leaving 'secrets' in someone's mouth. I'm not sure this *is* the story I've been asking for.
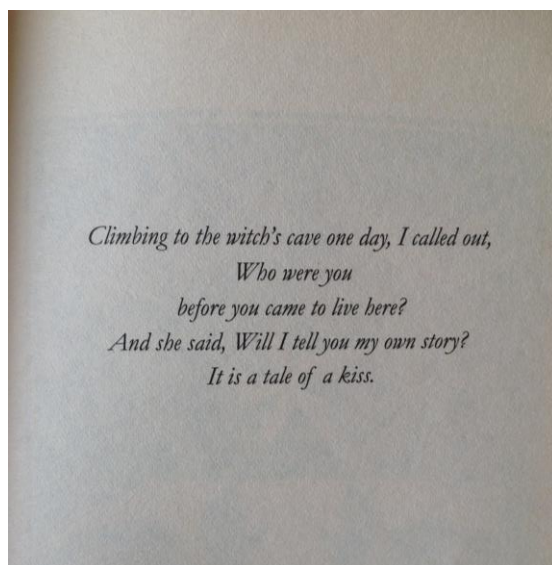

Figure i. (Hitchman, 2015)

In *Writing on the Wall: Selected Essays*, Patricia Duncker takes Angela Carter to task for failing to include queer perspectives in her feminist fairy-tale collection *The Bloody Chamber*: 'Carter's frolics in the exotic world of the weird conclude by domesticating, diminishing or even denying the dangers of difference' (Duncker, 2002: 97). She claims that there is a heterosexist bias to Carter's work: although Carter has been claimed by critics as a radical, her women 'still have their heads full of men' (2002: 99). Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* could be read as a response to Duncker's call to arms, as it's full of alternative, radical sexualities. 'The Tale of the Rose', a reworking of Beauty and the Beast, sees Beauty discover that the Beast is female. 'The Tale of the Apple' recasts Sleeping Beauty's stepmother as something perhaps more: 'Stepmother, yes, that was the word, but there was nothing of the mother about her' (Donoghue, 1998: 53). Instead of the 'fiction of Oedipal fathers' that Duncker claims makes up the Gothic element of fairy tales (2002: 87), Donoghue foregrounds the mother figure, and all the troubling elements of mother/daughter relationships. So, in Donoghue's retelling of 'The Snow Queen', the little girl on the hunt for her brother doesn't rescue him. Instead, she is furious that the brother has been stolen instead of her: 'Why him? I howled like a baby. Why him and not me?' (1998: 107). In 'The Tale of the Cottage', Gretel finds a new mother in the witch in the gingerbread cottage, after her real mother has put her out in the snow: 'Home not home if mother not mother' (1998: 133).

Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère observes how intertextual *Kissing the Witch* is. It makes references not only to canonical fairy tales, but also to Carter's work, and to Olga Broumas' *Beginning With O.* The latter in turn is indebted to the tales Anne Sexton tells in *Transformations* (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, 2009: 22-25). By absorbing this web of different texts, Donoghue situates herself as a writer of 'post-Carter generation fairy tales' (Benson, 2003 *cited in* Orme, 2010: 116). As well as including the perspectives of queer characters, she is also influenced by queer theories of writing. Orme writes of *Kissing the Witch* as a poststructuralist text, based on 'openness and fluidity' and 'troubling gaps' (2010: 118). Donoghue is interested in how power operates 'locally rather than systematically' (Martin, 2010: 7); she is 'reluctant to replace the margins for the center as the privileged space from which to gaze' (2010: 14). Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère argues that the stories illustrate the full spectrum of female agency: 'the lesbian continuum, i.e. a rich and diverse

spectrum of love and bonding among women' (2009: 136) - of which romantic feelings are just one part. The (unhappy) open ending of 'The Tale of the Kiss' may represent the critical distance between the politically-correct feminist fairy-tale retellings of the 1980s, and Donoghue writing at the height of queer theory in 1998. Perhaps, as Martin suggests, my way of reading is also of its time: 'an oppositional mode of resistance is not necessarily the most effective paradigm to invoke' (2010: 14) when reading *Kissing the Witch*.

I had initially read *Kissing the Witch* very simply, as a fairy-tale, in search of a happily-ever-after. Fairy tales deserve particular critical attention: Ford argues that they 'represent the wide-eyed innocence of childhood, a time when our minds were open to any and all possibilities' (1996: 1), yet they also function as scripts which 'conjoin morality and sexual identity', and in which 'heterosexuality is good and right, alternatives bad and even sinful' (Lester, 2007: 61). Lester, in '(Un)Happily Ever After: Fairy Tale Morals, Moralities and Heterosexism in Children's Texts', deals with some of the real-world issues raised by this. He notes that many young lesbian, gay and bisexual people are aware of their sexuality before the age of thirteen (2007: 62). Reading traditional fairy tales, they may struggle to find a reading position that matches their identity:

> As a budding queer…I gave some passing thought to the princes they [female characters] were usually searching for; but deep down, I always imagined myself as the one doing the searching…
>
> (Ford, 1996: 1-2)

Lester notes that: 'to live in the proverbial "happily ever after", boys and girls must perform the omnipresent and omnipotent heterosexual script' (2007: 72). Critics working on *Kissing the Witch* read a 'happily ever after' ending as constrictive, anti-feminist – an 'illusory conclusion for any couple' (Martin, 2010: 16). For me, reading (and having always read) fairy tales from a hedging, dodging, queer perspective, I can't help but feel that 'happily ever after' might be celebratory, and might better represent the 'wide-eyed innocence' of my thirteen year-old self. The witch in 'The Tale of the Kiss' speculates that 'perhaps it is the not being kissed that makes [one] a witch; perhaps the source of her power is the breath of loneliness

around her' (1998: 209). I wonder: would it be so terrible if the source of her power *were* being kissed?

For Donoghue, endings carry no special freight:

> Endings are overrated; they are often the point when the writer bows to convention, and there is a lot more to a story than who gets the girl, or who dies. When I write fiction or drama, I know that my liking for a character is shown by my giving her a lot of page time and vivid scenes, however I may dispose of her by the end.
>
> (2010: 10)

In her literary criticism, Donoghue cautions against reading characters and situations as if they were indicative of the real world: 'A society's literature is its dream: immensely suggestive, yes, but not a simple reflection of its daily reality' (2010: 14). This question of text-as-reality is also dealt with by Adano: 'the ending of a text stresses that that possibility of a world is over and makes us go back to everyday life' (1995: 85). We are dropped out of the magical world and into the real – the ending is a liminal space, a point of transition: and we can therefore expect something from the real world to flow back into the text. So, for Adano, 'the ending is the point at which the knowledge of the cultural community is inserted into the text' (1995: 100). Perhaps it's not surprising, therefore, that readers place such store in endings: part-dream, part-reality, they seem to have a privileged way to say things about both.

Of course, it's always possible that the end is the beginning. For Orme, Martin et al, the spinning wheel of *Kissing the Witch* stops turning with the appeal to the reader at the close of the novel. Harries argues that at the end of 'The Tale of the Kiss', 'the narrative chain is broken; the receding planes dissolve' (2010: 135), and we're dumped unceremoniously out of the cycle: 'the redhead never tells her story' (2010: 135). But *Kissing the Witch* is interested in regeneration and rebirth. From the beginning of 'The Tale of the Skin': 'See this leaf, little girl, blackened under the snow? It has died so it will be born again on the branch in springtime' (Donoghue, 1998: 139). As the narrator in 'The Tale of the Hair' says, 'In my last life, I was not a horse but a woman like you' (1998: 81). This suggests a different possible reading: that the whole book may simply recycle itself into a new start. A character's reincarnation may be a way to jump from 'The Tale of the Kiss' at the book's end, to 'The Tale of the Shoe' at the beginning. This would make 'The Tale of the Shoe' the

missing story of the red-haired girl who comes up to the witch's cave and kisses her. Textual clues support this reading. The red-haired girl suffers from an excessively anxious mother in 'The Tale of the Kiss': 'a good strong red-haired daughter, but she is a trouble and a trial to me' (1998: 201), who tries to control her. 'The Tale of the Shoe' opens with the female Cinderella character having lost both parents, and suffering from a script of 'voices' inside her own head: 'Do this, do that, you lazy heap of dirt' (1998: 3). There's an emphasis on the colour red, and on hair, on the second page of the story:

> I knelt on the hearth and looked into the scarlet cinders until my eyes swam […] Some nights I told myself stories to make myself weep, then stroked my own hair till I slept.
>
> (1998: 4)

This recalls the girl who sits on the floor of the witch's cave and combs 'out the red ropes of her hair' (1998: 204). And there's a kind of echo from the redhead in 'The Tale of the Kiss' – intelligent, insouciant, 'a trial and a trouble' (1998: 203), who wants freedom – to Cinderella in 'The Tale of the Shoe', with her persistent questioning of social roles. At her first visit to the ball, Cinderella gets 'right into the swing of things […] I accepted a single chicken wing and nibbled it daintily' (1998: 6). But, by the end of the three nights, she has revolted against what is expected: 'I swallowed a little of everything I was offered, then leaned over the balcony and threw it all up again' (1998: 7). Perhaps we can read 'The Tale of the Shoe' as a continuation of 'The Tale of the Kiss'; and maybe when the narrator says 'I had got the story all wrong. How could I not have noticed she was beautiful?' (1998: 8), there's a tacit acknowledgement that she might, in a former life, have got the witch all wrong, too.

Re-visiting *Kissing the Witch* after many cycles of my own life, I was able to 'rescue' an unhappy ending by re-reading it as a narrative which never formally closes, and can instead be read as an infinite, hopeful loop: a story cycle instead of a short story collection. In making this argument, I have employed the strategies of reparative reading that Love cautions against: I have given in to the 'critical compulsion to fix' (2009: 3). However, as some critics suggest, a story cycle can

offer a way to think about narrative that isn't in servitude to the either/or-ness of a happy/unhappy ending. Forest L. Ingram suggests that:

> Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some short story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts […] Shifting internal relationships, of course, continually alter the originally perceived pattern of the whole cycle.
>
> (1971: 13)

In this model, the short story cycle becomes a continually shifting set of tectonic plates, which resists loading meaning onto the ending of any one of its constituent parts. The possibilities of story cycles prompted me to consider the usefulness of a cyclical structure for *Julia Lindqvist*, and I will return to a discussion of this in Chapter 8.

4. *The Arrival Matters:* Postures of Life and Death

Cycles are also important to the ending of Duncker's *The Arrival Matters*, a brilliant fantasia of magical people set in the 1990s. The narrator of the story is unnamed, supernatural, independently wealthy and human-but-not-quite. S/he is holidaying in the South of France with her eleven year-old ward, Miranda, when the time comes for the ritual end of his/her lifespan. S/he has summoned her inheritor, the Magician, a concert pianist, with whom s/he's also in a long-term romantic relationship (although s/he also thinks of Cynthia, another supernatural being, as 'the only woman I have ever loved' – 1998: 140). The novella dramatises the final twenty-four hours in the run-up to the death, in which s/he, the Magician and Miranda go on a tourist spree round the Riviera. The threesome visit a fairground, 'a surface of changing lights, a code, like an airliner's control panel' (1998: 174), and the narrator experiences a flash of panic about the impending death: 'I stand inside the moment where "we all must die" becomes – I must die – and soon' (1998: 180). Miranda and the Magician go on the Big Wheel, and the narrator, watching, is freed from angst: 'As the wheel turns they soar out into space […] And my fear drops away. I know that I am no longer facing my death alone' (1998: 182). It is the performative, topsy-turvy space of the fairground which allows the narrator to 'decode' what is coming, and take control of the ship; under the Big Wheel, s/he reconceptualises death as part of an ongoing cycle.

