Chapter 6
Thatcherism, Domesticity and the Production of Homonormative Spaces in *The Line of Beauty*

Introduction

While we have an autobiographical account about the 'last summer of freedom' before the outbreak of AIDS and the ongoing effects of neoliberal ideology in London in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, in *The Line of Beauty* we find an explicit narration of the AIDS epidemic and of the city's Thatcherite politics and ideology. The first part of the novel is set in the summer of 1983, recounting the Tory's landslide victory in the elections; the second part, which takes place in 1986, shows the heyday of Thatcherite government and the already explicit AIDS epidemics and hysterical homophobia triggered by it; lastly, the third part is set in 1987, and it represents the collapse of Thatcher's government with high unemployment rates, the economic crisis, and a series of political scandals in the Conservative Party, epitomized especially by Gerald Fedden, a Tory MP for Barwick and the head of the Fedden family.

Like *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Line of Beauty* suggests a promising summer in 1983, not only in terms of sexual prospects for London's newly arrived Nick Guest, but in relation to the possibility of social ascension. Having finished his bachelor's degree at Oxford with Toby Fedden, the protagonist Nick Guest is invited to live at the Feddens' mansion in Kensington Gardens to begin his PhD on Henry James at UCL. Unlike what we saw in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, in the first part of the novel, set in 1983, we already have hints that imply the spreading of AIDS among gay men, although this does not seem to directly interfere with Nick's privileges within the Conservative Feddens' mansion.

Where Hollinghurst's first novel explored London as an overtly sexualized city that offered innumerous sexual encounters for gay men, in *The Line of Beauty*, published in 2004, London is represented mainly by domestic spaces, more specifically by wealthy mansions and country houses. While Will Beckwith flaunts his fortune and sex appeal with men, Nick Guest is more modest and less affluent and this makes him strive to belong to the wealthy Fedden family. What Will and Nick share is their adoration for

beauty, although Nick nurtures a great fascination for *beautiful* art, *beautiful* houses, *beautiful* furniture, instead of only directing his desire towards beautiful men.

As his name suggests, Nick Guest is primarily a 'guest' at the Feddens' residence in Kensington Gardens. Nick pays a symbolic amount of rent in exchange for the family's hospitality and he is responsible for taking care of the unstable Catherine Fedden, who suffers from maniac-depressive crises, and it is suggested that she attempted to harm herself. The Feddens epitomize a standard upper-class, dysfunctional family of the 1980s that conflates new wealth, represented by Gerald's family, and traditional aristocratic financial and social power on Rachel's side. Although Gerald's late father had been "very much a law man", his stepfather, Jack Partridge, had been "a practical man", who built motorways and went bankrupt right after getting his knighthood; this, however, "was a subject which might seem to tarnish his stepson by association".[1] As a Tory MP who is fiercely devoted to Margaret Thatcher, Gerald has been elected in Barwick, coincidentally the town where Nick comes from. It is not clear why the Feddens decide to let the young graduate in, but it would not be baseless to speculate that lodging a middle-class young man from his constituency could play well with Gerald's political image. After all, the invitation to move into the mansion comes right after the 1983 Tory landslide victory, and since Barwick is Nick's home constituency, "the arrangement was jovially hailed as having the logic of poetry, or fate".[2]

In spite of his sexuality, which is kept a taboo at the Feddens', Nick represents the figure of a middle-class young man whose education at a grammar school, and later at Oxford, enables his ability to climb the social ladder. Although he does not show any interest in a political future whatsoever, Nick nurtures "a fascination with social position and wealth", which is associated with "reverence for aesthetic beauty and sublime culture".[3] In fact, as Terentowicz-Fotyga argues, the appeal of wealth, social status, high culture, and aestheticism is spatially embodied in the country house, as the novel is set in three houses that speak to the literary tradition of the country house novel: the Fedden mansion in Kensington Gardens; Hawkeswood, the Victorian country house in Middlesex that belongs to Rachel's brother, Lord Kessler; and his country house in France.

Located in the affluent area of Kensington Gardens, the Feddens' residence does not convey the traditional manorial landscape of the country house. However, Terentowicz-Fotyga explains that, as a stately home, the mansion yields a "sense of spacious luxury, moneyed opulence, exclusivity, refined style and hierarchical order"[4] that is similar to the trope articulated in the country house. In this spatial hierarchy, Nick lodges in a small room in the attic, as Rachel makes sure to recount aloud in a conversation with her mother-in-law, Lady Partridge, who "had scented [Nick's] fantasy of belonging, of secret fraternity with her beautiful grandson, and set to eradicate it with

1 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 142.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

3 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 71.

4 *Ibid.*

a quick territorial instinct".[5] Nick feels that he is the family's "lost middle-child",[6] and when he arrives at the Feddens' mansion he feels "almost […] in possession".[7] Since Rachel and Gerald are away in France, Nick feels that he is in charge, since he is the one at home taking care of Catherine.

Nick takes advantage of Rachel's and Gerald's absence to explore the house amidst the (many) servants, such as the housekeeper who comes in the morning to cook him and Catherine all meals, and Mr. Duke, the handyman who makes all sort of repairs in the house and has affectionately earned the reverence 'His Grace' by the family:

> [Nick] loved coming home to Kensington Park Gardens in the early evening, when the wide treeless street was raked by the sun, and the two white terraces stared at each other with the glazed tolerance of rich neighbours. He loved letting himself in at the three-locked green front door, and locking it again behind him, and feeling the still security of the house as he looked into the red-walled dining room, or climbed the stairs to the double drawing room, and up again past the half-open doors of the white bedrooms. The first flight of stairs, fanning out into the hall, was made of stone; the upper flights had the confidential creak of oak. […] [T]he pictures, the porcelain, the curvy French furniture so different from what he'd been brought up with. […] Above the drawing-room fireplace there was a painting by Guardi, a capriccio of Venice in a gilt rococo frame; on the facing wall there were two large gilt-framed mirrors. Like his hero Henry James, Nick felt that he could 'stand a great deal of gilt'.[8]

This passage already anticipates some of the novel's thematic, aesthetic, and stylistic elements. Firstly, as mentioned previously, Nick's fascination with wealth, as the narrator describes the neighboring mansions staring at each other, ready to overlook at least certain moral flaws as long as they do not interfere with the neighborhood's self-righteous principles. The second aspect refers to the locked doors and the many walls that "alienate the surrounding urban reality of those who do not belong".[9] Nick's circulation in the house functions as a guiding tour in an environment of wealth and privilege that is consolidated in British society, like the stone and the oak that compose the house's flights of stairs. Standing "a great deal of gilt" not only infers the protagonist's fascination and longing for wealth, as it also points to his 'guilt' in the process of mourning. In not being able to publicly mourn the friends he loses throughout the AIDS epidemic, namely Leo and Wani, guilt is also part of what constitutes melancholy in the novel.

The "curvy French furniture" and the "gilt rococo frame" that outlines the Guardi painting evoke the line of beauty that gives the novel its title. Theorized by William Hogarth in the eighteenth century, the line of beauty is "a waving line, being composed of two curves" that confers the art object movement and "leads the eye in a pleasing

5 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 78.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
8 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
9 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 72.

manner along the continuity of its variety".[10] The line is especially found in rococo and baroque art, which in the passage is represented by the furniture, the frame, and the painting itself, since Francesco Guardi was a prominent rococo painter in Venice. Hannah interprets Hollinghurst's impulse to play with the aesthetic composition of the line of beauty as "a motif for the novel's ambivalent tracing of the destructive yet uplifting appeal of wealth, taste and 'decorative' consumption".[11]

As Nick's PhD topic proclaims, Henry James is the novel's main source of intertextuality, not only in aesthetic terms, but also in the use of narrative techniques and re-workings of textual excerpts taken from the author's works. The second part of the novel, entitled "To whom do you beautifully belong?" stems from James' play *High Bid* (1907), which deals with the ownership of a country house. As a matter of fact, the description of the Feddens' mansion is very similar to the scenographic setting described in the first act of James' play: "[…] *the fine old stone staircase or oak staircase descending, in full view of the audience, as from a gallery*".[12] Terentowicz-Fotyga relates the American widow, Mrs. Gracedew, in James' play with Hollinghurst's protagonist, given that both of them feel in possession of what they do not own precisely because of their adoration of beauty.[13] Mrs. Gracedew teaches 'Taste' as a school subject in the U.S. and seems to know more about the house's objects, furniture, tapestry, and rooms than the house's legal owner, the bankrupt aristocrat Captain Yule, and the capitalist who took over his debts, Mr. Prodmore.

