



Gero Bauer

HOUSES, SECRETS, AND THE CLOSET

Locating Masculinities
from the Gothic Novel
to Henry James

[transcript] Lettre

From:

Gero Bauer

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»Houses, Secrets, and the Closet« investigates the literary production of masculinities and their relation to secrets and sexualities in 18th and 19th century fiction. It focusses on close readings of Gothic fiction, Sensation Novels, and tales by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, William Godwin, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, and Henry James. The study approaches these texts through the lens of domestic space, gender, knowledge, and power. This approach serves to investigate the cultural roots of the ›closet‹ – the male homosexual secret – which reveals a more general notion of male secrecy in modern society. The study thus contributes to a better understanding of the cultural history of masculinities and sexualities.

Gero Bauer is a research fellow at the Center for Gender and Diversity Research, University of Tübingen.

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Preface

This book is the revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which was accepted at the Faculty of Philosophy, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen in 2014.

I am immensely grateful to my supervisors, who helped me shape my ideas into what is now this book. Prof Ingrid Hotz-Davies at the University of Tübingen for humour, patience, and for the ability to always engage with even my most outrageous close readings. The idea for this project emerged from one of her seminars. Prof Mark Turner at King's College London for his enthusiasm, critical mind, and for supervising my work against all odds of university administration. Both were part of an ongoing and immensely fruitful conversation that gave me exactly the kind of environment I needed to push my work forward.

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Introduction

PRELUDE: BLUEBEARD

Once upon a time, there was a powerful count, who lived in a big castle. Nobody knew much about him, and everybody was afraid of him because of his blue beard. One day, the count went into the nearby village, and asked a young woman to marry him. She became his wife, and went to live with him. The count was kind and generous, albeit mysteriously secretive about his affairs. He allowed his wife to freely explore every part of her new home, and enter every room, except one, the key to which he always kept to himself. One day, the count had to go away for a few days. He trusted his wife with all the keys to all the rooms in the castle, but told her that, under no circumstances, must she use the little golden key to open the forbidden chamber. When the count was gone, curiosity overwhelmed the young woman, and she opened the count's secret room. In it, she found the corpses of several women, hanging from the ceiling, and the floor was covered in their blood. Shocked and frightened, the count's wife dropped the key in the pool of blood. The key was enchanted, and the young woman, try as she might, could not clean it from its stain. When the count returned, he demanded the key back from his wife. When he saw the blood, he knew what she had done. The cruel man revealed to her that every woman who entered the forbidden chamber despite his warnings would have to die, and her body would be locked away in that very room. The count dragged the crying woman to the room to kill her, but she asked him to spare her for one more day, so she could say her prayers, and die in peace. He agreed, and the resourceful young woman managed to ask her sister to get help. When the day of prayer was nearly over, the wife's brothers knocked down the castle's doors, killed the count, and rescued their sister. Bluebeard's spell was broken, and no more women would have to die at his hand.

Charles Perrault's "La Barbe bleu," the first written version of the story of Count Bluebeard – the Bluebeard 'ur-text,' so to speak – was published in Paris in 1697 in a collection of fairy-tales entitled *Les Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Perrault 1697). Based on an oral tradition of popular fairy-tales, Perrault's story has since

been retold countless times, and became a European – and, later, international – phenomenon. Although the tale’s adaptations and appropriations vary considerably, some particular elements are always the same: Bluebeard’s dark secret, the threat to the woman’s safety, and the secret’s ultimate disclosure. Emil Heckmann, in his impressive 1930 study on the literary history of the Bluebeard tradition, traces versions of the tale from central Europe to Africa, Turkey, and Palestine (cf. Heckmann 1930). Heckmann distinguishes between three ‘types’ of the Bluebeard story: the mythological variants, the main variants, and the Perrault variants (cf. Heckmann 1930: 19–20). This distinction is instructive, because it shows that the Bluebeard theme has not only been retold in the form of other fairy-tales – most prominently, maybe, in the Brothers Grimm’s tales “Fitcher’s Bird” (“Fitchers Vogel”), “The Castle Murder” (“Das Mordschloss”), and “The Robber Bridegroom” (“Der Räuberbräutigam”), all published in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* – but also, more or less obviously, in later prose, such as Charles Dickens’ “Captain Murderer” (1860), or Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” (1979). The elements of the Bluebeard tale also feature prominently in the Gothic tradition, with its array of male characters who hide a dark secret in their castles and houses, a secret which is always in danger of being found out. As Maria Tatar observes, the conventions of the Gothic “are the very plot elements basic to the Bluebeard story. Both Gothic novels and Bluebeard tales chart the vagaries of a whirlwind romance with a stranger or an impulsive marriage to an outsider – to a man whose house contains a room in which is buried a grim secret[...] about his past.” (Tatar 2004: 68)

The dynamics of secrecy negotiated in the Bluebeard tradition establish a pattern that features markedly in late eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, and which, I will argue, becomes a hallmark of modern constructions of masculinities. Bluebeard’s secret both empowers him, and makes him paranoid: keeping knowledge from his wife, and denying her spatial access to it, Bluebeard establishes an epistemological imbalance to his advantage. At the same time, however, he creates a secret for himself, which he is anxious to protect. Any woman who tries to penetrate the secret chamber – and undermine the basis of his gendered superiority – must die. She is silenced, erased, as it were, from an epistemological economy, and becomes herself part of the secret, in that her body is locked away in the very room she dared to enter. Bluebeard, then, in his effort to protect his power and advantage, creates a bloody reminder of his own deficiency, which he must, at all cost, keep hidden. Even more conspicuously, however, Bluebeard seems willing, even compulsorily, to make knowledge of his secret public: not only does he tell his wife that there is a room that she must not enter, but, in giving her the key, he actually provides her with the physical means to disclose his secret, only to per-

petuate his manic need to silence a femininity to which he precariously constructs himself as superior.

The place of femininity itself is further complicated by the frequent presence of a ‘female helper’ in many versions of the story. In the Grimm’s Bluebeard variants, the young heroine meets an old woman who assists the castle’s master in his dark deeds, a fact which demonstrates “the many ways in which Bluebeard makes use of women, as a sexual object and as a reliable accomplice in his crimes” (Hempen 1997: 48). The role of ‘female helper’ provides an alternative to the victimised femininity of women in the Gothic tradition, but remains morally ambiguous. While it is true that “Bluebeard’s need of a female helper, of a woman who does his dirty work and thereby necessarily shares his secrets, may ultimately contribute to his downfall” (Hempen 1997: 48), the old woman is nevertheless actively complicit in his crimes, and, hence, protects the very patriarchal structures that endanger herself and other women in the first place. The ‘female helper,’ it appears, can choose whether to take homosocial advantage of her privileged situation – and help the young woman – or not. Rose Lovell-Smith rightly foregrounds “[t]he female bonding [between heroine and ‘female helper’] within the husband’s house [...] to be a dangerously subversive element” (Lovell-Smith 2002: 199).

Perrault’s “La Barbe bleu,” then, stages a masculinity which, because it so heavily relies on a politics of secrecy for the promotion of patriarchal advantage, lives in a state of constant denial and fear of discovery. Perrault diagnoses paranoia at the very centre of patriarchal authority. Bluebeard’s castle, as so many houses in the Gothic, is “an architectural embodiment of its owner’s mind” (Tatar 2004: 53). As such, we find in the Bluebeard tradition the roots of what, in the course of the nineteenth century, will turn into the ‘sexualised’ rhetoric of the ‘closet,’ the secret whose meaning cannot be named, but has to be spoken *about* excessively. Just as the late nineteenth century ‘open secret’ of homosexuality denies what it is, but says that it is there, Bluebeard cannot name the contents of his ‘closet,’ indeed fears it, but must speak about it, and, hence, repeatedly risks its disclosure.

Power based on secrecy is prone to trigger paranoia. While the ‘speech act’ of secrecy affords the person who utters it the advantage of power over knowledge (‘You do not know what I know’), the language of secrecy will always invite interpretations the secret holder cannot control. “[S]ecrets secure domination yet also come back to haunt those who possess them.” (Tatar 2004: 80) Bluebeard’s paranoia, then, is twofold: he can neither reveal the secret his power is based on, nor control or contain his wife’s curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Shuli Barzilai rightly recognises this epistemological conflict as the central element of the Bluebeard myth, and calls it “‘epistemophilia:’ an epistemological thrust or drive, a desire to know” (Barzilai 2009: 5). Within a logic of patriarchal power – and especially in the context of emerging middle-class ideals of domesticity in the eight-

eenth century – this feminine desire to know is deviant, and potentially subversive. The curious woman, a hallmark of the Gothic, questions male hegemony over knowledge and domestic space, and exposes secretive masculinity as inherently paranoid. Strikingly, the reader of the Bluebeard tale – and of Gothic narratives – increasingly occupies the position of the curious wife, and becomes the ‘paranoid reader’ who needs to ‘know’ the secret. After all, “[w]hat arouses curiosity, [...] is both the character who has something to hide and the secret that he is harboring” (Tatar 2004: 48). What is important, in the end, is not so much the content of the secret. Bluebeard’s secret is so powerful because it does not have to make its violence explicit. Ann Radcliffe’s Emily wanders through Udolpho, waiting to open a door to a horrible sight she never actually finds. The Gothic male’s secret is a rhetorical device whose content varies and changes in the course of the nineteenth century. Tatar quotes Edna St. Vincent Millay’s 1917 “Untitled Bluebeard Sonnet.” “This door you might not open, and you did; [...] / But only what you see...Look yet again – / An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.” (St. Vincent Millay 2004)

The gendered, and increasingly ‘sexualised’ conflict I will be addressing throughout this book will revolve around this economy of knowledge. I will demonstrate how a male monopoly over knowledge, especially within the domestic setting already set up in Perrault’s Bluebeard tale, will, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, get increasingly questioned in a literary discourse that problematises men’s paranoid disposition in the face of both women’s ‘epistemophilia,’ and the historically induced need to position themselves within a more and more rigid dichotomy of genders and ‘sexualities.’