The Arrival Matters dramatises the death of a queer character, and separation from the love-object. Yet, unlike many queer endings, it has always seemed to me uplifting and beautiful rather than sad. In this chapter, I will suggest that this is because the character dies a 'good' death, and further, that the performance metaphor running through the text destabilises various ontological categories. It allows us to think about death as a camp 'performance', and therefore to complicate and reconceptualise our views of dying. As such, the ending fulfils the function suggested by Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*. Kermode argues that readers see in fictional endings 'a figure for their own deaths' (2000: 7): hence, perhaps, the disproportionate importance of the ending of the novel for readers. The price we extract for this little death is that we learn something: 'the gain is that we shall never quite resume the posture toward life and death that we formerly held' (2000: 40).

It must be said that ideas around a 'good death' are contested and specific to individual cultures: for Emanuel and Emanuel, it is subject to 'vagueness and difficulty in translation into practical guidelines (1998: 21), whilst for Raisio, Vartiainen, and Jekunen defining a good death is a 'dynamic' process (2015: 158). However, in the attempt to define, some key terms and concepts emerge. For the Institute of Medicine, a 'good death' is 'free from avoidable suffering and distress for patient and caregivers and in general accord with the patient's and family's wishes' (1997: 24). Meanwhile, Payne *et al*'s study of hospice workers characterised a 'good death' as peaceful and accepted in advance (1996: 307). These findings map well onto the ending of *The Arrival Matters*:

> I smile calmly at the magician. "No harm will come to you. I will watch over you always. You have my word."
>
> We walk on the terrace among the towering bougainvilleas and pots of geraniums. I sense the glass phial warm in my pocket. I hear Cynthia's laughter, long before I see the glow of Fatima's dancing fireflies, glimmering through the wisteria in the scented gloom.
>
> "Goodbye, my dear," I say to the magician and set off down the steps into the dark.
>
> (1998: 197)

The vocabulary here ('calmly', 'warm', 'laughter', 'glow', 'glimmering') suggests a comforting atmosphere; the narrator takes his/her leave surrounded by loving relatives ('I hear Cynthia's laughter, long before I see the glow of Fatima's dancing fireflies'). The narrator has assured an ongoing sense of family by appointing Miranda as 'inheritor', and it is under this sign of cyclical continuity that s/he takes her leave: 'All the monsters of the dark are prepared to obey her. Miranda will be our inheritor.' (1998: 197). Balducci suggests that 'a good death is achieved when […] patients and family recognise death as a unique living experience to be treasured as any other living experience' (2012: iii56). Although the novella dramatises the narrator's final few days, it also dramatises, perhaps more importantly, his/her acceptance that these are the last few days.

The Arrival Matters is a text deeply concerned with performance. For example, when we first meet the narrator, we see him/her through the eyes of the mother of the children with whom Miranda is playing on the beach, and we learn that the narrator

has 'long white hair' (1998: 123), worn loose; s/he's also compared to a witch ('Funny…I never imagine the witches as fat.' (1998: 123)). There's a clue to how we should read this, however, a page further on, when the narrator reflects on the fact that s/he has successfully distracted the mother of the children from his/her unusual appearance by simply being English: 'Being English is like travelling in a ready-made disguise. I am often successfully English, keeping the other identities for rare occasions' (1998: 124). The idea of being 'successfully English' suggests that Englishness, like any other form of subjectivity (including gender) is something one can perform, well or otherwise. In a later scene, in which the narrator goes to visit Cynthia and Fatima in their jungle home:

> She turns off the Minitel with a snap. Stands back measuring my performance critically. I take a few strides across the carpet, turn, frown, strike an attitude. She applauds my gestures, bounds forward, adjusts my cuffs […] Fatima, Fatima, she shouts. Come and see. It's quite wonderful.
>
> (1998: 130)

The narrator's gender is a successful, a 'wonderful', performance; pleasing to the other members of the supernatural tribe. Here, the clues have switched towards a masculine identity, as s/he is presenting in typically masculine attire: 'I adjust my collar and tie, straighten the white summer jacket' (1998: 129). There's a tone of the carnivalesque to the proceedings – of switching identities as play; Cynthia and Fatima are playing on the Minitel Rose (a 1990s French version of online lesbian, gay and bisexual dating), pretending to be exactly who they choose, for their own amusement: 'Oh, she laughs, I use all my names: La Luna, Artemis, Diana…I promise to be erotic, changeable, passionate, never bourgeoise or practical…I have the most amusing replies' (1998: 130). The characters have absolute choice in the ways that they establish their gender through performance; they aren't subject to the concretising effects that Butler writes about (Butler, 1990: 153-155), which might restrict the range of identities available to be performed. *The Arrival Matters* might be seen as a fantastic, fictional expansion upon Butler's *Gender Trouble*: 'I have always existed outside the universal law of the ruler and the ruled' (1998: 158).

Writing about Duncker's later novel *James Miranda Barry*, Gutleben suggests that 'the notion of performance remains the only structuring device acknowledged by the various actors of the novel' (2007: 220). Returning to the narrator's death scene, we

find performance running through it, too. Earlier, the narrator and the magician have shared a vision of the afterlife as being like a masked ball: 'Cynthia and Fatima are Hollywood Orientals in veils and harem trousers, and we are both wearing Fred Astaire DJs […] we dance the tango, swooping, bending and gliding to each other's rhythm' (1998: 162). So, when it comes, the last day is bracketed by theatrical convention. 'The beginning of the last day' (1998: 187) is also the day of the Magician's performance: he is replacing, a last-minute substitute like a magician's dummy, another musician at a concert. The concern with disguise and play-acting continues as the narrator and the Magician change their identities in order to evade press attention: 'The magician becomes a distinguished public man in a matter of seconds […] I try to look like a visiting Mafia boss…' (1998: 189). After the music performance, the Magician is encouraged into a second performance, this time of his magic (1998: 194: 'The magician peers into his hat, out of which he draws an umbrella, a kettle, a frying pan, a walking stick…'). During this, he takes the opportunity to ask Miranda to pass the narrator a vial of poison. 'The gesture is immaculate, elegant, a joker's trick carried out before his public, a perfect folding of white gloves […] The music reaches a crescendo of cymbals and brass. The performance is over' (1998: 194 – 196). Kermode suggests that the way we read a sad fictional ending is a performance of its own. A substitution takes place: we exchange our own bodies for the 'impersonal dummy' (Kermode, 2000: 161), the substitute body-which-must-die in the text. We are magicians, managing a sleight-of-hand trick. In *The Arrival Matters*, death is approached in just such a playful way: we think of death as just another performance, another magic trick.

This is not to say that death is not a serious matter; rather, that our relationship to what is serious is changed. Approached with an attitude of ironic artistic endeavour, the narrator's death attains a level of camp, which Sontag defines as a 'metaphor of life as theater' (2009: 280). In another of Sontag's formulations, camp 'introduces a new standard: artifice as an ideal, theatricality.' This is not a trivialising move: to be camp 'involves a new, more complex relation to the "serious"' (2009: 288). As Sontag makes clear, camp flies above homosexuality, but is also located in it: 'one feels that if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would' (2009: 291). In the complex web of shifting genders in *The Arrival Matters*, it is hard to argue that any of the characters are, strictly speaking, homosexual. However, in

the ending of *The Arrival Matters*, I see a queer attitude to death emerging, which centres on the adoption of a certain style: a 'good death' is not just one which is peaceful and dignified, although that is key; a 'good death' is also a successful artistic performance.

In this way, the ending of *The Arrival Matters* gives me a 'little death' which changes my own 'posture towards life and death' and towards the writing of a good death: this must be why I don't feel sad. The experience of re-reading *The Arrival Matters* prompts reflection on how to approach writing character deaths in *Julia Lindqvist*, which I will discuss further in Chapter 8.

5. Style and Substance in *The Line of Beauty*

The last section of *The Line of Beauty* sees Hollinghurst's protagonist, Nick Guest, ejected from the Garden of Eden. The novel has followed Nick's progress from callow twenty-one year-old Oxford graduate in 1983, through his dissolute twenties in London, where he assumes his gay identity, to the 'now' of the ending, in 1987. Throughout this time, the family-heart of the novel has been the Kensington home of Gerald Fedden, a Conservative MP, where Nick is a long-time lodger. This status has been achieved only through cultivating a tenuous friendship with the Feddens' son, Toby, and so Nick's surname is a clue to his status in this family home. Although he'd like to think he's close to the family, when Nick accidentally, tangentially involves Gerald in a public scandal around the death of Nick's lover from AIDS, the Feddens order him to move out. He is abjected from their life of privilege, and his status therefore revealed to be conditional on his closetedness: 'the gay observer is retained as the perfect guest, the refined observer, in the heteronormative house of capitalist acquisition' (Hannah, 2007: 85).

So Nick finds himself on the pavement in a sunny London street, with his cardboard boxes next to him, forced to give back the key to the shared gardens. The key is a treasured possession, representing access to economic power, and is also a repository of affect for Nick: the garden has been, at the start of *The Line of Beauty*, the paradisiac scene of his first sexual encounter. The abjection isn't just social, cultural; it may also include a tumble into illness, too. Nick is waiting for HIV test results, and as he stands on the pavement, he experiences a flash of panic: 'it came over him that the test result would be positive' (Hollinghurst, 2005: 500). All of his carefully curated social connections – Nick is an 'aesthete'-for-hire and inveterate social climber - are revealed to be useless: 'There was nothing this man could do to help him. None of his friends could save him' (2005: 501). The last lines of the novel see him in a hallucinatory tailspin:

> It was a sort of terror, made up of emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity; but he felt that the self-pity belonged to a larger pity. It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional. He stared back at the house, and then turned and drifted on. He looked in bewilderment at Number 24, the final house with its regalia of stucco swags and bows. It wasn't just

this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful.

<div align="right">(2005: 501)</div>

For Yebra, Nick here is 'at a loss, rhetorically looking at himself and alienated against the threatening sublime' (2011: 206) - Nick's emotions swell to try to encompass the world, and fail. Initially, Nick's aesthetic sense here 'is experienced as a democratic freedom' (Eastham, 2006: 526) – he loves the world, and everything in it, but, by focusing his gaze on the aristocratic No. 24, he falls back into his old familiar pattern, of loving frills and furbelows to the exclusion of any moral sense (2006: 527). The ending is unhappy not just because of Nick's circumstances, possible looming HIV diagnosis and ejection from happiness, but because of his failure of the imagination, his inability to move beyond a narrow aestheticism. Like the governess at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* (1957) (*The Line of Beauty* reads as a vast homage to James' work, with Nick writing a thesis on 'style' in James), Nick Guest is revealed to be a guest in the life he has begun to take for granted as his own. His successful infiltration of the Feddens' is highly conditional on a pretence of 'acceptable' mores, and he is thrown out of the dominant order as soon as he begins to challenge it; perhaps into madness, as his frightening flash-forward indicates.

The Line of Beauty was first published in 2004, to globally positive reviews; a 'gracious but stunned' (Zeitchik and Doran, 2004) Hollinghurst won the Booker Prize for the novel in the same year. Critics focused swiftly and surely on the book's gorgeous prose style: 'the work of a great English stylist in full maturity' (Adams, 2004); 'a novel so exquisitely written that at times it feels almost as if it could dispense with plot and characters and exist on a plane of pure perception' (Clark, *in*: Hollinghurst, 2005: prefatory pages). Flannery writes that the fact that *The Line of Beauty* is:

> so searingly tangible and so alluringly alive owes much to [Hollinghurst's] sheer skill as a writer of fiction, his handling of tone and finish, the degree to which his writing works so effectively to give […] so much sensuous solidity and affective intensity.

<div align="right">(2005: 302)</div>

Hollinghurst appears here not so much writer as master craftsman, polishing the legs on an antique armoire such as one might find in Feddens' home. In these reviews of the novel, his prose style is exactly what gives the book substance, 'solidity' and

'intensity'; it is 'tangible' and 'alive'. This leads to 'intensity', and to affective power, to a connection that goes outside the pages of the novel: 'the world is electrified in an arousal shared between reader and character' (Gilbert, 2015: 4).

