FEET DOWN, NEW PLANET: EXORBITANCE AND QUEER FUTURITIES IN *THE WELL OF LONELINESS*, LESBIAN PULP FICTION, AND RADICAL FEMINIST MANIFESTOS

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ABSTRACT

“Feet Down, New Planet” explores exorbitance and queer futurities in The Well of Loneliness, lesbian pulp fiction, and radical feminist manifestos. It extends queer theory to the texts as a way to expand them beyond the limits of their original sociocultural publication contexts. This thesis examines models of reproduction, queer embodiment, and world-building in The Well of Loneliness, lesbian pulp fiction, and radical feminist manifestos in order to examine how the authors write worlds beyond the limits of liberal feminist propriety, and imagine radical queer futures through oozing poetic sensibilities. “Feet Down, New Planet” contributes to queer theories of excess by mapping a cartographic and affective history of queer literary excess, and curates the exorbitant world-building frameworks Radclyffe Hall, Valerie Taylor, Jill Johnston, and Valerie Solanas imagine.
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Introduction: *SCUM Manifesto* and *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*.............. 56
Introduction: Feet Down

This is a collection of strange textual bedfellows. As an exploration in queer literary theory, “Feet Down, New Planet” joins Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, lesbian pulp fiction, and radical feminist manifestos by Valerie Solanas and Jill Johnston. Staged as a series of encounters, this project accounts for these texts as crevice-dwellers—queer in both content and form. As a canonical twentieth-century queer novel, *The Well of Loneliness* precedes the literary excitation of lesbian pulp by several decades. Yet, its melodramatic tenor dialogues with the sentimentality of lesbian pulp, and the homophobic sentiments that code lesbian pulp characters, and their stories, as tragic and tumultuous. Mapping the texts along a historical continuum of queer literature, I explore models of queer futurity through reproduction, oozing excess, and the material heaviness of the queer body. *The Well of Loneliness*, lesbian pulp fiction, and radical feminist manifestos are historically considered to be “bad writing” or “low literature” in various ways—whether through their privileging of queer content, or aesthetic exorbitance that spills beyond the edges of liberal feminist propriety (Bradway x). This project attends to entanglements of power—patriarchal sexism, homophobia, classism—that nudge these texts beyond the brink of literary decorum or feminist canonization, and offers a way of “staying with the trouble” by centering the excess (Haraway 2).

One of the guiding questions for this project follows the work of Tyler Bradway in his study of queer experimental literature: “How do the affective relations of a text ‘queer’ its readers and the social relations of reading itself?” (Bradway v). While explicitly queer in many senses, the texts I examine here are in a particular affective and aesthetic arrangement with

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1. In his work on queer experimental literature, Tyler Bradway explores “bad reading” as being “infused with affects that do not conform to the protocols of critical reading and other hegemonic, institutionally sanctioned, and socially approved modes of ‘good reading’” (*Queer Experimental Literature* v). I extend this notion to consider the politics of “bad writing” or “low literature.”

2. Donna Haraway calls for staying with the trouble in the daily processes of living and dying, and I apply it here to account for textual messiness and excess as troubling literary propriety. See: Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.
each other. The depressive tone of *The Well of Loneliness* informs my reading of lesbian pulp, and both lesbian pulp and *The Well of Loneliness* inform my reading of radical feminist manifestos. This arrangement gestures toward an ethics of queer literary criticism that resists reducing queerness to sexual orientation, and works against a fragmentary, postmodern sensibility that renders everything queer and thus nothing queer at all. To pursue queer literary criticism implies that these texts are, in some sense, available to this type of reading, and that queer theory is not an odd theoretical framework through which to read them. While queer theory expands each of the texts beyond their original contexts, this project advances a relational queer reading that allows the texts to nudge one another. “Feet Down, New Planet” proposes a pulpy reading of *The Well of Loneliness* to reveal nuanced models of queer futurity, and considers how linking *The Well of Loneliness* to lesbian pulp reconfigures the erotic and affective relations of lesbian pulp. Finally, this project considers how radical feminist manifestos dialogue with queer embodiment, affect, and futurity as explored through *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp fiction. Placing *The Well of Loneliness* in conversation with lesbian pulp and radical feminist manifestos makes a case for inter-genre criticism by attending to the overlapping models of futurity the texts present, and situates queer embodiment and affect as the central thrusts of queer futurity.

The structure of the project reflects its multi-genre critical investments, with chapters one and two building toward the final exorbitant ooze in chapter three. Chapter one theorizes the womb as a queer counterpublic and world-building site in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*. Chapter two examines lesbian pulp fiction through Valerie Taylor’s *Stranger on Lesbos* to link the heavy queer body in lesbian pulp to the earthbound wombs of *The Well of Loneliness*. Chapter three extends the temporality of the womb and queer heaviness to consider exorbitant poetics in Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto* and Jill Johnston’s *Lesbian Nation: The
*Feminist Solution.* This project offers a cartographic reading of queer aesthetics and futurities by accounting for publication patterns and the social history of gay and lesbian liberation movements. It locates *The Well of Loneliness,* lesbian pulp fiction, and radical feminist manifestos as relational objects with contemporary relevance for queer theory. Through a symbiotic reading of Hall, Taylor, Solanas, and Johnston across time and genre, this project develops a queer theory of excess that centers the impatience of queer world-building—from the fleshy wombs of *The Well of Loneliness,* to the cosmic propulsions of Jill Johnston.
Chapter I

Flesh Temporalities: Womb as Queer Counterpublic in The Well of Loneliness

Introduction: The Well of Loneliness

Hailed as the “lesbian bible” of the twentieth-century, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* chronicles the life of Stephen Gordon from her childhood in aristocratic England to adulthood as a novelist in post-World War I Paris (Saxey vi). Published in 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* details Stephen’s love affairs with women, and depicts early twentieth-century Parisian queer society. Following the initial wave of criticism after its publication, *The Well of Loneliness* experienced a renaissance during the second-wave feminist movement in the United States.³ New criticism emerged in the 1970s and 80s, bringing *The Well of Loneliness* back to the center of feminist and queer literary discussions amidst the budding women’s and gay liberation movements. In 1981, Catherine Stimpson offered a reading of *The Well of Loneliness* as paradigmatic of the dying fall—the tragic narrative of lesbian existence—which mirrored the sentiment of the “self-hating Radclyffe Hall tradition” (Love “Spoiled Identity” 101). A new wave of scholarship emerged in the 1990s that rethought the novel’s dependence on twentieth-century sexology, centering Stephen’s masculinity as crucial to the novel.⁴

In 2007, Heather Love privileged loneliness as a queer structure of feeling in her reading of Stephen’s inability to assimilate into aristocratic English society and queer communities in Paris.⁵ Love argues for honoring loneliness as a historically significant queer affect, while noting that *The Well of Loneliness* has proven stubbornly resistant to queer theory’s futural imaginings (Love “Spoiled Identity” 104). My reading of *The Well of Loneliness* responds

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³ Laura Doan and Jay Prosser offer two reasons for the novel’s lull in the 1930s-1950s: it did not jive with modernism or realism in its “clumsy blend of realism and sentimental romanticism,” and was largely out of print until its paperback reprint in 1951 (Doan and Prosser *Palatable Poison* 14–15).


⁵ See: Heather Love, “Spoiled Identity: Radclyffe Hall’s Unwanted Being.”
to the novel’s seeming resistance to queer futurity by analyzing womb imagery and sites of desire as complex temporal structures. The two formulations of the womb that bookend the novel—the shadow of Stephen in her mother’s womb at the beginning, and the clamoring queer collective in Stephen’s womb at the end—offer two models of queer futurity that complicate Freudian notions of sexual inversion and the wandering womb. While loneliness functions as a queer structure of feeling in *The Well of Loneliness*, Hall writes a complex womb that undermines the traditional link between the womb and futurity. Through the shadow of the queer child in Anna’s womb, and the collective queering of Stephen’s womb, representations of the womb in *The Well of Loneliness* undercut heteronormative reproductive discourse, and push against the dense affective loneliness of the novel. By reading *The Well of Loneliness* in this fashion, I offer a connection between the fraught politics of queer tragedy and loneliness that envelope the novel, and the futural thrust of queer theory that imagines the affective and erotic potential of alternate temporal and bodily arrangements.

**Situating the Womb**

In the final pages of the novel, Stephen unravels her relationship with her partner, Mary Llewelyn, after seeing “all that [Mary] was lacking” through her relationship with Stephen (Hall 392). Alone in her bedroom after Mary departs, Stephen feels the sensation of a throng of people that materializes to reveal “strangers with miserable eyes” before they take shape and become her friends—“Surely that was Wanda?” and “Jamie clasping Barbara by the hand”—and everyone in the world like her—“these unbidden guests” (Hall 399). Their anguish falls upon Stephen as they entreat her to approach God on their behalf: “They fought, they trampled, they were getting her under. In their madness to become articulate through her, they were tearing

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6 For more on the wandering womb, see: John Money, “Wandering Wombs and Shrinking Penises: The Lineage and Linkage of Hysteria.”
7 “children, a home that the world would respect, ties of affection that the world would hold sacred, the blessed security and peace of being released from the world’s persecution” (Hall 392).
her to pieces” (Hall 399). Stephen “could see their marred and reproachful faces with the haunted, melancholy eyes of the invert,” and the tearing to pieces turns maternal as the beings enter into her womb (Hall 399). “[Stephen’s] barren womb became fruitful—it ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation” (Hall 399). The image of the womb shapes the collective struggle for language, embodiment, and visibility as Stephen becomes the liaison between the voices and God. *The Well of Loneliness* depicts Stephen as a deeply masculine character who finds fulfillment in writing novels and loving Mary, yet here in the final image, her womb, as a traditional symbol of feminine fecundity, expands to contain a menagerie of queer creatures. Rather than serve as a site of reproduction, Stephen’s womb functions as a container for queer existence. “The quick, the dead, and the yet unborn” clamor for articulation through her, “tearing her to pieces” in their reach for language (Hall 398, 399). The beings inside Stephen do not operate within a reproductive model of the womb fashioned in the image of the future child. Instead, this final image reimagines the womb as a space for queer articulation and community. The womb, housed within a masculine female character, takes on a new connotation—as an envelope for queer bodies, rather than the secluded site of reproduction.

Stephen’s womb becomes a technology of articulation for past, present, and future queer people, “all calling her, softly at first and then louder” (Hall 398). Stephen experiences “burning rockets of pain – their pain, her pain, all welded together in one great consuming agony” (Hall 399). The pain traditionally associated with childbirth funnels through the cry for queer articulation. The sound of their cries, rather than their clamor for birth, situates as the searing pain, and the voices collide to form a singular voice: “A terrifying voice that made her ears throb, that made her brain throb, that shook her very entrails, until she must stagger and all but fall beneath this appalling burden of sound that strangled her in its will to be uttered” (Hall
Stephen transforms the inarticulate noises of the crowd into language, and utters the final collective plea of the novel: “Acknowledge us, O God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!” (Hall 399). The clamor for articulation and visibility builds toward a cry for God to acknowledge their existence, synthesizing the religious allusions featured throughout the novel. Religious discourse filters through Stephen’s womb as she becomes a mouthpiece for the people. The “fearful and sterile burden” of Stephen’s “barren womb” dialogues with anti-futural queer politics, and undermines the heteronormative procreative womb; it ruptures both the womb as site of reproduction, and the fetal creature as blissfully ignorant (Hall 399). The characterization of the collective as a fearful, sterile burden suggests Stephen’s womb to be not only an enclosed queer space, but also one that expands beyond the boundaries of her body—it dialogues with the “world that lacked all pity and all understanding” (Hall 399). In Stephen’s not-quiteness, in her habitation of a space between male and female, her womb offers space for self-expression beyond legible genders and sexualities. In this formulation, the potential for the womb lies in its resistance to a defined gendered or sexed identity, and refusal to house a limited number of beings. In its ability to contain past, present, and future queers—“the quick, the dead, and the yet unborn”—and thus expand beyond the physical parameters of the pregnant body, Stephen’s womb offers a complex temporality of birth: one that reaches backward and forward to make room for queer articulation (Hall 398). The sinewy sensibility of this womb-formation, its ability to trouble the sequential continuity

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8 Lee Edelman references the “death drive” historically associated with queer reproductive politics, and reclaims the pejorative connotation to advocate against a model of futurity centered on the child. See: Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.*

9 I define Stephen’s “not-quiteness” in relation to her characterization in early twentieth-century aristocratic English society. Even in her migration to Paris, and entrance into a budding queer community, she remains at odds with her body and sense of self. Jay Prosser (*Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*) uses this as the basis for his reading of transsexuality in *The Well of Loneliness,* but here I read it in relation to the womb as part of a non-sex or gender binary body.
of the procreative womb, creates space for Stephen and the beings inside of her to generate fresh language and means of expression previously deemed inarticulate or nonexistent.

In turning “first to God, and then to the world, and then to [Stephen],” Stephen’s womb maps as a generative queer space, siphoning through religious alienation and homophobic cultural forces (Hall 399). In this recursive turn from God, to the world, to Stephen’s womb, the queer bodies situate Stephen as divine savior and queer mother. While not explicitly maternal, the reconfiguration of the womb to house queer bodies privileges queer kinship, rather than motherhood, as a form of caretaking. Stephen must “stagger and all but fall beneath this appalling burden of sound that strangled her in its will to be uttered,” and the implied birth centers queer utterance, rather than the emerging child (Hall 399). The fragmented nature of articulation, the “appalling burden of sound” that weighs on Stephen in its quest “to be uttered,” resists the linear birth associated with pregnancy (Hall 399). Instead, fragmented articulation serves as the birthed creature; it is the desire and reach for language that sifts through Stephen’s womb, expressed in her collective cry to “Give us also the right to our existence!” (Hall 399).

In mapping this image of the womb as a productive queer space, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s influential 1998 essay “Sex in Public” offers a framework for theorizing a queer counterpublic in the body. Berlant and Warner explore the boundaries of public and private discourse in heteronormative society, arguing that sex aligns with the intimate domain of “simple personhood” (Berlant and Warner 553). By associating sex with the private, domestic sphere—often couched within a reproductive paradigm—public displays of queer eroticism and culture are classified as obscene (Berlant and Warner 556). In their discussion of queer spaces, Berlant and Warner note that the simultaneous fragility and “inventiveness of queer world making” frames these spaces as tenuous even in their most concrete realizations.
Accounting for both the inventiveness and fragility of queer world-making, Stephen’s womb functions as a nebulous queer counterpublic, concrete in its ability to resist dominant reproductive discourse. If intimate life is the “endlessly cited elsewhere of political public discourse,” reading the womb as a queer counterpublic challenges the traditional articulation of the womb as biologically predetermined and self-actualized (Berlant and Warner 553, original emphasis).

A queer reading of the womb resists the remoteness of private intimacy, and, in the context of early-twentieth century Paris, exhumes the processes that render public queer intimacies invisible. By positioning Stephen’s womb in The Well of Loneliness as something that contains, rather than creates, the queer womb is not activated by a heterosexual sex act, but by collective kinship that shapes the womb as a space for queer community. As Stephen takes in the “quick, dead, and yet unborn,” she engages in a form of queer world-making that articulates the womb as a “psychic base for identification” (Hall 399, Berlant and Warner 554). Berlant and Warner catalogue their queer world-making project as a “space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, and alternate routes”—constantly in motion, forming and dissolving, starting and stopping (Berlant and Warner 558). In their entry first into her home, and then into her womb, the beings inside Stephen engage in a queer world-making of their own. They make space for their bodies and languages to be felt through Stephen as their ordained martyr—“‘Stephen, speak with your God and ask Him why He has left us forsaken!’” (Hall 399). Stephen’s womb thus functions as a site of intimacy between her

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10 Berlant and Warner offer Christopher Street and sex shops as two examples of queer spaces (Berlant and Warner 551-552).
11 Berlant and Warner fashion the “fragility” and “inventiveness” in relation to the “history of the modern public sphere,” and the “modern discourse of sexuality” (Berlant and Warner 559).
12 Nebulos in relation to the fragility of queer world-making, and concrete in its inventive resistance to heteronormative reproduction.
13 “The normativity of heterosexual culture links intimacy only to the institutions of personal life, making them the privileged institutions of social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of capital, and self-development” (Berlant and Warner 553).
body and the beings, a “zone in which a future might be thought and willed” through kinship and collective articulation (Berlant and Warner 553).

**Mobile Sites and Border Intimacies**

In their discussion of queer world-making, Berlant and Warner claim that queer culture develops knowledge in “mobile sites [whose] mobility makes them possible but also renders them hard to recognize as world making because they are so fragile and ephemeral” (Berlant and Warner 561).14 *The Well of Loneliness* presents Stephen’s coming-of-age at various points: as a young child drawn to boyish activities, as a young woman articulating feelings of desire for women, and as a successful writer in a meaningful romantic relationship. Stephen functions as a mobile site of ideology and knowledge throughout the novel, moving through aristocratic and underground queer spaces alike. Perhaps the strongest mobile site, however, is the final image of her womb. As the ultimate mobile site for queer knowledge and identity formation, lonely, desolate bodies enter into her as a space outside of themselves. Stephen’s womb thus supports corporeal and affective arrangements that are “available to memory and sustained through collective activity” (Berlant and Warner 562). Through Stephen, the beings are able to collectively access memory, calling out to her from specific moments in their lives—the “terrible brothers from Alec’s” with their “white, shaking fingers,” “Jamie clasping Barbara by the hand; Barbara with the white flowers of death on her bosom” (Hall 398). The “terrible brothers” call out from Alec’s, a local gay bar, and Barbara and Jamie from death (Hall 398). Their cries originate from specific locations in queer subculture and thus bring the *physical* queer counterpublics into Stephen’s womb as a bodily queer counterpublic. In this collective plea for God to “Give us also the right to our existence!” Stephen accumulates the life-worlds of

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14 “drag, youth culture, music, dance, parades, flaunting and cruising” function as mobile sites (Berlant and Warner 561).
the queer beings within her; their movement through queer spaces, or counterpublics, shifts onto Stephen as she attends to the collective.

