University of Southampton Research Repository

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis and, where applicable, any accompanying data are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis and the accompanying data cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content of the thesis and accompanying research data (where applicable) must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder/s.

When referring to this thesis and any accompanying data, full bibliographic details must be given, e.g.

Thesis: Henesy, M.L. (2016) "Novels of precarity: Neoliberal Counternarratives in Contemporary British Women's Fiction", University of Southampton, Faculty of Humanities, PhD Thesis, pagination.

Data: Henesy, M.L. (2016) Novels of precarity: Neoliberal Counternarratives in Contemporary British Women's Fiction URI [dataset]

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

English

Volume 1 of 1

Novels of Precarity: Neoliberal Counternarratives in Contemporary British Women's Fiction

by

Megan Louise Henesy

Thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
September 2016

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

English

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

NOVELS OF PRECARITY: NEOLIBERAL COUNTERNARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH WOMEN'S FICTION

Megan Louise Henesy

This thesis argues that there is a growing canon of contemporary women's literature that is interested in exploring and reimaging the 'capitalist *fraying*'[1] of conventional good-life fantasies in contemporary Britain. By primarily using the theories of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed as a framework for understanding how precarity can be considered from an affective standpoint, this thesis will study how the chosen authors present British neoliberal society as an inherently precarious environment.

The thesis begins by discussing the evolution of the neologism 'precarity' from a term used to describe the shifting socioeconomic environment at the turn of the millennium, to one utilised across a range of disciplines to broadly describe the affective experience of living and working under neoliberal capitalism. In the first chapter, the thesis will explore how Ali Smith's novel *Hotel World* presents contemporary Britain as an exclusionary environment epitomised by the non-place at the centre of its interweaving narratives: the Global Hotel. The second chapter discusses Kate Atkinson's *Started Early, Took My Dog*, a novel which utilises the genre of detective fiction to explore two time frames that bookend the age of neoliberal ideology, the 1970s and the present day. The third chapter will study how Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* utilises gothic tropes to display a fractured contemporary Britain, which teeters on the edge of social and environmental ruin.

The thesis aims to demonstrate that these writers, in challenging the traditional narratives of the good life fantasy, are creating works that present a counternarrative to neoliberalism.

---

[1] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 295.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents i

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP.. v

Acknowledgements..vii

Introduction 1

Precarity as a Movement 2

The Precariat... 4

Neoliberalism 6

Gender and Precarity 7

Precarity in Fiction 10

Ahmed and Berlant 13

Lauren Berlant: Cruel Optimism 15

    The Historical Present as Impasse 17

    Intuition…… 20

    Situational Tragedy... 20

Sara Ahmed: Queer Phenomenology and Orientation 21

    Happiness and the Perhaps 24

    Hope and Hap 26

    Language of Hate... 26

The Approaches of Ahmed and Berlant as Complementary Frameworks 27

Novels of Precarity 30

Chapter 1: Ali Smith's *Hotel World* 35

Non-Place 37

The Capitalist World of the Global Hotel 39

Temporal Space in *Hotel World* 52

Sara’s Suspension..55

Surviving the Impasse 56

Queer Spaces..62

The Closet...65

Alternative Routes..69

Chapter 2: Kate Atkinson’s *Started Early, Took my Dog* 73

From Detective Fiction to Precarity 74

‘Motorway City of the Seventies’: The setting of *Started Early* 79

The ‘Factional’ History of *Started Early*...84

The Folly of Myth: Betty’s Tea Rooms and The Yorkshire Ripper 89

The Ripper as Myth 96

Faction… 103

Children as Hope for the Future..107

Social Mobility as a Hope for the Future...116

Jackson’s Lost Socialism 117

Chapter 3: Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* 125

In-between-ness..129

‘The time of Le Pendu’ 131

Suspended time ‘beyond geography and history’...133

The Historical Present 139

The Environmental Time-space...144

Crisis Ordinariness..148

Diana: The Queen of Hearts 150

The Twin Towers 157

The Language of Fear and 'Others'...160

Intuition and precarity in *Beyond Black* 163

Mart……. 164

Conclusion 169

Precarious Lives 170

Bibliography 176

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Megan Louise Henesy

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Thesis Title: Novels of Precarity: Neoliberal Counternarratives in Contemporary British Women's Fiction.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. None of this work has been published before submission;

Signed: ....

Date: 26th June 2017

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Clare Hanson for her continuous and unwavering support, guidance and encouragement throughout my studies. Working under her supervision has been genuinely inspiring, and I could not have asked for a better advisor and mentor.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Shelley Cobb, for the assistance she has provided during my studies, and the University of Southampton for their contributions to conference costs, training courses and career development during my candidature.

I would like to thank the Contemporary Women's Writing Association for allowing me to become a researcher on their series of writing skills workshops. This opportunity provided me with chance to meet and work alongside some amazing postgraduate researchers and experienced academics, and provided me with training that will be invaluable for my future career.

Without the support of all my friends and family, I would not have been able to pursue this doctoral study. To my family, thank you for your patience and support during the last few years. To my friends and my colleagues at Bournemouth University, thank you for the moral support, encouragement and distraction by coffee when it was needed. To my husband Andy, you have been so patient, supportive and loving, thank you for your unwavering confidence in my ability.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore precarity in contemporary British literature by exploring the concepts of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed in an analysis of three novels by prominent contemporary British female writers: *Hotel World*[1] by Ali Smith, *Started Early, Took My Dog*[2] by Kate Atkinson, and *Beyond Black*[3] by Hilary Mantel. Through a variety of books and articles over the past decade, Berlant and Ahmed have created frameworks that allow precarity and precarious existences to be considered from an affective standpoint, Berlant by placing her discussion of affect within the political context of neoliberal and late capitalist western society, and Ahmed by presenting her discussions within the context of a contemporary sphere still governed by racialized heteronormativity. This thesis will consider these frameworks in relation to the writing of Smith, Atkinson and Mantel in order to study how contemporary British literature is discussing and exploring what it is to live a precarious existence in contemporary Britain. In doing so it will aim to show that, whilst the chosen novels utilise aspects of different genres and writing styles, they are adding to a growing canon of literature and film which is interested in exploring and reimaging what Berlant terms the 'contemporary capitalist *fraying*'[4] of conventional good-life fantasies.

The thesis will endeavour to demonstrate that British contemporary women's literature is producing a range of narratives that explore what it is to survive in the historical present where the rules and ideology peddled through neoliberal governance clash with the needs and desires of many. These novels present characters who, in realising that their attachments to what Berlant calls 'good life' fantasies are no longer working, are forced to 'deviate from the paths of happiness'[5] and find new directions and orientations. In doing so, they open themselves up to new possibilities that do not promise the 'happy ending' so often expected in fiction, but do provide the hope that some form of happiness may be possible.

These novels are not blueprints for rebellion, in fact the characters presented rarely 'rebel' in a political sense, but they do develop a consciousness, or awareness, that the rules of society can be understood as a system to be negotiated rather than one that should be automatically followed. In this sense, these novels can be defined as neoliberal counternarratives; they provide a view of how lives can be lived outside of the rules of neoliberalism, and its associated ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity.

---

[1] Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin, 2002).

[2] Kate Atkinson, *Started Early, Took My Dog* (London: Doubleday, 2011).

[3] Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

[4] Berlant, p. 295.

[5] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London, 2010), p. 223.

This chapter will begin by introducing the concepts of precarity and neoliberalism through a brief discussion of the literature on these topics, and will then go on to discuss how these concepts are beginning to be considered in literature and film. It will then provide an overview of Berlant's and Ahmed's theories, and explain how and why they will be used as complementary approaches in the field of affect theory. Finally, it will give a brief summary of the directions that each chapter will take.

Precarity as a Movement

According to the political theorist Angela Mitropoulous, the term 'precarity (or *precarité*), in its current expression, emerged in French sociology' in the late 1990s in an attempt 'to grasp the convergence of struggles by unemployed and intermittent workers'[6]. Over the past decade, the exploration of this concept has gone beyond the simple economic impact of not having permanent work, and has developed into a study of how these struggles impact on the lives of individuals. As the Marxist theorist Franco Berardi explains, living in a world where work is 'discontinuous and occasional' results in a state of dependence on sporadic work that is 'full of anxiety':

> Precarious is a person who is able to know nothing about one's own future and therefore is hung by the present and praises God to be rescued from the earthly hell (the term precarity derives from praying).[7]

Alex Foti, a political activist, splits the concept of 'precarity' into two separate interpretations: precarity, which relates to 'a position in the labour market'[8], and existential precarity which is 'lived on the bodies and minds of everybody'[9]. Foti evidences existential precarity as an issue in Europe through the 'incredible rise in the use of psycho-pharmaceuticals and anti-depressants' over the past few years, even in wealthier countries such as Holland[10]. The sense of hopelessness described by Berardi in the quote above falls under the existential interpretation; like Berardi, Foti sees this condition of precarity as lacking a sense of future, describing it as 'being unable to predict one's fate or having some degree of predictability on which to build social relations and feelings of affection'[11].

---

[6] Angela Mitropoulos, 'Precari-Us?', *Mute,* 1.29 (2005), 88-92 (p. 90).

[7] Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), p. 148.

[8] Merijin Oudenamspen and Gavin Sullivan, 'Precarity and N/European Identity: An Interview with Alex Foti of Chain Workers', *Mute,* 2.0 (2005), 44-53 (p. 46).

[9] Oudenamspen and Sullivan, p. 46.

[10] Oudenamspen and Sullivan, p. 45.

[11] Oudenamspen and Sullivan, p. 45.

One issue, which several academics have noted as contributing to this sense of anxiety, relates to the inability to separate work time from personal time in this type of employment. Mitropoulos argues that the 'the distinction between work-time and leisure-time' formalised by Fordism is no longer present, now the post-Fordist worker must 'be continually available for such work', must see time outside waged work as 'a time of preparation for and readiness to work'[12]. Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos agree, arguing that because work becomes incorporated into non-labour time, exploitation of the workforce is distributed across 'the whole time and space of life': 'Precarity means exploiting the continuum of everyday life, not simply the workforce'[13].

In their 2008 article, 'Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception', Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter look retrospectively at the 'rise' and crisis of the concept of precarity, discussing its development from a movement of political activism to one of 'rigorous academic debate'[14]. According to Neilson and Rossiter, the term 'precarity' is an English- language neologism for a concept that emerged in 2003 as a 'central organizing platform for a series of social struggles' occurring across Europe[15]. Beginning as a consideration of economic issues, in particular the 'prevalence of contingent, flexible or precarious employment in contemporary societies', they suggest that it grew to incorporate a range of concerns:

> In its most ambitious formulation it would encompass not only the condition of precarious workers but a more general existential state, understood at once as a source of "political subjection, of economic exploitation and of opportunities to be grasped" (Lazzarato, 2004). Not only the disappearance of stable jobs but also the questions of housing, debt, welfare provision and the availability of time for building affective personal relations would become aspects of precarity.[16]

In this classification of precarity, Neilson and Rossiter do not appear to follow Foti's guide of separation between existential precarity and 'labour market' precarity, rather seeing them both as aspects of a larger, overarching experience that is evident throughout contemporary Europe.

While the term precarity, in academic and activist parlance, is most often related to existing and surviving within an unpredictable system of employment, particularly in reference to post-Fordism, Neilson and Rossiter posit that 'this does not mean that precarity can be bound down to any single set of experiences, social situations, geographical sites or temporal rhythms'[17]. In referencing Kojin Karatani they encourage one to 'think transcendentally' in relation to precarity, to approach the world 'as a heterogeneous space of intermundial intercourse, rather than thinking in the space of a community gathered around a univocal set of rules'[18]. They suggest that the concept of precarity is unlikely to go away; rather than considering it a passing phase, they suggest that:

---

[12] Mitropoulos, p. 90.

[13] Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos, *Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism* (2006) <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/tsianospapadopoulos /en> [accessed 10 March 2016].

[14] Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, 'Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 25.7-8 (2008), 51-72 (p. 52).

[15] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 51.

[16] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 52.

> By working through and across the differential registers and limits of precarity we can recognize that it is the norm – or an aspect of what we have been calling the common – and not the exception.[19]

The Precariat

With the advent of the term precarity came another neologism to describe the individual affected by this political concept: the precariat – a precarious proletariat. Guy Standing refers to the precariat as 'a new group in the world, a class-in-the-making'; he presents the precariat as dangerous due to their anger and anxiety and suggests that if it is not understood, this new group could 'lead society towards a politics of inferno'[20]. Several theorists have disagreed with Standing's stance, one being Ronald Munck who argues that the precariat is not a 'new sociological phenomenon'[21] but has a long history in relation to the capitalist system. In his exploration of the genealogy of the precariat, Munck traces the position from the 'under-employed internal migrants' of 1960s Latin America, classed as ''marginal' to the capitalist system'[22], through the workers of the 'informal sector' in 1970s Africa, a sector which was considered as outside of the 'formal' capitalist system[23], to the concept of 'social exclusion' which emerged in 1980s Europe and the USA[24]. Munck explains that the concept of 'social exclusion' arose 'as an overarching paradigm' to analyse the 'new poverty of the era of globalisation' and was 'multidimensional', embracing not only exclusion from work but also from the political system and shared cultural worlds[25].

For Munck, the concept of precarity is not a new one when considered on a global scale; he explains that precarity has been a 'norm' of the global South where Fordism and the welfare state were the exception to the rule[26]. Equally, therefore, the precariat is not a new 'role' or class: the precariat is simply an extension of the marginal and informal worker, of the socially excluded that has existed for decades.

---

[17] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 64.
[18] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 69.
[19] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 68.
[20] Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p. X.
[21] Ronaldo Munck, 'The Precariat: A View from the South', *Third World Quarterly,* 34.5 (2013), 747-762 (p. 748).
[22] Munck, p. 748.
[23] Munck, p. 749.
[24] Munck, p. 750.
[25] Munck, p. 750.

The term precariat is not only used to describe workers of the traditional working class and lower socioeconomic brackets, however, as Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt explain:

> Transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalisation, information and communication technologies, and changing modes of political and economic governance have produced an apparently novel situation in which increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualised or irregular labour.[27]

This addition of 'well paid and high status workers into this group of 'precarious workers''[28] is taken by some to show that the 'precariat' cannot be considered a class in itself. Richard Seymour, a Marxist activist and broadcaster, argues that attempts by writers such as Standing to make the precariat into an 'emerging class' are 'theoretically incoherent'. Rather he draws on the language of Althusser to argue that the term precariat 'works as a kind of populist interpellation'. In Seymour's view, the precariat is not a 'dangerous, exotic, alien thing' as suggested by Standing; in his words, 'it is all of us':

> Every one of us who is not a member of the CBI, not a financial capitalist, not a government minister or senior civil servant, not a top cop or guest at a Murdoch dinner party, not a judge or news broadcaster – not a member, in other words, of the 'power bloc', the capitalist class in its fractions, and the penumbra of bourgeois academics and professionals that surrounds it. We are all the precariat.[29]

For Lauren Berlant, the 'strange cohesion of neoliberal interest, psychoanalytical theory and radical theoretical commitments' present in the discussion and presentation of the precariat suggests that the precariat 'must be a fundamentally affective class, since the economic and political processes that put people there continue to structure inequalities according to local, gender, race, histories of class and political privilege, available state resources, and skills'[30]. This suggests that, rather than trying to define the precariat as victims of a particular economic or political situation, they should be considered as an affective group that have to reassess and adapt to a new way of life in which the 'promise of the good life' no longer exists.

---

[26] Munck, p. 752.
[27] Rosalind Gill and Andy C. Pratt, 'In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work.', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 25.7-8 (2008), 1-30 (p. 3).
[28] Gill and Pratt, p. 3.
[29] Richard Seymour, *We Are All Precarious - on the Concept of the 'Precariat' and Its Misuses* (2012) <http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/we_are_all_precarious_on_the_concept_of_the_precariat_and_its_misuses> [accessed 19 August 2016].
[30] Berlant, p. 195.

Whilst these various interpretations of precarity and the precariat show that the academic exploration of this sociological phenomenon is a complex one, they do also support the phenomenon's relevance as a point of discussion that, as Neilson and Rossiter suggest, is unlikely to go away any time soon.

Neoliberalism

Many theorists believe that the precarity seen in Britain and Europe over the past few years is fundamentally linked to the systems of neoliberalism that were introduced in the West in the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily by the governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher[31]. Berlant argues, for example, that while capitalism has always induced 'destabilizing scenes of productive destruction', 'neoliberal economic practices mobilize this instability in unprecedented ways'[32], while Berardi states that 'the dynamics of neoliberalism have destroyed the bourgeoisie and replaced it' with the cognitariat (an educated precariat) and the ultra competitive managerial class[33].

David Harvey defines neoliberalism as:

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.[34]

Harvey explains that since the 1970s there has been 'an emphatic turn' towards neoliberalism, causing 'deregulation, privatization and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision'[35]. Rather than slowing down over time, this turn has notably accelerated; as Imogen Tyler notes in her book *Revolting Subjects*, anxiety caused by the economic crisis of 2007 was 'exploited by governments' in order to procure public consent for the marketization of public institutions:

> This is exemplified by the dramatic acceleration of the privatization of the welfare state in Britain during the current financial economic downturn, in which the election of a Conservative-led coalition 'Austerity' government in 2010 has not only enabled the introduction of penal welfare

---

[31] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.
[32] Berlant, p. 192.
[33] Berardi, p. 52.
[34] Harvey, p. 2.
[35] Harvey, pp. 2-3.

> regimes such as ‘workfare’, but has allowed previously ‘sacred’ national institutions, such as the National Health Service, to be fully penetrated by competition and private finance.[36]

It is this image of neoliberal Britain that forms a backdrop for the novels which are discussed in this thesis. Whilst the economic downturn occurred after the publications of *Hotel World* and *Beyond Black*, novels firmly placed in the neoliberal boom of Tony Blair’s leadership, they nevertheless deal with themes of economic and social struggle; *Hotel World* looks at the cost of living in a world where private business rules, and newspapers run headlines like ‘BRITAIN MASSIVELY MORE UNEQUAL THAN 20 YEARS AGO. ONE IN 5 PEOPLE LIVES BELOW THE BREADLINE’[37]. *Beyond Black* presents its protagonist Alison endlessly driving around the M25, a ‘landscape running with outcasts and escapees’ where ‘dim lights shine from tower blocks, from passing helicopters’[38]. The other novel, published after the beginning of the recession, presents the country as if it is falling apart: *Started Early* tracks Tracy as she walks around the ‘soulless’ shopping centres of Leeds, full of discount shops such as Poundstretcher – ‘the retail preferences of the lumpenproletariat’[39]. Each of the novels presents contemporary Britain as somewhere you would not necessarily want to live; there are ‘nice’ places - gentrified bars and hotels, clean duplicated new-build houses - but the novels explore what it is to be excluded from these places, and how it feels to live on the outside of the neoliberal bubble.

Gender and Precarity

As the novels explored within this thesis are written by contemporary women writers, and in almost every case contain female protagonists, the examination of precarity in these narratives regularly draws on its relationship with gender. Even *Started Early,* the only novel to contain a male protagonist, presents the detective Jackson Brodie as a man obsessed with finding women and girls who have been ‘lost’ and need to be saved, or at the very least given a conclusion to their story. There is also the suggestion made by Atkinson in several interviews that Jackson is ‘secretly a woman’, her own authorial voice[40], which arguably adds a gender-skewed dimension to this masculine character.

Whilst it does not form the primary point of discussion for all theorists of precarity, gender has regularly been noted as an influential factor in the struggle for many to live comfortably within the neoliberal state. Neilson and Rossiter note that within the field of precarity studies, 'the affective labour of female migrant care workers' has become a discussion point in relation to the 'gendered nature of precarious work'[41], while the 'feminisation of labour', the employment of women in 'precarious low-paid and often short-term work', is considered by Imogen Tyler in her discussion of Britain's poor. As Taylor notes, feminist scholars have long argued that the term proletariat fails to account for the unwaged or low-paid labours of social reproduction and servitude[42], such as the labour of women who stay at home to raise children and those who work in domestic or low-skilled jobs, and this continues to be an issue. There are elements of gender-specific precarity throughout the tiers of the workforce however; issues relating to 'glass ceilings', maternity leave allowances and reduced hours due to childcare commitments affect women in all forms of work, and often result in them earning lower wages than their male counterparts. Anton Hemerijck observes that based on statistics from 2006, the gender pay gap in the UK is around 20%, making it one of the highest in Europe[43].

---

[36] Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013), pp. 8-9.

[37] Smith, p. 45.

[38] Mantel, pp. 1-2.

[39] Atkinson, p. 32.

[40] Genevieve Fox, 'Kate Atkinson: Week One: Interview', *The Telegraph,* 30 June 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/8608641/Kate-Atkinson-Week-One> [accessed 20 November 2012]

Whilst the disparity and unfairness in working conditions and pay experienced by women form a large part of any discussion of gender-specific precarity, women's precarious experiences are not limited to their roles within capitalist production. As Carol Hanisch's famous second-wave essay stated, 'the personal is political'[44], and this statement is as relevant in post-recession Britain as it was forty years ago. Berlant's argument that the present liberal-capitalist society barely provides support to individuals at the bottom of the social ladder is made clear through the underfunding of many social concerns, often ones that affect women in particular. Over the past few years, for example, dependency on food banks has increased for many families due, in part, to cuts in welfare support[45]. This year tax credits for third children, worth £2780 a year, have been removed unless the mother can prove that the child was conceived through rape, and a substantial cut to the Widowed Parent's Allowance has come into force[46]. The rates of domestic abuse recorded in London increased by 72% between 2007 and 2015, whilst the investment from councils in women's refuges fell by 38%[47], and although there have been attempted improvements in laws to assist in the prosecution of rape cases over the past few years, only around a fifth of women report incidents because they do not 'have any confidence in the police's ability to help them'[48].

---

[41] Neilson and Rossiter, 'Precarity as a Political Concept', p. 52.

[42] Taylor, p. 155.

[43] Anton Hemerijck, *Changing Welfare States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 248.

[44] Carol Hanisch, *The Personal Is Political,* (2009) <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[45] Patrick Butler, 'Poorest UK families struggle to put food on the table, survey finds', *The Guardian,* 30 March 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/30/poorest-uk-families-struggle-eat-regularly-heathily-food-standards-agency-survey> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[46] Helen Lewis, 'The Tories have stopped talking about austerity. That doesn't mean it's gone away', *New Statesman*, 6 April 2017 http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/welfare/2017/04/tories-have-stopped-talking-about-austerity-doesnt-mean-its-gone-away [accessed 25 April 2017].

[47] Niamh McIntyre, 'London refuges have funding slashed as rates of domestic violence soar', *The Independent*, 7 March 2007 < http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-councils-funding-refuges-domestic-violence-cut-38-percent-2010-a7612871.html> [accessed 26 April 2017].

Tsianos and Papadopoulos refer to the 'immediate level of social life where experience gets under the skin' as the micropolitical, and they argue that it is here that feminism and other socio-political movements start with 'the embodied experience of exclusion on the level of the everyday'[49]. Judith Butler's discussion of gender performativity and precarity echoes this sense of exclusion:

> precarious life characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. And in this way, precarity is [a] rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless.[50]

Butler states that precarity is directly linked with gender norms, with how the public and private are distinguished, and with how certain people fail to be protected by the law on the street or in the home[51]. These observations infer that gender-based precarity relates not only to neoliberalism in terms of work and pay, but has implications still in relation to sexual politics (reproductive, maternity and abortion rights, rape laws, domestic abuse prosecution and support) as well as the ideology related to the performance of traditional feminine societal roles. Ahmed discusses these ideologies in her examination of the 'unhappy housewife' and the 'feminist killjoy', both figures who she argues are seen negatively because of the 'challenge they offer to the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal'[52].

Multiple examples of gender-specific precarity are present in all of the novels considered in this thesis, some of which relate to work and poverty-based precarity, but most that link to the personal and social experiences of women in neoliberal Britain. Each novel contains one or more characters who suffer rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence. There are women who reject the traditional roles of wife and mother, women who become bad mothers because of mis-sold promises of happiness associated with motherhood, and other women who live miserable lives because of their inability to procreate, or due to the loss of a child. There are women who do not 'qualify as recognisable' by the public or the law because they are homeless or sex workers, women who suffer because they are homosexual, or are presumed to be homosexual by the people around them because they do not conform to feminine ideals.

---

[48] Gordon Rayner and Bill Gardner, 'Men must prove a woman said 'Yes' under tough new rape rules', *The Telegraph*, 28 Jan 2015 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/11375667/Men-must-prove-a-woman-said-Yes-under-tough-new-rape-rules.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[49] Tsianos and Papadopoulos.

[50] Judith Butler, 'Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics', *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 4.3 (2009) i-xiii (p. xiii).

[51] Butler, p. iii.

[52] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 53.

All of these characters present a vision of how hard it is to live in a society that thrives on ideals that are often unobtainable, or if they are obtained, are full of disappointment. They also present a vision of what it is to live in a society that does not make room for you, a society that you do not fit into. The fact that it is mostly females within the narratives who have these experiences is not coincidental; many of the forms of precarity explored through the reading of these novels are fundamentally linked to the gender of the protagonists.

Precarity in Fiction

Over the last few years precarity has begun to be noted academically as a concept that is explored in contemporary fiction, but this analysis is still limited to a handful of cases. The example that resonates most with this thesis is Lauren Berlant's concept of the 'Cinema of Precarity', which she explores in her book *Cruel Optimism.* Berlant discusses the Cinema of Precarity in relation to two of Laurent Cantet's contributions to French cinema at the turn of the millennium, *Ressources Humaines* and *L'emploi du Temps*, investigating the concept of precarity from an affective standpoint. Berlant states that the Cinema of Precarity:

> attends to the proprioceptive – to bodies moving in space performing affective laden gestures – to investigate new potential conditions of solidarity emerging from subjects not with similar historical identities or social locations but with similar adjustment styles to the pressures of the emergent new ordinariness.[53]

Melissa Gregg has used Berlant's 'reading of worker sentiment' as a guide for her analysis of office work in television shows *Six Feet Under* and *The Office*. In her analysis, Gregg extends Berlant's project 'to highlight the difficulty of improvising etiquette, intimacy, and commitment when traditional narratives for happiness and contentment reach exhaustion'[54]. Whilst her discussion centres on the individual's role in surviving the 'drudgery of office life', its main concern is how individuals living and working in the 'solitude of the cubicle' can begin to find a new way of understanding what it means to live a fulfilling life[55].

There has been some Italian feminist discussion of precarity in a 2007 special issue of the *Feminist Review* that included a brief discussion of literature, despite most of the articles exploring precarity as a politically and sociologically experienced phenomenon. Of the contributions there are two which deal with literary interpretations of precarity; in one article,

---

[53] Berlant, pp. 201-2.

[54] Melissa Gregg, 'On Friday Night Drinks', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 250-269, p. 252.

[55] Gregg, p. 267.

Lidia Curti explores the ‘literature of migration’ that has emerged in recent decades in Italy, specifically focusing on women’s writing:

> In women’s narratives, precarity emerges in the journey of emigration, described as a real odyssey; in tensions over identity and language; in contrasting cultures of departure and cultures of destination; in the problematic concept of ‘home’.[56]

The second article considers ‘precarious theatre’ in women’s prisons, and discusses how theatrical workshops ‘inspired by the works of Marguerite Dumas’ evolved into theatrical performances that were staged at the Mercandante Theatre in Naples as part of a prison-theatre festival[57]. Whilst creative interpretation and literature form the basis for this discussion, the main interest is how the precarious, immigrant female prisoners themselves interpreted Dumas’ writing based on their own experiences, and so again falls primarily under the exploration of precarity as a lived experience rather than its place in a literary field.

The issue of precarity is not only a European one, a point explored by Roman Rosenbaum and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt who have recently collated discussions of precarity in Japanese literature and popular culture in an edited collection[58]. In his introduction to this collection, Rosenbaum explains that different generations within contemporary Japan have developed a ‘worldview that is distinct in terms of its pessimism and anguish about the future’, attributes that are ‘expressed in the artistic output of several generations in popular culture and literature’[59]. The chapters of the book focus on the ‘ever-increasing proportion of literature, film, manga and anime that depict the side effects of prolonged economic stress on disenfranchised communities and the well-being of the individual in Japan’[60]. Rosenbaum explains that despite extensive discussion of the topics of economic decline in Japan, there are still very few scholarly studies on the cultural and literary repercussions of this period, making this collection surprisingly novel in its area of study.

Apart from Berlant’s ‘Cinema of Precarity’, the discussion of literary precarity that most closely resonates with this thesis is Jago Morrison’s article ‘The Turn to Precarity in Twenty-first Century Fiction’, in which Morrison uses Judith Butler’s *Frames of War* to study the presence of affective precarity in Trezza Azzopardi’s *Remember Me*. The article investigates the idea that cultural shifts evident in post 9-11 fiction can be characterised by 'a renewal of interest in the flow and foreclosure of affect, the resurgence of questions about vulnerability and our relationships to the other, and a heightened awareness of the social dynamics of seeing'[61]. He states that this 'substantive departure from the literature of the 1980s and 1990s' places 'affect as a central concern in fiction', and uses the term 'turn to precarity' to draw together the tendencies of post 9-11 fiction to explore 'historical transitions and aftermaths' as well as 'vulnerability and fragility, both personal and social'[62]. Morrison's interpretation of the neologism follows Berlant's and Gregg's interest in placing affect as a significant feature of understanding the importance of this political and social shift. In *Women's Fiction and Post 9-11 Contexts*, a collection that includes Morrison's article as a chapter, the editors' introduction supports Morrison's stance that 'one of the noticeable shifts post 9-11 is the reversion to an interest in sensibility and emotion after postmodernism's emphasis on the waning of affect':

---

[56] Lidia Curti, 'Female Literature of Migration in Italy', *Feminist Review,* 87 (2007), 60-75 (p. 60).

[57] Susanna Poole, 'Voicing the Non-Place: Precarious Theatre in a Woman's Prison', *The Feminist Review,* 87 (2007), 141-152 (p. 145).

[58] Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt and Roman Rosenbaum, *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

[59] Roman Rosenbaum, 'Towards an Introduction: Japan's Literature of Precarity', in *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature,* ed. by Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt and Roman Rosenbaum (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-23, p. 5.

[60] Rosenbaum, p. 3.

> One might say that precarity points to a world that is less predictable and more insecure, but also to a response that acknowledges the fragility and value of life. After postmodern irony and relativism, reality matters again.[63]

This brief discussion of the academic exploration of precarity in fiction displays that it is a growing area of interest, which this thesis aims to expand on. Morrison's discussion of *Remember Me* is, it appears, the only example in which British contemporary fiction has been explored under the banner of a 'turn to precarity', and yet as Morrison himself mentions, there are many examples of novels that grapple with similar issues of 'exposure, vulnerability and legacies of violence'[64]. The novels chosen for consideration in this thesis fall within this affective structure; like Berlant's Cinema of Precarity, they track the disturbance that is precarity, 'the instability of the ongoing present'[65].

One way in which this thesis diverges from Morrison's reading of a 'turn to precarity' is through the consideration of a wider range of 'victims' of precarity. While Morrison primarily considers a narrative that presents a homeless woman as a 'figure of the abject'[66] and an embodiment of precarity, the novels considered by this thesis present characters across the social spectrum as suffering from a precarious existence. Homeless characters still form part of this spectrum, but the argument of this thesis is that this affective experience resonates with anyone who is rejected by neoliberal British society, and many of those who attempt to live within it. Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson posit that 'wide inequality is bad for a society', and that 'more equal societies tend to do better on many measures of social health and wealth'[67]. It is this view that is put forward by this thesis: you do not need to be right at the bottom of the social scale to be classed as a victim of neoliberal inequality.

---

[61] Jago Morrison, 'The Turn to Precarity in Twenty-First Century Fiction', *American, British and Canadian Studies Journal,* 21.1 (2014) 10-29 (p. 10).
[62] Morrison, p. 12.
[63] Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook and Sebastian Groes, 'Introduction', in *Women's Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts,* ed. by Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook and Sebastian Groes (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. IX-XXV, p. XX.
[64] Morrison, p. 29.
[65] Berlant, p. 196.
[66] Morrison, p. 23.

Another way that this thesis varies from Morrison's chapter is in its exploration of precarity as related to everyday neoliberal life, rather than simply in relation to the violence and vulnerability of a post-9/11 world. The novels explored by this thesis do straddle the events of 9-11, and these events have an impact on some of the narratives, but the wider experiences related to precarity within the chosen novels resonate more with a general sense of social disorder. Violence, and the changing ways that 'vulnerability and grievability' have asserted themselves since 9/11[68], do form part of the discussion of some of these novels, but this is only one aspect of the reading which sits alongside pressures from economic, patriarchal, heteronormative and even environmental concerns.

Morrison does note that his classification of *Remember Me* as a 9/11 novel is not an obvious one, as it is 'both temporally and spatially removed from the events of September 2001'[69], but his application of Butler's *Frames of War* to his reading of the text does define it in relation to this event, and in this sense this thesis will discuss the impact of precarity on a wider societal and theoretical scale than Morrison attempts.

Ahmed and Berlant

This thesis devises ways of reading the chosen examples of fiction as 'novels of precarity' with reference to many spatial, political and social concepts, but the writing of Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant forms the theoretical backbone of this affective exploration. The approaches of both Ahmed and Berlant fall within the field of affect theory; a form of analysis which has been used in a range of subjects including history, political theory, human geography, urban and environmental studies and literary studies[70]. Ruth Leys tells us that affect 'is the name for what eludes form, cognition, and meaning'[71], while Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg state that it 'arises in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon'[72]. Leys explains that 'affects are “inhuman,” “pre-subjective,” “visceral” forces and intensities that influence our thinking and judgments but are separate from these’. They are processes that ‘take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning’[73].

---

[67] Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), p. x.
[68] Morrison, p. 20.
[69] Morrison, p. 22.
[70] Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry,* 37 (2011), 434-472 (p. 434).
[71] Leys, p. 450.
[72] Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 1-28, p. 1.

Seigworth and Gregg note that there are several ‘regions of investigation’ within affect theory ranging from cybernetics to ‘psychoanalytic inquiry’[74]. They observe that ‘phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies of embodiment’ are a form of affect[75] which places Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* within this theoretical approach, but explain that it is the ‘promises’ mentioned by Berlant in *Cruel Optimism* and Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* that are most clearly identified as ‘attempts to address what transpires in the affective bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality’[76]. The term ‘bloom space’ is used by Kathleen Stewart to describe living in a moment that has the potential of becoming something new. It is a world full of experiences that are ‘always promising and threatening to amount to something’, and it is fundamentally associated with affect as it is lived through affective experiences (‘not being able to sit still, being exhausted, being left behind or being ahead of the curve’[77]). In the case of both Berlant and Ahmed, it is this sense of being within a moment that feels as if it has the potential to become something bigger, or different, or simply new, which permeates so many of their ideas. The ‘promise’ could be, to use Stewart’s words, an allure or a threat, it could be positive or cruel depending on whether it is deemed feasible or unobtainable, but it is that promise that keeps people moving forward.

The following section contains a brief discussion of some of the main concepts developed by Berlant and Ahmed. Whilst this discussion is not exhaustive, it introduces many of the ideas that will be utilised by this thesis and will explain how the theorists will be used in conjunction. All of these concepts are explored in more depth throughout the chapters.

The themes present in the book *Cruel Optimism* have formed the basis for the discussion of Berlant’s theories in relation to these novels of precarity, but this has been supplemented with some ideas from Berlant’s journal articles, such as her discussion of the detective genre in ‘On The Case’[78], and other books including *Publics and Counterpublics*[79] which Berlant produced in collaboration with Michael Warner. Many of the chapters of *Cruel Optimism* appeared in earlier journal based variations that, whilst following very similar arguments to the chapters of the book, still differ in places, and for this reason these articles have been occasionally used in order to elaborate on particular discussions. This thesis has equally utilized concepts from a number of Ahmed's journal articles, but the primary source texts from her canon have been *The Promise of Happiness, Queer Phenomenology*[80] and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*[81].

---

[73] Leys, p. 437.
[74] Gregg and Seigworth, p. 7.
[75] Gregg and Seigworth, p. 6.
[76] Gregg and Seigworth, p. 9.
[77] Kathleen Stewart, ‘Worlding Refrains’, in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 339-354, p.340.
[78] Lauren Berlant, 'On the Case', *Critical Inquiry,* 33.4 (2007), 663-672.
[79] Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

Whilst both writers regularly consider the socio-political pressures present in contemporary literary, film and even documentary based narratives, neither have specifically considered the work of British women writers, with both favouring a discussion of American novels. There are many overlaps in the way that neoliberal policy and the rise of precarity have been experienced in the US and Britain, but this thesis posits that there are also nuanced differences which are missed when 'the West' is considered as a globalised whole. One example can be seen in the difference between the presentation of 9/11 in Berlant's reading of *Pattern Recognition*, and the consideration of *Beyond Black* within this thesis. The first novel presents an immediate and visceral experience of the traumatic events of 9/11 that changes the protagonist's sense of safety within her ongoing environment[82], while the second novel presents the same event as a distant occurrence which can only be experienced through the ongoing newsloop and eventual ripples of Islamaphobic feeling which followed. One account is intense and present, the other distant and elusive, reflecting a variation in the way that the two nations were impacted by the event.

The novels explored in this thesis draw on history and experiences that are specific to their British settings, and so these novels are accounts of neoliberal British precarity. Ahmed does examine some British cinema in her affective reading of happiness, in particular *Children of Men* and *Bend It Like Beckham*, but these discussions focus on topics such as race and immigration, and therefore differ in direction from this thesis. In consideration of these points, this thesis will expand the discussion of precarity in contemporary literature by discussing novelists and topics that have so far not been considered by Ahmed or Berlant, and which present a particularly British view of this affective socio-political experience.

Lauren Berlant: Cruel Optimism

For Berlant, the concept of cruel optimism is defined as a relation to something you desire but which 'is actually an obstacle to you flourishing'[83], a promise that is sold as something to aspire to but may not provide you with the happiness that is meant to be inherently related to it, such as marriage, children, or even job promotion. Whilst she ponders whether all forms of optimism are inherently cruel, Berlant decides that 'some scenes of optimism are clearly crueler than others'[84], citing examples from 'scouring love' to 'obsessive appetites, working for a living, patriotism, all kinds of things'[85]. At the centre of her project, however, is 'that moral-intimate-economic thing called "the good life"', a topic which prompts Berlant to ask:

---

[80] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology : Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

[81] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

[82] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 84.

[83] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 1.

> Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies – say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work – when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds?[86]

Berlant's interest lies primarily with the 'affective structure' of cruel optimism rather than the 'experience of optimism'[87]. She explains that her project is a formalist work in which optimism 'manifests in attachments and the desire to sustain them: attachment is a *structure* of relationality'[88]. Berlant's version of optimism is not about emotion, therefore; it is not about how optimism makes a person feel, but rather how certain attachments 'come to make sense or no longer make sense, yet remain powerful as they work against the flourishing of particular and collective beings'[89].

In an article titled 'Thinking About Feeling Historical', Berlant notes the difference between her definitions of structure and emotion/experience. She explains that an example of structure would be where a subject 'no longer finds traction in the ways of being that had provided continuity and optimism for her', whereas her feelings in relation to the event ('Maybe the event disorganizes her, which means that she may feel strongly or messy or distractedly about it') are her emotional response to that event[90]. Berlant's reason for this delineation is to clarify that 'the structure of an affect has no inevitable relation to the penumbra of emotions that may cluster in the wake of its activity, nor should it'[91]. One person's idea of a shameful event, for example, does not automatically produce shame in the subject it impacts.

This explanation proves useful when considering it in relation to the idea of precarity, which Berlant refers to as both 'the dominant *structure* and *experience* of the present moment, cutting across class and localities'[92]. She explains that the 'shifting up of economic precarity' into the formerly protected classes of the 'planetary petty bourgeoisie' (examples given include entrepreneurs, small property owners and the managerial class) causes 'major and minute recalibrations of relations among the state, the market, and how people live' making this shift more than simply economic: 'it is structural in many ways and permeates the affective environment too'[93].

---

[84] Berlant, p. 24.
[85] Berlant, p. 24.
[86] Berlant, p. 2.
[87] Berlant, p. 2.
[88] Berlant, p. 13.
[89] Berlant, p. 13.
[90] Lauren Berlant, 'Thinking About Feeling Historical', *Emotion, Space and Society,* 1 (2008), 4-9 (p. 4).
[91] Berlant, p. 4.
[92] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 192.

For Berlant, optimism is formed through attachments to objects of desire, a 'cluster of promises' which could seem embedded in 'a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea – whatever'[94]. Berlant uses the 'deictic' phrase of cruel optimism to 'track the affective attachment to what we call "the good life"', which she explains 'is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it'[95].

The Historical Present as Impasse

The historical present is a concept used by Berlant to explore the idea of the present as a 'mediated affect', a 'temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now whose very parameters [...] are also always there for debate'[96]. Berlant describes 'narrative histories of the present' as enabling 'us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing'; they provide 'a way to think about the history of sensualized epistemologies in the atmosphere of a particular moment now (aesthetically) suspended in time'[97].

Her discussion of the concept of the historical present borrows from Harry Harootunian's use of the term, in particular his concept of 'noncontemporaneous contemporaneity', defined as a 'constant concourse of mixed temporalities mingling and coexisting with each other'[98]. Harootunian's main interest is the discord between capital time, which attempts to even out disparate temporalities on both a local and global scale, and ordinary time as it is experienced outside of capitalist limitations. He calls for the creation of:

> a discourse on modernity that speaks to the world, one centered principally in understanding the history of our present as the unity of uneven temporalizations differentiating global geopolitical space, rather than merely affirming or cheering on a globalizing project that sees the world only as the true space of the commodity relation.[99]

---

[93] Berlant, p. 192.
[94] Berlant, p. 23.
[95] Berlant, p. 27.
[96] Berlant, p. 4.
[97] Berlant, p. 64.
[98] Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry,* 33.3 (2007), 471-494 (p. 490).
[99] Harootunian, p. 493.

Berlant presents herself as 'entirely in accord' with Harootunian's demand that a sense of 'noncontemporaneous contemporaneity' should be produced by literary historians in their analysis of the present, but disagrees with his presentation of the 'thick present' as a place that cramps imaginaries and limits a sense of alternativity, as well as his 'focus on futurity as the primary lubricant for counter-normative political consciousness'[100]. Berlant's version of the historical present allows for people to move and adjust within the unfolding moment.

Berlant uses a variety of terms in her exploration of the concept of the historical present. In an earlier article on the topic she introduces the terms 'stretched out now' to describe a merging of 'an intensified present with senses of the recent past and near future' which is caused when the 'historic(al) sense is forced to apprehend itself', and 'crisis ordinariness' to talk about social traumas that are lived through collectively 'and that transform the sensorium to a heightened perceptiveness about the unfolding of the historical, and sometimes historic, moment'[101]. She explains that throughout *Cruel Optimism* she refers to the historical present as a 'situation' deliberately, developing it as a concept to track actions and encounters 'within the elongated durée of the present moment':

> a situation is a genre of living that one knows one's in but that one has to find out about, a circumstance embedded in life but not in one's control. A situation is a disturbance, a sense genre of animated suspension – not suspended animation. […] When a situation unfolds, people try to maintain themselves in it until they figure out how to adjust.[102]

The term that Berlant uses most in relation to her discussions of the historical present, however, is that of the 'impasse', which she explains is her 'main genre for tracking the sense of the present'[103]:

> Usually an "impasse" designates a time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward. In this book's adaptation, the impasse is a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things.[104]

The experience of living in the impasse is likened by Berlant to 'dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure'[105]. She offers the concept 'both as a formal term for encountering the duration of the present, and a specific term for tracking the circulation of precariousness through diverse locales and bodies'[106], meaning that much like her other concepts, it can be applied to the reading of texts in multiple ways. She herself breaks down her application of the concept into three different examples, explaining that 'not all stretches of life and time in the present are suspended in the same way'. The first kind she instances is 'the impasse after the dramatic event of a forced loss, such as after a broken heart, a sudden death, or a social catastrophe'. The second is 'when one finds oneself adrift' without a clear catalyst, 'coasting through life, as it were, until one discovers a loss of traction'[107]. The third kind occurs when one lives in a situation that forces 'improvisation and reflection on life-without-guarantees', but this is experienced as 'a pleasure and a plus, not a loss'[108]. The concept of the impasse is therefore malleable and changes with the 'situation'.

---

[100] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 68.
[101] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 5.
[102] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 195.
[103] Berlant, p. 4.
[104] Berlant, p. 4.
[105] Berlant, p. 199.

There are various examples of impasse survival throughout the novels explored in this thesis; some forced by trauma, such as the death of a daughter and sister in *Hotel World*, and others realised through a loss of traction after many years of 'dogpaddling' in occupations and lives that are not happy, such as the experiences of Tracy in *Started Early* and Alison in *Beyond Black*. Each of these novels present the historical present as a temporal space that must be negotiated, and the narratives chart these negotiations as the characters invariably flounder, change direction, flee, or adapt. Berlant explains that:

> Whatever else it is, and however one enters it, the historical present – as an impasse, a thick moment of ongoingness, a situation that can absorb many genres without having one itself – is a middle without boundaries, edges, a shape. It is experienced in transitions and transactions. It is the name for the space where the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without assurances of futurity, but nevertheless proceeding via durable norms of adaptation.[109]

A concern for, or plan for, the future is not really what these novels are about; as the quote above confirms, there are no 'assurances of futurity' in the historical present. Rather, each of the novels record characters attempting to make sense of the present by drawing on the events of the recent, and sometimes distant past in order to attempt to work out a way of surviving in the now. One way that this occurs is through intuition.

---

[106] Berlant, p. 199.
[107] Berlant, pp. 199-200.
[108] Berlant, p. 200.
[109] Berlant, p. 200.

Intuition

Berlant defines 'intuition' as 'the process of dynamic sensual data-gathering' used 'to make reliable sense of life'; it 'is the work of history translated through personal memory'[110]. She begins by considering 'how narratives involving the education of embodied intuition in a transforming world situation can be said to capture the drama of their historical present'[111], but then goes on to track 'intuition as the most acute mediator of the ways affect can take form in a crisis-intensified historical present'[112]. She ends by considering works in which characters have 'super-sensitive intuitions that they have professionalized'[113], an exploration that is reflected on in this thesis in the analysis of *Beyond Black*'s clairvoyant protagonist, Alison.

Whilst, in a broad sense, intuition is used by Berlant to describe any form of information gathering in order to knowingly and shrewdly adapt and move within the historical present, much of her discussion relates to having to relearn how to survive within a time of 'crisis ordinariness', in other words in response to a personal or public trauma. Berlant explains that many analysts would call her work on the historical present 'post-traumatic', but that her aim is to move the discussion of the historical present towards 'explaining crisis-shaped subjectivity amid the ongoingness of adjudication, adaptation, and improvisation'[114].

Situational Tragedy

The final concept which the thesis utilises from Berlant's work is that of the situational tragedy, a term which describes 'episodes of personality caught up in a form of despair not existential or heroic but shaped within the stresses of ordinary life under capitalism'[115]. The term comes from a 'marriage between tragedy and situational comedy' and so plays on many of the traits of situational comedy; the characters of a situational tragedy for example are 'fated to express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning' or changing, but where the comedy genre's imaginary makes room for people to endure in this type of behaviour, the tragic counterpart sees them 'ejected from the social'[116]. Berlant explains that:

> In the situational comedy, the subject whose world is not too destabilized by a 'situation' that arises performs a slapstick maladjustment that turns out absurdly and laughably, without destroying very

---

[110] Berlant, p. 52.
[111] Berlant, p. 52.
[112] Berlant, p. 53.
[113] Berlant, p. 54.
[114] Berlant, p. 54.
[115] Berlant, p. 290.
[116] Berlant, pp. 176-7.

> much. In the situational tragedy, the subject's world is fragile beyond repair, one gesture away from losing all access to sustaining its fantasies: the situation threatens utter, abject unravelling.[117]

Aspects of this theory are applied in the reading of the character Penny in *Hotel World*, the only one who continues to 'buy' into the optimistic attachments to capital which are destined to disappoint, but there are characters in each novel who continue to perform this role, from Tracy's aspiring mother in *Started Early* to Alison's sour colleague Colette in *Beyond Black.* Whilst the events and situations that affect these characters are not always as economically tragic as those explored by Berlant, they still present a sense of sad inevitability of being unable to learn and adapt; these characters are often used to create a foil for the protagonists who watch them repeat their mistakes over and over, and are inspired through this to find an alternative way of surviving.

Sara Ahmed: Queer Phenomenology and Orientation

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed explains that she begins with the approach of phenomenology because it 'makes "orientation" central in the sense that consciousness is always directed "toward" an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body'[118]. She explores our use of spatial language to describe lived experiences, phrases such as orientation (as well as dis- and re-orientation), deviation, co-incidence, 'having a direction' or 'losing our way', in order to consider how these terms can be used to describe experiences in both literal and metaphorical ways.

Ahmed's approach helps to position the individual within their surroundings by building on the tradition of phenomenology, the investigation and description of phenomena (objects of the senses, such as sights and sounds)[119], and queering it in order to 'offer a different "slant" to the concept of orientation itself'[120]. To be orientated is a personal experience, and yet it is impacted by the society around us: Ahmed tells us that we are orientated when we are in line, but to be 'in line' we must face the same direction as others and allow our bodies to extend into spaces that 'have already taken their shape'[121]. To become offline, to deviate from a direction, can make one feel disorientated, and it is this idea that forms the basis of the book.

---

[117] Berlant, p. 6.
[118] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2.
[119] Walter Biemel and Herbert Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology* (2012), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/phenomenology> [accessed 20 August 2016].
[120] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 4.
[121] Ahmed, p. 15.

Ahmed reconsiders the idea of 'sexual orientation' as a phenomenological question, and in doing so offers 'a new way of thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race'[122] and a new model 'of how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space'[123]. She explains that:

> Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.[124]

The 'queerness' of nonaligned sexuality and gender forms an integral part of Ahmed's phenomenological investigation. Ahmed states that her project inhabits the fields of queer theory, women's studies and gay and lesbian studies, continuing each field's work in providing 'crucial insights into the alignments and nonalignments of sex, gender, and sexual orientation'[125]. These themes are considered in relation to the texts explored in this thesis, from the reading of the movements and experiences of *Hotel World's* Sara, a lesbian ghost in the world of the living, to the struggles of Tracy in *Started Early,* a policewoman who must negotiate a mysogynistic world into which she does not naturally 'fit'.