The desire to ‘know,’ to read ourselves and others, is an indispensable element of human identity formation and interaction. The immense and continuing cultural influence of the Bluebeard myth demonstrates “the importance in human life both of secrets, protected by all kinds of prohibitions and threats, and of irresistible curiosity – the powerful attraction exerted by the desire to know” (Gorilovics 2000: 26). I will explore how this tension, which has such a significant impact on our social being, is crucially shaped by historically contingent discourses that have an impact on the way we perceive ourselves and others. Secrecy, in literary discourse since the eighteenth century, has played a vital and conflicted role in shaping categories such as ‘masculine’/‘feminine,’ and ‘homosexual’/‘heterosexual.’ The close affinity of secrecy and masculinity in the character of Bluebeard make him, as Monika Szczepaniak remarks, a prototype of a problematic masculinity in constant crisis (cf. Szczepaniak 2005: 3).

CONTEXT: HISTORY, HOUSES, AND MASCULINITIES

Outside the 'Closet:' Pre-Modern Concepts of 'Sexuality' and 'Gender'

The texts chosen to illustrate my argument cover, in their entirety, a period of almost one hundred and fifty years, from the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 to Henry James' late tale "The Jolly Corner," first published in 1908. As such, the time span I will be looking at roughly corresponds to what historians call the 'long nineteenth century.' The term was coined by British historian Eric Hobsbawm in his three-volume history of Europe, referring to the time between the French Revolution in 1789 – the beginning of the end of the 'ancien régime' – and the start of the First World War in 1914, which marked the end of the balance of power prevalent in nineteenth century Europe (cf. Hobsbawm 1962; Hobsbawm 1975; Hobsbawm 1987).

Late eighteenth and nineteenth century European culture not only experienced a time of political upheaval, but also saw crucial changes and developments in discourses and practices concerning domestic privacy, genders, and 'sexualities.' In the course of about a hundred and fifty years, middle-class values of what we now perceive as 'naturally' feminine and masculine, homosexual and heterosexual, and the ways we think about the privacy in our homes were being established. Anxieties, concerns, and renegotiations regarding the newly emerging private sphere of middle-class domesticity, and the roles of men and women in- and outside this sphere found their particularly productive expression in the Gothic novel and related genres.

Historically speaking, the period in question – the long nineteenth century – was particularly productive in terms of newly emerging forms of gendered and 'sexual' identities, and their manifold expressions in the domestic private sphere of the middle-class home. Since the publication of Michel Foucault's seminal first volume of his *History of Sexuality* in 1976, which dates the 'invention' of the modern notion of homosexuality as an identity category back to the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Foucault 2006), other historians have contributed to a by now well-established understanding of the historical contingency and specificity of cultural and linguistic framings of desire and identity. Alan Bray's study of English 'molly houses' provided an example of the emergence of a recognisable group of 'sexually' and/or gender-'deviant' people at the turn of the eighteenth century (cf. Bray 1995); and David Halperin's historical take on homosexuality made an important point in demonstrating that our modern notions of 'sexualities' are simultaneously historically dependent on, and crucially different from earlier terms and practices, such as effeminacy, pederasty, friendship, and inversion (cf. Halperin 2002). Both

authors show that the idea of a ‘sexual identity,’ which could be theorised, applied to a certain group of people, or used by a person to define themselves, is a phenomenon that has to be dated back at least to the two centuries between 1600 and 1800. Although recently, scholarship in queer studies has focussed more on contemporary social and cultural issues (cf. e.g. the works of Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, and José Muñoz), these fundamental works of historical inquiry are still a valuable starting point for any investigation of genders and sexualities in the recent past. With the appearance of ‘sexual identities’ in the modern sense, as opposed to, for example, the vague and highly problematic earlier concept of sodomy (cf. e.g. Bredbeck 1991; Goldberg 1992; Hammond 2002), sexuality emerged, especially for men, as one of the main axes of identification. It became vital for every single person to define themselves and others in terms of their ‘sexual’ selves. Sexuality as *the secret*, the discursively produced regime over bodies, which reached its peak around the turn of the twentieth century, will be the historical terminus of this study. I will be tracing the influence of ever more specific ‘sexual’ discourses in fictional negotiations of masculinities and male desire in the context of a rhetoric of secrecy which, over the course of a hundred and fifty years, can be read more and more easily in ‘sexual’ terms. During this time, European society witnessed a change in attitudes towards privacy, the individual, and also – and tightly linked to these two – the relationship between men in the persisting ambivalence of homosociality and homosexuality. The shifts in the discourses on, and practices of same-sex desire affected the system of gender definitions and the self-fashioning of a modern masculinity that constantly defined itself – and still defines itself – in opposition to, and dependent on the powerful secret of homosexuality.

The blackmailability of western masculinities was, however, due not only to an increasingly rigorous ‘sexual’ binarism, but also to a simultaneously emerging dichotomy of genders. As post-structuralist theorists, including Judith Butler (cf. Butler 2006) and Judith Halberstam (cf. Halberstam 1998), have abundantly argued, ‘gender,’ just as ‘sexuality,’ is culturally produced. It is connected to, but not necessarily inseparable from biological sex. The biological ‘facts’ – if they are ‘facts’ at all – behind our current binary system of sex and gender begin to lose importance as markers of difference once we realise that ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are actually – to some considerable degree at least – ‘performed’ by bodies. Considering the history of western civilisation, the primacy of biological ‘sex’ over socially constructed ‘gender’ is itself not as stable and unchanging as we tend to believe. Recent scholarship has even begun to question the validity of biological sex and a male-female binarism as a valid system of reference altogether (cf. Voß 2010).

Introducing this train of thought, Thomas Lacqueur, in his seminal 1990 study *Making Sex*, showed that, historically, biological sex has not always determined a

person's gender, but that, on the contrary, "sex, as much as gender, is made" (Laqueur 1990: ix). Before the eighteenth century, Laqueur argues, the male body and the female body were not perceived as being two biologically different organisms. Instead, the female body was understood as a lesser version of the male body. It was "a world where at least two genders correspond[ed] to but one sex, where the boundaries between male and female [were] of degree and not of kind, and where the reproductive organs [were] but one sign among many of the body's place in a cosmic and cultural order that transcends biology" (Laqueur 1990: 25).

Laqueur calls this continuum of bodies a "one-sex model" (Laqueur 1990: viii). This model, however, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was gradually – albeit never completely – replaced by a "two-sex model" (Laqueur 1990: viii), the understanding of the male and female body as crucially and unchangeably different from each other. Sex itself came into focus as a distinguishable notion: "The tacit category 'sex' became unprecedentedly explicit in this period." (McKeon 2005: 271) Male and female reproductive organs began to be given separate names (cf. Laqueur 1990: 149). The biological 'facts' ('sex'), since then, have been believed to determine a person's gender, and, hence, their political and economic role. "Biology – the stable, ahistorical, sexed body – is understood to be the epistemic foundation for prescriptive claims about the social order." (Laqueur 1990: 6; cf. McKeon 2005: 271) The advent of the modern public-private dichotomy brought with it a debate about why women should not be part of the public sphere, and this debate was more and more fought in biological terms. Men "generated evidence for women's physical and mental unsuitability for [the public]: their bodies unfit them for the chimerical spaces that the revolution had inadvertently opened" (Laqueur 1990: 194).

What did it mean, then, for 'masculinity' to be now more or less inseparably and unchangingly tied to a 'male' body? The justification of the system of patriarchy, which, until the Renaissance, had depended on transcendental truths that manifested themselves in a hierarchy of gender difference, shifted to a biological reasoning. Power relations had to be newly negotiated in a system in which the relationship of men to women was not "one of equality or inequality but rather of difference" (Laqueur 1990: 207). While, in a continuum of sex and gender relations, men used to measure their 'manliness' according to their virility and physical power over other men and women – whether 'sexually' or not – the modern dichotomy of sexes, combined with the emergence of the 'homosexual'/'heterosexual' polarity, created a society in which "masculinity came to be consistent only with an anatomically gender-based differential and definable by sexual behavior" (McKeon 2005: 274). In the course of this study, I will be exploring how modern masculinities have had to incessantly re-affirm the fiction of both their 'natural'

gender identity, and their alleged heteronormativity against the cultural mirrors of both women and 'deviant sexualities.'

The Emergence of Modern Domestic Privacy

In order to better understand how secrecy became an integral part of modern discursive productions of gendered power structures, and their expression in fictional architectures of the home, and how discourses of 'sexual identities' began to heavily influence modern masculine self-conceptions, we should first have a look at how, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a modern notion of domestic privacy, crucially dependent on the emergence of the new European middle classes, first came into being.

What is 'privacy'? The word itself is a relatively recent addition to the English language. 'Private' and 'privacy' hardly occur in medieval texts, and although the related words 'privy' and 'privity' have a similar meaning as their later variants, it is significant that, from the seventeenth century onwards, we witness an immense increase in usage of 'private' and 'privacy' (cf. OED 2007). This late linguistic occurrence of 'privacy' suggests a change of mentality: "During the Renaissance privacy was emerging as a category of experience in its own right." (Huebert 1997: 29) From its earliest usage, privacy has always been closely linked to discourses of secrecy. Things could be concealed 'in private,' both in a literal and a figurative sense, and a 'privacy' could also refer to a secret itself (cf. Huebert 1997: 31-32). Early modern texts also use 'privacy' in connection with interiority, in the sense of keeping things to oneself. This interior space, which only gradually became of interest to writers of the period, had not always been regarded as desirable: "There is a progression from suspicion of privacy in the earlier texts to acceptance of and even a cherishing of privacy in the later ones." (Huebert 1997: 35)

Shaun MacNeill provides the most narrow and precise definition of privacy in its current usage: "Privacy is the condition which obtains to the degree that new information about one's self is not acquired by others." (MacNeill 1998: 438) Privacy, then, is a condition in which a person finds themselves, whether by intention or not, when no other person acquires previously unknown information about them. This very basic definition is useful to see how closely issues of privacy are linked to secrecy. New information that is acquired by somebody about somebody else can, but does not necessarily have to be, a secret.