Hollinghurst's intertextual use of Jamesian style and aesthetics has been widely discussed in literary criticism about *The Line of Beauty*, and it will be one focal point in my analysis. While most criticism regarding Henry James in Hollinghurst's novel concentrates on the relationship between aestheticism, neoliberalism, and homosexuality, my reading will consider the role of Hollinghurst's re-working of the Jamesian center of consciousness. Hannah, for instance, associates the novel's Jamesian style with the 1980s' exaggerated consumerism and argues that it also functions as a means to create moments of concealment and revelation that are closely related to Nick's homosexuality. As an aesthete, Nick occupies the position of "the refined observer" who is welcomed "in the heteronormative house of capitalist acquisition so long as the evidence of his sexuality is reduced to pure aesthetic taste [and the] bodily signs of his gayness remain private, invisible".[14] Thus, Hollinghurst's novel evinces gay subjects' status of 'guest' in England, very well represented by the heteronormative Fedden household which tolerates Nick's homosexuality as long as it does not interfere with Gerald's political image. For Hannah, the employment of the Jamesian technique of repression and exposure goes hand in hand "with the concealments and exposures forced upon the homosexual subject in 1980s Britain",[15] as the novel clearly shows

10 Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, p. 94.

11 Hannah, "The Public Life, The Private Stage: Henry James in Recent Fiction", p. 89.

12 James, *High Bid*, p. 1. Last accessed in November 2016 at http://www.henryjames.org.uk/highbid/home.htm. Emphasis in original.

13 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 68.

14 Hannah, "The Public Life, The Private Stage: Henry James in Recent Fiction", p. 85.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

how public spaces are bound to exist under the scrutiny of heteronormative surveillance.

It is no coincidence that Nick is scapegoated by the Feddens at the end of the novel and is asked to leave their home. As Gerald's political career falls to pieces after a corruption scandal and an affair with his secretary, tabloids take advantage of the turmoil to add fuel to the fire by publishing a photo of Nick and Wani Ouradi, the son of a Tory Lebanese multimillionaire who has AIDS. Despite the scandals involving Gerald's name, as well as the already established crisis of the Thatcher government in 1987, it is Nick who is blamed for the family's public humiliation. It is at the end of the novel that we perceive "the fragility of the aesthete's detachment"[16] that Nick seems to pursue throughout the novel, which the critic Andrew Eastham associates with irony. Eastham argues that, like Henry James, Hollinghurst's portrayal of Aestheticism is deeply rooted in irony "as an aesthetic idea, as a mode of performance and as an emerging relationship with arts and politics".[17] For Eastham, irony in the novel functions as an artifact that conveys the idea of the autonomy and distinction of art. What he calls 'inoperative irony' "suggests icy indifference, duplicity and detachment"[18] and is present in some of James' aesthete characters such as Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse* (1891).

In Hollinghurst's novel, Eastham regards the workings of the aesthete's point of view as both defining and limiting, since, on the one hand, Nick's position of detachment often functions as a means to criticize the conservative environment in which he circulates and, on the other hand, because he aspires to belong to this exclusionary and traditional circle. Although Nick is highly enchanted by the world of the Feddens, he tries to keep himself ironically detached, partly because of "an aspiration to a typically fin de siècle position of aesthetic spectatorship, and partly to conceal his gay identity".[19] This strategy works until the last part of the novel, "The End of the Street", which is set in 1987 and in which a series of Jamesian unmaskings occur,[20] such as the Feddens scapegoating Nick for Gerald's scandals. Eastham contends that the inoperative irony that Nick attempts to sustain throughout the novel functions as a critique of Conservative culture, even though he recognizes it as extremely "vulnerable to [Conservatism's] violent powers of containment and exclusion".[21] In other words, it is true that Nick's detachment from the world around him operates as a way to criticize political conservatism and homophobia. However, in doing whatever he can to belong to this specific social circle, Nick's ironic detachment fails once the practices of social oppression and segregation are inflected upon him: this takes place as he is outed in the press as a gay man who has a relationship with Wani, who has AIDS.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Eastham, "Inoperative Ironies: Jamesian Aestheticism and Post-Modern Culture in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", p. 509.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 511.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 511–512.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 524.

Eastham points out two problems in the novel regarding irony and aestheticism in the 1980s. The first is concerned with the aesthete's relationship with aristocracy, given that he claims a position of detachment only to end up performing attitudes very similar to the object from which he seeks independency. This is precisely the case with Nick's character in the novel. While he desires to belong to a social class that is not his own and exhibits his aesthetic taste and education as tokens to entry this social and political realm, he also shows contempt towards upper-class and aristocratic behavior and self-entitlement. The second problem that Eastham comments on is the aesthete's location within the contradictions of postmodernism, as he displays complete detachment from the appreciation of contemporary culture, but he cannot find himself liberated from capital, consumption, and the commodification of culture.[22] In his self-perception, Nick thinks that he deserves to belong to the elite because he has the taste, education, and intellectual means to be one of them. However, as it becomes clearer in the second part of the novel, Nick's aesthetic taste is deeply influenced by postmodernist and neoliberal culture, as we see in the increasing exaggeration in his cocaine habit, in his relationship with money, and in his appreciation of 'high culture' and its *pastiche* versions, as is the case with Nick and Wani's idea to film James' *The Spoils of Poynton*.

What we see in both Hannah's and Eastham's Jamesian readings of the novel is the ways in which Victorian culture is very much present in the 1980s, not just as a reminiscence of the past, but as an ideological *Zeitgeist* that was revived to boost nationalism by evoking the imperialist past. As Hall and Jacques have rightly put it, Thatcherism aimed to go beyond winning elections, its project was "to reverse the whole postwar [social democratic] drift of British society […] and to force-march the society, vigorously into the past".[23] In asserting the rules of a 'free market' as a primary force in governmental decisions, Hall and Jacques assert that Thatcherism consolidated "'Victorian' social values – patriarchalism, racism and imperialist nostalgia".[24] If Hollinghurst's novel captures concerns with "[b]eauty and ugliness, desire, avarice, and mortality" as essential aspects of the 1980s so well, it is something he certainly owes to Henry James, Rivkin argues, with respect to "the vision that he relies on […] to make [that] legible".[25] Hollinghurst's choice of Henry James as the main source for intertextual dialogue cannot just be read as a stylistic one. Rather, it can be read in terms of a preoccupation with Thatcherism's socio-economic effects, the power of the elites in the 1980s, and the obsession with traditional British values in the heydays of Thatcherism.

In the following section of this chapter, I will discuss Hollinghurst's employment of the Jamesian narrator in his novel, arguing that Nick's function as a center of consciousness shifts in the first, second, and third parts of the novel. While in the first part, the narrator displays the ways in which Nick's conservative and wealthy social

22 *Ibid*.

23 Hall and Jacques, *The Politics of Thatcherism*, p. 11.

24 *Ibid*.

25 Rivkin, "Writing the 1980s with Henry James: David Leavitt's *A Place I've Never Been* and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", p. 291.

environment forms him as a subject who aims to belong to this elite, the protagonist develops into a role of interclass mediator and of confidant in the second part. In the third part, however, Nick's role as a center of consciousness wanes and his position of observer turns into that of an observed character, whose homosexuality and relationship with an HIV-positive man is one of the focuses of media scandal. In the chapter's third section, I will elucidate Hollinghurst's depiction of the domestic sphere in the novel by associating it with neoliberal and Thatcherite ideology in terms of sexual and gender politics. Lastly, the fourth section will deal with the novel's deliberate narration of the AIDS crisis in London by addressing the direct consequences hysterical homophobia and governmental negligence had in the city's gay culture.

Tradition, Ideology, and the Jamesian Narrator

Hollinghurst makes use of national symbols of English culture throughout the novel, such as the country house, the Jamesian thematic scope about Englishness, class and aesthetic taste, and the University of Oxford, for instance, to create a narrative that reflects upon the intricacies of traditional spaces and institutions that form subjects who feel entitled to certain privileges. These institutions and their norms can be related to the ways in which ideology inflects individuals and constitutes their own subjective positions in society, as Althusser elucidates in his renowned essay about ideology and subjectivity. He argues that a system of production and the state can only uphold their functioning through social relations among individuals, which will reproduce the mechanisms of the state apparatus.[26] In capitalist societies, he explains, ideology is reproduced within families, schools, trade unions, religion, and politics, for instance. In these institutions, individuals learn language, manners, and rules that will dictate their position in society and, in so doing, they will inculcate and naturalize their roles in the system of production.[27]

For Althusser, ideology interpellates individuals and the recognition of this interpellation entails the transformation of individuals into subjects. It is ideology that binds individuals in society, since it creates a reality in which subjects are bound to perform and to repeat relations of exploitation and domination that are culturally and socially constructed as a means to warrant the perpetuation of the system itself. As I will elucidate in the pages that follow, it is possible to read these moments of interpellation and subject formation in Nick's role as a center of consciousness, particularly in the first part of the novel, in which the privileged and conservative environments in which Nick circulates allow him to enter a world of wealth and beauty to which he does not belong by birth, but which he is able to access through the incorporation and repetition of manners, gestures, and norms that establish these spaces' social prestige. Althusser's reflections on the relationship between subject and ideology make the case for the ways in which institutions function as means to impose ideology upon

26 Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", pp. 104; 115.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

individuals and how individuals are ingrained in the ideological reproduction of these institutions.