There is also a wider application of Ahmed's approach to orientation, however, when considered in relation to the idea of 'disorientation'. Ahmed describes 'moments of disorientation' as 'queer moments', and quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty to explain that moments of disorientation involve not only 'the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us'[126]. Disorientation, with all of its feelings of instability, is a queer feeling because it unsettles the person who experiences it; it upsets their concept of normality by forcing them to view the world from an unusual angle. Ahmed tells us that 'disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are'[127], but it can also be a realisation that we just do not fit, do not belong, where we once thought we did:

> If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails. Or we could say that some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others.[128]

---

[122] Ahmed, p. 2.
[123] Ahmed, p. 5.
[124] Ahmed, p. 2.
[125] Ahmed, p. 192.
[126] Ahmed, p. 4.
[127] Ahmed, p. 20.
[128] Ahmed, p. 11.

We may go home and find that it does not feel like home any more, or walk into a place and feel unwelcome for any number of reasons (gender, race, sexuality, wealth, nationality, social mobility, and so on). This sense of disorientation forces a response: either one stops and tries to realign oneself to the original 'line', the original orientation, or one makes the choice to deviate from one's path and, in doing so, reorientate to a new direction. The example given by Ahmed is the case of being a lesbian in a 'world organized around the form of the heterosexual couple': 'Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions'[129]. This 'making of worlds' is positive, but it is not easy.

Ahmed's theory of orientation and disorientation is useful in relation to the concept of precarity in literature because it allows for the position of the precariat to be considered as a personally experienced encounter with the space, objects and people around them. This tactile presentation humanises their 'lived experience' and allows the reader to begin to grasp how the characters' orientation in the time and space around them affects the directions they take in life. The movement from a reliance on a 'direction' promised by capitalism (visualised as 'the good life') is disorientating. It can result in dizziness and panic and nausea, but it can also allow for reorientation to a new 'direction', and so can provide a sense of positive change.

An example which is explored in the first chapter of this thesis is how a person's relation to the space of the hotel in Ali Smith's *Hotel World* is determined by their position within capitalist society; the way a person interacts with, moves through, inhabits and behaves in a hotel will vary according to whether they are a guest, a member of staff, or in the case of the homeless Else, an unwelcome visitor. The hotel will make space for some bodies and not others, and this will depend on both their ability to justify their presence in that space (through paying or working for the hotel), and their willingness to follow the rules of that place, of which there are many. By acting as a microcosm of the neoliberal world that surrounds the hotel, this non-place provides a metaphor of what it is to live in a society which extends 'certain bodies and simply do[es] not leave room for others': the welcome message on the front step is not universal, but rather acts as a reminder that some are more welcome than others. The other two novels, *Started Early* and *Beyond Black*, contain characters who have to reconsider who they are because of their experiences of social mobility; neither Jackson nor Alison belong in the working class worlds of their childhood anymore, and yet they struggle to be accepted into the middle classes which fit them just as badly.

The final concept from *Queer Phenomenology* which relates to the approach of this thesis is that of 'co-incidence'. Ahmed's phenomenological concept of co-incidence is based on the idea of two entities arriving to create an 'encounter'. The dash is used to separate the word from

---

[129] Ahmed, p. 20.

'coincidence' in order to avoid the interpretation of this type of event being based on chance. Ahmed explains that:

> To "co-incide" suggests how different things happen at the same moment, a happening that brings things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of each thing. Simultaneous arrivals are not necessarily a matter of chance; arrivals are determined, at least in a certain way, as a determination that might determine what gets near, even if it does not decide what happens once we are near. If being near to this or that object is not a matter of chance, what happens in the "now" of this nearness remains open, in the sense that we don't always know things affect each other, or how we will be affected by things.[130]

The example that Ahmed gives relates to her examination of Edmund Husserl's philosophical discussion of the writing table, the object which is nearest the philosopher and allows him to write his philosophy, an object which is only useful when it is 'near to hand'[131]. For Husserl, the table both allows him to write, and inspires his philosophy to become the subject of his writing, therefore Husserl and the table have had to co-incide in order for him to write on and about the table.

Each of the novels explored in this thesis are essentially about 'co-incidence'. In Smith's *Hotel World*, it is the hotel which forms an environment in which the characters co-incide: several characters arrive and encounter each other, and the novel charts how this 'nearness' affects their behaviour, their choices and their actions. In Atkinson's *Started Early*, it is Tracy's presence as the point between two different criminal cases and two different time frames that forms the co-incidence; in Mantel's *Beyond Black*, Alison is a sentry and communicator between her world and the afterlife, which makes her both the origin and the focus of co-incidence.

Happiness and the Perhaps

In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed aims to situate her work within the 'feminist cultural studies of emotion and affect' that includes Berlant, among others[132]. Her exploration of the concept of happiness takes 'good feeling' as its starting point, but explains that 'the distinction between good feeling and bad feeling' does not hold for long[133]. She explores how 'feelings are attributed to objects, such that some things and not others become happiness and unhappiness causes', noting that feelings do not reside within subjects and then move out towards objects, rather ‘feelings are how objects create impressions in shared spaces of dwelling’[134].

---

[130] Ahmed, p. 39.
[131] Ahmed, p. 3.
[132] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 13.
[133] Ahmed, p. 14.

One ‘happy object’ that Ahmed explores is that of the family; she explains that objects which are created by happiness accumulate ‘positive affect value as social goods’. They are ‘what good feelings are directed toward, as well as providing a shared horizon of experience’[135]. In exploring how the opposite can also be the case, Ahmed refers back to her approach in *Queer Phenomenology* by considering how the family as an object of happiness only creates happiness when one shares its orientation; if one deviates from the path laid out by the family then the feelings of disorientation associated with this makes a person disturb everything[136]. It can make them feel wretched and disappointed. When a person begins to feel wretched, they might begin to ‘want to want’ that thing which should make them happy (Ahmed gives the example of a bride who is not happy on her wedding day, but ‘saves the day’ by making herself not seem miserable so that people can say that ‘the bride looked happy’[137]) but people who ‘give up wanting what one wants to want’ and decide to ‘want other things’ become ‘affect aliens’, alienated by their inability to ‘desire in the right way’[138].

Examples of affect aliens that are presented by Ahmed include feminist killjoys, melancholic migrants and unhappy queers, but her concept is applied in this thesis to a range of characters who become alienated by their desires, such as Jackson of *Started Early* whose experience of social mobility has made him feel alien to both his working class roots and his middle class ex-wife and daughter. Sara in *Hotel World* can be classed as an ‘unhappy queer’ as a teenage girl who cannot admit her homosexual desires to her family, and so feels alienated and alone, but so too can Tracy of *Started Early* and Alison of *Beyond Black*, two older women who never married or had children, and so deviated from the expected path of womanhood.

Ahmed also applies another term to the concept of the affect alien, that of a ‘revolutionary consciousness’ which is associated with people who ‘fight for alternative futures’[139], usually in a political sense. Whilst none of the characters in these novels are overtly political, several of them do actively break laws and rules and confront wrongdoers in order to do what they think is right, and through these acts take on the role of ‘deviant’. Whilst not ‘revolutionary’ on a large scale, the minor acts performed by characters such as Tracy, Alison and *Hotel World’s* Lise disrupt the normal which can be viewed as revolutionary within their personal spheres. Sometimes the road to an alternative way of thinking requires small steps rather than world-altering revolutions, and that is what these novels present.

---

[134] Ahmed, p. 14.
[135] Ahmed, p. 21.
[136] Ahmed, p. 48.
[137] Ahmed, p. 42.
[138] Ahmed, p. 240.
[139] Ahmed, p. 170.

Hope and Hap

Ahmed discusses the concept of hope as imagining ‘happiness as what lies ahead of us’, an attachment to the future[140], and whilst this emotion appears in the novels, the narratives are not necessarily ‘hopeful’ ones. As discussed in the synopsis of Berlant’s approach, the spaces of the historical present lack ‘assurances of futurity’, and these novels tend not to look to the future as a place that will find space, or hope, or a ‘happy ending’ for these characters. A concept that is more relevant than ‘hope’ to this thesis’ analysis is Ahmed’s discussion of ‘hap’. Ahmed discusses the root of the term ‘hap’ which forms part of the concepts of happiness, happening and ‘perhaps’. ‘Hap’ means chance, and so the original definition of ‘happy’ was ‘to be lucky or fortunate’[141]:

> Perhaps we could separate the hapless from the wretched. The wretched ones might be full of hap, might be hapfull, because they deviate from the paths of happiness, because they live in the gaps between its lines. To be full of hap is to make happen. A politics of the hap is about opening up possibilities for being in other ways, of being perhaps. If opening up possibility causes unhappiness, then a politics of hap might be thought of as unhappy. But it is not just that. A politics of the hap might embrace what happens, but it also works toward a world in which things can happen in alternative ways. To make hap is to make a world.[142]

More than the concept of happiness itself, which is often fleeting in these novels, the idea of ‘hap’ has relevance in the analysis of these texts, allowing for the characters in the novels to be considered as examples of ‘the wretched’ who deviate from paths of happiness. The sense of hap over hope allows for the characters to be full of agency, and so capable of making a future of some kind, without the need for those futures to be mapped out or imbued with optimism and hope related to dreams that are destined to disappoint.

Language of Hate

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed discusses the concept of hate by explaining how ‘hate works by sticking ‘figures of hate’ together, transforming them into a common threat, within discourses on asylum and migration'[143]. She explores how 'the language of hate affects those who are designated as objects of hate'[144], and how narratives of hate work through 'othering': for example 'the 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers'' of a British National Front poster 'are those who are "not us", and who in not being us, endanger what is ours'[145]. This concept is primarily applied in the reading of *Beyond Black*, but the process of 'othering' is something that suffuses all of the novels, and matches Ahmed's other concepts of 'affect aliens' and 'revolutionary consciousness'.

---

[140] Ahmed, p. 160.
[141] Ahmed, p. 22.
[142] Ahmed, p. 223.

The Approaches of Ahmed and Berlant as Complementary Frameworks

There have been critical discussions which present Berlant's and Ahmed's work as having similar approaches. As noted earlier, Seigworth and Gregg have discussed both as affect theorists as well as including Berlant's original journal article 'Cruel Optimism'[146] and Ahmed's discussion of 'Happy Objects'[147] as chapters in their field-defining collection *The Affect Theory Reader.* In his review of *Cruel Optimism* and *The Promise of Happiness*, Donovan Schaefer states that 'it is in the *phenomenology of the political* that Ahmed and Berlant ground their projects'[148], but still notes that they have differing scopes:

> Although both Ahmed and Berlant write about the uses of affect as a phenomenological bridge to the political, and the slipperiness of happiness or the good life—the way that pleasure can be wrapped up with a strain of unease— there is a distinction between their respective scopes of inquiry. Where Ahmed's book is about frustration/promise/deferral, Berlant's is about addiction.[149]

He goes on to argue that whilst 'Berlant looks at how politics pulls on bodies using the ligaments of affect', 'Ahmed's focus is very different: she is interested in thinking through politics as the space of unhappiness and deferment'. Despite these differences, Schaefer concludes that:

> There is also a complementarity to these books, a sense in which both come at the relationship between affect and the political from different sides of the problem, but are nonetheless hurtling towards a common point of impact. Is Ahmed describing scenes where cruel optimism unravels under the internal pressure of a frustrated promise? Is cruel optimism the deferral of happiness

---

[143] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 15.
[144] Ahmed, p. 15.
[145] Ahmed, p. 1.
[146] Lauren Berlant, 'Cruel Optimism', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 93-117.
[147] Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 29-51.
[148] Donovan Schaefer, 'The Promise of Affect: The Politics of the Event in Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* and Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*', *Theory and Event,* 16.2 (2013), p. 2.
[149] Schaefer, p. 5.

> implicit in the temporal structure of the promise? These are not fully resolved or resolvable questions, in part because Ahmed and Berlant roll their theoretical lens over such a wide range of circumstances.[150]

The questions that Schaefer asks here show that there is a complex, sometimes impenetrable cross over between the concepts of these two theorists, but turning to the way that these writers refer to each others' work can provide some insight into how *they* feel that their work varies.

As discussed above, Berlant has stated in *Cruel Optimism* that her concept of cruel optimism, and everything that it encompasses, is presented as an affective structure where optimism is manifested through attachments. She separates this concept from the idea of emotional responses to these attachments, stating that 'the experience of affect and emotion that attaches to those relations is as extremely varied as the contexts of life in which they emerge'[151], and goes on to differentiate her approach from Ahmed's by referring to *The Promise of Happiness* as 'not really working on affect, but emotion'[152]:

> [Ahmed] is sceptical about optimism, at least in its appearance in contemporary regimes of compelled, often dissent-repressive, happiness. She is also more positive about its others, such as grumpiness and melancholy.'[153]

Berlant suggests that Ahmed equates 'the optimism of attachment with the feeling of optimism itself, and optimism with happiness'[154]. Ahmed responds to Berlant's assertion directly in the afterword of the second edition of her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, counter-arguing that her work implicitly 'challenges this use of this distinction between affect and emotion'[155]:

> I would suggest that my own attempt to re-theorise emotions includes analysis of those processes that some have used the term 'affect' to describe. Emotions, in other words, involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected, or to use my own terms, emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others. [156]

Ahmed demonstrates the inconsistency in the use of terminology, as she is described by some as an 'affect theorist' and by others as not working on affect because she works on emotion. She instead hopes for ‘an intellectual horizon in which emotion and affect are not taken as choices that lead us down separate paths’[157], arguing that:

---

[150] Schaefer, p. 6.
[151] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 13.
[152] Berlant, p. 12.
[153] Berlant, p. 13.
[154] Berlant, p. 12.
[155] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 207.
[156] Ahmed, p. 208.

> Emotions are not “after-thoughts” but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit […] While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated.[158]

Despite this variance in approach to emotion versus affect, Berlant references Ahmed’s other work, *Queer Phenomenology*, in her discussion of precarity in which she refers to it as affect. She names this work as being part of a larger canon of literature that forms a ‘proprioceptive history’ of precarity, literature which uses the movement, position and awareness of individuals within space to form an affective reading of what it is to live a precarious life. Berlant explains that this archive ‘provides access to the affective re-education that transpires in response to the stress fractures now appearing in the normative fantasy and its related economies’[159]. This normative fantasy could be love, job security, or even political and social equality, but whatever the fantasy is, it occurs within a precarious public sphere governed by neoliberal capitalism. Berlant argues that this consideration of ‘bodily orientation’ provides an ‘intellectual context for rise of proprioception as a metric for apprehending the historical present’[160].

Ahmed references Berlant’s theories extensively throughout her body of work, and even appears as a reviewer on the back page of *Cruel Optimism*, referring to Berlant as ‘one of the most important and original critics of contemporary cultural logistics’[161]. Despite their occasionally differing views on the affective genre of each other’s work, their continuous inter-referencing suggests that each feels that the other adds something to the conversation which they themselves have not. Their work is arguably symbiotic, approaching similar topics from different angles, sometimes using the same term to describe different topics (such as the example of optimism as a structure and a feeling) and other times different words for quite similar concepts (such as Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism and Ahmed’s idea that the promise of happiness, embedded in an object, provides ‘the emotional setting for disappointment’[162]). Where Berlant presents structure and attachment, Ahmed uses emotion; where Berlant uses the articulation of time in her discussion of the historical present, Ahmed looks at the spatiality of moving and interacting bodies.

---

[157] Ahmed, p. 230.
[158] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 231.
[159] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 196.
[160] Berlant, p. 197.
[161] Berlant, back cover.
[162] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 29.

The inclusion of a variety of the concepts put forward by both Ahmed and Berlant in this thesis allows for a broad affective approach to the reading of these novels. Based on the theorists' own definitions of terms, the chapters will use an amalgamation of the concepts of cruel optimism as an affective structure, queer phenomenology as a form of understanding the proprioceptive experience of the precariat, and Ahmed's ideas relating to happiness, 'hap' and fear as an emotional exploration in its analysis of the novels. It will consider all of these concepts under the temporal framework of the historical present as presented by Berlant.

Novels of Precarity

Each chapter of this thesis will concentrate on an individual novel, exploring in depth how the novels articulate the historical present and can be discussed as explorations of affective precarity. They will include discussions of other theoretical works utilised by Berlant and Ahmed to explore the concepts from different perspectives, and will take into account how the varying genre influences of the novels enhance their presentation of the contemporary world.

The first chapter will explore Ali Smith's *Hotel World*, her 2001 novel which is set in a contemporary unnamed city in the north of England. As the title suggests, the narrative moves in and around a chain hotel called the Global Hotel, a building situated in the centre of the town which hides behind a generic veneer of respectable millennial consumerism, and thrives parasitically on the tourist trade drawn by the town's historic landmarks.

The novel charts the experiences of five separate women over the span of a year: Sara, the spirit of a girl who died in a freak accident involving the hotel's dumb waiter; Else, a homeless woman who sleeps outside the hotel; Lise, an employee of the Global Hotel who suffers with an undiagnosed chronic illness; Penny, an unlikeable journalist who stays at the hotel in order to write promotional material about it; and finally Clare, Sara's younger sister who struggles to come to terms with her sister's death. Each chapter of the novel follows a different character, and in turn adopts a different authorial voice and style of narration. Smith uses language to present the individual identities of these women; Sara, Else and Lise all suffer with varying forms of aphasia, losing the ability to conjure words that are key to their survival, whilst Penny and Clare suffer with an overabundance of language that loses meaning in its excess.

The analysis of this novel will utilise Marc Augé's work on the non-places of supermodernity to supplement Berlant's and Ahmed's concepts in a discussion which explores Smith's temporal, spatial and affective presentations of precarious life in a neoliberal world.

The second chapter will discuss Kate Atkinson's *Started Early, Took My Dog*. This novel, written and set in 2010, is the fourth in the series of Atkinson's Jackson Brodie detective novels, and sees Jackson return to his childhood home of Yorkshire in search of answers for a client who was adopted under mysterious circumstances in the 1970s. This investigation allows the narrative to jump between the past and present, drawing comparisons between the Leeds of the 1970s, haunted by the Yorkshire Ripper and general police corruption, and the post-recession Leeds of 2010 with its dichotomous split of poverty and gentrification.

Running in parallel to Jackson's investigation are a series of other narratives centred on secondary characters whose stories all interweave to build to the novel's climactic conclusion. Tracy, a middle-aged, unmarried, childless, retired police officer works as a security manager in the local shopping centre, until the day she unwittingly buys a little girl from a crack-addicted prostitute, and goes on the run. Tilly, an aging actress who plays the mother of a TV detective, is in the early stages of dementia and struggles to hold on to her job as well as her memory and sanity. Themes of lost children, lost opportunities and fear of what lurks in society's shadows run throughout the novel, continuing the tropes found in the earlier Brodie novels.

The chapter will investigate how the themes of crime and class are juxtaposed in the novel's two different time frames to display a stretched out now that spans the history of neoliberalism. It will consider Roland Barthes' discussion of mythology in addition to Ahmed's and Berlant's concepts in order to explore how the presentation of the crimes of the Yorkshire Ripper, and the presentation of class boundaries, challenge bourgeois ideology.

The third chapter will consider Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*, published in 2005. This novel presents the character Alison Hart, a clairvoyant tarot reader who peddles her trade at the psychic fayres held in the London suburbs and the towns along the M3 and M4. Alison is an overweight, single, middle-aged woman who is literally and metaphorically haunted by the ghosts of her past, and as the narrative develops we learn about how the abuses performed on her in childhood have impacted on her adult life.

Alison's business partner, Colette, helps her to make her trade more streamlined and professional, but their commercialisation is paralleled by a growing darkness as the afterlife begins to bleed into the present. The novel presents a post 9/11 world in which people are suspicious of strangers and anyone who seems different, but it is Alison's knowledge of what lies 'beyond black' that truly puts these perceived dangers into context.

The chapter will explore how the novel utilises gothic tropes in its presentation of the historical present. In addition to Ahmed's and Berlant's theories, this chapter will return to Auge's presentation of the non-place as well as Barbara Adam's discussion of the temporality of environments in late capitalism to explore how Mantel presents a world that is inhospitable to both the living and the spirits that inhabit it.

These novels track narratives in which the fantasies of the good life have already frayed, and present characters who have to develop new ways to find happiness, or optimism, now that those fantasies have 'frayed'. The moments of crisis in which the protagonists find themselves are, in Berlant's words, a new ordinary; an 'intersecting space where many forces and histories circulate and become "ready to hand"'. They are spaces where it is possible to invent 'new rhythms for living, rhythms that could, at any time, congeal into norms, forms, and institutions'[163]. It is within this new ordinary, this intersecting space, that many of the characters of each novel, to use Ahmed's term, 'co-incide'.

Each novel centres around a crux point of unravelling, a fixed point of no return. Each novel also tracks the development of the unravelling, the pain associated with this, and the need to overcome what Berlant calls cruel optimism's double bind: 'even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working'[164]. Each one of the protagonists has become adept at 'fitting in' to society in one way or another, usually by hiding aspects of their true selves, but in the historical present of the novel this is no longer sustainable.

Berlant's approach in *Cruel Optimism* considers new aesthetic forms which emerged in the 1990s, such as 'the situational tragedy' and 'cinema of precarity', which she argues:

> register a shift in how the older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies shape adjustments to the structural pressures of crisis and loss that are wearing out the power of the good life's traditional fantasy bribe without wearing out the need for a good life.[165]

Atkinson's reinterpretation of the crime novel can be considered a new aesthetic form, although one not considered by Berlant in particular, which adapts a genre with a rich history of both British and female writing to create a form which explores the cracks which appear in the worn out 'fantasy bribe' of the good life. Mantel's use of gothic tropes in her writing adapts a genre with an equally rich history in women's writing to present a story that modernises the concept of horror, making it less about ancient monsters in the grand castles of Europe, and more about the general sense of anxiety found in contemporary society, such as the fears noted by Tyler of 'border controls and terror threats'[166].

While the term precarity is often defined as a sense of negative hesitation or nervous trepidation, Franco Berardi notes that the term derives from the Latin word for praying, *precari*, which one could argue still suggests a sense of hope[167]. For an atheist, praying could be seen as a form of cruel optimism as it is begging for a non-existent deity to bestow luck on someone. For all of the protagonists in these novels praying appears to be pointless. When Alison in *Beyond Black* is asked where God is in ‘all this’, she replies that her guide has never seen God because he ‘doesn’t get out much’, but he is on first-name terms with the Devil[168]; for Jackson, the lapsed Catholic from *Started Early,* prayers are simply ‘fragments of memories’ from his pious upbringing, ‘his mother’s long forgotten voice’[169], while for *Hotel World’s* Sara, a spirit hovering in a purgatorial gap between worlds, heaven feels painfully far away. Despite these points, the novels considered in this thesis do not convey a purely negative or depressing view of society, but consider it from a view of criticism and higher expectation. There are elements of optimism that appear for many of the characters, but to claim them they must break rules or take a different path to the one expected. Precarity, in the case of these characters, often removes their ability to make a choice in relation to their futures; rather, acts of impulse and unexpected accidents push them in directions, which have the potential to be good, or bad, or both.

---

[163] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 9.
[164] Berlant, p. 263.
[165] Berlant, p. 7.
[166] Tyler, p. 9.

---

[167] Berardi, p. 148.

[168] Mantel, p. 174.

[169] Kate Atkinson, *Case Histories* (London: Doubleday, 2004), p. 224.

Chapter 1: Ali Smith's *Hotel World*

This chapter will argue that *Hotel World* can be read as a counternarrative to neoliberalism in its presentation of social, economic and personal issues. The chapter explores Smith's use of temporality and spaciality within the novel, and considers how her descriptions of the Global Hotel, the non-place central to the novel, arguably presents a criticism of neoliberalism. Smith's novel brings to light marginal characters that must negotiate the discontent and malaise perpetuated by the contemporary world.

Precarity appears in this novel in many forms, some specific to the economic and work-based concerns of life under neoliberalism, while others are more affective concerns which relate to the definitions of existential precarity put forward by Berardi and Foti. There is no primary protagonist in this novel, rather it is shared by five women who on the whole survive on the edge of society rather than within it. One character, Lise, experiences both what it is like to work in a job that brings little satisfaction or pay, and what it is like to have to claim benefits due to being sick and therefore unable to work. Her story shows us how sickness can only be accepted in a neoliberal society when it is defined through language acceptable to the state, and if it cannot be diagnosed then it is equated simply with a refusal to work. Else's experiences of living on the street present the reader not only with an account of poverty in relation to lack of money and housing, but equate homelessness with sickness, fear, and a history of sexual abuse, showing the affective complexity of what is usually considered simply an economic issue. Clare's narrative follows her journey to learn how and why her sister Sara died, and presents themes of loss, grief and anxiety. Lise and Else, strangers to Clare and to each other, offer Clare the time and support she needs to come to terms with Sara's death, while others misread her grief as begging (when she sits on the street) and teenage stroppiness. Through this novel, the concept of suffering that is 'invisible' and therefore ignored by society links the experiences of these three women. Each character is rejected or marginalised by society in their own way, but their acknowledgement of each other for even a moment creates a sense that unity can provide strength.

The one character who promotes and represents the neoliberal ethics of the novel's setting is Penny, a woman whose name itself references the monetary wealth that she symbolises through working within the system. Her laissez-faire attitude toward the others in the novel present her as a superficial and uncaring person, an archetype of 'Blair's Britain' who wants to seem like she cares but is too self involved to actually help anyone. Penny spends half of her story following the homeless Else around the town after initially mistaking her impoverished look for the fashion statement of a possible 'minor ex-rock star'[1]. This paring allows many contrasts to be explored as wealth and poverty are juxtaposed alongside loquaciousness and reticence, and knowledge and naivety.

The final character, who begins and ends the novels, is Sara. She appears in the narrative in ghost form following her accidental death in the hotel's dumb waiter, and her narrative explores her coming to terms with her death, but also with her secret homosexuality. Sara's narrative is one which challenges the heteronormative society of *Hotel World*, and in doing so draws attention to how sexual identity can be yet another example of affective precarity when it comes to attempting to fit within society's given guidelines.

Heteronormativity and neoliberalism do not always appear intrinsically linked as concepts, and in the contemporary age of anti-discrimination laws, Pride marches and gay marriage, it could be argued that the demonization of homosexuality in the Western world is largely an issue of the past. Many theorists and campaigners have suggested, however, that the acceptance of 'gay rights' under neoliberalism has been due in part to a dilution or 'dequeering' of the gay movement, rather than a clear approval of queer lifestyle choices. Michael Warner explains that the 'desexualization of the lesbian and gay movement and the depoliticization of queer sex in the 1990s' brought about a move to the mainstream which included lifestyle magazines, gay celebrities, and pundits who gained success in 'promoting a neoliberal (that is, neoconservative) spin' on the gay movement in America[2]. A primary example of the type of gay politics that upholds heteronormativity, in his view, is the concept of gay marriage. Warner argues that gay marriage is a 'strategy to normalize gay sexuality', due to its rejection of the concept of 'nonnormative intimacies' that are an integral part of the queer counterculture, such as non-monogamous relationships[3].

Lisa Duggan argues that neoliberalism has a sexual politics which is 'contradictory and contested'[4], and that while the cultural politics of neoliberalism are rarely debated in relation to its economic and political aspects, the public discussion has regularly been shaped by neoliberalism's 'profoundly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian agenda'. She echoes Warner's views in her discussion of the 'neoliberal spin' found in the writing of the Independent Gay Forum (IGF), a group who are on the 'cutting edge' of this new gay movement. Duggan argues that the IGF adopt the 'third way' rhetoric now widespread in Western politics which positions them 'between the moral conservatism of the religious Right and the perceived "multiculturalism" and

---

[1] Smith, p.139.

[2] Michael Warner, The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.77.

[3] Warner, p.146.

[4] Lisa Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: the Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in *Materializing Democracy*, ed. by Dana D. Nelson and Russ Castronovo (London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 175-194, p. 177.

"civil rights agenda" of the progressive Left'. She terms this new neoliberal sexual politics '*new homonormativity*', arguing that:

> it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.[5]

Both Duggan and Warner posit that the concept of heteronormativity is ingrained in neoliberal cultural policy, and yet they mention many writers and movements that are still trying to develop a dialogue outside of this narrow interpretation of what it is to be gay in the new millennium. This discussion demonstrates that while gay culture is arguably considered more acceptable in the mainstream of Western society than it once was, it still often conforms to the restrictions set by neoliberal ideology in the sense that it performs, or aligns with, expectations of heteronormativity.

Sara's narrative within *Hotel World* does not openly present a discussion of these politicized aspects of the gay movement, primarily because it is from the perspective of someone who is only just recognising her own sexuality, but it does present an account of someone negotiating a space in which they do not feel safe because of their sexual identity. Sara struggles with the idea that she will disappoint and alienate her friends and family through revealing her sexuality, and in this sense her narrative is directly related to the idea of challenging the heteronormative ideologies of her world, and by extension what is expected under neoliberalism.

Non-Place

The hotel central to the novel, the *Global Hotel*, is considered in this thesis as a non-place, and therefore a representation of neoliberal ethics, rules and aspirations. Augé defines non-place as 'a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity', one that does not integrate with 'earlier places' or the history around it[6]. Examples include 'the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks'[7] negotiated by many of us on a daily basis. Augé's definition also encompasses roads and transport links which bypass historic towns while still indicating them with signs, and clichéd places which exist 'only through the words that evoke them'[8] such as desert island holiday destinations advertised on TV game shows .

---

[5] Duggan, p. 179.
[6] Augé, pp. 77-8.
[7] Augé, p. 79.
[8] Augé, p. 95.

Ali Smith's use of non-places in her writing has been discussed by Monica Germanà and Emily Horton who note 'the repeated forms of hyperspace and non-place which run through her short stories'[9]. Horton observes, however, that Smith's writing does not fully envelop Augé's theory; she notes that while Augé's non-place offers a starting place for analysis of Smith's short stories, it is questionable 'how fitting Augé's reading of space is in relation to character identity'[10], leading her to argue that Smith actually challenges the supermodern conception, remodelling it 'in favour of a more fluid spatial vision, which recognizes the city's affective and utopic dimensions'[11]. Horton argues that Smith 'challenges Augé's pessimism, recognizing a potential for freedom and community within urban space'[12].

While this chapter agrees with Horton that Augé's reading of space does not necessarily fit the analysis of character identity, and therefore must be complemented by other critical approaches, it does not agree that Smith's use of non-places challenges Augé's pessimism, or at least not in the case of *Hotel World*. Rather, Smith presents marginalised characters who learn to negotiate a space which would usually exclude them in a way which works for them; but this invariably requires them breaking into, out of, or destroying those spaces. They become happy despite the loneliness and exclusion perpetuated by the non-space, not because of it, and for that reason *Hotel World* does pessimistically mock the non-place, suggesting Smith's attitude matches Augé's. The only character who belongs in the society which promulgates the non-space is Penny, the character who attracts the least sympathy from the reader, and her journey into the world of the marginalized and 'disoriented' does not educate her and change her world view in a way which would suggest an optimistic future for all, rather she chooses to go back to her world, that of the non-place, and forget the people that she has met.

Augé's approach does clearly argue for the need 'to think about and situate the individual'[13] within the supermodern environment, even if he does not provide that critique himself. He argues that because the supermodern condition encourages the 'cocooning' or separation of individuals from each other, 'it is no longer possible for a social analysis to dispense with individuals, nor for an analysis of individuals to ignore the spaces through which they are in transit'[14]. Equally, considering the analysis of the individual without contextualizing them within their surroundings is limiting, as Buchanan observes; 'if we do not take some measure of the influence of the objective, space in other words, we wind up with a purely phenomenal account of the social, lacking even the constraint of the noumenal, that unseen and unpresentable something that all the time pushes to be felt but never is'[15].

---

[9] Emily Horton and Monica Germanà, 'Introduction', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 1-8, p. 4.

[10] Emily Horton, 'Contemporary Space and Affective Ethics in Ali Smith's Short Stories', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 9-22, p. 11.

[11] Horton, p. 11.

[12] Horton, p. 22.

[13] Augé, p. 38.

[14] Augé, p. 120.

It is here that the theories of Ahmed and Berlant can come to be useful in considering the non-place and how the individual experiences that environment. Berlant refers to Augé's focus on 'the need to consider the impact of life lived among social spaces that interrupt grounding logics of value and norms of intelligibility and self-identity' in the discussion of her concept of situational tragedy. She explains that her claim is on the 'affective side of things' in comparison to Augé's, but both take as their starting point the issues raised by the advent of supermodernity and neoliberalism[16], making her exploration of the structural adjustments that people must make to survive in the contemporary world 'in league' with Augé's work, among others[17]. Added to this, Ahmed's exploration of how people move through space, orientate themselves and fit into spaces not designed for them allows for the individual to be considered in relation to the non-places of *Hotel World*, just as her discussions of emotion through *The Promise of Happiness* allows us to explore the emotional impact that having to navigate the non-places of the contemporary world can have upon the characters' identities.

The Capitalist World of the Global Hotel

The Global Hotel is more than simply a physical space in *Hotel World*; it is the epicentre of Smith's story. As noted by both Monica Germanà[18] and Stephen Levin[19], the hotel can easily be defined as one of Augé's non-places; it adheres to the 'two complementary but distinct realities' described by Augé – it is a 'space formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)', and it is dependent on 'the relations that individuals have with these spaces'. It gives people a place to stay, but also requires actions from those people as part of the contract: they must purchase from the minibar, relax in the bath, sleep in the bed. Augé writes that 'as anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality'[20] and this is what the Global Hotel does; it forms contracts with guests and workers.

The hotel, as a faceless company of board members, revels in messages and invitations left to the customer and employee, establishing the 'link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place' through 'the mediation of words, or even texts' as discussed by Augé.

---

[15] Buchanan, 'Non-Places', p. 398.

[16] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 291.

[17] Berlant, p. 8.

[18] Monica Germanà, ''The Uncanny Can Happen': Desire and Belief in *the Seer*', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 115-29, p. 120.

[19] Stephen M. Levin, 'Narrating Remainders: Spectral Presences in Ali Smith's Fictions', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 35-47, p. 43.

[20] Augé, p. 94.

Smith litters her writing with messages from the hotel written in business jargon, messages which show that even the affective experiences of being within the building have been strategized and implemented by the board:

> Global International plc Board and Shareholders believe that site duplication within still-individual architectural structures reinforces attitudes of psychological security, nostalgia, and preserves the climate of repeated return in worldwide Global clientele.
>
> The lobby of the branch at which Lise works smells of good carpet, distant restaurant food and stargazer lilies.[21]

Some of these messages refer to the 'solitary contactuality' of the non-place such as the messages advising of the rules of the minibar: 'Anything removed from the Minibar for more than twenty seconds will automatically register on your room account'[22]. Others create the images which prompt peoples' imaginations of luxury, self-worth and 'the good life': '*Global Hotels. All Over The World*'; '*Global Hotels. We Think The World Of You'* [23]. Augé mentions the non-places of the imagination which exist 'only through the words that evoke them', the holidays in 'banal utopias, clichés'[24] that are given as prizes on game shows. The Global Hotel becomes one of those places thanks to the presence of Penny; she is a journalist peddling that clichéd dream, typing empty adjectives such as 'Classic' 'Ideal' 'Superior' 'Transcendent' into her Powerbook while admitting to herself that in reality, 'everything had pretended luxury and been slightly shabby'[25]. In her review she 'awards the Global chain nine out of ten. Effortless style and an effortless visit. A superior stay'[26] while actually believing that 'hotels were such a sham'[27]. This is in addition to her fantasy of telling a story to her friends at a dinner party to explain why her laptop has broken; she invents a scenario in which youths try to rob her and she uses the laptop to defend herself, describing the town as 'a rough old town up there, though it seems genteel enough, the architecture and so forth'[28]. In this image the southern, wealthy guest whose job is to sell the hotel through words describes a stereotypical scenario of northern, unemployed, youth crime which has no actual basis in her reality. Penny, the human symbol of the neoliberalist good-life is from the outset an untrustworthy character. Berlant describes the 'fantasy of meritocracy, a fantasy of being deserving' from the perspective of 'the economic bottom's thick space of contingency' in *Cruel Optimism*, but what we see here is the reverse, it is the same 'will to imagine oneself as a solitary agent who can and must live the good life promised by capitalist culture' as described by Berlant, but from the perspective of one who has already achieved that supposed position of belonging to 'the fantasy life'[29]. What is described here is the disappointment that occurs when the dream of privilege is shown for what it truly is: mundane normativity. If, as Berlant argues, the 'good-life promised by capitalist culture' is simply 'aspirational normalcy, the desire to feel normal'[30], then *Hotel World* suggests that once one reaches the pinnacle of that privilege, one sees that the promised good life is nothing more than 'slightly shabby' and boring[31].

---

[21] Smith, p. 110.
[22] Smith, p. 72.
[23] Smith, p. 73.
[24] Augé, p. 95.
[25] Smith, pp. 125-30.
[26] Smith, p. 181.
[27] Smith, p. 131.
[28] Smith, p. 131.

One would hope that this would encourage the disappointed party to re-evaluate the neoliberalist ideal, but Penny's narrative arguably falls under the genre described by Berlant as a 'situational tragedy', a:

> marriage between tragedy and situational comedy where people are fated to express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better, or dying.[32]

Berlant explains that in a situational comedy the subject faces destabilization and 'performs a slapstick maladjustment' that is absurd and laughable, but which never ends in destruction: in contrast, the subject of a situational tragedy lives in a world which is 'fragile and beyond repair' [33]; they are 'caught up in a form of despair' that is 'shaped within the stresses of ordinary life under capitalism'[34]. Penny is fated to express her flaws of superficiality and mistruth 'over and over, without learning'[35]: she continues hawking the neoliberalist fantasy through selling the non-place as a place of desirability and aspiration despite having first hand experience of its actual mundaneness.

Whilst we are never told the date or the actual town that this novel is set in, we do know from Penny that it is contemporary to the time it was written, as she considers writing about her experiences with Else as an example of 'Blair's Britain at the Dawn of New Millennium'[36]. In this supermodern setting words themselves begin to become meaningless and fake; they are used to imply sentiment which is unreal, propagating the cruel optimism discussed by Berlant; while those who need language in the 'organically social' world surrounding the hotel gradually lose the power to use it. The fading spirit of Sara is 'silent forever' because she cannot be heard by the living, and yet her incorporeal presence in the book means that her existence is only tangible through the 'words, words, words' which she begins to forget as the narrative goes on, the words she needs to describe the world around her[37]. Else asks passing people in broken language to 'Spr sm chn?'[38], and Lise, too sick to complete a government form explaining how sick she is, is plagued by ever-repeating but useless jingles from the adverts of her childhood[39]. While the communication strategies of the non-place and the neoliberalist world it symbolises run in uninterrupted abundance, the language in the 'real' world begins to be erased. Augé states that "anthropological place' is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language'[40], while the messages used by non-places 'are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and any of us'[41]. The hotel slogan examples this, as well as the government form requesting Lise to 'tell us about your pain' to justify paying incapacity benefit; it is equally representative of the uncaring, capitalist state that *Hotel World* is set in. The idea that the language of anthropological place, of individuals, is fading while that of the non-place in Smith's *Hotel World* is flourishing is uncomfortable and pessimistic, but this can be countered to some extent by the presentation of the historic world surrounding the hotel.

---

[29] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 167.
[30] Berlant, p. 170.
[31] Smith, p. 131.
[32] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 176.
[33] Berlant, p. 6.
[34] Berlant, p. 290.
[35] Berlant, p. 177.
[36] Smith, p. 177.

Initially the 'historic city' is described gloomily by Smith from the perspective of homeless Else:

> This historic city she's sitting on the pavement of, full of its medieval buildings and its modern developments teetering on top of medieval sewers, it is all that's left of history now; somewhere for tourists to bring their traveller's cheques to in the summer. Actual history is gone.[42]

The image created by this description of 'modern developments teetering on top of medieval sewers' encapsulates the unstable, overdeveloped quality of the supermodern, the reliance that the non-place still has on the historic past, as well as the way it hides (but cannot erase) the dirt and effluence of both history and humanity. The hotel has a parasitic presence; it hides and damages the historic city it inhabits but requires the presence of the 'medieval buildings' to bring in the tourists, as well as requiring the city's inhabitants to make up its underpaid workforce. We are informed of the hotel's history by the spirit Sara who describes the rooms on the top floor:

> it used to be the servants' quarters two hundred years ago when the house had servants in it, and after that the house was a brothel and up there was where the cheap girls, the more diseased or

---

[37] Smith, p. 6.
[38] Smith, p. 35.
[39] Smith, pp. 81-2.
[40] Augé, p. 101.
[41] Augé, p. 100.
[42] Smith, p. 45.

> aging girls, were put to sell their wares, and now that it's a hotel and each room costs money every night the smaller rooms still cost a little less.[43]

This unsavoury history is hidden by redecoration, in the same way that the lift shaft in which Sara died is covered by a painted 'screwed-in extra piece of wall'[44]. As Augé observes in relation to the non-place '[t]here is no room there for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle, usually in allusive texts. What reigns there is actuality, the urgency of the present moment'[45].

Despite the non-place's attempts at presenting history on its own terms, Smith's narrative allows it to break through and make itself visible. This is done in one way through the chapter titles: separated into 'past', 'present historic', 'future conditional', 'perfect', 'future in the past' and 'present' the novel plays with language tenses, continuing Smith's use of words and communication as a narrative motif, but it also references temporality, placing the neoliberalist non-place as one episode in a series of moments. The chapter which follows Penny and begins in the hotel is 'perfect', a word which can be seen to ironically refer to Penny as the 'perfect' person and the hotel as the 'perfect' place (echoing Penny's own use of superlative language) but in a grammatical sense the perfect tense can also be referred to as the retrospective, suggesting that this episode is in the near past.

The 'present' tense chapter is used by Smith for an exploration of the world outside the hotel, leaving the non-place behind as the narrative sweeps across the nation, from 'high in the north' to 'low in the south'[46] with past and present intertwined. Through this final chapter, and the first chapter, Smith is arguably presenting a historical present; one which provides a counter-narrative to that of the capitalist dream. Berlant describes 'narrative histories of the present' as presenting 'a shift between knowing and uncertain intuitionisms' which enable 'us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing'. They provide 'a way to think about the history of sensualized epistemologies in the atmosphere of a particular moment now (aesthetically) suspended in time'[47]. Berlant explains 'intuition' as 'the process of dynamic sensual data-gathering' used 'to make reliable sense of life'; it 'is the work of history translated through personal memory'[48].

Berlant discusses an argument set forward by Harry Harootunian, that 'capitalism always blocks the development of a historical sense that can grasp the structural determinations that constitute the present, engendering a distorted apprehension of pastness and a devastating misrecognition of how contemporary forces work'[49]. In his article, Harootunian explains that the spread of global capitalism functioned through demanding that all countries incorporated into the world market followed a world-standard time – 'a new imperialization of time' – which 'clashed with diverse local times and modes of existence as it established a world market and instigated colonial expropriation'[50]. Harootunian explains that whilst the 'unevenness' caused by these 'discordant temporalities' had always existed in 'the industrial heartlands of Euro-America', modern industrialised societies attempted to 'conceal the unevenness within their own precincts' by 'making it appear as a problem stigmatizing the nonmodern'. This unevenness, however, has always been a condition of capitalism's '"law" of accumulation', it is just usually hidden through attempts to 'homogenize the populations'[51].

---

[43] Smith, p. 6.
[44] Smith, p. 138.
[45] Augé, p. 104.
[46] Smith, pp. 226-8.
[47] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 64.
[48] Berlant, p. 52.

Harootunian refers to Benedict Anderson's concept of 'simultaneity' to discuss the 'homogenous time associated with both capital and the nation form'. In Anderson's view, the development of print capitalism informs such as newspapers and novels provides the technical means for 're-presenting the kind of imagined community that is the nation'. This 'temporal simultaneity' can sometimes come unstuck, however, as in the example given by Harootunian of the media coverage of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina catastrophe in New Orleans:

> the media immediately discovered the existence of a Third World within the midst of the United States and confronted all of the signs of unevenness once reserved for the world outside Euro-America. In no time at all, an act of nature was able to easily rip off the veneer of the present to reveal an enduring and deep-seated historic unevenness.[52]

This unveiling of the true disparity in America, the ripping of 'homogenous time', introduces what Harootunian refers to as a spectre in the form of 'noncontemporaneous contemporaneity': the 'constant concourse of mixed temporalities mingling and coexisting with each other— the historical uncanny that has always remained in the shadow of capital and "our" modernity'[53].

Berlant places herself as 'entirely in accord' with Harootunian's call for literary historians to use this sense of noncontemporaneous contemporaneity in their production of the present, describing it as:

---

[49] Berlant, p. 67.
[50] Harootunian, p. 474.
[51] Harootunian, p. 475.
[52] Harootunian, p. 475.
[53] Harootunian, p. 490.

> a history of the forces that bear on the everyday and interrupt its appearance of apparent homogeneity to reveal cracks in the local experience of life that can be mobilized toward alternative imaginaries. [54]

As a symptomatic manifestation of capitalism, the non-place arguably contributes to this block of a historical sense through a presentation of homogenous time. In contrast to Berlant's term of the 'historical present', Augé uses a very similar phrase to describe the atmosphere of the non-place as 'an unending history in the present':

> Everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present.[55]

For Berlant the 'historical present' is contextualised by placing it as a current moment in relation to other historic moments. It is reliant on personal experience, on intuition being used and developed to create a learning curve for the individual involved. In contrast to this, Augé explains that the non-place with its 'history in the present' distances the individual from their everyday worries by encouraging them to taste both the 'passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing', which results in them confronting an image of themselves which is in truth a 'pretty strange image'; one removed from their real world and influenced by the ego-ideal projected by the images flooding commercial retail institutions[56].

There are examples in *Hotel World* where characters actively attempt to contextualise their present by discovering more about the recent past. Both Claire and the ghost of Sara strive for answers regarding Sara's death, Claire by sneaking into the hotel and breaking into the dumb waiter lift shaft, Sara by haunting her decaying body and begging to be told the story of her life. In this sense, 'history' is suggestively synonymous with 'truth' while the disjointed non-history of the non-place is synonymous with 'non-truth'. As the characters' attempts to form a present historic narrative is regularly hindered by the forgetting of events and the loss of language to describe the events, the novel is not only a present historic narrative, but also a narrative about the need and desire to form a present historic for ourselves.

The story of *Hotel World* appears to take place over a time frame of a few months, meaning that even the past is recent. By interspersing this with ghosts and references to a more distant history, Smith places it in a historical context. It is a series of moments 'suspended in time', an exploration of individuals' experiences 'in the atmosphere of a particular moment' but as part of an ongoing history. In contrast, the Global Hotel and everything it stands for is suspended in time with no natural interaction with history or temporality.

---

[54] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 68.
[55] Augé, pp. 104-5.
[56] Augé, pp. 103-5.

Berlant states in relation to personal histories that 'History hurts, but not only. It also engenders optimism in response to the oppressive presence of what dominates or is taken for granted.'[57] She explains that while repeating optimism forces one to risk once again surviving disappointment, it also allows for change and learning. In her exploration of the historical present, Smith produces 'as the present a sense of "noncontemporaneous contemporaneity"'[58]. Whilst Smith's presentation of the non-place and other aspects of contemporary capitalist culture is pessimistic, her juxtaposition of this homogenised space with a more positive, alternative narrative that is full of natural imagery and temporality suggests that *Hotel World* acts as a snapshot of the present historic as it stands, a combination of 'uneven' time where capital time and local, even natural, time remain discordant. Added to this is Sara's concept of time, different again, which acts at once as a literal imagining of the 'spectre' of 'noncontemporaneous contemporaneity' through presenting the past (a ghost) in the present, but which also helps to reveal 'the cracks in the local experience of life that can be mobilized toward alternative imaginaries'[59].

Both the title chosen for the novel, *Hotel World*, and the name of the eponymous hotel, the 'Global Hotel', reference globalization and its intrinsic binding with 'the pattern of capitalist development'[60] which increasingly creates 'identical' and 'regulated'[61] non-spaces across the world. The hotel is the point of connection between the five disparate narratives while also being the physical centre of the unnamed Scottish town of *Hotel World*: 'It's like the street exists just for the hotel to be there in it. It sits squarely before [Else] like a huge obedient dog'[62]. As dogs are referenced earlier in the chapter through violent and aggressive imagery (Else is barked at by a passing dog because her cough spooked it, and when she reminisces of her childhood, 'the past gets her in its mouth like a dog gets a rag, and shakes her'[63]) this description of the hotel could be seen as a hint at an underlying sense of danger. Obedient dogs are only obedient to those who are welcome with their master's vicinity, and Else is decidedly unwelcome in or around the hotel. The hotel is not there for any of the inhabitants of the town who would have no use for it other than as an employer, but also probably would not be able to afford to stay there. As Else observes, the flagpoles are bare because the 'flags are only in the summer for the tourists'[64], and it is this exclusionary quality of the hotel which, as Stephen Levin notes, allows Smith to explore the 'subjects marginalized within the field of global culture'[65].

---

[57] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 121.
[58] Berlant, p. 68.
[59] Berlant, p. 68.
[60] Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 6.
[61] Smith, p. 110.
[62] Smith, p. 64.
[63] Smith, p. 46.
[64] Smith, p. 64.

Malcolm Waters argues that globalization 'does not imply that every corner of the planet must become Westernized and capitalist but rather that every set of social arrangements must establish its position in relation to the capitalist west – to use Robertson's term, it must relativize itself'[66]. Peter Beyer explains that the conflicting images of the good society are integral to globalization itself; the 'subunits of the global system can constitute themselves only with reference to this encompassing whole', but conversely, 'the global whole becomes a social reality only as it crystallizes out of the attempts of subunits to deal with their relativizing context'[67].

Smith creates a microcosm of this globalized world; one which presents the Global Hotel as a symbol for the capitalist west, but also presents other subunits present in the global system which must form a reflexive relationship with that space. Often excluded, their relationship is not always an equal one, but as well as showing the perspective of the outsider of western capitalist society, Smith raises questions of what 'internalising' actually requires of an individual.