In European societies since the eighteenth century, and with the growing importance of individual rights, privacy has not only been regarded as desirable, but it is even deemed to be psychologically necessary: "Privacy is important because it is posited to provide experiences that support normal psychological functioning,

stable interpersonal relationships, and personal development.” (Margulis 2003: 246) For our purpose, this becomes especially important in the context of the male homosexual ‘closet’: personal information about somebody’s ‘sexuality’ – in its modern form – is regarded to be private information and, hence, subject to one’s own knowledge management. However – as with many other stigmatised forms of information – knowledge about a person’s ‘deviant’ sexuality is such that the person often feels under pressure not to disclose the information freely, thereby making it a secret. “Losses of privacy have the potential for life-and-death costs when a person has as a critical goal the concealment of his or her intentions [...] or identity.” (Margulis 2003: 248)

Why, though, did modern forms of individual privacy only develop a few centuries ago? As Jürgen Habermas demonstrates, the end of absolutism, the abolishment of the feudal system, and the emergence of a modern civil society in the eighteenth century brought with it the formation of a ‘private,’ bourgeois sphere, a “bürgerliche Gesellschaft” (Habermas 1990: 67), that self-confidently set itself against the ‘public’ state apparatus (cf. Habermas 1990: 63-67; McKeon 2005: xix-xx; Ariès 1989: 8). Society had grown larger, new methods of communication had made the world less immediately accessible, new spatial arrangements made it possible for greater parts of the population to consciously seek ‘privacy’ (cf. Ariès 1989: 1-2). Two spheres had emerged that were associated with two distinct types of behaviour: “that which was permissible in public [...], and that which had to be hidden from view” (Chartier 1989b: 16).

How, then, did these big-scale social and political changes affect the life of the individual person? According to Michael McKeon, in an age in which knowledge, especially concerning the running of the state and society, was more and more a matter of open debate, “making tacit knowledge explicit” (McKeon 2005: 5), not only was the power of the absolutist state apparatus increasingly questioned, but, “over the long term, the indefinite transferability of royal absolutism fed the notion that even, perhaps only, the individual was endowed with an absolute authority” (McKeon 2005: 6). McKeon calls this social phenomenon “the devolution of absolutism” (McKeon 2005: 3), a process that, over the centuries, trickled down to the realm of the domestic. Patriarchal ideology drew “an analogy between the state and the family that legitimated each institution by associating it with the ‘naturalness’ of the other” (McKeon 2005: 11). The male head of the household claimed the now mobile absolutist ideology for himself, recreating its power structures on a small scale within a new private sphere of individual domesticity, legitimised by a claim to individual autonomy and power. The individual increasingly claimed their rights to ‘private’ property, personal economic interests, and liberty from external interference, “a freedom from state control whose corollary was the autonomous agency of the individual subject” (McKeon 2005: 21). Protestantism, at the same

time, made religion a matter of conscious and explicit discourse by questioning the tacit authority of the 'old' church, delegitimising any absolute religious authority, and making religion a matter of 'private' and individual responsibility and interiority (cf. McKeon 2005: 33-39).

This development reached further and further down into the deepest recesses of private existence, in a continual process of relocating authority, shifting focus more and more to the individual, and their domestic and interior existence. It found one of its most striking expressions in the spatiality of the Protestant devotional closet, the most private and intimate personal space within the home, where the most carefully guarded secrets of the soul were shared with God, and nobody else: "The interiority of conscientious experience and experiment was correlated with the interiority of the domestic spaces in which these activities occurred, a correlation between micro- and macro-, bodily and architectural privacy." (McKeon 2005: 43)

As Roger Chartier rightly observes, "[t]he history of private life[...] is not a national phenomenon. Its natural setting is that of an entire civilization, the Western world." (Chartier 1989a: 609) England, however, played an especially significant role in the development of a modern, bourgeois private sphere. Christoph Heyl points out that in England – and in London in particular – a unique combination of prerequisites facilitated the development of modern privacy in a way that was different from other European countries (cf. Heyl 2004: 12), and made it the 'birth-place of privacy.'

In the modern process of privatisation described so far, the family and the home became focal points of the new private sphere. The public-private dichotomy, however, was also reproduced within this space: "The modern 'home', the thoroughly privatized replacement of the traditional household [...] reproduced a divided domain within its own walls." (McKeon 2005: 111) This division was also gendered, recreating "the subordination of private to public authority in the unequal relationship of husband and father to wife and children" (McKeon 2005: 111). Privacy is as much lived in an actual space as it is rhetorically constructed. A room within a house is 'private' to the degree to which it can be situated on two axes: its actual spatial seclusion, and the social convention that designates it as the private space of any given person (cf. Peters 1998). Privacy within the home, hence, depends as much on social norms – such as gender roles – as on a new spatial organisation of houses.

Architectural criticism and theory since the end of the twentieth century has seen a theoretical shift towards a more interdisciplinary approach to houses, housing, and home making, and has increasingly asked "how ideas and assumptions about social relations around gender, class, and 'race' get translated into domestic space, embodied in the home, and represented in its spatiality" (Walker 2002: 823).

Research on the meaning of household structures for the men and – especially – women living in them, “investigations of spatial experience, memory, and the sense of place, and of the roles of power, difference, and design in shaping these experiences” (Friedman 1999: 407), have opened essentially new perspectives on the way houses have shaped the lives of people, and vice versa (cf. Kwolek-Folland 1995: 3-8).

The basic assumption of most of these theories is that relevant ideas about social behaviour, the relations between people – especially between men and women – and certain normative assumptions about gender roles get translated into the way a house is structured and ordered. Alice Friedman suggests that houses, from the early modern period onwards, tended to represent architecturally what the owner wanted the world to see of his own supposed character traits: “The houses were in truth but the outward signs of what the inhabitants hoped would be an inward grace. They wished to transform themselves along with their environments.” (Friedman 1999: 409) Similarly, the Victorian home had heavily masculine connotations, in its representative function, and in terms of property, territory, and patriarchal control (cf. Walker 2002: 826).

Lynne Walker demonstrates how, in the nineteenth century, due to Victorian assumptions about the public and the private – and, more particularly, the association of women with the private and the home as a limited sphere, and men with the public – and the doctrine of ‘separate spheres,’ certain spaces, even certain rooms within the house, came to be gendered feminine, and others masculine (cf. Walker 2002: 824-826). A new patriarchal domestic ideology emerged which both assigned moral authority to women, and restricted this kind of moral superiority to the home: “One function of domestic ideology [was] to reconcile the increasingly common argument for the ethical superiority of women with the persistence, perhaps even aggravation, of their socioeconomic subordination.” (McKeon 2005: 169)

People of higher social strata came “to value female idleness, in the strict sense of eschewing all modes of production for the market, [...] and] female accomplishments, while cheap labor did much of what had once been the inside work of wives” (McKeon 2005: 177). At the same time, the role of the female as ‘the angel in the house’ was given new value as a moral and ethical authority. She was thought to have a beneficial influence on husband and children, and watched over the household’s economy and management (cf. McKeon 2005: 181).

Privacy within a household became more and more complex, depending on who was trying to achieve privacy from whom:

“The family sought privacy from domestic servants; males and females increasingly were thought to require segregation from each other; children had to

be separable, if not entirely segregated from each other; personal privacy was required for reading, writing, contemplation, and bodily evacuation; and all members of the household sought privacy from the outside world of uninvited visitors.” (McKeon 2005: 238; cf. Heyl 2004: 263)

Within the house, space was not equally accessible to all members of the household. Most importantly, the house’s hall, since it was the public centre of the house, was a specifically masculine space. Here, the master of the house received visitors, and could display his power in front of other men. Women, although not completely excluded from this public space, were mostly restricted to the upper, more private parts of the house. Traditionally ‘feminine’ rooms are the kitchen, the nursery, the dairy, and the laundry. However, since upper-class – and, increasingly, middle-class – women got used to having more and more servants, even this female kind of influence over the household economy – namely taking care of the children, the food and the laundry – got taken away from them, which left them with the only part of the house where they could have some kind of space of their own: the bedroom (cf. Friedman 1992: 44-45; Heyl 2004: 288-297; Walker 2002: 824). Even the bedroom, however, was an almost exclusively female space only for younger, unmarried women or widows. Married women shared their bedrooms with their husbands, and were often restricted to a small table as the only private space left to them for all-female homosocial contemplation and correspondence (cf. Kross 1999: 396-401). What remained for them was the privacy of the soul: “At this lowly rung of the hierarchy the devolution of absolutism becomes instrumental in disclosing interior realms of autonomy and privacy, the secret precincts of the self [...], an] autonomous privacy [...] for women in general in a man’s world, utterly deprived as they are of direct access to the public realm.” (McKeon 2005: 148)

Even though the processes of architectural innovation, meeting the needs of a new desire for privacy, was first and foremost a phenomenon of upper- and middle-class homes, the lower orders increasingly copied the innovations of their social betters since “the impulse toward physical privacy was experienced as a universal human value rather than as proper to the socially elevated alone. What had begun as an elite withdrawal from collective presence had become the architectural expression of an emergent individualist norm.” (McKeon 2005: 252)

This growing need for domestic privacy found its most striking (and culturally influential) expression, in both upper- and middle-class homes, in the closet. The closet, in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, developed as a small, but important room where books or rarities were kept, and which could serve as a place of devotion or private reading for male and female members of a household, “a comparatively small space that enclosed yet smaller ones, and its contents could be quite diverse” (McKeon 2005: 225). Over the next centuries, the

closet became the most private space of the house, where the person having access to it kept their secrets. Both men and women might have a closet, female member of a household, however, less so, and they often varied considerably in content and relevance for private and public purposes: "If a husband's closet were furnished with resources needed to master the world (books, maps, and scientific instruments), his wife's would be likely to contain materials of household management (baskets, bottles, and cooking utensils)." (Huebert 2001: 41) Women – at least in general – were not expected to use a space like the closet for properly individual, 'private' activities – like writing or serious studying – that went beyond the fairly publicly scripted activity of 'private' praying. A woman's privacy was usually only a conditional state that could constantly be interrupted by men (cf. Huebert 2001: 58-63).

The association of the – mainly male – closet with the keeping of secrets, which I will discuss further below, can already be observed in the seventeenth century royal household, where the king's cabinet or closet was the meeting place of councils that discussed the most delicate state affairs, and in which the king's most private secrets were kept, guarded by his secretaries, their title's etymology suggesting their function as keepers of secrets and guardians of their master's keys (cf. McKeon 2005: 228-230). That the relationship between a male master and his secretary was potentially precarious, both because of the danger of disclosure, and because of the close homosocial relationship between two men of different social ranks, will become important later for the readings of literary 'closets' as spaces of homosocial intimacy and secret sharing:

"The liability of the secretary has a sexual as well as a social dimension. In the homosocial intimacy of seventeenth-century male friendship at this level of social interaction there is an erotic component that parallels the amatory energy with which the emergent model of marriage for love challenges the traditional model of the dynastic marriage of alliance, a parallel that contemporary discourse is increasingly inclined to test as a competition." (McKeon 2005: 232)

The increasing need for privacy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not only found its expression in architectural changes allowing for more and more actual private space within the home, but also led to the emergence of new literary forms that focussed on the individual, and the innermost private recesses of the mind. A new consciousness of the individual, and their need for privacy is closely linked to the experience of textual production and consumption: "The emergence of the concept of privacy as a personal right, as the very core of individuality, is connected in a complex fashion with the history of reading." (Jagodzinski 1999: 1)

The most important and influential new literary form was the novel. Its subject matter were ‘low,’ common themes, and thoughts about the private lives of individuals (cf. Heyl 2004: 475). This was certainly a novelty: “Private activities and intimate feelings (to which the public has no access) were not a subject of writing before the second half of the seventeenth century.” (Foisil 1989: 361) Until the sixteenth century, a lot of literature was “characterized by a dissimulation of private and intimate subjects” (Goulemot 1989: 370). Matters of individual private experience were simply of no interest.