In their exploration of queer sexual culture, Berlant and Warner describe “border intimacies” as forms of “nonreproductive eroticism” that render bodies “disorganized and exciting” (Berlant and Warner 560, 564). While the religious supplications that tint the final image of the womb in *The Well of Loneliness* offer a sense of divinity, an erotic code also shadows Stephen’s womb. Past lovers, lifelong partners, and queer youth inhabit Stephen’s womb, and sex saturates this formation of the womb. Even in Stephen’s plea for God’s intercession, the womb becomes a space for same-sex and multi-gendered eroticism that transforms the space itself. Women-loving-women and men-loving-men comprise the weight Stephen struggles under. In reading this formation of the womb as both affectively charged and erotic, the womb functions as a disorganized, fragmentary element of the body: a border intimacy. The beings inside the womb, both in relation to Stephen and each other, *perform* this fragmentary, non-reproductive, erotic relationship to the body—they both enable and embody the erotics of the womb.

In building a framework for the erotic queer womb, I turn to Luce Irigaray’s 1980 essay “When Our Lips Speak Together” as an exploration in autoeroticism and same-sex desire. Irigaray writes: “Do we need, or want, children? What for? Here and now, we are close. Men and women have children to embody their closeness, their distance. But we?” (Irigaray 84). Irigaray articulates the desire for reproduction as proximal to heterosexual male and female identities, reading both closeness and distance as integral to the formation of a child. In considering the proximity of reproduction to heterosexual culture, children are depicted as an embodiment of closeness—the product of a particular sexual act. In Stephen’s case, “the quick, the dead, and the yet unborn” inhabit her womb, blurring the line between child and adult, born
and unborn (Hall 398). The child-as-closeness does not inform this messy formation of the womb. Rather, in writing the womb as a space for queer kinship, the beings exist in Stephen’s womb without the pressure to be born. Even though Stephen implores God to give them the right to their existence, the beings are not “born again” through Stephen, and she does not function as a messianic figure for the redemption of outcasts. Instead, the beings possess Stephen, instructing her to “speak with your God and ask Him why He has left us forsaken!” (Hall 398-399). Stephen, with the power of divine communication, queers the saturated religious imagery; her body sags under the weight of queer bodies crying out to God. This image rearticulates the material structure of the womb through a relational queer temporality. As container for past, present, and future queers, Stephen’s womb, alongside her masculine gender performance, fragments a clearly male or female body. This image of Stephen’s womb situates it as a site of queer community in relation to the rest of her body, destabilizing the womb as a site of reproduction and child-formation.

Mapping the Child

While Irigaray’s notion of the child-as-closeness offers a framework for thinking through heteronormative futurity, the queer child in The Well of Loneliness further complicates this schema. When Anna conceives Stephen in the beginning of the novel, her husband, Sir Philip, feels that “this thing meant complete fulfillment, the fulfillment for which they had both been waiting” (Hall 6). Anna and Sir Philip experience the forming child as the dull ache of contentment, the “thing” leading to complete satisfaction (Hall 6). The child within Anna haunts the novel from its conception, and the narration implies that the child will somehow rupture the reality Anna and Sir Philip imagine. As the child stirs within her, “she would think it stirred strongly because of the gallant male creature she was hiding; then her spirit would grow large with a mighty new courage, because a man-child would be born” (Hall 6). The
movement of the womb-creature takes on a particular gendered embodiment as Anna imagines it to be a “man-child” (Hall 6). Anna’s spirit grows “large with a mighty new courage” as her body stretches to contain the growing child (Hall 6). In reading the future queer child within the present womb of Anna, “the archetype of the very perfect woman, whom creating God found as good,” the layering of the fetal body within the maternal body casts a shadow over Anna’s longing for a male child (Hall 5). Stephen as womb-shadow suggests the dark, damp shape of Anna’s womb is not the pastoral site of Anna’s fantasies. Instead, her womb functions as something more akin to the queer world-making project of Stephen’s womb at the end of the novel.

As Anna gazes upon the beauty of Malvern Hills, “their swelling slopes seemed to hold a new meaning. They were like pregnant women, full-bosomed, courageous, great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons!” (Hall 6). Anna’s swollen, pregnant body mirrors the “swelling slopes” of Malvern Hills, and she projects an engorged fertility onto nature. The slopes are not lightly pregnant, but “full-bosomed, great green-girdled mothers of splendid sons” (Hall 6). This unbridled swelling of the pregnant body emphasizes the exaggerated femininity associated with pregnancy—breasts grow large and the belly extends out from the body over the hips. The pregnant body expands to contain, yet rather than seem monstrous in its largeness, Anna tempers this fertility with the courage of “mothers of splendid sons” (Hall 6). It is the male-child that encodes the womb as valuable. Malvern Hills swelling to contain “splendid sons” (and the multiplicity of the hills as many mothers) endows Anna’s body with a sense of divinity, similar to Stephen’s at the end of the novel (Hall 6). Yet here, the forming queer child clouds the association between Anna’s divinity and the promise of a male child. Anna’s shape-shifting body reflects Mother Nature as plural “green-girdled mothers,” and the excessive fecundity of this image—multiple pregnant bodies riddled across nature—destabilizes
an omniscient Mother Nature (Hall 6). If Anna projects fertility onto the surrounding hills as a reflection of herself, then these reflections also function as iterations of the queer child growing inside her.

When Anna finally gives birth, “she was delivered of a daughter; a narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby, that yelled and yelled for three hours without ceasing, as though outraged to find itself ejected into life” (Hall 7). The “ejection” from the womb, and subsequent outrage at finding oneself squarely in life, codes the womb as a safe, yet temporary, space; it functions in relation to the fetal creature, even in its continued existence in the body beyond pregnancy. While pregnancy activates the womb in this context, the continuation of the womb’s existence after the birth of the child points to it as a potentially generative space. In the case of Stephen’s womb, the generative potential lies in its position in the non-pregnant body. The description of the baby as “narrow-hipped” and “wide-shouldered” combines an inverse fertility (narrow rather than wide hips) with a developed masculinity (wide-shouldered). This “narrow-hipped,” “wide-shouldered” creature functions as a physical manifestation of Stephen’s future queerness (Hall 7). Stephen’s infantile body refuses to be anything but contradictory—not delicate or feminine, but monstrous and otherworldly. Anna grieves while Stephen drinks from her breasts “because of her man who had longed so much for a son” (Hall 7). As Stephen grows older, however, Anna’s grief is not associated with Sir Philip’s longing for a son, but in response to the uncontainability of Stephen’s body.

As Stephen grows into a small seven-year-old child, Anna notes Stephen’s “plentiful auburn hair, the brave hazel eyes that were so much like her father’s, as indeed were the child’s whole expression and bearing,” which would fill her with a “sudden antagonism that came very near to anger” (Hall 9). The disconnect between Stephen and her mother is “grotesque,” a disintegration of the feeling that should “exist between mother and child” (Hall 9). Stephen’s
likeness to her father elicits anger in Anna, a visceral repulsion to the child-forming-as-father. Stephen’s likeness to Sir Philip strikes Anna as an “outrage – as though the poor, innocent seven-year-old Stephen were in some way a caricature of Sir Philip; a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction” (Hall 9). This maiming, and Stephen as a reproduction, suggests Anna views Stephen as a particular failure of reproduction. Yet even in her detestation of Stephen’s appearance, Anna labors to maintain Stephen as the “innocent” child (Hall 9). Anna understands that Stephen is blameless even in her perception of Stephen’s body as monstrous and ill fitting.

Anna’s negative feelings toward Stephen develop as a creeping thing: “The thing had crept on her like a foe in the dark – it had been slow, insidious, deadly; it had waxed strong as Stephen waxed strong, being part, in some way, of Stephen” (Hall 9). Anna’s anger toward Stephen grows as a “creeping thing,” yet Stephen as the creeping queer child also positions her in relation to darkness. Both Stephen, and Anna’s anger toward her, develop as creeping things; they grope through the darkness, implicating Anna’s womb as something capable of creating this “thing.” Anna cannot altogether despise her child, gripped by the fear of being an “unnatural mother,” yet sheds tears when “remembering the inarticulate Stephen” (Hall 9). In Anna’s description of Stephen as inarticulate, both Anna’s womb—the space for the formation of would-be Stephen—and Stephen’s embodiment challenge Anna’s desire for a fully realized, male child. This “inarticulate” Stephen foreshadows the mass of beings clamoring “to become articulate through her” at the end of the novel (Hall 9, 399). As such, articulation, and the grope for an appropriate body-language, frames the novel as the wombs bookend the novel. Even in Stephen’s apparent health and intelligence, Anna views her as maimed. As a “maimed reproduction” of her father, Stephen is a distinctly queer manifestation of maleness and familial
kinship (Hall 9). In bearing the image of the failed male child, Stephen recalibrates Anna’s womb as the location of the forming queer child.\textsuperscript{15}

While Stephen operates as a young body “slipping to the side” of a particular fantasy, the fantasy is not so much that of the “innocent” child, but rather an evasion of the fantasized male child (Stockton 505). Sir Philip views Anna as a “mother of sons,” a fantasy imagined by Sir Philip and Anna, and later by Stephen in her childhood performance of male personas like Nelson (Hall 6).\textsuperscript{16} The dialogue between the child and adult Stephen troubles the emergence of the queer child as “largely birthed through retrospection” (Stockton 507). In conceiving of the child as a “creature of managed delay,” the liminal occupation of a space resistant to adulthood, Stephen’s adult desires haunt the edges of her childhood self (Stockton 506). In reading the child as a creature of managed delay, or child-as-interval as Kathryn Bond Stockton theorizes, the child Stephen offers space for thinking through a complex queer futurity (Stockton 513). Stephen’s childhood innocence is in tension with the impending future of her queer adult life, and thus Anna and Sir Philip’s “management” of Stephen’s innocence is constantly buttressed by the shadow of her emergent queerness. Instead of reading the child from the perspective of the adult, and constructing the child in relation to adulthood, the child functions here as an \textit{interval} of queer world-making. While most obvious in the dreamscape discussed below, Stephen also builds space for herself prior to her birth: “[Anna and Sir Philip’s] present had been the result of [past] travail, had sprung from its womb as she from her mother’s, only she had not been a part of that travail, as she had been a part of her mother’s” (Hall 76). Here, Stephen reveals the travail of time past as instrumental in birthing the present. Time, depicted as a womb, propels the past into the present, and the present into the future.

\textsuperscript{15} For more on failure, see: Judith Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}.  
\textsuperscript{16} For more on Nelson, refer to footnote 18.
Queer Dreamscape as Birthing Space

As Anna’s revulsion to seven-year-old Stephen grows, Stephen develops a love for the housemaid, Collins. Collins has a swollen knee from years of scrubbing floors, and Stephen cultivates a fascination with Collins’s suffering. She petitions Jesus to give her a bad knee like Collins, or to pass the pain from Collins to her own body:

This petition she repeated until she fell asleep, to dream that in some queer way she was Jesus, and that Collins was kneeling and kissing her hand, because she, Stephen, had managed to cure her by cutting off her knee with a bone paper-knife and grafting it on to her own. The dream was a mixture of rapture and discomfort, and it stayed quite a long time with Stephen. (Hall 15)

Stephen asks for Collins’s suffering to be grafted onto her body in the dream-space. Rather than read “to dream in some queer way” in its intended context (queer as odd), the scene depicts a queered dream-space (Hall 15). Stephen dreams “in some queer way” that she is Jesus, and instead of petitioning Jesus on Collins’s behalf, she becomes Jesus (Hall 15). Stephen takes on the likeness of Jesus, and as a maimed reproduction of her father, becomes the wounded, nail-torn Son of God.17 Collins “kneeling and kissing her hand” mirrors Mary Magdalene shedding tears upon the feet of Jesus and wiping his feet with her hair (Hall 15). Collins anoints Stephen in this formation, yet this moment is markedly queer in relation to its original biblical context. Stephen, female embodied and masculine performing, offers salvation to Collins. The moment does not intimate a mere divine sisterhood, however. Rather, the pouring out of Collins’s love, and Stephen’s ability as Jesus to offer healing, endows Stephen with a particular masculine power she fantasizes about throughout her childhood. In her putting on of alter ego Nelson, and Collins’s validation of Nelson as a valid form of play, Stephen moves from Nelson-as-male

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17 Following the image of Stephen as Mary-like in her containment of the queer bodies, and queerness shadowing Anna’s projection of the forming male child, this scene offers another moment in which religious imagery maps through the queer body.
to Jesus-as-divine. Collins and Stephen as same-sex creatures queer and destabilize the merging of divinity and masculinity. The replacement of Christ’s body with Stephen’s grants her access to an embodied male self. Even as Christ functions as a decidedly male figure in his interaction with Mary Magdalene, Stephen’s shape-shifting as not-quite male, not-quite female queers this space. In her dream, Stephen cures Collins by “cutting off her knee with a bone paper-knife and grafting it on to her own” (Hall 15). While acknowledging the biblical overtures of Christ taking on the ills of the world, and grafting as a picture for Christ as the vine, Stephen maims Collins in the process. If read literally, Stephen bloodily removes Collins’s knee with a bone paper-knife and grafts it onto, or on top of, her own knee. Stephen does not interpret Collins’s missing knee as a form of lack, but instead reads Collins as whole through the removal of her pain. Stephen takes on Collins’s suffering by layering it over her own knee. This effective doubling of the knee as part Stephen, part Collins queers the formation of sinner/savior. The suturing of Collins’s knee with Stephen’s maps these bodies onto one another, rather than a savior merely acquiring the sin. Within this dreamscape, Collins becomes an integral part of the queer body as Stephen dismembers Collins in her formation of self-as-savior.

Stephen experiences the dream as a “mixture of rapture and discomfort” (Hall 15). The combination of rapture and discomfort suggests that even in this divine bodily assemblage, a feeling of discomfort shadows the potential for ecstasy (Hall 15). Whether this discomfort is bodily (the act of removing, transporting, and grafting the knee from one body to another), or spiritual (Stephen taking on the likeness of Jesus and Collins as Mary Magdalene), or something else altogether, it’s the mixture of rapture and discomfort that sustains the dream in Stephen’s memory. As she rubs her knee against the carpet desiring to enter into Collins’s

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18 For more on Nelson, see: Hall 19 and 29.
19 This dialogues with psychoanalytic readings of desire as lack. For more, see: Elizabeth Grosz, “Refiguring Lesbian Desire.”
suffering, Stephen feels that her suffering “certainly seemed to bring Collins much nearer,” as though she “owned [Collins] by right of this diligent pain” (Hall 16). In bringing Collins close through suffering, and owning Collins through her performance of “diligent pain,” Stephen shapes Collins into something for her own use (Hall 16). She births a new Collins through this dreamscape, a queer Collins that desires Stephen-as-savior and recognizes Stephen’s ability to alleviate her suffering. Yet, this picture of Collins is altogether Stephen’s. As an imaginary space, the grateful, pain-free Collins is a construction of Stephen’s imagination. In reality, Collins views Stephen’s obsession with her pain as odd. Stephen stays awake at night to “build up pictures” of her and Collins, imagining scenarios in which they live together apart from the world (Hall 18). As she moves through these pictures, Stephen alights upon the last picture “in which it was Collins who talked about loving, and Stephen who gently but firmly rebuked her” (Hall 18). In this final picture, Collins desires Stephen. Stephen’s dreamscapes, detailed by an omniscient narrator, are written from outside the confines of a child’s consciousness. In depicting the child Stephen as shadowed by the adult Stephen, Stephen’s future queerness inflects upon the perceived innocence of her childhood self. Things grow in the dream-space as Stephen’s sleeping, dreaming body brings worlds into existence. The dream-space that Stephen develops, as opposed to something she passively enters, functions as a prototypical, queer birthing space. Stephen does not dream as the maimed reproduction of her father, or as the failed creature of Anna’s womb, but enters a space of queer world-making that mirrors her womb at the end of the novel. In this sense, the child Stephen dialogues with future Stephen in a manipulation of spatial and temporal logic, and the dream-space generates a tangible existence for Stephen beyond the confines of the waking world.

While Stephen’s dream-space functions as a site of queer world-building, her desire for Collins seeps out of reality into the dream-space, and back into reality in the form of rubbing
her knee against the carpet to acquire a housemaid’s knee. In accounting for the intimacy between Stephen’s dream-space and her waking world, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of texture offers a generative link between emotion and the body. Sedgwick highlights the “particular intimacy [that] seems to subsist between textures and emotions,” and extends Renu Bora’s writing on textural perception to her reading of texture and affect (Sedgwick Touching Feeling 17). For Bora, “texture itself is not coextensive with any single sense, but rather tends to be ‘liminally registered on the border [of] touch and vision’” (Bora qtd. in Sedgwick Touching Feeling 15). In exploring the intimacy between tactility and emotion, Bora’s description of texture’s liminal register extends Stephen’s dream into the waking world. After her night of prayer, and rubbing her knee against the carpet with the hope of acquiring a housemaid’s knee, Stephen examines her knees the next morning to find them “flawless except for old scars and a crisp, brown scab from a recent tumble […] She picked off the scab, and that hurt her a little, but not, she felt sure, like a real housemaid’s knee” (Hall 15).

The iterative act of rubbing her knee against the carpet in order to acquire a housemaid’s knee, and the performative act of examining her knee only to find old scars, registers this moment on the edge of touch and vision. Stephen picks off an old scab, and examines old scars, but does not find a fresh injury. For Bora, textural perception links physicality to iteration—various actors act upon physical properties over time (Sedgwick Touching Feeling 15). Similarly, the existence of the scars as evidence of past injuries, and the close examination of her knee for a housemaid’s knee, performs a corporeal textural perception, as Stephen positions her scars in relation to the housemaid’s knee she longs for. If, as Sedgwick and Bora note, texture does not sit squarely in one sensorial plane, but rather functions in relation to multiple senses at once, the child Stephen, and this process of seeking to acquire a housemaid’s knee that plays out across an extended period of time, registers liminally on the
border of touch and vision. Even as Stephen feels along her legs for the desired injury (which she views less as injury and more as an acquisition of the one she loves), she feels and sees the scars. Removing the scab approximates, but does not reach, the pain of a “real” housemaid’s knee (Hall 15). Even though she could only ever approximate the injury Collins possesses, reading texture across senses joins Stephen’s body with Collins’s presumed pain. In the tracing of her scars, and in the search for the housemaid’s knee on her own body, texture rests intimately between what Stephen feels (her own body) and what she desires (Collins’s knee as her own). This allows the ephemeral dream-space to be of consequence in the material world. The desires of Stephen’s dreams dialogue with her physical body, and thus dreaming generates space for Stephen to birth the world she desires—one in which Collins desires her too.