Style is an obvious thematic concern for the novel, too, of course; part of what makes *The Line of Beauty* so beautiful is that it 'shows and tells' (Su, 2014: 1085), *le fond et la forme* reflecting each other in effortlessly intertwined sinuous lines of beauty. But, within the world of the novel, style can sometimes seem, at first, very far from this sensual connection: more like a chilly mirrored surface, to which Nick frantically clings. For some critics, the novel's upper-class emphasis on beautiful surroundings seems apolitical: 'Much preoccupied with Thatcherism, the book depicts scant opposition to its political triumph: the miners' strike is simply flown over' (Brooker, 2005: 104), with Nick Guest looking more and more like *Brideshead*'s Charles Ryder, who flies right over his own self in his own relentless aesthetic sensibility. For Yehani, 'the novel offers an almost fetishist appraisal of the beautiful that is always ephemeral' (2012: 223). Nick is 'unable to dissociate himself from his aesthetic drives' (Yebra, 2011: 182). Indeed, there's a telling moment when Nick goes to dinner with his lover Wani's parents, and is introduced as Wani's magazine start-up colleague and 'aesthete':

> '…I hope it's soon going to start bringing in some money.'
> 'It will, Papa,' said Wani quickly, while Nick blushed in horror at the chasm he'd just hopped over, and said, 'I'm the aesthete, remember! I don't know about the money side of things.' He tried to smile out through his blush […]
> (Hollinghurst, 2005: 223)

At this stage in the novel, the question of art and money is for Nick extremely embarrassing; the two can never be intertwined. Nick-the-aesthete lives 'by irony, maintaining a posture of detachment and indifference, protecting himself from use-value, ethics and social life' (Eastham, 2006: 511).

In so doing, self-protecting Nick becomes a kind of cipher, an endlessly repeating performance, seeking to parasite onto others' style. He is 'a great favourite with mothers' (Hollinghurst, 2005: 134), and wants above all things to adopt the linguistic, ironic tics of Rachel Fedden, Gerald's wife (Eastham, 2006: 526). This

leads to appalling moments of self-abnegation; for instance in the scene in the Feddens' French *manoir*, where they learn that a family friend has died of AIDS:

> 'Awful losing an old friend,' said Nick.
> 'Mm,' said Sally with a twitch, as if to say her meaning had been twisted. 'So you knew him too, did you, the man?'
> 'Pat – yes, a bit,' said Nick. 'He was a great charmer.' He smiled and the word seemed to linger and insist, like a piece of code.
>
> (Hollinghurst, 2005*:* 338)

In appropriating the allusive tics of upper-class chatter – substituting proper words ('charmer') for forbidden ones ('gay') – Nick shows bad faith, and becomes himself a kind of pastiche. The setting of the novel at the start of postmodernism isn't for nothing, here: 'aesthetic impressions return farcically as stylised pastiche and over-consumption' (Eastham, 2006: 526), and paradoxically lead him back to money: 'Jokes understood in a foreign language became amusing in a further, exemplary way: he was storing them already as the coinage, the argot, of their ten-day visit […]' (Hollinghurst, 2005: 294). Nick sickens, not necessarily with an illness, but with his own over-consumption of the style of others.

It would be possible to see, if we follow this logic, the ending of *The Line of Beauty* as truly unhappy, the crisis of this repetitious disease: Nick is adrift, unable to process, or to 'dissociate himself' from his obsession with style. Yet, as Gilbert suggests, perhaps we should be wary of reading the novel so uncomplicatedly, as 'a moralist fable guided by the aesthetic as flickering beacon' (Gilbert, 2015: 14). As Su further argues, although Nick may at first make the mistake of thinking it, beauty in *The Line of Beauty* is not really an apolitical or ahistorical category (Su, 2014: 1084). Instead, it tracks, if we read carefully, various shifts in beauty marks. A conversation between Wani, Toby Fedden and Nick hints at this:

> Toby, who had been quiet since they'd moved on from potholing, said, 'What's the difference between baroque and rococo?'
> 'Oh,' said Wani, smiling tolerantly at his old friend, 'well, the baroque is more muscular, the rococo is lighter and more decorative. And asymmetrical,' he remembered […] so that Nick thought he had absorbed far more from him than his capsule guides to style […] 'The rococo is the final deliquescence of the baroque,' he said.
>
> (Hollinghurst, 2005: 304)

Here, the different styles – however simplistically Nick might think Wani explains them – are seen as moving in historical progression, shifting tectonic plates. It's tempting to map this aesthetic progression (muscular to lighter/asymmetrical) onto Wani's failing body, very near death from AIDS. In an earlier, unrecognised stage of the illness, Nick has noticed that Wani's appearance has thinned into an 'eerily beautiful, etched-out version of himself' (2005: 186). He:

> …commanded attention now by pity and respect as he once had by beauty and charm. The claim to attention was constant, but it had turned fiercer and quieter. Nick thought he still looked wonderful in a way […] Wani's face, gaunt and blotched, had taken on new possibilities of expression – the repertoire of someone not only older but quite different…
>
> (2005: 431)

Nick may dispassionately read the movement from Wani's straightforward physical beauty to Wani's beauty marked by illness, but this doesn't stop him from seeing beauty there – in stark contrast to his former worshipping of Wani as the idealised male form. Similarly, when the first issue of Wani and Nick's joint magazine venture, *Ogee*, arrives, Nick admires its beauty; but finds it tinged with 'a glassy malignity. The lustre was perfect and intense – it was the shine of marble and varnish. It was the gleam of something that was over' (2005: 489). In its 'lustre' and 'malignity', the object directly recalls Catherine Fedden's bipolar illness, with its reckless and alarming highs. As she describes it, the disease is: 'glittering but […] deadly at the same time. It doesn't want you to survive it.' (2005: 17). Nick sees the magazine not as an isolated piece of ephemera, but as something intimately tied to an act of feeling and mourning: 'at noon on a mild autumn day, it might have been Wani's memorial tablet, with the angel's wing sheltering the blank where his name and achievements should go' (2005: 490). He becomes part of an affective community: one legacy of AIDS being that it draws those exposed to it into 'a chain, a chain of transmission, from the past' (Clum, 1990: 650). It's therefore possible to trace Nick's subtly-drawn progression through the fictional world, and read *The Line of Beauty* not as a 'glassy malignity' but a *Bildungsroman*: 'a scene in which the ongoing origination of the subject in a world of value is explored' (Gilbert, 2015: 14). Nick goes through 'ongoing origination'. Perhaps we can re-read the ending of the novel under these signs of futurity and progression.

Hollinghurst's earlier novel *The Swimming Pool Library* is set during 'the last summer of its kind there was ever to be' (Hollinghurst, 1988: 3) before the AIDS crisis (Corber, 1999: 117; Clum, 1990: 654). The gay protagonist, Will Beckwith, senses that something is coming – 'flames around a photograph' of his carefree life (1988: 3), and experiences nightmares: 'We knew we had no chance of surviving the violence that surrounded us, closing in fast, and I was gripped by a nauseating terror' (1988: 33), but the epidemic is never discussed. The shadow of the HIV crisis hangs over the novel all the more darkly for never being named, and the novel ends with Will in the swimming pool where he has made most of his sexual conquests: 'And going into the showers I saw a suntanned young lad in pale blue trunks that I rather liked the look of' (1988: 288). In contrast, *The Line of Beauty* engages directly with HIV and its effects, dramatising 'the beginning of the end': Nick's ejection from the Kensington shared gardens at the end of the novel is a fall from the 'paradise' of pre-HIV gay culture, as well as from social grace. One reason for the unhappy feeling at the end of *The Line of Beauty* is Nick's own possible imminent HIV diagnosis ('It came over him suddenly that the test results would be positive'). For Gilbert, any reading of the ending of *The Line of Beauty* must be inflected by the fact that it is a historical novel, and we the readers know, to some degree, 'what happened next' in the real context. So, we should read into our understanding of the ending the fact that Wani has just left Nick 'the Clerkenwell building' in his will, an office space which is sure to double in value in the coming years of financial stability (Gilbert, 2015: 21). As Marsh points out, Nick literally gains agency by becoming a property agent; a fiscal upswing awaits him beyond the pages of the novel, which ends 'by implicitly acknowledging the possibility of recovery, the resurgence of the healthy body' (Marsh, 2011: 312). Although Marsh is referring to fiscal recovery here, the novel ends in 1987: this year saw FDA approval of the first HIV therapy, AZT, the start of widespread activism and public recognition of the disease (Avert, 2015); perhaps, the end of the beginning. Nick, who has already been tested for HIV once and been clear (2005: 285), may not be HIV-positive, and if he is, he may be amongst the first wave to gain treatment. For Lukàcs, one of the goals of historical fiction is that it 'represents historical process, and in doing so gestures towards actual historical progress' (de Groot, 2010: 29). By choosing to end *The Line of Beauty* in 1987, Hollinghurst opens up the possibility of a positive interpretation beyond the pages of the text. In contrast to *The Swimming Pool Library*, we close our reading of *The Line*

of Beauty knowing that help is on the way, in historical terms, for the lone gay protagonist.

Returning to the final paragraph of *The Line of Beauty* and the question of style as a blank pane, we can also find hope in the fact that Nick *feels* something:

> It was a sort of terror, made up of emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity; but he felt that the self-pity belonged to a larger pity. It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional. He stared back at the house, and then turned and drifted on. He looked in bewilderment at Number 24, the final house with its regalia of stucco swags and bows. It wasn't just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful.
>
> (Hollinghurst, 2005: 501)

For Nick-the-aesthete-and-imitator to experience any kind of overwhelming emotion, authentically, for the first time, signals that he may be through the 'crisis' of his style obsession. A 'love of the world' that is 'shockingly unconditional' could represent his connectedness; an abrupt understanding of the asymmetries he's been sheltering under *chez* Fedden. The 'regalia' of 'stucco swags and bows' of Number 24, which might be seen as proof that he's focusing on his old problem of aesthetic style, Nick now sees as 'bewildering'. In appreciating 'not just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all', Nick makes a claim on the beautiful that's beyond his usual narrow aesthetic sense; and thus a loving claim for an appreciation of style, both in writing and life, as an agent of positive change.

Re-reading the ending of *The Line of Beauty* as 'style-positive', I can make a claim for sinuous writing as a 'love of the world'. This re-reading will allow me to think about the place of style in *Julia Lindqvist*, as well as how the period in which the novel is set might influence how we interpret the ending.

6. Spectrality and Sleight-of-Hand Romance: *Affinity* Comes Back

I began this study by looking at negative reader responses to *Affinity*. Here, I try to explain these responses. Considering the end of the novel against Radway's study of romance readers, I argue that *Affinity* mobilises romance tropes only to reveal itself to be a 'failed romance'. I also examine Waters' sophisticated use of lesbian spectrality in the text – in particular, the ways in which she mobilises what is ghostly and vaporous to seduce the reader into the romance plot.

Affinity, Waters' second novel, drips with the Gothic sensibility of its Victorian London setting. When we meet the main character, Margaret Prior, she is putting herself back together after a failed suicide attempt, prompted by a dual bereavement: the death of her father and the abandonment of her lover, who has married Margaret's brother. Margaret Prior becomes a charitable visitor at Millbank Prison, where she meets the fake medium Selina Dawes. They begin (as far as Margaret is concerned) an emotional affair, and Margaret cashes in her inheritance so that she and Selina can run away to the Continent together. Through an escalating fog of opiates and depression, Margaret comes to believe that Selina's spirit powers will allow her to escape Millbank. However, in a bravura twist, it is not with Margaret but with Margaret's lady's maid, Ruth Vigers, that Selina flees. Vigers, who has a longstanding relationship with Selina, has engineered a real, corporeal escape, stealing the money and dresses Margaret had put aside for her own flight. In despair, Margaret decides to end her life. Bracketed by suicide attempts, beset by spirits, set in dank neo-Victorian London, it isn't surprising that Palmer situates *Affinity* as 'lesbian gothic' (Palmer, 2010: 1).