In contrast to *The Swimming-Pool Library*, in which we are given an account of an already formed neoliberal subject and his life of privileges, *The Line of Beauty* shows an extradiegetic narrator who portrays moments of ideological inflection upon the protagonist, Nick Guest. The first part of the novel, entitled "The Love-Chord" is set in 1983 and depicts Nick's efforts to belong to that elite environment by mimicking the gestures, manners, and language of the people who surround him. I will argue that we can read the effects of ideology on Nick through Hollinghurst's use of the Jamesian center of consciousness, a character who functions as a "central intelligence […] whose personal vision wholly controls the story; or [appears] in the subsidiary role of choric commentator, *raisonneur*, or confidant, intermittently present in the action".[28] While in the first part of the novel Nick's role as a center of consciousness functions as a means to capture his efforts to become a member of the elite, in the second part, this role shifts to that of a confidant, a pretentious insider who can negotiate class differences and whose knowledge of family secrets provides a false sense of belonging. In the third part, there is a further change in the role of the narrator as Nick's function as a center of consciousness diminishes, for he becomes an object of observation and of judgmental evaluation by other characters.

Like other Jamesian centers of consciousness, Nick's character presents a "reflective nature, sensitivity to impressions, analytical turn of mind, speculative propensities, and, above all, insatiable curiosity and capacity for appreciation".[29] In the first part, Nick's adaptation to his new life involves learning and repeating class mannerisms and habits as a means to perform them with a certain naturalness in the future. On their way to Hawkeswood, for instance, Rachel Fedden makes vague remarks about the house, and Nick observes her way of talking. He is sitting in the backseat of the car with the Italian housemaid Elena, and he is fascinated by Rachel's comments: "Nick loved the upper-class economy of her talk, her way of saying nothing, except by hinted shades of agreement and disagreement; he longed to master it himself".[30] Slowly, Nick adopts Rachel's language, as well as her frequently used comment that characterizes an object or situation as "vulgar and unsafe". In the following passage, we can read a moment of ideological interpellation that describes transformations in Nick's self, as he is trying to perform another social class. As they are leaving the Feddens' mansion, Gerald is irritated because of traffic due to the Notting Hill carnival:

> Everywhere there were groups of policemen, to whom [Gerald] nodded and raised his hand authoritatively from the wheel. Nick sitting in the back with Elena, felt foolish and conceited at once. […] He imagined [Leo] cruising the carnival, and yearned to belong there in the way Leo did. […] In a side street a team of young black men with high yellow wings and tails like birds of paradise were preparing for the parade. 'It's

28 Segal, *The Lucid Reflector*, p. xi.

29 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

30 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 47

> marvelous what they do,' said Rachel. […] Nick found himself in fact at one of those unforeseen moments of inner transition, when an old prejudice dissolves into a new desire.[31]

From inside the car, Nick asserts his position, at least publicly, of not belonging to the carnival. However, his position in the back seat with the maid also suggests his own subaltern status in relation to the Feddens. Nick looks outside and thinks of how he wants to belong to the same world as his Caribbean working-class boyfriend, Leo Charles. It is only when Rachel makes her vague and exaggerated remark that "it's marvelous what they do" that the narrator accounts for the transformation of Nick's self. From wishing to belong to the Carnival with Leo, he becomes annoyed with the music outside; from his original prejudice against 'rich snobs', he becomes certain that *performing* and *belonging* to Gerald and Rachel's class is what he really desires.

Therefore, I would argue that Nick's role as a center of consciousness represents the individual aspect of the entrepreneurship culture that is promoted by neoliberal ideology and, subsequently, by Thatcherite ideology. As I have discussed in the first section of this chapter, neoliberalism and Thatcherism promoted notions of free market and of meritocracy whereby individual ambitions overrule social attempts to produce equal opportunities.[32] In Nick's delusional understanding, his aesthetic taste and education can potentially grant him a free pass to England's high society. In the first part of the novel, we see the making of a subject of the elite or, at best, the possibility of performing that subject. Apart from his efforts to imitate the upper-class, Nick's potential entrance into this social environment is also yielded by his capacity to withhold information. In the first part, this takes place with the secret he keeps from Rachel and Gerald concerning Catherine's self-harm by cutting herself. In the second part, when he has already established his 'love-chord', he gains more power when he finds out about Gerald's affair with his secretary.

Bersani points out that what one sees and what one knows in the Jamesian novel are crucial aspects in the outline of power relations, as "they diagram the specific mechanism of power when its exercise is limited to verbal exchanges".[33] Whether they are carried out in the form of dialogues or in the narrator's account, the economy of information in the Jamesian novel will determine a character's position of power. Hollinghurst definitely devises distribution of power along these lines, having Nick as an ambitious and yet volatile source of it. Taking care of Catherine is presented as a condition for his ingression into the Feddens' household, a burden that Toby tells him about when they are still at college. Toby's telling Nick about Catherine is "a mark of trust", which discloses "Catherine's ups and downs [as] part of Nick's mythology

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31 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

32 Cf. Corner and Harvey, *Enterprise and Heritage*, p. 7. In their introduction, Corner and Harvey quote an interview in the *Daily Express*, published in July 1982, in which Thatcher asserts that Britain needs more "self-starters" and "princes of industry", reinforcing the idea that it is only individual effort that is required to succeed, a principle that, according to Corner and Harvey, "grates against the egalitarian tradition which proposes collective provision for general human advancement".

33 Bersani, "The Subject of Power", p. 10.

of the house".[34] Catherine's mental illness is described as intrinsic to the residence's architecture, and the trust that Toby places on Nick foreshadows his role as Catherine's confidant and guardian, thereby giving him responsibility over her mental health.

As Eimers elucidates, experience in Henry James' novels is defined by the encounters the characters have with objects and events, in which "the details a character has been trained to notice or to ignore contribute to the way that object or event affects her consciousness".[35] Hence, perception is pivotal for "altering habits of attention and in turn, consciousness",[36] meaning that a character develops and transforms according to the accumulation of visual experience. This is how Hollinghurst traces Nick's development throughout the novel: constructing the first part as a collection of new experiences that Nick must learn to master; the second part as Nick's ostensible realization that he does indeed master these experiences and can actually act upon them; and the third as the disclosure of these experiences as pure delusion.

The second part of the novel starts with Nick and Wani in the 'men only' part of what seems to be Hampstead Heath, displaying that Nick is now an insider in London's gay culture and also that he and Wani are in a relationship. The insecurities that the narrator extracts from Nick's behavior in the first part, such as his preoccupation in belonging and his ability to conceal his sexuality where necessary, are partially overcome. In contrast to his relationship with Leo, in which Nick is the inexperienced one, the relationship with Wani places him in the position of teaching. Although both boyfriends are men of color, Wani enjoys the privilege of wealth and it is his money that can, at least to some extent, safeguard Nick's position in their upper-class environment.

They spend most of their time at Ogee, Wani's film production agency, a nineteenth century house located in Kensington. The Victorian house has been converted into a ground-floor flat, and above on the upper floors there is another flat "that was full of eclectic features, lime-wood pediments, coloured glass, surprising apertures, the Gothic bedroom had an Egyptian bathroom". Nick finds the decoration and disposition of the flats rather pretentious, "but inhabited it with his old wistful keenness, as he did the Feddens' house, as a fantasy of prosperity that he could share, and as the habitat of a man he was in love with". He feels comfortable with the world that Wani is giving him, it "was a system of minimized stress, of guaranteed flattery",[37] which does not demand much from him. In contrast to the Feddens' home, in which his privileges are limited to his position as a guest, at Wani's firm, where Nick also works, he can share the financial privileges as a partner. "Of course the house was vulgar", he reflects, "as almost everything postmodern was, but he found himself taking a surprising pleasure in it".[38]

34 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 6.