The relationship between the characters and the hotel is more complex than the simple welcome/not welcome dichotomy; as well as the banished Else who is regularly moved on from sitting outside the hotel[68] (she also recalls being moved on from the station, another non-place designed only for those who can afford the ticket which allows them entry), there are the staff who work inside the hotel but cannot afford to stay there. For them, Lise in particular, working for the hotel 'presses you hard, with your nose squashed and your face distorted and ugly, right up against the window of other people's wealth, for which employment you are, usually, quite badly paid'[69]. Berlant refers to low paid workers as surviving in 'the economic bottom's thick space of contingency' [70]; she speaks of '[t]he ongoing prospect of low-waged and uninteresting labor' as a 'routinized rut' or impasse whose only alternative is amongst the 'ominous cracks'[71]. In the scenario of *Hotel World* Lise and Sara can be described as following the impasse which 'offers a route to the *good* life' while Else has fallen into the ominous cracks, but this does not suggest that any of them necessarily believe in the capitalist ideology, or desire what it offers. This is clearest with Else who, on being let into the hotel for a night, finds it a safe place in which to cough, but otherwise cannot adjust to the warmth, decides not to use the towels after her bath as 'they are too white, folded in their gross wedges' and decides that she would rather sleep in the carpet shop opposite[72]. The capitalist dream holds nothing for her, she does not aspire to it and is not impressed by it. In fact, the concerns she shows over the origin of the 'collection of stuff, all matching' which makes up the hotel room arguably conveys a Marxist point of view:

---

[65] Levin, p. 43.
[66] Waters, p. 6.
[67] Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London and California: Sage Publications Ltd., 1994), p. 27.
[68] Smith, p. 43.
[69] Smith, p. 97.
[70] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 167.
[71] Berlant, p. 164.

> She had looked at the whiteness of the flannel and the cardboard band round it with the G of Global printed on it. Someone in a factory or workshop somewhere has wrapped up the soap in paper so that to use it you have to unwrap it like it's a gift. There are cotton wool buds and each one is individually wrapped. The fact that they are individually wrapped has made Else miserable.[73]

Through this act, Else is essentially denying the commodity fetishism that the hotel thrives on. In relation to the concept of the 'commodity', Marx tells us that 'So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour'[74]. Yet, he argues that when an object, such as a table, 'steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent'[75]. Paul Thomas explains that Marx's concept of the 'fetishism of commodities' tells us that fetishism, 'the attribution of human attributes to inanimate objects', is exploitative and oppressive: 'The state, law, the Church, the commodity – all can in principle operate as fetishes, unless they are unmasked practically'[76].

Through equating the commodities in front of her with the people who made them in a factory, Else is unmasking the fetishized element of the product and making the fripperies which add nothing to the use-value of the product feel unnecessary and excessive. Soap has a use-value, but the paper around it is simply there to make it seem more important, or valuable, or special, 'like it's a gift'. Else's sense of misery at the image of people being hired just to wrap a soap, or put individual wrappers on a cotton bud, is in its own way, revolutionary.

Else's interest in the past adds to this Marxist view. She is the character who observes the historical sense that Harootunian tells us is blocked by capitalism, and in doing so forces the reader to consider a working class history largely ignored and hidden by the non-place of the hotel. She sees a carved cupid over the hotel's front door and considers the man who carved it, wondering how much he was paid[77], and earlier in the chapter thinks of the philanthropist Robert Owen 'who built the workers in his factory a church and a school and a hospital'[78]. The factory which created the soap for the Global Hotel that bothered Else is a contemporary reference to this working-class history, and to the modern state of globalization which sees things like this still being created but in a place far away from the capitalist west.

---

[72] Smith, pp. 71-6.
[73] Smith, p. 71.
[74] Karl Marx, *Capital* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2013), p. 46.
[75] Marx, p. 46.
[76] Paul Thomas, *Critical Lives: Karl Marx* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 141.
[77] Smith, p. 65.
[78] Smith, p. 44.

For the hotel workers, the forced observation of the priviledged paired with strict rules of conduct encourages disobedience which would suggest that while they follow the 'rut', they are not convinced by the ideology peddled by Penny and the hotel; they are cynical of it. Lise, when considering Else's lifestyle, thinks that 'it must be a rough life but a good life, a freed-up life'[79] which contrasts with her life led by rules such as the 'Global Quality Policy' which no-one who works for the hotel really understands, 'other than it's something to do with the difference between good and bad and the need for better'[80]. Along with prank calling rooms and spitting in food, Lise invites Else to stay in a room in the hotel on a night that the surveillance cameras break, a 'spontaneous act of generosity' which makes her 'feel better'[81] but also 'has probably broken all Global Quality Policy'[82]. As an employee she has no autonomy and resents the Global Hotel for this, Lise's bind to the globalized non-place is due more to her financial necessity than her acceptance of its ideals and promises, putting her on a closer proximity to the factory workers creating the Global wrapped soaps than the board of directors who run the Global chain. She is not made happy by working there; rather than finding the 'fantasy of meritocracy' [83] inspirational she feels resentment towards it and the guests who represent it. She is made happy by an opportunity to be rebellious, thus reclaiming her own autonomy, but this rebellion is materialized through generous acts which break the rules of the hotel and thus the non-place. It undermines the 'contractual relations' which link the consumer to the 'powers that govern'[84] the non-place, usually confirmed through a purchased ticket or receipt, and therefore essentially undermines the hierarchical structure which supports capitalism.

Lise's rebellious actions of giving a bed for the night to homeless Else, and a large cooked breakfast to Claire who has broken into the hotel, both literally and metaphorically, are charitable acts. As she herself is on the bottom of the economic structure, she does not have the personal funds to help others and so resorts to repurposing those of the Global franchise. Charity is usually considered an act of 'good', and yet this act contradicts the Global Hotel Quality Policy which the staff vaguely understand to define the difference between good and bad. This contradiction displays the confused and conflicting relationship of morality and consumerism which is a real concern in our globalized culture; one only needs to compare Starbucks's statement of their ethical business model and their desire 'to do the right thing'[85] with their policy that they will never donate food which has not been sold during the day 'but must dump it all'[86] to see the contradictions displayed in capitalist rhetoric. The only charity authorised by capitalism is philanthropy, which Else observes, like 'poor', is a 'word from history'[87]. David Harvey, quoting an interview with Peter Buffet, the son of billionaire Warren Buffet, states that modern philanthropy still exists but is flawed:

---

[79] Smith, p. 115.
[80] Smith, p. 117.
[81] Smith, p. 115.
[82] Smith, p. 101.
[83] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 167.
[84] Augé, p. 103.

> Philanthropy becomes a form of 'conscience laundering' which merely 'allows the rich to sleep better at night, while others get just enough to keep the pot from boiling over. Nearly every time someone feels better by doing good, on the other side of the world (or street), someone else is further locked into a system that will not allow the true flourishing of his or her nature or the opportunity to live a joyful and fulfilled life'.[88]

For Harvey, capitalism causes problems which philanthropy tries to fix, but as they are forever linked philanthropy can never solve social problems, it simply moves them around.

As an agent at the top of the capitalist hierarchy, Penny is well placed to perform philanthropic acts, but some form of social conscience is required for this and as we are told, Penny 'had been blessed with the gift of no guilt, or at least the gift of guilt that was never more than momentary'[89]. After she has gone out with Else to wander the streets she writes her a cheque and places it in her pocket without telling her. When she returns to the hotel she regrets this act and calls the 24 hour banking line to cancel the cheque:

> something inside her which had been forced open had sealed up again. Good, she thought again, pleased with herself for the initial extravagance of her act, and next for being able to, crucially being sensible enough to, put a stop to it. If you were poor, you were poor. You couldn't handle money. Money was nothing but a problem if you weren't used to it. It must be a relief, to have none. It was no accident that the words poor and pure were so alike.[90]

This passage reinforces Harvey's suggestion that philanthropy is more closely linked with a person's feelings about themselves than with the actual difference it makes to the person on the receiving end. It reinforces the sense that Penny is so removed from the real world that she has no real concept of the struggle of others, hence her ability to mistake a homeless person for a rock star. The fact that Else probably does not have a bank account and so would not be able to cash the cheque does not seem to cross her mind. She was lost while following Else, and had to borrow change from her in order to call a taxi, but when back within the non-place she can order food to be brought up, speak to her 24 hour bank and forget the world outside which she is not equipt to navigate. The currency for life on the streets consists of coins, the lowest and most physical denomination of sterling, but in her safe surroundings of the non-place the currency is electronic and instantaneous, it is invisible and always available, so she is never left wanting.

---

[85] Starbucks, *Business Ethics and Compliance* (2016), <http://www.starbucks.co.uk/about-us/company-information/business-ethics-and-compliance> [accessed 01 March 2015].

[86] Change.org, *Change Your Food Donation Policy* (2013), <https://www.change.org/p/starbucks-ireland-change-your-food-donation-policy> [Accessed 01 March 2015].

[87] Smith, p. 44.

[88] David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014), p. 211.

[89] Smith, p. 154.

[90] Smith, p. 178.

Penny's narrative is a variation of Berlant's 'situational tragedy'. Penny is 'fated to express [her] flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better'[91]. She has a chance to learn from her experience with Else and Clare, but instead allows herself to be 'sealed up again' and forgets it. She tells Else that meeting her has made a 'real difference' to her and that she has 'had a lovely time'[92] but this is superficial politeness, proven by the cancelling of the cheque and the return to 'normality' when she returns to the hotel. She does not even learn in the traditional sense, mocking Else in her head for believing that there is gravity on the moon when '[e]veryone knew there wasn't', proving that her arrogant assumption that she must know more than Else stops her from expanding her own knowledge.

While for Berlant's definition it is the people on the economic bottom who are the subject of the situational tragedy, squatters in 'terrifying nonplaces' who are 'ejected from the social', none of the characters in *Hotel World* who are on the economic bottom show the traits of Penny. They learn, they change, and they experience relief through the discovery of truths. Else, the character in the lowest economic bracket, is the most socially aware and the brightest character in the novel. We are told that she notes errors in grammar on shop signs and has been going to the library to read 'metaphysical poets'[93]. She 'likes to wrap relevant things round her feet', choosing a paper with the headline 'BRITAIN MASSIVELY MORE UNEQUAL THAN 20 YEARS AGO. ONE IN FIVE PEOPLE LIVES BELOW BREADLINE'[94] to cushion her heels. Penny falls into the trap of trying 'heart-wrenchingly to live as though [she is] in a situation comedy'[95] by blocking out the tragedy around her, but the other characters who are less fortunate than her are fully aware of the tragic nature of the capitalist dream. It is this knowledge which allows them to seemingly triumph in producing an optimistic and yet obtainable counternarrative to that of the capitalist ideal; proving that the situational tragedy is a trap only for those who are gullible enough to follow the fantasy of meritocracy. Those who learn, accept the dirt of the world around them and work to form a narrative of the present historic are given the tools to negotiate the world which offers a chance of happiness, one not defined by commodity fetishism and a blinkered world view.

---

[91] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 117.

[92] Smith, p. 173.

[93] Smith, pp.50-55.

[94] Smith, p. 45.

[95] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 177.

Temporal Space in *Hotel World*

The temporal aspects of *Hotel World* can arguably be read as examples of what Berlant terms the historical present and the impasse, while the physical (and not so physical) spaces of the novel relate to Ahmed's discussions of 'reorientation', chosen pathways and happy objects. By exploring this novel with these concepts in mind, it is argued that Smith's presentation of time and space overtly plays with concepts of 'normality' associated with capitalism, and by extension with neoliberal ideals. In doing this, the novel challenges what 'normal' truly is, and presents the reader with a world that contains a variety of alternative options so often hidden by capitalist symbols such as non-places and capital time.

Smith visualizes and utilizes temporality in a number of ways in *Hotel World*. Time is experienced subjectively and changes from person to person, for some it is never ending whereas for others it moves too quickly. Time is a 'happy object'[96], a gift in the form of a watch accidentally left by Sara to the girl in the watch shop, it is a clock dropped through a hole in the wall in an attempt to measure the speed that Sara fell to her death, it is a point of desire for Sara as she dives and swims competitively, and it is the space of mourning in which Clare's grief at the death of her sister is allowed to dissipate. Temporality is a device that demarcates the natural, seasonal world and the political world regulated by capital time; it separates history from the now of the novel. The Global Hotel 'non-place' which forms the focal point of *Hotel World* represents the 'ordinary' temporality of the neoliberal, globalized world; it repels and excludes alternative temporalities just as it does those who are not deemed worthy of the titles 'guest' or 'worker', and yet it is here that these alternative temporal worlds 'co-incide'[97] and observe each other.

Primarily, alternative temporalities and pathways are used by Smith to explore the different, often unseen, worlds which form the ordinary. They are presented as viable alternatives to the 'normal': worlds that exist and have agency even if we are not always aware of them. These temporalities and pathways are considered here under the heading 'temporal spaces' to utilize and explore, as Augé terms it, the 'eminently abstract' nature of the term 'space'; which can at once define a physical area such as the distance between two objects, and a 'temporal expanse' such as 'in the space of a week'.

---

[96] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 45.
[97] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 39.

Throughout *Hotel World*, Smith presents characters submerged in what Berlant would term the 'historical present', an affective 'temporal genre'[98] in which attention is drawn to 'different styles of managing simultaneous, incoherent narratives of what's going on and what seems possible and blocked in personal/collective life'[99]. Smith achieves this partially through the temporal tense-titled chapters, which follow the perspectives of different individuals who all converge in the chapter entitled 'Perfect' but whose individual narratives span across a year of near past and near future. She also accomplishes this, however, by creating a sense of different temporal spheres which forces us to realise that the Hotel World itself, rather than being the only or 'real' world, is in fact one of many which includes, from the outset, the world of the afterlife.

The Global Hotel happens to be the place of convergence for these other worlds as it was the place in which the death of Sara occurred, and so the physical point of crisis, but of all of the worlds presented it feels like the least present, the least tangible. Its characteristics of non-place make it feel as purgatorial as the space in which Sara is suspended, reminding us that it is a world of 'transit points and temporary abodes'[100], a place to be passed through rather than a destination. While the temporal frame of the novel is around a year, the hotel emulates the unreal temporal pattern of the non-place as described by Auge:

> Everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present'.[101]

Augé's suggestion of the unending history in the present is different to Berlant's historical present; while the non-place is 'trapped in time' the historical present is a space where 'recent pasts and near futures blend into a stretched-out time that people move around in'[102]. In this sense, the novel as a whole is a record of historical present, while the hotel acts as a window into the capitalist infrastructure that is present around the globalized world. Augé describes the non-place as 'a world […] surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral[103], and initially, the introverted quality of each individual character's point of view echoes these characteristics, especially Sara's. It is the introduction of each character's interaction within the stretched-out present moment which begins to break this down: the movement within this stretch slows time and makes it feel less fleeting, less temporary. The communication between characters, while fleeting in the sense that it only lasts a few hours, still has an affective impact on each of them which breaks down their solitary approaches: they are forced to consider other points of view through these interactions.

---

[98] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 4.
[99] Berlant, p. 4.
[100] Augé, p. 78.
[101] Augé, pp. 104-5.
[102] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 261.
[103] Augé, p. 78.

One of Berlant's primary areas of interest in *Cruel Optimism* is how a present moment, a 'situation', can occur in which 'a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing, but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos'[104]. A sense of instability within *Hotel World* is certainly conveyed through Smith's use of language in changing narrative styles and voices, and through the changing character perspectives, but there is also a sense that characters begin to question their negotiation of the world, begin to try new and different ways, adapting their approaches by imitating each others' to see if they fit. Both Clare and Penny inadvertently imitate the homeless Else, Clare by being mistaken as a beggar and Penny by following Else through the streets after mistaking her for a 'minor-ex rock star'[105]. Else imitates the role of a guest in the hotel, and Sara imitates the part of a heterosexual through flirtation with a male co-worker, although both attempts end badly. The 'situation' that allows these imitative interactions to occur is one of 'co-incidence'; a term coined by Ahmed which describes:

> a happening that brings things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of each thing. Simultaneous arrivals are not necessarily a matter of chance; arrivals are determined, at least in a certain way, as a determination that might determine what gets near, even if it does not decide what happens once we are near. If being near to this or that object is not a matter of chance, what happens in the "now" of this nearness remains open, in the sense that we don't always know things affect each other, or how we will be affected by things.[106]

Augé would note that arrivals and departures are integral to a person's interaction with a non-place, people are identified 'only on entering or leaving'[107]; but as several of the characters who arrive at the hotel are not deemed guests, Smith is taking a key indicator of the non-place, and skewing it. If the rules of the non-place were followed, then the events which occur 'in the "now" of this nearness', in the 'situation' of the Perfect, would not happen as neither Else nor Clare would be in the hotel. This skewing of the essence of the non-place, this changing it from a place which plays 'no part in any synthesis' and 'simply bears witness […] to the coexistence of distinct individualities'[108] to one in which interaction and change occurs means that the situation of change in *Hotel World* is more than simply about the characters, it is about change of the rules associated with their surroundings also.

---

[104] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 6.
[105] Smith, p. 139.
[106] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 39.
[107] Augé, p. 111.
[108] Augé, p. 111.

Sara's Suspension

The narrative of Sara's spirit frames the other stories in *Hotel World* in a literal and figurative sense, both bookending the novel and affectively bleeding into the other characters' lives, impacting their stories. We are told by Sara that the story 'starts at the end'[109] and that she is 'hanging falling breaking between this word and the next'[110], a play both on the fact that she cannot remember the word 'world' and that her language, representative of her being, is fading as her story (and therefore every story framed by hers) is coming to a close before it really begins.

In her exploration of the representation of the afterlife in fiction, Alice Bennet observes several implications of this 'imagery of a suspended fall'[111], the most poignant for this thesis being that '*Hotel World* is temporally situated in this arrested jump, almost between cause and effect'[112]. To return to Berlant's discussion of the historical present, her use of the term 'impasse' holds many links with this sense of suspended time. She cites this as her book's main 'genre' for tracking the sense of the present. Usually the term 'designates a time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward', but in Berlant's lexicon it is defined as:

> a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event.[113]

Berlant describes the novels and films that she considers as 'staging the impasse in which breakdown does its work on suspending the rules and norms of the world' in order to make us aware of 'the built and affective infrastructure of the ordinary'[114]. Smith's presentation of a spirit 'mid-fall' both suspends the rules and norms of the world, and stages an impasse in which the other narratives take place. It sets a tone of mourning and loss which filters throughout each chapter, but also one of appreciation for life, even if it is not necessarily the 'good-life' synonymous with cruel optimism.

Many aspects of Sara's narrative equate with Berlant's description of an impasse, from the 'wandering absorptive awareness' of Sara's observations of the world around her ('here's a woman being swallowed by the doors'[115]) to the hypervigilant collection of material, be it affective memory through the physical ('imagine an itch, imagine a foot'[116]) or emotional ('I fell in love. […] It made me happy, then it made me miserable'[117]). The narratives of the characters framed within this spectral impasse have temporal indications made through the tense-based chapter titles, but they are all in the recent past or near future, framed between the beginning of Sara's spiritual fall and the end. This, to use Berlant's terminology again, places them within 'the stretched out now', a merging of:

---

[109] Smith, p. 3.
[110] Smith, p. 31.
[111] Alice Bennet, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 81.
[112] Bennet, p. 83.
[113] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 6.
[114] Berlant, p. 49.

> an intensified present with senses of the recent past and near future: the temporal compartmentalizations of an ordinariness that can be broadly taken for granted are themselves suspended when the historic(al) sense is forced to apprehend itself.[118]

The tense-based titles help to create a sense of temporal compartmentalizations which follow the individual narratives of different characters while also holding them within the overarching suspended moment of *Hotel World*.

Surviving the Impasse

The historical present as a concept is tangled with the frameworks of neoliberalism and capitalism; Berlant's exploration considers the emotional, affective impact of living in the present, but the requirement to learn to live in this style is influenced primarily by the temporal designs of late capitalism as a societal infrastructure.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the presentation of globalized time by Harry Harootunian, the theorist whose work Berlant bases her consideration of the historical present on, would suggest that globalized time is itself a 'collision of temporalities'; a clash of 'exported world-standard time' and 'diverse local times and modes of existence'. He argues that 'national time and the time of capital are different'; national time 'with a punctual calendar of commemorative days, holidays, and so forth, is externalized in the conduct of linear time and moves inexorably to the end of each year to be repeated endlessly every new year', while capital time:

> is more complex; it presents a smooth, unbroken surface that resembles national time, yet it also works to unify immense temporal irregularities—uneven time—in the sphere of production,

---

[115] Smith, p. 30.
[116] Smith, p. 3.
[117] Smith, p. 17.
[118] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 5.

> circulation, and distribution—thus totalizing the various temporal processes resulting from the division of labor. [119]

In Harootunian's view, 'capitalist time situates the global at the level of the everyday and local, unsettling and segregating it into heterogeneous units'.

These two competing temporalities are clearly presented by Smith in *Hotel World*; the 'linear time' moving forward and ever repeating is conveyed through seasonal change, through the process of decay as Sara's body rots in the ground, and at a deeper level through the presentation of history and antiquated ghosts, while the Global Hotel, situated 'at the level of the everyday and local', symbolizes that capital time working to unify temporal irregularities. Some characters are more affiliated with one or the other: Sara and Else, both excluded from the world of the hotel in different ways, judge time through the changing of seasons and the day turning into night. Lise, as a hotel employee, judges time not by natural indicators of change ('Outside the sun was shining. It was irrelevant'[120]), but from within the capital 'sphere of production':

> This week Lise is on evening shift. At Global Hotels, evening shift runs from 4 p.m. till midnight when the night staff takes over. In actuality here, when Lise thinks 'five hours to go', she still has five hours plus seven minutes till her shift officially ends, and usually there's also a loss of several minutes at staff change over with the exchange of hellos and the putting on of coats; on evening shift Lise rarely leaves the hotel before 12.20 a.m.[121]

The term 'a loss of several minutes' intimates a blurred cross over between Lise's personal time and work time, as if anything not clearly demarcated as one or the other is written off as non-time, or not worthy of a temporal definition. A loss, a capital term in itself for the opposite of profit or gain, suggests a flaw or an inefficient process: when time is measured through capital, each moment must be accounted for.

This sense of the worth of time, or the time not worthy of definition, is explored through Smith's presentation of Lise's illness in two ways: in terms of capital, and in an affective and experiential way. The chapter begins with a questionnaire that Lise must complete on how ill she really feels; one assumes this is for incapacity benefits but we are not told by whom the form is issued. It could be the hotel, it could be the government, or it could be a doctor, but as these are all representatives of a capitalist state it does not really matter who wrote the form, only that they require Lise to define her illness in the measurable terms indicated by them. The writing style of the form resembles a Global Hotel quality manual quoted later in the chapter; in each case a united, unrecognisable 'we' require Lise to follow particular rules, both as employee ('*If we can do things better and cheaper, we can handle growth more easily, have happier customers, happier staff and happier managers'*[122]), and as an unwell member of the state ('***Sitting in a chair*** ***We need to know if you have any difficulties sitting comfortably in a chair***'[123]). The classification of Lise's level of illness is measured through time just as her shift work was; Lise must confirm if the length of time she can sit comfortably in a chair is 10, 30, 60 or 120 minutes, but her stream-of-consciousness narrative structure allows us to see the puerile and irrelevant nature of these questions: she cannot even remember how many minutes there are in an hour[124] which one would have to be able to do in order to begin formulating an answer to the question.

---

[119] Harootunian, p. 474.
[120] Smith, p. 85.
[121] Smith, pp. 103-4.

In Berlant's discussion of 'slow death', a phrase that refers to a population's experience of being defined by its own deterioration[125], she references David Harvey's 'polemical observation' that 'under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work'[126]. This sense is certainly drawn from Smith's juxtaposition of Lise 'the worker' and Lise 'the invalid' (at once ill and worthless); one belongs and contributes to society while the other has to justify their existence as a non-contributor. The change of Lise's experience in the novel is due to sickness, but it is presented by Smith as a shift in temporal consciousness; a shift in worlds:

> Light and fevered, Lise's world spun; in its spinning the names of all its places were loosened and jettisoned off the sides of it, leaving seas and countries nothing but blanks, outlines waiting to be rediscovered and renamed, their longitudes and latitudes stretched and limp as done elastic.[127]

Lise slips from capital temporality to a sense of non-temporality, or lost time; from the globalized world to a blank, as yet undiscovered one. Her shift from the world of the hotel to one of lost time echoes the story of her departed colleague, Sara, and pushes her narrative into one of 'counternarrative' status.

Just as Smith describes rainwater jolting from a shaking branch as 'a miniature parody of rain'[128], Lise's period of illness imitates Sara's impasse, as if her illness is a miniature parody of death. Her impasse, like Sara's, is depicted through the metaphor of falling but never landing, a purgatory through suspension:

> Lise […] had been falling in the same monotonous way for weeks, down into it like Alice hazily pondering bats and cats, through nothing but languid gravity, in a place where a second of time was

---

[122] Smith, p. 117.
[123] Smith, pp. 98-9.
[124] Smith, p. 81.
[125] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 95.
[126] Berlant, p. 95.
[127] Smith, p. 119.
[128] Smith, p. 236.

> stretched out so long and so thin that you could see veins in it; and all these seconds, all this time, she (Lise) had seemed to be hardly moving, though in reality the sides of the tunnel were flying up past her at thousands, maybe millions of miles an hour. [129]

Like Sara, Lise's memory fades ('So there was a story after all, somewhere, insistent, strung between this place and the last and the next, and she was trying to remember it'[130]) and she begins to suffer from, as Stephen Levin terms it, 'a kind of aphasia'[131]. Lise loses the ability to communicate with the world, as Sara has, but this hole in her memory where real, useful language was previously is now filling with ever repeating commercial jingles of her past[132], conjuring a sense of capitalist haunting.

Lise's language begins to shift from 'will' to 'would've'[133] as she contemplates that her active working life may never return, that the impasse will never end. Her life itself has become precarious, she cannot envisage a future. Alice Bennet references a quote from David Herman to argue that Sara's use of nonindicative verbal moods (not *went*, but *would go*) is typical of story-tellers in ghost stories, and that this technique suggests 'certain temporal and ontological properties of storyworlds inhabited by supernatural presences cannot be definitely known'[134]. As Lise adopts the same 'verbal moods' as Sara, it can be argued that both characters exist in storyworlds where reality, and time, differ from that of nation and capital; their impasse, to use Berlant's terminology, is one of breakdown where 'rules and norms of the world'[135] are suspended. The sense that the temporal and ontological properties of Lise's and Sara's storyworlds cannot be 'definitely known' suggest that, through their affective experiences in this impasse, they are capable of creating new rules which could permanently exist outside of the regular world of national and capital.

Berlant states that 'chronic illness is an illness of time' measured by 'corporeal decay', the weakening body representing 'the abrasions of time'[136]. Berlant notes that the affective experience of passing through illness forces a person to form new strategies to cope with 'a phase that could be an impasse, or life itself'[137], and it is this demarcation which Lise considers when she begins to question whether she will have a future, or if this illness will become 'life itself'. The sense of precarity linked to Lise's experience of illness here is not only an example of Harvey's assertion that capitalism defines sickness as the inability to work, but is also an example of how sickness can withdraw a person from society, as for many no work also means no link to the outside world. Like Sara, Lise is alone in her impasse, her experience of precarity is defined by her unemployment and her sickness, but also by how these two issues ostracise her from society.

---

[129] Smith, p. 84.
[130] Smith, p. 84.
[131] Levin, p. 43.
[132] Smith, p. 85.
[133] Smith, p. 88.
[134] Bennet, pp. 83-4.
[135] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 49.
[136] Berlant, p. 62.
[137] Berlant, p. 63.

It can be argued that while Lise is experiencing a literal form of chronic illness, Sara's spiritual experience also fits within Berlant's depiction, as her time since death is measured in part by the 'corporeal decay' of her body under the ground, and in part by the fading of her spirit. Both characters have had to relearn how to negotiate their lives within this new context of extended impasse and 'illness of time', but while Lise has no idea if her sickness is forever, Sara knows that this is her last night in this world[138].

It is in this point that the connection between the characters' experience begins to separate; Lise is unaware of her destiny but has a future, while wherever Sara is going is so temporally and ontologically removed from the corporeal world that the novel cannot follow her to wherever it is she will go next. We are told that 'in two years' time' Lise will be on holiday in Canada and, to escape bad weather, will enter the Ottawa Global Hotel where the smell of the flowers in the foyer will make her memories of working in the hotel, before she was ill, flood back to her[139]. This tells us both that Lise's sickness is an impasse between moments of health, and also that Lise does not return to work for the Global Hotel when she regains her health, but takes a new path. Lise's chance of a future is achieved through change. This glimpse of hope, although unknown to Lise herself in the present of the novel, suggests that Sara's last edict of 'remember you must live'[140] somehow gets through to her in their shared suspension.

As we know that Lise was unsatisfied in her work at the Global Hotel before her illness, and it is suggested that her future holds a positive outlook, one could argue that her period of sickness is not only an impasse through which she must transition, but that the illness is symbolic of the pain associated with detaching from a fantasy which is not working in order to discover a new, better way of survival. Berlant terms this 'cruel optimism's double bind', where 'even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working'[141]. This act of detachment is experienced by several of the characters in *Hotel World*; it is hinted at through Sara's reminiscence of the lesbian relationship that she was afraid to embark on, and through Penny's decision to continue following the fantasy of the good-life despite being aware of its flaws. Sara's observation of both Penny and Lise in her sweeping view of the hotel in the first chapter highlights this sense of moving on, or changing direction, as a theme of the novel:

---

[138] Smith, p. 3.
[139] Smith, p. 111.
[140] Smith, p. 30.
[141] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 263.

> Here's a woman being swallowed by the doors. She is well-dressed. On her back she carries nothing. Her life could be about to change. Here's another one inside, wearing the uniform of the hotel and working behind its desk. She is ill and doesn't know it yet. Life, about change.[142]

Penny is 'swallowed' by the hotel, a violent and predatory image that intimates that she has been consumed by the neoliberal agenda. She is given the chance to change through her encounter with Else, but does not. Lise, like Sara, has change forced upon her through a moment of crisis, an impasse. The illness, as suggested in Sara's narration, is a change in itself, but the experience of this impasse also encourages Lise to change direction once she has regained health. Change is linked to the positive, natural aspects of the narrative: the change of seasons, of time, of tenses. If, as Smith suggests, life is 'about change', then to refuse change is to refuse to live; perhaps it is the acceptance of change which allows Lise to move from simply existing to living, and allows Sara to move from purgatorial survival to death.

Lise's experience is evocative of one that Smith had herself; before writing *Hotel World* she suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome for around a year, an illness symptomatically similar to Lise's own undiagnosed disorder. After this period of sickness, Smith decided to leave her old career as a university lecturer, which made her 'miserable', and 'follow her heart and try to write for a living instead[143]. While this does not suggest that Lise's experience in the novel is in anyway autobiographical, it does suggest that Smith's own experience of surviving an impasse to continue to a different future may well have informed the novel. This vague, insinuated but not confirmed hope of future happiness for Lise creates a sense of optimism without making unsupportable promises; we are not told that she will live 'happily ever after' as in a fairy story, but there is a suggestion of survival, endurance and flourishing which, as Berlant notes, are forms of optimism in themselves[144].

Berlant suggests that the staging of impasse shows us 'how to pay attention to the built and affective infrastructure of the ordinary, and how to encounter what happens when infrastructural stress produces a dramatic tableau'. She argues that 'in scenarios of cruel optimism we are forced to suspend ordinary notions of repair and flourishing to ask whether the survival scenarios we attach to those affects weren't the problems in the first place'[145]. Both Lise and Sara, through their suspension, are forced to re-evaluate the 'survival scenarios' that they adopted; for Lise it was working in a job which brought no satisfaction and prompted her to break rules which she found superficial and mundane, while for Sara it involved denying her maturing sexuality. While

---

[142] Smith, p. 30.

[143] Louise France, 'Life Stories: Interview: Ali Smith', *The Observer*, 22 May 2005 <www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/may/22/fiction.bookerprize2005> [accessed 20 November 2012].

[144] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 48.

[145] Berlant, p. 49.

Lise's illness forces her out of capitalist time and into a temporal world where she no longer has a use value, Sara's greater and more absolute suspension makes her reconsider a theme of life which is so often regulated by the capitalist, and heteronormative, world: Love.

Queer Spaces

Just as capital time within *Hotel World* is juxtaposed with alternative temporalities, so the internal space of the hotel is juxtaposed with 'other' spaces to create a geography of non-places and anthropological places. Augé defines anthropological place as the opposite of non-place, it is somewhere that 'can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity'[146]. Each character has a place associated with their identity: in Else's narrative it is the historical street on which she sleeps rough, in Lise's it is the domestic space that she recuperates in, and quite tellingly for Penny it is the non-place itself. The presentation of place in Sara's narrative is more abstract than the others, however. Her places range from public spaces in which she lingers and floats (a swimming pool, a graveyard, outside a shop) to small, claustrophobic spaces that trap her (the dumb waiter, her coffin).

One of the primary reasons that Sara's places vary so much is due to her spectral form. She can go anywhere, flying above the trees one moment and searching under the ground for her coffin the next. Stephen Levin discusses Smith's invocation of spectrality 'as a means of disclosing the multiple temporalities that constitute the present'[147]. For him, Smith's presentation of Sara's spirit produces a 'spectral counternarrative of the global', one which 'unravels the synchronic time of globalization'[148]. This thesis argues that while Levin's argument is solid, globalized time is unravelled more in *Hotel World* by Lise's experience of non-time than by Sara's spectral presence; it also argues that the significance of Sara's 'spectral counternarrative' lies not in its relation to globalisation but in its challenge to the inherent heteronormativity of the neoliberal world.

Sara's narrative contains a trope that sees her repetitively negotiating between jumping and falling. The first, controlled and with autonomy, she does for fun as she dives competitively. The second knocks her 'off course'[149] initially by forcing her to acknowledge her sexuality (falling in love) and later forcing her into purgatory (falling to her death). By using the same language to describe the pivotal actions within Sara's narrative, that of falling in love and falling to her death, Smith presents both as acts which defy choice, and both as painful experiences:

---

[146] Augé, pp. 77-8.
[147] Levin, p. 37.
[148] Levin, p. 47.
[149] Smith, p. 19.

> I fell in love. I fell pretty hard. It caught me out. It made me happy, then it made me miserable. What to do? I had expected all my life to fall for some boy, or some man or other, and I had been waiting and watching for him.[150]

In *Queer Phenomenology,* Sara Ahmed discusses how she left 'the "world" of heterosexuality, and became a lesbian, even though this means staying in the heterosexual world.'[151] For Ahmed, the "world" of heterosexuality and the heterosexual world are not the same thing, one can be gay but must still exist within a space designed for heterosexuality: 'the lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organized around the form of the heterosexual couple'[152]. Sara's purgatorial existence between worlds acts as a metaphor for this sense of belonging and yet not belonging. Sara is disorientated, she is 'hanging falling breaking'[153] and from that perspective the world must seem upside-down, distant and unclear to her. As Ahmed notes, disorientation is actually part of becoming reorientated; it is essential in the process of determining a new path, a new direction:

> Becoming reorientated, which involves the disorientation of encountering the world differently, made me wonder about orientation and how much "feeling at home," or knowing which way we are facing, is about the making of worlds.[154]

Sara is not the only one who is disorientated by being knocked off course; her death impacts on the paths of others including her sister, her colleagues, and her mother whose unspoken words hang round her head as Sara's spirit hangs next to her:

> Although this is my home where I have lived for twenty-two years, and in it I am surrounded by family and familiar things, I do not rightly know any more where it is that I am in the world.[155]

Sara's death sends ripples through the world that she departs and yet remains in; her mother's disorientation echoes and twists Ahmed's terminology, showing that if 'feeling at home' is about the making of worlds, then the destruction of worlds is closely tied with the feeling of un-canniness. For both Sara and her mother the sense of being knocked off course is caused, in part, by 'stress about the loss of an imagined future'[156], and the loss of potential future happiness, the loss of a 'perhaps'. Ahmed reminds us that '"perhaps" shares its "hap" with "happiness." The happy future is the future of the perhaps.'[157] For Sara's mother the crisis felt is twofold; her grief is for the loss of her own object of happiness, her daughter, but also for the loss of Sara's own 'perhaps', the loss of her potential future.

---

[150] Smith, p. 17.
[151] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 19.
[152] Ahmed, p. 20.
[153] Smith, p. 31.
[154] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 20.
[155] Smith, p. 11.
[156] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 19.

The stages of mourning experienced by Sara's family, the father's denial of her existence by refusing to see her ghost, and the mother's pain at her presence[158], are experienced by Sara's spirit as forms of rejection. They mirror the concerns she felt before her death when she was contemplating the ramifications of her sexuality on how others would perceive her; she states that falling for the girl in the watch shop 'had made [her] invisible' and considers at length what becoming gay would mean for her world:

> I knew what my sister would think. I thought about what my parents would think; I could hear them through the wall, breathing. What our neighbours would think; they were breathing through the other wall. What Siobhan and Mary and Angela, and all the boys, all my friends from going to the pub, would think. What people who knew me would think. What people who hardly knew me or didn't know me at all would think.[159]

While alive, Sara's future happiness, her 'perhaps', becomes more than simply being about whether the girl she likes notices her, and begins to become about how her chosen direction will impact on those around her. Ahmed explains how a form of happiness in relation to family is related to 'the comfort of repetition', to 'staying on the right path'[160]. When a person deviates from 'the path of making other people happy' they become what Ahmed terms an 'affect alien', that is 'one who converts good feelings into bad, who as it were "kills" the joy of the family[161]. Sara is so concerned about becoming the killjoy of the family that she closets herself and does not risk telling the people around her about her true self, she choses to remain on 'the straight path'[162].

Sara's experience as a spirit symbolises the pain and loneliness associated with deviating from a path, but it also puts these life decisions into perspective. Sara's parents are never given the opportunity to come to terms with her sexuality and so we do not know if they would have accepted or rejected her for her life choices. Her death, however, becomes an undeniable 'killjoy' and removes autonomy and choice from all involved. The object of happiness that emerges from Sara's narrative, the object desired by all characters involved, is one of optimism or the chance of the 'perhaps' that is removed by the finality of death. Sara returns this object to her family and the other characters by reminding them to live; the impasse of mourning which they must endure can end if they let it.

---

[157] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 198.
[158] Smith, p. 13.
[159] Smith, pp. 22-3.
[160] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 48.
[161] Ahmed, pp. 48-9.
[162] Ahmed, p. 48.

The Closet

'The closet', a term used to describe 'a state in which someone will not admit being a homosexual'[163], is a spatial metaphor, but as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggest, it is a misleading one. As they note, we consider the closet as 'an individual's lie about him- or herself' but it is in fact a position imposed upon that individual by society:

> We blame people for being closeted. But the closet is better understood as the culture's problem, not the individual's. No one ever created a closet for him- or herself. People find themselves in its oppressive conditions before they know it, willy-nilly. It is experienced by lesbians and gay men as a private, individual problem of shame and deception. But it is produced by the heteronormative assumptions of everyday talk. It feels private. But in an important sense it is publicly constructed.[164]

Sara's emerging homosexuality in *Hotel World* echoes the experience described and language used by Berlant and Warner; the first time she imagines what the girl in the watch shop would look like naked she is caught 'gazing, without even realizing' at her sister undressing, causing herself to feel 'shame […] spreading all up and down' her body. Sara's sister questions her aggressively, calls her a 'fucking weirdo', and blushes 'like she was ashamed too'[165]. The shame felt by Sara leads to her 'deception' through hiding her feelings from those around her, but the shame is not generated through the feelings relating to the girl themselves but rather by being 'caught in the act' of thinking, a reaction to her sister's own embarrassment at being watched. In this scene it would seem unfair to accuse Sara of being in the closet as she is only just becoming aware of her feelings, but the combination of her discomfort in this interaction with her sister, and the fact that the girl from the watch shop ignores her when she visits, begins to make her see the world differently; her new love has made her invisible to those she wants attention from, and too visible to those she wants to ignore her.

As Berlant and Warner note, publicness can feel like exposure and privacy like the closet, but while the closet feels as if it is offering protection to the individual, it is actually 'riddled with fear and shame'[166]. Sara's experience in life bounces between exposure and privacy, the open and the closet, and while she appears to opt for 'privacy' before she dies, it is in death that she comes to realise the importance of following your heart, even if it means becoming 'becoming reorientated'[167] in a world that no longer fits.

---

[163] Merriam-Webster, *Closet* (2016), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/closet> [accessed 15 August 2016].

[164] Warner and Berlant, p. 52.

[165] Smith, p. 22.

[166] Warner and Berlant, p. 52.

Smith uses several scenarios in Sara's narrative that can be read as symbolic of the concept of 'the closet'. There is a scene in which Sara is at the pool and a middle-aged, slightly overweight woman tries to get changed in a small cubicle but the doors will not stay closed, meaning that everyone can see her undress. When the woman gives up trying to keep the doors shut and simply strips, she is escorted away by the swimming guard to the cheers and claps of the watching public. Sara swims across to 'the other side' of the pool to watch with the other people, to see the incident 'like them'[168]. At first she believed they were laughing and pointing at her as she was three cubicles along from the woman, but once she integrates with the mob they shift to make room for her, a man flirts with her and she smiles at him. When she leaves after the incident it is as if the people at the pool 'were old friends', like they 'had been through something together'[169]. She happily takes part in an act of ridiculing a stranger because of the relief that it was not she who was being exposed as not 'fitting'.

Later in the chapter, when Sara considers the implications of telling everyone she knows about being gay, she likens the experience of coming out of the closet to going back to the pool and stripping 'right down to skin and thumping heart'[170] in front of all the people. As Berlant and Warner note, being publicly known as homosexual 'carries echoes of pathologized visibility'[171]; to 'come out' is to make oneself vulnerable to a public which may interpret your choice as abnormal, and not be afraid to tell you so. There is comfort in being one of the many who point and laugh rather than the one who is being pointed at.

When Sara first observes the woman changing, she notes that she 'wasn't that big a person but the cubicles on the women's side of the pool are small'[172], suggesting that the bad fit was not actually due to the woman being abnormally big, but rather the cubicle being strangely unaccommodating. As the chapter continues, the 'closets' that appear in the narrative become smaller and more obscure, making the act of using them feel increasingly unnatural and claustrophobic. On her eighteenth day of watching the girl from the watch shop, Sara decides to stop going. She shuts herself in her bedroom and hides the receipt for her watch in a music box, folding it 'as many times as it would fold' and forcing it into a space under the ballerina's foot[173]. The receipt for the watch is the only evidence of Sara's interaction with the girl in the shop, so although it would mean nothing to anyone else, she feels the need to hide it in the same way that she hides her behaviour and her longing.

---

[167] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 20.
[168] Smith, p. 21.
[169] Smith, p. 22.
[170] Smith, p. 23.
[171] Warner and Berlant, p. 52.
[172] Smith, p. 20.
[173] Smith, p. 24.

While the music box is an heirloom from Sara's mother, and therefore another 'happy object' which symbolises the dreams passed from mother to daughter, it is described by Sara in a way that makes it sound gauche and tacky – the ballerina 'only has one leg, meant to be two, stuck together', her 'fingers are melted into themselves' and the music played by the box 'sounds cheap'[174]. The song it plays is Lara's Theme from Dr Zhivago, a story of heterosexual love which was made into a very popular film in the sixties, the same decade that we are told the box was made in. By hiding a secret of love within a box synonymous with old-fashioned views of femininity and love, Sara changes what should be a happy object into something that closets her true desires. What her mother saw as sentimental and worth keeping, Sara sees as fake, proving that as Ahmed observes, when a happy object is passed on, it is 'not necessarily the feeling that passes':

> Happiness is precarious and even perverted because it does not reside within objects or subjects (as a form of positive residence) but is a matter of how things make an impression.[175]

What Sara's mother interpreted as a representation of happiness, Sara interprets as a something she cannot relate to. Her object of happiness, and misery, is the receipt forced into a hole in the box. Once again, she hides her real self and her real feelings in order to avoid exposure. Sara becomes an imitation of happiness just as the ballerina within the music box is a symbol of beauty and grace; from a distance they seem real but when they are viewed up close, they are unnaturally moulded and glued into shape.

While the episode at the pool shows Sara's fear in relation to exposure, and the misappropriation of the music box shows her actively hiding her feelings, her death by dumb waiter is a more obvious physical metaphor of forcing oneself into the closet. She makes a bet with a boy at work that she can fit within the dumb waiter; at one point she claims that she fitted in 'perfectly'[176] but at another the description of the act feels forced and uncomfortable:

> I curled like a snail in a shell with my neck and the back of my head crammed in, pressed hard right up against the metal roof, my face between my arms, my chest between my thighs.[177]

The act of proving that she can 'fit' requires her to contort her body; every adjective that could be applied to this experience could equally describe that of denying her true sexual orientation, especially if it were to last for an extended amount of time – restrictive, distorting, painful, unnatural. Ahmed argues that ‘compulsory heterosexuality shapes what bodies can do’:

---

[174] Smith, p. 24.
[175] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 44.
[176] Smith, p. 25.
[177] Smith, p. 6.

> Through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being orientated in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted: they get twisted into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action. Compulsory heterosexuality diminishes the very capacity of bodies to reach what is off the straight line.[178]

Because deviating from the ‘straight line’ did not work for Sara, because the girl in the watch shop ignored her when she followed her day after day, she twists back into an orientation which no longer fits. We learn in Clare’s narrative later in the novel that Sara had planned a date with the boy who she tried to impress by fitting in the dumb waiter. They had arranged to go and see *Happiness*, a film released in 1998 which charted the breakdown of the family unit and the uncovering of deviant sexual impulses, and has been described as ‘a cynical, nihilistic expose of social relationships’[179]. The ironic film title and the planned date allude to what could have happened if Sara had lived; she sought a form of acceptable happiness through ‘performing’ heterosexuality and it may have worked to an extent, but the metaphorical contortion of her body would have lingered, causing her to always feel slightly disorientated.

Sara’s final closet, the one that will always be linked with the world she has left, is her coffin, ‘smooth and costly on the outside, chipboard-cheap at the centre’[180] much like the hotel. While the representation of the coffin itself is morbid, as is the description of Sara’s decaying body with its blackened eyes and glued mouth[181], the scene allows for a juxtaposition between the physical and the spiritual Sara to occur. One is permanently ‘closeted’, asleep, passive, while the other is free to move around, inquisitive and active. This splitting of the physical and spiritual allows for the different approaches and different attitudes that are hidden within one person to be compared. The ‘body’, representing the part of Sara who was too scared to follow her heart, resents being asked about the past, she finds remembering ‘painful’ and tells the ‘spirit’ Sara: ‘We’ve no business with each other anymore’ before closing ‘like a lid’[182]. The ‘spirit’, representing the part of Sara who was willing to take risks, wants to know everything that happened; she is the one passing on her story to the reader and the world, coming-out to anyone who will listen:

---

[178] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 91.

[179] Joan Hawkins, 'Dark, disturbing, intelligent, provocative, and quirky: avante-garde cinema of the 1980s and 1990s', in *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream,* ed. by Christine Holmlund and Justin Wyat (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.89-106, p. 99.

[180] Smith, p. 14.

[181] Smith, p. 15.

[182] Smith, p. 26.

> It has tired me out telling you her story, all you pavement-pressing-see-hearing people passing so blandly back and fore in front of the front door of the hotel.[183]

Ahmed argues that 'to move one's sexual orientation from straight to lesbian […] requires reinhabiting one's body, given that one's body no longer extends the space or even the skin of the social'[184]. This struggle is symbolised in many ways by Sara's body no longer fitting her spirit, the two being unnaturally split. When Sara's spirit wants to awaken her body to discuss her past life she tries to literally climb back into her body, 'reinhabiting' it by 'pushing down into her legs and arms and through her splintery ribs' only to find that she no longer fits, she has to lay 'half-in, half-out'[185]. Her attempt at 'reinhabiting' is too late at this point, her body is broken and so can not assist her in either return to her old life, or developing a new one by completing the act of 'becoming' a lesbian, her only choice is to return to the surface and go home 'to heaven, or hell, or somewhere'[186]. This future is uncertain and therefore could be read as scary and daunting, it is the future of the unknown. The unknown is also full of potential possibilities, as Ahmed argues, 'the happy future is the future of the perhaps'[187].

Alternative Routes

In *Hotel World* Smith creates queer and transient spaces which complicate regular concepts of temporality. In doing so, she creates a novel which confronts the dangers of living within a societal framework which deceives and offers false promises, and presents an alternative route which may not necessarily bring 'happiness' or satisfaction, but will at least allow a person to be true to themselves. Berlant asks in *Cruel Optimism* why 'people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies– say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work'[188], and through *Hotel World* Smith does the same, exploring what happens when people gradually let go of these fantasies.

Ahmed states that 'It is important that we do not idealize queer worlds or simply locate them in an alternative space'[189] and Smith does neither of these things. The alternative routes and temporalities in *Hotel World* all interact with and dissect the non-place of the hotel central to the novel. They orient towards and are disorientated by the non-place but they are still located within the same 'world'. In this sense Smith does not present an 'alternative space' in which queer narratives take place, but rather layers them on top of each other to present a map of pathways which are usually hidden. The Queer World and the Hotel World occupy the same space, they just require the occupants to re-orientate in order to see them.

---

[183] Smith, p. 26.

[184] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 101.

[185] Smith, p. 15.

[186] Smith, p. 26.

[187] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 198.

[188] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.

[189] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 106.

Ahmed uses the term queer to describe both 'what is "oblique" or "off line"' and 'to describe specific sexual practices'[190]. In the same way, to describe *Hotel World* as a queer exploration of what it is to live in a neoliberal, heteronormative world takes into account both the representation of queer pathways as the route chosen by people who deviate from the 'norm', such as Else, Lise and Clare, as well as ones which are homosexual in nature, such as Sara's. None of these 'queer worlds' are idealized; each one is visceral, dirty and painful in a different way. The world in which Sara and the girl from the watch shop negotiate their feelings is fraught; their paths cross but never align ('walked over the road, towards me, right to me, and right past me, inches from me.'[191]), they see each other but pretend that they do not while their bodies betray them through hearts thumping and 'small wings' moving in chests[192]. None of this feels idealized; love itself is uncomfortable and makes Sara 'miserable', while the girl from the watch shop finds the whole situation 'embarrassing'[193].

Hotel World is a record of queer moments; it presents the 'precarious bodies'[194] that interest Berlant and 'the drama of contingency'[195] which situates Ahmed's research. Many of the characters within the novel are wretched, but as Ahmed reminds us, this does not necessarily make them lost causes:

> Just recall that one of the definitions of the wretch is "a poor or hapless being." Perhaps we could separate the hapless from the wretched. The wretched ones might be full of hap, might be hapfull, because they deviate from the paths of happiness, because they live in the gaps between its lines. To be full of hap is to make happen.[196]

As Ahmed suggests, it is autonomy and choice that seem to be the most accurate indicators of satisfaction for the characters within *Hotel World;* sustainable happiness is possible for those who 'make happen' by deviating from the path expected of them. This does not mean that the novel is suggesting that deviation automatically leads to happiness, but it does promote risk taking as something far more natural than limiting oneself to the continuous striving for the 'better' of the 'good life' only to find, when one arrives, that it is simply an oversold 'ordinary'.