**Circulation of Desire**

As Stephen moves from childhood into young adulthood, she experiences her first same-sex relationship with Angela Crossby, a married woman who lives near her family’s estate. After Angela and Stephen have spent some time together, they kiss for the first time: “And all that [Angela] was, and all that she had been and would be again, perhaps even tomorrow, was fused at that moment into one mighty impulse, one imperative need, and that need was Stephen. Stephen’s need was now hers, by sheer force of its blind and uncomprehending will to appeasement” (Hall 130). Stephen and Angela move within the “queer, unearthly adventure” of the night, and their connection temporarily removes them from the linear progression of time, coalescing into “one mighty impulse” (Hall 130). If sexuality and desire function as impulses, excitations, and energies, rather than “predesignated erotogenic zones,” then this moment of fusion occurs as the effect of Stephen and Angela’s bodies meeting (Grosz “Refiguring” 179).20 Angela’s temporal register fuses at the point of Stephen; she no longer abides by the rules of

20 Elizabeth Grosz reads desire as “impulses, excitations, and energies” in opposition to the erotogenic zones of desire in psychoanalysis (sites that always already function as erotic). Grosz’s model of desire suggests a complex temporal arrangement between bodies and surfaces, which I draw upon here.
past, present, and future, and time itself transforms into an impulse. Time diffuses at the point of impulse to create a moment of intense desire (Grosz “Refiguring” 179). The intensity of desire as a surface effect, and the erotic site of contact between two bodies, situates Angela and Stephen in relation to a slippery, mobile desire. The erotic potential of this moment is not predestined; rather, it occurs as the energies and excitations of two desiring bodies meeting.

After Angela and Stephen kiss,

“[Stephen’s] physical passion for Angela Crossby had aroused a strange response in her spirit, so that side by side with every hot impulse that led her at times beyond her own understanding, there would come an impulse not of the body; a fine, selfless thing of great beauty and courage – she would gladly have given her body over to torment, have laid down her life if need be, for the sake of this woman whom she loved. (Hall 131)

Stephen experiences both the “hot impulse” of physical desire and a more primal urge to protect Angela (Hall 131). The physical impulse of erotic desire separates from the “impulse not of the body,” yet Stephen’s body is implicated in this second impulse just as it is in the first (Hall 131). If, for Angela, various iterations of time converge at the moment of desiring Stephen, then the “hot impulse” of Stephen’s desire for Angela functions in a similar way—both meet at a site of warmth. For Angela, it is time standing still at the intersection of Stephen’s body with her own. For Stephen, it is the eroticized heat of her desire for Angela. The fusion of Angela’s past, present, and future into “one mighty impulse,” and the “hot impulse” of Stephen’s desire as an “[encounter or interface] between one part and another of bodies or body-things,” positions warmth between desiring bodies as an erotic signifier of its own—an energy or pulse of feeling that shapes desire as both fantastical imagining and embodied excitation (Grosz “Refiguring” 182).
As Stephen’s love for Angela grows, Angela seeps into Stephen’s daily life: “And now someone seemed to be always near Stephen, someone for whom these things were accomplished […] Her long walks on the hill were part of this person, as also were the hearts of the wild dog-roses, the delicate network of veins on the leaves and the queer June break in the cuckoo’s rhythm” (Hall 122). Angela seems to be “always near Stephen,” and extends into nature—reflected in Stephen’s walks, projected across the surface of flowers and leaves, experienced through the cuckoo’s rhythm. The night is “pregnant with a new and mysterious purpose,” and Stephen feels “little shivers of pleasure creeping out of the night and into her body” (Hall 122). While Angela’s past, present, and future blend at the point of Stephen, Angela also diffuses across Stephen. This diffuse Angela, the way in which the desired body inflects upon the desiring body, alters Stephen’s perception of reality; the ghostly nearness of Angela, even in her absence, invigorates Stephen with purpose. Desire circulates across the scene as pleasure crawls out of the night and into Stephen’s body (Sedgwick Touching Feeling 41). To read these moments of Angela’s absence as a “force of positive production” defines desire in terms of its “capacities and abilities,” rather than in relation to lack (Grosz “Refiguring” 179). Angela’s persistence, even in her absence, allows desire, and the memory of erotic encounters, to linger around the edges of Stephen’s perception. In this way, the circulation of desire situates it as a kinetic impulse, moving across bodies, objects, time, and space. As time melds around Stephen for Angela, and as Stephen sees Angela in the crevices of her daily life, desire functions as both retrospective erotic memory and anticipatory erotic futurity.

Soon after she begins her affair with Angela, Stephen sits in Sir Philip’s office and attempts to remember his face:

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21 In her discussion of Henry James, Sedgwick writes that James “[removed] the blush from its terminal place [as the betraying blazon of a ruptured narcissistic circuit] and put it in circulation [as the] bond between the writer of the present and the abashed writer of the past” (Sedgwick 41). I gesture toward this “circulation” of the blush as a way to frame the circulation of desire between Angela and Stephen.
Sitting down in the old armchair that had survived him, she let her head rest where his head had rested; and her hands she laid on the arms of the chair where his hands, as she knew, had lain times without number. Closing her eyes, she tried to visualize his face, but the picture came slowly and faded at once […] It was Angela Crossby’s face that persisted as Stephen sat in her father’s old chair. (Hall 126)

Stephen gropes for the image of her father as he appeared in the chair, and while she mirrors his movements, Angela Crossby’s face replaces her father’s in the memory. Even as she approximates her father by fitting into the shape of the chair, Stephen’s present desire for Angela blunts her effort to bring her father into the present. Stephen lingers in her father’s chair, and the image of Angela’s face layers over the fleeting face of her father. The substitution of Sir Philip’s body for Stephen’s in the chair, and the replacement of Sir Philip’s face with Angela’s in the memory, offers a queer cyborgian pastiche that sutures Stephen’s past love for her father with her present desire for Angela. Desire as a surface effect between two forces alters the temporal and spatial logic of this scene; it shape-shifts across cracks of memory and nodes of the present.

A few chapters later, after Angela and Stephen’s relationship disintegrates, Stephen experiences the sensation of a failed love: “All around her were grey and crumbling ruins, and under those ruins her love lay bleeding; shamefully wounded by Angela Crossby, shamefully soiled and defiled by her mother – a piteous, suffering, defenceless thing; it lay bleeding under the ruins” (Hall 185). Fetal imagery returns as Stephen’s love—a living, breathing organism—burrows under the ruins of her heartbreak. Rather than suffocate, however, the love is alive and bleeding—“shamefully wounded by Angela,” and “soiled and defiled by her mother” (Hall 185). Describing her love as a “piteous, suffering, defenceless thing” gestures toward the ruined love as an abandoned fetal creature, something unable to care for itself (Hall 5). The bleeding out of
Stephen’s love for Angela echoes the description of her writing: “Like infants they had sucked at her breasts of inspiration, and drawn from them blood […] the strange and terrible miracle of blood, the giver of life, the purifier, the great final expiation” (Hall 193). The characters in her novel, and the very act of writing itself, are rendered infantile, and draw blood, rather than milk, from her breasts. This moment of imagined identification with her fertile, female body feels stark when read against Stephen’s masculinity. Yet blood, as breast excretion, challenges a stable feminine fertility. Stephen’s second novel appears as a “poor, lifeless thing, having no health in it,” and her third novel a book that “[intends] to get born” (Hall 211, 311). While acknowledging the literary history of aligning writing with birthing, and books with children, Stephen’s novels exist within a larger queer world-making framework.

In Stephen’s struggle to write her second novel, her heart shrivels into a “dry, withered thing; for she did not feel love these days when she thought of Angela Crossby – that must mean that her heart had died within her. A gruesome companion, to have a dead heart” (Hall 213). There is an echo of a stillborn child in the dead heart, and Stephen carries it around as the residue of a miscarried child. The characters and writing in her first novel drink blood from her breasts, and her third novel begs to be born, yet this novel in between is poor and lifeless, “having no health in it” (Hall 211). The connection between blood, sustenance, and writing positions Stephen as a generator of ideas and creatures. Her creatural novels are healthy when drawing blood from her breasts, and stillborn when buried under the ruins of failed desire. The writing space functions as a proto-womb in the novel as words engage in a symbiotic relationship with Stephen’s blood. The fleshiness of the writing process links Stephen’s creativity to the sustenance of her body. Blood as the “giver of life, the great purifier” enables Stephen’s writing (Hall 193). The comingling of bodily fluids at the site of writing, and blood as a viscous exchange between Stephen’s body and her creation, acts as a metaphorical umbilical
cord. Amidst this seemingly linear birth, however, the loss of queer love “bleeding under the ruins” ruptures the forward progression of Stephen’s writing process (Hall 5). This failed love inserts itself into Stephen’s writing as something she must attend to—not as the queer bodies that fill her womb at the end of the novel, but as the remnant of queer desire.

Conclusion: Futurity in *The Well of Loneliness*

While saturated in loss and loneliness, *The Well of Loneliness* contains models of queer futurity that undermine the womb and child as markers of heteronormative futurity. Through the inflection of queer Stephen upon the fantasy of the male child in Anna’s womb, queerness-as-creeping-thing shadows the womb as the site of endlessly unfolding future bliss. Stephen’s shadowing of Anna’s womb resignifies the womb as a site of queer world-building; literally, in Anna’s conception of Stephen, and figuratively through the queer kinship developed in Stephen’s womb at the end of the novel. In Stephen’s childhood dreams of Collins, and in her desire for Angela rippling across nature and her father’s office, queer desire weaves amorphously through the text as an excitation, rather than site of erotic connection (Grosz “Refiguring” 179).

This reading proposes that models of queer futurity can be found where least expected: through the fraught symbolism of the womb. While the centering of Stephen’s masculinity in 1980s and 90s criticism offered a generous rereading of a seemingly bleak text, the complexity of the womb in *The Well of Loneliness* makes space for queer futurity beyond Stephen’s masculinity. In the configuration of queer bodies in Stephen’s womb, and the haunting of the queer child in Anna’s womb, the womb functions as the site of queer futurity. To return to Heather Love’s insistence on *The Well of Loneliness*’s resistance to queer futurity, my reading suggests that Hall recodes reproduction through her manipulation of the womb. Thus, *The Well of Loneliness* has room for, and already contains, a corporeal model of queer futurity. The novel’s
bookending womb frame, and configurations of desire throughout, exhumes the futurity it otherwise fails to present; it disorganizes the womb as the site of heterosexual reproduction, imbuing it with a set of complex temporalities that allow for reimagined queer kinships.
Chapter II

Toward a Glowing Futurity: Erotics of Warmth and Queer Heaviness in Lesbian Pulp Fiction

Introduction: Lesbian Pulp Fiction and *Stranger on Lesbos*

As *The Well of Loneliness’s* mid-twentieth century neighbor, lesbian pulp fiction offers models of futurity that expand my reading of the queer child and womb temporalities in *The Well of Loneliness*. I theorize an erotics of warmth and explore looking relations in Valerie Taylor’s 1960 novel *Stranger on Lesbos* to connect the shadowy queer figure in *The Well of Loneliness* to the heavy queer bodies in lesbian pulp. Historically, *The Well of Loneliness* and mid-twentieth century lesbian pulp situate near two world wars. Migrating from England, to Paris, to war, and back to Paris, Stephen Gordon’s movement through aristocratic England and Parisian society in the post-World War I era traces a historical arc through the queer body. Lesbian pulp offers a similarly situated portrayal of post-World War II queer culture in the United States, with societal anxieties manifesting through the queer body. As Yvonne Keller notes, the centering of queer encounters in *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp fiction speaks back to the policing of gays and lesbians during the texts’ respective publication moments (Keller 20).  

The “obviousness” of queer content, particularly across the lush book covers of lesbian pulp, positions these texts as influential queer literary touchstones (Keller 20). While *The Well of Loneliness* was published shortly after World War I, the golden age of lesbian pulp, which spanned from the early 1950s through mid-1960s, followed in the wake of World War II amidst a societal panic around sexuality (Stryker 12). In her work on queer pulp, Susan Stryker locates lesbian pulp within the flourishing era of mass-market paperbacks in the 1940s-60s to

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22 Keller details post-World War II anxieties that sought a “return to a mythical pre-War, pre-Depression ‘normality,’ envisioned in ideologically conservative terms,” and “increased public discourse on homosexuality as a psychological disease and the Cold War notion that homosexuals were a pressing political threat” (Keller 1). For more, see: Yvonne Keller, “Pulp Politics.”
account for the transportability and disposability of pulp novels (Stryker 5). Foregrounding the literary environment into which lesbian pulp enters provides not only a historical connection to *The Well of Loneliness*, but also illuminates the circulation and reception patterns of queer literature in the early and mid-twentieth century.

*The Well of Loneliness* experienced a renaissance during the golden age of lesbian pulp when Perma Books republished it in 1951 (Stryker 52). Even in its radically different aesthetic style, *The Well of Loneliness*’s publication history positions it proximally to lesbian pulp as an influential precursor, and as a proto-pulp novel in its republication. In placing *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp in conversation with queer theory, I explore the theoretical latitude of these texts while accounting for their respective historical contexts. Queer theory expands *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp beyond their original gender essentialist and homophobic contexts to reveal complex temporalities and futurities. The temporality of queer erotics in lesbian pulp echoes the strange womb-temporalities in *The Well of Loneliness*, and in reading various iterations of Stephen Gordon as the creeping queer child against the saturated characters of lesbian pulp, these texts dialogue with one another through their aesthetic excess and melodramatic overtures. Further, the titular loneliness of *The Well*, and the traumas of queer life depicted in lesbian pulp, function similarly as queer structures of feeling (Love “Spoiled Identity” 104). In illuminating futurities that exist amidst the traumas and devastations of *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stranger on Lesbos*, I read the excess and melodrama of the texts in relation to alternate models of futurity. I center *Stranger on Lesbos* in my discussion.

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23 Yvonne Keller makes a similar argument, crediting new paperback distribution channels with the proliferation of lesbian pulp (Keller 2).

24 While I account for lesbian pulp in its original publication context, The Feminist Press’s reprint of popular lesbian pulp novels locates these books in the contemporary moment as something other than pulp (operating within less “pulpy” circulation and distribution patterns). I offer a reading of *Stranger on Lesbos*, and lesbian pulp more broadly, to examine pulp in relation to *The Well of Loneliness* as a historically situated genre.

25 Generically speaking, *The Well of Loneliness* is, of course, not a pulp novel. However, it situates near lesbian pulp in its 1951 paperback reprint.
of lesbian pulp as a paradigmatic lesbian pulp novel, one that features the generic patterns of lesbian pulp—its cast of characters, tensions, and plots—while presenting nuanced queer temporalities and futurities. Through reading the heavy queer body in relation to an erotics of warmth and reoriented gaze, I build a model of “glowing futurity” through Stranger on Lesbos that accounts for the simultaneous violence and pleasure of mid-twentieth century lesbian pulp fiction.

**Queer Heaviness**

Valerie Taylor published Stranger on Lesbos early in her career, and enjoyed success as one of lesbian pulp’s most prolific writers. Stranger on Lesbos chronicles the love affair between Frances Ollenfield, a 1950s housewife, and Mary Baker (Bake), a television promoter. Frances returns to college in the early pages of the novel, and observes Bake for the first time sitting in a literature lecture. Frances “liked Bake’s clear, firm profile under the short hair, her good nose and solid chin, the way her neck rose out of the white collar. She liked the way Bake sat with her shoulders back and her feet firmly planted. By contrast, Frances felt colorless and insipid” (Taylor 11). From their initial meeting, Bake presents as a self-confident, masculine figure. In contrast, Frances reads as tepidly feminine, unsure of herself in public spaces, and enamored with Bake’s aura. Bake and Frances slip into traditional butch/femme roles, with Bake’s body commanding space and Frances sinking into the frame around her. Frances fits into a normative mold of mid-twentieth century, white middle-class femininity, yet her surroundings accumulate on her otherwise lithe body. The societal forces that shape Frances’s subjectivity physically press down on her body “in a fatigue almost too heavy to bear” (Taylor 90).

Frances and Bake’s relationship begins in the early pages of the novel, and while Frances finds Bake to be a welcome escape from her role as wife and mother, the weight of

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26 A list of lesbian pulp novels not referenced in this chapter appears in the bibliography.
27 This version of white middle-class femininity dialogues with sociological accounts of the era, most notably Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (published in 1963).
housewife labor pulls on Frances’s body. Within the space of the home, Frances’s body appears legibly feminine and refined; she disciplines it to adhere to an expected code of feminine appearance. As she prepares to meet her son’s fiancé, Frances looks at herself in the mirror: “She was thinner than she had been two years before, and better groomed; harder, more polished, her mouth a tighter line. Not the sort you suspect of leading a double life. She threw down her pearly button earrings and picked up the copper hoops Bake had given her, but they dangled incongruously against the white collar of her plain wool dress” (Taylor 92). While appearing to be a “slender woman with soft brown hair and gray eyes,” more polished and refined than two years prior, the weight of Frances’s “double life”—her relationship with Bake—wears on her body (Taylor 92). As she replaces her pearl earrings with Bake’s copper hoops, her appearance reflects back to her as disjointed; the copper hoops associated with queer desire cannot be reconciled with the “white collar of her plain wool dress” (Taylor 92). Even in the seeming compactness of Frances’s body, and her careful layering of feminine symbols onto it, her body expands beyond its edges; it does not fit within the drawn parameter of domestic femininity that sketches the female body as ethereal and weightless.