35 Eimers, *The Continuum of Consciousness: Aesthetic Experience and Visual Art in Henry James's Novels*, p. 3.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

37 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 199.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Nick's fluent use of Rachel's idiomatic phrases ("vulgar") expresses his mastering of the upper-class language that can make it *look like* he is one of them. In the second part, Nick is no longer allured by luxurious objects, works of art, or expensive furniture, but he actually has the power to criticize them and point out their inadequate aesthetics, as is the case with Wani's flat. Set in 1986, the second part epitomizes the heydays of the financial market during Thatcher's government, showing actions exceeding all limits: Wani's flat is an overwhelming juxtaposition of styles and materials; Nick and Wani's cocaine drives are insatiable; Catherine's mental health deteriorates, and she becomes more vulnerable; Gerald's power and ambitions grow according to his value in Thatcher's cabinet; the AIDS epidemic breaks out and deaths are often encountered. While Nick's connection to the world outside the upper-class is maintained by his relationship with Leo in the first part, his interaction with lower-classes in the second part are restricted to economic exchanges of service and sex, such as Nick's encounter with a Jamaican dealer in Ladbroke Grove to buy cocaine.[39]

As a center of consciousness, Nick's role develops into a mediator between classes, who holds all benefits of the upper-classes but who can still have empathy towards working- and middle-classes. At a dinner party at the Feddens', "Nick had noticed already the flickers of discomfort and mimes of broadmindedness as [a black waitress] moved through the room and gave every one what they wanted". She fills Bertrand Ouradi's, Wani's father, glass with Chablis and he calls her a "bloody idiot" because he wants mineral water. It is through Nick's perspective that we see the conflict between the upper- and the working-classes. As Bertrand humiliates the waitress, she "recoiled for just a second at the smart of his tone, at the slap-down of service, and then apologized with steely insincerity". Nick then tries to appease the situation by saying that they could get him water, and Bertrand holds a "contemptuous blink" towards her: "She held her dignity for a moment longer, while Nick's smile pleaded with her not to mind and with him to relent." Unsatisfied with Nick's reaction, Bertrand seeks to "excite a similar outrage" in him by showing him that "he himself was afraid of no one".[40]

Bertrand Ouradi's way of asserting his social position as an up-and-coming elite of color is enacted by the humiliation of a black worker, whose precarious position of serving is deeply subjugated by the guests' indifference. To publicly degrade a waitress in front of the Conservative elite is also to publicly show that he complies and supports mistreating and repressing working-class subjects, even if they are subjects of color like himself, thereby evincing class, educational, and cultural differences within groups of racialized minorities. After all, it is Mr. Ouradi's multimillionaire supermarket chain and his frequent donations to the Conservative party that gives him a free pass in this environment. Nick, conversely, has a much more vulnerable position and, although he apparently has the Feddens' trust, he knows what it feels like to be looked down upon because of his social class and of his sexuality. In the same way that public humiliation of servants functions as a bond between Bertrand and his upper-class counterparts, it is the feeling of oppression and subjugation that create a bond between Nick and

39 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

the waitress. Yet, this passage also emphasizes the contradictions and cynicism in Nick's behavior: on the one hand, he feels that he belongs to this social class because of aesthetic taste, education, masculinity, and whiteness; on the other hand, it shows that he is aware of the forms of class conflicts expressed in daily gestures, although he is not necessarily willing to engage in conflict because of them.

As a center of consciousness, Nick's character displays elements of social detachment, which guarantees his position as an observer, but also as a person who can circulate in-between social hierarchies. Like his role as a mediator between Bertrand Ouradi and the waitress, Nick's interaction with the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is enabled by his ambiguous social position. At Gerald's and Rachel's 25th Anniversary party, at which the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is in attendance, the narrator describes the event through Nick's circulation in the house. He observes the waiters preparing food and drinks in the kitchen, he joins Toby for a line of cocaine, he flirts with Tristão, a young Portuguese waiter who is working at the party and, at a distance, he watches the guests enjoying themselves in the drawing room: Nick sees Gerald shaking hands with Ronald Reagan, looks around for men who are interesting to him sexually, and watches some of the guests greeting the Prime Minister.

While the Feddens and their guests treat Margaret Thatcher with great reverence, making sure they keep a certain distance to assert deference to her higher political position, Nick is the character who can move closer to the Prime Minister because of his social detachment from that environment and, also, because of his role as a center of consciousness. After describing the party through Nick's spatial perspective of an observer, the narrator focalizes on the protagonist to minutely illustrate his approximation to Thatcher. The narrator relates Nick sitting near her and performing a theatrical pose "half-kneeling, on the sofa's edge, like someone proposing in a play" to assume a narrative position in which we, the readers, are brought face to face with the Prime Minister:

> He gazed delightedly at the Prime Minister's face, at her whole head, beaked and crowned, which he saw was a fine if improbable fusion of the Vorticist and the Baroque. She smiled back with a certain animal quickness, a bright blue challenge. There was the soft glare of the flash – twice – three times – a gleaming sense of occasion, the gleam floating in the eye as a blot of shadow, his heart running fast with no particular need of courage as he grinned and said, 'Prime Minister, would you like to dance?'
>
> 'You know, I'd like that *very much*', said the PM, in her chest tones, the contralto of conviction. Around her the men sniggered and recoiled at an audacity that had been beyond them. Nick heard the whole episode already accruing its commentary, its history, as he went out with her among twitches of surprise […]. He himself smiled down at an angle, ignoring them all, intimately held in what the PM was saying and the brilliant boldness of his replies.[41]

As Duff and Johnson have noticed, Thatcher's caricature in this passage resembles her puppet character in *The Spitting Image*, whereby the puppet presents a queer body

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 383–384.

whose masculine clothes and gestures are contrasted with feminine make up, hair, and voice.[42] Duff argues that Hollinghurst's portrayal of Thatcher not only speaks to her free-market and neoliberal policies, but also to the ways in which "her free-floating gendered identity troubled traditionally male gendered roles".[43] The flashes of the camera register the moment in which Nick, taking advantage of his detachment, makes all other men in the room envious for having got closer to the Iron Lady than any of them had dared.

It is Nick who notices, before asking her to dance, the way the men at the party fawn over the Prime Minister, a scene which he describes as "heterosexual queenery".[44] While his status as an aesthete affords him a distance from his surroundings, a distance that is reinforced by his position as a center of consciousness, the other characters' actions and gestures are under meticulous surveillance, since most of them have an interest in partaking in Thatcher's government or have ambitions in the realm of politics. If the young men at the party aspire prominent positions in the Conservative Party, the older men, such as Gerald himself, are concerned with making a good impression on Thatcher in order to be in the highest ranks of her government. In their turn, the women who are not part of the political realm must show their utmost respect to the Prime Minister in order to encourage their husbands' political success. In contrast to Nick's character, who has no interest whatsoever in pursuing a career in politics, all of the other characters' vested interests hamper their approximation to Thatcher.

It is Nick's character who can transition among the different social classes and be part of the hetero and homosexual groups of the party, thereby creating a dispute with Gerald himself, in fact, who becomes extremely envious of Nick's approach. In contrast to Nick's dislocation in the upper- and aristocratic classes and his struggle to become part of these groups in the first part of the novel, in the second part Nick's sense of belonging, his apparent successful detachment, and the secrets that he holds are the features that sustain his role as center of consciousness. In the third part, however, Hollinghurst's employment of the Jamesian center of consciousness is less refined, as the narrator is more explicit in his accounts and does not devise Nick exclusively as a source of reflections or transformations. In the third part, the narrator is more omniscient than in the other parts, keeping a wider distance from Nick to recount the disintegration of beauty and of Thatcherite politics. Entitled "The End of the Street", the last part begins with the 1987 elections and anticipates the downfall of the Thatcher government with the escalation of the financial crisis and the rise in unemployment. Apart from these factors, the novel associates Thatcher's political collapse with Gerald's corruption and sex scandals and also with the AIDS crisis, since disintegration and decay are also conveyed through Leo and Wani dying of AIDS, evincing the tragic consequences of the epidemic by the controversial deaths of two men of color.

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42 Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher*, p. 131; Johnson, *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence*, p. 115.

43 Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher*, p. 151.

44 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 382.

The first page of the third part begins with Nick voting, and the narrator provides the character's opinion about the elections: "[v]oting always gave him a heightened sense of irresponsibility. […] His pencil twitched above the Labour and Alliance candidates, and then he made his cross very frowningly for the Green man. He knew the Conservatives were bound to get back in".[45] It is interesting to notice that Nick does not vote for the Tories, although he has continuous contact with them and apparently does not object to their political stances and opinions. Instead, he chooses to vote for the candidate that he thinks has no chances of winning the elections, which points to Nick's own cynicism concerning political participation.