---

[190] Ahmed, p. 161.
[191] Smith, p. 23.
[192] Smith, p. 235.
[193] Smith, p. 235.
[194] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 3.
[195] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 22.
[196] Ahmed, p. 233.

One of the quotes that Smith begins her novel with, which introduces the discussion of risk and unpredictability as a theme of *Hotel World,* is from the architectural theorist, Charles Jencks:

> Traditional religions emphasize constancy, the modernists with their mechanistic models emphasize predictability, but the cosmos is much more dynamic than either a pre-designed world or a dead machine…each jump is a great mystery.[197]

It is the mystery, the 'perhaps', which makes life worth living. The quote is taken from *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* through which Jencks considers a 'new world-view', a new 'metanarrative of the universe' which is being constructed to ask 'the deep questions: Where do we come from? Who are we? How do we fit into an evolving world?'[198] Smith is essentially asking the same questions but at a smaller, more affective level. Just as *Hotel World* is a microcosm of the wider Western, and even cosmological condition, the questions relating to our place in the world are considered by the novel from a personal, intimate perspective.

The temporal, changing nature of the contemporary situation frames both the novel and the theories that have been considered in this chapter. Berlant sees the neoliberal present as 'a space of transition'[199], Augé as a world surrendered 'to the fleeting, the temporary'[200], while Ahmed presents the queer inhabitation of the present as a creation of 'temporary spaces that come and go'[201], a world 'full of fleeting points'[202]. While the transitions of the neoliberalism present occur within the boundaries of what is expected by society, the queer spaces that appear do so outside, in the margins. Smith similarly reminds us several times that life is 'about change'[203]; Sara's affirmative refrain occasionally slips into 'remember you must leave'[204] while Lise's mother quotes William Dunbar, reassuring her sick daughter that '*this false warld is bot transitory'*[205]. The novel's exploration of how transient individuals form and amend their identities within the ever-changing environment of the present places *Hotel World* within this larger contemporary discussion of what actually constitutes a 'good life', and how to endure the process of survival in a world which does not always feel as if it 'fits'. Ahmed suggests that we embrace this misfit, this world-in-flux:

---

[197] Charles Jencks, *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1995), p. V.
[198] Jencks, p. 7.
[199] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 261.
[200] Augé, p. 78.
[201] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 106.
[202] Ahmed, p. 172.
[203] Ahmed, p. 30.
[204] Smith, p. 28.
[205] Smith, p. 12.

> It is given that the straight world is already in place and that queer moments, where things come out of line, are fleeting. Our response need not be to search for permanence, as Berlant and Warner show us in their work, but to listen to the sound of "the what" that fleets.[206]

The spoken message of the 'what' that fleets in *Hotel World* is Sara's recurring refrain of 'remember you must live', but the *sound* of the 'what' is one of free-falling, one of risk and one of 'perhaps' which begins, ends and suffuses the novel:

'Wooooo-
hooooo
oo'[207]

---

[206] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 106.
[207] Smith, p. 238.

Chapter 2: Kate Atkinson's *Started Early, Took my Dog*

This chapter will consider how Kate Atkinson adapts the detective story to create a narrative that charts the ongoing crisis of the ordinary. The chapter will argue that *Started Early* can be read as a counternarrative to neoliberalism in its presentation of class, economic recession and systemic violence. Through *Started Early,* Atkinson presents a world disorganized by capitalism, but specific to the geopolitical and biopolitical location of northern England since the birth of neoliberal politics in the 1970s. The novel plays with truth and myth associated with this area of the country, juxtaposing reality with fiction, myth with authenticity. This chapter will consider how Atkinson pulls apart traditional ideas of hope and optimism to explore alternative routes to, and definitions of, hope and happiness.

Started Early's primary protagonists are Jackson Brodie, a retired policeman turned private investigator, and Tracy Waterhouse, a retired policewoman turned head of security at a local shopping precinct. Their narratives run in parallel as Jackson investigates a historic case of child abduction, and Tracy accidentally buys a child from a prostitute and runs away to France. Jackson's historic investigation allows for the narrative to move between the 1970s and the present, juxtaposing a time associated with riots, strikes, Margaret Thatcher and the Yorkshire Ripper, with the post-millennial world of austerity.

The characters presented in *Started Early* range across a variety of backgrounds, but all convey a sense of precarity in their survival. The protagonists of *Started Early,* the ones given a voice through the third person subjective narration, tend to originate as characters who survive within 'the good life's normative/utopian zone'[1], and yet their lives are intertwined with those outside of the zone, the ones living in what Berlant terms 'survival time, the time of struggling, drowning, holding onto the ledge'. At the bottom of the social spectrum are the prostitutes known by Tracy from her days as a police officer; with the presence of a murderer targeting women on the streets their occupation is more precarious than usual, but as Tracy observes, even without a serial killer on the loose a '*fille de joie* […] was forty times more likely to die a violent death than the fellow members of her sex'[2]. At the other end of the spectrum, 'resolutely middle-class'[3] Tilly, an aging actress suffering with the early stages of dementia, struggles to keep her job on a TV detective show as she forgets her lines and calls the other actors by their real names instead of character names. She reminisces on why she is alone, why she has no family and no money, and tries to survive in a world that she no longer recognises.

---

[1] Berlant, p. 169.
[2] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 266.
[3] Atkinson, p. 41.

In writing a critical perspective for the British Council, Jules Smith describes Atkinson's work as 'her own special genre - the death-defying tragi-comedy'[4], while Sinead McDermott describes Atkinson's novels as accounts of loss which attempt 'to rewrite and revision the family'[5]. *Started Early* follows both of these trends, but does so in a more open ended way than Atkinson's previous novels. Family is once again redefined in this novel, but the themes are more complex than that; here Atkinson pulls apart what it is to renegotiate a world in tatters, to cope with loss not just of an individual, but of a hope for the future, a hope for better.

From Detective Fiction to Precarity

In the opinion of Tzvetan Todorov, for detective fiction to be truly good, it must fit within the rules of that genre; if it is developed or improved then it is no longer popular fiction: it becomes 'literature'[6]. While *Started Early* follows the basic premise of detective fiction, in that there are mysteries to be solved and criminals to be caught, it also breaks rules by leaving cases unsolved, criminals unpunished. It blurs the delineation, as with other novels in the Brodie series, between those who are 'guilty' and those who are 'innocent'; allowing the novel to become more about recording and interpreting a moment than reaching judgements within that moment.

In his discussion of the history of 'the case' in crime stories, Todd Herzog explains that in traditional detective fiction, 'the narrative begins with a disruption of bourgeois order (the crime) and ends with the restoration of bourgeois order' as the detective pieces together the events and distinguishes the criminal[7]. He notes, however, that to catch a criminal and place them behind bars is not enough, as another can always take their place and continue the disruption:

> To avoid living in a continuous state of crisis, we need to control our anxiety that anybody is a potential criminal threat by clearly distinguishing between the criminal and the noncriminal. This is the crucial task that tales of crime—from scientific criminological works to popular journalistic accounts to fictional texts—seek to accomplish.[8]

In *Started Early* it is difficult to distinguish between the criminal and noncriminal; policemen and caseworkers are dangerous liars while child-stealing criminals such as Tracy are essentially good and retired gangsters sit somewhere inbetween. Murders and rapes remain unsolved, meaning that there are rarely any neat conclusions to the multiple criminal cases that turn up throughout the narrative. By veering away from the traditional aims of detective fiction in *Started Early*, Atkinson allows the 'state of crisis' generated by the crimes to continue past the novel's conclusion; on a simple level this may irritate the reader as they feel duped by not being given a sufficient ending, but on a more complex level this reminds us that crimes often go unsolved, that the world is not a safe place, and that in real life there is rarely a 'happy ending'.

---

[4] Jules Smith, *Kate Atkinson: Critical Perspective*, (2009), <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/kate-atkinson> [accessed 21 August 2015].

[5] Sinead McDermott, 'Kate Atkinson's Family Romance: Missing Mothers and Hidden Histories in Behind the Scenes at the Museum', *Critical Survey,* 18.2 (2006), 67-78 (p. 67).

[6] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1977), p. 43.

[7] Todd Herzog, 'Crime Stories: Criminal, Society, and the Modernist Case History', *Representations,* 80.1 (2002), 34-61 (p. 34).

[8] Herzog, p. 34.

The 'state of crisis' imagined through the crime of this novel echoes the sociopolitical worlds of both time frames. As Alwyn Turner observes, 1970s Britain 'was confronted by a series of crises that set the tone for the remainder of the century and beyond', including immigration, street violence, and class war. It is a decade which conjures 'images of social breakdown, power cuts, the three day week, rampant bureaucracy and all powerful trade unions[9]. The term 'Crisis? What crisis?', misattributed to the Labour prime minister James Callaghan by *The Sun* newspaper, was used in the Conservatives' election campaign broadcast in the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1979[10], paving the way for the neoliberal Thatcher government.

The state of crisis in the present day of *Started Early* is primarily economic in the sense that it is framed by the recession of 2008, but the novel also presents a world in which the neoliberal agenda has not worked in securing a better future for the masses. According to Tracy's twisted view as an ex-cop, Leeds is full of criminals and examples of the lumpenproletariat. As Harvey notes, for 'those left or cast outside the market system […] there is little to be expected from neoliberalization except poverty, hunger, disease, and despair'[11], resulting often in the need to work in the illegal trades of stealing and trafficking to survive. David Garland suggests that even the contemporary criminal justice system is in a perpetual sense of crisis, suffering from cost cutting on elements supported by experts (such as drug treatment programs and education in prison) and extra spending on aspects popular with the public but which are considered less effective in the long run (such as mass imprisonments and the 'war of drugs'). He does note somewhat sardonically, however, that 'crisis' as a term to describe this 'demoralization' could be considered inappropriate 'for a situation that has now endured for several decades'[12]. Both time frames within *Started Early* can be read as ordinaries 'shaped by crisis' in which people must develop skills for adjusting to new pressures[13]. The solving of crimes, or lack of it, is symptomatic of larger social issues of crisis within late capitalism related to everything from job security to a sense of social belonging.

---

[9] Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum Press Ltd., 2009), p. IX.
[10] Tyler, p. 52.
[11] Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 185.
[12] David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 19.
[13] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 8.

We already know from earlier novels in the series that Jackson Brodie's main impulse for solving crime stems from the rape and murder of his sister which was never solved, but rather than finding a psychoanalytical 'closure' in other cases, he forever accumulates unfinished business, further impacting his disillusioned view of the world:

> His specialist subject on Mastermind would be looking for people. Not necessarily finding them, but half the equation was better than none. 'Really, you're looking for your sister,' Julia said. 'Your own dear grail. You're never going to find her, Jackson. She's gone. She's never coming back.'
>
> 'I know that.' Didn't make any difference, he would go on looking for all the lost girls, the Olivias, the Joannas, the Lauras. And his sister, Niamh, the first lost girl (the last lost girl).[14]

The allusion here to lost girls brings to mind the lost boys of J.M Barrie's *Peter Pan*, juxtaposing the magic and innocence of a childhood story with Brodie's dark reality of searching for girls who have fallen victim to predatory men. Like the lost boys, these girls are destined to remain young forever.

Started Early is the first novel in this series that adopts and encourages this sense of disillusionment by leaving cases open; the reader is left guessing and attempting to solve the crime on the information left by Atkinson like breadcrumbs, but following these simply raises more questions. In previous novels in the series the separate narrative threads always conclude for the reader; Jackson does not always find the killer, the police are not always notified and the families of the victim do not always get told the truth, but the reader tends to have the threads resolved as they are told individual accounts through the third person subjective narrative of victims, perpetrators and witnesses. In *Started Early* there are two cases left open, the case of lost girl Courtney's true identity, and the case of the prostitute murderer in the present day, for which there is not even a suspect. These two unresolved cases create different effects; the first encourages empathy for Tracy who is building a life with Courtney but aware that it probably will not last, while the second echoes and reminds us of the 'continuous sense of crisis' created by the case of the Yorkshire Ripper, a real case which surfaces several times in the novel.

Carl Malmgren notes that 'in mystery fiction closure is contingent upon disclosure; the real *terminus ad quem* of such fiction is the discovery of Truth'; but he builds upon this idea to argue that disclosure 'frequently takes the form of poetic justice' and that the 'detective's solution leads to resolution of the narrative's imbalances and injustices'[15]. There are several aspects of 'poetic justice' in *Started Early* as well as most of the earlier novels in the series, and these do arguably create a balance in the narrative. One example is a murderer being pushed under a train while he tries to cover up the murder that took place 30 years earlier. One could argue that the truth that is discovered at the end of the novel relates more to universal truths and philosophies than to an answer of 'whodunnit'. *Started Early* certainly explores the moral dimensions of what really constitutes guilt, and who is truly criminal as already mentioned, but there are deeper considerations of moral issues also. The presentation of police corruption and systematic misogyny creates an environment in which moral ambiguity is rife.

---

[14] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 66.

[15] Carl Malmgren, *Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 2001), p. 25.

By appropriating and then breaking the rules of detective fiction, Atkinson is creating, as Todorov would argue, literature rather than popular fiction. If we return, however, to Herzog's discussion of the history of 'the case', it can be argued that Atkinson is presenting a perfect example of the criminal case:

> The case ultimately does not illustrate a condition or answer a question; rather, it poses a question, without however ever being capable of answering it. The case is not closed — indeed, the case is never closed. It poses a question that cannot be answered, because it is not in itself a judgment, but rather a means of judging. It is, as Chandler nicely puts it, ''the very form of 'deliberation' ''.[16]

Started Early is a 'deliberation', one that both judges the criminal and interrogates the law that calls that person a criminal. It goes further than this, however, by questioning, exploring and criticising the very society that creates and implements those laws: the neoliberal state.

In her article 'On The Case', Berlant describes a case as 'a perturbation in the normative' and differentiates between the terms 'case' and 'event' by stating that a case is what an event might become:

> Usually, when an event happens there are no outcomes; it fades into the ordinary pulsations of living on undramatically, perhaps in memory, without being memorable. When an event occurs out of which a case is constructed, it represents a situation in which people are compelled to take its history, seek out precedent, write its narratives, adjudicate claims about it, make a judgment, and file it somewhere: a sick body, a traffic accident, a phenomenon, instance, or detail that captures the interpretive eye.[17]

According to this definition *Started Early* contains a multitude of cases, but is also essentially one big case in itself, in that it is a narrative, a record, of a sick society. Procreation, infidelity, societal prejudice and the flaws in capitalist culture all become factors as important to the novel as the murdered prostitutes and kidnapped children because they create the backdrop which influences, prompts and eventually absorbs these crimes. Rather than crime being presented as an exceptional event that disrupts the 'bourgeois order', it becomes a symptom of the underlying societal concerns that have continued and evolved since the inception of neoliberal politics when the story begins, in the mid nineteen-seventies.

---

[16] Herzog, p. 40.

[17] Berlant, 'On the Case', p. 670.

Several of the main crimes of *Started Early* are presented within the domestic environment, fitting it thematically within Atkinson's back catalogue of novels which, as Sinead McDermott observes, regularly reveal the family 'as a disturbing place, the site of violence, resentments and jealousies as much as love and affection'[18]. By adopting motifs and narrative structures from detective fiction but continuing to explore themes of domestic fiction, Atkinson cultivates a tradition found in the detective fiction of nineteenth century female authors. Catherine Ross Nickerson coined the phrase 'domestic detective fiction' to describe the stories of female crime writers such as Louisa Alcott, Anna Katherine Green and Metta Fuller Victor, writers who explored:

> fear and knowledge as twin subjects by drawing on several longstanding traditions of female writing about danger and women's experience, including female gothic novels, sensation fiction, seductive narratives and the more recently developed domestic novel. Into that mixture, they implanted the figure of the detective and the narrative structure of detective fiction.[19]

Nickerson observes that these novels follow two narrative lines, one 'forward to revelation and enlightenment' with the other 'working in the opposite direction, toward concealment and erasure'[20]. *Started Early* returns to these themes from the perspective of the twenty-first century; the change (and similarity) in women's experience from the 1970s to the present is explored through the presentation of domestic violence, betrayed wives, and family expectations.

The adoption of traits of traditional genres does not make *Started Early* old-fashioned or staid in its approach. As Heather Worthington observes, while crime fiction is 'deeply conservative in its formulaic conventions', it is also 'potentially radical in its diversity':

> its very status as popular and accessible literature means that it responds quickly to change, that it can incorporate cultural and social shifts almost immediately into its texts. We see clearly, in crime fiction, the anxieties, the morals and values of the contemporary society.[21]

Atkinson certainly uses the genre to present the values of contemporary society, and does so by comparing and contrasting the crimes of the past and present. *Started Early* introduces the reader to a world suffused with political history, a world in a moment of socioeconomic crisis that, at the time of publication, had not yet concluded itself. The story hops between 1975 and the present 2010, following events which occur in the life of Tracy and which link the two temporalities in eerie coincidence.

---

[18] McDermott, p. 67.

[19] Catherine Ross Nickerson, 'Women Writers before 1960', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction,* ed. by Catherine Ross Nickerson (Cambridge and Ohio: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.29-41, p. 29.

[20] Nickerson, p. 30.

[21] Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. IX.

‘Motorway City of the Seventies’: The Setting of *Started Early*

The novel begins in Leeds, an area of the country long associated with the working class, industry and mining. 1975 is introduced on the first page as the year that Margaret Thatcher becomes ‘the new leader of the Conservative party’[22], the beginning of the end for the industrial North, as well as a year in which West Yorkshire is ‘awash with serial killers’[23], establishing that this novel is at once concerned both with politics and violence. In this flash of the past, Tracy is a young policewoman new to the job; she is an outsider because she is woman in a man’s role, but also because she does not fit the conventional figure of the woman, being overweight and an assumed ‘dyke’[24].

In the second time frame, 2006, Tracy is a retired superintendent now working as head of security at a shopping precinct. While the primary narrative conveys the sadness linked to Tracy’s state as old, overweight and alone, it also allows us to see Tracy’s world through her eyes as she walks around the shopping centre that she protects. It is a world ‘going to hell in a handcart’, still showing signs of the recession that began two years before:

> She strolled past Morrisons, the gap where Woolworths used to be, Poundstretcher – the retail preferences of the lumpenproletariat. Was there anyone in the entire soulless place who was happy?[25]

The twenty-first century as seen by retired Tracy would have seemed utterly dystopian to the young policewoman we originally meet; this woman and world appear at first glance to be devoid of hope, Tracy embittered by years of working with the criminal underbelly of society and the world left in tatters after the recession.

The time frame chosen is poignant in many ways; at first glance it relates to the case of the Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe, which forms a background to Tracy’s investigation and is echoed in a serial murder case in the modern day, but the repetitive presentation of flawed neoliberal capitalism through poverty, closure of industry and gentrification also forms an important backdrop for the narrative. This juxtaposition of crime and socioeconomic concerns is one that occurs from the outset, and mirrors both the concurrence of two time frames and two versions of Leeds – the prosperous city and the crime-ridden underbelly. These comparisons set up a dialogue that in many ways replaces the traditional 'good/bad' dichotomy of the detective genre; instead of guilty/innocent and criminal/citizen, we have poor/rich and old/new, with the stronger of the parties trying to hide or push out the weaker. As Jackson observes on his return to Leeds after many years, 'The dirty old town he remembered had been overlaid by something new and shiny. It didn't mean the dirty old town wasn't still there of course'.[26]

---

[22] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 17.
[23] Atkinson, p. 18.
[24] Atkinson, p. 30.
[25] Atkinson, p. 32.

We begin, with Tracy, in the Merrion Centre, a modern shopping precinct in the centre of Leeds:

> The Watch Hospital, Costa Coffee, Wilkinson's Hardware, Walmsley's, Herbert Brown's ('Lend and Spend' a fancy rhyme for a pawnbroker, eternal friend of the underclass). All human life was here. Britain – shoplifting capital of Europe, over two billion quid lost every year to 'retail shrinkage', a ridiculous term for what was, after all, straightforward thieving. And double that figure if you added the amount of stuff that the staff nicked. Unbelievable.[27]

As Tracy suggests, all human life is present and welcome in this non-place of commerce; that is as long as they are playing the part of consumer. The shops mentioned are typically aimed at the 'underclass'; discount stores and pawnbrokers who eternally encourage those on the lower socioeconomic bracket to continue consuming even when they can no longer afford to. While it is not overtly stated, one assumes that the 'lumpenproletariat' present in the precinct are the ones most likely to add to the 'retail shrinkage' although of course the staff in the shops, still members of the underclass, also contribute; they remain part of the capitalist economy but read as negatives, losses, drains on the system. Theft, a term that denotes a crime has taken place, is renamed 'retail shrinkage', an accounting idiom. It changes the sense of the act from a legal matter to an economic one, from a moral problem to a material loss. While this type of crime irritates Tracy, she reminisces about working with the other more serious crimes, 'all the p's – paedophilia, prostitution, pornography' which links again back to economic exchange:

> Trafficking. Buying and selling, that's all people did. You could buy women, you could buy kids, you could buy anything. Western civilization had had a good run but now it had pretty much shopped itself out of existence.[28]

The assertion that 'you could buy anything' is supported moments later in the novel when Tracy herself purchases a child from Kelly Cross, 'prostitute, druggie, thief, all-round pikey'[29]. She does this on a momentary impulse, ‘a small floodgate letting out a rage of despair and frustration as she contemplated the blank but already soiled canvas of the kid’s future’[30]. As much as Tracy despairs of and denigrates both the criminal and capitalist world around her, she is part of both. When she visits the red light district later in the novel to get information on where Kelly Cross lives, she strikes up a conversation with an older woman who recognises her from her days as a policewoman. The conversation draws Tracy’s attention to the fact that even though some things have changed over the years, the undercurrent of poverty and criminality has remained as a fixture of the margins of society:

---

[26] Atkinson, p. 89.
[27] Atkinson, pp. 32-3.
[28] Atkinson, p. 33.

> ‘Recession. And we’re being undercut all the time by crack-whores. There’s girls offering full strip and sex for ten quid. It’s a different world, Tracy.’ It was what Barry had said, what Harry Reynolds had said. Tracy thought she must be missing something, it felt like the same world as ever to her. The rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, kids everywhere falling through the cracks. The Victorians would have recognized it. People just watched a lot more TV and found celebrities interesting, that was all that was different.[31]

As Tracy observes earlier in the novel, ‘used to be poverty that drove women on the game, now it was drugs’[32]. Even the illegal workers have to learn to offer discounts in order to maintain an income during a time of financial downturn and drug-induced entrepreneurial spirit. Again, morals have no real place here, regarding either the sexual acts or drug taking referenced by the conversation; the situation is presented purely as an economic problem. The only suggestion of concern relates to the children ‘falling through the cracks’: the innocents, the future, the lost opportunity for hope. Otherwise it is business as usual.

Early on in the novel, Tracy uses the term ‘punter’[33] to describe the shoppers in her precinct, a slang term usually applied to gamblers and men who visit prostitutes; she likes to get ‘up close and personal’ with them as she strolls around the shops. *Started Early* often blurs the lines between the occupations of its female characters by using the same terminology for each; the young uniformed Tracy was ‘another working girl, walking the streets’[34] just as actresses Phoebe, Kitty and Tilly are ‘working girls’[35], as are, of course, the prostitutes of the novel[36]. This repetition of the term blurs the lines between those within ‘the good life’s normative/utopian

---

[29] Atkinson, p. 37.
[30] Atkinson, p. 39.
[31] Atkinson, p. 265.
[32] Atkinson, p. 34.
[33] Atkinson, p. 32.
[34] Atkinson, p. 467.
[35] Atkinson, p. 195.
[36] Atkinson, p. 289.

zone'[37] and those on the margins, but it also references the dichotomy subtly raised throughout *Started Early*; that of men and women as divergent entities. In many cases, Tracy has more affinity with the women on the streets than the men she works with, 'Eastman's Golden Boys'[38] whose club she has no chance of getting into due to being a woman and someone who asks too many questions. The underlying fear generated in both time periods by the 'Rippers' also presents a differentiation between men and women as perpetrator and victim, hunter and prey; while the time periods have shown some improvements in societal attitude, Atkinson's Leeds still appears to be a safer place to live as a man than as a woman.

The presentation of Leeds' non-places of commerce (the shopping precinct, the street-walkers' route, the factories) appear dismal, and despite the difference in the legal and illegal nature of the work which takes place in each of the spaces, they are presented as if they are two parts of the same spectrum. The poverty and crime associated with each area in the novel are indicative of real changes that have occurred in the city since the 1970s; the adjacent temporal narratives present the changes that have occurred since the neoliberal gentrification of previously industrial areas. *Started Early* references areas that have undergone gentrification over the timespan covered by the novel; suburbs of Leeds which are more expensive and attract consumers who represent a higher class of society than the centre of Leeds are juxtaposed with places they once were through the flashbacks to Tracy's past:

> A fug of cigarette smoke and the ripe smell of fresh and stale beer swilled together. Double Diamond works wonders. In 2008 Carlsberg would announce the closure of Tetley's brewery and it would be 'regenerated' – restaurants, shops and apartments. 'A sparkling destination on Leeds waterfront'.[39]

In an article in *The Guardian* at the time of the brewery closure it was noted that the closure, prompted by the recession, meant the loss of 170 jobs and the end of Leeds' industrial identity, with the brewery being the 'last major industry in an area of prime office and residential development land close to the river Aire'[40]. Another place mentioned in the novel is The Calls, an upmarket area where Jackson eats in a Bistro at the end of the novel[41]. According to an article by Paul Dutton in the journal *Urban Studies*, the gentrification of The Calls between 1981 and 1991 resulted in a significant increase of upper middle class and a decrease of working class people living and working in the area[42]. Dutton states that 'The policy initiatives undertaken in The Calls reflect the changing nature of urban governance, encapsulated by the shift from urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism'[43].

---

[37] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 169.
[38] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 296.
[39] Atkinson, p. 296.
[40] Martin Wainwright, 'Tetley's Yorkshire Brewery Set to Close', *The Guardian,* 5 November 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/nov/05/fooddrinks-recession> [accessed 19 August 2016].
[41] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 477.

Harvey gives an example of the negative properties of gentrification in his book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, where he discusses how 'gentrification and neighbourhood 'restoration'' from the mid 1970s in New York affected inhabitants from the lower socio economic brackets:

> Working-class and ethnic-immigrant New York was thrust back into the shadows, to be ravaged by racism and a crack cocaine epidemic of epic proportions in the 1980s that left many young people either dead, incarcerated, or homeless[44]

The description of drug addicts, criminals and homeless people living in 'the shadows' is reminiscent of the marginalised characters that appear in *Started Early*; an example of the people once defined by the role of proletariat in an industrial city who over time have become the 'precariat' or 'lumpenproletariat' of the contemporary business minded, gentrified city.

A year after *Started Early* was published Leeds Council released a report which ranked Leeds as the fourth most deprived area in the country in relation to income and work[45]. In contrast, many of the more affluent surrounding areas that are mentioned in the novel, Harrogate and York for example, fare much better in the ranking in the mid hundreds of the same scale. The facts taken from these reports and studies demonstrate that the Leeds of *Started Early* has a footing in truth, and its change over the years is representative of many cities that have been impacted by neoliberalism. Atkinson presents the clean, gentrified areas populated and visited by the upper-middle classes, and juxtaposes these with the crime-ridden, unsafe places frequented by those lower on the socio-economical scale. Her presentation of poverty and crime in both timeframes reminds us that, while there is not always a clear link between the two, the ever-increasing inequality caused by gentrification and neoliberal policy does push many of those on the margins of society into the role of 'lumpenproletariat' by simply pushing them out of the areas in which they were once provided with work, and therefore income. In addition to this is the incremental erosion and withdrawal of shelter such as 'secure housing, medical care, welfare support and education' through neoliberal stratification, as noted by Tyler[46]. The displacement of societal issues through gentrification, in tandem with the withdrawal of support and education by the government, makes the chance of social mobility for these people nothing more than a pipe dream.

---

[42] Paul Dutton, 'Leeds Calling: The Influence of London on the Gentrification of Regional Cities', *Urban Studies,* 40.12 (2003) 2557-2572 (p. 2564).

[43] Dutton, p. 2565.

[44] Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 47.

[45] Leeds City Council, 'Leeds Economy Briefing Note: Index of Deprivation 2010'*, Leeds Economy Briefing Note,* 46 (2011), p. 4.

[46] Tyler, p. 12.

While the geographical setting of *Started Early* is integral to many of the themes raised in the novel, it is the sense of history generated by the two timelines that creates another layer of analysis of the society that these characters live in. It reminds us that our environments evolve and are impacted upon by the past as much as the present, and in this sense *Started Early* is arguably, in part at least, a historical novel. The influences of true places and true stories upon the narrative add elements of fact to the fictional tropes; the world of *Started Early* is an amalgamation of past and present, fact and fiction. As Atkinson states herself on the acknowledgment page preceding the novel: 'All mistakes are mine, some deliberate. I have not necessarily kept to the truth'[47].

The 'Factional' History of *Started Early*

Berlant uses the term 'crisis ordinariness' to talk about 'traumas of the social that are lived through collectively and that transform the sensorium to a heightened perceptiveness about the unfolding of the historical, and sometimes historic, moment'[48]. The case of the Yorkshire Ripper, which arguably created that exact sense of the 'unfolding of the historical' for those who lived through Sutcliffe's six year murder spree, has been explored in fiction numerous times.

While Berlant's various discussions of the historical present, stretched out now and 'impasse' refer to the past and present as 'recent' and 'near', this chapter considers the period covered by *Started Early* to be within the parameters of Berlant's definition, partially because of the novel using Tracy's personal memory to form a dialogue between the time frames which makes the 'history' recent enough to be something memorable and subjective, but also because the neoliberal political elements of the novel create a political window in time which in the future may arguably be seen as a particular political and economic 'period'. Atkinson's extended fictional present conceives the 'contemporary moment from within that moment' before it becomes something else, 'such as an orchestrated collective event or an epoch on which we can look back'[49]. *Started Early* charts a crime that takes 35 years to solve; a crime that begins in April 1975 when Tracy is on the beat with her more experienced colleague, Ken Arkwright:

> Margaret Thatcher is the new leader of the Conservative Party. At the beginning of the month, in Alberquerque, Bill Gates founds what will become Microsoft. […] They would both see the beginning of the Ripper's killing spree but Arkwright would be retired long before the end of it. Donald

---

[47] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 11.
[48] Berlant, p. 5.
[49] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 4.

> Neilson, the Black Panther from Bradford, hadn't been captured yet and Harold Shipman had probably already started killing patients unlucky enough to be under his care in Pontefract General Infirmary.[50]

Each one of the epochs mentioned by Atkinson here set a tone of Tracy's case as within a moment that it is unaware of; the seeds for the neoliberal and technological revolutions due in the following decades have been sown; the horror of the killing sprees which have already begun are as yet not conceived of by the inhabitants of Yorkshire. When we jump forward to the present day of 2010, Tracy is in a 'bankrupt country' that even the Polish workers want to leave[51], one in which a new murder spree, similar to the Ripper's, has begun but will not be solved. Yorkshire 2010 is mid crisis, but again it is not fully aware of this fact just yet.

In his discussion of the modern state of capitalism, David Harvey has argued that '[c]rises are essential to the reproduction of capitalism'[52]. Of course, here he is referring to financial crises rather than the affective type described by Berlant, such as the stock market crash of 1929, but as he goes on to state, these crises still have an affective impact, shaking 'our mental conceptions of the world' and forcing us 'to adapt, through coercion or consent, to the new state of things'. These crises last for decades and are not singular events: 'While they have their obvious triggers, the tectonic shifts they represent take many years to work out.'[53]

In Harvey's view, the recession prompted by the fall of the investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008, the recession that forms the backdrop to the modern day sections of *Started Early*, is a crisis which was triggered by 'the debt-saturated and increasingly deregulated global financialisation that began in the 1980s', following the 'rise and consolidation of the politics of neoliberalisation' in the 1970s[54]. In this sense, the time period covered by *Started Early* essentially tracks smaller, affective, personal crises across a broader backdrop of political and financial crisis. Harvey's suggestion that adaptation is forced upon us by negotiating these crises reinforces Berlant's argument that 'the neoliberal present is a space of transition, not only between modes of production and modes of life, but between different animating, sustaining fantasies'[55]. These arguments show us that the neoliberal present requires us adapt both in practical and psychological terms, firstly by accepting the real-world changes triggered by financial crises, and secondly by readjusting our expectations and fantasies in response to those changes.

---

[50] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 17-8.
[51] Atkinson, p. 30.
[52] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, p. IX.
[53] Harvey, p. X.
[54] Harvey, p. X.
[55] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 261.

Berlant discusses the genre of historical novels 'as a locus of affective situations that not only generate exemplary aesthetic conventions but exemplify political and subjective formations local to a particular time and space'[56]. She supports the ideas of 'formidable critics like Harry Harootunian and Moishe Postone' who 'argue for seeing the present as an effect of historical forces that cannot be known fully by the presently living', stating that otherwise 'the present is cast as virtually ahistorical, fleeting, fantasmatic'[57]. By creating links between a near history and the present of the novel, Atkinson is contextualising the issues felt by contemporary characters who are trying to negotiate the 'impasse' of the precarious present by considering them in relation to the recent past. There is a double sense in the novel: the past is to some extent intelligible but the present is different, unknowable. The 'lumpenproletariat' that Tracy encounters in the shopping centres, for example, are the societal descendants of the working class who had their jobs taken by the closing of factories and pits under Thatcher, the people that Jackson could have become if it was not for the vestiges of social mobility still available to him as a child. Imogen Tyler, in her exploration of social abjection in neoliberal Britain, *Revolting Subjects*, discusses Raymond Williams' term of the masses as 'a name for the working class under industrial capitalism'[58], and applies this definition to Tony Blair's creation of 'Blair's poor' in 1997:

> The 'new class: a workless class' which [Blair] identified as 'the greatest challenge of any democratic government' inaugurated a new political formula in British politics, a neoliberal perceptual frame through which to perceive 'the masses' as 'an underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose'.[59]

The invention of terms such as 'Broken Britain', which Tyler argues that Cameron plagiarised from Blair, and 'chav', have become synonymous with the underclass precariats, people that Tracy interacts with in *Started Early*. Atkinson links the past working class and the present underclass in her reference to real events linked to the town of Dewsbury:

> Shoddy capital of the world. It said something about a mill town that it couldn't aspire to even second rate cloth, weaving instead the lowest quality from rags and shreds. A filthy trade, shoddy. A town where now women drugged and kidnapped their own kids for money. The Ripper was questioned in Dewsbury after being caught in Sheffield.[60]

The expression 'shoddy' is synonymous with terms such as inferior, cheap and low-quality; Tracy equates the production of shoddy with the town's own lack of aspiration but these terms are just as easily transplanted onto the workers involved in the creation of this 'filthy' second-rate product themselves. Tracy's narrative suggestively links past and present Dewsbury as if the term of shoddy continues to apply to the residents of the modern Dewsbury, using a subtle reference to the real case of Shannon Matthews being kidnapped by her mother, and again the reference to the Ripper whose history haunts Yorkshire.

---

[56] Berlant, p. 65.
[57] Berlant, p. 64.
[58] Tyler, p. 175.
[59] Tyler, p. 176.
[60] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 211.

The reference to Shannon Matthews does many things; it adds a sense of reality to the motif of lost children that runs through not only *Started Early*, but the whole Jackson Brodie series of novels, and arguably Atkinson's entire canon of literature. It juxtaposes the 'lumpenproletariat' shoppers of *Started Early*'s fictional narrative with real people and real stories to give a validity to Atkinson's presentation of the 'underclass', it also imparts the mercenary nature of many forced to live on the bottom of the social scale, which Tracy has seen on a daily basis from her work as a police officer. As the case prompted one tenth of Yorkshire police to be deployed in the hunt for Shannon, 'the biggest such operation since the search for the Yorkshire Ripper'[61] it is a criminal case which had a large impact on the community, many of whom volunteered their help in the search. In an article on the case of Shannon Matthews' disappearance, reporter Martin Wainwright describes her mother's motive for kidnap:

> Harassed from bringing up four children from different fathers, often skint, and unhappy with her latest partner who was secretly accessing internet child porn, 32-year-old Matthews made her own daughter the centre of an extortion plot.[62]

The portrayal in this article of real-life Karen Matthews, Shannon's mother, is similar to that of both Kelly Cross and Carol Braithwaite in *Started Early*; each are single mothers with an unstable relationship with men, who appear to disregard their children's needs for their own. Each is judged by society as an unfit parent, an example of the 'lumpenproletariat' who does nothing to benefit the society in which they live; rarely are they considered to be victims of that very society. In the article from *The Guardian*, Wainwright conveys the desperation felt by all of those involved in the Matthews disappearance; the 'hardened murder specialist heading the enquiry', Andy Brennan, was sure that they would find a body and was shocked when Shannon turned up alive, even more so when the true culprit was revealed to be the mother. The hunt lasted 24 days and cost the Yorkshire police £3.2 million, but the motive, it turned out, was money rather than psychopathy or sexual deviancy so often associated with these cases. Brennan drew parallels between the Matthews case and that of the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in 2007, as both were high profile cases which revolved around the disappearance of a young girl:

---

[61] Staff and Agencies, 'The Disappearance of Shannon Matthews', *The Guardian,* 4 December 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/mar/14/2> [accessed 20 August 2016].

[62] Martin Wainwright, 'How the Shannon Matthews Kidnap Plot Fell Apart', *The Guardian*, 4 December 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/dec/04/shannon-matthews-kidnap-plot> [accessed 20 August 2016].

> "I believe that they were going to hold out until they got to £50,000," says Brennan. "And though there's no direct evidence that this case mirrored the McCann one, you can see the possibility.
>
> "Madeleine was still fresh in everyone's minds. A young, pretty girl was being looked for in Portugal, and Shannon was a photogenic girl missing here in Dewsbury. You can see why two and two has been put together."[63]

The detective was not the only one who linked these two cases; during those 24 days of crisis impasse others compared the two cases from a political and socioeconomic perspective; an article in *The Independent* made a comparison in the backgrounds, wealth and occupations of the parents of the missing girls, and the rewards offered and press attention given to each case[64]. The differences were stark, and, if it were not for the case being overcast by the cynical outcome of the mother as culprit, would have made a very interesting comparison in class division still present in the UK.

While the reference to the case by Atkinson is subtle and brief, it is enough to enhance the themes of missing, abused and hidden children with which her work is so often concerned, and blur the boundaries of fact and fiction. When presented with true cases of purely mercenary kidnap and abuse, the fictional account of Tracy paying to kidnap a child begins to appear less fanciful and more believable, but combine this with the persistent undertone of fear generated by Atkinson's use of the real Ripper cases, and the lines between fact and fiction truly begin to blur.

The blurring of the lines between fact and fiction in this case remind the reader that the narrative put forward by Atkinson has roots in truth. The poverty, criminality, desperation and fear experienced by the 'underclass' of this novel are reality for many people, and by referencing Shannon Matthews and the Ripper among others, Atkinson is showing us that the crimes portrayed in the novel are not fantasy, but rather echoes of the real world. It is seeing these accounts through the eyes of Jackson and Tracy that truly make this story a counternarrative: the underclass are defined by neoliberalism as a mass of people who are a challenge to democratic government, but these protagonists see them as individuals worthy of pity, and in some cases respect. They may not like them, but they remember their names, they talk to them, and when they see children in need, they try to save them.

---

[63] Wainright.

[64] Cole Moreton, 'Missing: The Contrasting Searches for Shannon and Madeleine', *The Independent,* 2 March 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/missing-the-contrasting-searches-for-shannon-and-madeleine-790207.html> [accessed 20 August 2016].

The Folly of Myth: Betty's Tea Rooms and The Yorkshire Ripper

Atkinson's use of true crime in *Started Early* is mirrored by her use of myth, a mechanism that allows her to present the clichés often associated with life in Yorkshire as a veil of commercial puffery that hides the county's darker history. The stark contrast drawn between myth and truth in the novel often challenges the dreams associated with neoliberalism, and in doing so encourages the reader to question the images of 'the good life' put forward through nostalgia and commercial advertising.

In his 1957 collection of essays entitled *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes explains that 'the function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence'[65]. He reflects on 'some myths of French daily life'[66] that influence the public, ranging from icons of film, such as Garbo and Chaplin, to objects such as toys and cars. In his discussion of wine as a totem-drink of France, he briefly mentions the British equivalent of 'tea ceremonially taken by the British Royal Family'. Tea is considered a very British answer to any problem, and like Barthes' wine and any other 'resilient totems', it 'supports a varied mythology which does not trouble about contradictions'[67], such as being the perfect drink for both a cold day and a hot day, or being a means to quieten a talkative person as well as having the capability of making a quiet person talk.

In relation to Yorkshire, and to Atkinson's presentation of Yorkshire in particular, tea takes on even more of a mythological quality. Yorkshire Tea has a quote on their website which closely paraphrases Barthes' own, that 'There's nothing more British than tea and the Royal Family', referring to the Royal Warrant bestowed upon them by Prince Charles[68]. The company owns and runs the Betty's Tea Rooms which pop up several times in *Started Early* as Jackson attempts to visit them all in his tour of Yorkshire, a collection of cafes in which 'the waitresses all looked as if they were nice girls (and women) who had been parcelled up some time in the 1930s and freshly unwrapped this morning'[69]. Jackson's love of the Tea Rooms is prompted by more than just the good food; it is the 'way that everything was exactly right and fitting. And clean' which attracts him: it is the mythology of the history, the nostalgia, which it represents. As Barthes explains:

> What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality. And just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name

---

[65] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 142.
[66] Barthes, p. 10.
[67] Barthes, p. 58.
[68] Bettys & Taylors of Harrogate Limited, *Yorkshire Tea: Who We Are* (2016) <http://www.yorkshiretea.co.uk/about-us/yorkshire-tea-who-we-are.php> [accessed 8 December 2015].
[69] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 70.

> 'bourgeois', myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences. A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance.[70]

The real 1930s Yorkshire was a world of industry, dirt, hard work, war and poverty as explored by Atkinson in sections of *Behind The Scenes At The Museum*; the 'Betty's' image of 1930s Yorkshire is a picture postcard version which has very little basis in reality, but Jackson knows this. Betty's Tea Room as a suspended moment removed from reality, a window of nostalgia of a time that never was, is a place that Jackson is happy to sit and ponder in. He dreams of a world that could be made possible if this myth were a reality:

> If Britain had been run by Betty's it would have never succumbed to economic Armageddon. Over a pot of house blend and a plate of scrambled eggs and smoked salmon in the café in Helen's Square in York, Jackson fantasized about being governed by a Betty's oligarchy – cabinet ministers in spotless white aprons and cinnamon toast all round.[71]

This clean, warm and abundant slice of Yorkshire life in which Jackson is happy is in many ways the opposite of his true memories of Yorkshire as a young man; he grew up in a 'soot-encrusted terraced home'[72] which, despite originally containing love and family, is associated in his mind now with tragedy and loss, an 'emotional void' inhabited by Jackson and his father 'locked together in mute disregard'[73]. The juxtaposition of dirt with cleanliness, warmth with cold, scarcity with opulence reminds us that more than anything the imagery of Betty's is associated with the myths of domesticity and the home which Jackson, as a single man with no family other than two estranged kids, craves. He lost the warm, safe and loving feelings often associated with the mythical image of 'home' as a child, and has been unable to recreate them. In this sense, his nomadic search for 'real-estate', for 'a peg to hang his hat on'[74] which has brought him back to Yorkshire is more than the practical task he suggests, it is a search for a mythical home, a place of emotional safety.

In many ways, Betty's acts as a 'resting place' for Jackson. Lauren Berlant states that:

---

[70] Barthes, p. 142.

[71] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 71.

[72] Atkinson, p. 76.

[73] Atkinson, p. 78.

[74] Atkinson, p. 69.

> The desire for a less bad life involves finding resting places; the reproduction of normativity occurs when rest is imagined nostalgically – that is, in the places where rest is supposed to have happened, a fantasy masquerading as screen memory or paramnesia.[75]

The Tea Room performs this act in a double way, firstly as a place nostalgically thought of by Jackson as a provider of good food and welcoming service, and secondly as a nostalgic remembering of a time that never was. The signs of domesticity and home found in the description of Betty's are also linked to another place of Jackson's childhood memory; a farm he had holidayed at which 'had been a reprieve from the bleak afterlife he was sharing with his father, an angry man with a heart of coal'[76]. This farm again embodies and assimilates the nostalgic myths often associated with Yorkshire and performs the role of a resting place for Jackson; it was in 'the green outback of the Dales', where 'black-and-white cows where in the act of shouldering their way into a milking parlour', and in Jackson's mind was a place of domestic bliss:

> He could still see the farmhouse kitchen with the Rayburn that was always hot and was home to a big brown teapot containing tea the colour of old oak leaves. He could still smell the huge breakfasts, porridge with cream and brown sugar, fried eggs, ham, bread and home-made marmalade that Mrs served up.[77]

The description of the brief time Jackson spent at the farm contains every cliché of perfect farm life; the farmer refers to his wife as 'Mother' and Jackson as 'the boy', they have a collie that sits on the rug in front of the Rayburn, they even consider allowing him to stay with them as kind, loving people would[78]. In this sense, the mythical images of Yorkshire are combined with that of the family to create an image of domestic bliss which taps into the promise of happiness which Ahmed discusses; the happy family as 'a myth of happiness, of where and how happiness takes place'[79]. Happiness takes place in the countryside, in the outdoors, and in proximity to other people who provide for each other and make room for each other. For Jackson, happiness is symbolised by everything he does not have in his life; the death of his mother, sister and brother essentially resulted in the death of the potential of happiness for him and his father. While Atkinson allows Jackson this moment of mythic happiness, she brings it back to biting reality when he finds out from the Atwells' daughter months after leaving that her father died 'of an unhealthy heart' followed shortly by her mother, perhaps a result of all of that gloriously saturated food described by Jackson, which while symbolic of a happy life, is also now a known prompt of heart disease and diabetes. Atkinson's use of irony punctures the myth of domestic bliss.

---

[75] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 180.
[76] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 77.
[77] Atkinson, pp. 77-8.
[78] Atkinson, p. 78.
[79] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 45.

Later, in the novel's present day, Jackson decides to make a 'pilgrimage'[80] back to the farm, and finds that the buildings, in being turned into holiday homes, have become physical manifestations of myth themselves; they have been emptied of history, their meaning has been removed:

> He turned down the drive, once a muddy track but now weed-free and fresh with tarmac, and saw the farmhouse still sitting squarely at the end. The adjacent dairy and a scattering of farm workers' cottages that he had forgotten about were now all done up in matching white-and-green-painted livery. No sign of cows or sheep, no smell of manure and silage, none of the usual rustling litter of old farm machinery. The place had been transformed into a sanitized, storybook kind of farm. Once upon a time Jackson had erased his past, now his past had erased him.[81]

When Jackson was originally reminiscing, he did not think romantically of the 'smell of manure' as that did not form part of the myth of domesticity, but now he has returned to the once active, working farm, he misses even this. History, history he has experienced personally, has been appropriated and sanitized as myth, causing it to lose its original magic and purpose. Jackson was not around in the 1930s and so does not compare Betty's to the experience of a real Tea Room at the time, but if he had he would probably feel the same level of disillusionment, as if real life had been expunged and been replaced with a hollow, expensive version of itself. Myth as a nostalgic tool of the past only works, it seems, if one has no true knowledge of the reality that went before it; but as soon as one compares it to the actual event or scenario, it proves disappointing, or superficial.

When discussing Atkinson's often-used plot of family relationships, Mcdermott borrows Angela Carter's[82] phrase to describe Atkinson's writing as 'forays into the 'demythologising business''[83] that have 'the effect of debunking cultural myths and images of the family'[84]. This is continued throughout the Jackson Brodie series, where family as an ideal is held up to scrutiny and often presented as an unobtainable dream peddled through the neoliberal concept of the good life. Atkinson shows the reader how faith in the concept of the dream family can lead to not only a life of affective precarity through depression and disillusionment, but also how it can create actual precarity through sexual abuse, violence and abandonment. Through *Started Early*

---

[80] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 80.
[81] Atkinson, p. 81.
[82] Angela Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line', in *On Gender and Writing,* ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983) pp. 69-77, p. 71.
[83] McDermott, p. 68.
[84] McDermott, p. 71.

Atkinson is also ‘debunking’ the cultural myths linked to the world around us in general; she is unweaving the reality we know and showing it back to us, and the characters within it, as a parody of itself. Tilly sees it in the farmer’s cottage she stays in, Bluebell Cottage: ‘A made-up name obviously. Used to be a farm worker’s cottage. Poor peasants, all mud and blood and up at dawn with the beasts in the field.’[85]. The grand homes that Jackson visits on his tour of Yorkshire are no longer the homes of aristocrats as they can no longer afford to live in them; they are now ‘in the custody of the National Trust’[86] so that people can wander around the rooms that were once lived in and wonder what it would have been like to be rich enough to own them.

Of course the myths in *Started Early,* and those discussed by Barthes, do not only relate to how we view the historical, but also impact upon our interaction with, and within, society in the present day. Barthes argues that his society of 1970s France ‘is still a bourgeois society’ despite the many social and political changes that have occurred since the French Revolution. He argues that while the bourgeois regime as an economic fact is easily named as capitalism, it completely disappears as an ideological fact, becoming ‘*the social class which does not want to be named’*[87]. This ‘exnominating operation’ is, in his view, not ‘an illusory, accidental, secondary, natural or insignificant phenomenon: it is the bourgeois ideology itself, the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature’[88]. He links this back to his analysis of myth by stating that ‘just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name 'bourgeois', myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things’[89]. Ahmed, in her discussion of false consciousness as a concept that merits revitalizing in the present day, quotes Lukács’ description of bourgeois deception as a veil ‘drawn over the nature of bourgeois society’ which is ‘indispensable to the bourgeoisie itself’[90]. Whilst Barthes’ analysis is linguistic and Lukács’ is metaphorical, they both infer the same point; that bourgeois society survives by denying its own existence.