Affinity makes knowing use of one of the Gothic's key tropes: the ghost. In the novel, Selina, the medium, is associated with conjuring up the dead and possessing spiritualist powers, whilst Margaret becomes, through her painful romance:

> […] paler each day.
> My flesh is streaming from me. I am becoming my own ghost!
> I think I will haunt this room, when I have started my new life.
>
> (Waters, 2002: 289)

However, from the start of the novel, there has been the suggestion of something spooky about Margaret. Her servant Boyd gives notice and leaves the house, fearing loud noises heard late at night: 'She said it has 'turned peculiar' since Pa died' (2002: 56). Yet it is quickly established that Margaret is the only person who is awake at that time: '"You sit very late, Margaret. Have you heard nothing?"' (2002: 57). It is possible that, even in this early stage of the book, Margaret is already the one doing the haunting. This association between lesbian characters and spectrality is nothing new, as Castle makes plain in her seminal study of the 'ghosting of the lesbian' (Castle, 1993: 31). Lesbian characters throughout Western Anglophone literature are portrayed as spectres haunting the text: 'What better way to exorcise the threat of female homosexuality than by treating it as ghostly?' (1993: 31). In *The Apparitional Lesbian,* Castle remains pessimistic about what this might mean for lesbian representation in novels. However, she allows that, reappropriated by a sympathetic author, this trope might be turned on its head: 'the feeble, elegiac waving-off – the gesture of would-be exorcism – becomes instead a new and passionate beckoning' (1993: 46). In other words, there may be a way to harness the powerful potential of haunting to give lesbian characters agency in the text. For Derrida, ghostly things are not so insubstantial and powerless: 'the spectre is a paradoxical embodiment, the becoming-body; a certain fleshly, phenomenal manifestation of the spirit' (Derrida, 1993: 25, my translation). Haunting is, for him, something like an ethical injunction: it 'remains in place as a powerful force of displacement, as that disfiguring of the present, as the trace of non-identity within identity, and through signs of alterity, otherness, abjection or revenance' (Wolfreys, 2002: 6). Haunting becomes a lens through which to better understand, and reclaim power for, the Other. In Jameson's famous formulation, spectrality is:

> What makes the present waver: like the vibrations of a heat wave through which the massiveness of the object world – indeed of matter itself – now shimmers like a mirage.
>
> (1995: 38-39)

For Freccero, the presence of the spectre might help 'open us up to porous, permeable pasts and futures […] that enable us to mourn and also to hope' (2006: 69).

In *Affinity* the reader is focused, through identification with Margaret, on the idea that spirits really do exist. However, at the end of the text, spiritualism is revealed to be a trick, and if there is any magic, it's sleight of hand: one lesbian couple, Margaret and Selina, disappears and another, Selina and Ruth, takes their place and escapes. The text moves from the scene of the ethereal and ghostly, with Margaret supposing that Selina will be able to feel her soul departing from her body ('I wonder: when the thread grows slack, with you feel it?' (Waters, 2002: 351)), to an entirely more fleshly place. Selina and Vigers are holed up in her room: 'Ruth is lying on my bed with her shoes kicked off. She is smoking one of Peter's cigarettes.' The last line of the text also gestures to the body: '"Remember," Ruth is saying, "whose girl you are" (2002: 352). For Arias and Pulham, the text has led us into a trap: 'we are prepared […] to believe that Selina is able to contact the spirit world and transplant herself to Margaret's bedroom rather than acknowledge the presence of the servant woman Ruth Vigers' (Arias and Pulham, 2009: 30). At the end of the text, as Eve points out, there is a ghost in the house, but it isn't who we think (2013: 119). Reader 'Electric Barbarella' comments: 'I formed an impression […] that […] to be a lesbian in love was to be a lesbian alone' ('Electric Barbarella', Gingerbeer: 2008). This is incorrect: there is a happy ending, just not for the character with whom we most identify.

In *Affinity,* what is ghostly and vaporous is aligned with romantic feelings. At the time of *Affinity*'s publication, one critic called it 'a love letter to gothic fiction' (Hoggard, 2008). Palmer places *Affinity* within a genealogy of novels including *Rebecca* - perhaps the *ur*-text of gothic romance (2010: 1). As suspenseful, 'dark, paranormal' and 'anguish-filled' as the novel is, it is also a romance plot. In the classic study *Readers and their Romances*, Radway's focus group defined a romance as 'a slowly but consistently developing love between hero and heroine' (Radway, 1984a: 589). The key to the romance plot was that the text should chronicle 'not merely the events of a courtship but *what it feels like* to be the *object* of one' (1984a: 589). Lest we be wary of mapping hero/heroine directly onto heroine/heroine, we find the importance of feelings echoed in lesbian romance fiction: 'Romances revolve around their own specific structure of feeling, located at plot-level' (Hermes, 1992: 62).

Affinity's love plot drives the reader towards a union between Selina and Margaret. It emphasises love as a phantomatic, insubstantial feeling, an ethereal affinity between twin souls:

> With Selina's green eyes upon me, I did not think…I looked only at her, heard her voice only; and when I spoke at last, it was to ask her this: 'How will a person know, Selina, when the soul that has the affinity with hers is near it?'
>
> She answered, 'She will know. Does she look for air, before she breathes it? This love will be guided to her; and when it comes, she will know. And she will do anything to keep that love about her, then. Because to lose it will be like a death to her.'
>
> (2002: 210-211)

Radway writes that sex in the romance novel should be 'sensual, romantic, breathy', with an 'understanding of female *emotions*: hesitancy, doubt…confusion, loss of control, exhilaration' (1984a: 593): 'Does she look for air, before she breathes it?' Sex, which is prevented by the bars separating Margaret and Selina, is transmuted into breathiness:

> She ran, and leaned to the wall, until her face was close to mine and her breath came on to me.
>
> I said, 'I'll do it. I'll go with you. I love you, and I cannot give you up. Only tell me what I must do, and I will do it!'
>
> […] My soul left me – I felt it fly from me and lodge in her.
>
> (2002: 280)

Breathiness is a common trope of lesbian romance fiction: 'although every part of the body can be and is named, in the description of sex scenes something has to remain covered up, hidden in the mutual understanding of reader and writer' (Hermes, 1992: 59).

Radway's readers reacted very strongly against what she terms 'failed romances' (1984a: 578). The most important criterion in defining a failed romance was the novel's ending. Asked to select the three most important ingredients in a romance, 22 out of the 40 women chose 'a happy ending' as the most important feature, with 32 women listing it in one of their top three choices (1984a: 586). Asked to choose three things that ought *not* to be included in a good romance, the Smithton women selected

rape scenes first, and a sad ending a close second (1984a: 590): not just prioritising a happy ending but also explicitly rejecting an unhappy one. This echoes some of the more conservative Goodreads and Gingerbeer reader reactions to *Affinity* cited in Chapter 2. 'Electric Barbarella' writes: 'I guess I'm a romantic at heart and dagnamit, I like happy endings' ('Electric Barbarella', Gingerbeer: 2008). Radway considers that her readers disliked unhappy endings because they enforced 'the need to accept distraction, sorrow and imperfection as inevitable components of adult human existence' (1984b: 163), leaving the readers feeling that they had been led astray by such texts, which, like *Affinity,* initially seemed to promise (literal) escapism. *Affinity* functions in at least two genres, including Gothic thriller and romance fiction, and one could argue that the readers protesting the unhappy ending have been reading it as a romance. Readerly pleasure must be taken on the plane of sophistication, from the text's thriller elements, rather than breathless romance. As Hermes writes in *Lesbian Romance Fiction*: 'I like a romance to adhere to the rules of the genre and give me my, admittedly conservative, reader pleasure' (1992: 65).

This readerly pleasure may be conservative in other ways, to do with class and gender non-conformism. As well as being a domestic servant, Ruth is also written as butch – at least, more butch than Margaret. This is signalled by emphasis on her physical strength - 'Look at my great arm' (Waters, 2002: 174), and her appetite for cross-dressing as Peter Quick, Selina's fake spirit guide (2002: 346–347). Ruth is at certain points in the text identified with Peter so as to almost fuse them together: 'I saw Ruth's eye […] & then Peter Quick's voice might have come whispering the words in my own head' (2002: 232). There may be an unease here for the reader in substituting a bookish, but still femme-y, spinster for a more classically lesbian stereotype.

This romantic misreading might have a particular sting in the tail for queer readers. Radway notes that heterosexual romance plots depend on acts of misreading: a heroine fails to realise that the hero's taciturnity actually means he is deeply in love with her, until the ending, at which point there is a happy revelation (Radway, 1984a: 597). In lesbian romance fiction of the 1980s, Hermes writes, these misreadings were transmuted into the heroine misunderstanding her own sexuality: the obstacle became her own coming-out process (Hermes, 1992: 60). In *Affinity*, there are no

such questions around coming-out. Margaret and Selina are both comfortable with their feelings, and neither experiences shame. The reader sees - or thinks they see - the two female leads falling in love, without misreading each other. Like the rest of the Waters canon, *Affinity* is concerned with different acts of reading. As Palmer notes, erotic and sexological texts are a key feature of *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith*'s labyrinthine plot arguably turns on the disparity in literacy between the two heroines (Palmer, 2008: 70). *Affinity* stages a huge number of different texts: it is set up as competing and (ultimately) converging diary entries from the two leads (Palmer, 2008: 71), not to mention the letters Margaret receives from her former girlfriend and now sister-in-law. A complex system of intertextual allusions is brought into play, some of which are clues - we can read in 'Peter Quick' a direct reference to Peter Quint, the wicked and ghostly servant in *Turn of the Screw* – and some of which mislead. For example, we initially misread the poetry that Margaret refers to - Keats' 'The Eve of St. Agnes' (2015) - as placing she and Selina as the fleeing phantom lovers, only to realise that it refers to Selina and Vigers (Waters, 2002: 313). References to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, introduced via Margaret taking the nickname 'Aurora', also encourage a reader to (mistakenly) place Margaret and Selina as characters who will flee to the Continent together.

The attention to different kinds of texts serves to foreground the fictionality of Waters' fiction *as* metafiction, and is one of the ways in which she 'bowls her fiction at an academic discourse' (Eve, 2013: 121). Yet these many references may also give us a teasing clue as to the importance of different reading acts. The substitution trick substitutes our dominant readings for catastrophic mis-readings. If the romance plot is dependent on a sustained act of misreading, without which it cannot advance, *Affinity*'s ending turns this strategy on its head: incredibly, the heroine really does love someone else, after all. For a queer reader, the everyday act of being queer entails constant reading and re-reading, an alertness to the ambivalence of situations: 'every sign becomes duplicitous, slipping back and forth across a wavering line' (Beaver, 1981: 105). Juhasz highlights the importance of 'reading against the grain' as a queer reading strategy, in which a queer reader may look for gaps in the heterosexual plot (1998: 66). *Affinity* lulls such a reader into a false sense of security, only for them to find they 'should' have been reading against the grain all along.

Ahmed's work on politically productive endings teases apart our cultural understanding of happiness and 'goodness' as naturally aligned, as a means of reclaiming the 'unhappy queer ending' (2009). Yet she also has this *cri de coeur*, reading *The Well of Loneliness*, which seems to speak directly to the Goodreaders'/Gingerbeerers' feelings about *Affinity*: 'Every sad book has its moments, the moments when it is all "too much," when a life, a body, a world, becomes unbearable. Turning points are usually breaking points' (2009: 11). The *too-muchness* of *Affinity* - 'This sense of emptiness and despair I am left with is so overwhelming right now...' ('Tatiana', Goodreads: 2011) – proceeds directly from its turning point. Readers who have been absorbing the book as a romance have their expectations confounded by *Affinity*'s 'cruel trick' (Hoggard, 2008) ending, due in no small part to Waters' sophisticated mobilisation of lesbian spectrality first in the service of, and then against. The act of substitution of one lesbian couple, just as it asks the valid question *an unhappy ending for whom?* rides roughshod over the structure of feelings evoked by the book's romance plot, recategorising it as a 'failed romance', and challenging the implicit assumptions in our various reading strategies.