In the third part, the narrator gives us less information about Nick's consciousness, although he is still a leading intelligence in the novel. This shift in narration can be directly linked to Nick's finding out that Leo has died of AIDS and in relation to his increasing fear of taking an HIV test. After meeting Rosemary, Leo's sister, and her girlfriend, Nick looks around the flat where Wani's film production agency operates; "in the remorseless glare of the news, […] the flat looked even more tawdry and pretentious".[46] The news of Leo's death makes him think of the time he has with Wani and, as if the expensive objects, furniture, and decoration in the flat were more important than his current partner; Nick directs his anger and fear of loss towards objects and Wani's lack of taste:

> The pelmets and mirrors, the spotlights and blinds, seemed rich in criticism. It was what you did if you had millions but no particular taste: you made your private space like a swanky hotel; just as such hotels flattered their customers by being vulgar simulacra of lavish private homes.[47]

Nick's criticism of the flat's kitsch decoration and of Wani's excessive showing-off places the latter's death as a secondary aspect in their relationship. His outrage with the details in the environment indicates the problem he has with the necessity of flaunting wealth, but not being able to see the essence of art or even to understand aesthetic taste, as Nick does. Moreover, it points to the spectacularization of the private within the analogy of hotel rooms functioning as a 'vulgar' spectacle of the domestic. Nick tries writing a letter to Leo's mother and "saw himself, in six months' time perhaps, sitting down to write a similar letter to the denizens of Lowndes Square",[48] where the Ouradis live. He wants to tell Catherine about Leo, but she is too passed out from the high dosage of lithium that her psychiatrist has prescribed. He even considers talking to Gerald about it, but quickly rejects the idea, since "he knew he wouldn't get his attention, it was the wrong moment, the wrong week, and actually the wrong death".[49] It is the wrong death because Leo is a working-class, black, and gay man, exactly the citizen who is completely disavowed by both Thatcher's policies and ideology.

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45 *Ibid.*, p. 394.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 409.
47 *Ibid.*
48 *Ibid.*, p. 411.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 414.

Nick's role as a center of consciousness weakens and becomes restricted in the process of acknowledging the possibility of death and the unlikeliness of the future, given that his critical input and clever perceptions about his conservative environment are impaired by the losses that he must endure; it is also because he becomes a target of public surveillance, as Gerald's scandals are turned into a media spectacle. If in the first and second parts it is Nick's capacity of distinguishing subtle details in gestures, relationships, and conversations that grants him power as a critical all-seeing eye, in the third part he becomes fully aware that these gazes have been analyzing him the entire time. As he arrives at the Feddens' in Kensington Gardens in the first part of the novel, Nick's arrogance and desire to belong slowly efface the fact that he is, in fact, an 'enemy within', someone from a lower class, with a deviant sexuality, whose trust is only valuable if it can be used according to the family's interests. Later, in 1987, as Nick arrives at the Feddens' mansion, there are dozens of journalists at the door who take photos of him, even though they do not actually know who he is. These pictures are later used to expose Nick and Wani's relationship, as the press finds out that the Feddens' guest is gay and is dating the son of a Tory multimillionaire, someone who is also dying of AIDS.

As I will show in the following section of this chapter, Nick's role as a center of consciousness and his circulation in different homes and in the city suggest problematic separations of public (domestic) and private (city) spheres. The emphasis on domestic spheres is strongly associated with the political realm of the Tories and with neoliberalism in the novel, as well as with the clear-cut division between the roles played by women and men. While the domestic spaces in the novel are represented as spaces that display male political power, as has been shown with Thatcher's appearance at the Feddens' 25th anniversary, they are also depicted as spaces of female subordination and objectification. As Wendy Brown has rightly explained, neoliberalism has intensified female subordination in society by reinforcing their position as caregivers at home, schools, communities, and neighborhoods, and by having them "occupy their old place as unacknowledged props and supplements to masculinist liberal subjects".[50] This is precisely the role of women in Hollinghurst's portrayal of domestic spheres as a space that enables political power and social ascension.

In *The Line of Beauty*, the construction of domesticity is deeply imbued with Thatcherite neoliberal ideology and policies that allow men to thrive in socio-economic and political power and women to remain in the position of 'props' who have the function of supporting their husbands. For Brown, neoliberal principles of government, which are based in the dismantling of social welfare, privatization of public goods, and the encouragement of the self-sufficient individual who does not depend on anyone but himself, aggravate women's position in society. This is due to the fact that, since individuals cannot count on anyone apart from themselves and their families, women become the site of responsibility in providing care and affective support for their families.[51] In this sense, Brown contends that, while the *homo oeconomicus* is the human capital, who is completely autonomous and independent

50 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, p. 105.

51 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–107.

from the state and who is the entrepreneur of himself, the woman, in aligning herself with this principle, comes to be the *femina domestica*: they are the caregivers who "disproportionately remain the invisible infrastructure for all developing, mature and worn-out human capital – children, adults, disabled and elderly".[52]

In the employment of the Jamesian center of consciousness, Hollinghurst explores the division between private and public by, on the one hand, offering panoramic accounts of the environments in which Nick circulates and, on the other hand, by focusing on Nick's consciousness, reflections, and his role as a figure of mediation. Considering Bersani's argument that literature should "be read as a display of power", as an "instructive model of that play of complicity and resistance which characterizes the innumerable local confrontations of power in human life",[53] the narrator in *The Line of Beauty* outlines such confrontations by evincing relationship between the individual and his environment, which are at times conflictive, and by bringing out mechanisms that promote inclusion and exclusion. In doing so, the narrator has a central function in mapping out the relations of power that are at stake, which are certainly based on historical relations acted out during 1980s Britain. It is through the narrator's focalization on Nick's consciousness and reflections that we can access the relations of power in the novel and its workings on a subject, displaying the Janus-faced aspects of wealth, power, and beauty.

The Public Stage of Domesticity

In the first part of the novel, wealth is construed according to an aesthetic layer of beauty, which makes up a gilt of gold that disintegrates and degenerates throughout the narrative. The narrator stabilizes beauty as a natural by-product of wealth. This beauty, however, is deconstructed and it becomes possible to perceive its obscure essence that pertains to the habits of excess and greed over time. After the crisis in which Catherine tries to harm herself, she talks to Nick about the feeling of depression by comparing it to a Daimler that stopped on the other side of the street to drop off a wealthy man:

> 'It's when everything goes black and glittering.' […] The yellow of the early street lights was reflected in its roof, and as it pulled away reflections streamed and glittered in its dark curved sides and windows.
>
> 'It sounds almost beautiful.'
>
> 'It is beautiful in a sense. But that isn't the point.'
>
> Nick felt he had been given an explanation which he was too stupid, or unimaginative, to follow. […]

52 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

53 Bersani, "The Subject of Power", p. 6.

> 'Well, it's poisonous, you see. It's glittering but it's deadly at the same time. It doesn't want you to survive it. […]'[54]

Catherine's description of her mental illness departs from an aestheticized portrayal of an expensive car. The image that she creates is that of something beautiful and valuable, but that is closely associated with death, depression, and to a poisonous essence that is intrinsic to beauty. Catherine's character is developed as an emotionally fragile, at times frivolous, young woman and it is exactly her inclination to madness that conveys a distorted idea that she is untrustworthy and unreliable. Instead, her opinions and comments are generally very accurate and clever, especially when they are directed at the family's *status quo* and their conservatism. Being the black sheep, Catherine tends to date men from lower social classes who somehow defy the family's traditional environment. In the Feddens' household, her relationship with Nick is telling of their vulnerable positions, although she holds the power of wealth and heritage to protect her, while Nick depends exclusively on his attempt to belong to a wealthy family and social circle.

Catherine is the victim of a silent violence that comes directly from her family. As we see at the end of the novel, she is completely sedated by the increasing amount of lithium that she takes. Nick is the one who notices the brutal differences in Catherine's behavior, finding it difficult to maintain a close relationship, since "[i]t was hard work living with someone so helpless and negative, and much worse if you'd known them critical and funny".[55] Similarly to the way in which Nick's relationship with the Feddens' deteriorates in the last part because of his sexuality, so does Catherine's capacity of perception and the state of her mental health.

The last part of the novel can be read in tandem with the downfall of the Thatcherite government, since there was a collapse in the financial market, a high rate of unemployment, and high inflation in 1987, which compromised Thatcher's political leadership. In the narrative, this breakdown is not only represented in terms of Gerald's political scandals and of the aesthetic deterioration of beauty, but also in terms of Catherine's fragile mental health and by both Nick's and Wani's exposure to public humiliation in the press. These allegories, expressed by psychological breakdown and by hysterical homophobia, can be interpreted in relation to the consequences triggered by Thatcher's dismantling of the welfare state and to her infamous negligence of the AIDS epidemic in the UK. Hollinghurst's portrayal of the effects of Thatcherism on a personal and individual level is devised in parallel with representations of domesticity, as Hollinghurst emphasizes the violence within the familial sphere and how the state shows double standards in dealing with families and homes from different social and ethnic backgrounds.