Frances becomes “conscious again of the small purple bruise above her elbow, and for the second time she wondered whether it had been inflicted by the husband she had come to hate and was beginning to feel sorry for, or by the woman she loved and was beginning to distrust” (Taylor 94-95). The bruise on Frances’s arm troubles the line between violence and desire. Frances accumulates bruises throughout the novel after moments of violence, yet her infatuation with the “small purple bruise above her elbow” takes precedent over the other markings (Taylor 94). For Frances, the bruise serves as a point of intersection between two disparate modes of contact: the impact of violence and the marking of desire. The clear line

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28 The simultaneity of housewife labor and queer identity doubly encodes the heavy body, rather than the heaviness simply resulting from Frances’s confinement in the home.
between violence and desire disintegrates at the point of the bruise, and the layering of violence and desire rests on Frances’s body.\textsuperscript{29}

Frances experiences bodily heaviness first through her occupation as a housewife, and second through the compounded weight of her “double life”—her relationship with Bake and movement through queer social circles (Taylor 92). When Frances returns to college, she “felt ashamed to admit that this was her first time in a classroom in fifteen years, that she was just a housewife smothered by walls” (Taylor 10). She notes the “harsh solace of physical work” and the “numbing of mental stress in the aching back” associated with housewife labor (Taylor 91). After her son announces his engagement, “[Frances’s] face felt wooden. She thought that she might break into small pieces if she tried to move” (Taylor 107). Each of these moments orients heaviness toward the “delicate” housewife body, expanding as the burden of queer shame layers over Frances’s body. The weighing down of Frances’s body dialogues with the labor of her day-to-day life, as well as the shame she associates with queer desire. In moments of pain when Frances feels as though “she might break into small pieces if she tried to move,” the weightiness functions literally as bodily exhaustion, and affectively as queer shame (Taylor 107). The weight of physical labor and shame burdens Frances’s body and mind as she attempts to “find a path through the tangle of problems that was her immediate future” (Taylor 90).

Frances experiences a series of assaults in the novel—from her husband Bill, the police during a bar raid, and from a woman she meets at a queer bar the night before her son’s wedding (Taylor 81, 59, 120). After the final assault, Frances arrives home the morning of the wedding in time to get dressed, mask the smell of alcohol with perfume, and cover her bruised eye with makeup (Taylor 123). Temporally, Frances slides into the marriage scene from the underground queer scene, jarring the continuity between her experience of lesbian subculture

\textsuperscript{29} For more on the politics of violence, see: Elizabeth Grosz, “The Time of Violence; Deconstruction and Value.”
and the heteronormative coupling of her son through marriage. The refractions of violence across all points of Frances’s life—in her marriage, in queer bars—situate the heaviness of her body as intersectional and iterative. As her son says his wedding vows, Frances looks at her husband, Bill: “His gaze held hers. As though he had told her in so many words, she knew that last night was no longer an issue between them. Out all night, drunk, promiscuous, raped, beaten, and robbed—degraded and faithless as she might be, still unsteady on her feet and marred by violence—it didn’t matter. He was big enough to bypass it” (Taylor 127). The presence of matrimony covers the riff between Frances and Bill, obscuring Frances’s “marred” body (Taylor 127). Frances internalizes the shame of acts beyond her control, subsumes her traumas to Bill’s bigness, and shrinks under his ability to bypass her. Bill moves across Frances eclipse-like, and yet even as he “bypasses” Frances’s trauma, her body still exists at multiple sites of violence. Bill’s shadow, drawn large enough to shroud Frances’s assaulted body, folds the dense institutional violence away from the marriage scene. Bill reconfigures Frances’s body in relation to matrimony, as the bruises and marks that remain from the night before push back from the pores of her skin.

The lightness of marriage as depicted here, its ability to obscure the intersection of gender, sexuality, and class, renders Frances’s body ethereal. Yet, the markings—her “swollen and discolored eye,” stiff muscles, and aching pains—heave against the lightness (Taylor 123, 136). Heaviness as a particular manifestation of sexist and homophobic society sifts through Frances’s body and clashes with matrimonial lightness. Frances’s tethered body ruptures the lightness associated with heterosexual matrimony; it reads violence over and against marriage, undermining its portrayal as a site of intense longing and blissful futurity. Against the backdrop of heteronormative futurity expressed through marriage, Frances’s body offers a different vision of the future. Her presence suggests that marriage, within this context, unfolds
as a recurring process of violence against women. Marked by both the pains of housewife labor and bruises from assault, Frances’s presence reroutes heteronormative futurity through the heavy queer body. The presence of Frances’s bruises existing beneath her “pancake makeup” alludes to the incommensurability of systemic violence with the idyllic marriage ceremony the scene portrays (Taylor 126).

During the wedding, Frances imagines: “It would feel good to get home, cold cream the gunk off her face, and take off her shoes, maybe crawl under her own covers for a nap. I need some rest, she thought, feeling very bright to have figured that out. Then I can make up my mind what to do next” (Taylor 130). In light of the many forces acting upon her body, “cold [creaming] the gunk off her face,” slipping out of her shoes, and crawling into bed offers Frances a certain sense of power (Taylor 130). By removing the makeup concealing the bruise, and slowly unwrapping her body, Frances imagines relieving the burden. While the weight of the queer body in this context exists ontologically beyond its physical confines, due to institutional structures of violence, the physical manifestations of weight (the bruise, the aching muscles) dialogue with the touch of Frances’s hands. Because Frances stages this fantasy at the wedding, her body recodes both the wedding and the home. The bruises beneath her makeup, and her fantasy of removing the makeup when she gets home, places the material structure of Frances’s body in her own hands. While not a panacea or institutional solution to the violent forces of patriarchal society acting upon her body, this moment of autonomy offers Frances a tangible, if temporary, antidote to the heaviness. The dialogue of this fantasy with the sanitized wedding scene in which it occurs offers Frances self-gratification—“feeling very bright to have figured [this] out”—and propels her forward to the imagined moment (Taylor 130).
Erotics of Warmth

While the heaviness of the queer body features prominently in *Stranger on Lesbos*, warmth functions as a symbol of queer desire throughout the novel. As Frances explores her relationship with Bake, she feels “warm for the first time in her life. Warm and at home, solidly and actually when she was with Bake, in retrospect or anticipation when they were apart” (Taylor 44). Frances notes, “It was foolish, it was fantastic” because her house has a “perfectly good gas furnace—indeed, the first thing Bill did when he came in after work was to throw the windows open and ‘get some fresh air in here,’ while she shivered” (Taylor 44). The shift from literal warmth and coolness to the “residue of chill, lingering in the center of her bones [melting] for the first time” privileges Frances’s relationship with Bake as a process of “thawing out” (Taylor 44). The stark contrast between Bill throwing open the windows to let cold air in, and the warmth Frances associates with Bake, intimates a certain level of comfort and familiarity with Bake. But, the link between queer desire and the influx of warmth for the “first time in [Frances’s] life” complicates a simple reading of warmth-as-comfort (Taylor 44).

For Frances, warmth is “solid” and “actual” with Bake, and retrospective or anticipatory when they are apart (Taylor 44). The solid and actual warmth of Bake and Frances together as bodies situates warmth as sensory and embodied, yet warmth also expands beyond the realm of physical contact. Warmth, as depicted here, networks temporally as retrospective and anticipatory. The lingering of chill in the center of Frances’s bones reveals the depth that the warmth of queer desire reaches. The centering of Frances’s bones as the location of coldness imbues warmth with the power to “melt” (Taylor 44). Warmth-as-desire thus diffuses across the body as a physical sensation and queer temporality. The sensation of warmth, as a physical thawing out, and its queer temporality, with Bake as the catalyst for warmth, percolates through the heavy body. As something Frances feels “for the first time in her life,” warmth
infiltrates the cold stasis of patriarchal coupling expressed through Frances’s marriage—the open windows to “‘get some fresh air in here’” (Taylor 44).

Early in the novel, Bake and Frances drive into the country for a picnic. During the drive back, Frances “laid her head against Bake’s soft wool sweater, feeling the good solidity of bone and the warmth of living flesh beneath” (Taylor 21). Bake’s bones dialogue with the chill that lingers in Frances’s bones, and Frances encounters Bake sensorily as an aggregation of bones and flesh with warmth emanating from bodily contact (Taylor 21). When Frances and Bake arrive at Bake’s apartment, Frances admires “best of all” the “working fireplace, the brick hearth dusted lightly with ashes” (Taylor 22). As Frances watches, “Bake crumpled a sheet of newspaper, knelt to arrange it with three sticks, and lit one of the kitchen matches she carried in her shirt pocket. A tiny blaze leapt up, primitive in its beauty” (Taylor 22). Frances asks, “‘What is it about fire?’” (Taylor 22). Bake responds, “‘It’s a symbol. Home and safety—and other things too’” (Taylor 22). The fire provides a sense of safety and comfort while gesturing toward the erotic connotation Bake alludes to. Bake has the power to light the fire with the “sheet of newspaper” and “kitchen matches she carried in her shirt pocket” (Taylor 22). The image of the fire, and subsequent warmth, converge around Bake as the active agent. Bake has both the materials and agency to cultivate the fire, and Frances admires it as a site of warmth. This scene of Bake and Frances’s first moments together orients around the fire as the “flickering light of the fireplace” blurs the shapes in the room (Taylor 23). The glow of the fire, as a blurring agent, mirrors Frances’s descent into warmth as a sensory experience of queer desire. By filtering through the physical warmth of Bake’s apartment, and the sense of safety and home associated with it, queer desire links both warmth-as-comfort and warmth as erotic charge. As Frances and Bake move toward expressing their feelings for each other, Frances “felt rather than saw the warm solidity of Bake’s thigh next to hers on the cushion and the even
rise in her chest” (Taylor 23). The warmth of the fire, Frances and Bake’s discussion of it, and the warmth of Bake’s body move toward an erotic climax. As Frances and Bake move around the fire, the scene angles toward desire. Frances and Bake sleep together for the first time at the end of this scene, and the warmth of the fire and bodies collides in an expression of desire. This scene serves as one illustration of warmth in the novel—several iterations of warmth (the fire, bodies, desire) collapsing into one another as a temporal and sensory experience. As time propels forward, and Frances and Bake move from their drive in the country, to building the fire, to sex, warmth shapes the timbre of their relationship.

Warmth as an indictor of desire in Stranger on Lesbos echoes the slippery model of desire Elizabeth Grosz proposes in “Refiguring Lesbian Desire.” Grosz situates desire as “an intensity, enervation, positivity, or force” as opposed to lack—“what is missing or absent” (Grosz 179). Desire in terms of “surfaces and intensities,” rather than “latency or interiority,” challenges undertones of queer-desire-as-loss in Stranger on Lesbos (Grosz “Refiguring” 179). This expansive model of desire resists the “sentimentality and romanticism so commonly involved in thinking lesbian relations” by mapping desire onto the heavy queer body (Grosz “Refiguring” 181). Queer desire thus dialogues with the material pull of Frances’s body, positioning sexuality and desire as “energies, excitations, [pulses of feeling]” (Grosz “Refiguring” 182). Invocations of warmth, as moments of kinetic desire, offer an erotic temporality that functions outside the parameters of heteronormative coupling, experienced as “the press of desire” in person, and as a “pulse of feeling” when apart (Taylor 71, Grosz “Refiguring” 182).

The physical warmth of Bake’s apartment symbolizes Frances’s desire for Bake: “A slow warmth generated by alcohol and desire was beginning to grow within her, dispelling the fatigue and loneliness. It spread from the pit of her stomach up into her chest and arms, then down. Wonderful, after being chilled so long” (Taylor 70-71). Frances’s loneliness warms
through queer desire, which “[spreads] from the pit of her stomach up into her chest and arms, then down” (Taylor 70). Here, as elsewhere, warmth spreads as physical sensation and queer temporality. It recalibrates Frances’s relation to her physical body, and the “chill” she associates with years of marriage (Taylor 70). Warmth, as a point of contact and temporal structure, allows Frances a certain measure of autonomy—she experiences warmth, rather than loneliness, as a queer structure of feeling (Love “Spoiled Identity” 104). By reading warmth in *Stranger on Lesbos* as “points of machinic connection,” or “surface effects between one [body] and another,” warmth functions as a surface effect of desire (Grosz “Refiguring” 179). Warmth, as the glow emitted through bodily contact, shapes a desire that exists in the present (solid, actual), reaches backward (retrospective), and glances forward (anticipatory), pushing against the “coolness” of Frances’s relationship with Bill. Warmth, as a surface effect of *queer* desire, resists the stasis of traditional gender configurations as depicted in the novel. Instead, it renders queer bodies and worlds legible and powerful (Grosz “Refiguring” 184).

**Pleasure—Shadows and the Orgasm**

In situating warmth as physical sensation and queer temporality, I turn to a discussion of pleasure and the orgasm in *Stranger on Lesbos*. Contrary to many lesbian pulp writers who prominently feature sex in their novels, Valerie Taylor’s pulp offers a restrained account of sexual congruence. While lesbian pulp’s success was due, in part, to male readership and fantasies of titillating lesbian relationships, Taylor’s work exercises subtlety within a genre often characterized by excess (Stryker 98). Although *Stranger on Lesbos* features a cast of characters central to many lesbian pulp novels—the depressed housewife, the confident butch, the cruising older lesbian, the coquettish femme—Taylor labors to “normalize, humanize, and

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30 Heather Love explores this in her reading of *The Well of Loneliness*, but loneliness as a historically situated queer feeling also dialogues with the characterization of Frances in *Stranger on Lesbos*.

31 After the early publication success of Tereska Torrés’s *Women’s Barracks* (1950) and Vin Packer’s *Spring Fire* (1952), a flurry of male-oriented, sex-saturated pulp novels flooded the market (Keller 2).
desensationalize the lesbian characters while keeping them central to [the] story” (Keller 6).\textsuperscript{32} Taylor avoids “sensationalism and extraneous sex scenes” in her writing, and details Frances’s sexual pleasure with subtlety and precision, leaving much to the imagination (Keller 6). Accounting for the simultaneity of violence and pleasure, the novel portrays nuanced intimacies that subvert the expectations of sexual exuberance in lesbian pulp.

The orgasm, as a historically gendered specter of female sexuality, operates as a disrupting force in \textit{Stranger on Lesbos} (Beckman 70). It rests in the shadows, indicative of mid-twentieth century sexual discourse, yet undermines the traditional privileging of male virility in heterosexual relations.\textsuperscript{33} By routing the erotics of warmth through the orgasm, the orgasm operates as “provisional and temporary, ephemeral and fleeting” in the novel, yet not without material consequence (Grosz “Refiguring” 182). The orgasm functions as a more densely codified expression of erotic warmth, and offers a jittery temporality that interfaces with “bits of bodies” produced through contact (Grosz “Refiguring” 182). The spectral and subtle, rather than explicit and ornate, presence of orgasms in the novel challenges a voyeuristic reading of sex in lesbian pulp (Stryker 61). In situating sexual pleasure and the orgasm’s function in relation to warmth, the orgasm races across the heavy body as a dizzying, constructive energy.

The orgasm haunts an early scene in the novel when Frances remembers her first Thanksgiving with Bill, newly married and broke. The narration slips from third- to first-person as Frances observes how Bill does not remember “the laughter, or the way we fell into bed when the dishes were done, in the middle of the afternoon, because we couldn’t wait. That was the first time I ever really—she blinked” (Taylor 15-16). Frances tiptoes to the brink of

\textsuperscript{32} For more on the archetypes of lesbian pulp novels, see: Susan Stryker, \textit{Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback}, 61. For more on the archetypes of pulp novels as a genre, see: Scott McCracken, \textit{Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction}.

\textsuperscript{33} In the 1940s and 50s, Alfred Kinsey published his findings on human sexuality, and early soft-core magazines like \textit{Playboy} appeared in the 1950s. For more on this era, see: Miriam G. Reumann, \textit{American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports}.
making her pleasure explicit before the narration slips back to third-person—the dash, “she blinked” (Taylor 16, emphasis added). Frances shifts back to the present as she undresses and slips on “a sheer black nylon nightgown she had never worn” (Taylor 16). While waiting for Bill, who never arrives (desire both deferred and occluded), Frances moves into a childhood memory of being stood up by a popular boy at a school dance (Taylor 17). The memory of her first orgasm propels Frances through several temporal registers: the past, via her memory of Bill and the schoolboy, the present, through the “growing, insistent pressure of desire,” and the disintegration of fantasy as she falls asleep (Taylor 18). In contrast to the warmth associated with Bake, however, Frances ascribes no bodily sensations to her relationship with Bill. The “growing, insistent pressure of desire” links to the past orgasm, “the small hotel room,” rather than to her present feelings for Bill (Taylor 18). Though Frances feels a prick of desire associated with the memory, the desire fades as Bill ignores her. While Bake functions as a warming agent, thawing Frances out over the course of the novel, the memory of her pleasure with Bill fades as quickly as it appears. The incessant warmth associated with queer desire throughout the novel serves as its own orgasmic topography, located squarely outside a heterosexual paradigm in which orgasm functions in relation to male virility and heterosexual reproduction (Beckman 4).³⁴ Warmth via Bake resists a reproductive imperative, writing sexual and emotional pleasure within the context of queer embodiment and desire.