It is the denial, and the supposed inevitability of capitalism and bourgeois society as the only option, which interests Ahmed; she explains that history and the failure of communism tells us that political revolution is impossible, and yet ‘there is too much evidence of the failure of global capitalism to deliver its own promise of the good life to the populations of the world for it to become evidence of the impossibility of alternatives’. She discusses revolutionary consciousness as a development or awakening from a state of false consciousness: the failure of consciousness, the social ‘sharing of deceptions’ which ‘blocks other possible worlds’[91] that is visualised by Lukács’ ‘veil’. People can become revolutionary when they start to become aware of their own alienation within bourgeois society; building upon Marx’s work on alienation, she explains that:

---

[85] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 48.
[86] Atkinson, p. 85.
[87] Barthes, p. 137.
[88] Barthes, p. 140.
[89] Barthes, p. 141.
[90] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 166.

> Consciousness of alienation involves both recognition of suffering and recognition of what produces that suffering. To become conscious of alienation is to become conscious of how one’s being has been stolen. It is not simply to become alienated from the world but to become conscious of how alienation is already, as it were, in the world.[92]

Atkinson arguably begins debunking cultural myths in *Started Early* by creating characters who, to use Ahmed’s term, embody that ‘revolutionary consciousness’[93]. Jackson, along with Tracy and to some extent the characters Tilly and Barry, sees the true state of the world. While he appears to crave the mythology of Yorkshire, his logic and politics, and own sense of alienation, will not allow him to be fully mystified and convinced by it. Just as his lapsed relationship with religion prompts him to mock the church but still admit that he ‘misse[s] God’, Jackson sees the beauty in the world, but also sees the dark in it. The ruins of Jervaulx are ‘sublime’ and touch ‘his soul in some inarticulate and melancholy place[94], and yet he cannot simply see them as the positively mythicized image of the past they are sold as:

> Of course, these were the very same rich and powerful abbeys that in the Middle Ages farmed the sheep, the golden fleeces which provided the foundation of the wool trade and England’s wealth and which led in turn to the Satanic mills of the West Riding, and thence to poverty, overcrowding, disease, child exploitation on levels beyond belief and the death and destruction of the dream of Arcadia. For want of a nail. Those mills were museums and galleries now, the abbeys in ruins. The world turns.[95]

The mention of ‘golden fleece’, Satan and ‘Arcadia’ do add a mythological colouring even to the darkness of Yorkshire’s history, but the passage also makes it clear that Jackson has seen through that ‘veil’ which ‘participates in the reproduction of the social order’[96] to see ‘things otherwise over time’[97]. Jackson recognises that the abbeys were part of a complex, hierarchical social structure in the Middle Ages and that their legacy of wealth was one which led to even greater social inequalities and suffering, showing that he is in possession of a revolutionary consciousness; as Ahmed states '[t]he recognition of the wretched is revolutionary. It involves a recognition that wretchedness is not an inevitable consequence of being in a certain way but is an effect of the occupation and violence of the colonizer'[98]. Whilst in this context it is not the colonizer who has performed the violence, but rather the bourgeois class of Britain itself, the sentiment is arguably the same; Jackson is recognising the mythical history presented by bourgeois ideology but also acknowledging those elements hidden behind the veil, and in doing so he is embracing his 'revolutionary' identity.

---

[91] Ahmed, p. 165.
[92] Ahmed, p. 167.
[93] Ahmed, p. 164.
[94] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 72.
[95] Atkinson, p. 73.
[96] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 166.
[97] Ahmed, p. 268.

Jackson's forays through the bourgeois mythology of Yorkshire are juxtaposed with the true, less glossy history that the area appears to prefer to forget, the industrial past. We are shown these representations as two ends of the spectrum that is Yorkshire; they clash and jar with each other to present that 'disunited kingdom' which Jackson visualises as 'at odds with itself'[99]. The industrial wastelands of coal mining that have haunted Jackson throughout the series of novels are presented as the residue of a world which no longer exists but which, unlike the 1930s Tea Rooms, no-one feels the need to re-enact nostalgically for the sake of capitalist enterprise. The nostalgia of tea can be sold again and again, the nostalgia of 'a dark, deep mineshaft'[100] not so much.

The history of the Yorkshire Ripper, referenced throughout *Started Early,* is however a dark history steeped in mythology that supports bourgeois ideology to the cost of the inhabitants of Yorkshire. Like other serial killers, Sutcliffe was presented by the press as a lone threat, a monster whose capture would end the sense of danger that haunted the women of the area. The 'narrative' around the Ripper aligns well with Herzog's description of the traditional detective case, a narrative that 'begins with a disruption of bourgeois order (the crime) and ends with the restoration of bourgeois order'[101]. Of course the restoration of order in this case took several years which increase the sense of panic and crisis, but for the veil to remain over the nature of bourgeois society it was essential for those close to the case to carry on believing that the capture of this one man would make the world safe again. As Herzog states, 'To avoid living in a continuous state of crisis, we need to control our anxiety that anybody is a potential criminal threat by clearly distinguishing between the criminal and the noncriminal'[102]. It is in her representation of the Ripper, and his later fictional copycat, that Atkinson truly begins to break down the myths of recent history and the present day to force the reader to consider whether Sutcliffe was the true danger, the example of pure evil that so many believe to this day, or simply a symptom of a sick society.

---

[98] Ahmed, p. 168.
[99] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 68.
[100] Atkinson, p. 84.
[101] Herzog, p. 34.
[102] Herzog, p. 34.

The Ripper as Myth

In her discussion of the Yorkshire Ripper, Joan Smith clearly explains why the mythologizing of Sutcliffe as a ‘monster’ had dangerous consequences:

> This is the terrible mistake, the appalling blunder, that lies at the heart of the case; this is the real reason why Peter William Sutcliffe was able to roam with impunity through the towns and cities of northern England for more than five years, restlessly searching out his victims: if you devote your resources to tracking down a figure from myth, if you waste your time starting at shadows, you are not likely to come up with a lorry driver from Bradford.[103]

Just as Jack the Ripper took on, and continues to hold, an almost mythical role as an punisher of unclean women, so Sutcliffe became a bogey man who seemed to be unstoppable during his killing spree from 1975 to 1980. Now that we look back on his attacks as historical events we lose the sense of hopelessness that was felt at the time by police and the public, but by presenting these events as a blurred historic present, Atkinson rekindles that sense of fear and dread.

Atkinson is not the first writer to use the myths and atmosphere surrounding Peter Sutcliffe to create a backdrop for a novel set in Yorkshire. David Peace appropriates the Ripper ‘myth’ in his *Red Riding Quartet* of novels, novels which Dan Laughey argues ‘play with these stark boundaries between fact and fiction, statement and rumour, truth and corruption’, to create novels which ‘pastiche an atmosphere of confusion, malpractice, and fear about what will happen next’[104]. Mark Blacklock’s 2015 novel, *I’m Jack*, follows the story of John Humble’s ‘Wearside Jack’ hoax calls which distracted the police during the Ripper investigation, charting the area’s ‘cavernous history and quiet desperation’ and Humble’s own ‘careless misogyny’[105]. *Blow your House Down*, a novel written by Pat Barker in 1984, charts the case of the Ripper from the perspective of prostitutes in the North of England at the time, ‘working-class women in a decaying inner-city neighbourhood who have only two means of employment open to them: walking the streets and working on the assembly line of a chicken slaughterhouse’[106].

The adjectives used to describe the atmosphere generated by each of these novels, one of confusion, fear, desperation, decay, certainly provide a sense of the problems of how to live, as described by Berlant, when a situation reveals ‘threats to the sense of ongoingness in the durational present'[107]. Laughey's description of Peace's novels as ones which create a 'fear about what will happen next' equally conveys the sense of 'a loss of trust in the historical future' which was experienced by the police, the prostitutes, and the public who were trying to survive day to day. These novels all explore what it is to live through a crisis as ordinary; the everyday becomes one of heightened awareness in which murder is a complication that one has to learn to live around, as a discussion between two of the characters in Barker's novel shows:

---

[103] Joan Smith, *Misogynies* (London: Westbourne Press, 2013), p. 164.

[104] Dan Laughey, 'Ripper', in *Barthes' Mythologies Today : Readings of Contemporary Culture,* ed. by Julian McDougall and Peter Bennett (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 83-4, p. 83.

[105] Catherine Taylor, 'I’m Jack by Mark Blacklock Review – a Spotlight on the Yorkshire Ripper Hoaxer', *The Guardian,* 25 June 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/25/im-jack-by-mark-blacklock-review> [accessed 25 August 2016].

[106] Ann Ardis, 'Political Attentiveness Vs. Political Correctness: Teaching Pat Barker's "Blow Your House Down"', *College Literature,* 18.3 (1991) 44-54 (p. 44).

> 'Did you ever get anybody you thought was him?'
>
> Maureen smiled slightly, 'Every night.'
>
> 'I couldn't have stuck with it,' said Audrey. 'I'd've had to get out.'
>
> 'It's not that easy, you know. I had the bairns with me then. And I'd just got a council flat. I was on the waiting list three years to get that.'
>
> 'You must've been frantic.'
>
> 'No. Not really. Oh I suppose once or twice.'[108]

Atkinson's approach to the myth or the history of the Yorkshire Ripper in *Started Early* varies from that of these other novels in that the narrative is not solely set in the time period of the 1970s, rather it considers it from the contemporary perspective of 2010, jumping between the two periods sporadically to shed further light on the unfolding mystery of Carol Braithwaite's murder, and her missing child[ren]. This approach, rather than presenting the Ripper case as one of historic relevance which is symptomatic of a time and place, draws parallels between the past and the present to essentially create a stretched out moment of time, one in which the events of the past still create ripples in the present.

Berlant explains that her term 'the stretched out now' merges:

> an intensified present with senses of the recent past and near future: the temporal compartmentalizations of an ordinariness that can be broadly taken for granted are themselves suspended when the historic(al) sense is forced to apprehend itself. [109]

In her discussion of this concept, Berlant explains that the process of living within a situation requires people to 'reshape' themselves and their surroundings, and it is these acts that determine how that situation eventually comes to form as 'an episode, event or epoch'[110]. The 'situation' which is explored through the revisiting of the Ripper's murders allows the reader to see how people were 'shaped' by the fear generated by living through a spree that lasted for years. Any story that ends with the arrest and prosecution of the Ripper essentially wraps up that situation, ending the sense of ongoingness by naming it an 'episode' of violence that is now in the past. By presenting a contemporary case that echoes that of the past, Atkinson is arguably stretching out the situation by reminding us that the issue of crime against women is still active: the arrest of the Ripper did not stop misogynistic murder, it did not stop the fear of walking alone at night.

---

[107] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 5.

[108] Pat Barker, *Blow Your House Down* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 12.

[109] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 5.

[110] Berlnt, p. 5.

Part of this sense of the present and past feeling like a 'stretched out now' is created by Atkinson using characters who began their professional life in the Seventies and are still present in the role in the present day, but it is also affected by the presence of unsolved cases which bleed into the present due to their lack of conclusion or 'closure'. The repetitious aspects of the novel, the presentation in both time frames of murdered prostitutes, kidnapped children and life as an exercise in survival, also add to the sensation of stretched time as they present a world in which the same mistakes are made over and again, making the events of the past feel less like history and more like a faded mirror of the present. If, as Worthington suggests, crime in fiction is a 'mode of expression for contemporary social anxieties and speaks eloquently of its cultural context'[111], then Atkinson's novel suggests that the social anxieties of the Seventies and the period three decades later are essentially the same; women still tend to be the victims, they are still warned to be careful about where they go at night and who they speak to, and there is still corruption throughout this society's systems of power. Atkinson reminds us that 1975 was the year that Bill Gates founded what would become Microsoft[112], opening a new world of possibilities, but the evolution that these technological advances has provided over the decades is juxtaposed with an image of sociological stagnation. Much is made of the practical, procedural aspects of the Ripper case, as Tracy states it was 'in the days before computers, when the sheer weight of paperwork was enough to swamp the investigation'[113]; but while the advances now allow technology to be used to administer cases coherently and quickly, the police still have to deal with cases where men kill, rape or abuse women. Figures provided by the National Office of Statistics and the Ministry of Justice show that between 2010 and 2012 over 54,000 sexual offence crimes were recorded by the police, with only 18% of these going to court, and an average conviction rate of around 10%[114]. This is in contrast with one in three reported cases leading to conviction in 1977[115], showing that developments in technology have not solved the sickness still inherent in society: the social anxieties of the seventies live on, and if anything have worsened.

---

[111] Worthington, p. 32.

[112] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 20.

[113] Atkinson, p. 30.

[114] Home Office, *An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales* (2013), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/an-overview-of-sexual-offending-in-england-and-wales> [accessed 30 August 2016], p.7.

[115] Marcel Berlins, 'Conviction Rates for Rape Have Plummeted since the 1970s. Is There Anything We Can Do to Change That?', *The Guardian,* 24 January 2007

This creation of a ‘stretched out now’ in some ways lifts that veil of bourgeois ideology discussed by Ahmed by unravelling the mythology of the Ripper as something out of the ordinary when his actions were actually surprisingly ordinary; rather than a lone criminal in an otherwise orderly society who decided to go on a rampage, he is an extreme example of the crime and misogyny presented as systematic within that society. Furthermore, his acts are repeated over and again in the decades that follow; not only is he not a lone, deviant individual in his own society, he is only one example of many throughout history. Just as his murders are replications of the crimes of Jack the Ripper, so the novel’s contemporary Ripper is a replication of him.

If the Ripper had been understood to be an example of a larger problem of misogyny, he could have become the means to break the false consciousness of the people of Britain and work for a better solution, but as he was vilified as a monster and incarcerated as part of ‘the restoration of bourgeois order’[116], the wider concerns were swept back behind the veil. In a discussion of subjective and objective violence, Ahmed refers to Slavoj Žižek’s argument that subjective violence is ‘seen as a perturbation of the ‘normal’, peaceful state of things’ while objective violence is ‘precisely the violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things’, it is ‘invisible’:

> Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious ‘dark matter’ of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seems to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence.[117]

In Ahmed’s view, Žižek’s view misses some nuances, namely that ‘some agents of violence are visible precisely because other forms of subjective violence recede into the background, becoming inseparable from the social and symbolic system’[118]. An example in relation to the topic of the Ripper would be how Sutcliffe’s violent tendencies varied from other men he associated with, his peers and family; as Joan Smith notes, Sutcliffe’s father and grandfather were both unfaithful to their wives, his father was a violent man, and his brother ‘also had a criminal record for GBH and often visited the Red Light district, being questioned by the police as a Ripper suspect himself’[119]. In this sense, the violence and criminality of Sutcliffe’s family was arguably systemic compared to his own tendency to murder women with a hammer and rip them open; that

---

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jan/24/television.prisonsandprobation> [accessed 30 August 2016].

[116] Herzog, p. 34.

[117] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2008), p. 2.

[118] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 268.

[119] Smith, pp. 194-5.

became subjective in comparison, a ‘perturbation of the ‘normal’’. If, as Ahmed suggests, the beating of one’s wife or use of a prostitute is still a subjective crime that somehow loses its visibility as it is accepted into the symbolic system as a way of the world, then the relationship between the crimes of the ripper and other men who perform ‘lesser’, more objective crimes, can be visualised as a sliding scale rather than a dichotomy of visible and invisible crime. As Joan Smith observes, ‘only a culture which nurtured and encouraged a deep-seated hatred of women could produce a mass killer of [Sutcliffe’s] type’[120]; misogyny is systemic, and therefore anything less than *fatal* hatred and violence against women is often allowed to ‘recede into the background’.

In *Started Early* there are many examples of this sliding scale of visible violence and misogyny, including respectable men such as policemen and doctors who develop clandestine relationships with prostitutes and criminals, and this is arguably one of the issues that the novel attempts to bring to light; how bad does crime and violence have to be to overstep that mark from objective to subjective, from invisible to visible? The issues related to objective and subjective violence are not limited to the topic of misogyny, however; Žižek argues that objective violence has taken on a new ‘shape’ with capitalism, and talks ‘of the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence’[121]. In his view, the focus of liberals on subjective violence enacted by ‘evil individuals’ and ‘fanatical crowds’ distracts attention ‘from the true locus of trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence’[122]. For him, the lesson is ‘that one should resist the fascination of subjective violence’[123]. In this sense, *Started Early* is performing the act that Žižek calls for: objective violence is considered alongside subjective; the subjective Rippers linger in the background of a setting where the usually invisible violence and corruption gradually becomes evident.

For *Started Early*, misogyny is a systemic concern. Jackson tell us that ‘Policewomen in the seventies were still regarded as teamakers and hand-holders. *Life on Mars* was only the tip of a sexist iceberg’[124], a theme repeated throughout the narrative not only in relation to how Tracy is viewed as an undesirable sexual object, but also in her inability to get promoted due to her gender. The concerns do not disappear in the contemporary narrative, however; the news of a murder of a prostitute is met by conflicting remarks from a young man and woman that Tracy once managed:

---

[120] Smith, pp. 14-5.
[121] Žižek, p. 8.
[122] Žižek, p. 9.
[123] Žižek, p. 10.
[124] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 219.

> Leslie could see the headline in the paper, 'Leeds prostitute murders – man held for questioning' and then something about 'a new Ripper'.
>
> 'It never stops', Leslie said.
>
> 'Slappers, what do you expect?' Grant said, reaching for a packet of Monster Munch.
>
> 'I expect people to behave better'.
>
> 'You'll be waiting a long time.'[125]

Grant is described as gawping 'openly at the good-as-naked Page 3 girl on offer' while he expresses his opinion; a reminder that women are still openly and publicly objectified in the present day of the novel. Leslie's statement that 'it never stops' places her as a conscious individual within the 'stretched out now' of this society, a person who expects more from the world around her; Grant's attitude, his apparent acceptance of this violence as a normal occurrence, is arguably what contributes to some examples of subjective violence becoming 'inseparable from the social and symbolic system'[126].

The presence of the Ripper and his potential 'copycat' belies the arguably more dangerous, but less sensational, image of the domestic killer present in *Started Early*, as well as the general sense of misogyny displayed by many of the male characters. The monstrous, dehumanising pseudonym of the Ripper frightened women into accepting curfews and male escorts during a time of women's liberation[127], but as Karen Boyle explains, this myth of there being an individual, lone predator 'obscures the continuum of male violence on which his crimes are located and consumed and allows other abuses – and abusers – to hide in his shadows. Sadly, there is rarely (if ever) only one'[128]. This conundrum plays out to some extent in *Started Early* when Tracy questions if Carol Braithwaite was one of the Ripper's victims as she, 'pretty much fitted the victim profile', not that they did victim profiles in those days[129], even Jackson wonders if his sister Niamh had been an early victim[130].

Boyle suggests that the suggestion that the Ripper only targeted prostitutes in order to enact retribution for bad behaviour acted 'as a warning to 'respectable' women'[131]. Just as the term 'Ripper' became a dehumanised signifier of ultraviolent male vengeance, so the term 'prostitute' became a signifier of victimhood; but the introduction later of the term 'innocent' to describe Jayne MacDonald who was the first non-prostitute to be attacked by Sutcliffe, also implies that the prostitutes were by definition 'guilty', and therefore deserving of the attacks.

---

[125] Atkinson, p. 480.

[126] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 268.

[127] Karen Boyle, *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005), p. 80.

[128] Boyle, p. 66.

[129] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 467.

[130] Atkinson, p. 138.

[131] Boyle, p. 80.

Sutcliffe himself supported this aspect of his own myth; he claimed in his trial that he had been missioned by God to get rid of these women because, 'they were the scum of the earth' and showed remorse for killing 'innocents':

> When I saw in the papers that MacDonald was so young and not a prostitute, I felt like someone inhuman and I realised that it was a devil driving me against my will and that I was a beast. […] I were quite certain she were a prostitute, absolutely positive. She were walking along in the red-light area, for one thing, and then I saw her stop and chat to a couple of girls on a street corner. I felt sure she were one of them.[132]

His vocabulary again reinforces the mythical rhetoric of a superhuman monster, but also suggests that it is not only 'guilty' women who should be scared of monsters like the Ripper, but ones who associate, talk to or happen to walk near those deemed guilty; basically any woman who is not indoors at night.

The presentation of prostitutes in *Started Early* isn't flattering in any way, but it varies according to the perspective of who is talking about them. As Dominguez Garcia suggests, different characters produce different truths[133]. Tracy observes that prostitution is a career of necessity rather than choice, her attitude is more pragmatic than that of her male colleagues, as she notes that it 'Used to be poverty that drove women on the game, now it was drugs'[134]. Tracy's male colleagues in the seventies had a similar approach to prostitution as Sutcliffe, happy to use them but not considering them worthy of respect or, in death, worthy of investigation. Their phraseology varies from light-hearted innuendos, such as 'good-time girl', to terms of contempt, 'scrubbers' and 'slappers'[135], presenting them as agents of the systemic misogyny of the time. This continues with the modern murders of the new 'Ripper'; a female SIO refers to the murdered woman by name, while Barry, a 'Jurassic'[136] Detective Superintendent refers to her as 'The Mabgate Whore'. This derogatory title makes her sound like a character in a play rather than a person; it makes her occupation more important than her identity, and as with the Ripper, creates a role within the prevalent mythology. Tracy thinks that Barry would fit perfectly back in the seventies; referring again to *Life on Mars*, another crime drama that utilises many of the myths of Yorkshire in the seventies, she describes Barry as 'Gene Hunt without the charisma':

---

[132] Barbara Jones, *Voices from an Evil God* (London: Blake Publishing, 1994), p. 380.

[133] Beatriz Domínguez García, 'The Retelling of History through Her Story', in *The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy,* ed. by Alberto Lazaro (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 139-56.

[134] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 34.

[135] Atkinson, p. 18.

[136] Atkinson, p. 127.

> Barry probably thought prostitutes had it coming to them. In fact she knew he did. 'Whores,' Barry always said, couldn't get him out of the habit no matter what you said to him. (Political correctness? About whores? Do me a favour).'[137]

When Barry visits the scene of Kelly Cross's murder he laments the effort going into the investigation of a dead prostitute[138] and recollects that he knew her mother, a 'real piece of work, but good for a quick knee-trembler up a dark alley'[139]. When the third body turns up, Barry is reminded of the mythology of the past, thinking 'Leeds and dead prostitutes. Don't use the 'R' word.'[140]. Despite being a man who disrespects women and is happy to use prostitutes, he is afraid of the myths surrounding the Ripper.

The different perspectives and different 'truths' used by Atkinson, particularly in relation to the prostitutes in the novel, present a world that not only functions by producing myths, but is problematized by this act. If by taking on a particular occupation, a woman makes her life less valuable than another's, then there is no longer a dichotomy of right and wrong in relation to the act of murder. Instead it becomes that some murders are worse than others, rated on the value to society that the victim provided. The murder of a prostitute becomes objective, it blends into the background, because they are 'slappers', it takes an 'innocent' such as Jayne MacDonald for the crimes to be seen as subjective and problematic.

Faction

In his discussion of the Yorkshire Ripper, Dan Laughey notes that the mythology surrounding Yorkshire in the 1970s suggests that it was unusually 'dark, seedy, rundown, depressing, and downright unfriendly' when in fact there were 'plenty of tragic, violent, or dissident acts that were committed in the south of England and elsewhere' in this same period[141]. While he notes that the *Red Riding* novels by Peace are more poetic than historically accurate, he argues that they encapsulate the muddled collective memory of the case: 'This is history not only capable of being rewritten amid a dearth of authenticity, but made more convincing by amplifying the deep uncertainty of the events it portrays'[142].

King and Cummins describe the faction at work in Peace's writing as 'a form of bricolage in its drawing on real events and characters, woven together through fictional dialogue and mirroring the past in the present'[143]. Atkinson's approach in using the Ripper in her narrative could arguably be considered the reverse of King's and Cummin's definition of 'faction', as her text consists of fictional events with fact interwoven. Their article does suggest, however, that a vague reference to an actual event within *Red Riding*, the murder of David Oluwale, is 'in the spirit of faction'[144], which would suggest that Atkinson's similar approach, in naming David Oluwale and numerous killers in Yorkshire[145] as well as referencing the events of the Ripper killings and the Shannon Matthews kidnapping, could be considered an example of factional bricolage.

---

[137] Atkinson, p. 128.
[138] Atkinson, p. 287.
[139] Atkinson, p. 285.
[140] Atkinson, p. 289.
[141] Laughey, p. 83.
[142] Laughey, p. 85.

King and Cummins argue that the strength of Peace's work lies 'not only in its authentic portrait of society', but also in the way it 'forces the reader to confront the troubling possibility that the structure of society as much as individual pathology has a very significant role to play in the production of sexual violence and murder'[146]. This thesis has argued that the same can be said of *Started Early.* The examples of sexual violence in *Started Early,* from the reference to the real Ripper to the fictional accounts of rape, abuse and beatings, can be read as instances of female precarity that are often linked to economic and social problems, such as poverty and lack of education. In addition to this, the way that Atkinson layers fact and fiction within the novel, particularly in relation to sexual violence and murder, encourages the reader to question whether the realities that we are presented with by society really hold any truth.

Atkinson's detectives in the 1970s work cases parallel to the Ripper murders, encapsulating the same sense of fear and muddle as Peace's novels do but without directly engaging the aspects of the true investigation into the narrative. The layers created by this approach, with fictional murders coated over factual ones and fictional social unrest explained by genuine fear of the time, are added to as Atkinson incorporates fictional detective stories into the narrative that criticise the very genre that she is working in. The first is *Collier*, a TV detective show which Jackson watches 'to the bitter end' despite thinking of it as 'crap':

> Real murder was disgusting. And smelly and messy and usually heartbreaking, invariably meaningless, occasionally tedious, but not this neat sanitized narrative. And the victims were often prostitutes, dispensable as tissues, both in reality and in fiction.[147]

Even this comparison of 'real' and 'fake' crimes is complicated by Atkinson; Julia is playing a pathologist in the drama because the previous pathologist was played by an actor who 'had been caught with child pornography on his computer and had been quietly transformed into a nonce in a prison somewhere'[148]. Julia's investigation of a 'mutilated prostitute'[149] in this sanitized drama is echoed ten pages later in Tracy's discovery of Kelly Cross's body. Sardonic references to police dramas are made throughout the scene; the door is unlocked which 'was always an ominous moment in TV thrillers' but 'in Tracy's experience all it usually meant was that someone had forgotten to lock up'[150]. Tracy rationally puts on the light in each room she goes into which no-one ever does in TV crime thrillers, 'For the atmosphere, Tracy supposed'[151]. The 'disgusting' element mentioned by Jackson is experienced by Tracy as she finds the body:

---

[143] Martin King and Ian Cummins, '"Dead Cities, Crows, the Rain and Their Ripper, the Yorkshire Ripper": The Red Riding Novels (1974, 1977, 1980, 1983) of David Peace as Lieux D'horreur', *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory,* 6.3 (2013), 43-56 (p. 44).

[144] King and Cummins, p. 49.

[145] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 18.

[146] King and Cummins, p. 53.

[147] Atkinson, p. 259.

> The offal and sewage smell of death was everywhere. Even Tracy's tough police ticker missed a beat. Kelly Cross was sprawled on the bed, her head mashed in, her belly slashed open. […] Tracy put two fingers against Kelly Cross's neck. No pulse. She didn't know why she was checking, as it was glaringly obvious that Kelly was dead. She was still warm. Tracy preferred her dead bodies to be cold.[152]

Smell becomes a sense linked with truth over fiction; Kelly's death is similar to Carol's which Tracy recollects through dissmell, a term coined by psychologist Silvan Tomkins for the 'reaction to noxious odors'[153]:

> The stench inside was unbelievable. Decomposition. Tracy wouldn't be able to get it out of her nostrils for days. It was on her skin, her uniform, her hair. Years later she just had to think about the flat in Lovell Park and she could smell it.[154]

This experience haunts her as she searches Kelly's flat, she has a flashback to Lovell Park, 'The smell that was released, the flies…'[155]. The negative affect, the reminiscence prompted by this visceral, material interaction with a dead body, can only be created in an encounter with real death. TV shows attempt to recreate the visual and auditory effects of murder and the resulting corpse, but there is no necessity to recreate the smell as that would not reach the audience. Ahmed discusses how the 'impressions' of a new landscape, 'the air, the smells, the sounds' can impress upon the body, creating new 'textures on the surface of the skin' and reshaping 'the body surface'[156]. In the case of Tracy, the impression of the smell in Carol's flat upon her body is enough to change her forever; she will never be able to forget the experience of being in close proximity to a decomposed corpse.

---

[148] Atkinson, p. 256.
[149] Atkinson, p. 260.
[150] Atkinson, p. 268.
[151] Atkinson, p. 268.
[152] Atkinson, p. 270.
[153] Paul C. Hollinger, 'Winnicott, Tomkins, and the Psychology of Affect', *Clinical Social Work,* 37.2 (2009), 155-162 (p. 156).
[154] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 245.
[155] Atkinson, p. 269.
[156] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 9.

The other 'fake' detective story referred to in *Started Early* is one penned by Marilyn Nettles, a reporter involved in the Carol Braithwaite case, which she also refers to as 'crap':

> The Slaughtered Seamstress was the title, raised and embossed in a metallic red on a lurid cover that depicted a half-naked, bug-eyed woman in the foreground, her mouth open in a scream as she tried to escape from a shadowy male figure who was wielding a huge knife.'[157]

Again the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred; Marilyn explains that the genre is referred to as "True Noir", an ironic title in this context, and it is a genre that she adds to under a pen name, again a removal from reality. Marilyn notes the popularity of stories of 'women in jeopardy' to Jackson, adding the aside that 'you have to wonder', a point which coming from Atkinson seems at once ironic and insightful. If Marilyn is doing this simply, as she states, because it 'pays the bills'[158], one wonders if Atkinson is insinuating here that her reason for writing stories of 'women in jeopardy' has a more genuine stimulus than that of Marilyn's. Atkinson's approach is designed to make the reader of *Started Early* ponder the question posed by Marilyn: why is it always women in jeopardy? While fiction arguably sanitizes fact in the same way that the veil of bourgeois ideology conceals the truths of inequality, it does reflect aspects of reality back to the viewer or reader; when a violent crime occurs women are more likely to be the victim than the perpetrator, especially ones in precarious occupations such as prostitutes, 'dispensable as tissues, both in reality and in fiction'[159]. This layering of realities (fact, fictional fact, fiction within fiction and even a glimpse of authorial intent) creates a complex bricolage effect, similar to the one noted by King and Cummins as present in Peace's novels.

Through Jackson and Tracy, who have both seen behind the veil of 'bourgeois order' in relation to crime plenty of times, the reader is given access to a world of crime from the perspective of alien revolutionaries, detectives who accept that the criminal and the noncriminal are sometimes indistinguishable. Tracy's world is one where Harry, a retired conman, thief and fixer admits that he used to be a member of the same golf club and play rounds with all of her police superiors: 'It's like being in the Masons'[160]. She has suspicions that he is linked to two different cases of dead prostitutes, one being Carol Braithwaite, but has no proof. When she is told by an inspector after the capture of the Ripper that 'Women are safe again', she laughs in his face, partly due to being drunk but mostly in disbelief: 'As if taking one mad, bad bloke off the streets made women safe'[161].

---

[157] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 356.
[158] Atkinson, p. 356.
[159] Atkinson, p. 259.
[160] Atkinson, pp. 233-239.

By presenting a world that interweaves truth and fiction, myth and history, Atkinson creates a narrative in which nothing is as it seems, nothing can be trusted and so everything must be questioned. Ahmed states that 'The key might not be so much the distinction between truth and falsity but the role of falsity in the reproduction of the truth'[162], and it is arguably this use of false reproduction that *Started Early* brings to life through its combination of fact and fiction. By admitting from the outset that this novel may not contain the truth, Atkinson is continuing a trend of female historical writing which she has already become a part of in her earlier work. As Dominguez Garcia explains, her historical narratives are not ''real' in the sense that history – as a discipline – is seen, because these 'real historical events' are perceived differently through the eyes of the characters and narrative voices and, consequently, through the eyes of the reader'[163]. *Started Early* is therefore a foray into the world of both truth and fiction, to use the term coined by Ian Cummins and Martin King, Atkinson is using 'faction', 'with plots based on real events and characters with fictional text interwoven'[164] to create a narrative which arguably lifts the bourgeois veil to see what is behind it.

While *Started Early* presents a view of Yorkshire that is arguably dark and quite pessimistic in its outlook, especially when we consider how the crimes of the new Ripper are left open at the end, there are aspects of hope in the novel. These are expressed in the main by the acts of kindness shown by Tracy towards her stolen child, Courtney, and Jackson's embodiment of the dream of social mobility, and through it a disintegration of a false consciousness. Because these characters appear to remain aware of their inability to ever truly reach a sense of 'happy ending' or permanent fix, theirs is arguably a position of 'happenstance' as championed by Ahmed.

Children as Hope for the Future

The use of children as symbols of hope for the future, and as a reason to invest in the present, is a form of optimism strongly threaded through *Started Early.* Sara Ahmed explains that sentimentality around children 'sees them as the reason to have optimism – for if nothing else, their lives are not already ruined'[165], a point reflected in *Started Early* when Tracy considers her act of purchasing a child:

---

[161] Atkinson, p. 184.
[162] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 166.
[163] Domínguez García, p. 141.
[164] King and Cummins, p. 44.
[165] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 171.

> She felt soiled by everything she had witnessed. Filth, pure and simple. Massage parlours and lap-dancing clubs at the soft end and at the other end the hardcore DVDs of people doing repugnant things to each other. The unclassified stuff that scrambled your synapses with its depravity. […] No end to evil really. What could you do? You could start with one small kid.[166]

While Ahmed considers children as symbols of optimism in a broad sense, the way the concept is presented in *Started Early* is through characters who were destined to grow up in a particularly precarious environment: children of prostitutes, children kidnapped for money, and those abandoned by their parents to survive in the care system. In a world of precarity visualised through crime, abuse and exploitation, young children are presented as images of hope, but they also act as reminders that under neoliberalism child poverty is as much of an issue as it was forty years ago. In 2017, Barnardo's stated that 1.7 million children in Britain were classed as living in severe poverty[167], and the children of *Started Early* fall within this bracket. Through the narrative of Tracy and her stolen child, Courtney, Atkinson is showing a failed society, one that cannot protect its young. Tracy's desire to care for Courtney and her investment in her future shows hope as something that is possible when we provide each other with the support lacking from the neoliberal state.

Whilst several of Atkinson's earlier novels are beset with lost, stolen and abandoned children, *Started Early* uses the motif of unfettered children as embodiments of hope as much as her previous novels used their loss as a symbol for defeat. Bunty in *Behind the Scenes* never fully recovers from losing two of her daughters, while Rosemary in *Case Histories* dies heartbroken shortly after her favourite daughter goes missing, two examples of many where damage to the traditional family unit causes permanent emotional harm to those who remain. Loss is still an issue that causes immeasurable pain for some in *Started Early*, but there is also a sense that if one is able to invest time and love in children that are unwanted, or unprotected by those who should protect them, then there is a chance of hope and happiness. As Ahmed states in relation to Toni Morrison's 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, another novel where an unwanted child is taken in by someone who is childless themself; 'to want the unwanted is a moment of political hope, however much the moment passes by'[168].

This does not mean that *Started Early* presents the family unit as a symbol of happiness however; the same tropes of broken, damaged and ill-fated domestic dreams continue when women in stable marriages are unable to have children, and when others fail to experience conventional family life because they are not conventionally attractive, or because they are seen by men as objects of fun rather than as potential wives. Kitty and Margaret, wives of Tracy's colleagues in the 1970s, bond over 'fertility. Or lack of it. Kitty Winfield couldn't conceive a baby, Margaret couldn't keep one inside'. Margaret copes by knitting 'cupboards full of baby clothes'[169] while her husband, Ray, cheats, finding relief 'with someone who wasn't in permanent mourning for an empty womb'[170]. Kitty is haunted by the decision to abort a foetus when she was young which has left her unable to conceive; having been told that 'it's nothing, it's like going to the dentist'[171] she found it to be 'a brutal affair' which almost killed her. Both Tracy and Tilly have regrets that they never married or had a family, and both feel a desire to protect the child dragged through the shopping centre by Kelly Cross:

---

[166] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 142-3.

[167] Barnardo's, *Child Poverty Statistics and Facts* (2017) <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/child_poverty/child_poverty_what_is_poverty/child_poverty_statistics_facts.htm> [accessed 30 February 2017].

[168] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 248.

> If Tilly had had a child she would have wrapped it in lamb's wool and treated it like an egg, fragile and perfect. She'd lost a baby, back in the Soho days. A miscarriage but she'd never told anyone. Well, Phoebe. Phoebe who had tried to persuade her to get rid of it, said she knew a man in Harley Street.[172]

For all of these women, children become what Berlant terms 'objects of desire', a 'cluster of promises': 'proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us and good for us while others, not so much'[173]. The desire for children is a desire for the cluster of promises associated with them: a family unit, love, the chance to rely on people and be relied upon, the chance of a future. When they become unobtainable, the desire for children can become an example of cruel optimism, a desire that evolves into an obstacle to a person's flourishing[174]. In the case of Margaret and Ray, their unfulfilled dream of a family stops them being capable of finding happiness in their marriage; it becomes an obstacle to their love for each other. For Ray, this sense of cruelty becomes even more acute when he has a final opportunity to provide his wife with the child she so desperately wants, but cannot act:

> The worst thing wasn't what happened to the boy, nor was it the fact that Len murdered Carol Braithwaite or that Eastman helped cover it up. The worst thing was that when Ray whisked the little girl away – stole her, really – and he was sitting in the back of Crawford's Cortina he realized they were driving past his own house. […] He could have pulled into his own driveway, rung his own doorbell and given the best gift possible to his own wife. But he hadn't done that, he'd given that

---

[169] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 147.
[170] Atkinson, p. 154.
[171] Atkinson, p. 194.
[172] Atkinson, p. 50.
[173] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 23.
[174] Berlant, p. 1.

> little girl to Kitty Winfield instead. And the boy. He could have saved that little boy, brought him up as his own. Two chances, both lost.[175]

In Ray's summation, his and his wife's inability to have children is worse than murder, false imprisonment, abduction and obstruction of justice, and Ray is a policeman. The extreme emotions that Ray feels when he thinks of this event and these child 'objects' that could have been his relate to the cluster of promises offered by their presence. The 'best possible gift' that Ray could give his wife is hope for the future, a chance to have someone corporeal to knit those baby clothes for, someone to look after or to 'save', a way to stop her mourning.

Just as being unable to have children can ruin lives, having them and then losing them can seem like the end of the world. Barry, a detective in *Started Early* who has often cheated on his wife but still provided her with the life and family she wanted, cannot forgive himself for prompting an accident that killed his grandson and put his daughter in a coma. For him and his wife, the loss of descendants is worse than never having them in the first place:

> Before Amy's accident he used to feel sorry for Tracy, one of those women who'd sacrificed motherhood to the job. They reached the menopause and realized that they hadn't had kids, that their DNA was going to die with them and nobody was ever going to love them the way a kid would. Sad, really. But after Amy's accident Barry envied Tracy. She didn't have to feel unbearable pain every living second of every living day.[176]

The complexity of children as objects of both extreme happiness and extreme pain creates a bittersweet motif in *Started Early*; even the pleasure of being a parent is described by Tracy as 'terrifying and exhilarating at the same time'. When Tracy bathes Courtney soon after buying her from Kelly Cross, she is moved to tears and is 'surprised to find (let alone explain) such deep wells of primal, untapped emotions inside the calcified shell'[177]. When Jackson finds out that Nathan is his son, he feels daunted, unsure 'that he wanted his heart stirred by unbreakable, sacrificial bonds'[178]. When, at the end of the novel, he finally experiences the emotions he feared, they are again described using negative adjectives despite the positive connotations of them being linked to love: 'surprise', 'alarm', 'fierce', 'churning', 'terrifying'[179].

Both characters have histories of trying and failing to protect children; Tracy tried to protect the young boy Michael who was locked in a flat with the decaying corpse of his mother but was unable to beat the system. Jackson regularly worries about his daughter Marlee, and has spent many years searching for lost children, or trying to find their killers as well as being haunted by the loss of his sister, Tracy by the loss of Michael before she had a chance to ensure that he was safe. Jackson makes sure that every year he takes a 'good, clear head-and-shoulders shot' of Marlee in case she goes missing, having seen too many cases over the years where they had to use poor portraits because the child had grown up so quickly[180]. Both, having had these experiences in the past, dread the possible loss of their newfound children.

---

[175] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 458-9.
[176] Atkinson, p. 231.
[177] Atkinson, pp. 121-122.
[178] Atkinson, p. 111.
[179] Atkinson, p. 479.

These complex emotions associated with children within the novel break away from the traditional view of children and family as something desirable or even achievable; Len Lomax is the perfect example of this dysfunctional view, having two families that are both unhappy. One partner, a prostitute, provides him with the passion and children that his wife cannot, and yet he will not allow himself to live with her as, in his view, her class and occupation make her unworthy to be a wife. Carol Braithwaite, the prostitute, wants to be a 'family' in the traditional sense, such as having Len live with her and go on family holidays with them, and this conflict results in Carol being murdered by Len and Michael, the child he denies, being left in the flat with her body. Atkinson's presentation of family here does what Berlant describes in *Cruel Optimism*; it presents the 'conventional good-life fantasies – say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families' and so on as unstable, fragile and costly[181].

In her analysis of *Behind the Scenes* and the two novels which followed*,* Emma Parker states that in Atkinson's 'fictional world, the traditional family unit is unhealthy or abusive', suggesting that her presentation of families in *Started Early* as inevitably flawed is simply following the same pattern seen throughout her canon of novels:

> Atkinson has made public her view that the conventional nuclear family is a "pernicious" and "destructive" institution. By privileging community over family, she adopts a position that counters Margaret Thatcher's assertion that, "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families".[182]

And yet happiness is glimpsed in the examples of make-shift families that do not follow the conventional rules. While the more traditional approach to life leads to disappointment and even suffering, those who are willing to consider another approach prove that happiness may be possible, even in a fleeting capacity. As Ahmed states, 'hope is an investment that the "lines" we follow will get us somewhere' but sometimes accidents or chance encounters veer us off-course, redirecting us and opening up 'new worlds'[183]. If it is the following of these new lines which open up a chance of hope to these new make-shift families, then by linking their actions back to Thatcher's assertion, as quoted by Parker, the mere adoption of new family units made up of non-related members can begin to be seen as political. Berlant uses the same quote from Thatcher as an expression of the 'long neoliberal moment of the attrition of the social'[184] in which the 'affective turn emerges' to form the sense of a historical present; Thatcher's words express the neoliberal ethic, while Atkinson provides us with an affective form of rebellion which counters that ethic.

---

[180] Atkinson, p. 372.
[181] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.
[182] Emma Parker, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 10.

There are several occasions when make-shift families appear through the novel; for Jackson and Julia there is no doubt that friendship is better than a romantic relationship, and by working as a separated couple they can provide a happier life for their son. While Michael has a difficult upbringing in care, the Winfields' kidnap and name change of his baby sister allows her a life that she would not have had in England. Their illegal and desperate act, which was an extreme deviation that took them half way around the world, resulted in happiness, and as the child's name suggests, 'Hope'. Of course, the clearest example of a positive make-shift family is that of Tracy and her daughter Courtney, purchased from a prostitute and given a new identity through dodgy dealings with an ex-con.

The presentation in the novel of children as objects of happiness links with the theme of capitalist commerce, reiterating Tracy's view that anything can be bought, or sold, or stolen: 'You could buy women, you could buy kids, you could buy anything'[185]. While Carol Braithwaite's daughter is not necessarily for sale to the highest bidder, Ray is ordered to take her from a life labelled as an orphan and the daughter of a prostitute to give her to a couple that are much more affluent than him; a doctor and his model wife. They can afford to disappear to New Zealand with the child and start again with no questions asked; Ray, if he had kept the child as 'best gift possible' for Margaret, would have been more limited in his options of escape due to being lower on the social and economic scale. The child as both a cluster of promises and as an object for sale, therefore, is as linked to economic viability as much as any other object that can be bought or sold. The child does well out of the role as stolen gift; she is named Hope, an accurate name for what she represents to so many, and is given an affluent life on the other side of the world; but this does not stop her wondering about where she came from.

While from an economic standpoint Hope's new life can give her chances that she would have been unlikely to have as the daughter of a prostitute, her lack of knowledge about her past creates a hole that she feels the need to investigate; she wants to know about her '*origins'* and to be able to tell her kids about their genealogy:

---

[183] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, pp. 18-19.
[184] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 6.
[185] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 33.

> When you have a child you start to wonder about their genetic inheritance and although my 'real' parents will always be Mum and Dad I can't help but be curious… you know how it is, you feel as if you've lost something but you just don't know what it is.[186]

If the assumption for Hope in *Started Early* is that an improvement in social position, wealth and parental influence will automatically create a happier life for her, then her need for an understanding of her lineage could be interpreted as what Ahmed refers to as happiness crisis. These crises make us question 'what we want from life', but despite the negative connotations of the term 'crisis' these questions themselves can be positive acts; encouraging us to think about what is possible rather than settling for what is unsatisfactory:

> Embracing possibility involves returning to the past, recognizing what one has, as well as what one has lost, what one has given, as well as what one has given up. To learn about possibility is to do genealogy, to wonder about the present by wondering about the how of its arrival.[187]

As it is Hope's act of delving into her past that prompts the underlying narrative of *Started Early*, which creates the very investigation into past events that Jackson performs, the whole narrative is arguably one of 'embracing possibility' by exploring what it is to embrace a crisis of happiness. The characters that allow themselves to be driven by the 'regulatory effect' of social beliefs in relation to happiness, the ones who believe that they need marriage and children and money to be happy, are the ones who appear stuck in a rut. The ones who are able to make a change and embrace possibility are the ones who have a chance of happiness; for this reason *Started Early* is arguably a novel that promotes what Ahmed refers to as the position of 'happenstance', or 'a stance toward possibility' that is neither happy nor unhappy:

> To have a sense of the happenstance would involve being open to the possibility of good and bad things happening. We could say that happiness would be a possibility kept open by happenstance, such that the condition of possibility for happiness includes other possibilities. If we think of happiness as a possibility that does not exhaust what is possible, if we lighten the load of happiness, then we can open things up. When happiness is no longer presumed to be a good thing, as what we aim for, or as what we should aim for, then we can witness happiness as a possibility that acquires

---

[186] Atkinson, p. 108.
[187] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 218.

> significance by being a possibility alongside others. We can value happiness for its precariousness, as something that comes and goes, as life does. [188]

The narrative arc that follows Tracy's purchase of and disappearance with Courtney is a re-enactment of Hope's so many years before, but it is also one that revels in this sense of happenstance. As with Hope, Courtney is taken from a future of precarity to one of wealth and social improvement, although Tracy's actual purchase of the child in this scenario makes the link to a child as an object of economic value far more literal. The way that this repetitious act varies from the first however is that Tracy's act is not entirely selfish: she does not purchase Courtney because she desperately wants a child, although it is something that she wishes she had done earlier in her life, but rather to protect the child from the horrific truths that she had to face every day as a policewoman. The fact that Tracy and Courtney's relationship begins with a chance encounter adds to this sense of happenstance. Tracy is haunted by her inability to save and protect Michael, Hope's brother whom she wished she had given a home: 'She should have taken him from that hospital bed, run away with him, given him the love he needed'[189]. When she is given the opportunity to do so with Courtney, she takes her and runs. Through her desire to protect and care for both Michael and Courtney, Tracy is essentially the symbol of political hope for the novel; she wants the unwanted.

Atkinson does not provide Tracy and Courtney with a 'happy' ending, but rather one of happenstance, or the possibility of both good and bad:

> From now on Tracy would forever be looking over her shoulder, waiting for the knock on the door. Cameras had tracked them everywhere, if somebody was looking for them they would find them. […]
>
> When she bought the kid she made a covenant with the devil. She could have someone to love but it would cost her everything. She thought of the Little Mermaid, every step torture, a pain like the piercing of sharp swords. Just to be human, to love. […]
>
> This was love. It didn't come free, you paid in pain. Your own. But then nobody ever said love was easy. Well, they did, but they were idiots.[190]

The lack of true resolution to Tracy's story, as with the crimes which occur in the background of her narrative, leaves the ending open to a combination of hope and dread. The cyclical aspects of the stories presented remind us that things do not 'end' in real life, rather they are recycled and rehashed; and just as we can hope that Tracy and Courtney will live to explore and identify their own forms of happiness, there is a suggestion that as Tracy fears, their past will catch up with them. A number of subtle points hint that Courtney is not truly the daughter of Kelly Cross, from Kelly's daughter Chevaunne not recognising her in the back of Tracy's car, to the reference to her birthmark, a 'misreading of the genetic code' tattooed on her arm[191] which is recorded in a dossier of lost children seen by Jackson[192]. These points lead us to believe that Courtney will not remain for long with Tracy, but that while she does she will be protected and cared for, which is more than could be said if she had remained with Kelly Cross.

---

[188] Ahmed, p. 219.
[189] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 400.
[190] Atkinson, pp. 487-8.

Despite the 'happenstance' ending of Tracy and Courtney's narrative, the optimism generated by seeing two characters previously unloved by others finding happiness together is one of hope. It is a hope that arguably 'deviates' from the straight line of heterosexual union and family through reproduction, which the other characters in the novel tend to follow dutifully to their own detriment. Ahmed uses spatial terms to discuss how deviations from the paths set by social convention create 'perverse points', in which a person is wilfully determined to go against orthodoxy by turning away[193]; she argues that in this spatial sense 'the perverse' can become a 'useful starting point for thinking about the "disorientations" of queer'. While Tracy, despite being assumed a 'dyke'[194] for most of her life, is not actually homosexual, the relationship of adopted/stolen child and single mother on the run is definitely a queer one; one that presents spatial deviation and disorientation both literally and metaphorically. Tracy's and Courtney's narrative does what Berlant calls for; it takes aspects of the ordinary disorganized through capitalism and invents 'new rhythms for living, rhythms that could, at any time, congeal into norms'[195]. Tired of following other people's directions, Tracy is finally forming her own path which one hopes will direct her through the 'ongoing crisis' of the ordinary to a world of possibility.