The representations of working, middle- and upper-class segments of the 1980s, their spatial and aesthetic separations, epitomize the relationship that these groups maintain with urban space in the 1980s. Leo's and Wani's families are the counterpoints for immigration double standards, in which Leo's family is kept in the subal-

54 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 17.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 412.

tern position of the working-class, the 'bad immigrant', as it were, who struggles to survive in London. The Ouradis, conversely, correspond to the image of 'successful' immigration that unites the dogma of entrepreneurship and wealth in a way that their ethnicity becomes obfuscated by their money. As Duff has rightly noted, Wani is able to "become part of the Conservative upper-classes in a way that Nick never can"[56] due to his family's wealth and their close support for the Conservative Party. In 1987, when the Tories are struggling with an economic crisis, high unemployment, and Gerald's corruption and personal scandals, it is Wani's father who makes a 500-thousand-pound donation to the party.[57] This is obviously not the first donation from the Ouradis, but this is the first time in the book in which the amount of money donated is made explicit.

In Hollinghurst's novel, describing the characters' homes in detail could be read as a means of portraying the material and cultural capital of each group and the ways in which Thatcherite neoliberal politics interfere with their lives. If the Ouradis', the Feddens', and Lord Kessler's homes recount affluence and a high volume of consumption, then the Charles' and the Guests' lifestyles are represented in modesty and subservience. They eat dinner at 5:45 pm at the Charles', which for Nick seems like "some absurd social reflex, the useful shock of class difference, a childish worry perhaps […] all combined in a mood of interesting alienation".[58] He feels alienated within his position at the Charles', and at the same time he feels that he belongs to another social class that lives in Kensington Gardens. In a visit to Barwick for Gerald's campaign in 1986, Nick takes him to his parents' house for a drink, feeling "ashamed of the smallness of the drinks", and observing the ways in which "[h]is parents looked at Gerald proudly but nervously. They were so small and neat, almost childlike, and Gerald was so glowing and sprawling and larger than local life".[59] In Nick's interaction with members from middle- and working-classes, he begins to feel superior, especially in the second part when his role as center of consciousness functions as an interclass mediator.

The novel's domestic spatial divisions are not only related to clear-cut divisions of social class and ethnicity, but also to the realms of gender and sexuality. We notice that men are fundamental characters for these upper-class homes, as they often use their domestic realms to stage their public interests, which are very much attuned to politics. For instance, Catherine gives the perfect description of Toby's birthday party at Hawkeswood, calling it a "party-conference",[60] since Gerald invites ministers and politicians to celebrate with his family. Hollinghurst's depiction of this party, set in the first part of the novel, recalls a series of Victorian cultural stereotypes regarding gender and sexuality that are adapted to fit 1980s politics. At the party, the narrator describes men and women socializing separately, the men being associated with political ascension and the women as objects who uphold their husband's respectability as

56 Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher*, p. 134.
57 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 477.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

'family men', in addition to asserting the men's heterosexuality in the public sphere. Paul Tompkins, one of Nick's and Toby's contemporaries at Oxford who aspires to a career in politics, compares the women's beauty to the Tories' landslide victory in the 1983 elections: for Paul, in the same way that women overlooked their husband's flaws and exhibited themselves prettier than before, the Conservative Party managed to exceed the negative expectations towards Thatcher's first government (1979–1983); if there had been doubts in "the first time round [they] have now been completely discounted".[61] His explanation leads to a direct relationship between Tory men in power, their potential irresponsibility and, conversely, their success: "The men did something naughty, and got away with it, and not only did they get away with it but they've been asked to do it again, with a huge majority. That's so much the mood in Whitehall – the economy's in ruins, no one's got a job, and they just don't care, it's bliss."[62]

Like Rachel's apparent acceptance of Gerald's affair, there is a general consent to the population's decrease of welfare and a complete dismissal of unemployment. The narrator does not recount the will and power of those women, but he does bring out just how many of the men in that specific environment think of their female friends, colleagues, or companions by reducing them to passive, uncritical, and beautiful female objects that serve as accessories to their husbands. The country house, as Terentowicz-Fotyga explains, is a commonly used setting for representation of social manners, for "it represents a traditional structure of relations organized hierarchically and according to strict rules of social conduct".[63] The social hierarchy is clearly outlined at Toby's 'party-conference', which takes place in Lord Kessler's country house Hawkeswood, separating servants from guests, women from men and, latently, hetero from homosexuals.

Apart from being depicted as ornaments for the men, the women at Toby's party also function as objects that deflect the possibility of homosexuality among them. Where women must perform submissiveness and passive beauty, the men must do whatever they can to assert their heterosexuality. Paul and Nick are misleadingly described as the only gay men at the party and, at this point, we are led to think that Wani is actually straight, since he has just got engaged to Martine. In his turn, Toby is presented as an unattainable sexual object and, since the narrator focalizes on Nick and on his interaction with Paul, we are given the impression that there is a possibility that Toby is also gay. As if reminded by the possibility of being directly linked with Nick's homosexuality, Paul wants to ensure that he does not "become Nick's partner for the night on the strength of that chance connection" of being gay. He makes sure to hop on "the great heterosexual express pulling out from the platform", which is led by the exclusive Home Secretary and constituted mainly of Oxford graduates.[64] At Hawkeswood, homosexuality is only narrated in the backstage of the party, in Paul's flirting with Tristão, the Portuguese waiter, or by Nick's fantasies with Leo, and by speculations about Lord Kessler's sexuality. At the party, the sexual topography hinges

61 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 38.

64 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 65.

upon the gay characters' ability to conceal their sexuality whenever necessary, and to disclose it when there is potential to find sex partners. In this constellation, women are portrayed as objects with whom the men only interact whenever extremely necessary:

> The boys, most of them Nick's Oxford contemporaries, all in their black and white, glanced across at politicians and people on the telly, and caught a glimpse of themselves as high-achieving adults too – they had that canny glint of self-discovery that comes with putting on a disguise. They didn't mingle unnecessarily with the girls. It was almost as if the High Victorians codes of the house, with its smoking room and bachelor's wing, still guided and restrained them. But the girls, in a shimmer of velvet and silk, and brilliantly made up, like smaller children who had raided their mothers' dressing tables, had new power and authority too. As the sunlight lowered it grew more searching and theatrical, and cast intriguing shadows.[65]

Apart from the spatial separation between girls and boys in this passage, the notion of disguise that is constructed conveys the young men's idea of self-importance and their projection of a successful future. Moreover, it can also be read as the straight mask they must put on in order to network with their peers. Wani's fiancée, Martine, and Toby's girlfriend and daughter of the MP Maurice Tipper, Sophie Tipper, are all presented as beautiful artifices that deflect the possibility of Wani's and Toby's homosexuality. Paul knows about Nick's crush on Toby and advises him to wait because "they're all tarts, these boys, they've all got a price", so if Nick can find Toby at two in the morning, "when he's had a bottle of brandy", Nick will "be able to do what [he] want[s] with him".[66] The boys' policy of only interacting with the girls in case of necessity suggests that they are in control of their relationship with them, not the other way around.

The narrator mocks the 'High Victorian codes' that dictate the rules of behavior by pointing out the ways in which they contradictorily constrict and enable the male guests' participation in the party, particularly in masculine spaces, such as the smoking room. In an attempt to grant the girls a small dose of power and agency, the narrator ironically describes them according to their beauty, prompted by their clothes, and their childlike manners as some kind of powerful achievement. The image of young women, who look like children and raid their mothers' make up and beauty items, infers a violent appropriation of their mothers' social (and secondary) position. However, their fantasy of replacing their mothers' roles as instrumental decoration – while the boys aim to achieve higher positions in politics or finance – is somehow attributed to attaining new roles of power and authority.

Hollinghurst's representations of women in the novel, with the exception of Thatcher, bring out the power of men and the privilege that they enjoy in society, placing women in positions of disadvantage. It also questions the premise that a woman in power consequently represents women's rights and feminist politics. As feminist commentators have argued, Thatcherism had great impacts on women's

65 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
66 *Ibid.*

lives, especially among low-income women.[67] Gardiner notes that the recession and unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s had specific effects on the detriment of women, who were often forced into part-time jobs or temporary work, making them more vulnerable in relation to men.[68] With high rates of unemployment, she explains, women were frequently left to accept their roles as homemakers, distancing themselves from the range of opportunities that emerged in the post-war period and in the 1960s Women's Liberation Movement.[69]

It is clear that most of the upper-class female characters in Hollinghurst's novel are not the main victims of Thatcherism, as they do not depend on any kind of social welfare, and they enjoy the privilege of class, whiteness, and education. As Wilson notes, a woman's social vulnerability under Thatcherite government was enhanced by her (lower) class position, given that Thatcher did not have clear intentions to subordinate women.[70] Nevertheless, this did not mean that the continuation of conservative politics did not affect women from middle- and upper-classes. According to Wilson, middle- and upper-class women improved their social positions in comparison with working-class women; however, they did not improve their positions in relation to other men in the same class group.[71] While Leo's mother, Mrs. Charles, and his sister Rosemary are presented as hard-working women who struggle to make a living, Rachel and Catherine are women who have high educational levels, but who are kept in the domestic sphere: Rachel as the 'angel in the house' and Catherine as the 'madwoman in the attic'.