In *Between Desire and Pleasure: A Deleuzian Theory of Sexuality*, Frida Beckman invokes Elizabeth Grosz’s work on desire to argue that a historically male model of orgasmic pleasure “excludes other models of orgasm as invested in the body in its entirety and as a mode of transubstantiation” (Beckman 4). Beckman writes of the orgasm’s power to “create an affective milieu by claiming a segment of the chaos of physical, sensory, auditory and mental sensations

³⁴ For more on the history of the orgasm, see: Robert Muchembled, *Orgasm and the West: A History of Pleasure from the 16th Century to the Present.*
and images of sexuality through the event” (Beckman 10). In considering orgasmic energies as “frames for” a set of expressive intensities,” and extending Beckman’s phrasing to sexual pleasure writ large, Frances’s encounters with Bake reframe the topos of her body and her perception of it. The morning after Frances and Bake sleep together for the first time:

> Frances was at once aware of her body, as she had never been with Bill […] she wondered how she could hide the experiences of that night. She got up and looked into the dressing-table mirror, seeing her color deeper and her eyes brighter, a thin veil of boredom or resignation—the habit of years, a thing she had come to carry without being aware of it—stripped away […] She stepped into the shower reluctantly, feeling that the warm water must wash off Bake’s touch and leave her again the sterile, neutral creature she had been before last night. (Taylor 25-26)

The physical effects of sexual pleasure make Frances conscious of her body as she examines “her color deeper and her eyes brighter” (Taylor 25). While the removal of the “thin veil of boredom or resignation” seems obvious after her night with Bake, the specificity of queer sexual pleasure underlines Frances’s invigorated awareness of her body (Taylor 26). Pleasure traces the scene as Frances worries about how to “hide the experiences of that night” (Taylor 25). The memory of pleasure ruptures the temporal continuity of the moment as Frances reaches back to the night before to read her present body, and showers with the assumption that the water will “leave her again the sterile, neutral creature she had been before last night” (Taylor 26). If Frances exists as a “neutral” body prior to her encounter with Bake, their time together serves not only as a temporary excitation, but also as an undulating disruption—“a mode of transubstantiation” (Beckman 4). In the same way that the routine domesticity of her life “sterilizes” Frances’s body and psyche, her experience of pleasure “desterilizes” her body. Queer desire trails Frances’s body as she imagines returning to Bill with the flush of pleasure on her
face. Frances brings with her the ghost of queer cohabitation even as she moves back into the spaces of her daily life.

As Frances rides the bus to class after her night with Bake, she compares the flatness of her marriage with her feelings for Bake:

But this—this loving someone like yourself, who knew what you wanted and how to give it to you! She felt her mouth curling into a smile, remembering the response Bake had wrung from her in spite of her fear and ineptness. She boarded her bus and sat hugging her books, beaming at the commonplace houses and stores as they slid by. For all the pleasure of remembering, she was a little shy about facing Bake. Reliving the hours in Bake’s bed, she felt that the whole thing had been a dream. (Taylor 28)

The scene slips between the present of Frances’s bus ride and her memory of the evening before. Memory inflects the present as Frances remembers the pleasure Bake elicited. The physical sensation of recalling sexual pleasure colors the “commonplace houses and stores”—previously uninteresting or mundane structures of Frances’s daily life (Taylor 28). In highlighting the moment of orgasm (“the response Bake had wrung from her in spite of her fear and ineptness”), and moving beyond the specificity of this moment to encompass sexual pleasure in general, the disorientation of recalling pleasure folds the “exteriority of perception and the interiority of psychological response” into one another (Taylor 28, Beckman 63). The “dizzying turning and returning” orgasmic temporality loops Frances back and forth between the past moment of pleasure and the present (Beckman 63). Even as the folding and unfolding of the orgasmic moment ruptures temporal linearity, it also functions as a process of becoming. Pleasure serves as momentary pulsation and excitation along the otherwise bounded trajectory of 1950s housewife confinement (Grosz “Refiguring” 182). Warmth and sexual pleasure snake
through the past, present, and future as nodules of resistance, jarring Frances out of the monotony of day-to-day life.

While Frances experiences orgasms with both Bill and Bake, her encounters with Bake extend beyond their immediate bodily connotation as intervals of sensorial climax.35 Even though Frances’s memory of Bill diffuses across time and space, she does not revel in the pleasure of her remembered orgasm with him; she “blinks” out of it (Taylor 16). In contrast, “Bake’s caress had stirred and wakened [Frances’], taught her what passion could be,” and the recalled pleasure of the orgasmic moment brightens her perception of the “commonplace houses and stores” (Taylor 89, 28). As an “event that folds into the body at the same time it folds out,” the orgasm, as both physical sensation and disrupting temporality, positions sites of warmth and sexual pleasure in Stranger on Lesbos as transformative and potent pulsations across the heavy body (Beckman 10).

Texture of the Glance

While sexual pleasure and the orgasm slither across France’s body as moments of resistance, looking relations in Stranger on Lesbos undermine the voyeurism often associated with lesbian pulp.36 Although other pulp genres like hard-boiled noir and science fiction may not be as readily vulnerable to voyeurism, lesbian pulp intimates queer sex in its female-driven plot lines, and is thus exposed to the power relations of the male gaze.37 Models of futurity in lesbian pulp must therefore account for looking relations and formations of the gaze. In her discussion of the “pro-lesbian” pulp genre, which resists the voyeurism associated with heterosexual male readers and writers, Yvonne Keller writes about pro-lesbian authors’ three

35 Beckman routes the orgasm through the temporality of the “plateau” as “a quivering pitch of intensity that is not automatically finalized through a climax” (Beckman 1). I account for this articulation of the orgasm in Stranger on Lesbos, reading it beyond the moment of sensorial climax.
36 Yvonne Keller writes that pre-Stonewall lesbian pulp novels are “fully immersed within, and indeed obligated to attend to, the discourse of voyeurism because of the constraints of their mass-cultural form” (Keller 5).
37 For more on the politics of the male gaze, see: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”
anti-voyeuristic strategies: “refusal to acknowledge [voyeurism's] existence in their writing, appropriation, and subversion” (Keller 6). Keller considers Valerie Taylor a part of this “pro-lesbian” genre due, in part, to her humanizing, nuanced depictions of lesbian characters (Keller 6). Accounting for “who looks and what the look means,” instances of Frances glancing at herself serve as an anti-voyeuristic model of looking (Keller 6).

The glance occurs in two previously discussed moments—as Frances observes herself in the “dressing-table mirror” after sleeping with Bake, and as she gazes into the mirror at the incongruity of Bake’s copper earrings with her wool dress (Taylor 27, 92). In each of these moments, Frances’s reflection glances off reflective surfaces, returning to her as a refracted image. In reading the refracted image, Frances translates the image into perception—perceiving how her body actually appears in relation to how she thinks it appears. The twinkles of time in which Frances takes hold of the gaze by glancing at her reflection function as empowering moments of looking (Mulvey 17). Frances “sees her color deeper and her eyes brighter” after sex with Bake, and “her reflection [looking] back from the dressing-table mirror […] harder, more polished” before meeting her son’s fiancé (Taylor 26, 97). Frances’s reflection dashes across the dressing-table mirror in both scenes. The glance functions as both gaze (Frances glancing at herself) and motion (her reflection glancing off a surface). In these moments, the light duration of the glance redistributes the weight of the heavy body. The glance Frances sends forth from her body lands on a reflective surface, and returns to her with material consequence—she glimpses the flush of pleasure, notices the incongruity of copper hoops against her wool dress. Frances holding the gaze, and glancing at herself, establishes a powerful looking relation. The glance alters both the reflecting surface and the reflected image. As Frances traces the dressing-table mirror, her reflections serve as crevices of queer world-

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38 Ann Bannon and Randy Salem also variously resist and subvert voyeurism as part of this pro-lesbian pulp genre (Keller 6).
building amidst a cacophony of forces inflecting upon her body. The interface of Frances’s corporeal body with the traced image of her body staring back at her renders the glance powerful—a site of queer world-building where she can reclaim power over her body.

While most aware of her body during the two moments mentioned above, Frances catches a glimpse of herself in a drugstore door after spending the night in jail following a bar raid. Frances “was surprised to see, when they passed a drugstore on the way to the car and she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the plate-glass door, that she didn’t look particularly wayward. She felt dirty and messy, her head ached, her arm and leg muscles were tired. But she looked mild and refined” (Taylor 67). Frances scans her reflection for waywardness, looking for traces of the night before. The duration of the glance—Frances looking just in time to catch her passing reflection—situates Frances’s body as material and consequential. The glance as a form of queer world-building dwells in the cracks between sanctioned forms of looking. Frances “steals” glances in between moments of being looked at and interpreted by others (Casey 80). The glance thus functions as “an act of derecognition [reinforced] by the putative fragility of its operation” (Casey 80). The fragile operation and brief duration of the glance in *Stranger on Lesbos* echoes the fragility of queer world-building explored in *The Well of Loneliness*—ephemeral and fleeting, yet material in its effects.

In “The Time of the Glance: Toward Becoming Otherwise,” Edward S. Casey presents the glance as “tritemporal,” unable to “fit snugly into a gapless continuum of time” (Casey 82). Casey notes that the glance “arises in the present, but only as a reflection of the immediate past of interest or desire and as foreshadowing the future of current attention” (Casey 83). While Frances glances at herself in the dressing-table mirror, she also glances at Bill during their son’s wedding. When Bill sits down next to her, “She glanced at him, but his profile was stony. Bags under the eyes, too. He was certainly going to tell her off as soon as they got home.
Maybe throw her out right away, with no money and no place to go. She guessed she had it coming” (Taylor 124). Frances’s glance lands on Bill’s profile, his face pointed toward the marriage ceremony unfolding in front of them. Rather than the slow unfolding and duration of looking, the glance offers “a sense of discontinuous darting,” a quick motion “when there is not enough time for more assiduous or prolonged seeing” (Casey 82).

The trajectory of the glance, as “continually at its own future, where the extremity of the glance is going at any given moment,” positions it in relation to future orientations (Casey 82). Frances’s glance at Bill signals an ocular turn from the marriage ceremony, accounts for the effects of the night before, and gestures toward the future of Bill “[telling] her off as soon as they got home” (Taylor 124). Frances “[takes] note of entire worlds” during the time of the glance, and considers past, present, and future traumas (Casey 80). The duration of the glance, then, follows a model of time that is “not simply mechanical repetition, the causal ripple of objects on others, but the indeterminate, the unfolding, and the continual eruption of the new” (Grosz “Thinking” 28). Time as “intrication and elaboration” grants Frances agency as the glancing subject (Grosz “Thinking” 18). Later in the wedding ceremony, Frances “[ventures] a glance at [Bill],” noticing, “his eyes were soft with pity” (Taylor 126). Frances “looked again, incredulous—something that could only be affection. She knew what it was, because it mirrored the emotion that suddenly overflowed her own heart” (Taylor 126). The scene cuts to the minister—“In the presence of God and these witnesses”—before shifting back to the glance (Taylor 126). Frances “was afraid to look at [Bill]. Then, looking, she found herself unable to turn away. His gaze held hers” (Taylor 127). The durational shifts between the glance Frances ventures at Bill, to Frances “looking” at Bill, to Bill returning the gaze, deposits the short temporality of the glance onto a sustained look (Taylor 127). Here, as in moments when Frances examines her reflection, Frances holds the agency of the gaze. She sends it out,
lighting upon Bill, and captures his returned gaze. While Frances does not glance at her own reflection here, she situates her material body in relation to the glance—“She knew what it was, because it mirrored the emotion that suddenly overflowed her own heart” (Taylor 126).

To orient queer futurity through the glance, rather than the horizon, allows for brief durations, moments where one takes stock of the self (Muñoz 1). For Frances, these are the moments when she catches glimpses of herself in a mirror or drugstore window, or glances at her surroundings to account for others’ reactions. These glancing moments serve as expansive modes of looking that empower Frances in the face of violent traumas. They are windows, rather than peepholes. To catch Frances glancing at herself orients male voyeurism away from the text and centers a subject who returns the gaze. These moments, coupled with the erotic nodes of warmth, function as subversive crevices. Accounting for the complex temporalities of physical (via warmth) and ocular (via the glance) contacts in the past, present, and future, the texture of the glance affords it material consequence.

The material significance of the glance, its flow across physical structures before returning to the glancing subject, textures this act of looking (Muñoz 65). Sedgwick and Bora’s notion of texture, as explored in the previous chapter, extends to the glance in an endeavor to join the ocular with the physical (Sedgwick Touching Feeling 16). To reclaim looking relations, or own the gaze, inherently textures the glance. As Frances glances out at the world and catches her reflection returning the gaze, the texture of the glance, as embodied and multi-sensorial, renders it consequential even in its evanescence. Similar to the “dizzying turning and returning” of orgasmic temporality, the glance “loops, [coils, and folds] back onto the subject who emitted it” (Beckman 63, Casey 86). For Frances, the glance does not occur in a

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39 In Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity, José Esteban Muñoz theorizes queerness as horizon—as something that never arrives but is always approaching.
40 Muñoz’s discussion of ephemera (as that which alters a material structure even in its effervescence) speaks to the ephemeral nature of the glance. For Muñoz, ephemeral acts last beyond their immediate context even though they are naturally fleeting.
vacuum as a short moment of looking. Rather, the feedback loop of observation (looking at herself or someone else) and perception (interpreting herself or someone else) offers the glance texture.

When one glances, “[the] self is augmented by its own looking […] carrying the surfaces of [the observed world] back into the attentive subject” (Casey 86, 96). As Frances observes herself in the drugstore door, she sends the glance out from herself (“[catching] a glimpse of her reflection”), observes the reflected image (“mild and refined”) and reads the reflected image back onto her body (Taylor 67). The texture of the glance grants Frances interpretive power. The object of the glance—her reflection—informs the materiality of Frances as the glancing subject. Because the glance gains texture when read back onto Frances’s body, the act of glancing serves as a gesture of transubstantiation; reading the reflected image (how she appears) back onto her body (how she feels) links the ocular to the material. From the glance, she rereads her body as “mild and refined” (Taylor 67). For Frances, caught in a network of gender-related violence, the texture of the glance affords her a frame around and across iterative practices of violence. As she glances at herself in the dressing-table mirror, catches her reflection in the drugstore window, and steals looks at Bill during the wedding ceremony, the glance resists voyeuristic looking by privileging Frances’s gaze and its effect on her material body. The textured glance, then, serves as a form of queer world-building in *Stranger on Lesbos*. The short temporality of the glance, projected back onto the heavy body, allows Frances room to read her body within a world that always already reads it for her.

**Queer Traces**

In the final scene of the novel, as Frances greets guests at her son’s wedding, she looks up to see Kay, a queer friend of Bake’s, walking toward her:
Suddenly, she felt the floor shake under her feet. For there was Kay, who certainly had not been invited, looking pretty and conventional, in hat and heels, with a mink stole slung over her shoulders [...] Frances’s heartbeat quickened. Here was everything she was leaving behind—rapture, heartbreak, the exciting potential of a new affair. Kay reached her, raised her eyebrows at the sight of the bruised eye, then winked and moved on. (Taylor 128)

Kay, “who certainly had not been invited,” ruptures the seeming tranquility (and normativity) of matrimony (Taylor 128). The introduction of a queer body—albeit passing as “pretty and conventional”—unnerves Frances (Taylor 128). For Frances, Kay signifies loss of “rapture, heartbreak, [...] the exciting potential of a new affair” (Taylor 128). For Kay, Frances’s bruised eye gestures toward a world apart from the marriage scene—the queer bar where Frances acquired the bruise. As Frances turns from Kay to Bill, “What she saw was reassuring. What if he was getting a double chin? What if his hairline was beginning to recede? He was Bill. Dear, familiar, safe, the stuff of day-by-day living” (Taylor 129). Frances shifts from “watching [Kay’s] retreating back, [warm, understanding]” to Bill’s gradual deterioration—the double chin and receding hairline (Taylor 128-129). As Frances orients herself to Bill as “the stuff of day-by-day living,” she “[turns] for a valedictory look at Kay, now half-hidden in a milling throng of friends and relatives. Well, I’m not sorry. It was good, and I’ll stick to that no matter what. (A pang hit her somewhere in the midriff. Bake, darling)” (Taylor 129). Bill’s subtle aging makes him seem familiar to Frances as she traces Kay through the “milling throng of friends and relatives” (Taylor 129). The buoyancy of queer desire expressed through Kay, juxtaposed with Bill’s double chin and receding hairline, fragments heterosexual desire. While the sight of Bill’s aging comforts Frances, it’s Kay’s energy that excites her. The unfamiliar in Kay becomes more exciting than the perceived comfort of Bill’s familiarity.
The movement of Kay toward Frances as a destabilizing force, and the disappearance of Kay into the crowd, traces the scene.\textsuperscript{41} Kay appears as Frances sees her: coming toward her, then disappearing from view. This flash of Kay as the desiring queer body momentarily jolts Frances out of her plans to forego queer desire and return home with Bill. Through the shift in gaze between Bill (legible, in front of her) and Kay (evocative, disappearing into the crowd), Frances maps desire across the landscape of her reality. Frances characterizes Kay as “a wonderful person [...] warm [...] understanding” (Taylor 128). While “warm” here suggests a friendly disposition, rather than erotic charge, the “pang” that “[hits Frances] somewhere in the midriff” hearkens back to desire-as-warmth expressed through Bake (Taylor 129). The association of “Bake, darling” with the pang not only exposes Frances’s trace of desire for Bake, but also circulates warmth across the scene. The warmth Frances associates with Kay, and the warmth explored elsewhere through Bake, traces queer desire along the outline of the marriage scene. Even as Kay disappears into the crowd, Bake enters the scene through the pang of unapologetic, intense desire. Bake as “darling” queers the seeming reconciliation of Frances and Bill; queer desire hovers around the edges of Frances’s body, privileging what was “good” in her relationship with Bake (Taylor 129). The tracing of desire across Frances’s memory of Bake, and Kay’s presence at the wedding, fashions “bits of bodies” that function according to their own vibrations and sensory registers (Grosz “Refiguring” 182). Kay, Frances, and Bake pulse across the scene. The potential kinships this scene builds, the proximity of slippery forms of desire to one another, contribute to the formation of queer traces. Queer traces, as explored here, do not intitate a disembodied queer subjectivity. Or, in other words, a “trace” is not necessarily the residue left by a body moving through space and time (Muñoz 65). Rather, these traces (both embodied through Kay and via memory through Bake) have texture, suggesting a

\textsuperscript{41} Jacques Derrida theorizes the trace as the “logic of repeated inscription without a single origin” (Kamuf 7). For Derrida, “the self of the living present is primordially a trace” (Derrida qtd. in Kamuf 7).
“degree of organization [that] hovers just below the level of shape or structure” (Sedgwick Touching Feeling 16). Here, the shape and structure of materiality operates through the icons of marriage—the “first strains of organ music,” “the lacy whiteness” of the bridal dress, the “minister’s thin, kind face” (Taylor 125). By contrast, the queer traces in this scene hover just below the surface of these recognizable shapes. The texture of queer traces, as explored through Kay, Bake, and Frances, dent the heteronormative configuration of the scene. As queerness traces the scene, in the form of queer bodies and desire, it pushes against the sanitized portrayal of marriage. These traces offer an alternate, hovering framework, and undermine the forces that would discipline and shame them. Queerness slants through the scene as “the slanting blue-and-crimson rays [filter] through the stained-glass windows” (Taylor 126). The tracing of queerness across the scene thus serves as a form of subversive world-building, disrupting the linearity of matrimonial time.