The text of *Affinity* therefore works in multiple ways: as thriller, as gothic, gothic romance, and 'failed' romance, and indeed, as a kind of comment on genre and categorisation, and the ways in which we are continually led back to genre as a map through a book. The 'turning point' exposes the importance of novels' endings as carrying enormous affective freight; in *Affinity*, this is when the feelings of the book break out into eerie, sentient materialisation – 'it wants you to be sad' ('S.S.', Goodreads: 2012). It is the point at which the boundaries of the book are thinnest: it is not just a book, but 'a life, a body, a world' (Ahmed, 2009: 11). In Chapter 8, I will consider what this critical re-reading of *Affinity* has meant for my writing of the ending of *Julia Lindqvist*, with reference to how I might manage reader expectations of genre, and how I might harness the possibilities of lesbian spectrality.

7. The False Wall: Virus, Supplement and *Carol*'s Afterword

The question of genre and endings is also key to any discussion of *Carol*, and I now want to turn towards the scene of lesbian pulp fiction. Patricia Highsmith's *Carol* was first published pseudonymously, as Claire Morgan's *The Price of Salt*, in 1952. Like so many pulps, it sold extremely well - half a million copies by 1958 (Keller, 2005: 403). Lesbian pulp fiction in the 1950s and 1960s was big business. Between 1950 and 1965, there were an estimated 500 books containing lesbian representation, with sales figures comparable to a boom (Keller, 2005: 388). Pulp author Vin Packer's *Spring Fire,* published in 1952, sold more than 1.5 million copies. Meanwhile, Tereska Torres sold two million copies of *Women's Barracks* in the United States between 1950 and 1955: the same number as Khaled Hosseini's bestseller *The Kite Runner*, except that the population of the US at the time was only 55%-60% of today's figure (Seajay, 2006: 18).

Serious critical attention has been given to how the act of reading lesbian pulp fiction may have contributed to the formation of lesbian subjectivity. Some scholars consider lesbian pulp's impact to be ambivalent, citing homophobic practices within the text, the assumed 'voyeuristic appeal to a heterosexual male audience' (Keller, 2005: 385). Yet there is also evidence that for many women, reading pulp may have given them their first real sense of a lesbian community – 'signs of a secret history of readers' (Foote, 2005: 178). Carol Seajay talks about finding a pulp novel in 1966 and discovering an entirely new way of life: 'I was thrilled by what I read: that we could support ourselves and make our lives together, and that there were many women like us' (2006: 18). For reader Donna Allegra, pulps were the only place in which she could locate 'the possibility of a lesbian happily-ever-after, when I was a teen' (Allegra, 1981 *cited in* Keller, 2005: 385).

Reading-as-self-discovery became so ingrained that it started to be reflected back to the reader, playfully, in the pulps themselves. In *A World Without Men*, the main character, Kate, reads pulps voraciously as a way of entering a community: 'It was a

world along whose borders she had walked for a long time, without ever really finding a gate that opened in' (Miller, 2001: 37). But these readings-within-books also talk about the ambivalence of the reading experience – locating that ambivalence towards the books' endings. We find Beebo Brinker, Ann Bannon's famous butch, reading a lesbian pulp and Beebo gives particular attention to the sense of the ending: 'It hit me so hard,' she says of the lovers' suicidal separation at the end of the tale, 'I wanted to die, too' (Bannon, 1962, *cited in* Foote, 2005: 169). Real-life reader Seajay also reacts to the typically tragic ending of pulps: she 'trains' herself to read them only as far as the last twenty pages, 'to avoid sharing the lesbian protagonist's inevitable tragic end' (Seajay, *cited in* Foote, 2005: 176). As John Mullan writes, the 'feelings' of the reader of narrative satisfaction or otherwise are often focused on the endings of novels (Mullan, 2006: 303). In lesbian pulp fiction, there is more than just readerly pleasure at stake, precisely because the reading experience is so tied up with 'feelings' and the formation of subjectivity.

Like the readers, *Carol's* heroine, Therese, discovers herself through the novel's plot. She meets Carol whilst working in a department store, and they quickly form a friendship, then a romantic bond, which ends in a *Lolita*-esque road trip across America. During this trip, they realise they have been followed and spied upon by a private detective hired by Carol's soon-to-be-ex husband, Harge. Harge uses the trip as proof of Carol's 'degeneracy' and sets new terms for their imminent divorce: she must either choose to make a life with Therese or give up visiting rights to the child she has with Harge. *Carol's* ending is therefore embittered by the fact that Carol must give up custody of her daughter. Nevertheless, unlike the majority of pulps, the novel prioritises lesbian romantic happiness over a conventional heterosexual resolution. The two protagonists are 'going to try to have a future together' (Highsmith, 2005: 308); neither is suicidal, and neither wants to leave the other for a man. Christopher Nealon, writing about reappropriation of lesbian pulp in the present day, argues that we do so under the sign of 'camp pleasure' (Nealon, 2000: 745). We buy fridge magnets featuring pulp covers; we read the books with one side of the face laughing at the stilted language, the melodrama. However, reading the novel fifty-plus years after initial publication, it's hard not to be charmed by the passionate declaration of the final paragraph, as Therese walks into the hotel bar and thus chooses Carol:

> …it was Carol she loved and would always love…it was still Carol and no one else. It would be Carol in a thousand cities, a thousand houses, in foreign lands where they would go together, in heaven and in hell
>
> (Highsmith, 2005: 307).

The novel ends with Therese walking towards Carol and a lesbian future – at least, in the original edition.

However, in 1984, *The Price of Salt* was republished as *Carol*, under Highsmith's own name. We can say that where the novel 'ended up' – the artefact's cultural trajectory - was changed. Reassigned to Highsmith, retitled, *Carol* was reclaimed as 'literature', by a certain movement of disavowal, from its pulp origins. Yet, crucially, the text changed too. *Carol*'s 1984 edition features an Afterword, written by Highsmith, which occupies the last few pages of the book, and has been included in all subsequent printings.

How are we to interpret the general fact of an afterword? Royle suggests that everything that is 'peritext' – epilogue, foreword, afterword - falls under the logic of the Derridean supplement. Standing in uncanny relation to the rest of the text, afterwords are paradoxical: 'what is added on to something in order further to enrich it *and* what is added on as a mere 'extra' (Royle, 2003: 48). The supplement is haunting: 'it forms part without being part, it belongs without belonging' (2003: 49); the supplement is an untamed disease. Endlessly adding on material to the 'body' of the text, it replicates 'like a virus' (2003: 58).

Writing about the inspiration for *Carol*, narrator-Highsmith opens the Afterword by saying she was 'vaguely depressed' (Highsmith, 2005: 308), and working in a department store - like the heroine of the novel, Therese. Again, like Therese, Highsmith glimpses the archetype for Carol across the shop floor: a blonde, wealthy female shopper. She immediately starts to feel ill: 'I felt odd and swimmy in the head, near to fainting, yet at the same time uplifted, as if I had seen a vision' (2005: 309). Highsmith has contracted chicken pox, and starts to write *Carol* at the same time as she gets sick: 'the germ' as she says, 'of a book' is born from the experience of disease (2005: 310). She devotes most of the rest of the paragraph to a detailed

description of the pox: 'ears and nostrils are covered or lined with pustules that itch and burst' (2005: 309). She then makes a somewhat unusual move, leading directly into a discussion of how she is categorised as a writer: 'If I were to write a novel about a lesbian relationship, would I then be labelled a lesbian book-writer?' (2005: 310). It isn't just the pox that is contagious – she might be infected by the 'lesbian book-writer' genre – in the same way as she worries that her face will be marked by illness, leaving her with visible signs of difference: 'looking as if one has been hit by a volley of air-gun pellets' (2005: 309).

Disease is an anxiety for the text as a whole. Going to Carol's house for the first time, Therese feels unwell and has to be tucked up in bed and given hot milk; illness is persistently, queasily mapped onto lesbianism (2005: 65). Carol says of her previous affair with a friend, Abby, 'it lasted only two months, like a disease that came and went' (2005: 207); Therese struggles to identify her own feelings for Carol, much as one might try to diagnose an illness: '…I don't know, why not call it love, it had all the earmarks' (2005: 207). Richard, Therese's boyfriend, goes further. He describes Therese's relationship with Carol as 'sordid and pathological', and significantly, in terms of contagion: it 'makes me not want to touch you or anything concerned with you' (2005: 265). Given the long history of writing about lesbianism as sexology, as medicalised, it isn't very surprising that illness becomes one way to think through sexuality in the book. But it is surprising to find the infection infecting the Afterword, and therefore the very last words in the book – reinflecting the 'happy ending'.

Following directly from the discussion of chicken pox and being 'labelled', the second part of the Afterword begins with another kind of rejection, by a publisher: *The Price of Salt*, Highsmith tells us, was originally rejected by Harper & Bros (2005: 309). Mary Esteve writes that in the Afterword to *Carol,* 'defensive vanity gives way to more dignified pride when Highsmith describes the stream of fan letters' she received (Esteve, 2012). It is true that Highsmith elaborates, in the final paragraph, on the positive reception her book elicited from fans, who were thrilled with its resolution: '"Yours is the first book like this with a happy ending! We don't all commit suicide and lots of us are doing fine"' (2005: 311). However, it is more difficult to locate 'dignified pride' in what follows. Highsmith takes shelter behind

her pseudonym: she notes that the fan letters arrived 'addressed to Claire Morgan' (2005: 310), and admits that she has not fully engaged with the correspondence: 'A lot of them I answered, but I could not answer them all without a form letter, which I never arranged' (2005: 311). She considers the fact that there were 'as many letters from men as from women' to be 'a good omen for my book' (2005: 311). She ends the afterword taking steps away from *Carol*:

> I never wrote another book like this. My new book was *The Blunderer*. I like to avoid labels. It is American publishers who love them.
>
> (2005: 311)

Highsmith's ambivalent feelings around interacting with readers and publishers are surely not unusual – particularly given the political context in which she was writing, and her identification as a 'genre' writer. As Esteve notes, categorisation also plagues Highsmith in her writing manual, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* (Esteve, 2012), in which she relates how, since *Strangers on a Train*, her fiction has been repeatedly labelled as 'suspense' in the US, which has meant she does not receive serious critical attention (Highsmith, 1983: 134). She contrasts (queer) 'suspense' with 'straight' fiction, and fears being overly identified with the former, in much the same way as one fears prejudice due to being identified as a lesbian: 'Some readers would not dream of buying a mystery or suspense novel…because they don't like "that type of book"' (1983: 136). Highsmith ends by disconnecting herself from the suspense genre: 'I do not take myself seriously as a suspense writer as to category…' (1983: 140). The last words in *Carol* are '24 May 1989', situating the text temporally and culturally (2005: 311). Highsmith reappropriates her own work thirty years later; as Nealon suggests, somewhat ironically and through taking a certain distance, rather than embracing it with kitsch affection.

Just as Highsmith worries about being mislabelled, mis-seen, misunderstood as an author, Therese worries about being 'seen through', in relation to her sexuality: 'she felt the woman's eyes could not look at anything without understanding completely' (2005: 47). Eyes are also following Carol, who feels that there should be no shame to being homosexual except 'in the eyes of the world' (2005: 210). This surveillance paranoia reaches its climax when Therese and Carol set off on a road trip together – followed by a detective hired by Carol's husband. This road trip should be a release,

but, as Hesford points out, 'the America they see…is the America of the private detective, the regulatory space of heterosexual norms and middle-class hegemony' (Hesford, 2005: 230). Metaphors of intrusion accumulate throughout the book – in a conversation between Carol and Therese towards the end of the novel, they are unable to talk because Carol fears the phone is tapped (Highsmith, 2005: 269); they discover that they have been overheard in their hotel room because the detective has taken the room next to them and drilled a spike into the wall as a means of listening in (2005: 297). In *How Novels Work*, Mullan includes a definition of the false ending: 'an apparent conclusion that is provided only in order to be unsettled by the true ending' (Mullan, 2006: 311). The outside boundary of the text becomes – like a false wall – flimsy. It is possible to listen through it to the 'real' conclusion, which is always happening elsewhere. Thus the Afterword of *Carol* replaces the textual ending of *Carol.* Instead of finishing with the lovers' happily being reunited, in fact we end the book with an anxious statement by the author about sexuality, genre and authorial identity.