Works of fiction began to experiment with narratives that invade their characters’ most private spaces, and expose their secrets. The novel, from the beginning, was a genre interested in matters of privacy and its boundaries (cf. Heyl 2004: 476). People began to think of someone’s ‘private self’ as their rightful space to keep secrets, a necessary refuge from the outside, and the social world around them, a space of reflection about the individual ‘I’: “Secrecy and concealment [were] no longer treasonable but the prerogatives of private life. The mistrust of solitude and aloneness ha[d] been transformed into the valuing of private, physical, psychological space.” (Jagodzinski 1999: 6)

Ian Watt, in his influential study on *The Rise of the Novel*, shows that characters in novels were no longer – like in earlier forms of fiction – just allegories or types, but individuals that acted in a contemporary environment, a fact that appealed to a new middle-class readership conscious of, and interested in the exploration of the private, individual self (cf. Heyl 2004: 518). Watt was the first to realise the intimate connection between the emergence of the novel and new forms of ‘private’ architectures. In Samuel Richardson’s novels, he sees a tendency “towards the delineation of the domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it: the two go together – we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses” (Watt 1995: 175). J. Paul Hunter makes the link between the novel and the private sphere even more explicit:

“The novel’s willingness – indeed, incessant need – to invade traditional areas of privacy (the bedroom, the bathroom, the private closet) and explore matters traditionally considered too personal to be shared leads to an entirely new understanding of the relationship between public and private. [...] In the novel, readers can peek into traditionally secret spaces – physical, mental, or emotional[.]” (Hunter 1990: 37-38)

As Christoph Heyl rightly points out, however, these private spaces were by no means ‘traditional.’ They became the subject matter of the novel only around the same time as they actually became real for a wider part of the population. These new private spaces were the new phenomenon, and the novel, as a genre, reacted

to this development (cf. Heyl 2004: 522). It is no coincidence, then, that the rise of the novel, and an increase in private reading in general coincided with the creation of more and more private domestic spaces:

“As reading became less a communal activity, it also became associated with the private spaces being created in seventeenth-century homes. [...] It was easy to make the link between the ‘discovery’ power of print and the private rooms or storage places known as cabinets. The metaphor was a simple one: either could contain treasure (words or jewels) or hide secret corruption.” (Jagodzinski 1999: 12; 16)

Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti similarly argue that the new great houses of the bourgeoisie and the novel have their roots in the same structural changes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society. Famous authors of the period, like Jane Austen, Elisabeth Gaskell, or George Eliot, chose subject matters that were often domestic, the private life and the concept of home. “The comparatively recent notion of privacy resonates in this new literary form that explores intimate, private scenes of the mind and society often set within a middle-class household and home.” (Mezei/Briganti 2002: 838) The novel, like the house, is “a dwelling place – a spatial construct – that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts” (Mezei/Briganti 2002: 839).

The novel was the first genre that was explicitly concerned with issues of privacy and – following from that – secrecy. Being a genre that expresses concerns about the private on various different levels – spatially and psychologically – the link becomes obvious: the creation of more and more private spaces – in real life and in the novel – led to an increasing interest in what others kept private. Privacy creates secrecy:

“While one could rely on the safety of one’s own home, those of one’s next-door neighbours became unknown quantities. The perfectly ordinary became unfathomable and thus potentially mysterious and interesting. It was only in the realm of the imagination that unopposed and immediate access to such houses could still be possible. [...] The preoccupation with protecting one’s own private sphere almost instantly engendered a fascination with other people’s private lives.” (Heyl 2004: 561)

The Gothic and its traditions are the most prominent literary expressions of these developments. Although inherently ‘aristocratic’ in its depiction of castles and the gentry, the Gothic novel reflected many of the concerns of its predominantly middle-class readership, and heavily influenced more ‘domesticated’ fiction of

contemporary and later writers. I will show how, in literary discourse from the mid-eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, and in the context of ever more prominent discourses of gendered and 'sexual' binarisms, the closet increasingly becomes the metaphorical 'closet.'

Choice of Texts

We can analyse Gothic fiction, for the sake of defining the genre, according to certain elements and conventions that characterise a work as 'Gothic.' Eighteenth century Gothic, and that part of the tradition that would closely follow along its lines, is usually set "in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space" (Hogle 2002: 2), mostly an old castle, a monastery, a building that has a history. This edifice then always serves as the stage on which the (mostly gendered, as we will see) conflict unfolds. Crucially for our purpose, the Gothic castle is always, unfailingly, a Bluebeard's castle: "Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past [...] that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise." (Hogle 2002: 2) More specifically, it is usually the male villain and master of the castle who is haunted by the secret, which he keeps carefully hidden in a secret room, a secret trunk, a secret cupboard, or his closet. The house comes to stand for the mind, its hidden rooms are the secret recesses of its owner's thoughts and emotions: "[T]he locus of the truly mysterious unknown becomes the human mind rather than the haunted house." (Anolik 2007: 2) The Gothic novel, at the same time, reflects and negotiates concerns about the actual spatiality of modern domesticity that accompany emerging middle-class ideologies of the ideal home. As Kate Ferguson Ellis observes in her influential study on the important role of domestic discourses for the Gothic, "it is the failed home that appears on [the Gothic novel's] pages, the place from which some (usually 'fallen' men) are locked out, and others (usually 'innocent' women) are locked in" (Ellis 1989: ix). The Gothic novel juxtaposes ideals of the 'feminine home' as a safe haven, the place in which the majority of readers of Gothic fiction – middle-class women – would actually find themselves, with the fact that this home can be a stifling prison. Gothic fiction also, however, both provides women with the means to spatially subvert the rules of patriarchal domesticity, and, as I will argue, proves the private sphere of *masculine* activity – the library, the closet – to be the locus of a highly problematic masculine self-conception.

Literary scholarship and criticism have long realised the potential of Gothic fiction for a productive analysis of historically contingent patterns of gendered behaviour. What is at stake in these stories is, in fact, as Donna Heiland points out, a delegitimisation of patriarchy itself: "The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic

fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny." (Heiland 2004: 5) I will show how Gothic fiction not only criticises the objectification of women, and their exposure to potential psychological and physical violence at the hands of patriarchal tyranny, but also constructs masculinity, in terms of patriarchal-homosocial power (economical, sexual, epistemological), as inherently paranoid and flawed. This masculinity relies on a rhetoric of homosocially shared secrecy which is, in itself, dangerously pathological (I need to protect my secret!), and becomes increasingly problematic within the discursive context of ever more virulent categories of 'deviant sexualities.' As George E. Haggerty emphasises, "[i]t is no mere coincidence that the cult of gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture" (Haggerty 2006: 3). At a time when the discursive structures of modern ideologies of gender and 'sexuality' were still in the process of being established, Gothic fiction points to the frictions and nodes of conflict that arise in an economy of desire that needs to be negotiated within an increasingly heteronormative patriarchal environment. In fact, "gothic fiction itself helped shape thinking about sexual matters" (Haggerty 2006: 3). As Ruth Bienstock Anolik suggests, in a time during which binaries of both gender and 'sexuality' were newly fleshed out, we encounter "the space of the other gender, an unknown territory that is the locus of the Gothic" (Anolik 2007: 6), and that becomes aligned with the space of the 'sexual other.' It will be one of the aims of this book to explore the relationship between misogyny and homophobia in the conflicted space of homo- and heterosocial relations.

In the course of the following chapters, I will explore how Gothic literature and its successors problematise the many ways in which the discursively powerful fiction of masculine supremacy is based on structures of homosocial intimacy which constantly struggle to dissociate themselves from some 'other' – women, heterosociality, homosexuality – and fail. Masculinity, in the Gothic, in its paranoid attempt to establish itself as the norm and centre of power, destabilises its own fiction of supremacy. Bluebeard faces women who sneak into his closet, and make the foundations of his house crumble. We can find manifestations of this process from the very beginnings of the genre. Taking three of the most famous and culturally influential texts from the Gothic canon, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), I will analyse the already precarious position of masculinity, and its difficult relationship with normative discourses of homosocial-patriarchal secrecy in these narratives.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the themes and conventions of the Gothic novel were picked up and re-contextualised again and again by writers

of fiction as diverse as crime, horror, and fantasy. The Gothic “scattered its ingredients into various modes, among them aspects of the more realistic Victorian novel” (Hogle 2002: 1). Victorian sensation fiction, as Henry James remarks, explores “those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries that are at our own doors. [...] Instead of the terrors of *Udolpho*, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country house or the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely more terrible.” (James qtd. Taylor/Crofts 1998: xiv) Sensation novels relocate the horrors of the eighteenth century Gothic, and bring them from faraway regions of the Italian Alps to our very doorstep, to London, to the houses of the English aristocracy and middle classes. Supernatural elements disappear, but sensation fiction exploits and explores the same dynamics of secrecy that we find in the Gothic.