It is interesting to notice, however, that it is Catherine who drops a bombshell on her family by exposing Gerald's affair, as she leaks the information to an ex-boyfriend who is a press photographer. In having limited access to the public sphere of politics, and being constantly undermined in the domestic sphere, Catherine has her personal revenge by blowing off Gerald's image as a 'family man' with her own personal access to private information. Gerald's lover, Penny, is the only woman who transitions in the public sphere, at the cost of being depicted as cold and treacherous due to her political ambitions. By contrast, the upper-class men in the novel, who are also insidious and conniving, have the power to transform the domestic (private) sphere into a political (public) stage, in which only heterosexual and sexist behavior is permitted. In this framework, the homosexual men, such as Nick, Wani, and Paul, must all learn to master the public sphere, within domesticity and outside on the streets, in order to conceal their homosexuality whenever it is disadvantageous. After all, the concealment of homosexuality is the price to pay to have a free pass on the prestigious political stage.

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67 Cf. Gardiner, "Women, Recession and the Tories" and Segal, "The Heat in the Kitchen" in Hall and Jacques (eds.) *The Politics of Thatcherism*, pp. 188–206 and pp. 207–215; and Wilson "Thatcherism and Women: After Seven Years", pp. 199–235.

68 Gardiner, "Women, Recession and the Tories", in Hall and Jacques (eds.) *The Politics of Thatcherism*, pp. 190–191.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

70 Wilson, "Thatcherism and Women: After Seven Years", p. 223.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

AIDS, Homophobia, and the Politics of Urban Privatization

One of the shared forms of prejudice found throughout *The Line of Beauty* is a thorough portrayal of endemic homophobia that is omnipresent in all of the households mentioned above: from the Charles' council-house flat, going through the Guests' home in Barwick to the Feddens' Kensington Gardens mansion, homophobia is a key oppression that the homosexual characters must confront. As Sedgwick accurately explains, homophobia "is tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class and race relations. Our society could not cease to be homophobic and have its economic and political structures remain unchanged".[72] Hollinghurst's construction of domestic spheres point to an increasing individualization of communal life in the city, prompted by a growing privatization of London during the Thatcherite period and, particularly, the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s which compromised both gay culture and nightlife in the city. Though there have been several initiatives in favor of gay men,[73] Hollinghurst does not account for AIDS activism and supporting movements, but instead focuses on completely depoliticized gay men.

The combination of Jamesian aesthetics and literature with 1980s culture and politics is telling of how homophobic and sexist relations persist throughout time, in spite of cultural shifts marked by the various generations of the feminist movement and by the rise of gay movements in the 1960s and 1970s. This is not to say, of course, that homophobia and sexism are the same as they used to be in the nineteenth century. Rather, Hollinghurst's novel shows that these oppressive relations have taken on new modes of enactment that are historically defined by Thatcherism, its moral conservatism, and AIDS. This juxtaposition of Victorian mores and contemporary sexual moralism can be noticed in Hollinghurst's contextualization of sexual politics in the 1980s within the realm of Thatcherite politics, and also in Hollinghurst's employment of traditional literary techniques, retrieved from Jamesian and Victorian literature primarily.

One aspect of literary representations of homosexuality and homosocial bonds between men is articulated in the strategy of revealing and concealing as part of what Sedgwick characterizes as the "epistemology of the closet", an oppressive regime that consists in a complex interplay between knowledge and ignorance, secrets and silences, public and private, and speakable and unspeakable.[74] The second element that often appears in the analyses of homosocial bonds, including homosexuality, is the figure of the triangle, generally composed of two men and a woman, whereby the woman functions as an object of exchange and as property.[75]

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72 Sedgwick, *Between Men: British Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, p. 3.

73 Cf. Cook, "London, AIDS and the 1980s" in Avery and Graham (eds.) *Sex, Time and Place*; Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy"; Chapter 9 "Protest" in Garfield, *The End of Innocence*.

74 Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 72–5.

75 *Idem*, *Between Men: British Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, pp. 25–27. See also *The Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 27–36 and chapter 4, in which Sedgwick reads James' *The Beast in the Jungle*.

Hollinghurst devises both elements in the narrative, displaying the various consequences of the regime of the closet in the gay characters' lives, and creating several triangular relationships that are not strictly sexual, but also cemented by desire: Rachel-Gerald-Penny; Nick-Wani-Martine; Gerald-Rachel-Norman Kent (Penny's father, who is also Rachel's friend and her boyfriend before marrying Gerald); Norman Kent-Penny-Gerald; Sophie-Toby-Nick; Nick-Thatcher-Gerald. Thatcher is the only exception among the women characters who is not presented as an object of exchange, although she is definitely an object of desire. As Bertrand Ouradi puts it, all men are "in love with her. She has blue eyes, and she hypnotizes them".[76]

Thatcher's character is alluring because, on the one hand, as Duff explains, Hollinghurst overtly sexualizes the Prime Minister and reduces "her interaction with the men around her to furtive glances across the dance floor";[77] on the other hand, her character's grandiosity and grotesqueness, as displayed in her visit to the Feddens, metaphorically represents how her ideological project went beyond the period in which she was in power. As we know, the effects of Thatcherism can be felt up to the present day, since it inaugurated a rupture with the welfare state that has only worsened with successive governments (Labour and Tory). The men in the novel are seduced by her image because they are greatly seduced by her power and, if her character resembles an image of monstrosity, then it is certainly attuned to excess, greed, and individualization that were consolidated throughout and after her government. The focus on the family and on individual care, along with welfare cuts and privatization, established a sense "that we must look after *ourselves* and be self-sufficient – we should only look after our own and their properties".[78]

During Thatcher's government, there was significant lobby concerned with sexual mores, homosexuality, sexual education in schools, pornography, and the sex industry. Durham explains that questions of sexual morality were not of great concern in the 1979 campaign, due to high unemployment, recession, and the strikes that Britain was facing.[79] For Durham, the campaign instead focused on the economic crisis, on showing an 'alternative' for the post-war politics of social welfare, and on the promotion of an 'entrepreneur culture'. He makes a direct link between the 1960s 'permissive society' and its socio-economic context, claiming that "[t]he liberalisation of the sixties had rested on what had seemed to be economic success",[80] and once the economy started to decline with high inflation and unemployment, conservative sexual discourses gained force in the public sphere.

The political pressure exercised by moral lobby in parliament culminated, according to Durham, in Clause 28 in 1987, which "sought to prevent councils from the 'promotion' of homosexuality or promoting the teaching of its 'acceptability' as a 'pre-

76 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 221.

77 Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher*, p. 127.

78 Segal, "The Heat in the Kitchen" in Hall and Jacques (eds.) *The Politics of Thatcherism*, p. 209. Emphasis in original.

79 Durham, *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years*, p. 14.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

tended family relationship'".[81] In May 1988, Clause 28 became Section 28. While Clause 28 discouraged schools from talking about homosexuality or AIDS in class in 1987, Watney points out that Section 28 was the juridical enactment of the recommendations made by the Department of Education in 1987.[82] As a law, the measure affected educational and cultural programs in particular that were state-funded and which were committed to social and community activities for AIDS prevention and in support of gays and lesbians.[83] Apart from endorsing hysterical homophobia, the law reinforced homophobic violence, often acted out by the police. Watney notes, for instance, that the number of cases of homophobic prosecution in the UK increased considerably, going from 857 in 1985 to 2,022 in 1989.[84]

Although *The Line of Beauty* does not explicitly portray police violence against gay men, as it happens in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, it does indicate two shifts in London that directly influenced gay culture: first, the privatization of the city due to the Right to Buy[85] and the unequivocal support of real estate speculation; second, Thatcher's negligence towards the AIDS epidemics and her avowal of hysterical homophobia. Massey has rightly noted that "[i]t was on the basis of finance that London reinvented itself from the 1980s on", enabling the emergence of "a remoulded social stratum of the super-rich".[86] It was under Thatcher's neoliberal government that London's financial center thrived in its measures of deregulation and privatization, which had direct effects on the city as a whole with its spiraling social inequality and poverty.