But if one false wall, why not more? We could argue that the Afterword is not the ending of *Carol*, either. Following the logic of the constantly replicating supplement, just after the Afterword comes 'A Note on the Author' (2005: page not numbered). Including a short piece of biographical information, it makes no mention of *Carol* or Highsmith's earlier work apart from *Strangers on a Train* (which it notes was filmed by Hitchcock) and then moves swiftly to *The Talented Mr Ripley*, 'who was to appear in many of her later crime novels' (2005: page not numbered). This brief piece of peritext confirms Highsmith's fears about being situated as a suspense author, and works to undermine the Afterword she has written, in exactly the same way that the Afterword undermines the romantic 'happy ending' which has come before. We could go on. Why not include in the text the back matter advertisements which follow the Note on the Author, featuring a graphic of four other Highsmith reissue covers? Or the blurb on the back of the book (ironically the point at which many readers really 'start' a book, casually browsing in a store)? What we learn from *Carol*'s afterword may not really be to do with authorial anxiety - or the reversal of an apparently happy ending - but to do with the difficulty of deciding where books end at all.

In so deciding, it is clear that supplementary matter – including what the author goes on record as saying about their own book – must come into play in the question of the happiness, or otherwise, of the ending. In Chapter 9, I return to a discussion of how I might mobilise the potential of the peritext, the supplement and authorial persona in relation to the ending of *Julia Lindqvist*.

8. Ending *Julia Lindqvist*

The original ending of *Julia Lindqvist* came to me within the first six months of writing, from that strange place that Sontag refers to: 'I experience the writing as given to me – sometimes almost as dictated' (2012: 123). In the penultimate scene, Nana would go to see a film that dramatises her and Julia's life; after the showing, she would meet Per Lindqvist, now a great age, and they would reminisce. The book would end with Nana dying peacefully in her sleep. Her granddaughter, Astrid, would be present, and Nana's last thoughts would be of Julia:

> [The photograph] lands face up. She thinks, *it's Julia,* looking at the woman's wide smile. She remembers Julia standing by the apartment window, holding, jiggling the baby, who has just had a crying storm. *Julia Lindqvist.*
>
> Her chest heaves. There is very little feeling left in her arms and legs. Just the sounds are left: a clock, the rattle of the baker's shutter being pulled down, the tenants in the flat below arguing softly. In the street outside, a car has parked for a moment, leaving its engine running.
>
> (Hitchman, 2017b: 384)

At plot level, this ending initially felt satisfying in four main ways. Firstly, it seemed inevitable to me that both main characters should die at the end of the novel. I had thought of *Julia Lindqvist* as the drama of one long and successful relationship. Where most novels focus on romance and lead to an elopement, I wanted to see what could be dramatised from the romance on the other side of the elopement – the part where the work of marriage must be done. In this way, *Julia Lindqvist* would function as a kind of romantic anti-romance, the grown-up companion piece to my first novel *Petite Mort* (Hitchman, 2013).

Secondly, the play-within-a-play seemed to offer value. In the opening scene, Julia suggests that Per write about their separation ('*I know you don't understand*, she'd said, *maybe you could write a play about it*' (2017a: 8)). The episode is based on

August Strindberg's real-life divorce from Siri Von Essen, whose involvement with her friend Marie David was one of the causes of the marriage failure. Strindberg later dealt with the episode in fiction and plays including *Miss Julie* and *A Madman's Defence*, and these interventions did not show his wife in a positive light (Senelick, 2003: 7). The film-of-a-play in Julia Lindqvist, *The Orchard*, mimics this ('The ending is a deliberate act of violence she can't speak about' (2017b: 380)) and so also mimics the trope of the violent death of the lesbian character in fiction. To stage this within the text would draw attention to such a negative portrayal as the 'typical' ending of a novel, whilst also containing it. By having Nana walk out of the cinema and into her own life, it would underline the fact that such portrayals can be left behind: other narrative options are available.

Thirdly, I was attached to the possibility of Per Lindqvist reappearing at the end of the novel, even though we had long believed him to be dead. I had remembered reading Eugenides' *Middlesex* and admiring the parlour-trick of bringing back Cal's grandmother Desdemona: 'Patient reader, you may have been wondering what happened to my grandmother…' (2003: 521). This unforeseen character-revival gestures to the fact that the reader's attention cannot be everywhere, and to the idea of life going on elsewhere in the book, and therefore it suggested to me a more complete narrative imagining. In my favourite film, *Before Sunset* (Linklater, 2004), I also enjoyed the part where two characters nearly see each other again on the streets of New York, but it's a near miss. In the original conception of the novel as a love-triangle, I wanted to show that Per had come to Vienna in search of Julia ('It probably was her,' Nana says. 'I used to work at a factory at the edge of the Prater' (2017b: 380)).

Fourthly, although most of my critical research was still to be done, I was already in the business of not writing an undignified and painful end for a lesbian character which was not called for by the plot. I highlighted this by showing Nana's own matter-of-fact assessment of her dying: '…she has only just seen Astrid that morning. It could have been a lot worse' (2017b: 384). She remembers her life with Julia and their baby; the novel comes full circle to its title, *Julia Lindqvist*. The final line suggests futurity and an onward journey: 'a car has parked for a moment,

leaving its engine running' (2017b: 384). We might imagine the suspicion of an afterlife – that it is Julia in the driver's seat, waiting to take Nana away.

I can now see that the true gift of the first ending was neither the play-within-a-play, nor the reappearance of Per, nor the 'good death' of Nana: the gift was Astrid. It was a surprise to find that Nana had a grandchild. This fact set an endpoint for the novel, and the child had to be explained by what happened between beginning and ending. My recent re-reading of *Affinity* had signalled to me the importance of working in an identifiable genre, and of not disappointing readers who are expecting a romantic outcome. Whereas before I had conceived of *Julia Lindqvist* as a romance between two people, I now began to visualise a family saga: one complicated by what it means to be a family in a contemporary world. As Roof points out, recent examples of the family saga by Isabel Allende and Maryse Condé posit 'a redefinition of family which requires the reintegration of excluded members'. They further argue for a definition of family in which 'family is meaningful, but it is a flawed institution' (Roof, 1996: 283).

Genre also came into play when establishing the family structure on which the novel would now depend, and I turned to *Kissing the Witch* for inspiration. Given the historical setting, Julia and Nana's family could only be started through unconventional action. Not only would *Julia Lindqvist* no longer be a romance, it would also borrow fairy-tale genre elements for the baby kidnapping. Here, *Kissing the Witch* was useful not just for its cyclical structure, but for the feminist re-tellings of fairy-tales it offers. Changeling stories abound in Donoghue's work, with a twist: in 'The Tale of the Shoe', orphaned Cinderella fails to fulfill her destiny by marrying the prince but falls instead for the Fairy Godmother (Donoghue, 1998: 7-8); in 'The Tale of the Handkerchief', a princess confesses that she is adopted, not royal by birth: 'I have been a fraud from the beginning' (1998: 61). Donoghue restages *The Snow Queen*, in 'The Tale of the Brother', as a competition between two siblings who vie to be taken in by the mysterious stranger (1998: 107), and 'The Tale of the Spinster' restages Rumpelstiltskin, but ends with the narrator's baby being stolen by a servant. Like most fairy-tale elements, in Donoghue's tales there is something cruel to be navigated here, and I was aware that Julia and Nana's child-theft is an example of the 'unhappy for whom?' ending I considered in my reading of *Affinity*; there, the

happiness of one main character, Margaret, is sacrificed in the name of another couple in whom we are not, as readers, invested.

The plot decision to introduce Astrid, and the consequent re-genreing of *Julia Lindqvist*, set the stage for the final version of the ending, whose evolution I will now discuss. The last section of my novel opens with the title and date *Österreich ist frei! – 1958* (2017a: 299). Reading Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, it became clear to me that positioning a text within a certain historical context could alter the way its ending was read. By adding '1958', I wanted to introduce the reader to a Vienna which had survived the trauma of the War years and its subsequent division into four segregated blocks. The phrase 'Österreich ist frei!' refers to a 1955 speech given by Leopold Figls, announcing the restoration of sovereignty to Austria after seventeen years of post-World War II occupation (Figls, 1955). It is clear from the ending that the events of the War have left their trace: Peter is scarred, psychologically and physically, by his experiences as a pilot (2017a: 302) and Anders 'struggles with his nerves' (2017a: 309). However, an alert reader will recognise that, in 1958, the characters in the book will, for once, be on the edge of a period of relative prosperity. Post-1955, the Viennese economy began an upswing, due in part to help given by the Marshall Plan but also due to the departure of Russian troops; this new-found wealth is reflected in Rolf and Anders' upscale living circumstances ('The Garnerstrasse is a good address and Rolf is showing off to Peter' (2017a: 318)). Just as a part of Nick Guest's ending in *The Line of Beauty* is the fact of having inherited a block of flats from his lover, it felt important not to gloss over the importance of the characters' material circumstances in calibrating their ending.

Returning to my reading of *Kissing the Witch*, I remembered how satisfying it had been to have a sense of the story as a cycle. I connected this to the warm feeling I had re-reading *The Arrival Matters*, with its discussion of inheritors as a component of 'a good death' ('she will be your inheritor'). It is possible to draw a straight line from Miranda in *The Arrival Matters* to Astrid, who is seen as central to the continuance of this family unit: 'Where is Astrid? Everyone stops, glasses raised to their lips. Without Astrid they cannot go' (2017a: 320).

I also tried to echo something of *The Arrival Matters* in the performative nature of family in *Julia Lindqvist*, to emphasise the complicated nature of the family saga and the move beyond ideas of biological inheritance: just as in *The Arrival Matters*, Miranda is the narrator's 'inheritor' despite being not a physical relation, and Miranda's new family unit once the narrator has departed will be with the Magician, who isn't biological family. In the last section, I repeatedly emphasise Astrid's likeness to Julia: her sense of style, 'the straightness of her shoulders, the uncanny, red-gold hair' (2017a: 321). Astrid is not related to Julia, but she uncannily captures something of her nonetheless, suggesting that inheritance is a matter of nurture as well as nature. The use of Astrid's surname ('"Ladies and gentlemen," Signe says, "Miss Astrid Perret"' (2017a: 320) in a performative speech act that underlines that Astrid has taken Nana's name, despite not being a biological relation.

Like *Affinity, Julia Lindqvist* is a novel of a city in flux – Vienna rather than London – and haunted by various ghosts. Whereas in *Affinity,* lesbian spectrality is used to play a brilliant trick on the reader, I felt there were other possibilities here. Astrid's appearance, and the reaction it provokes, are an attempt to mobilise lesbian spectrality in the name of futurity and inheritance. Like Waters, I found myself using my spiritual inheritance, in the form of the work of other authors, to make a spectral point. Where Waters' text refers to the malicious ghosts of *Turn of the Screw*, I chose to retool a scene from Du Maurier's *Rebecca*. In the original, the unnamed narrator descends a staircase, dressed – although she doesn't know it – in clothes that have belonged to the villainous Rebecca; the spectators react with distress (Du Maurier, 2003: 239-240). The episode has been engineered to humiliate the narrator by Mrs Danvers, who is unhealthily preoccupied with the ghost of Rebecca. Rebecca is elsewhere characterised as 'not normal' (2003: 304) and 'like a boy' (2003: 272). When she meets her end, there is a suggestion of her bisexuality: '"But it wasn't a man, it wasn't a woman. The sea got her"' (2003: 272).