Sensation fiction, frowned upon by contemporary critics as “a self-evidently substandard literary category” (Radford 2009: 1), has, over the last decades, been increasingly acknowledged by literary scholars as a subject worth studying. Laurie Garrison places the genre at the very centre of Victorian reading culture, since “it inspired a new form of reading, one that depended first on the physical effects it inspired in the reader and secondly on the psychological effects that occurred as a result of this form of reading” (Garrison 2011: xii). Written to pleasantly shock and scandalise its readership, sensation novels, with their – often unlikely – plots revolving around adultery, incest, bigamy, illegitimacy, and deviant gender behaviour, are an invaluable source for the study of Victorian concerns with gender and ‘sexual identities.’ In close readings of three of the most influential works of mid-nineteenth century sensation fiction – Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1859/60) and *No Name* (1862), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) – I will demonstrate how these novels, just like the early Gothic, choose domestic spatiality as the starting point to question and re-evaluate Victorian ideologies of gendered power relations. Masculinity, in particular, is heavily scrutinised by Collins and Braddon, in that women subvert the patriarchal space that holds Bluebeard’s secret. Men, in these narratives of the home, are, more often than not, physically weak, ill, decadent, effeminate, and not at all in control of the knowledge that patriarchal masculinity bases its power on. Those male characters that will survive the struggle are the ‘queer fish,’ those who manage to liberate themselves – often through heterosocial bonds with women – from the paranoid structures of the patriarchal ‘closet.’ Both Collins and Braddon construct heterosocial bonds between men and women as much more stable than patriarchal bonding along the axes homosocial-heterosexual. This ideal of ‘queerness,’ a ‘queerness’ that reconfigures normative economies of desire (and power), becomes an even more central concern in Henry James’ writing.

James, famous for his tongue-in-cheek rhetoric full of innuendo and ambiguity that reverberates with all sorts of ‘meanings,’ has become a favourite author for queer studies. Many biographical approaches now associate his alleged homosexuality with readings of his work. James’ concern with questions of gender – and of masculinity in particular – has become a subject of scholarly attention as well. Kelly Cannon begins her work on this very topic thus: “The life and work of Henry James offer a wealth of impressions to readers with eyes for the unconventional: the author and many of his male characters defy stereotypes of masculinity, asking in their varied voices if culture allows for deviation. [...] James unsettles, rather than appeases the reader’s longing for conventional manhood.” (Cannon 1994: 1)

James’ male characters are acutely concerned with their own identity and place in the world, while a lot of their female counterparts seem much more in control of the (self-) knowledge which, in James’ writing, so ominously stays just below the level of explication. What is more, James – most famously, perhaps, in “The Turn of the Screw” (1898) – consciously inscribes himself into a Gothic tradition. His use of domestic spatiality in particular places his work in the context of earlier literary manifestations of Gothic houses. James combines constructions of gendered domestic spatiality with what I will be calling a ‘queer rhetoric.’ His employment of language, with an excessive use of innuendo, ambiguity, and constant references to epistemological processes, shows a significant and deliberate affinity to the language of the ‘closet.’ What is so striking about James’ rhetoric are, as Eve Sedgwick famously argues in her analysis of “The Beast in the Jungle” (1903), the absences, the painfully obvious silences, the things that are *not* said, which bring the narrative almost palpably close to one particular reading, which can hardly be anything but ‘sexual.’ “In ‘The Beast in the Jungle,’ written at the threshold of the new century, the possibility of an embodied male-homosexual thematics has, I would like to argue, a precisely liminal presence. It is present as a – as a very particular, historicized – thematics of absence, and specifically of the absence of speech.” (Sedgwick 1990: 201)

In my analysis of three of James’ tales – “The Aspern Papers” (1888), “In the Cage” (1898), and “The Jolly Corner” (1908) – I will flesh out the semantic possibilities of exactly these silences, and show how, in James’ fictional turn-of-the-century world, Bluebeard’s secret has become properly ‘queer,’ not in that it is ‘simply’ homosexual, but in that it almost violently pushes towards a ‘paranoid reading’ of the excessive absences as the presence of the unspeakable ‘closet’ that denies a heteronormative solution. James ingeniously turns his readers into ‘paranoid readers.’ He does not offer us any definite hints as to how to read his multiple textual uncertainties: “The denial that the secret has a content – the assertion that its content is precisely a lack – is a stylish and ‘satisfyingly’ Jamesian formal gesture.” (Sedgwick 1990: 201) James brilliantly masters the rhetoric of the ‘closet,’

which, at the turn of the twentieth century, would have loudly reverberated with all kinds of ‘sexual’ meanings. He leaves it, however, to the reader to, almost involuntarily, engage in the sheer joy of *maybe* knowing, of *maybe* recognising, and offers this potentially reparative, ‘queer’ stance at a point in history when masculinities were faced with all kinds of ‘knowledge,’ sexual and otherwise, that created the need to ‘speak one’s name,’ be it heterosexual or homosexual. James opts for neither, and presents us with a vision of a denial of knowledge that is both productive and liberating.

The fictional discourses I will be tracing here reveal a lot about eighteenth and nineteenth century English culture as a whole. Gothic fiction, thanks to its rich array of imagery and psychological density, lends itself particularly well for an analysis of the cultural state of mind at a certain historical moment. At the same time, fiction has itself always contributed to shaping the way we understand the world around us. So, when it comes to questions of gender and ‘sexuality,’ Gothic fiction, and the traditions succeeding it not only reflect certain discursive modes of the time, but are voices of their own, which helped create our current understanding of these matters: “[G]othic fiction anticipates the history of sexuality and gives that history its most basic materials. [...It] was the testing ground for theories of individual psychology before that psychology was fully articulated.” (Haggerty 2006: 5; 44) In the course of the following chapters, I hope to establish a grid of dynamics that will help shape a better understanding of the ways authors negotiated notions of desire, identity, and power during a time in European history in which our current set of terms and ideas concerning genders and ‘sexualities’ first came into being.

METHODS: SECRECY, SEXUALITY, AND LIMINAL SPACES

The Language and Culture of Secrecy

A historical account of how privacy emerged in its modern form has given us an idea of the prerequisites for a cultural preoccupation with individual secrecy. Privacy, in fact, creates secrecy. It provides actual and mental spaces in which secrets can be kept. The two notions should not, however, be treated as semantically equivalent. It is, therefore, worth stopping for a moment to think about what the differences between privacy and secrecy are. Stanton K. Tefft’s claim that “privacy involv[es] voluntary concealment and secrecy involv[es] obligatory concealment” (Tefft 1980a: 13) is not universally applicable. After all, the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting

adults in England, only did so *under the condition* that these acts be performed in private. This form of privacy is neither voluntary, nor is it a secret in the strictest sense. Secret societies, like the freemasons, on the other hand, keep their secrets not because they are afraid of the consequences of someone revealing a socially unacceptable truth, but as a means of power. The differences between privacy and secrecy, then, must lie elsewhere.

Carol Warren and Barbara Laslett point out that privacy and secrecy are valued differently concerning their moral dimension. While secrets are usually kept because what they contain has a negative moral value, either for the person keeping the secret, or for those from which the secret is kept (or, of course, both), private behaviour is valued either neutrally or positively: "Privacy has a consensual basis in society, while secrecy does not." (Warren/Laslett 1980: 27; cf. Tefft 1980b: 320-321; 333) This distinction, however, must also take into account the overlap of privacy and secrecy where the moral value of the act or knowledge concealed is unclear. Privacy is supposed to create a space in which socially legitimised acts or knowledge can be protected from the invading gaze of the 'public.' This logic, however, always makes private space potentially secret space, because who knows what goes on behind my neighbours' curtains (cf. Warren/Laslett 1980: 28)?

It appears that our culture has grown accustomed to respecting the boundaries of privacy to the extent that what is known to be private is nobody else's business. "That which is restricted by secrecy, however, is more likely to be regarded as legitimate public property that must be concealed or hidden illegitimately through secrecy." (Warren/Laslett 1980: 27) Secrecy is perceived as a threat to the social order, while privacy is not. Since, however, modern privacy is structured such that it always holds the potential for secrecy, the promise of an inviolable private space becomes a myth: curiosity does not stop at the doorstep of the private. The modern bourgeois home invites us to want to know what is going on inside. We imagine all kinds of secrets lurking in its locked rooms and closets. Here, within the space of modern domesticity, privacy and secrecy overlap to an extent that explains the popularity of Gothic and sensation fiction from the eighteenth century onwards, genres famously preoccupied with the secrets hidden in the privacy of castles, or the urban homes of men, and depicting characters trying to conceal or reveal these domestic secrets.

The position of the secret holder is not always disadvantageous. Warren and Laslett claim that "the most successful secret occurs when knowledge of denial of access (the secret's very existence) is also withheld" (Warren/Laslett 1980: 27). This, however, is not necessarily true. First of all, a secret only becomes a secret if knowledge of it (the secret as such, not its content) is accessible to more than just the person holding it. Secondly, this kind of negative definition of secrecy completely disregards both the empowering potential of secrecy ('I know some-

thing you do not, and, hence, I have a certain amount of power over you.’), and the socially perfectly accepted and functioning forms of ‘open secret’ structures (‘We both know, but as long as we do not mention it, we do not have to acknowledge it.’) that exist in our culture.

Why, then, does private secrecy hold such a subversive potential? The question brings us back to the emergence of modern ‘sexualities,’ and the predominance of sex as *the* knowledge of our times. The modern private sphere created spaces the individual could withdraw to. What was going on in the secluded home and the secluded mind was becoming a matter of interest and speculation to those excluded from them. If somebody had something to hide, if a certain knowledge was such that it was kept in the most private and hidden spaces of the modern home and the mind, what could this knowledge be if not a person’s – especially a man’s – ‘sexual’ self; and sex, within the modern regime of discourses, is never a mere ‘private’ matter. The modern homosexual ‘closet’ owes its emergence to various processes, among which the creation of the bourgeois private sphere is one of the most important ones. Before discussing the structure of the ‘closet’ in more detail, however, and in order to fully understand how secrecy works, and how it stands in relation to private mental and actual space – especially in the form of the homosexual ‘closet’ – it will be necessary to have a closer look at the structure and rhetoric of secrecy itself.

We have established that privacy and secrecy are different from, but also connected to each other. Privacy provides an environment in which secrecy can flourish. What, however, is the particular cultural role of secrecy itself?

“Secrecy is established to protect information or to conceal knowledge of acts or relationships that outsiders have an interest in, for whatever reasons, and that they are capable of acquiring without the consent of the secret holders by espionage. To understand what secrets are concealed we must find out who conceals them – and from whom and for what purpose.” (Tefft 1980a: 14)

Tefft’s definition is a good starting point, because it is neutral. The decision to keep a secret can be voluntary or forced (or something in between), and keeping the secret can be a threatening or an empowering experience (or both): “[S]ecrecy enables individuals and groups to manipulate and control their environments by denying outsiders vital information about themselves.” (Tefft 1980a: 15; cf. Tefft 1980c: 35) Keeping a secret can be a necessity – in order to avoid punishment or stigmatisation (cf. Tefft 1980c: 36) – but still lead to an increase in personal power. What counts is not primarily the content of the secret, but the fact of its being one: “[S]ecrets, whatever their nature, give the secret sharers a power over those outsiders who *think* the secret information is vital to their own interests and, thus, want

to discover what it may be.” (Tefft 1980c: 37; emphasis mine) It does not matter whether the concealed knowledge is *actually* vital to the interests of the outsiders as long as they *think* it is.