**Assembled Futurity**

In the final scene of Stranger on Lesbos, as Frances returns home with Bill after the wedding, “The days and nights reaching ahead were, after all, full of glowing possibilities” (Taylor 130). The guise of restored order within the patriarchal framework of Frances returning home with her husband to an endless future of “glowing possibilities” repositions Frances in relation to the home as a site of violence (Taylor 130). This optimistic view of the future cannot exist in the domestic space without reimagining gender relations and labor structures, and privileging sexual autonomy. Perhaps, though, the erotics of warmth, as expressed through queer desire, and previously explored as physical sensation and queer temporality, might account for the glow in this “glowing” futurity. In carving out space for Frances’s desire within the home, and if this glowing futurity can exist within the parameters of the novel, I turn again to the “residue of chill, lingering in the center of [Frances’s] bones”
(Taylor 44). The warmth of Bake and Frances together as bodies, and the return of Bake as a pang in Frances’s midriff at her son’s wedding, situates the future in relation to the “horizon imbued with potentiality,” rather than simply the promise of a changed Bill (Taylor 129-130, Muñoz 1). Warmth that exists physically (literal bodily warmth), temporally (the retrospective and anticipatory warmth when Frances and Bake are apart), and through memory (“Bake, darling”) contributes to an optimistic, glowing futurity (Taylor 129).

This glowing futurity does not unfold as a series of “glowing possibilities” through Frances’s future with Bill, however (Taylor 130). Rather, it unfolds as a map of queer encounters and affects that creeps into the home. Warmth in a glowing futurity evidences two surfaces touching or sliding over one another in a relational encounter—an embodied futurity that reaches back to warm nodes of the past to inform the present and shape the future. Moments of warmth in this framework thus function as sites of desire that “occur at a conjunction, an interruption, a point of machinic connection” (Grosz “Refiguring” 179). Frances reaches back to sites of warmth as pinpoints of desire, and reaches forward to propel warmth into the future, placing it on the horizon (Muñoz 3). Within the space of the home, then, the memory of warmth expands Frances’s body beyond its confined edges; it offers a relational model of time in which past queer desire dialogues with the present and future.

The “glow” of a glowing futurity emanates from a warm source—whether sensorial or through memory. Here, the warmth of prior queer encounters extends into the home. If warmth radiates from a point of contact, then warmth as an element of a glowing futurity positions the future in relation to the present body (Muñoz 3). Filtering the future through the past and present materializes futurity not only as horizontal, or ever-approaching, but warm and fleshy (Muñoz 1). Analyzing warmth through this model of futurity, as a physical sensation.

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42 Following Ernst Bloch, Muñoz distinguishes between abstract utopianism, as mere idealism, and concrete utopianism, as that which dialogues with the future through the present.
and queer temporality, positions Frances in relation to queer kinships through memory and desire even in the absence of other queer bodies. When read through warmth, Frances’s relationship with Bake does not classify as a singular dip in the queer pond. Rather, it continues to glow from its place in the past into the present and future, diffusing across the heavy queer body. Warmth as internal, emanating from within and expanding outward, extends futurity from the porous past and present body into the infinitely unfolding future.

As Frances imagines the days and nights ahead “full of glowing possibilities,” Kay enters the scene (Taylor 129). Frances sees Kay “as though Kay’s face were within her range of vision,” and plans to leave the phone off the hook to prevent Kay from reaching her (Taylor 129). In this closing scene of the novel, Kay exists alongside Bill. Rather than the repression of queer desire altogether, Frances’s final fantasy of Kay queers the endlessly unfolding future with Bill (Madison 14). The image of the dangling phone receiver—“I’ll leave the receiver off the hook, [Frances] decided firmly”—and Kay attempting to call on the other end, does not repress queer affection in favor of heteronormative coupling (Taylor 130). Instead, the dangling receiver, rather than the endless nights in Bill’s company, functions as a metonym for glowing futurity. Instead of reading Frances’s final return to the home as a hopeless ending, an open-ended future routes through the dangling phone receiver, one that “acknowledges the capacity of any future eruption, any event, any reading, to rewrite, resignify, reframe the present” (Grosz “Thinking” 18). To “accept the role that the accidental, chance, or undetermined plays in the unfolding of time” positions the phone receiver as connective tissue in a glowing futurity, the link between the home and the external world with its potential for queer kinship (Grosz “Thinking” 18). Frances’s knowledge of Kay’s feelings for her, and Kay’s desire to contact Frances, allows for an unfolding of time that reframes the depressive nature of Frances’s present. Frances’s decision to position Kay in proximity to the home, via the disconnected
phone receiver, offers an antidote to her return home. Kay, the tantalizing queer love interest, haunts the dangling phone.

The technological apparatus of the phone stands in for the desired queer body, forever off the hook yet always within reach. Kay’s desire for Frances, and Frances’s potential reciprocation, challenges the notion that Frances might “just” be infatuated with Bake and not other women. It offers a more expansive and generative formulation of queerness than, perhaps, Frances’s many encounters with Bake suggest. Kay’s positioning in the present, as well as an ever-interested presence on the horizon, leaves the door open to queer desire (Muñoz 1). While Frances plans to disconnect the phone in order to resist Kay’s advances, the possibility of a future relationship between them folds over the scene. This final formulation positions a forward-looking queer desire; Kay’s desire for Frances, and Frances’s potential fondness for Kay, does not simply exist in the past, like Frances’s relationship with Bake. Rather, it functions as something that could, quite possibly, exist in the future. In a literal sense, the dangling phone situates queer desire as only ever a phone call away. Metaphorically, it operates as a symbol of futurity—the technology of the telephone orients away from the house toward the promise of connection. It suggests that a phone call dances out of the house into the home of another person—Kay, Bake, or someone new altogether.

Conclusion: Toward a Glowing Futurity

I began this chapter by drawing a historical link between The Well of Loneliness and mid-twentieth century lesbian pulp fiction, claiming that The Well of Loneliness functions historically as both proto-pulp text in its initial publication, and as proximally pulp in its republication. This discursive turn from The Well of Loneliness as a canonical lesbian text, to The Well of Loneliness as lesbian pulp compatriot, draws a generic and thematic link between the texts. In my discussion of lesbian pulp, Stranger on Lesbos situates as a paradigmatic lesbian pulp novel
that illustrates patterns and conventions of the genre. *Stranger on Lesbos* at once evokes and refines the aesthetic excess of lesbian pulp, with exorbitance moving through the heavy queer body rather than being performed as stylistic or sexual abundance. Valerie Taylor’s approach to the pulp genre, and the omnipresence of violence throughout the text, positions excess as the multiple oppressive forces acting upon the queer body. Following this generic formulation, the heavy queer body, nodes of warmth, reimagined looking relations, and queer traces work through pulp-as-genre to imagine a glowing futurity—one that dialogues with the weighty breadth of queer texts. As such, *Stranger on Lesbos* speaks to the heaviness in *The Well of Loneliness*—the weight of loneliness as queer affect—while creating crevices through which more expansive models of futurity and relations can be imagined (Love “Spoiled Identity” 104).

The complex temporalities of *The Well of Loneliness*’s womb connect to the model of futurity I build here—namely, that through reclaiming the shadowy queer child, and queering the heterosexual reproductive womb, the saturation of loneliness in *The Well of Loneliness* does not obscure futurity altogether. In mapping futurity through dense, depressive affect, *Stranger on Lesbos* also offers hopeful moments against an otherwise bleak backdrop. In reading warmth as sexual desire and queer temporality in Frances’s return to the home, her gesture toward the endlessly unfolding future filled with “glowing possibilities” can be reread through the remembrance and function of queer kinship (Taylor 130). In this model of futurity, erotics of warmth, the texture of the glance, and queer traces filter through the heavy queer body toward a glowing futurity. This model of futurity does not privilege endless deferral or an omni-horizontal orientation, but instead sketches a trajectory through the material present toward the endlessly unfurling future.
Chapter III

In Defense of the Ooze: Impatience and Exorbitant Poetics in *SCUM Manifesto* and *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*

***Introduction: SCUM Manifesto and Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution***

In a final queer Loch Nessian turn, I extend my discussion of *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp fiction to include radical feminist manifestos of the 1960s, tracing the sentimentality of the womb and queer heaviness developed in previous chapters. I orient my exploration of radical feminist manifestos around two texts: Valerie Solanas’s 1967 *SCUM Manifesto*, and Jill Johnston’s 1973 *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*. While the urgent exorbitance of Solanas’s *Manifesto* differs in form and approach from Johnston’s *Lesbian Nation*, an impatient temporality and oozing excess undulates across the texts. Theories of negative aesthetics and shadow feminism put forth by Ellen E. Berry and Jack Halberstam, respectively, inform this attention to the political oomph of the absurd in Johnston and Solanas’s writing.43 The materiality of language in the texts propels the writing beyond the bounds of “modest” second-wave feminist discourse, and the language itself takes on an oozing quality—words bumping into one another and sliming across the page (McBean 107). Orienting around the moment of the “ooze” (echoing 1960s “happenings” in Johnston’s writings), Johnston and Solanas challenge the bounds of the manifesto genre itself—deploying certain genre conventions only to dismantle them—and the impatient temporality of the texts works against liberal feminism’s project.

In the context of second-wave feminism, in which *SCUM* and *Lesbian Nation* were published, manifestos were critical, action-oriented texts. Or, as Susan Miller notes, dependent

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43 Berry defines “negative aesthetics” as a set of “textual features and political commitments [that] constitute a radical critique of all structures of domination and inequality and thus produce a kind of extreme or limit feminism not easily assimilated within conventional rationalist frameworks” (Berry 2). Halberstam offers a similar reading of “shadow feminism” as engaged with the negative and perverse beyond the realm of liberal feminism. See *Women’s Experimental Writing* (Berry) and *The Queer Art of Failure* (Halberstam).
upon the “textual subject,” one who “temporarily yet purposefully [acts through writing]” (Rhodes 2). As a genre rooted in action, the manifesto scoots around the edges of textual certainty—the stable conventions that would cement a novel or collection of poems in place. Instead, it inches toward “performative language,” what J.L. Austin first theorized as language with the power to bring into being that which it names (McBean 112). The manifesto’s reliance on performative language is of import to queer theory’s investment in performativity and futurity. Within the context of feminist activism, manifestos are performative objects that disseminate the politics they purport. Second-wave feminism networked through manifestos, from The Combahee River Collective Statement to The Redstockings Manifesto, but something about *SCUM Manifesto* and Johnston’s writings made them inassimilable. The women’s liberation movement Johnston and Solanas critique called for the equitable assimilation of women into public and private sectors of society without overthrowing the oppressive structures into which they entered. Johnston and Solanas’s respective political projects are not interested in bounds of propriety or modesty; they are at war with the patriarchal system, and dismantle it one word at a time.

In Johnston’s critique of the second-wave feminist movement, she writes that the lesbian’s “reversal [of] the cultural appraisal of womanhood is the crux of the revolution,” citing “its outrageousness [as] the measure of truth” (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 185). “Outrageousness as the measure of truth” also applies to the language of Solanas and Johnston’s writing—billowing, excessive, over-the-top, and outrageous in many senses. Yet, the truth of their respective critiques resides in the absurdity of the language itself. Johnston

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44 The “fluid textuality of the radical feminist [manifesto]” offers a “visible, textual, manifest presence” in the rhetorical situation of the author’s writing moment (Rhodes 2).
45 Even though genres like the novel or poem might be textually experimental, the manifesto has a particular performative quality that resists textual certainty.
46 See Judith Butler, “Performatve Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” for more on performativity, and Josè Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* for a model of horizonal futurity.
claims, “the language [of woman] is no longer adequate to signify the liberated sex [the lesbian]” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 185). In placing the inadequacy of language in relation to its exorbitant quality across the texts, the linguistic tricks of SCUM and Lesbian Nation perform the radical politics they propose. While the texts may fail to enact the “future tenses [they reach] for,” their performative velocities render these texts works of “written theater,” staging the worlds they construct (McBean 100, Jowitt qtd. in Johnston Marmalade Me xxvii). In what follows, I articulate a link between the inherent impatience of the manifesto and the oozing aesthetic of this genre in the hands of radical feminist and queer writers. Performative excess filters through the generic conventions of the manifesto and seeps out the other side as queer affect. Through the “pathological purity of [Solanas’s] fury” and Johnston’s “lesbian [as] woman prime,” the queer aesthetics of SCUM women and “the fugitive Lesbian Nation” embolden, expand, and intensify the queer temporalities and affects of The Well of Loneliness and lesbian pulp fiction (Johnston Lesbian Nation 175, 185, 182).

The Limbic State: Grooviness and Energies

Historians credit 1960s cultural critic turned everything-writer Jill Johnston with establishing a new form of criticism, one that collapsed “poetry, criticism, history, [and] self-revelation” (Battcock qtd. in Johnston Marmalade Me xvii). Johnston’s two collections, Marmalade Me and Lesbian Nation, offer markedly different approaches to criticism and personal writing. Johnston writes of her position in a “limbic state, poised between a repressive past and a promise of fantastic liberties” as a way to situate her writing and politics in the 1960s (Johnston Marmalade Me xii). This notion of the “limbic” state captures both the historical surroundings of Solanas and Johnston’s writing, and the oddities of the texts themselves. While

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47 This inter-genre approach performs the comingling, oozing politics this chapter develops. By placing The Well of Loneliness in conversation with lesbian pulp and radical feminist manifestos, each is altered by the aesthetic structures of the other two acting upon it. To apply the shadowy temporalities of the womb in The Well of Loneliness, and the kinetic erotics of warmth in lesbian pulp, to the oozing performativity of these manifestos suggests genre as relational, even in its seemingly discrete boundaries.
Solanas builds a forceful, imaginative persona in *SCUM* that does not dialogue with specific people and places exterior to the text, Johnston evokes Solanas and her “hippiedom” as an inspirational model of radical feminism, but one she herself departs from (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 152). Johnston positions Solanas and Ti-Grace Atkinson as “beyond the necessities of erotic gratification,” pointing toward the post-erotic, separatist politics of *SCUM* (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 175). For Solanas, “you’ve got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex,” while Johnston advocates for the power of erotic potentialities in lesbian relationships (Solanas 54). As a point of departure, Solanas calls for complete eradication of the male sex, and the ultimate triumph of women in a separatist society, while Johnston positions the lesbian as the exemplary figure in radical politics. For Johnston, “Feminism at heart is a massive complaint. Lesbianism is the solution,” which gestures toward the “solution” of the book’s subtitle (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 166).

Partway through *Lesbian Nation*, Johnston presents her treatise on lesbian feminism, portions of which appeared in *The Village Voice* prior to the book’s publication. Johnston develops her theory of lesbian feminism through four subheadings—“The Making of a Lesbian Chauvinist,” “The Myth of the Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” “The Second Sucks & the Feminine Mystake,” and “Woman Prime”—each riffing on titles of prominent second-wave feminist texts. Johnston defines lesbian chauvinism as “the aggressive assertion of your sensual and sexual needs and interests,” and presents her personal liberation as a “rebellion against passivity” (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 154-155). For Solanas, males are inherently passive and seek sex with women in order to disprove their passivity, or approximate the active female

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48 “The only radical feminists around here worthy of the name that I know of are Ti-Grace Atkinson and Valerie Solanas and they don’t have to use the word lesbian to define the man as the enemy, we can take instruction from the pathological purity of their fury. The lesbian has no quarrel with them unless it be personal” (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 175).

49 Johnston riffs on other female-authored texts throughout *Lesbian Nation*—Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir here, but also Joan Didion (“Slouching Toward Consciousness” – 98) among others.
position (Solanas 41). For Johnston, “Passivity is the dragon that every woman has to murder in her quest for independence” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 154, original emphasis). Johnston chronicles the “liberation of the lesbian” from her “prefeminist past into her natural polymorphic state of identification with other women at multiple levels of the physical intellectual and spiritual which should constitute the new ideal for any feminist aspiring to equality and self realization” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 157). Both Johnston and Solanas present an embodied consciousness-raising that collapses female bodies into one another in a pseudo Sapphic utopianism. And yet, Johnston presents a recalibrated integration of gender through the “physical intellectual and spiritual,” signaled by the lack of commas and the interrelation of mind and body (Johnston Lesbian Nation 157). This “polymorphic state of identification” acts as a limbic state in Johnston’s formulation of lesbianism, a multi-nodal positionality that situates women (and lesbians as exemplars) in relation to one another (Johnston Lesbian Nation 157). The inter-female relation Johnston builds echoes the “kooky, funky females grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe” of SCUM (Solanas 52). Johnston and Solanas evoke particular kinetic configurations as characteristic of the separatist worlds they imagine. Solanas positions “grooviness” in cosmic proportions, extending out from the point of contact between women, to an interrelated connection between women and the universe. Grooviness functions as a complex temporal distortion that disrupts continuity of gendered relations in SCUM. Grooviness orders the society Solanas imagines by capturing the vibrations of world-building, and performs the necessary pulsations of finding a way through, and out of, the present.