Rebecca becomes the queer ghost that haunts the text, and the scene where Astrid is announced by Signe deliberately recalls this. The party guests are assembled, as in *Rebecca*. However, rather than humiliating Astrid ('nobody clapped, nobody moved' (2003: 239)), in my version, Astrid's likeness to Julia provokes 'a shocked and loving silence' (2017a: 321). The spectre is welcomed into the house; Mrs Danvers is

rehabilitated as an adoring little sister – 'Signe helped me get ready' (2017a: 321). In this way, I attempt to reverse Castle's 'feeble, elegiac waving-off' and turn it into 'a new and passionate beckoning' (1993: 46): Astrid becomes Julia's spectral 'inheritor'.

We can also draw a straight line from *Kissing the Witch*, with its fairy-tale emphasis on cyclical story-telling, to Nana telling August the story of how she and Julia met:

> 'Let me tell you a story, *min August*, of a grandma who was once both.'
> Her voice is low and careful as she talks about two people meeting in an orchard on a hot summer's day. *It was August. Yes, like your name.* August, held around the waist, slumps against her, and listens with his eyes half closed.
>
> (2017a: 319)

This act of story-telling underlines August as another 'inheritor' of Nana and Julia's story and further complicates ideas of heredity: August's name, just like August, is a 'happy accident' of non-genetics. The story-telling also reclaims the tale of Julia and Nana as something that belongs to Nana.

In this version of the ending, it seemed appropriate to excise the film, with its gloomy and violent reappropriation of Nana and Julia's life story by Per. Whereas my initial strategy had been to show Nana walking away and disavowing the film of her life, I now saw no need to include a description of the screening. Instead of staging the film within the text, I keep it on the fringes of the novel as a future event. The contents of the film adaptation is not revealed, and including Per also no longer seemed relevant to the new conception of the novel as a family saga: 'The banner will say FROM THE ORIGINAL PLAY BY PER LINDQVIST but the only person on the banner will look like Julia' (2017a: 320). The screening becomes a place of promise, which Julia's family visit together in celebration of her life, rather than somewhere Nana must go alone: together, they experience the 'hushed magic of the cinema' (2017a: 320).

From my readings of *The Arrival Matters* and *The Line of Beauty*, I had gained an appreciation of how style might be mobilised as a loving gesture. Just like Nick Guest, Julia pays repeated attention to questions of style in clothing, music and

décor, as a foundational rather than superficial way to construct the world around her; Rolf relies on the appearance of wealth as a part of his subjectivity. In *The Line of Beauty*, style appears as a means to connect with beauty and the sublime ('It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional' (Hollinghurst, 2005: 501). Through Hollinghurst's prose, writing style becomes substance: 'the world is electrified in an arousal shared between reader and character' (Gilbert, 2015: 4). Reading the ending of *The Line of Beauty* is an experience infused with happiness because it is beautifully written, and I tried to recreate this feeling in my own ending to *Julia Lindqvist*. Hollinghurst's prose has been called 'impeccably textured' and 'ravishingly measured' (Dyer, 2011), so it can seem daunting to write in the shadow of his style. One of the elements of Hollinghurst's writing I most admire is his description of place, particularly as it pertains to the city environment: 'the Park itself seemed pensive, the chestnuts standing in pools of their shed leaves, the great planes, slower to change, still towering tan and gold' (2005: 443); 'the long neutral light grew more tender and burning as it touched the gilt handles of the fire-irons' (2005: 416). In these phrases, light becomes personified ('pensive', 'tender'). I felt myself echoing this in my own penultimate paragraph: 'Outside, the light hits them: the great boom of the city in summer' (2017a: 321).

Hollinghurst's writing pays close attention to gesture and physicality: 'Catherine, in her dark coat, made up, evangelical, had the confidence to pass anywhere,' (2005: 458); '"It was perfectly all right," said Lady Partridge, with her usual indifference to a kiss' (2005: 315); '"Welcome, welcome!" said Toby, in a weak flourish of good manners' (2005: 315). Drawing characters in such a vivid way invites the reader to judge them – even though they are fictional – with the moral complexity and nuance one would apply to real people. Applying this to my own work, though characters such as Elsa have made questionable decisions, I hope that describing them with similar close attention encourages the reader to reserve judgement: 'Elsa's eyes are overflowing with tears and her hands shake; she fumbles blindly in the air ahead of her, and then reaches for a handkerchief, which she holds to her nose' (2017a: 315).

In *The Arrival Matters*, style appears as camp, providing a way to negotiate death and love in a way that is oblique but complicated, serious but non-serious. *The Arrival Matters* stages a death scene as a performance: in a similar way, I stage the

'little death' of the end of my novel by assembling the cast of *Julia Lindqvist* and emphasising them 'getting into costume' ('A gloved hand appears in the frame' (2017a: 320), 'Nana comes tapping her gold-topped cane across the floor' (2017a: 319); 'they will be driven to the cinema and step out and be celebrities' (2017a: 319)). When Elsa says, of Julia, at the graveside, 'she always wanted to be seen in her best light,' (2017a: 314) I am mobilising an idea of style, not vanity, as an alternative way to approach dying, and as a valid, if arch, reason, for Elsa not to have visited. The arbiter of camp style in the text, Rolf, undercuts serious emotional discussions by commenting on Elsa's hair: 'My God, you need your roots done.' (2017a: 317). It is also to Rolf that we return at the end of the text, as he accompanies Nana down the steps to the waiting car. I chose to keep the image of the car with its engine running, as it seemed to me a still-useful symbol of movement and futurity. However, instead of invoking Julia at the end, the novel closes on an image of ceremonial friendship: '"Come on, old friend," Nana says, and with the lowest bow she can manage, escorts him to the car' (2017a: 321). In keeping with *Julia Lindqvist* as a family saga rather than a romance, the novel ends not with Julia Lindqvist but with her inheritors and all the complications of friendship and family that this entails.

Just as the novel complicates ideas of family and romance, my hope is that the ending of *Julia Lindqvist* tangles up, rather than flattens, our conceptions of what constitutes a 'happy' ending. Julia, the title character, has died – in this way, the novel matches the traditional outcome of a sad unhappy LGBTQ+-literature ending, which separates the romantic couple. However, there is no shame associated with Julia's death, which does not proceed from homophobia. The ending does not try to elide the depth of grief, but rather to allow the work of mourning and celebrate what she has given to those around her. By emphasising notions of camp, of performativity and style, I have tried to suggest an alternative view to the apocalyptic sense that the death of a main character is always an unhappy ending. As in *The Arrival Matters*, the character's death is part of an ongoing process of living, viewed with a certain stylish abandon; as in *Kissing the Witch*, there is a sense of a different, fairy-tale logic in the ending; as in *The Line of Beauty*, the prose style pays tender attention to questions of play, costume and uncertainty. Julia's life, and the life of the family that is ongoing, is held up to the light rather than kept in the dark.

9. First-Person Conclusion: 2017

I'm thirty-seven years old and I'm in Waterstones in Bristol's Broadmead Centre. I have twenty minutes before I have to meet my wife, who's shopping elsewhere. I'm looking for a present for a friend, who has recently been left by her partner, and needs to feel understood. I wander into the LGBTQ+ section and unhook a few different books from the shelves. *Will a happy ending make my friend feel more or less lonely? What is the specific kind of consolation she requires?* I pick one and go to the counter; hand over my money and the transaction – emotional, fiscal and cultural – has ended, and I haven't been afraid.

Many of the critical texts on queer unhappiness I have engaged with end on a recursive note. Freccero's study of queer spectrality argues that 'it is the very force from the past that moves us into the future […] blown backward by a storm' (2006: 104). Meanwhile, Love asks 'how to make a future backward enough that even the most reluctant among us might want to live there' (2009: 163). These endings are curious, Gatsby-esque in their hesitancy about the possibility of moving into the future, as they try to unpick the ethical knots of wanting to honour unhappiness in life and art, whilst allowing social progress. Perhaps this is because it is hard to suggest a happy ending which caters to every individual body in the body-collective. In *An Archive of Feeling*, Cvetkovich argues that lesbian cultures may be difficult to archive because 'they are lived experiences' (2003: 8) which have not 'solidified into institutions, organisations or identities' (2003: 9). This study began by locating the unhappy queer story within my own thirteen year-old self. With this

autoethnographic move, I wanted to gesture to the fact that any discussion of unhappy queer endings in fiction will be personal to *this* person; any approach to the subject must necessarily be filtered through one lived history. Indeed, we might say that this critical thesis, as much as the novel which accompanies it, is a work of historical fiction, in that it narrativises a period of critical research filtered through three years. My approach to endings, including *Julia Lindqvist*'s, will be nuanced by the evolution of my own life since 1994, and over the period of writing the PhD, with its many losses, including friends and family, and its many gains, including family, friends, and – it would almost be wilful at this point not to mention it – the happy ending that is my own happy marriage. In this way, the novel and critical study together have been an intervention of creative practice research, whose goal might be said to be 'making tacit knowledge available to research, because it includes the experiential part of knowledge which evades conventional communication' (Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes, 2007: 2). However, the process of making new knowledge through practice-based research has also come full circle, flowing back into my own experience. Along the lines of Haseman's formulation that 'practitioner-researchers do not merely 'think' their way through or out of a problem, but rather they 'practice' to a resolution' (Haseman *cited in* Barrett & Bolt, 2007: 147), and so the PhD project (novel as thinking-machine) brought to the surface my feelings around starting a family of my own.

Studying the unhappy queer ending seems ripe for expansion outside the limits of a three-year project and my own creative practice. One possible direction would be a wider qualitative study of creative practice by the chosen LGBTQ+ authors, extended to monograph length. This might include author interviews: these exist with Hollinghurst, Donoghue et al (Wheeler, 2004: 71–86; Ue, 2012: 101–106), but none focus specifically on the topic of the unhappy ending. Waters remains the most interviewed of my four living subjects, and has spoken about process in terms of the transition to bestselling author: 'More than ever before I was aware of an audience waiting for the next book and that was quite daunting' (Armitt, 2007: 117). She also begins to discuss the question of whom her books are 'aimed' at, and the question of a lesbian readership: '[…] if I'm imagining a reader at all, it is somebody with a similar collection of interests to me' (Armitt, 2007: 117). A series of interviews, and resultant analysis, might extend the findings of this study. There is also much work

to be done in other fields of fiction outside the literary, 'mainstream' and non-BAME-authored. Whilst my study touched tangentially on pulp fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, a wide range of other LGBTQ+ fiction has since made itself available via romance publishers. It would be interesting to consider the evolution of the un/happy ending within lesbian romance fiction – for example, by considering contemporary romance authors such as Melissa Brayden and Georgia Beers. Texts by BAME LGBTQ+ authors would also certainly prove fruitful, to consider cultural differences in how we approach endings and add to our collective knowledge in this area..

If we accept that any research is necessarily filtered through the lived experience of one author, we can also accept the productive possibilities this entails. Conspicuous by her absence in the discussion of the ending of *Julia Lindqvist* in Chapter 9 was my reading of Patricia Highsmith's ending to *Carol*, and I want to return to this here. In my Highsmith chapter, I examined how texts may be said to end. Following supplementary logic, they are continually being added to, by afterwords, indices, bibliographies, back matter, blurbs as well as by authorial interviews and reviews, all of which engage the reader in discussion outside the book. One such example was Highsmith's intervention via the Afterword, which nuanced my interpretation of the ending of her novel: I came to realise that I was reading the author as well as, or as part of, the book. For McCabe, 'the creation of an authorial 'persona' is arguably the principal means by which a poet [engages] in a dialogue […] through the contemporary reader' (2012: 1). As with *Carol*, interviews and interventions become woven into the fabric of the ending, as supplements to the novel. If, as Myers argues, 'authors are caught up in a stream of social media attention whether they participate or not' (2016: 486), how the ending of *Julia Lindqvist* is read will necessarily, helplessly be inflected by my own paratextual supplements in the future. Metaphors of ghostliness have been central to this study; books stay with us, even after their pages have been read – consider, for example, the ways in which the Goodreads participants responded to *Affinity* as a possessed object. It seems fitting, therefore, to end on the non-ending of a proposed haunting, and say that my book will never really be done with: perhaps the most productive application of lesbian spectrality is not Julia Lindqvist but *Julia Lindqvist*'s ghostly afterlife, and I am looking forward to it.