The emergence of a modern private sphere in Europe paved the way for a heightened appreciation of, and preoccupation with secrecy. David Vincent suggests that British culture, in particular, has traditionally been shaped by issues of secrecy, developing a “particular British tradition of clothing secrecy in secrecy” (Vincent 1998: ix). Albert D. Pionke, too, assumes that, especially in the Victorian period, British culture was particularly secretive, ranging from issues of social control and government censorship, to the preoccupation with shame and criminality, and an aesthetic appreciation of secrecy as a privilege (cf. Pionke 2010: 8-9). Secrecy, in nineteenth-century Britain, became a ‘gentlemanly’ quality of the upper-middle classes. An English gentleman was ‘discreet.’ The ability to keep secrets and manage information came to be considered a positive character trait: “[T]hose accorded the public status of gentlemen had subtly to indicate that they were reserving an essential part of their characters from the public gaze.” (Pionke 2010: 3) Unsurprisingly, it was the very class which also profited most from the emergence of a new private sphere that came to value secrecy most. Again, a culture of privacy was a prerequisite for the development of a culture of secrecy. Secrecy in Britain was not just a matter of politics, but of culture, “more a cultural than an institutional phenomenon” (Minkley/Legassick 2000: 3).

Keeping secrets affords a high amount of mental information management, it influences the way people interact with one another: “Secrets are negotiated: continual decisions about whom to tell, how much to tell, and who not to tell describe social worlds, and the shape and weight of interactions therein.” (White 2000: 11) Keeping a secret is not simply an individual activity, it is a form of social communication. Similarly, lying affords more creativity than telling ‘the truth,’ and, hence, tells us a lot about someone’s character. “Lying is about deliberation and concealment and lies have to be crafted, negotiated as well as durable. Secrets and lies, then, not only tell stories in the ‘not telling,’ but also [...] often tell a lot, indeed often a lot more than ‘telling.’” (Minkley/Legassick 2000: 7) Behind a secret or a lie there is always a conscious decision, an agenda. Secret information is given special attention and value that differentiates it from information that is commonly shared:

“Telling lies and proclaiming and keeping secrets [...] are decisions to make certain information so charged that its value and importance is unlike that of other information. Lies and secrets are explanations about the past that are negotiated for specific audiences, for specific ends. Secrecy and lies conceal, they camouflage, but they certainly do not hide everything.” (White 2000: 15)

There are reasons why people keep knowledge to themselves, share it with just a few others, or tell lies. Secrets and lies can shape a person's life and personality. This is especially true for the secret of all secrets in modern, 'sexualised' culture: the male homosexual 'closet.'

Apart from Eve Sedgwick's theory concerning the 'closet,' which I will discuss in detail below, nobody has, so far, fundamentally analysed the workings and effects of a more general masculine secret beyond a 'mere' homosexual reading. Sedgwick's analysis of the 'closet' cannot be applied to earlier forms of masculine secrecy, since it presupposes the development of modern discourses of 'sexuality.' Here lies a fundamental deficit in theory.

A possible starting point for developing a more general theory of a masculine secret is Jacques Derrida's essay "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in which he deals with the question of how it is possible to speak about something that is unspeakable. He starts his argument by discussing the Platonic theory of 'negative theology': "Negative theology consists of considering that every predicative language is inadequate to the essence, in truth to the hyperessentiality (the being beyond Being) of God; consequently, only a negative ('apophatic') attribution can claim to approach God, and to prepare us for a silent intuition of God." (Derrida 1989: 4)

God, in this view, is neither a positive existence nor non-existent: God 'is' above, before, beyond being. Derrida criticises 'negative theology' for reserving a kind of 'hyperessentiality' for God, hence not letting go of God's 'existence' (cf. Derrida 1989: 7-10). However, he uses the assumptions of 'negative theology' as a stimulus for a discussion of how it is possible to speak about something that cannot be spoken about, since every speech act that includes the unspeakable presupposes its existence.

At a crucial point in his essay, Derrida talks about secrecy: "In certain situations, one asks oneself 'how to avoid speaking,' either because one has promised not to speak and to keep a secret, or because one has an interest, sometimes vital, in keeping silent even if put to the rack. This situation again presupposes the possibility of speaking." (Derrida 1989: 16-17)

The secret, then, is itself structured such that it only exists by presupposing the possibility of verbalising it. The secret only comes into being through a politics of hiding, by denying its content. Derrida does not want to face the challenge of exploring in detail the workings of the secret: "I will not take up this immense problem here." (Derrida 1989: 17) Nevertheless, he sufficiently hints at the powerful potential of secrecy: a person's mind, according to Derrida, is the space "in which is retained the singular power not to *say* what one knows, to keep a secret in the form of representation. A conscious being is a being capable of lying, of not

presenting in speech that of which it yet has an articulated representation: a being can avoid speaking.” (Derrida 1989: 17)

The secret’s potential power lies in the presupposed verbalisation that gives the secret its shape: “To keep something to oneself is the most incredible and thought-provoking power.” (Derrida 1989: 18) At the same time, the secret is constantly in danger of being uncovered: “Does one ever have at one’s disposal either sufficient criteria or an apodictic certainty that allows one to say: the secret has been kept, the dissimulation has taken place, one has avoided speaking?” (Derrida 1989: 18). Power based on secrecy is always precarious, because, rhetorically, the secret is a void: as an act of communication, saying that one will not say something leaves open to speculation what that something might be. Others can fill the secret with a meaning that lies beyond the control of the secret holder. Secrecy always means both power and paranoia, and this becomes especially problematic in the course of the nineteenth century, when discourses of binary ‘sexual identities’ become increasingly virulent, and a masculine secret is more and more in danger of being read as *the* secret of the male-homosexual ‘closet.’ The ‘speech act’ of masculine secrecy becomes prone to be read in only this one way, no matter if the secret really is *that*.

The Modern Homosexual ‘Closet’

In 1990, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published *Epistemology of the Closet*, which triggered a fruitful debate in post-structuralist gender and queer studies that has not yet been sufficiently absorbed by research on Gothic spatialities. Originally due to her interest in post-AIDS discussions in the 1980s on the ‘outing’ of homosexuals, Sedgwick investigates the epistemological preconditions and social consequences of a gay ‘coming out’ in the Western world. In doing so, she – following Foucault – diagnoses an “endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick 1990: 1) since the end of the nineteenth century, stating that, for about a hundred years, thinking and knowledge in our society has centred on the question of ‘sexuality,’ and, particularly, on whether somebody is ‘gay’ or ‘straight.’ Without this definitional tension in late-nineteenth and twentieth century society, she believes, “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture” (Sedgwick 1990: 1) is impossible.

In contemporary Western society, everybody is implicitly required to define themselves as either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ – with ‘bisexuality’ not substantially challenging the rigidity of this compulsory definitional grid. The discursive pressure to label yourself, and be labelled by others, according to pre-configured categories, and the moral value attached to them produce the ‘closet,’ the

secret, the space in which ‘sexuality’ is not named or spoken. To be ‘in the closet,’ however, not to be ‘out,’ does not mean that definition can be entirely dodged. The silence speaks for itself: “‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it.” (Sedgwick 1990: 3) The silence of the ‘closet’ is always in dialogue with the surrounding discourses of ‘sexual’ definition. One of Sedgwick’s aims is to demonstrate how instable and alterable these historically contingent, and ever-changing definitions are, and to show that a binary model of homo- and heterosexual self-definition is insufficient to cover the rich array of human desire: “Axiom 1: People are different from each other.” (Sedgwick 1990: 22) Following Sedgwick’s line of thought, I will be tracing the textual evidence of strategies through which authors of fiction have variously embraced and avoided, questioned and distanced themselves from the categories available to them to describe human gender, power relations, and forms of desire.

Doing close readings of several canonical literary texts, Sedgwick shows that discourses of homoeroticism and ‘homosexuality’ are not at all only found on the fringes, as exceptions, anomalies, but, on the contrary, they are part of, and even constitute the very heart of the Western literary canon. Deliberately exaggerating and simplifying the complex history of male-male desire, Sedgwick assesses that “not only have there been a gay Socrates, Shakespeare, and Proust but [...] their names are Socrates, Shakespeare, Proust” (Sedgwick 1990: 52). Despite the obvious historical haziness of this claim, Sedgwick rightly points out the irony of a large part of modern, heteronormative historical research and literary criticism: whenever critics discover the – often powerful – homoerotic undertones of any given narrative, they declare them not to be important, either because, at a certain point in history, homoeroticism was, supposedly, ‘normal,’ or because the text’s homoeroticism is marginal. In historical and cultural meta-discourse, hence, according to Sedgwick, voices that universalise homoeroticism (‘Homosexuality is everywhere.’) often appear simultaneously with ones that minoritise it (‘Homosexuality is limited to a small group of people.’) (cf. Sedgwick 1990: 48-59).

Sedgwick wants to work against this contradictory phenomenon of dodging and denial, and refuses to position herself with either of the two extreme voices. She realises how meaningful and central homoerotic relationships (especially between men) have been in Western cultural and literary history. For a productive appreciation of this history, then, it is crucial to be aware that “[t]he stimulation and glamorization of the energies of male-male desire is an incessant project that must, for the preservation of that self-contradictory tradition, coexist with an equally incessant project of denying, deferring, or silencing their satisfaction” (Sedgwick 1990: 56).

Sedgwick positions her close readings in the context of this tension between the denial and omnipresence of homoerotic and homosexual relationships between men. For not only do readers often ignore the homoerotic subtext of a lot of writing, but authors themselves have turned ambiguity into an art. When homoeroticism became increasingly unspeakable in a culture that created ever more rigid pathological definitions of aberrant 'sexual' behaviour, and same-sex desire became the 'open secret' that could only be hinted at, known, but not spoken, writers turned to innuendo. In the vicinity of the 'closet,' contradictions between knowledge and ignorance, secrecy and betrayal, power and impotence emerge: "The position of those who think they know something about one that one may not know oneself is an excited and empowered one." (Sedgwick 1990: 80) While the 'closet' is a – textual and cultural – space whose readability the person 'in the closet' cannot control, the same holds vice-versa: the 'closet' provides a space of possibility, within which a language of secrecy and half-knowledge can make somebody 'readable' only to those who are looking for a particular meaning. It takes one to know one.