Echoing Solanas’s grooviness, Johnston writes of the “vital energies” of feminists which are “[delivered] to the oppressor” when feminists sleep with men (Johnston Lesbian Nation 50). The inter-female relations of lesbian pulp, and Stranger on Lesbos specifically, dialogue with the grooving energy Johnston and Solanas chart. Warmth, as previously explored, offers one nodal point for “grooving” as a physical and temporal connection. 

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50 The inter-female relations of lesbian pulp, and Stranger on Lesbos specifically, dialogue with the grooving energy Johnston and Solanas chart. Warmth, as previously explored, offers one nodal point for “grooving” as a physical and temporal connection.
The “interactive energies of women at all levels physical mental emotional chemical spiritual” defines the “new social structures” Johnston imagines (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 183). Johnston’s “energies” take on a similar vibratory valence as Solanas’s “grooving,” and herein exists the potential for the ooze. The pulsations of grooviness and energies intimate excess, affectively important in both *SCUM* and *Lesbian Nation*. Grooviness, as both adjective and verb, and energies, as movement and feeling, slips beyond the limits of confined movement. The temporality of the groove, for Solanas, is an alternative to the progression of patriarchal time. It is a corporeal temporality, one that depends upon bodily contact and movement. The “energies” of Johnston’s formulation have the power to form “new social structures,” granting them a particular performative quality that creates the very thing it names (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 183).

The performative excess of Johnston’s “energies” and Solanas’s “grooviness” filters through the manifesto form and seeps out the other side as queer affect. While “groovy” is used to describe SCUM women, Solanas also situates it as a verb to describe the relations between women (Solanas 52). Solanas claims that “love can only exist between two secure, free-wheeling, independent, groovy female females,” and that men have “no self to groove on” and are thus incomplete (Solanas 37, 48). Groovy, as adjective and verb, intimates both attribute and movement (woman as “groovy,” women “grooving” on one another). Grooviness functions as a temporal ripple across *SCUM*. Solanas implies a particular ecstasy in her discussion of groovy women, and “grooving” as a bodily arrangement and movement. In conceiving of grooviness as attribute and movement, *SCUM Manifesto* works against a model of “smooth” time that privileges linear progression and constant forward movement (Halberstam 70). Instead, the groove performs a looping motion, a “jamming [of] the smooth operations of the

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51 In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam aligns “smooth time” with heteronormative constructions of progressive time.
normal and the ordinary” (Halberstam 70). In positioning the “groove” as an expression of both erotic and kinetic energy, grooviness offers a way out of the linear constraints of patriarchal time. The positionality of grooviness in SCUM Manifesto queers both the operation of time and the collective ordering of bodies. Its jerky movement across the text, as an attribute of SCUM women and a method of temporal distortion, situates grooviness as a queer affect—the undulation of the “groove” across space, time, and bodies. Energy for Johnston is specifically erotic, and erotic energy operates as power within Johnston’s lesbian feminist framework. Johnston writes that the non-separatist woman must “face her acculturated alienation from herself and other women and for her very survival she must learn to tap the source of her erotic energy,” which she links to “tribal groupings of women” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 181). These tribal groupings, or “the fugitive Lesbian Nation,” serve as “support [systems] and psychic power bases within the movement” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 181). Johnston positions tapping into erotic energy as the catalyst for the non-separatist woman to join the lesbian feminist movement. Each grouping as a “psychic power base” suggests a kinetic node associated with Johnston’s model of energy (Johnston 181). Johnston references the “psychosomatic labor pains” of “attending the birth of myself during a critical period of cosmic consciousness,” which echoes the cosmic scale of Solanas’s grooviness and speaks to womb temporalities in The Well of Loneliness (Johnston Lesbian Nation 170-171). The “subject turned inward,” and birthing oneself into consciousness, intimates an auto-energetic framework in which “cosmic consciousness” is brought forth from the self (Johnston Marmalade Me xxii). While Solanas dwells on the topic of reproduction in her critique of twentieth-century American society, and meditates upon its place in her imagined SCUM world, Johnston discusses reproduction in the context of lesbian feminist consciousness-raising (Solanas 35, Johnston Lesbian Nation 170-52 For another articulation of erotic power, see: Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.”
53 The various moments of Johnston’s coming to consciousness also echo Frances’s discovery of queer desire in Stranger on Lesbos, even though Frances’s surroundings limit a public embrace of queer desire and identity.
Solanas and Johnston’s respective reproductive models offer additional commentary on, and complications of, theories of the womb and birthing explored in *The Well of Loneliness*, and queer heaviness as theorized through lesbian pulp.

**Parthenogenesis and World-Edges**

While grooviness functions as a central temporal structure in *SCUM Manifesto*, Solanas also addresses the temporality of reproduction. Solanas contends, “It is now technically feasible to reproduce without the aid of males (or, for that matter, females) and to produce only females. We must begin to do so immediately” (Solanas 23). Solanas classifies the male as an “incomplete female, a walking abortion” (Solanas 23). The male functions as an evolutionary failure in *SCUM Manifesto*, an “incomplete set of chromosomes” that prevents him from being female (Solanas 23). Solanas presents males as both evolutionary and reproductive failures. The abortion, as an internal process, is turned inside out, given legs, and named male. Solanas offers a technological version of reproduction, removing it from its sequestered location in the womb, and placing it in a laboratory (Solanas 61). In her theorizing of reproduction after the SCUM takeover, Solanas writes, “Should a certain percentage of women be set aside by force to serve as brood mares for the species? Obviously this will not do. The answer is laboratory reproduction of babies” (Solanas 61). The womb, as a feminized location, has no place in the society Solanas imagines. As such, Solanas offers a vision of reproduction that renders the womb obsolete. Reproduction becomes a synthetic, rather than fleshy, endeavor.

For all of its focus on the female body, *SCUM* presents a post-fleshy womb. Even in the apparent swerve away from the womb in SCUM society, Solanas presents pregnancy as a classed experience, referencing the “privileged, educated middle class, the backwash of humanity [who] try to groove on labor pains and lie around in the most advanced nation in the world in the middle of the twentieth century with babies chomping away at their tits” (Solanas 61).
Here, grooviness collides with labor pains, and labor approximates non-SCUM women to grooviness (women who, according to Solanas, fit into patriarchy’s construction of proper womanhood) (Solanas 35). The intimation of labor pains as experienced through the womb echoes the “appalling burden” of Stephen’s womb in The Well of Loneliness (Hall 399). While Hall writes Stephen’s womb as bursting with queer bodies, and pain experienced as the burden of sound in their clamor for articulation, Solanas writes the womb through labor pains. Both models undermine the site of the womb as a beacon of heterosexual reproduction. Hall fills the womb with queer bodies, while Solanas approximates grooving on labor pains as an erotic experience for non-SCUM women. Taken together, these two images paint a complex portrait of the womb—one that is not altogether bound up in the body as the site of reproduction, but as an entity that moves according to its own queer, fleshy rhythms.

If grooviness serves as a twilight temporality in the text, as a model of “ecstatic time,” Solanas associates “inauthentic” grooviness with middle-class, privileged women giving birth (Muñoz 32). While groovy SCUM women groove on one another, and have access to grooviness due to their marginal status in patriarchal society, women of a certain class (and race and sexuality) can only ever approach grooviness through labor pains. Furthermore, Solanas writes that the “tits [are] for Daddy to hang onto, the labor pains for Daddy to vicariously groove on (half dead, he needs awfully strong stimuli to make him respond)” (Solanas 35). Not only do the “privileged, educated middle class” women attempt to groove on labor pains, as Solanas writes, but their fathers (and “Daddy” as stand-in for patriarchy) also participate in the groove of their labor pains (Solanas 35). While grooviness has a liberatory connotation for SCUM women, it is inaccessible and only ever a proximal feeling for privileged, middle-class women. Thus, grooviness-as-ecstatic-time operates outside of heteronormative,
reproductive society. It warps the continuum of straight space and time, reconfiguring bodies and temporalities in ever-new arrangements.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam extends Joseph Roach’s concept of “surrogation” to discuss queer temporalities. Roach argues that “all of culture emerges from the kinetic and even frantic process of ‘surrogation’: forms constantly supplant each other while holding on to a vestige of the performance they replace in the form of a gesture here, a use of language there” (Halberstam 73). Roach’s model of surrogation, as one gesture supplanting another while retaining traces of the replaced gesture, offers a model for *SCUM*’s articulation of reproduction. Solanas’s technologized reproductive framework takes with it traces of the fleshy womb, which rather than reify a human/nonhuman binary, offers a complex reproductive assemblage—building a sort of non-womb of the future. *SCUM* externalizes reproductive processes. In writing the male as a walking abortion, and positioning all future reproduction as technologically oriented, Solanas offers a post-womb society—one that positions the feminized mechanics of reproduction within a network of exterior processes. *SCUM* offers a picture of the womb as feminine and imprisoning, and thus imagines a society in which women are not intimately linked to reproduction. If reproduction becomes solely the purveyance of machines, the “feminized” womb is no longer fleshy. In this post-flesh depiction of the womb, reproduction is not necessarily a female venture. The shadow feminism of *SCUM*, then, is made most explicit in Solanas’s reimagining of the place of reproduction—as a set of procedures that occurs outside of the body (Halberstam 4).

Johnston’s theory of reproduction dialogues with Solanas in her notion of the self-reproducing female. Johnston cites the female as “originally the self-sufficient self-recreating creature,” with the male as “one of her offspring” (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 187). Destablizing an essential feminine, Johnston writes, “The primary creature was parthenogenetic whether
you call her female or not” (Johnston 187). The parthenogenetic quality of the “primary creature” implicates the individual as the reproductive and erotic unit. For Johnston, patriarchal “repression of woman is rooted in womb envy,” and woman is defined by, and reduced to, her reproductive capacity (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 187-188). Following Solanas, Johnston troubles Freudian theories of penis envy, but complicates Solanas’s “pussy envy” by writing the envy within the folds of the womb (Solanas 26). The specificity of the womb as the site of envy locates it within the reproductive framework of the female body. Rather than reinforce the trope of the sacred maternal womb, however, Johnston reorients the womb through her “revolutionary figure” of the lesbian (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 156). While this disaggregation of bodies might lead to an unproductive deconstruction, or risk reinforcing a normative reproductive bent, Johnston loops back to the parthenogenetic creature as a destabilizing force. For Johnston, the creature that can reproduce without fertilization—and the creature that can do this “whether you call her female or not”—is the revolutionary figure (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 187). And, through her exposition of the lesbian, the *queer* parthenogenetic creature offers a certain model of non-linear reproductivity. To link these images—the womb, the lesbian, the original parthenogenetic creature—offers something akin to the work of the womb in *The Well of Loneliness*. If the womb, as depicted across these texts, functions as a sort of queer counterpublic with its own temporalities and birthing rhythms, Johnston’s parthenogenesis privileges the auto-reproductive abilities of the primary creature. This radically destabilizes the womb as the site of reproduction activated by fertilization. Instead, it suggests that the womb contains the power to produce offspring that are not parthenogenetic in themselves, but link back to the parthenogenetic creature as *auto-generated* offspring.\footnote{The creatures spawned from the parthenogenetic creature are not parthenogenetic themselves, but this configuration constantly reorients back to the parthenogenetic creature as the site of radical reproductive politics.} Johnston continues, “If the woman had in some sense needed the male to recreate herself by impregnation she nonetheless
was never in any doubt as to her self recreation or the identity of her offspring” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 187-188). While Johnston calls for a lesbian feminist movement, and the mass “lesbianification” of women (Johnston says all women are lesbians whether they acknowledge it or not), she undermines the role of the male in reproductive activities (Johnston Lesbian Nation 166). Johnston’s formulation of reproduction, and gesture toward the parthenogenesis of the primary creature, presents a complex model of womb-time—configured as both the temporality of the womb, and the duration of pregnancy. Johnston offers an auto-energetic womb that situates the womb as a technological, dermal phenomenon. In her advocacy for the gay revolution, Johnston writes that the revolution’s goal is “an end [to] sexual duality or the two-sex system and a gradual evolutionary movement through massive liberation of homosexuality back to the true parthenogenetic species,” noting that “all men start off as women and that’s the way they’ll end up if they don’t destroy us all first” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 189-190). For Johnston, the gay revolution not only aims to abolish gender binaries, but also follows an evolutionary through line back to the “true parthenogenetic species” (Johnston 189-190).

While the “truth” of the parthenogenetic species begs explication, this lateral evolutionary movement works against linear scientific time. If evolution’s narrative is reconceived so that it does not occur sequentially, or according to a mathematical scale of advancement and progress, but rather through processes of adaptation and expansion, Johnston’s evolutionary model links queer politics—the gay revolution—to parthenogenesis in the primary creature. This presents a complex temporal model of the womb, one that is both shadowy and active. The housing of the womb within the parthenogenetic creature shadows the idyllic quality of the womb as constructed in the patriarchal imaginary (as activated by male fertilization). While Solanas locates the womb of the SCUM present and future in the

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56 Here, too, are echoes of the shadowy womb in The Well of Loneliness—both Stephen’s at the end, filled with the queer bodies, and Anna’s at the beginning, shadowed by the future queer Stephen.
laboratory, Johnston links present queer bodies to the past self-generating primary creature—a proto-queer, autoerotic figure. This connection between the present queer self and the self-reproducing figure traces a queer evolutionary path—one that links liberation movements of the present to a fleshy, mythic body of the past. Johnston’s model of the present queer self linking back to the self-reproducing figure of the past offers an imaginative model of the womb’s operation in *The Well of Loneliness*—the present and future Stephen inflecting upon the reproductive space of Anna’s womb. As such, both Hall and Johnston present the womb as a space that is acted upon by future temporalities; for Hall, it is the future Stephen acting upon the past of her mother’s womb, and for Johnston the present queer revolutionary siphoning back through time to the original parthenogenetic creature.

In the conclusion to *Lesbian Nation*, Johnston takes up the meaning of “lesbian,” detailing its expansion “through political definition” to “no longer [referring] exclusively to a woman simply in sexual relation to another woman” (Johnston 278). Part of Johnston’s redefinition suggests “lesbian” to “[signify] activism and resistance and the envisioned goal of a woman-committed state” (Johnston 278). Johnston argues, “in such a state a woman or lesbian will also be free to reproduce herself as she pleases, that is on her own terms in a woman supportive environment in which the child has a legal identity derived from its mother, still the only clear parent” (Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 278). Johnston defines this reimagined woman-committed state as a “peer grouping” kinship model (Johnston 278). Like the final image of the womb in *The Well of Loneliness*, Johnston’s model functions as a space of queer world-building rather than heterosexual reproduction. Naming parentage as a key component of a woman-committed state, Johnston’s model imagines a queer future that reaches beyond the confines of homophobic society. In this sense, it offers what *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stranger on Lesbos* cannot, given their historical locations. In *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen serves as
womb-container for past, present, and future queers, but does not care for the community as parent. Reproductive discourse draws a parallel temporality between pregnancy and induction into motherhood—that as the pregnancy proceeds, one is mother-to-be and the arrival of the child births the woman into motherhood. Johnston’s model challenges this. By granting the mother full parentage, as “parent prime,” Johnston links the child to the mother’s lineage, rather than the father’s (Johnston Lesbian Nation 190). In a parthenogenetic Lesbian Nation, a woman can “reproduce herself as she pleases,” and, in fact, the “essence of [this] new political definition is peer grouping” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 278). In conversation with Solanas’s forceful, funky, over-the-top world-building, Johnston presents a model of separatist futurity that does not orient itself away from the child as the icon of futurity. Instead, it accounts for the child within a larger peer group that links to the woman’s reproductive prerogative. This not only challenges notions of heteronormative futurity, oriented “around the eternal sunshine of the spotless child,” but also works against an anti-reproductive queer futurity that orients toward death (Halberstam 180). Instead, Johnston reconfigures both the reproducer and the reproduced within a larger kinship network, necessarily leaning toward an autonomous, separatist framework by “adhering to [the power] inherent in natural peers” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 279).

While Solanas and Johnston both meditate on the role of reproduction in their current and imagined societies, each positions the womb differently. For Johnston, the power of the womb lies in the parthenogenesis of the original creature—part mythic, part divine. For Solanas, liberating women from the burden of reproduction placed on them by patriarchal forces lies in the realm of technology—free from the constraints of the gendered, fleshy body. Both Johnston and Solanas reach beyond the reproductive body to implicate the cultural forces

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that shape it. Solanas argues that there is no need to reproduce beyond the present revolutionary moment, and that laboratories are sufficient should the future SCUM society need to reproduce (Solanas 63).58 Johnston, in perhaps a more radical turn, does not remove the child or the woman from her model of futurity. Rather, she orients her reading of reproduction and the womb through parthenogenesis, positioning auto-creation as a form of autoeroticism that generates versions of the self. In her “peer grouping,” Johnston presents the child not as the hope for the future, but as a figure of kinship in the present (Johnston 278). In both of their meditations on the patriarchy, and its various homophobic and sexist tendrils, Solanas and Johnston trouble the normative perimeter of reproduction. They make it messy by moving the womb and child around as body-structures, and shape a society driven by women committed to women. Rather than slip into abstract utopianism, Johnston and Solanas work with the materiality of the present to shape the future (Muñoz 3).

These complex womb-temporalities provide generative links to The Well of Loneliness and lesbian pulp. Solanas and Johnston offer queer reproductive models that subvert the norms of their respective writing moments. Rather than write around the reproductive model, or ignore reproduction altogether, Johnston, Solanas, and Hall locate a complex, webby womb that expands and contracts to account for dynamic processes of lived experience. In their attention to embodiment, and the womb’s location in the female body, the authors account for queer embodiment as heavy and significant. While Stephen sags under the weight of queer bodies within her, and the heaviness of Frances’s body pushes down on her, Johnston and Solanas imagine forms of reproduction that account for the material body while routing them through alternate means. For Solanas, the laboratory provides an alternate arrangement. For Johnston, routing reproduction through the present revolutionary figure to the original

58 For a practical application of this, see: Laura Mamo, Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience.
parthenogenetic creature offers a nuanced bodily arrangement. Couched within the urgency of the manifesto form, Solanas and Johnston’s respective reproductive critiques locate reproduction as a core preoccupation of their world-building projects.