10. Appendix: First-Draft Ending of *Julia Lindqvist*

Nana is walking in the Renzenstrasse when she sees the poster. What a poster! Gold embossing for the title, and a picture of the lead actress. Red hair, oval pale face. The image makes Nana smile and bend over, leaning her stick into her ribs, the breath momentarily leaving her. And then text about the writer, and a small portrait next to the name, that makes her chuckle to herself in the street.

She goes home and when Astrid comes to prepare her lunch, she tells her she will go out that evening. Astrid is sceptical. Will she require a chaperone? Nana waves this away. Astrid rolls her eyes. *Yes, yes, I know. You were in the War.* They spend the afternoon playing dress-up. Nana makes Astrid lay out all her best suits, finger the stuff and select the correct cravat. Then it's five o'clock, and Nana banishes Astrid with a sprinkling wave. Has she got her stick? Yes, she has her stick. Will she need help knotting the cravat? She will not. *Go, go.* Astrid goes. She will be relieved, Nana knows: there has been a twinkle, a blush, in recent weeks. *I will be hard at work on my textbooks tonight*, Astrid sighs, smoothing back her hair. Nana smirks. She and Julia were both better liars.

The sun makes long bright bars on the faded carpet. The school playground next door opens its gates – a flood of noise – and then is still. It's time. Nana gathers

herself, remembers her stick, straightens her tie (pure reflex) and walks straight past the mirror in the hall. She knows how she looks.

Outside. Sugary smells from the baker on the corner. She crosses the Watzenkrasse and into the Mosellekirche square. Knots of crowds – bubbles of students, all so beautiful. Rationing is over and you can see it everywhere, in stronger limbs and brighter teeth.

Nana waves to the window where Frau Kirchner used to be, and crosses the street. She doesn't always remember to look the correct way – these endless trams and cars – but today she manages it. Someone says hello to her – a young man with a long nose and an elegant flower in his buttonhole – and she greets him in return. She senses his pain, his aloneness. He reminds her of someone. Then she passes on.

The cinema is on Mosellestrasse, and the whole front is lit, to show the film poster pasted above the doorway. The lips and hair of the star, leaning towards you, are luscious, enormous. There is a crowd out front, waiting for the doors to open – young men in flat caps, cigarettes dangling from their lips, eyes everywhere, to see who's watching.

Nana makes use of her stick. *Excuse me. I am old.* Amusement, at her strange figure, and then grudging respect. She should do this more often. Cheap thrills. *Epater la bourgeoisie.*

Two please. The teller looks bored, then narrow, for Nana is alone. Nana smiles patiently.

'You're lucky,' the young woman says, 'last two tickets.' Nana takes them and slips them into the inside pocket of her jacket.

Darkness in the auditorium. She feels the anxiety rising of being alone in the rustling black, with treacherous steps everywhere. She has been waiting outside, smoking a cigarette with a charming young man who asked her about her life, and in the pleasure of the telling – she has spared no detail of the furious description of the

War, then the empty spaces, the need to accommodate change – she has somehow made herself late. She is humiliated. She must ask someone for help. She asks an usherette – *so sorry, my eyes* – and picks her way along the rows until she finds the ticketed seats.

She ghosts a hand over the plush velvet of the empty seat she has reserved, apologising to whichever bright young thing has missed out because of her. She feels sentimental, and then alone, and then that others are disapproving of her foolishness. The curtains open and the film begins.

Flickering light. She had forgotten this pleasure, hasn't been to a film in years. Technicolour waves of sound: an orchestra playing a spiky, Peer Gynt score. Jagged mountain ridges; pan left to right. Imagined smells of mint, the alpine water.

Zoom in on an orchard, where two figures are taking tea. Nana keeps a smile plastered to her face, in case anyone is watching.

The lights go up and she looks this way and that. She has come here with vague challenging animosity and scorn. She would have said that if she didn't see him, it wouldn't matter. But now she is casting about for him, groping for him in the crowd.

His flyaway hair rises from the front row: he is accepting the praise from the flood of onlookers graciously. A young man is standing respectfully next to him, holding his coat, ready to catch him should he fall.

He looks around the auditorium with a blank expression. His gaze passes over her and registers nothing. His minder is leaning down to whisper in his ear, steer him away from the crowd. He bends to speak to one final person, and is led away. The people in the aisle part for him to pass and he makes a royal progress towards the back of the room. He nods to the projector and exits the room. Immediately the chatter rises. The students who have studiously ignored him break into excited noise. *Per Lindqvist himself.*

Nana moves after Per, and out into the lobby, in time to see him surrounded by a knot of obsequious, flustered cinema manager, reporters and admirers. The manservant stands patiently back. She stalks him: walks slowly down the steps and around him. He is speaking perfect, if accented, German – of course he is. He is inclined with perfect attention towards the bright young thing accosting him.

She goes out to the steps and lights a cigarette and blows plumes of smoke into the air. Eddies of leaves, lifting and falling in the square. The lime tree at the centre is festooned with small lights. One by one the last of the spectators leave and then finally he comes too, out through the door, which slaps closed behind him.

Leave us, he says to the manservant, eyeing Nana with the look one gives an old friend.

They walk through the dark-bright city. Per does not seem to notice the passing streets, or require a destination. Pleasantries are exchanged – it seems that pleasantries must always be exchanged - about the time of day, the film's director – *oh, very good, a bright young man* – and then Per veers towards an all-night cafe that could have been his choice all along.

It is warm enough to sit out, or at least Per sits without asking if she prefers an inside table, though he pulls his fine overcoat closely round him.

She notices that his face is softened but also peevish, and that his eyes water in the cold. A cataract is filming the right; the left remains bright and subtle. He looks about for the waiter, but accepts that there is nobody about at present without comment. He settles into his chair and she feels the old growing feeling, the pleasure and nervousness, of his total attention on her.

He will expect her to say that she enjoyed the film; but if she does he will know it is a lie. (In the film version, Julia and Nana do not elope; Julia's character tearfully bids Nana goodbye; Julia, exiled and mad with grief, shoots herself.) No. The ending is a deliberate act of violence she can't speak about. And this is a limited interval they

have together: soon the minder will appear, and there are other things she wants to say to him, and have him say to her, that are not about anger.

'Did you know I came after you,' Per says. He's smiling. One forefinger taps the edge of the table, as though he's lining up a joke. 'I asked the station-master where you'd gone and I came myself to Vienna on the next train. I searched, myself, for you both. I am convinced I saw her once, in the Prater, carrying a basket of food.'

'It probably was her,' Nana says. 'I used to work in a factory at the edge of the Prater.' She is amused too. Perhaps this is what she's been wanting: painstaking recovery, piece by piece. 'What made you give up looking?'

Per shrugs. 'Work,' he says, 'Work commitments. I was called to Berlin. I wrote a play. And there I made my home, amongst the Germans.'

He uses the feminine (German women). He smiles slightly. It's a piece of barefaced boasting. Nana's smile has a twist in it. Here, after all these years, is his Achilles heel: his vanity. She wonders how many women, whether there were children. She won't ask.

'And then the work is the work, you see,' he says. He is smiling at her kindly now, as if explaining it to a child.

'I saw one of your plays once,' Nana says. 'Here in Vienna. I didn't tell her I was going. *The Goblin King.*'

Of course he cannot resist. 'And?'

'I thought it was a good production.'

He smiles. 'The production. Yes.'

She realises he wants her to say more, about the writing, and about her life with Julia.

'Nana Perret, tailor,' he says.

'Used to be a tailor,' she says, smiling.

He shuts his eyes for a moment; a cat in the sun. 'Your clothes were beautiful. You should have kept it up.'

'I retired,' Nana says. She shows him her hands: arthritis. 'Our granddaughter cares for me.'

Silence. Per smoothes the tabletop. 'She wrote to me, when she was ill. Julia.' There is no emotion in the saying of the name. It stings Nana to hear him speak with an empty, careless friendliness. And because she didn't know about the letter.

'She said it was a problem with her eye. She joked it was a Biblical curse, for leaving me. She expected the operation to be a success and wished me well. She said she had been to see *The Goblin King* when it was in Vienna and thought it was stronger than my earlier works, but brittler. She said she could see that I'd aged.'

Nana wants there to be more. She wants Per to say: *and of course she said she loved you, and never had regrets.* But, even if there is more, he will just sit there with that bright expression, those interlaced hands. He would want her to use her imagination. If asked, he would say that everyone's feelings are a mystery and one might as well invent them.

Nana wants to say: *of course I hated you, the ghost of you, for years*, or perhaps *of course you were always with us, the wraith in the middle of the bed*, but she realises it isn't true, or not any more.

'How long will be you be in Vienna?'

'A week, perhaps.'

'And then?'

'Stockholm. I have my house, my permanent study, there.'

He smiles. It feels as though both are preparing to leave. The waiter has never arrived.

'Did you ever go back to Annecy?' Nana asks.

'No,' Per says. He seems surprised. All places, she thinks, to him are all places.

He gets to his feet. She stays sitting. She will have a cognac before the walk home.

'Nana Perret, tailor,' he says, with the faintest bow, and sets off across the square.

From the back, he looks exactly as he did. One of those moments: time unspools into itself, delivering a shock that rises in a wave from the feet.

One thing she has learned is not to let them swamp her, these feelings, with their inevitable pain. She lets the green smell of the orchard linger for just long enough, then raises her finger for the waiter.

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Nana, eighty-six, lives in a world of total feeling, in which words and names often fail to attach to things. She can remember the name of Astrid but even that needs a period of quiet reflection. Who is this kindly and accommodating young lady in Nana's kitchen, until: *It's Astrid. Your granddaughter. A medical student, of all things!* Even the name of the Person – the woman whose face she sees, whose photograph sits on every surface, polished by Astrid – even that name is rarely forthcoming. Nana knows the importance of the face. But that doesn't help her to remember why.

Nana wakes up and Astrid – whom she doesn't immediately know – is standing over her. 'Your tea is next to you,' she says, 'your book is on the footstool, can you reach? Shall I help you with anything else before this evening?' She means the commode. Nana beams at her; the prudishness of the very young. She smiles and says no.

'Then I'll see you tomorrow,' Astrid says confidently. She smiles her way to the door, wrapping a long woollen scarf around her neck several times. What long copper hair. Is still smiling on her way out. The dear, clever girl. The greatest

satisfaction of Nana's life, hers and – she lapses, feeling the memory, the thought, whatever it was, slip away. Everything she has felt seems to belong to someone else, and they are hiding it from her.

Nana sits still and listens to the afternoon. It is never really quiet here. The cries of the children in the park two apartment blocks away. The hum of the tramline singing as the tram approaches down the street. A bicycle whirring on the cobbles. Smells of cherry. Someone – the baker on the corner, or was that somewhere else? – is making Sachertorte.

She rarely worries. Only about Astrid, sometimes – is she wasting her life, looking after Nana? How will she find someone, if she works so hard at her studies?

Some time later Nana wakes up and feels faint. It is darker in the room. Evening? If so, then where is the girl? She should be here, bustling and scolding Nana about some wonderful little thing.

Nana's fingertips are numb, her feet are cold, she has tunnel vision.

Nana would have preferred not to have been alone when it happened. But then again, what an awful thing to wish on anybody, to watch them die, and she has only just seen Astrid that morning. It could have been a lot worse.

She has some vague idea of trying for the telephone, but only manages to knock the photograph off the table next to her chair.

It lands face up. She thinks, *it's Julia*, looking at the woman's wide smile. She remembers Julia standing by the apartment window, holding, jiggling the baby, who has just had a crying storm. *Julia Lindqvist.*

Her chest heaves. There is very little feeling left in her arms and legs. Just the sounds are left: a clock, the rattle of the baker's shutter being pulled down, the tenants in the flat below arguing softly. In the street outside, a car has parked for a moment, leaving its engine running.

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