As we have seen earlier, same-sex desire, naturally, did not suddenly come into being in the age of modern discourses on 'sexuality.' It is only, however, with the emergence of modern notions of 'sexual identities,' and in the context of a new private sphere, that the 'closet,' in its fully-fledged modern shape, appears. The nexus of homosociality and homoeroticism is gradually transformed into a 'sexual' dichotomy that becomes – especially for men – unsurpassable.

Sedgwick points out the crucial importance of the homosexual 'closet' as an abstract space in which power over knowledge is negotiated: "[I]gnorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there as is knowledge." (Sedgwick 1990: 4) Her book includes, apart from her theories, 'closet readings' of several central works of English and American literature, for example of Melville's *Billy Budd Sailor*, and, as mentioned above, James' "The Beast in the Jungle" (cf. Sedgwick 1990: 91-130; 182-212). This (successful) search for the 'closet' at the heart of the Western literary canon suggests that the sexualised male secret is a basic constant of modern English society. Over the last years, many authors, following Sedgwick's example, have done 'closet readings' of other works of literature, and the 'closet' is now an integral part of modern gender and queer studies. Even before Sedgwick published her extensive theoretical framework, Ed Cohen did a 'closet reading' of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which he illustrates "that even in the absence of explicit homosexual terminology and activity, a text can subvert the normative standards of male same-sex behaviour[...] evoking possibilities for male same-sex eroticism without explicitly voicing them" (Cohen 1987: 803; 809). Cohen also already makes explicit what a 'closet rhetoric' could mean for writers who work in a society that does not allow for an open literary discourse on same-sex desire:

“To the extent that Wilde and contemporaries like him were beginning to articulate strategies to communicate – both to themselves and to others – the experience of homoerotic desire, their texts enact and virtually embody this desire. But since these men were also writing within a larger culture that not only denied but actively prosecuted such embodiments, they were forced to devise ways to mediate their expressions of passion.” (Cohen 1987: 810)

The nineteenth century, in particular, then, sees an accumulation of texts that consciously play with their simultaneous obscurity and ‘readability.’ Sedgwick, however, is not concerned with investigating the historical roots of this phenomenon, which she firmly places in the nineteenth century. It is surprising that, so far, there has hardly been any research on the cultural roots of the ‘closet.’ No one has yet sufficiently noted that the ‘closet,’ as an omnipresent male secret, has its roots early in our cultural history, roots that reach far beyond the nineteenth century ‘open secret’ of homosexuality. Discourses on both individual privacy and secrecy, and ‘sexual’ categorisations, as I have demonstrated above, begin to become virulent as early as in the eighteenth century.

Alan Stewart was the first to explicate the connection between the metaphorical ‘closet’ of modern homosexuality, and earlier, actually localisable spaces of secrecy – literal closets. He shows that “the crisis of the epistemology of the closet in the early 1990s is inherent to and prefigured in the closet as architectural reality and topos in sixteenth century England” (Stewart 1995: 77). Sedgwick’s list of meanings of the word ‘closet’ from the OED (cf. Sedgwick 1990: 65) had already hinted at the fact that the new privacy of the early modern closet, and its potential as a secret space are the historical link between metaphor and actual space of the ‘closet.’

This very particular domestic space, while serving as a room of withdrawal for one individual, is also – and for our purpose most crucially for men – a homosocial space, in which intimate exchanges of information take place. It is “a secret non-public transactive space between two men behind a locked door” (Stewart 1995: 83).

Stewart draws particular attention to the role of the secretary – etymologically the keeper of secrets – whose relationship with his master appears, in early modern writings on the subject, not exclusively professional. Intimacy and friendship are conflated with patronage and service in such an unusual way that this relationship becomes a prototypical same-sex relationship that does not comply with the normative codes of its society, and can only exist in the vicinity of a particular private space, the closet (cf. Stewart 1995: 83-87). Even contemporaries seem to have felt uneasy about the potentially ‘sexual’ contents of the secrets hidden behind the closed doors of the closet. A lady’s closet that male servants had access to could

figure as the female-male model of a more subtly perceived anxiety about what might be going on in the homosocial space of the male closet (cf. Stewart 1995: 87-89). The homosocial secrets shared in this private space become dangerously readable within the discursive context of 'sodomy,' 'mollies,' and, later, 'homosexuality.'

What is more, the secrecy of the closet makes it particularly intriguing for outsiders: "Far from rendering relationships and transactions secret, the closet paradoxically draws attention to those relationships and transactions and marks them off as socially and even ethically problematic." (Stewart 1995: 93) It is not surprising, therefore, that the secret space of the closet served even contemporaries as a metaphor, one that has survived to our days, most prominently – and not in the least by coincidence – as the male homosexual 'closet.' The changes and continuities in the relationship between the spatial and metaphorical qualities of the 'closet' will be the central theme of the following close readings. I will be tracing the ways authors have employed actual domestic spaces as metaphors for the secret spaces of the mind, how power over knowledge is negotiated within, without, and via these spaces, and how writers establish a 'queer rhetoric' that productively plays with the ambiguous readability of a 'closet' that never fully says what it means.

Heterosexuality – Homosociality / Homosexuality – Heterosociality

We have, so far, established that, with the advent of modern forms of individual privacy, and ever more influential and discursively powerful definitional terms for same-sex desire, men, in particular, increasingly faced the challenge to actively dissociate themselves from any kind of 'deviant identity' or behaviour. We have also seen that this tension created the 'closet,' a rhetorical space which, rooting in early forms of actual patriarchal private space, became more and more 'sexualised.' Before further discussing the paranoid dynamics of the 'closet,' I would like to draw attention to the changes patriarchal power structures underwent within the problematic discursive grids of modern 'sexual' categorisations.

Again, Eve Sedgwick is a very useful starting point. In her 1985 study *Between Men*, in which she investigates the literary history of male-homosocial desire, she posits "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (Sedgwick 1985: 1-2). Not only does she demonstrate that, before the emergence of the modern 'homo-hetero' split, there is a potential for liveable desire in male-male relationships, but, for her, the whole system of patriarchy depends, to a considerable extent, on the ambiguous currents of desire inherent in male-homosocial bonding. Sedgwick, referring to René Girard's work (cf. Girard 1972),

shows that the common literary trope of erotic triangles – the rivalry of two men over a woman – not only expresses heterosexual desire, but holds the potential for an equally intense emotional bond between the rivals: “[I]n any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.” (Sedgwick 1985: 21)

Quoting Gayle Rubin (cf. Rubin 1975), Sedgwick claims that women, in these kinds of patriarchal same-sex bonds, are reduced to objects through which homosocial relations can be cemented in accordance with the rules of heteronormativity: “[P]atriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men.” (Sedgwick 1985: 25-26)

Throughout her book, Sedgwick investigates the relationship of ‘homosociality’ and ‘homosexuality’ in texts from the Renaissance to the beginning of the twentieth century. The changes she traces in these literary discursive examples – the way the ‘homosocial’-‘homosexual’ continuum was reshaped over the course of a few centuries – can serve as a starting point for any literary investigation of modern – and especially male-male – same-sex desire. Sedgwick skilfully exposes one of the most central traumas of modern patriarchal culture, which is closely linked to the dynamics of the ‘closet:’ patriarchy, according to Sedgwick, on the one hand, heavily depends on close homosocial bonds between men, which, for much of our history, have, in their physical and emotional expressions, often bordered closely on what, today, would be perceived as ‘homosexual’ (cf. e.g. Bray 2003; Hammond 2002). On the other hand, it seems that “homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage” (Sedgwick 1985: 3). As Sedgwick demonstrates, however – and as we have seen above – homophobia, just as same-sex desire itself, has been structured differently at different points in history. Physical expressions of love between men, for example, were positively sanctioned in Greek antiquity, as long as they had “an educational function” (Sedgwick 1985: 4). “The radically discontinuous relation of male homosocial and homosexual bonds” (Sedgwick 1985: 5), then, is a fairly recent phenomenon. While modern English patriarchal society, from the eighteenth century onwards, has continued to depend on strong emotional, political, economical, intellectual, and, crucially, *secretive* bonds between men, it has increasingly – indeed paranoiacally – striven to set itself apart from the charge of ‘homosexuality:’ “Because the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an en-

demic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement.” (Sedgwick 1990: 185)

I would like to extend Sedgwick’s analysis of the homosocial-homosexual split, and make it productive for my following close readings. We can complement the nodes ‘homosocial,’ ‘homosexual,’ and ‘heterosexual’ with a fourth node, which will re-establish a definitional balance between what, in English patriarchal society, is deemed ‘normative’ or ‘deviant.’ If ‘normative masculinity’ is supposed to act and define itself as ‘homosocial’ and ‘heterosexual,’ then ‘deviant masculinity,’ we can assume, would not only be considered ‘homosexual,’ but also ‘heterosocial.’ A ‘queer’ denial of heteronormative, patriarchal masculine behaviour, which finds one of its most powerful literary expressions in Henry James’ turn-of-the-century writing, is not only (or not even necessarily) ‘gay,’ but it is also excessively ‘heterosocial,’ in that non-sexual, intellectual, emotional, economical, and political bonds between men and women substitute the heterosexual marriage plot. This is a radical move in many respects: it admits women into the political sphere of knowledge exchange, and makes them secret sharers; it refuses supposedly ‘natural’ reproductive sexuality; and it affords a space for ‘queer’ masculinities, without having to step out of the ‘closet,’ ‘come out,’ and embrace a more blatantly pathologised ‘homosexual’ identity. A concept of ‘heterosociality’ as a subversive stance also, and maybe most importantly, supports Sedgwick’s central observation that “homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic” (Sedgwick 1985: 20). Shifting the erotics of the body to same-sex relations, and, at the same time, admitting women into the realm of epistemological power politics, ‘queer’ writings potentially not only alleviate the objectification of women as either consumed sexually, or traded in the interest of furthering the bonds between men, but also subvert the patriarchal ideal of strictly homosocial secret power politics, affording women the power to act on their own account (sexually and politically). As such, paranoid patriarchal masculinity must beware of its secret being read as both ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosocial.’