In each of these historical moments (Hall in 1920s Britain, Taylor, Solanas, and Johnston in 1960s-70s United States), the authors critique the structures of society that position the womb as a stable, feminine structure. They design complex models of reproduction that account for the spectral child, and the technologies that impinge upon and mold the flesh. While each of the writers build as-yet unimagined worlds, they also push their respective present worlds to the edges, exploring what might exist at the very limit or rim of the present. This, then, offers a deeply complex model of utopia—that in reaching for something beyond the present but through the present, the edges of the present world are necessarily sketched, colored in, and expanded. The authors are less invested in world-building than world-edges—the cracks and fissures that contain the present. To read The Well of Loneliness, lesbian pulp, and radical feminist manifestos in tandem intimates porous generic borders; The Well of Loneliness takes on pulpy valences, while the saturated poetics of radical feminist manifestos reflect the melodramatic thrusts of The Well of Loneliness and lesbian pulp. Pushing to and beyond these edges is certainly an act of world-building, but one that accounts for the permeable boundaries of the present—as edges, rather than stable perimeter lines.

Politics of Impatience

The temporality of the manifesto presents it as “primarily concerned with the future tense” while also “calling into being a new future in the present” (McBean 112). The manifesto thus creates its own enclosed temporal rhythm while dialoguing with linear, non-manifesto time. This tension between the time of the manifesto, and the time the manifesto dialogues with, presents it as constantly in motion. In considering the models of futurity in SCUM
Manifesto and Lesbian Nation, impatience functions as the jerky temporal movement of radical queer politics. The evocation of cyclical impatience, as a constantly repeating model of time, renders impatience as a queer affect, rather than simply a model of queer time. Impatience is experienced bodily, spatially, and temporally in the texts through discussions of reproduction, revolution, and reconfiguration, and is ultimately shaped as a queer affect when distilled through the manifesto form. In exploring the jerky time-movements of Solanas and Johnston’s respective projects, SCUM and Lesbian Nation dialogue specifically with impatience, with perturbation, rather than simply a critique of the present in service of the future (Muñoz 125). Instead, impatience (evoked repeatedly throughout the texts) takes on an oozing quality—both continuous—oozing as present participle—and congealing; it hurries the manifesto forward, carrying with it the societal structures it seeks to overturn.

Johnston locates her treatise on lesbian feminism in the 1960s United States, and distinguishes gay liberation from feminist liberation. She notes, however, that “Gay liberation emerged out of women’s liberation and through the critically intermediate figure of the lesbian the two liberation fronts unite as a Gay/Feminist movement” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 183, emphasis added). The critical intermediacy of the “figure of the lesbian” is crucial in Johnston’s configuration (Johnston 183). For Johnston, the feminist who does not identify as a lesbian does nothing to advance the women’s liberation and/or gay liberation movement—she is a mere “insipient revolutionary” (Johnston 183). Johnston views the category of “woman” as inherently oppressed, and thus seeks to “expose the fraud of the ‘real woman’ and establish the is-ness of the lesbian as the sex with the organs commonly referred to as woman” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 185-186, emphasis added). To “establish the is-ness of the lesbian” emphasizes Johnston’s impatience with the structures that exist in the present (Johnston 185-186). Johnston continues: “Gay revolution means an end to the sexist underpinnings of every
political-economic power base extant which have remained unchallenged in the successive waves of class and racial disorder leading to novel forms of oppression” (Johnston 191). The salience of Johnston’s project is her impatience not just with how society is organized in the present, but also with how past revolutions have failed to achieve expansive structural justice. Instead, Johnston gestures toward the constant development of new oppressions in the wake of revolutions that do not overhaul all societal structures. For Johnston, the “lesbian argument is first and foremost withdrawal at every level” for the “(re)-development of the moral physical spiritual intellectual strengths of women” (Johnston Lesbian Nation 276). Similar to the way in which Solanas calls for women to withdraw from every arena in which they interact with men, Johnston advocates for “withdrawal” as a political practice and means to cultivate “moral physical spiritual intellectual strengths” (Solanas 65-66, Johnston 276). This act of constant withdrawal reveals a particular impatience with patriarchal configurations, and disrupts the assumed linearity of time. To withdraw in the present is to stunt the forward progression of time, and rather than move toward regression, withdrawal suggests recalibration and world-building in this context. If withdrawal is an act of impatience—the movement associated with an impatient temporality—Solanas’s insistence on SCUM’s desire to act “now” echoes a similar sentiment.

While SCUM Manifesto formulates a post-male society, utopian energies are secondary to the impatience of altering the present. Solanas writes, “SCUM is impatient; SCUM is not consoled by the fact that future generations will thrive; SCUM wants to grab some thrilling life for itself” (Solanas 63). The introduction of impatience as a temporal maneuver revises, or challenges, the horizonal orientation of futurity. Solanas does not write of the remoteness of utopian energies, but instead employs impatience as a queer affect (Muñoz 1). Impatience jams…

59 After the SCUM revolution, “women will be busy solving the few remaining unsolved problems before planning their agenda for eternity and Utopia” (Solanas 73). SCUM itself is not a utopian text, but rather wades through the present muck to build a Utopia only after fixing the present.
the smooth unfolding of linear time (Halberstam 70). It asks that the present take precedent over the future, and, in fact, that a seizing of the present push against the need for a radically reimagined future. While grooviness functions as a queer temporal structure of the present in *SCUM*, impatience dialogues with the future. Solanas argues that the changes she calls for could occur in a short span of time, that “a small handful of SCUM can take over the country within a year by systematically fucking up the system, selectively destroying property, and murder” (Solanas 8). Solanas states that women “could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks simply by withdrawing from the labor force, thereby paralyzing the nation […] If all women simply left men, refused to have anything to do with any of them—the government and the national economy would collapse completely” (Solanas 63). Solanas emphasizes the intertwining of patriarchy, capital, and violence throughout the *Manifesto*, and positions an upheaval of gender relations as the impetus for change. While this risks obscuring the vast differences between women, the novelty of Solanas’s project is its anti-utopian bent, its refusal for *SCUM* to be a forward-looking manifesto. While it must, in some sense, look forward to imagine a different society, Solanas positions the mechanisms for change within the framework of the present. As such, Solanas offers a futurity not centered on reproduction or utopic, conflict-free energies, but rather dependent upon the urgency of impatience.

**Exorbitant Poetics**

Jill Johnston’s *Marmalade Me*, a collection of her writings from *The Village Voice*, “ends at the moment where [her] political consciousness—both feminist and lesbian—would begin” (Johnston *Marmalade Me* xv). “Marmalade Me,” the titular story, offers a snapshot of the “ultimate performance” and “written theater” of Johnston’s work (Jowitt qtd. in Johnston

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60 Gender reconfiguration as the seed of change echoes many second-wave feminist manifestos, but it’s the *means* through which Solanas imagines this change that ostracizes *SCUM* as being beyond the pale.
Tracing Johnston and Solanas’s work along this theatrical line positions the aforementioned ooze as the moment of “ultimate performance” in their respective works, even as it slinks across the texts as an aesthetic, rather than momentary, orientation. In exploring the ooze as an excessive sensibility, or as the linguistic fecundity of *SCUM Manifesto* and *Lesbian Nation*, “Marmalade Me” offers a poetic departure from the strident manifesto tone.

While not positioning *Lesbian Nation* as the theory and “Marmalade Me” as the practice, the poetics of “Marmalade Me” resonate with the tone of *Lesbian Nation* and *SCUM*. Johnston’s call for revolutionary practice seeps into, and dialogues with, her poetic exploration in “Marmalade Me.”

“Marmalade Me” offers a vision of the world that equally implicates the astronaut in space and the newborn baby on earth. Johnston writes an astronaut’s journey into space—“the naked ape [speeding] toward the moon”—and veers the spaceship off course (Johnston 7). “If the flight for the moon overshoots its mark the announcers will go off the air immediately, the families of the astronauts will be notified in person instantly […] Presumably the control tower will continue to communicate with the astronauts as they speed toward infinity, sipping their final meals out of their final plastic bags” (Johnston 7). Johnston claims this is the “ultimate poetry”—“If all philosophy since 400 B.C. has been a footnote to Plato, possibly all poetry since Sappho has been a preparation for astronautical communications during operation sayonara” (Johnston *Marmalade Me* 7). This passage takes on a cosmic velocity as it speeds from earth to outer space, through the final meals of the astronauts and the spaceship overshooting the moon, to all poetry from Sappho onward being preparation for this web of communication. Johnston and Solanas offer a similar cosmic sensibility through language—“overshooting” the moon as they launch into space.
“Overshooting” the mark versus “missing” exposes the exorbitant poetics of SCUM and Lesbian Nation. In the reach for separatist worlds, Solanas and Johnston dismiss the boundaries of propriety that would seek to limit the revolutions they call for. Instead, shooting past the moon implies an oozing motion, an unbounded velocity that curves around the edges of liberal feminism’s call for equality with men, launching past it altogether. Johnston invokes the infant as a metonym for life on earth, characterizing the prophetic “handwriting on the wall” as “the first mark made by a delighted infant” (Johnston Marmalade Me 7). Johnston continues, “When did the human animal begin to notice its own footprint as a mark of pleasure, a visible imprint on its environment, another autoerotic involvement, having no functional design” (Johnston 7). The parthenogenesis of the original creature is recast here through the scope of the delighted infant, extended to equate human markings as “autoerotic involvements” (Johnston 7). The evocation of autoeroticism as primal and innate extends to include the infant as the original marker, the first creator of the handwriting on the wall.

Johnston links the infant back to the womb, noting:

Did the human animal become human when it called itself human? It doesn’t matter. I’m thinking of the calling as an invisible mark, the handwriting as a current in the air, as the sound that became a fury. The sound (and motion) came first. The sound was the noise of an infant’s disapproval at separation from its cave of blood and water. (Johnston 7-8)

Here, the handwriting on the wall and human acts of marking trace back to the infant’s expulsion from the womb, its “disapproval at separation from its cave of blood and water” (Johnston Marmalade Me 7-8). For Johnston, this expulsion is the “ultimate poetry”—“that first noise of a shocked infant spilling out of a bloody canal. I think it’s impossible to separate the pure pleasure of making a play on a bodily extension (sound, motion, etc.) from the expressions
of the so-called functional needs of food, shelter, affection” (Johnston Marmalade Me 8). The “pure pleasure of making a play on bodily extension” characterizes the infant’s exit from the womb, its “shock” upon entering the world (Johnston 8). Rather than offer a vision of futurity that either pedestals the child or denigrates reproduction as a tool of heteronormativity, Johnston reorients poetry through the infant and, by extension, the womb. Yet, Johnston does not present a romanticized image of the infant and its safety in the womb. Instead, the “ultimate poetry” is the noise of the infant exiting the womb—the “bodily extension” of sound and motion (Johnston 8). Here, the clamor of the beings inside Stephen comes to mind, the “appalling burden of sound” that “strangled [Stephen]\ in its will to be uttered” (Hall 399). Coupled with Johnston’s meditation on parthenogenesis, this alignment of the infant with the primal scream, with the discharge from the blood and water of the womb, links birthing to the cosmic trajectory of the astronauts speeding through space and overshooting the moon (Artaud 62). The ejection of the infant from the womb, and the speeding of the astronauts past the moon, suggests poetic expression to be not merely an expression of bodily extensions, or affects associated with life, but the thing itself. These moments are poetry itself, the very expression of poetic sensibility rather than the means of expression.

While the dense loneliness of Stephen’s womb in The Well of Loneliness reflects the novel’s melodramatic sensibility, the oozing of the infant out of the womb—the spillage Johnston references—mirrors the florid linguistic sensibility of Johnston’s manifesto writing. Extending this image to SCUM further captures the sentiment of Solanas’s call for militant feminist separatism. On a literal level, the infant pushes its way into the world, making space for itself where space does not necessarily exist. It expresses an impatient temporality, moving out from the body that grew it. If the pregnant body shapes around the developing child, expands, shifts, and contracts to contain and nurture it, then pushing out of the womb is a
demand for external space; involuntary, perhaps, yet forceful and demanding. Johnston links the ultimate poetry back to the astronaut and infant: “It begins and ends with a scream on the way in (or out) and a conversation on the way out (or in). The astronauts could be screaming in their conversation on the way out and the infants could be talking in their screaming on the way in” (Johnston *Marmalade Me* 8). The jerky back-and-forth movement of conversation and scream, and the notion of in and out, sketches a dialectical motion between outer space and the earth (the astronauts’ trajectory), and the womb and external world (the infant’s arc). The collapse of talking and screaming also gets at the clamor of Johnston’s manifesto writing, the commotion implicated in her call for revolution, and her devotion to the lesbian as the ultimate revolutionary figure. For Solanas, the scream of *SCUM* is gathering SCUM women and inciting revolution—it’s the act of overthrowing the government, eradicating the male sex, and instituting complete automation (Solanas 23). This inward and outward motion, the oscillation between scream and conversation, captures the linguistic sensibility of *SCUM* and *Lesbian Nation*, and Solanas and Johnston’s respective interests in making language fat, extending it beyond the bounded body of middle-class, white feminist endeavors (Skeggs 101). Solanas and Johnston force language to overflow its banks. The messiness of the infant oozing out of the womb, the propelling of the astronauts past the moon while sipping their airtight meals—these are the symbols of excess, the ornate poetics of Johnston and Solanas’s respective projects. In examining “ultimate poetry” as a dive through language, the infant and astronaut capture how Johnston and Solanas manipulate and expand language as queer artistic practice. This propulsive movement of the astronauts through space, and the infant out of the womb, speaks back to the heavy, earthbound queer body of *The Well of Loneliness* and lesbian pulp; namely that as they propel past earth, and out of its atmosphere, they reconfigure the aesthetics of the

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61 I extend Beverly Skeggs’s discussion of class proprieties in *Class, Self, Culture* to linguistic proprieties.
shadowy womb and heavy queer body. While not launching past the tendrils of queer embodiment, Solanas and Johnston reimagine the velocity of queer politics—the movement, speed, and direction of queer futurity as routed through the womb and heavy queer body (Sheridan, Ridolfo, and Michel 81). The cosmic scale of the astronaut dialogues with the fluid exit of the infant, thus linking the space of futurity with the trappings of embodiment. Taken together, these images offer a complex queer futurity—one that accounts for the shadow of the womb as it sits in the heavy queer body, while propelling forward to imagine alternate worlds.

**Conclusion: The Impatient Ooze**

*SCUM Manifesto* and *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* read as impatient critiques of the present, embodying the urgent temporality of the manifesto genre. Filtering impatience through radical queer and feminist manifestos produces performative excess—expressed through the over-the-top language, embodied revolutions, and feverish world-building of the texts. While the time of the manifesto is necessarily urgent, Solanas and Johnston’s writings take on an oozing quality—the gooey movement of exorbitance across the texts. The potential for the ooze in these texts functions as a deeper, more frantic form of seepage. While the oozing abundance of *SCUM* and *Lesbian Nation* builds across the pages, it also occurs in short bursts of poetic saturation—moments when the authors create lists (“dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant females” for Solanas, “moral physical spiritual intellectual strengths of women” for Johnston) and saturate the text with adjectives (Solanas 64, Johnston *Lesbian Nation* 276). By extension, Johnston and Solanas present imaginative, complex models of reproduction that speak to the womb temporalities in *The Well of Loneliness*, and the stylized, niche aesthetic of lesbian pulp fiction.

“Promiscuously” reading Hall, Taylor, Solanas, and Johnston across time and genre offers an intertextual exploration of the ooze that accounts for the impatience of queer world-
building, and the demands placed upon women in each of the textual time periods (Tompkins 55). As explored in this chapter, Johnston and Solanas work through the generic conventions of the manifesto to create abundant texts—troubling world-edges in their demand for revolution. Thus, in this concluding turn, Stephen’s womb as queer counterpublic in *The Well of Loneliness*, warmth as queer erotic point of contact in lesbian pulp, and the impatience and ooze of Johnston and Solanas’s manifestos works toward a queer theory of excess.
Conclusion: New Planet

This project traces a line through queer literary history, from Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, to Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto*. By placing seemingly disparate genres in relation to one another, these texts dialogue as artifacts of queer literary history, and present varied models of queer futurity. Through each chapter, I traced narratives of queer embodiment to account for reproductive discourse, desire, and non-normative temporalities. Collectively, this reading centers the reproductive body without conflating reproduction with heteronormativity. It seeks to recuperate these texts from a dismissive reading, as largely essentialist and homophobic, to reveal how Hall, Taylor, Solanas, and Johnston each account for the reproductive body, challenge models of heteronormative futurity that pedestal the child, and reconfigure the child and parenthood in their intricate models of futurity. Hall through the shadowy queer womb, Taylor through the heavy queer body, and Solanas and Johnston through their respective reproductive propulsions suggest a rerouting, rather than a routing around. In *The Well of Loneliness*, the womb functions as a site of queer world-building and kinship, whereas nodes of warmth in *Stranger on Lesbos* contribute to a networked, glowing futurity. The futurities in *SCUM Manifesto* and *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* manifest in cosmic proportions, propelling into another dimension by imagining different worlds altogether.

Taken together, the texts discussed here form an eccentric body of work that dialogues across queer literary history and theory. These texts—along a queer/pulp continuum—interrogate the question of not-quiteness, with some reimagining the potential crevices in the present, and others carving out new spaces altogether. The sensorial nature of the material body dialogues with the futures the writers imagine; thus, none of the texts craft disembodied worlds. Rather, Hall, Taylor, Solanas, and Johnston reimagine and reassemble the body in favor
of their world-building projects. This concluding turn calls for futures fashioned through the messiness of queer bodies, temporalities, and subjectivities. It calls for soft feet, walking toward a new planet—the faint glow of a queer Venus hovering just within reach.
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