At the same time as introducing a viable alternative to the false or 'cruel' optimisms sold, however, Atkinson's novel reminds us of Berlant's suggestion that breaking away from these traditional optimisms is one of the hardest things to do. When Tracy runs from her broken society to abscond to safety with her new child, she tellingly escapes to a place which symbolizes so many aspects of the neoliberal dream: Disneyland, 'the dark beating heart of capitalism'[196]. As Umberto Eco observes, 'Disneyland makes it clear that within its magic enclosure it is fantasy that is absolutely reproduced' [197].' For children, it is the fantasy of the make believe which makes the place so magical; for Tracy it is the fantasy of having a child, someone to spoil, which draws her to this place. She and Courtney become simulations of the happy mother and daughter in a world of simulacra, and they intersperse these roles with those of the fairy godmother and princess, buying into the 'masterpieces of falsification'[198] by staying in the 'Sleeping Beauty suite' and buying dresses and wands from the hotel shop[199].

---

[191] Atkinson, p. 121.
[192] Atkinson, p. 372.
[193] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 78.
[194] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 30.
[195] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 9.
[196] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 482.
[197] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (Florida: Harcourt, 1986), p. 43.

Tracy knows that this cannot last forever; perhaps her escape to a world suspended in non-time and make-believe is her way of bridging the gap between the dark past and their new future of possibilities. Or perhaps by play-acting obvious stereotypical roles, the two fugitives are simply finding a way of exploring and articulating new identities; we are told that they spent a couple of weeks in London before travelling to Paris where they 'tested out their new identities on doctors and dentists and opticians'[200] so perhaps the trying on of costumes is an extension of this play-acting which can be seen itself a positive act, as it embraces change.

Whatever the reason for the escape to a world of make-believe, Tracy has enough common sense and cynicism to be aware that the world of Disneyland is unreal, and therefore not a permanent solution. Despite this, her very act of stopping to breathe and think allows for the happenstance of her future to materialize; she and Courtney are given the hope of happiness in their future, but to fully possess it they must accept that it comes with its terms and conditions, just like everything else for sale in the neoliberal world.

Social Mobility as a Hope for the Future

Upward mobility is considered by Berlant to be an example of a fantasy of the good life, which has frayed under the retraction of the social-democratic promise over the last three decades[201]. Ahmed similarly considers it a 'conventional' desire in which 'the good life is associated with getting up and getting out', a social form attributed as a happiness-cause along with family, marriage and 'whiteness'[202]. Jackson Brodie is the character most associated with social mobility in *Started Early* and in the previous novels in the series; like a character discussed by Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*, he embodies both 'the familial investment in upward mobility' and 'the postwar social democratic contract to grant the working classes access to *embourgeoisement*'[203]. The point at which this fantasy begins to fray for Jackson, however, is when the political and social beliefs he inherits from his father fail to tally with his new, improved life; the intergenerational mobility he experiences forces him into a state of limbo, forever floating between the working class and middle class strata, but never truly belonging to either. This, along with his role of discoverer of the missing and the guilty, makes him what Ahmed would call an affect alien, 'one who converts good feelings into bad'[204] and whose 'proximity gets in the way of other people's enjoyment of the right things, functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere'[205].

---

[198] Eco, p. 43.
[199] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 482.
[200] Atkinson, p. 482.
[201] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 3.
[202] Ahmed, *The Promise*, pp. 112-120.
[203] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 205.

Berlant notes that a distinctive part of being a parent, especially one in a precarious situation themselves, is to desire better for their children referring to it as passing on the promise of the promise, 'children's only sure inheritance – fantasy as the only capital assuredly passable from one contingent space to another'[206]. When this desire, this happiness dream, is fulfilled, there is a potential for the child to become an affect alien: their presence, their opportunity, reminds the parents what they are not and what they never had. They may begin to lose common experiences over which to bond, or represent to their parents the education or money or lifestyle that the parent was never able to experience them selves. Social mobility can appear to be an act of detaching from a known existence and having to develop a new orientation in the world; one which can be a bittersweet experience for those forced or encouraged to detach. Through Jackson, Atkinson explores this experience from two perspectives; firstly from that of a child growing up in Yorkshire who is encouraged to better himself, and then from that of the parent as Jackson's own daughter Marlee begins to grow up in a world as alien to him as his was to his father.

Jackson's Lost Socialism

Throughout the series of novels Jackson is haunted by the metanarratives of Catholicism and socialism, which, while forming a large part of his parents' working class identities, have been rejected to an extent by Jackson in his process of '*embourgeoisement'*. Ahmed explains that, through the family home, we inherit non-material objects including 'values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles', as well as orientations[207]. For Jackson, it is the management of these inheritances which often makes him feel lost. Because of social mobility he had a working class upbringing, but has the education and income of someone who is middle class. This means that he no longer fits into either class comfortably, and so he feels alienated from both.

The flashbacks which chart Jackson's upbringing occur throughout the series of novels, forming a perfect picture of social mobility from the industrial working class to the middle class bracket and presenting the ramifications this has on a family split down the middle. Jackson's father, a miner, sees upward mobility in a practical way, he refuses to let his sons follow him into the mines and work in a job 'that you wouldn't make a dog do'. Jackson's father 'was a socialist, the bitter, chip-on-the-shoulder Scottish kind that attributed everything that had gone wrong with his life to someone else but particularly "capitalist bosses"'; he mistrusted his neighbours' aspirations, believing that despite being a town which always votes labour, the people still 'craved the fruits of capitalism' more than anyone[208]. Despite this, he states that 'he hadn't worked all his life 'in this filthy hellhole' just so that his son would have to as well[209] and encourages Jackson into the army, and in the process away from him and his life.

---

[204] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 49.
[205] Ahmed, p. 67.
[206] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 174.
[207] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 86.

As a child Jackson 'had no idea what Capitalism was and no desire to know', a stark contrast to his father whose knowledge that 'the Tories wanted to wipe the miners off the face of the earth' made politics personal and a matter of survival. Jackson's brother described capitalism as 'driving a Ford Consul and buying a Servis twin-tub'[210]; presenting a simplified and somewhat mercenary view of the changing world of politics that surrounds him. The contrast between the father and sons' views of society and politics presents three very different perspectives; politics can be at once of no interest, incredibly personal and something in which emotional attachment is removed.

Jackson's sense of politics as an adult begins to become much more personal as he ages and begins to see his childhood with a sense of nostalgia; his father's socialism haunts him in the same way that his mother's Catholicism does, and it becomes representative of a lost life, a lost self:

> In 1995 […] he listened to the Six O'Clock News on Radio 4 and somewhere in the middle of that night's bulletin they announced the closure of the pit his father had worked in all his life. […] and without any warning the tears had started. He wasn't even sure why – for everything that had gone, he supposed. For the path he hadn't taken, for a world he'd never lived in. 'Why are you crying?' Josie asked, lumbering into the kitchen […] 'Fucking Thatcher,' he said, shrugging it off in a masculine way, making it political not personal, although in this case there was no difference.
>
> And then they got a baby and a dishwasher and Jackson continued on and didn't think again for a long time about the path he hadn't chosen, a way of life that had never been and yet that didn't stop him aching for it in some confused place in his soul.[211]

The complicated emotions which Jackson experiences here are indicative of someone who feels confused about their place in the world. The sadness he experiences at the closure of the mine, a sadness for 'the path he hadn't taken', is as he says, both personal and political. He is grieving the loss of a place in which his father worked, a place which his father hated and yet relied upon to support his family, and a place that he would have worked if he had not been pushed by his father into the army. At the same time, the closure of the mines is linked by Jackson back to Margaret Thatcher, despite it happening under John Major's leadership. Thatcher was in power during the mining strikes of the 1980s, which symbolised a battle between the working and the controlling classes. Thatcher saw the strikes as 'anti-democratic', and yet Seumas Milne explains that the events that took place during the strikes were challenging exactly the type of politics we see today:

---

[208] Atkinson, *Case Histories*, p. 353.
[209] Kate Atkinson, *One Good Turn* (London: Doubleday, 2006), p. 101.
[210] Atkinson, *Case Histories*, pp. 353-354.
[211] Atkinson, *One Good Turn*, pp. 316-317.

> A generation on, it is clear that the miners' strike was more than a defence of jobs and communities. It was a challenge to the destructive market and corporate-driven reconstruction of the economy that gave us the crash of 2008. The outcome of the dispute brought us to where we are today: the deregulated, outsourced, zero-hours world of David Cameron's Britain.[212]

Through leaving the mining town of his childhood, Jackson has alienated himself from the personal politics of survival which defined the people who remained. He avoids thinking about these feelings of guilt and anger, and yet they are part of him, they make his soul ache. Through social mobility, he has become gentrified and aligns with the very class that has benefitted from Thatcher's actions, and it is this conflict which defines Jackson as an affect alien.

While Jackson followed the dream of social mobility and gained a life that was easier in many ways than his father's, a life that offered stability rather than precarity, and promotion rather than stagnation, it also forced Jackson to become a different person to the one he would have been had he stayed in that Yorkshire town. He experiences a nostalgic sense of loss and alienation from that 'world he'd never lived in', suggesting that the optimism offered by attachments to promises such as social mobility can be experienced as retroactively cruel. Despite this, he still does not feel an affiliation to the class which he has essentially joined, referring to them as 'yahs and Hooray Henrys' and then pondering if his attitude is simply 'the envy of the underclass': 'Was it his father's voice in his head that he could hear?'[213].

His inherent dislike or distrust of the upper classes could be seen as envy in some ways; he admits that he wishes 'he'd had a classical education rather than an army education'[214] and gets frustrated when his on-off girlfriend Julia uses words he does not understand, but in truth the sense one gets from Jackson is that he simply believes in equality and honesty and dislikes the inherent unfairness present in the structure of neoliberal society which benefits some more than others. He is an amalgamation of classes, being a middle class detective from working class roots, with a socialist outlook on life, and in this role, he appears to be both the embodiment of a moral compass and social egalitarianism for the novels.

---

[212] Seumas Milne, 'During the miners' strike, Thatcher's secret state was the real enemy within', *The Guardian*, 3 October 2014 < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/03/miners-strike-thatcher-real-enemy-within-extremism> [accessed 20 May 2017].

[213] Atkinson, *Case Histories*, p. 162.

[214] Atkinson, *One Good Turn*, p. 401.

Jackson attempts to bridge the divide with his daughter Marlee who is growing up in a world again removed from his, a world of 'good schools' and 'degrees'[215], by communicating his lost heritage to her. When driving through 'a series of depressing post-industrial wastelands' in the investigation of a murder in *Case Histories*, he begs Marlee to '[n]ever forget this is what Margaret Thatcher did to your birthright', to which she responds 'Ok, I won't' and eats her smarties[216]. The sense drawn from Jackson's political and social purgatory is one of disappointment and loss; the promise of upward mobility has been frayed by the neoliberal agenda introduced by Thatcher, whom he blames for literally and metaphorically erasing his history, his ancestry, his 'birthright'. The complication of Jackson's political and social identity is opened in these novels but never closed; just as he will probably never solve his sister's murder, one assumes that Jackson will never truly rectify his own complicated placing in the world.

In *Started Early* Jackson begins to embrace his *embourgeoisement* to an extent; the title of the novel is a line from a poem by Emily Dickinson, a poet who Jackson has begun to enjoy since 'poetry had started to get under his skin a couple of years ago' following his near-death experience. In his 'resurrected life' he decides to catch up on things he had missed in his 'impoverished education' such as 'culture':

> He caught the Fifth at the Proms. He'd never been to the Proms before, put off by all those jingoistic Last Night shenanigans, and, indeed, the self-important Promenaders proved to be over-privileged smug wankers but Beethoven hadn't written the music for them. He had written it for Everyman, in the guise of a middle-aged trooper who was surprised to find himself moved to tears by the triumphant blossoming swell of brass and horsehair.[217]

Jackson's description of 'over privileged smug wankers' and jingoism shows that he still aligns himself with working class attitudes, he does not want to be one of these people, he holds no respect for them. He has to justify his desire to experience the Proms through alienating himself from the other people who want to be there: he wants to experience the music, not the status symbols associated with attending.

While Jackson's inverted snobbery, inherited from his father, still affects him, he is beginning to accept the joy provided through cultural activities so often associated with the upper middle classes. As the quote above suggests, many of these activities, rather than being symbols *of* the upper class, are elements appropriated *by* them and denied to those of the lower echelons of society by pricing them out of the market. By learning to enjoy culture, one could argue that Jackson is re-appropriating aspects of society which were always meant to be for the 'Everyman' rather than buying into the lifestyle of the upper classes. In doing so, Jackson is arguably breaking through the very mythology that enforces the societal roles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as presented by Roland Barthes:

---

[215] Atkinson, p. 401.
[216] Atkinson, *Case Histories*, pp. 448-449.
[217] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 74-75.

> in a bourgeois culture, there is neither proletarian culture nor proletarian morality, there is no proletarian art; ideologically, all that is not bourgeois is obliged to borrow from the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois ideology can therefore spread over everything and in so doing lose its name without risk: no one here will throw this name of bourgeois back at it. It can without resistance subsume bourgeois theatre, art and humanity under their eternal analogues; in a word, it can exnominate itself without restraint when there is only one single human nature left: the defection from the name 'bourgeois' is here complete.[218]

If Jackson is re-appropriating rather than borrowing from the bourgeoisie as Barthes claims the proletariat is 'obliged' to do, then the act is essentially re-nominating the bourgeoisie and breaking through the mythology associated with cultural ownership. Jackson names the bourgeoisie 'smug wankers', distancing himself from them, refusing to emulate or admire them, but also refusing to allow them to stop him enjoying the cultural event for its own merits. He does the same by making the effort to visit the monuments of Yorkshire, embracing the historic beauty of his home county whilst still remembering his own working class past:

> He had met Julia and Nathan not at Rievaulx itself but on the Terraces above, from where there was a panoramic vista of breathtaking beauty. It brought out the Romantic soul in Jackson, once hidden in a dark, deep mineshaft but lately peeking its head, unabashedly, into the daylight.[219]

The suggestion that Jackson's 'romantic soul' has been hidden links his appreciation of art, poetry, and music with a sense of shame, as if working class men do not have the time for such fripperies. And yet the embracing of these feelings does not change Jackson's political sensibilities; in their conversation while walking between the Grecian temples, Julia imagines what it would be like to own the land, placing herself in a position of awe of the aristocrats who commissioned the buildings, while Jackson states that 'No one should be allowed to own a view like this', prompting Julia to state that 'you can take the boy out of his collectivist past, but you can't take the collectivist past out of the boy'[220]. These acts strengthen Jackson's role as an affect alien with a revolutionary consciousness, especially in contrast to other characters in the novel such as Tracy's parents, whose desperate attempts to climb the social ladder backfire in comic and sadly ironic ways. Tracy describes Dorothy Waterhouse as having an accent that she thought of as 'aspirational'[221], but her attempts to buy into the capitalist dreams of her society only lead to disappointment. We are told that, while pregnant with Tracy, Dorothy hoped for a baby boy, and that she and her husband chose to attend a private maternity hospital to give their child 'a better start in life' than an NHS ward could provide:

---

[218] Barthes, p.139.
[219] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 84.
[220] Atkinson, p. 85.

> The maternity hospital was so underheated that Dorothy Waterhouse came home with chilblains and the infant Tracy with croup. Still, they had mixed with a better class of mother and baby and that was the important thing.[222]

Unlike Jackson, Dorothy Waterhouse's aspirations stem from a snobbery imposed by buying into bourgeois ideology that is full of misplaced optimism. By paying unnecessarily for a private hospital, Dorothy essentially turns the birth of her child into a commodity, and the act of giving birth into something with an exchange value, and it is this act that allows the process to become one of cruel optimism. As Berlant observes:

> What usually gets returned in the exchange of desire embedded in things is merely, disappointingly, a brief episode, often with a thing as memento of the memory and not the actualization of desire.[223]

For Dorothy, it was no longer the desire to have a child that drove her act of giving birth, but having a child that allowed her to step in line with a 'better class' of person. By failing to deliver this aspirational desire, Tracy is destined to be a disappointment to her mother; she is simply the 'thing' that embodies the memory of the desire for better. Equally, by failing to note the ironic situation that Dorothy finds herself in of paying for an experience that falls short of the cheaper alternative, she fails to see the existence of the bourgeois veil and continues to follow 'the process of remaining unsatisfied' in a life under capitalism[224]. She continues to invest in the 'normative promises of capital' and in doing so makes normativity itself seem aspirational'[225]; in one example she throws an unsuccessful dinner party when her husband gets a 'significant promotion' and has to invite neighbours and colleagues because they have no friends. Her lack of experience in throwing parties means that they put an end time on the invitation to ensure that people 'leave promptly' without realising that this could appear inhospitable, and then embarrassingly run out of food halfway through the evening. Tracy sees the 'banality of the occasion' as depressing[226]; this is not an exciting exploration into an unknown world, this is banal, disappointing, aspirational normativity.

---

[221] Atkinson, p. 235.
[222] Atkinson, p. 395.
[223] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 42.
[224] Berlant, p. 42.
[225] Berlant, p. 170.

Tracy, when recalling details about her parents, shows a contempt reminiscent of that shown by Ruby towards Bunty in *Behind The Scenes*; theirs was yet another example of a traditional family unit which was far from perfect:

> Her parents had been over forty when Tracy was born, already old before their time. 'We'd given up,' her mother said, as if it had been a relief to do so. 'And then you came along.'
>
> Her parents had been too much at war with each other to bother with their child. They had battled passively, locked together in silent hostility while Tracy lived in the solitary confinement of the only child.[227]

While *Behind The Scenes* allows the reader to gradually realise that Bunty, the 'evil' mother of the narrative, is actually suffering from depression that is ignored or misread by the untrustworthy narration of Ruby, *Started Early's* presentation of Dorothy remains unsympathetic. We are not given a view from her perspective at any point, and the ironic errors that seem to follow all of her attempts to socialise feel comic, as if Atkinson is encouraging us to laugh at her. It could be that Atkinson uses irony here as a device to point 'to a contrast between conventional surface reality and the possibility of another set of truths'[228]; we need to see the comic failure of Dorothy to witness the contrasting success of her daughter Tracy who refuses to follow the same path.

Mcdermott states that Atkinson's 'forays into the "demythologising business" are tempered by an accompanying narrative longing to recover and mend the family, if only via memory and imagination; and an attempt to restore wholeness by some kind of offer of substitution and restitution'[229]. In *Started Early* Atkinson does not attempt to 'mend', even through memory, any of the families broken by tragedy or unfortunate event, but an 'offer of substitution and restitution' is made over and again through a variety of means. Jackson cannot save his sister but he can attempt to save others, he cannot find her killer but he can bring other bad men to justice. Tracy cannot satisfy her mother as a daughter should, cannot have a family of her own, but she can provide hope to an unwanted child and in the process find some happiness herself. Jackson cannot solve or correct the history of subjugation of the working classes, he cannot make the shattered images and histories of the 'disunited' kingdom align coherently, but he can view them as of equal value and in doing so, restore a sense of truth by seeing through the myth. Atkinson's presentation of a broken and naïve society demythologises the dichotomies that rely upon each other to hold up the myth; that of good versus evil and worthy versus unworthy, and in return shows us the world of frayed fantasies as discussed by Berlant. In this scenario of the stretched out moment, the image of the evil Ripper is as much a fantasy as that of the happy housewife; buying into these fantasies can only prompt disappointment as one realises that it is not the sole psychopath who poses the greatest danger, but the ones who perform the objective violence which becomes 'the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence'[230].

---

[226] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 399-400.
[227] Atkinson, p. 97.
[228] Domínguez García, p. 152.
[229] McDermott, p. 68.

The hope that the novel provides is through the characters that move on and retain hope through the sense that a future is possible. These are the characters who embrace the position of happenstance rather than buying into the fantasies peddled by the society in which they live; as Ahmed states, 'The happy future is the future of the perhaps.'[231].

---

[230] Žižek, p. 2.

[231] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 198.

Chapter 3: Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*

The novels discussed so far in this thesis deal with contemporary time and space by placing their narratives within the neoliberal present, and yet play with this temporal space to create contrasting realities and pathways through life. Both cross temporal planes; *Hotel World* forms a convergence of past and future, life and death, within the non-places of the present, while *Started Early* creates a stretched out present which encapsulates an affective experience of living within a prolonged moment of crisis and change. The third novel, *Beyond Black*, will be considered by this chapter as an extension of both of these; not only does it deal with the topic of social trauma and flash backwards and forwards in time to tell the story of Alison and her acceptance of her own traumatic past, but the narrative itself fits within a multitude of temporal spaces and realities.

This chapter will argue that *Beyond Black* can be read as a counternarrative to neoliberalism in its presentation of social crisis, environmental crisis, and through the protagonist's personal experience of economic and affective precarity. As in *Started Early,* female specific precarity underlies the whole narrative in relation to themes of sexual abuse, prostitution and the presentation of 'failed' mothers, but this is suplemented with a sense of a failing world, a discordant society, and an everpresent sense of supernatural evil.

This chapter will investigate the way in which the experiences of the contemporary world are presented in *Beyond Black* as a form of 'crisis ordinariness'[1], considering how the themes of suspension and trauma are used by Mantel to explore what it is like to live in millennial Britain. By presenting the 'ordinary' world as we know it through Alison's super-perceptive eyes, we are shown the darkness that the characters of the novel tend to ignore or be oblivious to, pointing to the idea that perhaps the biggest aspect of fantasy in the novel is the concept of normality itself.

On a superficial level there are two clear realities which are presented in *Beyond Black*: the world of the living and the world of the dead. Alison, the protagonist, is a medium who acts as the conduit between the two; allowing people to speak to their late relatives and the ghosts who have passed to communicate with the living. Unlike in Mantel's previous work, such as *Fludd*[2] and *Every Day is Mother's Day*[3], at no point is the reader truly encouraged to question these realities; Colette, Alison's assistant, occasionally shows some cynicism but even she is gradually convinced of Alison's abilities and therefore the genuine manifestation of an afterlife. As Alison says to her, 'it doesn't matter if you're a bit sceptical [...] it doesn't matter what you think, it doesn't matter what I think – what happens, happens all the same'[4].

---

[1] Berlant, p. 81.

[2] Hilary Mantel, *Fludd* (London and New York: Harper Perennial, 1989).

[3] Hilary Mantel, *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (London: Penguin, 1986).

[4] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 91.

By introducing this second reality, Mantel does more than just present a dichotomous world. The presentation of a possible second realm creates a disturbance in the realities of the 'real' world – nothing is as it seems, the mundane becomes strange and the abnormal becomes everyday. Reality becomes a spectrum of possibilities, and on the whole these possibilities are presented as both modern and timeless in nature. The afterlife imagined by Alison, for example, is an 'eventless realm' that has an air of 1950s nostalgia about it; and yet we are told that the dead 'have no sense of time' or place, they are beyond geography and history'[5]. At the same time, this strangely nostalgic and yet timeless place is haunted by 'low level' spirits[6] who work for Old Nick (The Devil) by 'chasing out all spooks what are asylum seekers, derelicts, vagrants and refugees'. Theirs is an existence which mirrors the contemporary neoliberal sphere of the living: Nick, we are told, is management; he sets targets, he expects his workers to follow procedure, and if the paperwork is not done correctly he 'will take a pencil and ram it through your earhole'. These worlds often appear to cross over; such as when the low spirits seep into the world of the living to scare Mrs Etchells, Alison's mentor, to death[7], or to convince her friend, a homeless man, Mart, to hang himself[8]. The darkness that Alison sees 'airside' is reflected in the world of the living, and her presence enables the barriers between these worlds to seem thinner, or less substantial.

In the interview included with the novel, Mantel herself acknowledges that the central preoccupation of *Beyond Black* is the 'mystery that lies behind the visible world'; she asks:

> is the world as we see it, or are there competing and overlapping realities? […] I feel as if I am conscious all the time of different realities that are forming and reforming and humming about one's head, and this restless and quite frightening idea […] absolutely suffuses *Beyond Black*.[9]

Mantel's suggestion that these realities are 'frightening' and mysterious, along with her acknowledgement that in virtually all of her books there is 'a slight edge of the supernatural' could lead one to suggest that *Beyond Black* is an example of contemporary Gothic literature. Catherine Spooner has observed that Mantel's writing regularly uses Gothic vocabulary[10], but as Sara Knox discerns, this does not make her a 'writer of the Gothic'. Knox defines her work rather as 'super-realist – as *fantastically* real':

---

[5] Mantel, p. 43-4.
[6] Mantel, p. 193.
[7] Mantel, pp. 384-386.
[8] Mantel, p. 445.
[9] Sarah O'Reilly, 'A Kind of Alchemy: Sarah O'reilly Talks to Hilary Mantel', in *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), pp. 2-6, p. 6.
[10] Catherine Spooner, ''That Eventless Realm': Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* and the Ghosts of the M25', in *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination,* ed. by Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 80-90.

> She portrays Britain (or Britons abroad) without mythologising or nostalgia, writing fiction in which the problem of belonging is most starkly drawn in those spheres that define it: home, neighbourhood, region, nation. […] By writing a world that includes the dead, Mantel is simply (although I use that word advisedly) deepening her themes of belonging, exclusion and exile.[11]

Beyond Black's main protagonists, Alison and Colette, both feel that they do not belong. The narrative follows them attempting to assimilate in society; they buy a house in a new suburban site designed for families and young professionals, make Alison's business more professional, and hide the truly gruesome aspects of Alison's gift in order to fit in and be accepted, and yet none of their plans work. They are not the only ones to feel excluded; the margins on which Alison makes her living, the motorways, are part of a 'landscape running with outcasts and escapees, with Afghans, Turks and Kurds: with scapegoats'[12]. The naming of these outcasts as nationalities that we associate with the wars that have plagued the last few decades draws in the precise political and temporal setting of this world: it is a world of terrorism, a world of displacement, a world of 'others'. Spooner describes this space as 'a dead zone in which community is fragmented and memory lost, swallowed by an affectless consumer culture'; a space which ranges from Augé's non-places of Supermodernity to the inhospitable, hostile spaces of the 'outer suburbs'[13]. Added to this, the spirits of 'airside' manifest as the truest examples of the outcast; continually attempting to break back into the world they once knew, they remind us that as horrible as the wastelands of the London orbital are, they are nothing compared to what may well await us 'beyond black'.

Many of these features of *Beyond Black* utilise aspects of the gothic; the 'wild and elemental natural settings, the gloom of the graveyard and ruin'[14] noted by Fred Botting as standard features of the eighteenth-century gothic novel are transposed onto the non-places and outskirts of contemporary Britain. The gothic castle, a 'realm of morbidity and madness, the eerie and the weird' is modernised into the semi-detached home in Aldershot where Alison grew up with a cruel mother and the 'fiends' who tortured and abused her. The novel utilises 'the condensed associative and emotional powers of archetypal symbols' of the gothic noted by Rita Felski; her examples include 'houses, veils, fathers, virgins', most of which make an appearance in *Beyond Black* as well as many of Mantel's other novels. Where the novel separates from the gothic is by presenting a sense of a journey of self development in Alison, a journey which contradicts the tradition noted by Felski of the gothic being 'not about the formation of the self

---

[11] Sara Knox, 'Giving Flesh to the 'Wraiths of Violence'; Super-Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', *Australian Feminist Studies,* 25.65 (2010), pp. 313-323 (p. 314).

[12] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 1.

[13] Spooner, pp. 81-82.

[14] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 24.

(*Bildung)*, but a psychic scattering of the self, a return to a condition of de-individuation and formlessness'[15].

Alison's use of the Tarot throughout the narrative allows for the presentation of archetypes often imagined in gothic fiction – The Devil, The Tower, Death – to be visualised as part of a journey of understanding; as Sallie Nichols observes in her exploration of Jungian archetypes in Tarot, 'a journey through the Tarot cards is primarily a journey into our own depths. Whatever we encounter is *au fond* an aspect of our own deepest, and highest, self'[16]. Whilst the journey that Alison experiences could be described as a 'psychic gathering of the self', almost a re-gathering from the gothic scattering that appears to have taken place in her life before the narrative begins, it is also a journey which explores and explains the psychic state of contemporary society. The gothic images and archetypes that saturate this novel, therefore, are utilised by Mantel to explore the concepts of trauma, both personal and collective, through the language of the ghost story. In this sense, Mantel's novel follows the trend of reinventing the Gothic horror which Lucie Armitt identifies in late twentieth-century examples of the genre; she notes the gothic significance of the 'monster narratives the media constructs around 'the paedophile', 'the child abductor', 'the child murdered', 'the child abuser' which play on our nocturnal fears, 'monsters' who appear in great numbers in *Beyond Black*. Armitt also argues that late twentieth-century haunting 'takes on a more psychological (perhaps also a more metaphorical) dimension'[17] than earlier examples, a point that can certainly be applied to Mantel's writing in relation to the tracking of trauma through regression.

Through *Beyond Black*, Mantel is presenting the reader with a world in which neoliberal services, laws and ethics are not only limiting and ineffective, but are actively dangerous. The environmental decay that becomes ever present resembles a hellish uprising, the non places of the industrial past and social past are described as haunted wastelands where ghosts hover, and the living who do not see these dimensions carry on in their world with fear misdirected toward the immigrants and the impoverished. While some characters, such as the homeless, hapless Mart, suffer a more precarious existence than others, the general sense is that everyone is teetering on the edge of an abyss. In *Beyond Black*, life itself is a precarious balance between what is known and what lies beneath.

---

[15] Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 153.

[16] Sallie Nichols, *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey* (Maine: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1980), p. 1.

[17] Lucie Armitt, *History of the Gothic: Twentieth-Century Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 3.

In-between-ness

Alison forms a connection between earth-side and ‘airside’, between the present and the past, and between a person’s conscious and subconscious mind. Through forming this connection, Alison becomes a bridge of communication; she links the possibilities of these juxtaposed spatial and conceptual opposites through her skills of intuition. There is an innately disembodied quality to the connection between the contrasting spaces of the real and the imaginary in *Beyond Black*, the spaces of life and the afterlife; there is not simply a border between these worlds because they are on different planes of existence, and therefore Alison’s role as communicator between these two planes is equally inherently abstract. She sees and hears the spirits that the living step on and walk through, she delivers messages from the dead to the living and vice versa because they cannot speak to each other; they are in the same physical area, but through abstraction of space they dwell in different worlds.

In his discussion of spectral epistemology in *Beyond Black* and *Fludd*, Wolfgang Funk has gone so far as to describe Alison’s manifestation in the novel as ‘a catalyst, a ghost of possibility’, arguing that ‘through her powers she herself acquires spectral status’; she embodies ‘a symbol of the what-if of another economy of being’[18], she is a ‘doorway’. Throughout the novel her engagement with the spirits, such as locating the spirit of Maureen Harrison for a spirit that kept asking for her[19] or pushing through the ‘spirit imposters’ and impersonators to find the genuine spirits[20], involves her acting as more than just a channel for the spirit world; she is an active agent within the process of communication. The hints that she is the daughter of the Devil which occur towards the end of the novel also indicate a sense of unknown, untapped power that could make her role even greater in the future, and her presence even more abstract: she is an unknowable entity, and a truly marginal character whose presence resides neither in the present world or the afterlife. She is both human and spectral, good with the power to be diabolical.

Alison’s ability to psychically enter another plane of existence allows her to see the world differently from others. She is aware that many of her colleagues are frauds, and when questioned on the difference between ‘a clairaudient and an aura reader’, she answers:

> ‘No great difference, my dear, it’s not the instrument you choose that matters, it’s not the method, it’s not the technique, it’s your attunement to a higher reality.’ But what she really wanted to do

---

[18] Wolfgang Funk, 'Ghosts of Postmodernity: Spectral Epistemology and Haunting in Hilary Mantel's *Fludd* and *Beyond Black*', in *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now,* ed. by Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hilyard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 147-60, p. 158.

[19] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 249.

[20] Mantel, p. 150.

> was lean across the table and say, you know what's the difference, the difference between them and me? Most of them can't do it, and I can.[21]

As a true psychic in a world of fakes she experiences the darkness; she knows and understands the truth of the multiplicity of worlds around us, and it is her role to communicate (or withhold) that information:

> 'When I work with the tarot, I generally feel as if the top of my head has been taken off with a tin-opener.' […] She couldn't explain to Colette how it felt to read for a client: even if it was just psychology. You start out, you start talking, you don't know what you're going to say. You don't even know your way to the end of the sentence. You don't know anything. Then suddenly you do know. You have to walk blind. And then you walk slap into the truth.[22]

In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant discusses two novels which contain female characters who have 'supersensitive capacities for apprehension'; capacities which go beyond the 'supersensorium associated with "women's intuition,"' that claim 'access to the affectsphere's unstated intimate truths'[23]. In the cases explored by Berlant the women's skills relate to structural causality which is different to Alison in *Beyond Black*, but while Alison's skills relate more to the unseen world of the afterlife than the current world, she still manages to 'make a living' from her intuitive skills, and so has 'professionalized' her ability as they have[24]. Essentially the roles performed by these women fit within the same bracket as that of Alison in *Beyond Black*; they see the world in a different way to those around them, and by doing so generate new ways to survive in a sphere saturated with trauma. Alison's awareness of the traumatic state of the world in relation to environmental factors, terrorism, and 'evil' present in the realm 'beyond black' makes her see life itself as precarious.

Mantel states that '*Beyond Black* is about the terror of living below consciousness, of going down every day and every night into the realm where the demons are and where the bodies are buried'[25], a concept which appears at once both psychological and spatial. This chapter will explore the breadth of this concept by analysing the novel in relation to Berlant's concepts of the impasse and intuition, and Ahmed's discussions on passing through precarious spaces and the language of fear. Whilst the two theorists take different approaches to their presentation of affect theory, as with the previous two chapters their concepts will be entwined to explore both the larger thematic concepts of surviving in the modern age, and the more detailed phenomenological approaches required to see one's way through the newly articulated spaces of the twenty-first century.

---

[21] Mantel, p. 172.
[22] Mantel, p. 262.
[23] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 70.
[24] Berlant, p. 54.
[25] O'Reilly, p. 9.

'The time of Le Pendu'

The opening of *Beyond Black* sets the novel in a moment of suspension. This sense of waiting, hesitating, whilst visualised through the character of Alison, feels as if it is larger than the story of one character. It is not her life that is presented as in suspension, it is time itself:

> Night and winter: but in the rotten nests and empty setts, she can feel the sign of growth, intimations of spring. This is the time of Le Pendu, the Hanged Man, swinging by his foot from the living tree. It is a time of suspension, of hesitation, of the indrawn breath. It is a time to let go of expectation, yet not abandon hope; to anticipate the turn of the Wheel of Fortune. This is our life and we have to lead it. Think of the alternative. [26]

As with most of the imagery utilised by Mantel in *Beyond Black,* this is a complicated, layered presentation of positivity wrapped up in negativity: whilst the current state is one of 'night and winter', 'rotten' and 'empty', there is optimism visualised in the 'signs of growth'. Whilst we are encouraged by Alison from the outset of the story to 'not abandon hope', the idea that we have any control over what will occur is taken away: this is a world of fate dependent on the 'wheel of fortune', the only reason given for hope is the fear of the 'alternative', one of despair.

Ahmed explains that 'hope is an investment that the "lines" we follow will get us somewhere'[27]; it is entangled with the concept of happiness, and the act of looking to the future. Hope is 'a wish and expectation that a desired possibility is 'becoming actual"[28]. This concept is somewhat paradoxical in the opening of *Beyond Black*; not only are we introduced to Alison in a time of suspension, therefore a time that feels like it is without future, we are also introduced to someone who has the ability to read the future, but is overwhelmed by her skills: messages 'arrive at random. You don't want them but you can't send them back'. Alison, and by extension the world around her, are caught in a cyclical pattern on the M1 motorway with 'its wastes looping London' in the 'dank oily days after Christmas'[29]. If hope is investment in following lines to get somewhere, then being caught on a repetitive circular road suggests that hope is futile, and yet it cannot be abandoned. The mention of the Tarot card, *Le Pendu*, famously used by Eliot in *The*

---

[26] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 2.
[27] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 18.
[28] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 182.
[29] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 1.

Waste Land[30], is the twelfth trump card that falls 'midway in life's journey'[31] and symbolises the sense of suspension introduced by Mantel, that moment of 'indrawn breath'. As Spooner observes, Eliot's damned souls walking 'round in a ring' are mirrored by both the dead and living inhabitants of *Beyond Black*, especially the 'drivers on the London Orbital'[32].

In her Jungian reading of the Tarot, Nicholls describes the man in the image as 'suspended between the twin poles of all existence: birth and death'[33], hanging over an 'eternal abyss'. Whilst this description suggests that feeling suspended is interchangeable with feeling helpless, the suggestion that is delivered by the novel is that Alison's awareness of the suspension gives her some power to move through it. In this sense, Alison's experience of the suspension described as the setting for the novel arguably resembles Berlant's concept of 'impasse'. Berlant explains that, whilst the term 'impasse' usually refers to a 'time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward', her definition has more agency:

> the impasse is a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event.[34]

Alison is the only character in *Beyond Black* who has the skills of 'hypervigilance' which allow her to clarify what is going on in the world around her; all others appear to be moving through the present in a 'dithering' way, surviving in the ongoing present by 'walking round in a ring'. In this sense, she is the only one truly aware of the precarity faced by humanity.

The suspended world that Mantel presents in this novel is a complex amalgamation of different spaces and times, not just in relation to an afterlife which borders the world of the living, but in its presentation of history within the sphere of the 'everyday'. There is a disjunction between the past and present, dramatized through the public who cannot remember their family history and Alison who tries not to remember hers, and there is a further contrast between the non-places of supermodernity and the ghosts of the near past who are lost in the spaces of the contemporary world. Added to this are the foreboding messages of environmental contamination that create a sense of Berlant's extended, traumatic 'stretched out now' which feels as if it will solidify as an event in the near future. These are the spaces and temporalities that Alison must learn to navigate and make sense of.

---

[30] T.S Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Broadview Press, 2011), p. 63.
[31] Sallie Nichols, 'The Hanged Man: Suspense', *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought,* 10.2 (1979), 191-202 (p. 191).
[32] Spooner, p. 82.
[33] Nichols, 'The Hanged Man', p. 194.
[34] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 6.

Suspended time 'beyond geography and history'[35]

Alison makes the non-places of the neoliberal world her home: travelling the motorways of southern England, the 'hubs' of her business are 'the conurbations that cluster around the junctions of the M25, and the corridors of the M3 and M4'[36]. She keeps out of London where she can, preferring the suburbs of 'Bromley and Harrow and Kingston upon Thames', and chooses to live in a new-build house on a suburban housing estate, the kind of development which Augé describes as characterizing the 'peripheral zones or outskirts' of a place, 'where people do not live together and which is never situated in the centre of anything[37]. When she travels, Alison tries to avoid staying in older hotels which tend to be haunted with 'loneliness and guilt and regret':

> What Alison prefers is somewhere new-built and anonymous, part of some reliable chain. She hates history: unless it's on the television, safe behind glass. She won't thank you for a night in a place with beams. 'Sod the inglenooks,' she once said, after an exhausting hour tussling with an old corpse in a sheet.[38]

Beams and inglenooks are clichéd symbols of history, ones that attract customers and encourage them to pay more for hotel rooms. The irony with Alison is that for her, history is alive through the spirits she must communication and 'tussle' with. For someone who cannot escape the past, non places provide respite through their lack of history.

Augé notes that the reorganization of space caused by the creation of bypasses and motorway routes tends 'to short-circuit the historical context by avoiding the monuments that embody it'[39]. Alison embraces this aspect of the supermodern thoroughfares, but rather than avoiding the 'monuments' that embody the historical context of the old towns, she is evading the spirits that loiter around them.

The few anthropological places (as opposed to non-places) that Alison works in are not pleasant: the 'crumbling civic buildings from the sixties and seventies' built before the dismantling of the welfare state that she tours have 'exoskeletons in permanent need of patching: tiles raining from their roofs, murals stickily ungluing from their walls'[40]. Civic centres were a

---

[35] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 44.
[36] Mantel, p. 10.
[37] Augé, p. 107.
[38] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 41.
[39] Augé, p. 68.
[40] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 10.

Modernist attempt to answer a need for replacements of the monuments of history in the modern world; in the 1940s, Elizabeth Mock, a professor of Architecture, called for buildings 'which raise the everyday casualness of living to a higher and more ceremonial plane', while architectural critic Sigfried Giedion focused on 'the need for civic centres symbolizing the idea of 'community'' through providing a place for festivals and celebration of the arts[41]. These buildings were designed to provide a space which embodied a sense of community that was becoming lost in the new towns of post-war urbanization, but the spaces that Alison works in have been allowed to become out-dated and run-down. Just as neoliberalism halted the post-war social democratic promises of social mobility and welfare provisions, so investment in these places designed to promote community has been gradually withdrawn, leaving them to crumble and decay along with the communities they were meant to support. This presentation of Alison's workplaces parallels Tyler's observations that successive neoliberal governments have enacted policies that have 'fractured communities' and 'decomposed the fabric of social life'[42].

It is within these buildings that Alison plies her trade of providing people with a link to their own genealogical history through communication with the spirits of those who have passed, although her task is not an easy one. Alison faces difficulty in her role because of her audiences' lack of knowledge of their own personal history; in attempting to pass a message to one client, a 'young lass of seventeen or so' from her grandmother, the girl claims that 'she didn't think she had a granny', prompting sniggers from the audience. Her silliness, 'deeper than average', makes her refuse to entertain the idea that the spirit named Kathleen might be her relative, and leaves Alison with no choice but to tell her to go home and ask her mum what her granny was called and where she lived: 'then you'll know, won't you, that she was here for you tonight?'. The contrast made between the silly girl, 'hung about with unnecessary buttons and bows, her hair in twee little bunches' and the 'panting and striving' spirit of Kathleen is unambiguous; Kathleen is a ghost from Britain's industrial history, a woman from a town 'shrouded in a northern smog' whose 'wheezy goodwill' goes unacknowledged by her granddaughter who, one assumes, has never had to struggle up a hill with a 'bagful of potatoes'. Alison acknowledges that this type of reaction from members of her audience is not unusual, and the way that the towns are described makes them take on the sense of Augé's non- place as single, unified entity:

> It was not uncommon to find family memory so short, in these towns where nobody comes from, these south-eastern towns with their floating populations and their car parks where the centre should be. Nobody has roots here; and maybe they don't want to acknowledge their roots, or recall

---

[41] Alan Colquhoun, *Oxford History of Art: Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2002), p. 213.

[42] Tyler, p. 7.

> their grimy places of origin and their illiterate foremothers up north. These days, besides, the kids don't remember back more than eighteen months – the drugs, she supposed.[43]

It is not simply that these towns contain non-places such as shopping malls and car parks; these 'towns where nobody comes from' are places of transit with no room for history[44] and are non-places themselves. Kathleen's presence highlights how the concept of 'roots' and belonging to a community are linked; she is wandering the afterlife looking for family but also attempting to locate her friend Maureen who she has been looking for 'this thirty year'[45]. The people sitting in the hall do not know each other, even though they all live in the same town. There is some reciprocal recognition when Alison delivers messages to individual members of her audience, but generally these towns are presented as, to use Berlant's words, 'an inoperative community, a community in affective proximity'[46].

The lack of 'roots' in these towns not only detach the living from a sense of historical context or attachment but the ghost populations equally appear to 'float', forcing Alison and Colette to stay clear of the centres of the towns:

> They tried to avoid the high streets and shopping malls of the denatured towns, because of the bewildered dead clustered among the skips outside the burger bars, clutching door keys in their hands, or queuing with their lunch boxes where the gates of small factories once stood, where machines once whirred and chugged behind sooty panes of old glass. There are thousands of them out there, so pathetic and lame-brained that they can't cross the road to get where they're going, dithering on the kerbs of new arterial roads and bypasses, as the vehicles swish by: congregating under railway arches and under the stairwells of multi-storey car parks, thickening the air at the entrance to underground stations.[47]

The non-places of supermodernity have transformed the places of the past so much that the ghosts cannot recognise where they are anymore; the spirits are presented here as if they are vagrants, they are unwelcome in the present and yet they have nowhere else to go, so they hover, ignored. Like Kathleen, they hail from Britain's relatively recent industrial past, but the memories of this past have been erased by the replacement of factories with shops dedicated to the service industry, a reminder of the 'epochal shift from industrial to neoliberal modes of capitalism' as noted by Tyler[48].

---

[43] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 16-17.
[44] Augé, p. 103.
[45] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 17.
[46] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 254.
[47] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 265-6.
[48] Tyler, p. 5.

In his discussion of spectral metaphors, Daniel Erickson observes that the role of the 'ghost' in literary history, in particular the gothic tradition, has been one of 'unfinished business', the manifestation of 'unresolved problems and conflicts of the past', but in *Beyond Black* these 'unresolved problems' are remarkable only in how unremarkable, even boring, they are. One spirit that Erickson considers in his analysis is the ghost of Hamlet's father, a perfect example of a spirit returning 'to seek retribution'[49], but the lost ghosts who try to communicate with Alison 'elbow her in the ribs with questions, always questions: but never the right ones'. They want to know mundane, every day things:

> Always, where's my pension book, has the number 64 gone, are we having a fry-up this morning? Never, am I dead? When she puts them right on that, they want to know how it happened, trying to glean some sense out of it, trying to throw a slippery bridge over the gap between time and eternity. 'I had just plugged in the iron,' a woman would say, 'and I was just starting on the left sleeve of Jim's blue-striped shirt... of his... our Jim... of his stripes...'[50]

When they do realise that they are dead and come with messages for Alison to pass on, these are just as ordinary and domestic in nature; the message that Kathleen wishes to pass to her granddaughter, for example:

> Something about a cardigan, she was saying. A certain class of dead people was always talking about cardigans. The button off it, the pearl button, see if it's dropped behind the dresser drawer, that little drawer, that top drawer, I found a threepenny bit there once, back of the drawer […] but tell her I want her mum to look for that button.[51]

The unfinished business that occupies these ghosts is of no importance or interest to the living; the messages they want to pass on resemble the ramblings of an old relative who is not visited enough by their family, a sad image of someone desperate to pass on something important but with nothing interesting to say, and who is therefore placated and snubbed by the living ('it's time to go, pet. Lie down, Kathleen. You go and have a nice lie-down'[52]).

Botting, referencing Angela Carter's statement that 'we live in gothic times', discusses how the gothic genre exists now in a 'normalised, commodified' way through fashion and entertainment, noting that 'everyday life is, of course, dominated by commodities, by goods, images or information'[53]. In the case of *Beyond Black*, it would seem that everyday death is also dominated by it, with memories of buttons, lost money, buses, even pension books haunting the dead.

---

[49] Daniel Erickson, *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitute* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

[50] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 266.

[51] Mantel, p. 17.

[52] Mantel, p. 17.

[53] Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 40.

This presentation of the 'pathetic and lame-brained' dead holds little similarity to the 'classic' gothic ghosts with unfinished business, but arguably has more in common with the shopping-mall zombies of George Romero's 1979 film *Dawn of the Dead*: 'undead bodies, returning to the scene of so many purchases are virtually indistinguishable in habit and action from their former living selves'[54]. The ghosts of *Beyond Black* are, like the zombies, repeating the habits of their living selves, but rather than seeming at home in the non-places like the recently dead consumer-zombies, they are confused by them, 'dithering' on the sides of roads and trying to find homes and work places that do not exist anymore. By forever following their ex-daily patterns of going to work, these spirits fit into a category of the gothic which is fundamentally linked to having lived in a world structured by capitalism, and in facing a daily purgatorial existence in which there is no work to go to, their actions echo the role of the precariat, forced to eternally endure outside the formal capitalist system.

The world of *Beyond Black* is one that, to use Berlant's words, comprises an overwhelming ordinary disorganized by capitalism; it is an 'intersecting space where many forces and histories circulate'[55], but as discussed above, the histories are often hidden or erased by neoliberal progress and the proliferation of non-places. Spooner believes that '*Beyond Black* poses the question: what does it mean to be haunted in a culture with no history? If a society has no interest in its personal and collective past, then in what form can that past return?'[56]. This thesis would suggest that rather than a culture with *no* history, Mantel presents a culture which, through being organised by the 'world-standard time demanded by capital'[57], consists of histories and clashing temporalities that are hidden under the uneven time of capitalism. Berlant, in reference to Harootunian's work on the historical present, explains that:

> Capitalism always blocks the development of a historical sense that can grasp the structural determinations that constitute the present, engendering a distorted apprehension of pastness and a devastating misrecognition of how contemporary forces work.[58]

It is not that these places have no history, it is that the history that is there is smoothed over temporally through patterns of the everyday organized by capital and calendar time, and spatially by the layout of these modern towns. One example of this relates to peoples' relationship with, and memories of, previous generations; Augé tells us that in older towns and villages ‘the intimacy between the living and the dead was once expressed in more everyday fashion’, because ‘the church, surrounded by the cemetery, lay at the very centre of active social life’[59]. It is not only that a town that has ‘car parks where the centre should be’[60] and favours consumerism over religion, but that by removing the concept of the past through memorials from the centre of everyday life, they distort that ‘apprehension of pastness’ related to the memory of previous generations. Considered from another angle, the space that was once designed to allow people time to sit, ponder, even pray, has been replaced by a concrete arena that requires visitors to pay by the hour to stop. There is no chance to rest and remember any more; even this act now has a price.

---

[54] Botting, p. 135.
[55] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 9.
[56] Spooner, p. 81.
[57] Harootunian, p. 474.
[58] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 67-8.

Mantel herself raises the lack of time or space that contemporary society gives a person to mourn as an issue in an article for *The Guardian*. She explains that we deal with death badly in our society, unlike the Victorians who ‘knew how to do it’ with ‘black horses and plumes’ and the ‘black clothes of full mourning’:

> But now it's a 20-minute slot at the crematorium, a half-day off work, a funeral sparsely attended by gormless people standing around in anoraks, shuffling their feet in embarrassment and singing "My Way".[61]

It is not only that the contemporary capitalist world blocks ‘the development of a historical sense’, it does not even allow you a full day off work to remember someone who has recently passed. In this sense, it is not surprising that memory, and therefore concepts of personal history, becomes so limited in these towns.

Augé notes that the non-place, associated with late capitalism[62], has no room ‘for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle’[63], and as the novel continues, this begins to become the case for those non-place satellite conurbations where Alison’s clients reside. The audiences do not begin to become more receptive to Alison’s messages of and about the past, but they do begin to engage more in a disingenuous way following the break out of ‘a plague of psychic shows’ on television, ‘crawling all over the schedules’:

> In the days when she and Al first got together […] the punters squirmed when they were fingered; they twitched in their seats, desperate to foist the message on to the person next to them or the person in front or just behind. But now, when they came to a dem, the TV shows had tuned up their expectations, they couldn’t wait for their messages. When a sensitive asked, ‘Who’s got a Mike in

---

[59] Augé, p. 66.
[60] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 17.
[61] Hilary Mantel, 'Ghost Writing', *The Guardian,* 28 July 2007 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jul/28/edinburghfestival2007.poetry> [accessed 28 August 2016].
[62] Buchanan, 'Non-Places', p. 397.
[63] Augé, p. 103.