The ‘Paranoid Reader’

It should be sufficiently obvious by now that there exists not only a connection between masculine secrecy and the Gothic, but also between the emerging ‘sexual’ secret of ‘homosexuality’ and masculine secrecy in general, and, hence, between the ‘homosexual’ secret and the Gothic. If we want to conceptualise this link, we might call it ‘paranoia.’ Eve Sedgwick emphasises the central crux of modern homosocial-homophobic masculinities: “For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being

‘interested in men.’” (Sedgwick 1985: 89) The constant need for men to simultaneously rely on secretive bonds with other men, and dissociate themselves from the charge of ‘homosexuality’ leads to what Sedgwick calls “homosexual panic” (Sedgwick 1985: 89), the paranoid need to avoid being ‘read’ as that ‘sexual other,’ which is unnameable. The Gothic, for Sedgwick, is the literary expression of this particular form of modern masculine paranoid self-conception: “[P]aranoia is the psychosis that makes graphic the mechanisms of homophobia. [...] The Gothic novel crystallized for English audiences the terms of a dialectic between male homosexuality and homophobia, in which homophobia appeared thematically in paranoid plots.” (Sedgwick 1985: 92; cf. Sedgwick 1990: 186)

Although I agree with Sedgwick’s analysis of homophobia’s central role in Gothic narratives, I would like to argue that the paranoid mechanisms she describes as inherent in modern masculinities are, in fact, most problematic not due to their being closely associated with the workings of homophobia, but because paranoia as such is an integral part of patriarchal power structures. In other words, masculinity was phobic before it was homophobic. Let us remind ourselves for a moment of the Bluebeard tale. Bluebeard’s ‘closet’ is paranoid not because it is ‘homosexual’ – it is, in fact, not even homosocial – but because his power relies on the existence of an impenetrable secret space. The mere fact of his having a space (and knowledge) that is out of bounds to his wife cements his ‘heterosexual’ power and control over her. The modern masculine ‘closet,’ then, is both powerful, and paranoid, both a prerequisite to the self-legitimation of homosocial-patriarchal dominance, and a source of incessant ‘homosexual panic.’

One of Sedgwick’s more recent texts will prove a useful additional tool for a detailed analysis of the paranoid dynamics in the works discussed below. Her 2003 collection *Touching Feeling* contains a revised version of her essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in which she diagnoses current research in the humanities with a pathological need to find ‘meaning’ in everything, and make ‘knowledge’ explicit: “[P]aranoia has by now become less a diagnosis than a prescription.” (Sedgwick 2003: 125) Sedgwick actively positions herself against the unearthing of still more positive ‘truths,’ and posits that “to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression” (Sedgwick 2003: 128). She then calls for ‘reparative readings’ of history, literature, etc., and an appreciation of “the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading” (Sedgwick 2003: 145). Ascribing a higher value to non-linear discourses, and avoiding a ‘phobic’ and ‘paranoid’ epistemology, which looks for ‘meaning’ and ‘knowledge,’ while avoiding surprise, we might, Sedgwick believes, arrive at a more creative and fruitful understanding of “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting

sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (Sedgwick 2003: 151).

I will be using Sedgwick’s concept of the ‘paranoid reader’ on several analytical levels. Generalising her idea that a dominant mode of ‘paranoid epistemology’ looks for meaning everywhere to make it work for both textual (the writing itself) and psychological (the characters) analyses, and combining it with the very particular dynamics of the paranoid ‘closet’ of modern masculinities, I will locate the ‘paranoid reader’ in three instances. Firstly, the Gothic male himself is a ‘paranoid reader’ of his own character, in that he feels the need to ‘read’ himself according to available discourses on accepted or ‘deviant’ gender and ‘sexual’ identities. He is both paranoid (‘reading’) subject, and paranoid (‘read’) object, since he also lives in constant fear of what his secret might be ‘read’ as by others. Secondly, other characters, the female Gothic heroine in particular, are ‘paranoid readers’ par excellence. Their curiosity and thirst for knowledge make them want to penetrate the masculine secret at stake, and ‘read’ its holder in terms of an epistemology of power. Thirdly, on a textual level, the narratives discussed here play with their reader’s desire to penetrate their meaning, and ‘know’ their secrets. The Gothic ‘closet’ playfully asks us to ‘read’ it, fill it with meaning, while, at the same time, denying us immediate gratification, only revealing its secrets at the very end, or, in fact, not revealing them at all.

This textual space of possibility, I would like to argue, is where ‘queer readings’ become possible. As long as definite ‘meaning’ is suspended, our paranoid tendency to fill the gaps with ‘sense,’ which we draw from dominant discourses we associate with the textual context, will constantly and productively fail, and almost *any* kind of ‘meaning’ becomes possible. Or rather, by denying us definite ‘truths’ about its secrets, a text can negate the comfort of confirming or preferring *one* reading. In terms of the tension between homosocial-heterosexual versus heterosocial-homosexual readings, a text can either open up a space for both readings, and then confirm one in the end, or the ‘truth’ may remain ambiguous, and the reader (un)comfortably (dis)satisfied. A plot can, for example, explore the possibilities of a homoerotic dynamic, and then end with either a confirmation of the heteronormative marriage plot, an ‘ironic’ confirmation of the same, or no confirmation at all. What counts is the textual space in-between, the gaps, the secrets, the points that leave it to us to assign ‘meaning,’ to apply our paranoid need to ‘know.’ These textual strategies are already inherent in the Gothic, and, in the course of the nineteenth century, writers increasingly employ them deliberately to various ends – to create suspense in crime fiction, to trigger surprise, or to open up a space for socially problematic readings. Writers of homoerotic subplots – most prominently Henry James – can explore the titillating erotics of a ‘queer rhetoric’ that either cannot, or simply will not say what it ‘means.’ Here, I would like to

argue, lies the potential for both reparative writing, and reparative readings. In my textual analyses, I will be trying not to point to any one *meaning* of a certain ‘textual secret,’ but to call attention to the many ways in which texts can open up *possible* readings, and, at the same time, emphatically deny and foreclose any kind of straightforward, normative, ‘easy’ reading. This is where the paranoid ‘closet’ can be positively re-evaluated, and become a space of exciting opportunities, a veritable ‘other space.’

Beyond Silence: Heterotopias

The textual ‘other spaces’ which an anti-paranoid, non-phobic rhetoric generates, lead us back to the fictional architectures that metaphorically create the masculine ‘closet’ under discussion. The tales and novels examined here not only increasingly work towards a ‘reparative,’ non-linear mode of writing and reading, but also, within their fictional world, produce spaces which provide their characters with a certain amount of freedom from both the paranoid spatiality of the domestic masculine ‘closet,’ and the normative discourses associated with it. In all of the texts I will be analysing, we find a juxtaposition of the stifling, rigid, normative, secretive, and paranoid domestic, and the outside, the garden, the seaside, the city, spaces that enable characters to speak, and to deviate from their prescribed (gendered and ‘sexual’) roles. These liminal spaces, the non-normative, enabling places on the margins of the domestic, can best be conceptualised in terms of Foucauldian ‘heterotopias.’

Foucault’s own definition of the term is contradictory and problematic, not least because his longest explicit reference to the concept is his 1967 lecture “Des Espaces Autres,” which was never intended for publication, and was only published, more or less unchanged, in 1984. Here, Foucault gives the following definition:

“There are also, and probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places ‘heterotopias.’” (Foucault 1994: 178)

Heterotopias are both separated from, and part of all other actual spaces. They exist within and without society. Foucault defines two types of heterotopia: ‘crisis

heterotopias,' "privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live" (Foucault 1994: 179), and 'heterotopias of deviation,' which have, according to Foucault, almost completely replaced 'heterotopias of crisis' in our society. He emphasises the central role of this second type of heterotopia as spaces "in which individuals are put whose behavior is deviant with respect to the mean or the required norm" (Foucault 1994: 180). As examples of 'heterotopias of deviation,' he gives rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons, the generalised 'closets' of society, so to speak, in which an individual is put to be separated from the rest of the 'normal' crowd, and silenced.

Foucault also, however, acknowledges the enabling potential of heterotopias: "The heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves." (Foucault 1994: 181) Heterotopias are liminal spaces that simultaneously exist within society, and without, they have to adhere to its rules (they are no utopias), and do not. Gardens, museums, archives, libraries, theatres, and fairs are transitory spaces, spaces in which time either expands or contracts, spaces out of the ordinary, which temporally suspend the laws and notions we live by. The ship, for Foucault, is the best example of such an in-between space: "[T]he ship is a piece of floating space, a placeless place, that lives by its own devices, that is self-enclosed, and, at the same time, delivered over the boundless expanse of the ocean. [...T]he ship [...is] the greatest reservoir of imagination. The sailing vessel is the heterotopia par excellence." (Foucault 1994: 184-185)

From the 'queer' point of view of a 'reparative' search for enabling spaces within a system of ever more rigid and pathologising notions of 'normative' and 'deviant' genders and 'sexualities,' heterotopias become particularly productive. In the following close readings, I will be exploring how, from the earliest examples of Gothic writing, up to the 'queer' work of Henry James, the paranoid domestic architectures of Bluebeard's closet get juxtaposed with liminal spaces that enable characters to act, speak, and think more freely. The garden, in particular, suspended between nature and culture, the outside and the inside, the public and the private, the wild and the domestic, simultaneously highlights and suspends these binaries, and becomes a liberating space. The domestic, very much along the lines of McKeon's 'devolution of absolutism,' becomes the locus of patriarchal, heteronormative, homophobic paranoia. Bluebeard's castles, just as Collins' houses, are no 'safe haven' for either men or women. Women, oppressed in Walpole's and Radcliffe's labyrinthine architectures, learn to subvert these structures, and find out their secrets. Men, stuck in the 'closet' of paranoid masculinity, lose control over the domestic space that defines their gendered supremacy. The garden, the seaside, the city, and the graveyard become the spaces in which epistemological

power relations are renegotiated, and in which, for men, a 'queer' existence beyond the narratives of homosocial heteronormativity and the paranoid 'closet' becomes imaginable, speakable, and liveable. As 'reparative spaces,' then, heterotopias enact spatially what 'reparative' writing and reading practices achieve textually: a space of the ambiguous, the productively and disarmingly non-normative, which engenders new ways of knowing: "By juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by revealing and destabilizing the ground [...] on which knowledge is built." (Topinka 2010: 56) As such, heterotopias enable the 'other ways of knowing' Sedgwick calls for in her plea for 'reparative readings.' In the course of the following analyses, I will be sketching out the ways textual production, in the course of about one and a half centuries, opened up these 'other spaces.'