> the spirit world?' fifty hands would shoot into the air. They yelled, cheered, embraced each other, made faces for the camera even though there wasn't one. They shouted, 'Oh my Gahhd!' when a message came through, and burst into grating sobs and dodgy howls.[64]

The phrasing of the word 'Gahhd!' suggests that the shows are either American imports or replicas of them, and the presentation of the audience's reactions is crass and comically insincere. Like the concept of 'temporal coincidence' noted by Harootunian where 'people who don't know each other are linked together in a temporal simultaneity made possible by reading daily newspapers or novels'[65]; the shows imported from the US create a link for the viewers with the TV participants that suggests it is easier for them to relate to a stranger from thousands of miles away in the present than it is to receive a message from someone they knew, were related to, who has passed on. History has become a spectacle, and by emulating another of the forms of communication mentioned by Augé, the TV game show, which derives popularity from 'giving rich prizes of travel and accommodation'[66], history also appears to have become a 'prize', and therefore a commodity which holds a quantifiable 'value'. The audience have become impersonators of celebrity culture, making faces for the camera that is not there, and yet the messages that come through are as mundane as they ever were, as Augé says: 'the spectacle is only an idea, only a word'[67]. This switch in audience response prompts the further commodification of history through new events that Alison becomes involved in, 'psychic hen parties' where they offer 'goody bags for the clients to take away' including mini aromatic oils and a candle in a tin. As Mandy, one of Alison's colleagues, says: 'It's time we started offering something to the punters that they can't get from satellite TV […] we have to reinstate the personal touch'[68].

The Historical Present

Despite the many ways that *Beyond Black* appears to display history as blocked, swept over and turned into a spectacle by the contemporary world, the fact that Alison herself is aware of the truth of what is beyond black arguably puts Mantel's writing in line with Berlant's and Harootunian's call for writers to 'produce as the present a sense of noncontemporaneous contemporaneity'. The mere suggestion that there are other worlds in her writing helps to produce what Berlant demands:

---

[64] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 319-320.
[65] Harootunian, p. 475.
[66] Augé, p. 95.
[67] Augé, p. 104.
[68] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 324-325.

> a history of the forces that bear on the everyday and interrupt its appearance of apparent homogeneity to reveal cracks in the local experience of life that can be mobilized toward alternative imaginaries. [69]

Harootunian, in his discussions of the historical present, argues for viewing history as a 'constant concourse of mixed temporalities mingling and coexisting with each other'[70], where 'past and present are not necessarily successive but simultaneously produced or co-exist as uneven temporalities'[71]. He labels the 'noncontemporaneous contemporary'[72] a figure from outside of 'the homogenous time associated with both capital and nation form'. This figure is described many times by Harootunian as a spectre, a 'repressed revenant', a ghost; it is a figure 'that has come back to haunt the present in the incarnate form of explosive fundamentalisms fusing the archaic and the modern'[73]:

> In this drama of uneven temporalities – the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous – the past will be seen to break into […] the seemingly eternal present in the form of memoration, often acting as a revenant or ghostly spectre of the past bent on haunting and destabilizing the present[74]

For Harootunian, the historical present is 'the scene where the ghosts of the past comingle daily with the living (a little like the cohabitation of dead and living labor), in a habitus of a haunted house'[75].

In the context of *Beyond Black*, figures that embody post 9/11 fundamentalism that we most readily recognize post 9/11 hide in the 'ditches' that track the M25, 'fundis hoarding fertilizer' and 'fanatics brewing bombs', but the actual ghosts who manifest as spectres of 'the past bent on haunting and destabilizing the present' are the fiends of Alison's childhood. These ghosts represent many aspects of history and society that neoliberalism has no time for; they are members of a lower working class that is 'dead' in a neoliberal state where people 'no longer identify with nineteenth-century class names'[76], they are travellers, 'the quintessential outsiders'[77], and they are vicious, paedophilic murderers. The 'cracks in the local experience of life' presented in *Beyond Black*, embodied by these spirits, reveal a parallel temporality suffused with a sense of evil; as Elizabeth Lowry observes in her review of the novel:

---

[69] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 68.

[70] Harootunian, p. 490.

[71] Harry Harootunian, 'Shadowing History: National Narratives and the Persistence of the Everyday', *Cultural Studies,* 18.2-3 (2004) 181-200 (p. 193).

[72] Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', p. 480.

[73] Harootunian, pp. 475-476.

[74] Harootunian, 'Shadowing History', p. 193.

[75] Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', p. 478.

[76] Tyler, p. 156.

[77] Tyler, p. 133.

> There is a vacuum of meaning at the centre of this world. […]. Instead of trying to fill the gap, this disconcerting novel is saturated with the ghostly, in the wider sense of whatever has been corrupted, botched or lost – dismally attenuated lives, failed aspirations, psychological and physical maimings and mutilations, murders and abortions. Mantel appears to be saying that modern Britain is Hell.[78]

Alison's knowledge of the 'forces that bear on the everyday' make the presence of these alternative imaginaries within the world of *Beyond Black* unquestionable (at no point are we led to believe that Alison could be imagining the ghosts), but Alison does not wish to share the truth with any of her clients, or even her friend Colette, mainly in an attempt to protect them:

> There are things you need to know about the dead, she wanted to say. Things you really ought to know. […] They'll pull the rug from under you. They don't become decent people just because they're dead. People are right to be afraid of ghosts. […] And even though they needed the frightening, even though they deserved frightening, she would never, when she was with her clients, slip a hint or tip a wink about the true nature of the place beyond black.[79]

If the ghosts who hover in the towns looking for meaning are an echo of the precariat, then the ones who Alison fears, the spirits who operate 'on a very low level', are the equivalent of Marx's lumpenproletariat, the 'dangerous classes' who make up the 'lowest sediment of the relative surplus-population'[80]:

> They're only drifting about earthside because they've got nothing better to do. They're like those kids you see on sink estates hanging about parked cars – you don't know if they're going to break in and drive them away or just slash the tyres and scratch the paintwork. But why find out? Just don't go there.[81]

Initially we are introduced to Morris, Alison's guide, as a spirit that will make every attempt to cause upset to her and anyone else around her. He 'destabilizes' through doing 'mischief'; in travel stations he enjoys pulling off hubcaps, snapping off windscreen wipers, unhooking tarpaulins, loosening the straps of baby seats; in shops he tosses 'top-shelf magazines into the wire baskets of respectable dads queuing with their families for giant packs of crisps'[82]. He does not like the new build house that Alison moves to, or the neoliberal world that it is a symbol of, complaining that there is no cover in the garden for 'his nefarious activities' and begging to go back to Wexham:

---

[78] Elizabeth Lowry, 'The Trouble Is I'm Dead', *London Review of Books,* 27.10 (2005) 25-26 (p. 26).
[79] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 194.
[80] Marx, p. 450.
[81] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 193.
[82] Mantel, pp. 162-166.

> where the dog track used to be. We liked it because you could go out fighting, but here there ain't the possibility of fighting. There ain't a bit of land where you can set up a cockfight. Young Dean enjoys nicking cars, but you can't knick 'em, these buggers have all got alarms and Dean don't do alarms.[83]

There is a point of irony, however, when Morris and the Fiends appear to give up on subverting the neoliberal world, and find peace instead by buying into the late capitalist managerial model. Morris is invited on a course by Nick, who Alison eventually realises is the Devil, with a mission to 'track down useless and ugly people and recycle them':

> 'All spooks with no identification will be removed. It ain't good enough to say you've got nowhere to go. It ain't good enough to say that your documents fell through the hole in your breeches. […] It's no good trying to bamboozle us because we have got targets, because Nick set us targets, because we have got a clear up rate.'
>
> Al said, 'Is Nick management?'
>
> 'You're joking me!' Morris said. 'Is Nick management? He is the manager of us all. He is in charge of the whole blooming world. Don't you know nothing, girl?[84]

Mantel presents the reader with criminal revenants mirroring the modern managerial establishment; they adopt business lingo such as 'working towards equal opportunities for all'[85] and aim for promotion through hitting targets. As Lowry observes, 'Hell itself has bought into this culture of aspiration, offering its Fiends 'vouchers to spend on modifications' and 'family leisure breaks', and sending them on courses in human resources'[86].

One can only assume that the spooks the fiends will begin to remove are those hanging around dumpsters, lost in towns that they cannot navigate, those whose manifestation echoes the presence of the unwanted and disenfranchised in the living world, those 'groups of people "laid to waste" by neoliberal economic, political and social policies', suffering under what Tyler refers to as 'the politics of disposability' which characterizes contemporary Britain'[87]. Rather than undermining the idea that the ghosts of *Beyond Black* are echoes of Harootunian's 'spectres' of history, these acts appear to reinforce the need for a historical perspective by showing that despite their everyday, boring messages, spirits with 'nowhere to go' carry history with them. If the fiends succeed in wiping out all 'spooks with no identification', then the only spectres who will remain are the Fiends themselves; ghosts who ironically embody the neoliberal need to erase, clean up and turn history into a spectacle. The ghosts of the non-places may not break apart the 'seemingly eternal present' with explosives as fundamentalists do, but by delivering messages piecemeal through Alison, they are reminding people bit by bit of a history that is in danger of being erased forever.

---

[83] Mantel, pp. 244-245.
[84] Mantel, pp. 385-387.
[85] Mantel, p. 444.
[86] Lowry, p. 26.
[87] Tyler, p. 4-8.

If Mantel *is* telling us that 'modern Britain is Hell', which certainly seems to be the case, then at least Alison's escape from the Fiends and permanent rejection of Morris at the end of the novel suggests that an alternative imaginary is possible. In this imaginary, Alison adopts two of the old ladies who appeared so lost throughout the novel, and takes them with her on the motorway with the promise of getting a 'very good tea' in Sevenoaks[88]. In some ways this adoption of the spirit women could be seen as a rebellious act, dissenting against that 'politics of disposability' which is peddled by the 'Hell' that is the neoliberal present, in other ways it is an example of Alison and the spirit women attempting to recoup the 'normative promise of intimacy'[89] denied by their families; Alison because of her horrific upbringing, and Maureen and Kathleen because their descendants have forgotten them.

Whilst the ending of the novel suggests that Alison is capable of finding some form of happiness through the patience and acceptance of the ladies, there is a greater element of foreboding time-space that runs in the background of the narrative from beginning to end, that of a decaying environment. Just as Berlant and Harootunian suggest that 'Capitalism always blocks the development of a historical sense', so Barbara Adam, a writer championed by Berlant for providing a 'view on how to think about the temporality of environments in late capitalism'[90], suggests that 'our understanding of the temporal dimension of socio-environmental life is pretty much exhausted with knowledge about the time of calendars and clocks', and that without a deep knowledge of the true temporal complexity of the environment and sustainability, 'environmental action and policy is bound to run aground, unable to lift itself from the spatial dead-end of its own making'[91].

Berlant's concept of the stretched out now, a merging of 'an intensified present with senses of the recent past and near future'[92], can be applied easily to *Beyond Black* when considered in relation to Mantel's use of flashback, ghosts and clairvoyance to drive the narrative. It can also be applied, however, to the wider sense of environment, contamination and decay in the world of the novel, as this 'intensified present' is equally affected by the actions dating back to industry, and forward to that 'spatial dead-end' of environmental policy's making.

---

[88] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 448.

[89] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 189.

[90] Berlant, p. 278.

[91] Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 8.

[92] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 5.

The Environmental Time-space

While environmental concerns are not always considered to be directly related to neoliberal policy, scholars such as Adam have begun to discuss the link between the two, with a focus on the failings of environmental policies to protect the planet effectively. Nik Heynen and others have argued that it is neoliberalism's 'ravenous craving for markets, commodities, and sites of accumulation across the planet' which has propelled the loss of species that it promised to protect, and the destruction of ecosystems that it claimed to care about[93]. The concerns raised on these topics by academics and campaigners suggest that humanity itself faces a precarious future if governments fail to take environmental concerns seriously. Moves have been made to reduce factors associated with global warming, such as the United Nations led 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement, but, as proven by Donald Trump's rejection of the Agreement in 2017, these policies are often themselves precarious[94].

Environmental decay becomes a regular theme in *Beyond Black*, and Mantel's descriptions of a failing planet reach a crescendo towards the end of the novel:

> There are mudslips and landslides, there are storm drains burst, a glugging and gurgling in sumps, conduits and wells. There are fissures in the river beds, there are marshes, swamps and bogs, there are cracked pipes and breached sea walls, and outswells of gas on the bubbling flood plain. There is coastal erosion, crumbling defences, spillage and seepages: where the saline and swift-rushing tide meets the viscid slime of swollen sewers, there the oceans are rising, half a metre, half a metre, half a metre onwards.[95]

The description above occurs five pages before the end of *Beyond Black*, leaving the reader in no doubt that Alison, and we, face a bleak environmental future. The line 'half a metre, half a metre, half a metre onwards' describe the rising tides alludes to the opening of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', suggesting that the gradual destruction of the planet is driving us, like the cavalry, 'Into the jaws of Death/ Into the mouth of hell'[96]. One could also read from this reference that, like the cavalry, our fate is intertwined with people who were meant to lead us safely but have 'blundered'. From the moment Alison moves into her home on Admiral Drive there are problems at the site relating to radioactive white worms, rising black sludge, sewage blockages and seepages which the councils 'cover-up' and the health departments deny[97], making the middle class residents feel 'trapped and baffled'[98] and desperate to sell their houses and escape.

---

[93] Nik Heynen et al., 'Conclusion' in *Neoliberal Environments: False Promises and Unnatural Consequences*, ed. by Nik Heynen and others (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 287-291, p. 290.

[94] Paul Owen, 'Tracking Trump: president tosses Paris agreement in the trash', *The Guardian,* 3 June 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/03/donald-trump-news-paris-agreement-covfefe-fbi> [accessed 3 June 2017].

[95] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 447.

[96] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (2016), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45319> [accessed 27 August 2016].

Mantel describes *Beyond Black* as being about 'going down every day and every night into the realm where the demons are and where the bodies are buried', but 'below' is also where the black sludge and radioactive white worms come from[99]; below is what is 'shredded by JCBs' to lay foundations for new buildings[100]. As Victoria Stewart observes 'nature is ravaged to build the new houses'[101] that Alison and her neighbours move into, and the language that Mantel uses in relation to the building of Alison's house is violent and full of the imagery of death:

> She sensed the underscape, shuddering as it waited to be ripped. Builders' machines stood ready, their maws crusted with soil, waiting for Monday morning. Violence hung in the air, like the smell of explosive. Birds had flown. Foxes had abandoned their lairs. The bones of mice and voles were mulched into mud, and she sensed the minute snapping of frail necks and the grinding into paste of muscle and fur. Through the soles of her shoes she felt gashed worms turning, twisting and repairing themselves. […] Towards the main road to Guilford she could see a hedge, a miscarried foetus dug in beneath it. […] It was an indifferent place; no better, no worse than most others.[102]

This description likens the laying of foundations in these new estates in the 'peripheral zones' to going into battle, a link perhaps to the spirit world where, Alison tells us, 'wars run concurrently'[103]. The imagery of creatures being mutilated by the builders' machines and the foetus discarded under a hedge are horrific and abject, and yet we are told that this is 'an indifferent place', suggesting that the violence Alison sees here is in fact everywhere, beyond the average human's perception. In an interview which appears at the end of *Beyond Black*, Mantel explains that her Catholic upbringing made her realise that 'the world is not what you see; that in fact beyond appearances there is another reality, and it is a far more important reality'[104]. The novel is full of examples where this other reality is referenced in terms of the afterlife, the spirit world, even Hell, but it also appears in these descriptions of contamination and environmental violence which most of us are unaware of. Adam echoes this sense of environmental concerns as ‘beyond the reach of our senses’ due to them being related to time, the ‘invisible ‘other’’:

---

[97] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 252.
[98] Mantel, p. 341.
[99] Mantel, p. 252.
[100] Mantel, p. 51.
[101] Victoria Stewart, 'A Word in Your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's Beyond Black', *Critique-studies in Contemporary Fiction,* 50.3 (2009) 293-312 (p. 297).
[102] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 218.
[103] Mantel, p. 403.
[104] O'Reilly, p. 3.

> Whether we are encountering chemical process, ozone depletion, air and water pollution, radiation, or a new disease such as BSE, we are dealing with phenomena where impacts of actions work invisibly below the surface until they materialise as symptoms – some time, somewhere. That is to say, these industrially produced phenomena and processes are characterised by invisibility and periods of latency.[105]

Alison’s intuitive skills allow her to see the damage inflicted upon the environment while it is still invisible ‘below the surface’, but the neighbours only begin to see it when those issues ‘materialise as symptoms’, such as the black sludge that comes up through their drains, and the heatwave ‘with temperatures creeping towards the upper nineties’ that prompts ‘fragile citizens’ to buy ‘charcoal masks to protect against the excess ozone’[106]. The ‘periods of latency’ that occur between these incidents make the concerns appear to go away, only to return again; the building of the estate is never truly completed as workmen have to return again and again to ‘put down asphalt’ that is cracked and split by mutated knotweed[107], and fix the ‘gas leaks, floods and falling masonry’[108].

Alison worries that her presence is partially responsible for the occurrence of these issues, that they are caused by the ‘black cloud of evil that hovers over’ her house and the spirits who are linked to her past who skulk around in her neighbours’ gardens[109]. Whilst in the context of this novel this supernatural element could definitely have made many of these issues worse, there is no denying that Mantel presents them as ‘symptoms’ of a larger ecological issue, and that this is linked with the building of the estates so closely linked with ideas of neoliberal progress.

The building of the estate makes the ‘last birds’ fly away and their song is replaced by the roaring and beeping of JCBs and ‘cries of the wounded’:

> scrubland gave way to a gashed landscape of trenches and moats, of mud chutes and standing pools of yellow water; which within a year, in its turn, gave way to the violent emerald of new turf, the Sunday-morning roar of mowers and strimmers, the tinkling of the ice-cream vans, the trundling of gas barbeques over paving and the stench of searing meat.[110]

---

[105] Adam, p. 9.
[106] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 319.
[107] Mantel, p. 341.
[108] Mantel, p. 235.
[109] Mantel, p. 440.
[110] Mantel, p. 226.

This replacement of nature with ‘trenches’ and then with the ‘violent emerald of new turf’ and the ‘stench of searing meat’ continues the war-like, violent descriptions of the act of creating a suburban estate, a place described by Berlant as a ‘manicured zone’[111], at the expense of the natural beauty that was present before. Some of the language mirrors Alison’s own discomfort at being there: she escaped the places of history to avoid the ghosts of her past, but did not count on having living neighbours who bother her (‘I don’t want them watching me and commenting on me. I want to be private’[112]) and embarrass her by offering her magazine articles about garden planning (‘They think we’re letting the side down, she thought; as well as being sexual deviants, we don’t have a pond or even decking’[113]).

In one sense, Alison and her neighbours’ move to this estate offers the inhabitants a British version of what Berlant refers to as a ‘vague attachment to an American dream that is actually lived as a series of missed encounters with disaster and human contact’[114], but the fact that the ‘disaster’ (and in Alison’s case the human contact) has followed them reinforces the position of the suburban estate, and the middle class dreams associated with it, as an object of cruel optimism.

The presentation of the destruction of nature through architectural progress, and the repercussions over a number of years, arguably adds to the novel’s position as concerned with the stretched out historical present, and therefore as an example of a historical novel. As Berlant states:

> despite the singularities of affect, the historical novel points to a unity of experience in an ongoing moment that historians can later call epochal, but that at the time was evidenced as a shared nervous system that it was the novelist’s project to put out there for readers.[115]

The symptoms of the failing environment and the strange occurrences of slime and worms create a ‘unity of experience’ through fear and confusion for the inhabitants of Admiral Drive, which echo a larger concern in the real world relating to global warming, deforestation and rising sea levels. In this sense the novel evidences a ‘shared nervous system’ within and outside of the novel, one which has not yet become ‘epochal’, but which is regularly discussed as an ecological, economic and sociological issue.

Global warming is a fundamental concern in relation to the precarity of humanity in the future; as one article from the *Journal of Environment and Urbanization* states:

---

[111] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 30.
[112] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 235.
[113] Mantel, p. 244.
[114] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 32.
[115] Lauren Berlant, 'Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event', *American Literary History,* 20.4 (2008) 845-860 (p. 847).

> While economic activity and urban development often increase the environmental pressures that lead to flooding, low-income settlements, and poor groups within all settlements, tend to be the most vulnerable. […] the poorest residents of the cities of low-income countries are often forced (implicitly or explicitly) to settle in flood plains or other hazard-prone locations, as they cannot afford more suitable alternatives.[116]

The implications of *Beyond Black* in relation to both the localised environmental issues within Admiral Drive and the wider concerns at the end of the novel of ‘coastal erosion, crumbling defences, spillage and seepages’, are that we are living on borrowed time, surviving within a prolonged moment that ‘historians can later call epochal’. Whilst the most financially vulnerable people in society will always be the first to suffer when it comes to environmental disasters, the suggestions made by *Beyond Black* are that we are all living precariously when it comes to the future of the planet. No suggestions of how to avoid or improve this are given, suggesting, along with so many climate experts, that if we are not already past the point of no return, ‘we may be getting awfully close’[117].

Crisis Ordinariness

In her discussion of the ‘intuitionist’ protagonists of recent historical novels *The Intuitionist* by Colson Whitehead[118] and *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson[119]*,* Berlant describes the characters as being ‘forced out of their comfort zones’, by catastrophic events, an act which encourages them to ‘leap into the impasse of a postintuitive consciousness that refuses a return to the ordinary’. She argues that the aesthetic and political point in these novels seems to be that ‘the drama of adjustment to a pervasive atmosphere of unexpected precarity makes certain situations exemplary laboratories for sensing contemporary life in new idioms of affective realism’. There are many aspects of this discussion which apply to *Beyond Black*; like the novels discussed by Berlant this story traces how a person with super-sensitive intuition learns to live on in a present that is defined and shaped by crisis, but it also considers Alison’s drive to find a way through, to learn ‘adjudication, adaptation, and improvisation’, in an impasse that many of the people around her are unaware of[120]. The impasse that Alison learns to move through replicates two of the examples given by Berlant: she learns to adapt her skills and approaches following social catastrophes, but in a wider sense, the novel charts Alison's realisation that she is 'adrift', coasting through life without any traction in a world infused with personal trauma. These instances require the utilisation of intuition based skills in different ways, and it is these varied 'dramas of adjustment' that the narrative explores.

---

[116] Gordon McGranahan, Deborah Balk, and Bridget Anderson, 'The Rising Tide: Assessing the Risks of Climate Change and Human Settlements in Low Elevation Coastal Zones', *Environment & Urbanization,* 19.1 (2007) 17-37 (pp. 19-20).

[117] EarthTalk, *Have We Passed the Point of No Return on Climate Change?* (2015), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/have-we-passed-the-point-of-no-return-on-climate-change/> [accessed 17 August 2016].

[118] Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (London: Fleet, 1999).

[119] William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2003).

[120] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 54.

The symbolic use of the death of Diana and the destruction of the Twin Towers to explore the reaction of the people to tragedy places the novel within a series of traumatic 'affectspheres'. The death of Diana takes more of a prominent role in the novel as a lived through event which places the narrative in a very British context, and yet the after effects of 9/11, the sense of distrust and fear as forms of affective precarity which has underlined the West since, is made clear through the novel. As Baudrillard notes, the death of Diana was in many ways a world event, and yet nothing in the years preceding the millennium came close to 9/11 in its symbolic role as 'the 'mother' of all events'[121].

Both events are examples of 'crisis ordinariness', a term used by Berlant to discuss:

> traumas of the social that are lived through collectively and that transform the sensorium to a heightened perceptiveness about the unfolding of the historical, and sometimes historic, moment.[122]

The events are explored differently in the novel, and therefore in this chapter. The death of Diana exposes us for the first time to the depth of Alison's intuitive skills in their affective glory, and then spans out to consider the process of public mourning that was adopted by Britain, at once an example of shared pain and underlying hypocrisy. It is a visceral, personal and detailed account in comparison to the presentation of the events of 9/11 that are barely mentioned, and yet this distant and immense tragedy creates ripples in the narrative which arguably create a more long term disturbance in perceived normality than Diana's death. Both events create what Berlant describes as a historical present, they are moments which disturb time and produce an atmosphere which 'suggests a shift of historic proportions':

> Norms and intuitions suddenly feel off: a sensed perturbation of world-shaping dimensions impels recasting the projected impact of small and large gestures, noticings, impulses, moments. The reinvention of life from disturbance re-emerges in cadences, rhythms, the smallest predictables. To change one's intuition about it all is to challenge the habituated processing of affective responses to what one encounters in the world.[123]

---

[121] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2002), p. 4.

[122] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 5.

[123] Berlant, p. 5.

Alison utilises both her own intuitive abilities to gain an understanding of the events which occur and to read those new ‘cadences’ and ‘rhythms’ which emerge from the disturbance.

Diana: The Queen of Hearts

The impact of the death of Diana on Alison and the public forms a substantial part of *Beyond Black*; placing it at once in the context of turn of the century neoliberal Britain, with its archaic system of monarchy and obsessive public interest in celebrity. The death becomes a symbol of public grief that Alison must navigate in her occupation as medium; we are told that in her readings, when Alison draws The Queen of Cups, the card becomes a symbol of the public’s grief for the princess:

> Diana is the queen of hearts; every time the card turns up in a spread, this week and next, she will signify the princess, and the clients’ grief will draw the card time and time again from the depth of the pack.[124]

There is a contrast drawn between the sense of genuine feeling and insincere displays of grief displayed by some, which makes the public reaction to the death appear almost farcical in its level of anguish. Alison allows the ‘punters’ to ‘sob their hearts out in comfort’ but still judges their ‘snivel, bloody snivel’[125] self-indulgence:

> There was something gluttonous in their grief, something gloating. Al let them sob, agreeing with them and feeding them their lines, sometimes making little there-there noises; […] ‘Yes, yes, yes,’ she sighed, patting the mottled palms she had just read. ‘It will all work out for the best. And I’m sure young Harry will look more like his daddy as time goes by.’[126]

The sardonic way in which the princess is discussed by Alison and Colette allows for the public mourning to be viewed, at least in part, ironically; the comment made by Alison relating to Harry’s looks refers to the many rumours that Diana cheated on her husband, but rather than judging her for this as was the habit before her death, people now see it as something to cry about; an indication of the tragedy associated with her iconic status. Colette notes the irony of the level of grief, stating ‘S’funny’ that only a fortnight before, Diana was photographed on a boat with Dodi in a bikini, ‘and we were all saying, what a slapper’. She mocks Alison’s supportive statement that she was ‘against landmines’ with the retort, ‘That doesn’t seem much to be against, […] Not exactly sticking your neck out, is it? Not like being against . . . dolphins'[127]. Even the presentation of the spirit herself, when she appears to Alison in her 'crumpled and worn' wedding dress with press cuttings pinned to the skirts, has a comical tone[128]. She asks Alison: 'Give my love to my boys', adding 'I'm sure you know who I mean', but when Alison does not respond she stamps her foot:

---

[124] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 191.
[125] Mantel, p. 190.
[126] Mantel, p. 171.

> 'You oiky little greasespot, you're just being hideous. Oh, fuckerama! What are they called? […] Anyway, whatever. You tell them, because you know. Give my love to . . . Kingy. And the other kid. Kingy and Thingy.'[129]

Mantel presents a clear contrast between the fading spirit of Diana and her real-world persona: as spirit she is more humanised, less composed than the mythical character portrayed by the media and the PR department of Buckingham Palace, and through this colloquial, spoilt humanization she almost becomes more of a pitiable character.

She ends her appearance with the request for Alison to 'bog off' and give her 'some privacy'[130], a request which we know will never be honoured by the tabloids who still muddy her name by writing about her potential sexual exploits with men such as Donald Trump nearly two decades after her death[131]. This rude, forgetful, lost spirit contrasts with the image of the kind, motherly Princess that the people mourn, reminding the reader that the people are mourning an idea, a figment of the collective imagination rather than the person herself. Only those closest to her would know if she ever used the term 'fuckerama', but the unlikeliness of her doing so in the collective imagination makes her speech comically incongruous and poignantly reminds us that her true identity, her real personality, was never actually shown to the public.

Much of the sadness equated with the death of Diana related to the ideologies embodied by her, listed by Ruby Tapia as the 'coded corporeality' of her 'racialized (white), classed (aristocratic), and gendered (female) body'. Tapia also notes how the newspaper photos of her mourning sons, brother and ex-husband attribute a 'heteronormativity to the womanhood that Diana represents'[132]; these images are again mentioned in *Beyond Black* in an off-hand manner as one of Alison's colleagues accidentally drops a knife on 'the *Mail's* Full-Colour Tribute' and smears butter on the Prince of Wales[133]. Diana's 'coded corporeality' as a white Princess who met her

---

[127] Mantel, pp. 160-162.
[128] Mantel, p. 213.
[129] Mantel, p. 214.
[130] Mantel, p. 214.
[131] Jennifer Newton, 'Donald Trump Claimed Princess Diana 'Was Crazy' but He 'Could (and Would) Have Slept with Her' Anyway', *The Daily Mail,* 25 February 2016 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3464039/Donald-Trump-claimed-Princess-Diana-crazy-said-slept-without-hesitation-supermodel-beauty.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].
[132] Ruby C. Tapia, *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death, and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 48-49.
[133] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 190.

Prince and had two children with him makes her the stuff of childhood fantasy; she embodies the fantasy of 'romantic love', noted by Berlant as an example of cruel optimism[134], which is relayed through Disney films and traditional fairy tales as an idealised form of heteronormative social mobility that young girls should aim to emulate. The 'dream' associated with Diana did alter when she divorced the Prince of Wales and began dating Dodi Fayed, a man whose death in the same accident received far less coverage and mourning due in part to his 'lesser' coding of non-white, non-aristocratic male; but people still believed that the happy ever after dream was possible for her. Mantel, in an essay written for the *London Review of Books*, suggests that Diana believed the same thing:

> Sue Townsend said of Diana that she was 'a fatal non-reader'. She didn't know the end of her own story. She enjoyed only the romances of Barbara Cartland. I'm far too snobbish to have read one, but I assume they are stories in which a wedding takes place and they all live happily ever after. Diana didn't see the possible twists in the narrative.[135]

It was not, however, simply her mythical role as 'princess' that made her a public icon; it was her humanity and supposed tangibility that made her seem, at once, both royal and ordinary. Mantel observes in her lecture that 'Diana walked bare-handed among the multitude, and unarmed: unfortified by irony, uninformed by history' whilst Marysa Navarro, who compares Diana to the mythologised Eva Perón, describes her as a 'Standardbearer of the Downtrodden'[136] due to her charity work. And yet, the positioning of the grieving masses in *Beyond Black* leave the reader in no doubt that Diana is not comparable to the people who mourn her.

Whilst driving to the psychic fayre, Alison and Colette see the crowds begin to gather on the 'bridges over the M1, waiting for the dead woman to pass by on her way to her ancestral burial ground just off Junction 15A'[137]. There is a clear contrast drawn between the positioning of the grief stricken public and the body and ghost of Diana; the people congregate in the non-places of modernity – the motorway slip roads and bridges, an old primary school with 'the marks of violence still chipped into its red brick'[138], whilst Diana is associated with places of historical meaning: her body is taken to her ancestral burial ground in the Althorp Estate, and her spirit is seen 'peeping over the shoulder of her ancestor Charles I in a portrait at St James's Palace'[139]. For Diana, as with any member of the aristocracy, the non-places are a means to an end; they transport her body to and from places imbued with historical meaning, whilst for the public they are the zones 'of episodic experience' in which they congregate[140]. The masses who wait in these thoroughfares do not know how to mourn with the decorum expected by royalty; the 'stubble headed boys' on the bridges jab the air with bunches of carnations, and hold 'a ragged bed sheet, grey-white' on which 'DIANA, THE QUEEN OF OUR HEARTS' is 'scrawled in crimson capitals, as if in virgin's blood'. The 'hitch-hikers lurking by the slip roads' tie black armbands around their sleeves whilst a 'leather-jacketed man' waves the Stars and Stripes[141]. Diana's death may have united the country in mourning, or even the western world as suggested by the flag waving American, but the images of her as a sophisticated, elegant royal stand in stark contrast to the descriptions of the public conveyed by the novel.

---

[134] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 2.
[135] Hilary Mantel, 'Royal Bodies', *London Review of Books,* 35.4 (2013) 3-7.
[136] Marysa Navarro, 'Wonder Woman Was Argentine and Her Real Name Was Evita', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies,* 24.48 (1999) 133-152 (p. 137).
[137] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 160.
[138] Mantel, p. 169.
[139] Mantel, p. 191.

The mourners that Mantel mentions here are members of the disenfranchised; in Berlant's words, they are examples of those who live 'on the outside of value, in terrifying non-places where one is a squatter'[142]. The boys with carnations would 'in normal times, heave a concrete block through your windscreen'[143], creating destruction for destruction's sake, just as the pausing hitchhikers would continue to travel across the country in a way that does not contribute economically, exemplifying their role as those who move 'between having a little and being ejected from society'[144]. The portrayal of the modern world is one of lost people in lost places; the disenfranchised living mirror the state of the dead who 'have no sense of time, no clear sense of place: they are beyond geography and history'[145]. Both worlds appear to be in the suspension prophesised by the Hanged Man card at the start of the novel, and yet the people who do not, or cannot, remember their own history and their own dead at least can recognise the death of the princess, the woman sold to them daily through the tabloids. Berlant states that an 'environment is organized by atmospheres of the affective', and the sense of "I was there" which forms part of that atmosphere clearly underlines the public's mourning of this event. This shared event has the potential to draw the public together in an affective sense, perhaps allowing those with no 'roots' to at least establish relationships with their equally lost neighbours through their shared pain, but in the world of *Beyond Black* this potential for hope is too optimistic.

By utilising a darkly comic, critical tone in her exploration of the death of Diana, Mantel presents a situation in which the public have to deal with a fraying fantasy en masse, but without encouraging the reader to form any real empathetic attachment to the actors involved. In the case of Alison's 'punters' the sense of contempt arguably relates to the fact that the people are more concerned with their own grief than Diana's death itself; but in relation to the general public who line the streets, the sense is that the mourning is disingenuous, misplaced and temporary. Ahmed refers to Graham Little's suggestion that the death of Diana is a 'prime example' of an 'outside in' model of emotional experience, where emotions start 'out there' but 'link up with something in us so that we feel drawn in and become personally involved'. This, she notes, 'has led to accusations that such grief was inauthentic'[146], a point clearly adopted by Mantel in her presentation of the event in *Beyond Black*. Mantel's mocking tone could relate to more than this simple impression of inauthenticity, however. In her essay 'Royal Bodies', Mantel discusses her interpretation of the event of Diana's death directly. She talks at length about how Diana, and later Kate Middleton, have been visualised by the media and discusses the public reaction to Diana's death in a tone of frustration, noting that it had the possibility to evolve from, to use Berlant's terminology a 'situation' into an 'event', but it never quite reached its potential:

---

[140] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 291.
[141] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 161-162.
[142] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 177.
[143] Mantel, p. 161.
[144] Berlant, p. 177.
[145] Mantel, p. 44.

> For a time it was hoped, and it was feared, that Diana had changed the nation. Her funeral was a pagan outpouring, a lawless fiesta of grief. We are bad at mourning our dead. We don't make time or space for grief. The world tugs us along, back into its harsh rhythm before we are ready for it, and for the pain of loss doctors can prescribe a pill. We are at war with our nature, and nature will win; all the bottled anguish, the grief dammed up, burst the barriers of politeness and formality and restraint, and broke down the divide between private and public, so that strangers wailed in the street, people who had never met Diana lamented her with maladjusted fervour, and we all remembered our secret pain and unleashed it in one huge carnival of mass mourning. But in the end, nothing changed. We were soon back to the prosaic […]. And yet none of us who lived through it will forget that dislocating time, when the skin came off the surface of the world, and our inner vision cleared, and we saw the archetypes clear and plain, and we saw the collective psyche at work, and the gods pulling our strings.[147]

If the grief displayed by the public is defined as an example of Berlant's 'situation', a 'state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life', where there is 'a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event'[148], then Mantel's apparent irritation is with the fact that the 'event' never materialised: 'nothing changed'. The 'secret pain' that was tapped into, the affective outpouring of the crowds broke through the rules of polite society, but not enough to keep the momentum going to a point where real change was realised. The media, despised for its part in causing the crash through their obsessive paparazzi, cut down their stalking of Diana's children in the aftermath of her death, but continued to sell papers and weathered the storm of public opinion. The Queen, accused by some of conspiring in the death, became an enemy of the people for the week following the death when she remained hidden at Balmoral and refused to lower the flag at Buckingham Palace to half mast[149], but was eventually forgiven for her initially cold reaction. The emotional backlash of the public that appeared at first to challenge the establishment waned, just as the ability to present true emotion and feeling in a public arena without ridicule was rescinded.

---

[146] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 9.
[147] Mantel, 'Royal Bodies', p. 5.
[148] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 5.

The cleared 'inner vision' experienced by the masses could be seen as an example of an awakening consciousness which involves the dropping of a false consciousness, a model introduced by Lukacs but retrieved and restored by Ahmed in her bid to critique 'claims to happiness'. Ahmed explains that in critiquing these claims:

> You would not be saying "you are wrong, you are not happy, you just think you are as you have a false belief." Rather you would be saying there is something false about our consciousness of the world; we learn not to be conscious, not to see what happens right in front of us. Happiness provides as it were a cover, a way of covering over what resists or is resistant to a view of the world, or a worldview, as harmonious. It is not that an individual person suffers from false consciousness but that we inherit a certain false consciousness when we learn to see and not to see things in a certain way.[150]

The display of unhappiness in *Beyond Black* could be seen as an enactment of that very realisation noted by Ahmed, a drawing back of the cover which presents the world as harmonious. The language used by Mantel in her description of the 'skin' being drawn off the surface of the world is similar to Lukács' metaphor of the 'veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society'; in Ahmed's discussion it is suggested that an affect alien can become a revolutionary consciousness simply by becoming aware of the veil itself, even if the 'truth' behind the veil is not revealed[151]. Arguably, therefore, if Alison's frustrations mirror Mantel's own irritation at the outcome of the event, it is not the gluttonous grief of the individuals themselves that makes her angry, but the fact that they allowed themselves to be drawn back into a false way of seeing after finally getting in touch with their inner grief and seeing the 'gods pulling' their strings for what they were.

Whilst the obvious discussion of public reaction in both *Beyond Black* and Mantel's lecture relates to the affective response following the death of Diana, there is a sense of underlying economic and political rebellion in the display of feelings. The people began to question the authority of the royal family, they began to question the status quo and everything it stood for.

---

[149] Robert Lacey, 'The Truth About Diana and the Queen: How Monarch Was Princess's Greatest Supporter... Until That Martin Bashir Documentary', *The Daily Mail,* 28 January 2012 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2092888/Diana-The-Queen-Her-Majesty-Princesss-greatest-supporter-sending-psychiatrist-hosting-family-therapy-session.html> [accessed 18 August 2016].

[150] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 83-4.

[151] Ahmed, pp. 165-166.

Diana embodied to some extent the public persona of the alienated martyr; whilst a member of the establishment she also renounced their rules, undermined their right to privacy, and strived for happiness over responsibility. Through her, the public began to develop a 'consciousness of alienation', an awareness perhaps that they themselves are aliens within a society run for the benefit of the wealthy whilst they continue to live in the 'towns where nobody comes from'. Ahmed uses the example of the rebellion of natives against colonizers to explain the sense of becoming 'conscious of how alienation is already, as it were, in the world'[152]; she explains how the native discovers that 'his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler', and in doing so shakes the world. His awaking consciousness allows him to rebel against his previously accepted 'subordinate place'; he sees his alienation and refuses it by revolting against the colonizer. By embracing and revelling in the display of emotional outpouring that is usually considered inappropriate in public, the people in *Beyond Black* begin to follow this process; their grief becomes an act of rebellion in itself that forced changes. The Queen had to adjust how she reacted to the event because of the public pressure. The government was forced to address the public reaction, the media was forced to follow the public sentiment rather than attempting to drive it. This alone showed the potential power behind such an act, the potential of revolution when the public all sharpen their attention on one point. As the grief subsided, however, people went back to the everyday, perhaps unaware themselves of the power that they held for that time.

What also appears to be frustrating for Mantel is that the social and gender politics were not confronted by the public when this event allowed the opportunity. In her essay, she describes the public interest in Diana's daughter-in-law Kate as barely any different from the royal women of history: she is defined by how she looks and her ability to breed, just like Diana, Marie-Antoinette and Anne Boleyn before her. The only way she does differ is that she, unlike the previous 'gliding, smiling disasters' is also judged on her polite, irreproachable lack of character; she 'seems capable of going from perfect bride to perfect mother, with no messy deviation'[153]. Diana's legacy could have been the ending of these stereotypes associated with royal wives and revered by the public, but instead they have continued unchallenged into the new millennium.

In the publisher's interview with Mantel, her statement that 'competing and overlapping realities' suffuse *Beyond Black* confirms what is obvious throughout the portrayal of the world and 'airside' in the text; and yet the presentation of the competing realities of life and death also works metaphorically in order to show the limitation of people's ability to clearly observe the world around them. Ahmed asserts that false consciousness 'blocks other possible worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible, such that possibles are lost before they can be lived, experienced or imagined'[154]. Alison's role as someone who sees the world of the living and the world of the dead arguably makes her function in the narrative as the person who helps people to 'unblock' their vision of other possible worlds, even if she does occasionally sugar coat what 'beyond black' actually looks like. In this sense her role as affect alien makes her the revolutionary consciousness of the novel; if all people saw the world as she does, then they would have a better understanding of the possibilities around them.

---

[152] Ahmed, p. 167.
[153] Mantel, 'Royal Bodies', p. 3.

The Twin Towers

The presentation of 9/11 in *Beyond Black*, whilst brief, mirrors many of the metaphors and observations utilised by Berlant, Ahmed and others, including Baudrillard, to describe the context and atmosphere of the event. We are told that in the years preceding 2001, the sense of suspension mentioned in the opening pages of the novel became more pronounced:

> As the millennium approached, their trade declined. It was nothing personal, no misstep in Colette's business plan. All the psychics called up to grouch about it. It was as if their clients had put their personal curiosity on pause: as if they had been caught up in some general intake of breath.[155]

Whilst this image of an 'intake of breath' creates a sense of foreboding and dramatic tension within the narrative, it also resembles the descriptions utilised by Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism* where he labels the 1990s as a time of stagnation; a time when events 'went on strike' before 'the 'mother' of all events'[156] that was the destruction of the Twin Towers. The reference that Mantel makes here to the 'intake of breath' relates in part to the 'millennium bug'[157], a term coined to describe the potential failing of all computer systems when the clocks changed back to 00 from 99 at midnight of 1st January. At the time, Tony Blair described the implications as 'one of the most serious problems facing not only British business but the global economy today', and leaflets were sent to businesses and the public which advised on how they could cope with the potential disasters of their computers thinking that it was actually 1900 instead of 2000. Of course, whilst there were some minor errors such as the temporary failure of some credit card transactions, the 'Armageddon' predicted did not come to fruition. The rhetoric of fear utilised by the politicians and media of the day were arguably the precursor of what we have seen since 9/11; a filtered political sphere which, in the words of Berlant, 'transmits news 24/7 from a new ordinary created by crisis, in which life seems reduced to discussions about tactics for survival and who is to blame'[158].

---

[154] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 165.

[155] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 251.

[156] Baudrillard, pp. 3-4.

[157] Luke Jones, *How the UK coped with the millennium bug 15 years ago* (2014) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30576670> [accessed 1 September 2016].

The public of *Beyond Black* begin 'creeping back' from the stagnation when New Year occurs and there is 'no flood or epidemic'; the clients give an 'apathetic sigh' and return to life as it was. Here, Mantel uses an interesting turn of phrase to describe the lack of drama that the millennium bug actually caused: 'the planes didn't fall out of [the skies]'. The sense here is that the globalised world did not end as predicted, and so people no longer had to worry about how to survive in a new 'normal', and yet the image Mantel conjures relates exactly to the occurrence fifteen months later where several planes did fall out of the sky in the act of terrorism which came to define the following decade:

> When 9/11 came, Colette was watching daytime TV. She called Alison through. Al rested her hands on the back of the sofa. She looked without surprise as the Twin Towers crumbled, as the burning bodies plunged through the air. Alison watched till the news looped itself around again and the same pictures were played. Then she left the room without comment. You feel as if you should say something, but you don't know what it is. You can't say you foresaw it; yet you can't say no one foresaw it. The whole world has drawn this card.[159]

As Al has previously informed us, the Tower card suggests that your world has blown up, that you have outgrown your current situation. If 'the whole world has drawn this card', then the suggestion is that the whole world will have to find a new way forward; as Baudrillard observes, this event disrupted 'the whole play of history and power'[160].

The way in which the event is seen by Al and Colette is reminiscent of the way that most of the world experienced it: from a position that is removed and yet is bombarded with images which Ahmed describes as 'saturated or even 'full' of affect':

> The images are repeated, and the repetition seems binding. The signs of the collapse of the buildings, and of bodies falling from the sky, are an invasion of bodies, spaces, homes and worlds. The images that appeared on television screens of the event as it unfolded, and which were repeated after the event, were images of trauma. They were also traumatic images. [161]

Ahmed proposes that the repetition of the images is due to a need to 'replay that which has yet to be assimilated into the individual or collective psyche'. Whilst this is unarguably an accurate account for anyone who remembers living through the event and watching the images for hours as they replayed over and again, the novel does not utilise this repetitive trait stylistically in this scenario. Elements of the changing globalised landscape are suffused into the narrative in a more subtle way; firstly in a way which questions western ignorance, and secondly as a presentation of the budding language of hate.

---

[158] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 225.
[159] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 252-255.
[160] Baudrillard, p. 4.
[161] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. p 95.

The comment from Alison that she did not foresee the destruction of the towers suggests initially that she has her limitations like anyone, but when accounts that precede the event are considered, we could argue that it may be Alison's own ignorance that stopped her prophesising it. We are told earlier in the novel that Alison does not 'do ethnics' in her line of work:

> 'I'm not a racist, please don't think that, but it just gets too convoluted.' It wasn't just the language barrier, she explained, 'but these people, those races, who think they have more than one life. Which means of course, more than one family. Often several families, and I don't know, it just gets-' She closed her eyes tight, and flapped her fingers at her head, as if trying to beat off mosquitoes.[162]

There is an indication that she is sent messages that she does not understand; when listening to tapes that have picked up the voices of spirits, she tries to listen to the messages hidden behind 'whatever foreign-language garbage she could hear up front'[163]; she feels that she owes it to them to listen, but then makes no attempt to translate what they are telling her. Alison's drawing of the Tower card itself earlier in the novel could have also indicated a premonition of what was likely to happen; as Inna Semetsky notes, 'the Tower picture has an uncanny resemblance with the image of the destroyed Twin Towers'[164]. As the reading of Tarot cards is interpretative, it is limited by one's own perspective and world view; in this sense perhaps Alison was being made aware of what was going to happen, but like the government in the US who were reportedly informed of the danger that al-Qaeda posed to the US a year before the attacks, did not try hard enough to understand the implications[165].

The presentation of this event in the novel is important because, like the death of Diana, it places the narrative firmly within an event that influenced social change, instigated wars and prompted intolerance across the world in a way that is still having repercussions nearly two decades later. It is clear from Mantel's adaptive use of the language of fear from here on in the novel that the global impact of this event is implied. Alison's observation that 'the whole world has drawn this card' is a momentous premonition; the ripples emanating from this event are felt everywhere, even in Al's neighbourhood in the suburbs of Woking.

---

[162] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 151.

[163] Mantel, p. 177.

[164] Inna Semetsky, *The Edusemiotics of Images: Essays on the Art~Science of Tarot* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013), p. 193.

[165] Michael Elliot, 'They Had a Plan', *Time Magazine,* 12 August 2002 <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003007,00.html> [accessed 2 September 2016].

The Language of Fear and 'Others'

Othering occurs in *Beyond Black* in its representations of violent extremists, the homeless, and sexual 'deviants', but each example links back to neoliberalism in some form. Simon Springer argues that 'processes of othering' are a 'central component of neoliberal logic', in particular in relation to bloodshed, where 'the idea of "backward" cultural practices' is invoked as a suitable explanation for violence[166]. The events of 9/11 could arguably be seen as an example of this, where 'backward' religious ideology was blamed with little consideration of how the neoliberal interests and wars in the Middle East over the decades preceding 2001 could have had any bearing on the actions of Osama Bin Laden and his followers. The language of fear and othering invoked in discussions of terrorism in *Beyond Black* extend also to homeless people and 'child molesters', people who do not fit with the normative guidelines of neoliberal social and sexual politics, and are therefore rejected by society. Othering automatically places those who have been 'othered' in a precarious position.

Whilst the darkness that exists in the world of *Beyond Black* is present from the outset, there is a change in language that occurs halfway through; perhaps indicating a seepage of impact that came from the changing landscape of the post 9/11 Western world. At the beginning of the novel, pre 1997, we are told of the 'Afghans, Turks and Kurds' living as scapegoats in the marginal landscapes of London[167], but when Alison returns to this landscape at the end of the novel, the language used to describe the figures in the darkness has changed:

> There are terrorists in the ditches, knives clenched between their teeth. There are fundis hoarding fertiliser, there are fanatics brewing bombs on brownfield sites, and holy martyrs digging storage pits where fiends have melted into the soil.[168]

The Middle-Eastern, East-European marginalised people of the first page are described as 'outcasts and escapees'; they are 'other' in the sense that they are non-British and displaced, but the description conjures a sense of sadness and pity for those forced to live on these margins. The description of the same area at the end of the novel utilises the language of fear and turns them into generic figures of danger; it makes the London orbital sound more like the outskirts of

---

[166] Simon Springer, 'The Violence of Neoliberalism' in *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Simon Springer and others (Oxon: Routledge, 2016) pp. 153-163, p. 156.
[167] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 1.
[168] Mantel, p. 450.

Kabul. This change also takes on a temporal dimension; the characters of the opening page are defined by their past actions (they have escaped, they have been cast out) while the actors of the last page are feared because of their current acts (hoarding, brewing) which predict danger that has not yet occurred. As Ahmed observes:

> while the lived experience of fear may be unpleasant in the present, the unpleasantness of fear also relates to the future. Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into a future.[169]

The year that *Beyond Black* was published was the year of the London bombings, an attempted, and arguably successful, rerun of 9/11. By this time, the image of the Islamic terrorist had become a permanent fixture in the mentality of the western world as a symbol of fear and distrust, and attacks, threats, and political rhetoric since this event has only gone on to cement this fear further. The change in language that occurs through the novel occurs gradually, but it begins after Alison and Collette watch the events of 9/11 on the news. There is an increasing sense of fear and distrust shown through the people who live in Alison's middle-class estate: Colette becomes upset when she finds out that Alison let a homeless man sleep in their shed, asking if it is her intention to invite 'child molesters, terrorists and would-be murderers' to stay. She goes on to suggest that it may be 'illegal immigrants' who are stealing shopping from their cars: 'Asylum seekers, you know. The council is taking the benches out of the park, so that no one can sleep on them'[170].

Ahmed talks of the slide of metonymy, explaining how it can 'function as an implicit argument about the causal relations between terms (such as *Islam* and *terrorism*) within the making of truths and worlds, but in such a way that it does not require an explicit statement'[171]. In this case, the slide occurs between the phrases 'terrorist', 'illegal immigrant' and 'asylum seeker', which are used interchangeably by Colette and the members of the neighbourhood watch, as if they mean the same thing. Ahmed notes that in the politics of fear, the figure of the terrorist 'has been mobilised in close proximity' to that of the asylum figure:

> This violent slide between the figure of the asylum seeker and the international terrorist works to construct those who are 'without home' as sources of 'our fear' and as reasons for new forms of border policing, whereby the future is always a threat posed by others who may pass by and pass their way into our communities.[172]

---

[169] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 65.

[170] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 317-318.

[171] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text,* 22.2 (2004) 117-139 (pp. 131-2).

[172] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, pp. 79-80.

The intention of the 'other' is not of interest to Colette and the neighbours; whether they want to hurt people or to ask for help from people makes no difference, the mere presence of the 'others' endangers their sense of community and therefore they must be shunned and excluded.

As the years progress, the neighbourhood watch begin holding meetings to discuss what to do in the event of 'terrorist outrage', and begin evening searches for 'wastrels' and 'refugees'[173]. This language of fear is not limited to perceived foreigners, however; the neighbour Michelle states that they 'don't want strangers' around, 'paedophiles and homeless people'[174], again as if the terms all mean the same thing. There is no perceived difference between those who have no home and those who abuse children; they are both 'strangers' and therefore are defined as 'strange': they pose a danger. The sense of fear generated by these comments 'works through othering'; Ahmed explains that this type of naming works 'by aligning subjects with collectives by attributing 'others' as the 'source' of our feeling': those who are not 'us' endanger what is ours[175]. It is no longer just terrorists and asylum seekers and paedophiles who are a danger within their community, but essentially anyone who is not a homeowner on Admiral Drive. Once this delineation is established, the othering is extended to any homeowner who decides to assist a 'stranger', and that is when Alison herself is targeted.

It is the aiding of Mart, the homeless man, which truly establishes Alison's own otherness to the point that her neighbours can no longer accept her as a member of their community. There are moments throughout the novel where her otherness goes under the radar, for example the neighbours believe that she works for the Met Office when Colette describes her work as 'forecasting'[176], but once she is deemed an enemy every non-conventional aspect of her becomes open to criticism.

Alison and Colette are arguably ‘othered’ by their neighbours due to their perceived homosexuality: they may not actually be lovers, but their choice to live together upsets the normative balance of the estate that they live in. Their perceived homosexuality breaks with the heteronormative ideal peddled by neoliberalism, which, as Sealing Cheng observes, privileges ‘heterosexuality as the unmarked assumption in a set of institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientation’[177]. Alison’s decision to live with another woman is initially accepted as long as the actual details of their relationship are not explored: the woman selling them the new-build house tells Al and Colette that they 'don't discriminate', that they were sent on a 'training day' and are enthused to 'enhance the diversity of the community'[178], and the neighbours welcome them, assuming that they are sisters[179]. It is when Alison upsets the neighbour Michelle by defending Mart that she tells her that the community are going to start a petition against her and that she has never been 'happy' with their situation: 'two single women living together, what does that say to you?'[180]. Despite the fact that Alison and Colette are not in a relationship, their perceived lesbianism is held against them, supporting Ahmed's stance that 'the lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organized around the form of the heterosexual couple'[181].

---

[173] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 344, p.374.
[174] Mantel, p. 406.
[175] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 1.
[176] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 236.
[177] Sealing Cheng, ‘Neoliberalising Sex, Normativizing Love’ in *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Simon Springer and others (Oxon: Routledge, 2016) pp. 227-236, p. 228.

Intuition and precarity in *Beyond Black*

In Berlant's discussion of the protagonists of *The Intuitionist* and *Pattern Recognition* in *Cruel Optimism*, she explains that:

> intuition is the contact zone between the affects and their historical contexts of activity, a zone of inference that, as it encounters the social, will always shift according to the construction of evidence and explanation.[182]

In an article on the historical present she puts forth the premise that 'intuition is the subject's habituated affective activity, the sensorium trained to apperceive the historical in the present by a whole range of encounters and knowledges, not just memory'[183], and in another article on intuitionists, she describes intuition as 'the organ that interfaces the sensorium and history'[184].

Intuition is something that everyone supposedly has, but the characters in the novels that Berlant explores are 'ordinary women with supersensitive capacities for apprehension', much like Alison. Whilst their 'professional authority' is intimately linked to the world of capitalism, in that one of the women 'inspects the health of elevators' and the other 'can read the potential power of any commoditized logo'[185], Alison's 'supersensitive capacities' relate more to the forms of the social scattered by capitalism, namely providing a sense of community and personal historical context where there no longer is one. In this sense, she represents resistance to neoliberal precarity through helping those left behind by the society that they do not fit in.

---

[178] Mantel, p. 220.
[179] Mantel, p. 235.
[180] Mantel, p. 406.
[181] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 20.
[182] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 79.
[183] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 5.
[184] Berlant, 'Intuitionists', p. 6.
[185] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 70.

Spooner posits that in a world where the outer suburbs are inhospitable to ‘local stories and legends’, it is Alison’s job to ‘narrativize these presences, to unblock the exits and make these hostile spaces habitable’[186], while Stewart argues that:

> by communicating with deceased family members, a medium like Alison can assist in the re-establishment of family ties, themselves often weakened by newly increased mobility and the resultant lack of both family support and community bonds in the “denatured” towns of Britain.[187]

Both of these readings of *Beyond Black* suggest quite a positive interpretation of Alison’s role as someone who can re-establish these non-places with a historical context, and the inhabitants with a sense of family and community. As discussed earlier in this chapter, however, that is not always an easy task in these places where family memory is short and signs of history have been wiped out so much that the ghosts of the past are lost in the spaces of the present.

There is a point in the novel where Alison’s attempts to make ‘hostile spaces habitable’ spill over into her ordinary life and into the world of the living, namely when she decides to allow a homeless man called Mart to secretly live in her shed. The chain of events which follows from this ‘good deed’ results in a traumatic crescendo that forces Alison into a moment of crisis. Just as the intuitionists of Berlant’s novels are pushed out of their ‘intuitive zone of professional authority’ by traumatic events, so Alison is made to abandon the ‘professional’ aspects of her skills as a medium and turn instead to the personal; she must face the traumatic events of her past in order to move on and create some semblance of an ordinary life.

Mart

For many of the lost spirits in *Beyond Black*, Alison represents some form of anchor in the material world, meaning that ‘if they brush up against [her] they follow her home’[188]. This problem is echoed later in the novel when a member of the disenfranchised living does the same thing; when Alison and Colette buy a shed, a man who was living in the garden centre follows the delivery van to their house and ends up sleeping in their garden. When Alison first sees Mart hiding in a shed at the garden centre she mistakes him for a spirit, but as she gets to know him it becomes clear that his life experiences have in many ways mirrored her own: ‘We have a lot in common, she thought, me and Mart, it’s like having a little brother’[189].

---

[186] Spooner, p. 82.
[187] Stewart, p. 298.
[188] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 266.
[189] Mantel, p. 312.

Alison's good deed goes beyond simply giving Mart a place to sleep; she feeds him, but as Colette has her on a strict diet due to her obesity, she essentially starves herself by giving him her allotted portions. He sneaks in and out of the shed at dusk and dawn to make sure that Colette and the neighbours do not see him, but when they are all at work he and Alison sit in the shed and talk. Alison learns information from Mart in two ways, firstly through what he tells her, and secondly through her intuitive ability which forces her 'to know the biographies of strangers. And pity them'. She finds out that he is on medication, the same tablets that her mother took, but despite being in and out of hospital regularly, he receives no help from the state. When she asks why the hospital did not help, he explains that he was meant to be in a 'policy' that never materialized:

> A policy, it's like … it's either like, shutting down, or it's like, admissions, or it's … removals. You go to another place. But not with a removal van. Because you haven't got anything to put in one. […] But they didn't get one, or I wasn't in it, I don't know if they put me down for it under another name, but I didn't get moved, so I just went, after a bit I just went.[190]

The lack of support that Mart receives from the state is an example of the neoliberal erosion of systems of medical care and welfare support noted by Tyler that engenders precarity[191], but the way that Mantel presents it through corporate terminology that Mart tries to use but does not understand also symbolizes the disconnect between those who speak the language of neoliberalism, and those who do not. The physical barriers of not being able to get to a new drop-in centre ('I couldn't go to Sheerwater on the off chance, with shoes like mine') are nothing compared to these barriers of communication; his imprecise attempts to speak the neoliberal patois demonstrate just how disenfranchised he is:

> 'You see, I came through the net,' Mart said. 'I'm an outloop. I'm on a list, but I'm not computerate yet. I think, the list I was on, I think they lost it.'[192]

Doreen Masey argues that the 'vocabulary of customer, consumer, choice, markets and self interest moulds both our conception of ourselves and our understanding of and relationship to the world'. In her view, these forms of self-identification become just as strong as our 'material entanglement in debt', because they show an internalisation of the system 'that can potentially corrode our ability to imagine that things could be otherwise'[193]. In the case of Mart, his self-identified title of ‘outloop’ places him as someone who has bought into his own role as an outsider, and who will always live precariously in relation to the neoliberal system.

---

[190] Mantel, pp. 295-297.
[191] Tyler, p. 12.
[192] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 296-299.
[193] Doreen Massey, 'Vocabularies of the Economy', in *After Neoliberalism: The Kilburn Manifesto,* ed. by Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 2015), pp.24-36, p. 26.

Mart attempts to work in a variety of cash-in-hand roles, but these always fail because of his inability to follow rules. He gets hired to draw white lines on a road but draws a box instead; he was put on ‘human traffic light’ but was ignored by motorists because he was not twirling his stop-go sign ‘in sync’; he was hired by a gardening service, but did not know how to work a lawnmower, so ‘that was another job that didn’t last’[194]. The information that Mart provides defines him as someone who is willing to try to work, but for whom society does not make space.

Mart’s story concentrates on the present and recent past, but Alison’s clairvoyant skills allow her to see his beginning as an unloved child passed through the foster care system. Her ‘sight’ provides context for his current state by presenting his personal history; she sees things that he would have been unaware of himself, such as his mother who did not know she was pregnant up until the time she gave birth, someone who ‘would have sold him, new as he was, in his skin’ for a drink[195]. This sight into Mart’s past allows for his recent experiences to be seen as a result of decades of small state failures, regularly caused by changes in policy, which make his present predicament appear as something that could have been predicted. Alison’s intuition, an example of Berlant’s ‘process of dynamic sensual data-gathering’, helps to create a reading of Mart which is not purely based in the present; her skills contextualise his current predicaments in relation to his past, and in doing so create a personalised sense of the historical present which helps ‘to make reliable sense of life’[196].

The parallels between Alison’s and Mart’s start in life make Alison contemplate her own journey; if she had been taken into foster care, would she have been different? Just as Mart is a victim of systems that do not work, so was Alison:

> I dare say, when I was a kid, people put me on a list. I expect they made a list of bruises, that sort of thing, noticeable marks. But it never came to anything. I guess that list got put in a file; I guess that file got left in a drawer.[197]

Mart hears voices just as Alison does; the pills he was prescribed were to help with this but they do not work. They both had ‘a few’ stepdads growing up and were both abused by them. The similarities drawn between the two characters display how precarious Alison’s life actually is; with the poverty and abuse of her background it is surprising that she is able to function within society as she does, but the primary difference between her and Mart, and even her own mother who also ‘hears voices’, is that she has been able to capitalise on her gift, and therefore make it pay. By turning what society views as a sickness, an infliction, into a performance, Alison has integrated herself into a society that by all intents and purposes, she should have been rejected from.

---

[194] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, pp. 298-300.

[195] Mantel, p. 302.

[196] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 52.

[197] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 299.

Whilst Mart is a relatively minor character in *Beyond Black*, he is significant because of the way he changes Alison’s perspective. She nurtures and protects him in a maternal way, seemingly in an attempt to make up for the lack of care that both he and she experienced growing up. Their bond of friendship creates disharmony for all of the inhabitants in Admiral Drive, dead and alive, primarily because her acceptance of someone whom the system has rejected ironically clashes with their concept of community. The estate may wish to ‘enhance the diversity of the community’[198] on paper, but as discussed earlier, ‘others’ are not actually welcome.

When Colette finds out about Mart, she banishes him from the shed and questions Alison’s intentions, which Alison struggles to find an answer for:

> I didn’t have an intention, I just wanted to do a good action, I suppose I didn’t think, I just felt sorry for him because he’s got nowhere to go and so he has to go in a shed.[199]

A few weeks after this interaction, Mart appears in the shed again, but this time when Colette tries to get in to eject him she cannot open the door; eventually Alison and Colette realise that it is because he has hanged himself against it[200]. He was encouraged in the act by the Fiends who have at this stage returned from their ‘course’; Morris justifies the act by reminding Alison of his status as an ‘outloop’: ‘We wanted a laugh, that’s all. Not as if the cove was doing much good this side, was he?’. Colette resents that Mart used the shed, noting that ‘he could have jumped on the railway track’ like most of the suicides in Woking, which reflects the views of the neighbours who are concerned that the death will affect their ‘resale values’[201]. Capitalist worth is prioritised over the value of a life. The death draws crowds, a radio car from the local station, and even a kebab van which parks up next to the playground.

The scene of Mart’s death encapsulates many of the themes that run through the novel; Mart becomes the ‘hanged man’ who began the narrative and in doing so symbolises the suspended nature of the contemporary world, which only ever lives in the present moment. Death becomes a spectacle that draws crowds and commerce rather than the grief and self-reflection that would be appropriate. The means of the death reinforces the suggestion that, like Alison, Mart was able to hear the ghosts who cajoled him into committing suicide, proving that the voices he heard were a symptom of being conscious of different worlds rather than a sickness. Finally, this scene forces Alison to accept that she can no longer survive with the Fiends in her life, and in order to remove their power over her she must face her past and come to terms with the trauma that has haunted her whole life:

---

[198] Mantel, p. 220.
[199] Mantel, p. 317.
[200] Mantel, p. 407.
[201] Mantel, pp. 409-411.

> At some point on your road you have to turn and start walking back towards yourself. Or the past will pursue you and bite the nape of your neck, leaving you bleeding in the ditch. Better turn and face it with such weapons as you possess.[202]

The demonising of Mart, and suggestion that his death is more of an inconvenience than a tragedy, pushes Alison to a point where she must detach herself from the fantasy of normality that she has clung to throughout the narrative. To see someone that Alison viewed as similar to her treated in such a way makes it clear that just as the port holes and the nautically named properties on Admiral drive are incongruous in their inland setting, so the terms of community, neighbourhood and diversity hold no relation to reality in this epitome of neoliberal civilisation.

---

[202] Mantel, p. 418.

Conclusion

Over the preceding three chapters this thesis has analysed the various ways that affective senses of precarity are presented in the chosen novels of Smith, Atkinson and Mantel. It has found that despite their different approaches to writing style and use of genre, each novel explored by this thesis presents a world which has been destabilized and disorganized by the structures of neoliberal capitalism, be it economically or in relation to 'the forms of citizenship and subjectivity that neoliberalism gives rise to', forms which Tyler argues reconfigure 'the relationship between individuals and the body politic by inducing and capitalising on psychic anxiety as a mode of (self-) governance'[1].

The main thread which links these novels together appears to be a desire to give voices to those who do not easily 'fit' into the societal model provided by neoliberalism. Rosalind Gill states that 'neoliberalism requires individuals to narrate their life story as if it were the outcome of deliberative choices'[2], but these novels present characters who adapt, change direction and learn from mistakes on a regular basis, subverting that neoliberal narrative. The adaptations these characters make are rarely down to choice; they are forced into finding a different path due to changes outside of their control, including catalysts such as illness, crime, grief, poverty, and trauma. Some characters feel that they do not fit because they are homosexual, or uninterested in the traditional route of marriage and babies; others want those lifestyles but could not achieve them and so struggle with letting go of those fantasies.

In his discussion of a turn to precarity in literature, Morrison suggests that a notable aspect of twenty-first century fiction 'is seen in the resurgence of affect as a central concern in fiction, together with a powerful reassertion of (often anxious) questions about our relationship to, and responsibilities towards, the other[3]. Relationships form a strong part of the narratives explored by this thesis, but never in the format of a traditional romantic plot. The relationships that these novels explore most often appear in the form of someone trying to help someone else, from Lise giving Else a room for the night to Tracy attempting to give Courtney the hope of a decent future, and finally Alison trying to make Mart her 'good deed'[4]. It is these relationships, built from a sense of social responsibility, which arguably form the backbone of these novels, fitting them within the 'affective turn' which, Berlant tells us:

---

[1] Tyler, pp. 10-11.

[2] Rosalind Gill, 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times', *Subjectivity,* 25.1 (2008) 432-445 (p. 438).

[3] Morrison, p. 10.

[4] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 444.

> emerges within the long neoliberal moment of the attrition of the social, expressed in Margaret Thatcher's claim that ''There is no society - just individuals, families, and neighbors''.[5]

Precarious Lives

In his discussion of the impact of neoliberalism on the 'social safety net' of welfare support, Harvey explains that 'the neoliberal determination to transfer all responsibility for well-being back to the individual' has had 'deleterious effects', reducing welfare provisions which leaves 'larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment'. The transfer of responsibility for individual success includes the transfer of blame when people become impoverished: 'personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings, and the victim is all too often blamed'[6].

Poverty, whilst not forming part of the main narrative of these novels, is the ever-present bass line of the neoliberal worlds in which they are set. The novels straddle the economic crash of 2007: *Hotel World* and *Beyond Black* present a world before the onset of global recession, but *Started Early* follows the aftermath in which people are adjusting to the closure of businesses and the struggle to find work. Despite these differences, the way that poverty and precariousness is displayed in the novels is remarkably similar. Those who were already living in poverty continue to do so, it simply appears that the small amount of support that was available before the crash is even more scarce afterwards.

In *Hotel World*, Else lists of some of the things policemen and women have said to her over the years:

> Ever thought of working for a living? The rest of us have to. We can't all just loaf around like you. (a woman)
>
> (whispered) Now I'm telling you straight and I'll only tell you once. You want a good raping, and you're for it. You let me see you in here again and you'll get it. I mean it. That's a promise, not a threat. You hear me? Hear me? Eh? (a man, at the station)
>
> Can't you get it through your thick skull that decent people hate scum like you? You're scum of the earth. You spoil it for the rest of us. The scum of the fucking earth. (a woman, at the station)
>
> Here you go, darling. Milk? Sugar? Give it a good stir, it's all the powdered stuff at the bottom. (a man, at the station)[7]

The interactions show a mixture of blame and pity directed at Else from those within the system, but this animosity is shared by many members of the public whose reactions to her presence on the street vary from ignoring her completely to propositioning her for sex. As Rosalind Gill states, 'The neoliberal subject is required to bear full responsibility for their life biography no matter how severe the constraints upon their action'[8]; the question of how she got there is never asked, the authorities are presented as purely interested in their need to move her on.

---

[5] Berlant, 'Thinking', p. 6.
[6] Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 76.
[7] Smith, pp. 43-44.

Mart, the 'tramp' from *Beyond Black*, is slightly more integrated into society, but his regular attempts to fit in never seem to work. He finds jobs, but all of his work is transient because he struggles to follow the rules: he is fired from handling a stop-go sign next to some roadworks because his 'twirling' was not in 'sync', and sacked from attending car parks because he 'didn't attend it enough'[9]. He attends the neighbourhood watch meeting for the neighbourhood in which he sleeps rough[10], but is driven out of the houses and sheds that he dosses in because people think he's a 'paedo' or an asylum seeker. He attempts to assimilate, but as he notes himself in broken and flawed management parlance, he is 'an outloop' who 'came through the net'[11].

The prostitutes of *Started Early*, whilst surviving on the margins of neoliberal society, have an occupation which makes their lives run parallel to those within the system. Like Mart, they take on the language of business to describe their entrepreneurial suffering, explaining that business is quiet because of the recession and being 'undercut all the time by crack-whores'[12]. Some of them, like Carol Braithwaite, fantasise about the good life by imagining a world where they can live like a 'proper family'[13] with a husband, but the world that they live in makes that fantasy at best an example of cruel optimism. As Tracy recognises, the world of *Started Early* is damaged, full of 'the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer', and 'kids everywhere falling through the cracks'[14].

Berlant explains that the 'lower you are on economic scales, and the less formal your relation to the economy, the more alone you are in the project of maintaining and reproducing life'[15]. The characters of Else, Mart, and Carol are all presented as 'alone' in their project of 'maintaining life'; even when they receive help from others it is never enough to make a real difference in their lives, it merely gives them momentary respite from the search for basic survival requirements, such as food and shelter, and a moment of emotional understanding. Each of these characters live by bargaining: for them, most peoples' interpretation of 'normal' is both aspirational and, in realistic terms, unachievable. Like the films explored by Berlant, these novels

---

[8] Gill, p. 438.
[9] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 298-9.
[10] Mantel, p. 342.
[11] Mantel, pp. 299-304.
[12] Atkinson, *Started Early*, p. 265.
[13] Atkinson, p. 453.
[14] Atkinson, p. 299.
[15] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 167.

'tell us a story from the perspective of the economic bottom's thick space of contingency' which present 'an account of normativity that sees normativity as something other than a synonym for privilege'[16].

The novels all build upon this image of life at the bottom of the economic scales by following the interaction of these characters with the protagonists of the novels (or in the case of *Hotel World*, the *other* protagonists, as each one is given equal narrative attention). The juxtaposition of the marginalised characters and the characters who function within the parameters of neoliberal society creates a narrative in which the similarities rather than the differences between the characters are amplified. Homeless Else did not come from a deprived background, her mother made her 'neat clothes', all 'handmade, all stitched with care', but somewhere along the line (we are not told where) she ended up alone, begging on the streets[17]. In this way, her family background is no different to that of Clare or Lise with whom she shares the narrative, but who both live within the margins of society. Jackson only managed to escape a life defined by mining and subsequent unemployment through social mobility afforded by a job in the army, something which has become a fraying fantasy in the neoliberal world. Alison realises when she speaks to Mart that their beginnings in life were very similar; they were both unloved by their mothers and both had multiple stepdads who beat them. Both characters hear voices, the difference is that Alison managed to turn her affliction into a career, while Mart is deemed crazy and shunned because of it.

By juxtaposing those who have 'thrived' in the contemporary with those who merely survive, it becomes clear that the difference between these two existences often comes down to pure luck, or lack of it. These novels also show, however, that just because someone has the means to live within the parameters of neoliberal society, it does not ensure that they will remain there. A person who willingly obeys the rules need only be nudged off track by sickness, crime, or the desire to help a person that society deems unworthy, and once someone has become 'off track', it is very difficult to get back on.

The message that these novels appear to deliver is that there may be no such thing as society in contemporary Britain, but that does not mean it has to remain that way. By exploring different forms of societal vulnerability and relationships between individuals from different strata of society, these novels 'attend to the proprioceptive' in the same way that Berlant's cinema of precarity does, by investigating:

---

[16] Berlant, p. 167.

[17] Smith, p. 46.

> new potential conditions of solidarity emerging from subjects not with similar historical identities or social locations but with similar adjustment styles to the pressures of the emergent new ordinariness.[18]

In utilising the work of Berlant and Ahmed, it is hoped that this thesis has demonstrated that British contemporary women's literature is producing a range of narratives that explore what it is to survive in the historical present where the rules and ideology peddled through neoliberal governance clash with the needs and desires of many. These novels present characters that, in realising that their attachments to good life fantasies are no longer working, are forced to 'deviate from the paths of happiness'[19] and find new directions and orientations. As Berlant notes, 'it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working'[20], but these novels suggest that what can be awkward and threatening can also be liberating.

None of these novels present a 'happy ending' and yet they all end with a sense that things have as much potential to be 'O.K.' as to be disappointing. They all work within the bounds of a 'politics of the hap', which Ahmed states 'is about opening up possibilities for being in other ways, of being perhaps'[21]. For *Hotel World*, the ending takes place in the morning, signalling a new day; birds shake rainwater off the branches of a tree in 'a miniature parody of rain', and Sara's spirit fades into the unknown while the living continue with their ordinary lives[22]. In *Started Early*, Tracy accepts that she will 'forever be looking over her shoulder', but for now she sits and watches a Tinkerbell DVD with the child who has 'knitted herself into [her] soul'[23]. Jackson receives an unexpected phone call from his estranged love, but the story ends before he answers the phone, with Atkinson diverting our attention to a poem by Emily Dickinson which tells us that ''Hope' is the thing with feathers – That perches in the soul'[24]. Alison of *Beyond Black* ends her story back on the motorway where it began, this time driving in the fast lane 'unmolested, unobserved' fleeing 'before the storm', with newly adopted spirit guides who excitedly talk about the cake they will be having for tea[25].

Whilst the majority of characters that are followed through these novels end their stories with a sense of hap, the worlds around them retain a sense of foreboding. *Started Early's* serial killer has not been found, the world in *Beyond Black* is decaying, toxic, and full of terrorists, and *Hotel World's* Global Hotel continues to do business, unaffected by the life-altering experiences of the novel's characters within its walls.

---

[18] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 201-2.
[19] Ahmed, *The Promise*, p. 223.
[20] Berlant, p. 263.
[21] Ahmed, p. 223.
[22] Smith, p. 236.
[23] Atkinson, *Started Early*, pp. 487-489.
[24] Atkinson, p. 495.
[25] Mantel, *Beyond Black*, p. 451.

When we consider these novels in relation to what has occurred since their publication, we could interpret the threatening or unresolved sense that suffuses the ends of these novels as a forewarning. The economic, political and environmental shifts of the past few years suggest that, as Neilson and Rossiter posit, social and affective precarity is the new 'norm'[26] rather than simply a phase that encompassed the first decade of the twenty first century.

Shortly after the publication of *Started Early*, a novel which presents the recession as an indicator of the present British socio-political climate, the coalition government introduced austerity measures which were described by *The Financial Times* as 'the most drastic budget cuts in living memory', outstripping measures taken by all other advanced economies affected by the 2008 recession[27]. These cuts disproportionally affected, and still affect, women and low-income households[28]. A report from The Fawcett Society refers to the impact on women as a 'triple jeopardy' of cuts to public sector jobs, withdrawal of services specifically used by women, and through the expectation that women will 'fill the gaps' with unpaid labour as state services are withdrawn[29]. Since the recession began the increase in food bank usage, the failing NHS, and cuts in work, disability, and even child benefits has garnered weekly news coverage, with little sign of struggles abating or funding being reinstated in the near future. The struggle experienced by Lise in her attempt to claim benefits due to an un-diagnosable sickness in *Hotel World* has now crossed over to people with mainstream illnesses and disabilities, a development chronicled in Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake*.

The 'Brexit' vote, which occurred in 2016, resulted in a sense that the nation had become divided. It prompted a series of farcical political party leadership bids, flawed EU negotiations and a snap General Election, as well as a concerning 41% increase in hate crime[30]. The referendum was closely followed by Donald Trump's ascension to the Presidency in the U.S., a turn of events that most believed was impossible. His win has secured a mainstream mouthpiece for the Alt Right in America, a movement that fights for white supremacy and the end of feminism among other far right policies[31].

---

[26] Neilson and Rossiter, p. 68.

[27] Daniel Pimlott and Chris Giles, 'UK unveils dramatic austerity measures', *The Financial Times*, 20 October 2010 <https://www.ft.com/content/53fe06e2-dc98-11df-84f5-00144feabdc0> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[28] Jerome De Henau and Howard Reed, *A cumulative gender impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies* (2016) <http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/De_HenauReed_WBG_GIAtaxben_briefing_2016_03_06.pdf> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[29] Daisy Sands, *The Impact of Austerity on Women* (2013) <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Impact-of-Austerity-on-Women-19th-March-2012.pdf> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[30] Katie Forster, 'Hate crimes soared by 41% after Brexit vote, official figures reveal', *The Independent*, 13 October 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html> [accessed 30 April 2017].

[31] Matthew Lyons, *Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The Origins and Ideology of the Alternative Right* (2017) <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/01/20/ctrl-alt-delete-report-on-the-alternative-right/#Conclusion> [accessed 7 May 2017].

It is not only the personal and social experience that has been affected by this shift to the right. The environmental concerns raised in *Beyond Black* see no signs of dissipating either. In the past year alone the British Conservative government have 'given the green light' to fracking (a shale gas extraction technique which is strongly opposed by environmental groups due to its ability to contaminate water supplies and trigger earthquakes[32]), abolished the department for Energy and Climate Change[33], and have been ruled against by the High Court for their failure to tackle illegal air pollution[34]. The fact that Trump is known for tweeting that global warming was created by the Chinese to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive[35] suggests that there will be little pressure from America in encouraging the use of green energy and tightening of environmental laws for the next few years.

Whilst all of this indicates that precarity is a way of life for many of us now, the presence of novels such as the ones considered by this thesis can, in many ways, provide us with a sense of hap. In an interview in 2007, Ali Smith stated that:

> Someone said that the novel gives us our imagined worlds, but actually it gives us our real world. Language and fiction give us how we could be, how we can be, […] You just have to keep yourself open [b]eyond the closed nature [of] what society suggests we ought to have.[36]

The novels considered by this thesis achieve what Smith discusses here; they provide counternarratives to neoliberal life by presenting characters who refuse to be limited by the 'closed nature' of what society suggests they should have, and instead decide to explore what they could be outside of those restrictions. The chance to read about people who refuse to conform through everyday acts of rebellion is important for anyone who does not feel as if they 'fit' in the society around them, and in the present political climate these counternarratives are needed more than ever.

---

[32] B.B.C., *Fracking in Lancashire given go-ahead by government* (2016) < http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-37567866> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[33] Ian Johnston, 'Climate change department closed by Theresa May in 'plain stupid' and 'deeply worrying' move', *The Independent,* 14 July 2016 < http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change-department-killed-off-by-theresa-may-in-plain-stupid-and-deeply-worrying-move-a7137166.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[34] Ian Johnston, 'UK government has breached air pollution laws and failed to take enough action on emissions, High Court rules', *The Independent,* 2 November 2016 http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/air-pollution-verdict-uk-high-court-government-breach-laws-not-doing-enough-a7392876.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

[35] Jeremy Schulman, 'A timeline of every ridiculous thing Trump has said about climate change', *Newsweek*, 4 February 2017 < http://www.newsweek.com/timeline-every-ridiculous-thing-trump-has-said-about-climate-change-576238> [accessed 26 April 2017].

[36] Caroline Smith, 'Ali Smith Interviewed by Caroline Smith', in *Brand Literacy Magazine,* 1 (2007) 75-79 (p. 78).

Bibliography

Adam, Barbara, *Timescapes of Modernity: Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

Ahmed, Sara, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text,* 22.2 (2004) 117-139.

———, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

———, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp.29-51.

———, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010).

———, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

Ardis, Ann, 'Political Attentiveness vs. Political Correctness: Teaching Pat Barker's "Blow Your House Down"', *College Literature,* 18.3 (1991) 44-54.

Armitt, Lucie, *History of the Gothic: Twentieth-Century Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011).

Atkinson, Kate, *Case Histories* (London: Doubleday, 2004).

———, *One Good Turn* (London: Doubleday, 2006).

———, *Started Early, Took My Dog* (London: Doubleday, 2011).

Augé, Marc, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London & New York: Verso, 1995).

Barker, Pat, *Blow Your House Down* (London: Virago, 1984).

Barnardo’s, *Child Poverty Statistics and Facts* (2017) <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/child_poverty/child_poverty_what_is_poverty/child_poverty_statistics_facts.htm> [accessed 30 February 2017].

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957).

Baudrillard, Jean, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (Londond and New York: Verso Books, 2002).

B.B.C., *Fracking in Lancashire given go-ahead by government* (2016) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-37567866> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Bennet, Alice, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Berardi, Franco, *Precarious Rhapsody* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009).

Berlant, Lauren, 'Cruel Optimism', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 93-117.

———, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

———, 'Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event', *American Literary History,* 20.4 (2008) 845-860.

———, 'On the Case', *Critical Inquiry,* 33.4 (2007), 663-672.

———, 'Thinking About Feeling Historical', *Emotion, Space and Society,* 1 (2008), 4-9.

Berlins, Marcel, 'Conviction Rates for Rape Have Plummeted since the 1970s. Is There Anything We Can Do to Change That?', *The Guardian,* 24 January 2007 <https://www.theguardian. com/commentisfree/2007/jan/24/television.prisonsandprobation> [accessed 30 August 2016].

Bettys & Taylors of Harrogate Limited, *Yorkshire Tea: Who We Are* (2016) <http://www.yorkshire tea.co.uk/about-us/yorkshire-tea-who-we-are.php> [accessed 8 December 2015].

Beyer, Peter, *Religion and Globalization* (London and California: Sage Publications Ltd., 1994).

Biemel, Walter and Herbert Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology* (2012), <https://www.britannica.com/ topic/phenomenology> [accessed 20 August 2016].

Botting, Fred, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995).

———, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

Boyle, Karen, *Media and Violence : Gendering the Debates* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2005).

Buchanan, Ian, 'Augé, Marc', in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. by George Ritzer (London: Sage publications, 2005).

———, 'Non-Places: Space in the Age of Supermodernity', *Social Semiotics,* 9.3 (1999), 393-398.

Butler, Judith, ‘Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics’, *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 4.3 (2009) i-xiii.

Butler, Patrick, ‘Poorest UK families struggle to put food on the table, survey finds’, *The Guardian,* 30 March 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/30/poorest-uk-families-struggle-eat-regularly-heathily-food-standards-agency-survey [accessed 25 April 2017].

Carter, Angela, 'Notes from the Front Line', in *On Gender and Writing,* ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 69-77.

Change.org, *Change Your Food Donation Policy* (2013), <https://www.change.org/p/starbucks-ireland-change-your-food-donation-policy> [Accessed 01 March 2015].

Cheng, Sealing, 'Neoliberalising Sex, Normativizing Love' in *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Simon Springer and others (Oxon: Routledge, 2016) pp. 227-236.

Childs, Peter , Claire Colebrook, and Sebastian Groes, 'Introduction', in *Women's Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts*, ed. by Peter Childs, Claire Colebrook and Sebastian Groes (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. IX-XXV.

Colquhoun, Alan, *Oxford History of Art: Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2002).

Curti, Lidia, 'Female Literature of Migration in Italy', *Feminist Review,* 87 (2007), 60-75.

De Henau, Jerome and Howard Reed, *A cumulative gender impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies* (2016) <http://wbg.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/03/De_HenauReed_WBG_GIAtaxben_briefing_2016_03_06.pdf> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Domínguez García, Beatriz 'The Retelling of History through Her Story', in *The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy*, ed. by Alberto Lazaro (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 139-156.

Duggan, Lisa, 'The New Homonormativity: the Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in *Materializing Democracy*, ed. by Dana D. Nelson and Russ Castronovo (London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 175-194.

Dutton, Paul, 'Leeds Calling: The Influence of London on the Gentrification of Regional Cities', *Urban Studies,* 40.12 (2003), 2557–2572.

EarthTalk, *Have We Passed the Point of No Return on Climate Change?* (2015), <https://www. scientificamerican.com/article/have-we-passed-the-point-of-no-return-on-climate-change/> [accessed 17 August 2016].

Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyperreality* (Florida: Harcourt, 1986).

Eliot, T.S, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Broadview Press, 2011).

Elliot, Michael, 'They Had a Plan', *Time Magazine,* 12 August 2002 <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003007,00.html> [accessed 2 September 2016].

Elmhurst, Sophie, 'The Unquiet Mind of Hilary Mantel', *New Statesman,* 3 October 2012 <http:// www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/10/unquiet-mind-hilary-mantel> [accessed 4 September 2016].

Erickson, Daniel, *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitute* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Felski, Rita, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Forster, Katie, 'Hate crimes soared by 41% after Brexit vote, official figures reveal', *The Independent*, 13 October 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-

hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html> [accessed 30 April 2017].

Fox, Genevieve, 'Kate Atkinson: Week One: Interview', *The Telegraph,* 30 June 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/8608641/Kate-Atkinson-Week-One> [accessed 20 November 2012].

France, Louise, 'Life Stories: Interview: Ali Smith'*,* *The Observer*, 22 May 2005 <www.guardian. co.uk/books/2005/may/22/fiction.bookerprize2005> [accessed 20 November 2012].

Funk, Wolfgang, 'Ghosts of Postmodernity: Spectral Epistemology and Haunting in Hilary Mantel's *Fludd* and *Beyond Black*', in *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now*, ed. by Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hilyard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 147-60.

Garland, David, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Germanà, Monica, ''The Uncanny Can Happen': Desire and Belief in *the Seer*', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 115-29.

Gibson, William, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2003).

Gill, Rosalind, 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times', *Subjectivity,* 25.1 (2008) 432-445.

Gill, Rosalind, and Andy C. Pratt, 'In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work.', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 25.7-8 (2008), 1-30.

Gregg, Melissa, 'On Friday Night Drinks', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 250-269.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 1-28.

Hanisch, Carol, *The Personal Is Political,* (2009) <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Harootunian, Harry, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry,* 33.3 (2007), 471-494.

———, 'Shadowing History: National Narratives and the Persistence of the Everyday', *Cultural Studies,* 18.2-3 (2004), 181-200.

Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

———, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014).

Hawkins, Joan, 'Dark, disturbing, intelligent, provocative, and quirky: avante-garde cinema of the 1980s and 1990s', in *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream,* ed. by Christine Holmlund and Justin Wyat (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.89-106.

Hemerijck, Anton, *Changing Welfare States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Herzog, Todd, 'Crime Stories: Criminal, Society, and the Modernist Case History', *Representations,* 80.1 (2002), 34-61.

Heynen, Nik, et al., ‘Conclusion’ in *Neoliberal Environments: False Promises and Unnatural Consequences*, ed. by Nik Heynen and others (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 287-291.

Hollinger, Paul C., 'Winnicott, Tomkins, and the Psychology of Affect', *Clinical Social Work,* 37.2 (2009), 155-162.

Home Office, *An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales* (2013), <https://www.gov. uk/government/statistics/an-overview-of-sexual-offending-in-england-and-wales> [accessed 30 August 2016].

Horton, Emily, 'Contemporary Space and Affective Ethics in Ali Smith's Short Stories', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 9-22.

Horton, Emily, and Monica Germanà, 'Introduction', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 1-8.

Iwata-Weickgenannt, Kristina, and Roman Rosenbaum, *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

Jencks, Charles, *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1995).

Johnston, Ian, ‘Climate change department closed by Theresa May in ‘plain stupid’ and ‘deeply worrying’ move’, *The Independent*, 14 July 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change-department-killed-off-by-theresa-may-in-plain-stupid-and-deeply-worrying-move-a7137166.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Johnston, Ian, ‘UK government has breached air pollution laws and failed to take enough action on emissions, High Court rules’, *The Independent,* 2 November 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/air-pollution-verdict-uk-high-court-government-breach-laws-not-doing-enough-a7392876.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Jones, Barbara, *Voices from an Evil God* (London: Blake Publishing, 1994).

Jones, Luke, ' *How the UK coped with the millennium bug 15 years ago* (2014) <http://www. bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30576670> [accessed 1 September 2016].

King, Martin, and Ian Cummins, '“Dead Cities, Crows, the Rain and Their Ripper, the Yorkshire Ripper”: The Red Riding Novels (1974, 1977, 1980, 1983) of David Peace as Lieux D’horreur', *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory,* 6.3 (2013), 43-56.

Knox, Sara, 'Giving Flesh to the 'Wraiths of Violence'; Super-Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', *Australian Feminist Studies,* 25.65 (2010), 313-323.

Lacey, Robert, 'The Truth About Diana and the Queen: How Monarch Was Princess's Greatest Supporter... Until That Martin Bashir Documentary', *The Daily Mail,* 28 January 2012 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2092888/Diana-The-Queen-Her-Majesty-Princesss-greatest-supporter-sending-psychiatrist-hosting-family-therapy-session.html> [accessed 18 August 2016].

Laughey, Dan, 'Ripper', in *Barthes' Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Julian McDougall and Peter Bennett (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 83-84.

Leeds City Council, 'Leeds Economy Briefing Note: Index of Deprivation 2010'*, Leeds Economy Briefing Note,* 46 (2011).

Levin, Stephen M., 'Narrating Remainders: Spectral Presences in Ali Smith's Fictions', in *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), pp. 35-47.

Lewis, Helen, ‘The Tories have stopped talking about austerity. That doesn’t mean it’s gone away’, *New Statesman*, 6 April 2017 http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/welfare/2017/04/tories-have-stopped-talking-about-austerity-doesnt-mean-its-gone-away [accessed 25 April 2017].

Leys, Ruth, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry,* 37 (2011), 434-472.

Lord Tennyson, Alfred, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (2016), <https://www.poetryfoundation. org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45319> [accessed 27 August 2016].

Lowry, Elizabeth, 'The Trouble Is I’m Dead', *London Review of Books,* 27.10 (2005), 25-26.

Lyons, Matthew, *Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The Origins and Ideology of the Alternative Right* (2017) <http://www.political research.org/2017/01/20/ctrl-alt-delete-report-on-the-alternative-right/#Conclusion> [accessed 7 May 2017].

Malmgren, Carl, *Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective, and Crime Fiction* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 2001).

Mantel, Hilary, *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

———, *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (London: Penguin, 1986).

———, *Fludd* (London and New York: Harper Perennial, 1989).

———, 'Ghost Writing', *The Guardian,* 28 July 2007 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/ 2007/jul/28/edinburghfestival2007.poetry> [accessed 28 August 2016].

———, 'Royal Bodies', *London Review of Books,* 35.4 (2013) 3-7.

Marx, Karl, *Capital*, Vol. 1 and 2 (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2013).

Massey, Doreen, 'Vocabularies of the Economy', in *After Neoliberalism: The Kilburn Manifesto*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 2015), pp.24-36.

McDermott, Sinead, 'Kate Atkinson's Family Romance: Missing Mothers and Hidden Histories in Behind the Scenes at the Museum ', *Critical Survey,* 18.2 (2006), 67-78.

McGranahan, Gordon, Deborah Balk, and Bridget Anderson, 'The Rising Tide: Assessing the Risks of Climate Change and Human Settlements in Low Elevation Coastal Zones', *Environment & Urbanization,* 19.1 (2007) 17-37.

McIntyre, Niamh, ‘London refuges have funding slashed as rates of domestic violence soar’, *The Independent*, 7 March 2007 < http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-councils-funding-refuges-domestic-violence-cut-38-percent-2010-a7612871.html> [accessed 26 April 2017].

Milne, Seumas, ‘During the miners’ strike, Thatcher’s secret state was the real enemy within’, *The Guardian*, 3 October 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree /2014/oct/03/miners-strike-thatcher-real-enemy-within-extremism> [accessed 20 May 2017].

Merriam-Webster, *Closet* (2016), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/closet> [accessed 15 August 2016].

Mitropoulos, Angela, 'Precari-Us?', *Mute,* 1.29 (2005), 88-92.

Moreton, Cole, 'Missing: The Contrasting Searches for Shannon and Madeleine', *The Independent,* 2 March 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/missing-the-contrasting-searches-for-shannon-and-madeleine-790207.html> [accessed 20 August 2016].

Morrison, Jago, 'The Turn to Precarity in Twenty-First Century Fiction', *American, British and Canadian Studies Journal,* 21.1 (2014), 10-29.

Munck, Ronaldo, 'The Precariat: A View from the South', *Third World Quarterly,* 34.5 (2013), 747-762.

Navarro, Marysa, 'Wonder Woman Was Argentine and Her Real Name Was Evita', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies,* 24.48 (1999), 133-52.

Neilson, Brett, and Ned Rossiter, 'Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 25.7-8 (2008), 51-72.

Newton, Jennifer, 'Donald Trump Claimed Princess Diana 'Was Crazy' but He 'Could (and Would) Have Slept with Her' Anyway', *The Daily Mail,* 25 February 2016 <http://www.dailymail. co.uk/news/article-3464039/Donald-Trump-claimed-Princess-Diana-crazy-said-slept-without-hesitation-supermodel-beauty.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].

Nichols, Sallie, 'The Hanged Man: Suspense', *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought,* 10.2 (1979), 191-202.

———, *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey* (Maine: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1980).

O'Reilly, Sarah, 'A Kind of Alchemy: Sarah O'reilly Talks to Hilary Mantel', in *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), pp. 2-6.

Oudenamspen, Merijin, and Gavin Sullivan, 'Precarity and N/European Identity: An Interview with Alex Foti of Chain Workers', *Mute,* 2.0 (2005), 44-53.

Owen, Paul, 'Tracking Trump: president tosses Paris agreement in the trash', *The Guardian,* 3 June 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/03/donald-trump-news-paris-agreement-covfefe-fbi> [accessed 3 June 2017].

Parker, Emma, *Kate Atkinson's Behind the Scenes at the Museum: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).

Pickett, Kate and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).

Pimlott, Daniel and Chris Giles, 'UK unveils dramatic austerity measures', *The Financial Times*, 20 October 2010 <https://www.ft.com/content/53fe06e2-dc98-11df-84f5-00144feabdc0> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Poole, Susanna, 'Voicing the Non-Place: Precarious Theatre in a Woman's Prison', *The Feminist Review,* 87 (2007), 141-152.

Rayner, Gordon and Bill Gardner, 'Men must prove a woman said 'Yes' under tough new rape rules', *The Telegraph*, 28 Jan 2015 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/11375667/Men-must-prove-a-woman-said-Yes-under-tough-new-rape-rules.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Rosenbaum, Roman 'Towards an Introduction: Japan's Literature of Precarity', in *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature*, ed. by Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt and Roman Rosenbaum (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-23.

Ross Nickerson, Catherine, 'Women Writers before 1960', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Catherine Ross Nickerson (Cambridge and Ohio: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.29-41.

Sands, Daisy, *The Impact of Austerity on Women* (2013) <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Impact-of-Austerity-on-Women-19th-March-2012.pdf> [accessed 25 April 2017].

Schaefer, Donovan, 'The Promise of Affect: The Politics of the Event in Ahmed's the Promise of Happiness and Berlant's Cruel Optimism', *Theory and Event,* 16.2 (2013).

Schulman, Jeremy, 'A timeline of every ridiculous thing Trump has said about climate change', *Newsweek*, 4 February 2017 < http://www.newsweek.com/timeline-every-ridiculous-thing-trump-has-said-about-climate-change-576238> [accessed 26 April 2017].

Semetsky, Inna, *The Edusemiotics of Images: Essays on the Art~Science of Tarot* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013).

Seymour, Richard, *We Are All Precarious - on the Concept of the 'Precariat' and Its Misuses* (2012) <http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/

we_are_all_precarious_on_the_concept_of_the_precariat_and_its_misuses> [accessed 19 August 2016].

Smith, Ali, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin, 2002).

Smith, Caroline, 'Ali Smith Interviewed by Caroline Smith', in *Brand Literacy Magazine,* 1 (2007) 75-79.

Smith, Joan, *Misogynies* (London: Westbourne Press, 2013).

Smith, Jules, *Kate Atkinson: Critical Perspective*, (2009), <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/kate-atkinson> [accessed 21 August 2015].

Spooner, Catherine, ''That Eventless Realm': Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* and the Ghosts of the M25', in *London Gothic: Place, Space and the Gothic Imagination*, ed. by Lawrence Phillips and Anne Witchard (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), pp.80-90.

Springer, Simon, 'The Violence of Neoliberalism' in *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Simon Springer and others (Oxon: Routledge, 2016) pp. 153-163.

Staff and Agencies, 'The Disappearance of Shannon Matthews', *The Guardian,* 4 December 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/mar/14/2> [accessed 20 August 2016].

Standing, Guy, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

Starbucks, *Business Ethics and Compliance* (2016), <http://www.starbucks.co.uk/about-us/company-information/business-ethics-and-compliance> [accessed 01 March 2015].

Stewart, Kathleen, 'Worlding Refrains', in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader,* ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press Books, 2009), pp. 339-354.

Stewart, Victoria, 'A Word in Your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's Beyond Black', *Critique-studies in Contemporary Fiction,* 50.3 (2009) 293-312.

Tapia, Ruby C., *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death, and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

Taylor, Catherine, 'I'm Jack by Mark Blacklock Review – a Spotlight on the Yorkshire Ripper Hoaxer', *The Guardian,* 25 June 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/ jun/25/im-jack-by-mark-blacklock-review> [accessed 25 August 2016].

Thomas, Paul, *Critical Lives: Karl Marx* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Poetics of Prose* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1977).

Tsianos, Vassilis, and Dimitris Papadopoulos, *Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism* (2006) <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/tsianospapadopoulos/en> [accessed 10 March 2016].

Turner, Alwyn W., *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum Press Ltd., 2009).

Tyler, Imogen, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013).

Wainwright, Martin, 'How the Shannon Matthews Kidnap Plot Fell Apart', *The Guardian*, 4 December 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/dec/04/shannon-matthews-kidnap-plot> [accessed 20 August 2016].

——— 'Tetley's Yorkshire Brewery Set to Close', *The Guardian,* 5 November 2008 <https://www. theguardian.com/business/2008/nov/05/fooddrinks-recession> [accessed 19 August 2016].

Warner, Michael, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Warner, Michael, and Lauren Berlant, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

Waters, Malcolm, *Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Whitehead, Colson, *The Intuitionist* (London: Fleet, 1999).

Worthington, Heather, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2008).