Not only do these shifts contribute to the rise in property value in London, thereby also affecting Soho and its gay venues, but it also paved the way for the selling of council houses, which deprived many people of having stable homes and incremented greater stigmatization of social housing.[87] The moralist lobby in Thatcher's government is another aspect that had direct effects on Soho gay culture. As Mort elucidates, the neighborhood experienced various transformations because of the entrepreneurial culture that was installed in the 1980s, culminating in the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act in 1982, which allowed local authorities to control the sex trade in Soho.[88] The conflation of an efficient moral lobby in Parliament with the rise of property value, hysterical homophobia during the AIDS epidemic, and then Section 28 in 1988 transformed Soho and its diversified gay culture. According to Andersson, these factors were decisive for gay life in London, as new venues opened in other parts of the city, such as Vauxhall in South London and Hoxton in East London, as

81 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

82 Watney, *Imagine Hope: AIDS and Gay Identity*, p. 39.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 38; p. 139.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

85 While the program aimed to sell council flats to the tenants that lived in them, Corner and Harvey contend that the main beneficiaries of the program were hardly the working-class tenants who lived in the flats, but the more affluent buyers who could afford a down payment. The program, they suggest, was an incentive to real estate speculation more than a social program for the working-classes in actuality (cf. Corner and Harvey, *Enterprise and Heritage*, p. 4).

86 Massey, *World City*, p. ix.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

88 Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, pp. 151–153.

alternative meeting places to the "hygiene aesthetics"[89] that emerged during the AIDS crisis in Soho.

In *The Line of Beauty*, the alternatives to Soho's stigmatized gay scene are almost exclusively transposed to domestic spheres, to mansions and country houses in particular, suggesting a general crisis in London's gay venues because of the epidemic. In focusing on a white and affluent group of gay men, Hollinghurst makes a point about the ways in which gay culture is a forming axis to conservative sectors of English society, but he does not account for the dozens of dissidents from a gay culture who have participated in organizations, prevention campaigns, and who have resisted the conservative measures that were being voted on in parliament. What we see in *The Line of Beauty* is a privileged group of gay men who have been shielded from both marginalization and violence. In spite of their homosexuality, these men have access to education, health, housing, and the city itself, unlike most people in 1980s London.

There is a separation between the outside world, narrated by Nick's encounters with Leo's social milieu, and the world of the Feddens, which exists within private domestic spheres, as we follow Nick's circulation in the first part. Terentowicz-Fotyga argues that Nick lives a double life between "the polite world of the Feddens and the transgressive reality of the London gay scene",[90] in which the latter has no influence over the former. This separation suggests a clear-cut separation between private and public in the novel, which I would argue does not exist. In the first part of the novel, Nick is completely unfamiliar with London's gay scene, and he does not explore it, given that he has only heard of popular places like the Shaftesbury, a gay pub, from his friend Paul Tompkins. Although Nick has already made his homosexuality a public aspect of his life at Oxford, he does not have much sexual experience and he constantly falls in love with supposedly straight men like Toby. It is Leo who introduces him to gay life in London, but we never see them going to a gay club or pub. In fact, their first date takes place in a shabby pub in the working-class area of Notting Hill, an area that Leo himself thinks is dangerous.[91] There are no signs of them exploring London's gay scene. Instead, we see them exploring parks and the Feddens' private gardens to have sex.

"Nick guessed Leo's other dates would have met him in a gay pub, but he had flunked that further challenge",[92] so he decides to invite Leo to go back home with him. Since he feels that he cannot introduce him properly, because he is black, working-class, and gay, Nick takes him to the communal gardens shared with the Feddens' neighbors. They find a hidden spot on the lawn and they have sex; Nick "loved the scandalous idea of what he was doing more perhaps than the actual sensations and the dull very private smell".[93] After sex, Leo pees on the lawn and Nick waits when he sees a man approaching. It is the neighbor, Geoffrey Titchfield. He passes by and rapidly returns to tell them that the garden is private and only available for keyholders.

89 Andersson, "East End Localism and Urban Decay: Shoreditch's Re-Emerging Gay Scene", p. 55.

90 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 64.

91 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 28.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Geoffrey "avoided looking at Leo, who was obviously the cause of this edgy exchange".[94] Geoffrey's attitude completely changes, and he becomes utterly polite after Nick tells the neighbor that he lives with the Feddens.

Nick and Leo's communal gardens scene epitomizes the ways in which private and public are intertwined in London's geography. Although the garden is a private space available only to the inhabitants who live in the houses that surround it, it cannot be regarded as a private space with no public function. The private garden also functions as an exclusive public space, which should supposedly be used within the moral codes of that restricted area, given that it is a space that is shared by the neighbors and their guests, at least to a certain extent. In using the garden for sex, Nick expands the use of his domestic space onto a public one and, conversely, he explores the liminal aspect of this space in the same way that he would by cruising in any other London park. However, what grabs the neighbor's attention as he is passing by is not the possibility of sexual exposure in the garden, but the fact that there is a black man using that garden.

In focalizing on Nick, the narrator contrasts Nick's and Leo's illicit use of that 'semi-private' space – since they have sex and risk getting caught – with the ordinary usage of it, represented by the neighbor's sudden appearance. In much the same way that working-class, immigrant, and homosexual populations are, according to Duff, stigmatized as "a different type of citizen, in a way always a guest"[95] within Thatcherite politics, so too are they perceived in these communal gardens. While it seems that the neighbor does not notice that Nick and Leo are gay, the fact that Leo is black is what gives him away as an unwanted subject in that space. Conversely, the neighbor welcomes Nick to use the garden because he lives with the Feddens and, therefore, deserves the respect of the neighboring houses, since Gerald Fedden is "just the Tory we need. A splendid neighbour".[96]

Hollinghurst's focus on gay identity in domestic spheres implicates the return of homosexuality into the closet, as it were, in a time that governmental neglect of AIDS and media coverage of the disease avowed public expressions of homophobia. In the second part of the novel, as Nick spends most of his time with Wani, they explore other spaces in the city, such as a sauna where they go cruising.[97] This is the only gay space that is depicted, given that other spaces, such as gay pubs and clubs, are mentioned only briefly, but are never thoroughly described. While in the first part, AIDS is only implied in the form of broad symptoms, such as Leo's friend's "chesty thing" probably caused by "[t]oo much outdoor sex"[98]; in the second part, it is Catherine who explicitly brings it up as a subject and associates it with both homosexuality and promiscuity.

Rachel gives the family the news that Catherine's godfather, the actor Pat Grayson, has died while the Feddens are on holiday in Lord Kessler's mansion in France. Since Pat is gay, and this is not mentioned by the family, Nick feels "the AIDS question rear

94 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

95 Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher*, p. 132.

96 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 42.

97 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 181–190

98 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

up, sudden and indeflectable, and somehow his responsibility, as the only recognized gay man present. Still there was a communal effort by the rest of the family to veil the matter".[99] In order to avoid the subject, Rachel completes her news by adding that Pat had caught "some extraordinary bug in the Far East last year. No one knew what it was. It's thought to be some incredibly rare thing. It's just frightfully bad luck".[100] In a burst of rage, Catherine shouts, "He had AIDS! He had anonymous sex", displaying her stereotyped "view of gay sex [which] was both tragic and cartoonlike".[101]

While Rachel's way of breaking the news evokes Thatcherite negligence towards the epidemic by diminishing its danger as a "bug" from a foreign land, Catherine's remark alludes to a stigmatized image of gay men as promiscuous, hinting at anonymous sex as the ultimate practice for catching the virus. Rachel's comment suggests that a brief mentioning of the disease could automatically acknowledge it as a social problem and somehow publicly condone Pat's homosexuality. To name Pat's illness would also implicitly corroborate the well-known fact that gay men were disproportionately more infected than heterosexual men and, moreover, it would acknowledge the death of so many gay men as lives that are indeed grievable. As we know, gay men's bodies were turned into a site of physical vulnerability or, as Butler notes, as "a community subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility if not its realization".[102] For Rachel, it seems convenient to refer to the cause of Pat's death as a disease rooted in the racialized Other, far away in the East, not as an illness spread among 'her own people'.

Her racist and homophobic remarks foreclose any possibility to reflect on AIDS as a public health issue, as an illness that conferred great vulnerability to homosexual bodies; it is a disease that was dealt with "as a pretext for almost any amount of prejudice, scapegoating, and even celebration [of gay men dying]".[103] Catherine's outburst, conversely, avows the gay lives that have been lost, but under the moral scrutiny that condemns non-normative sexual practices. As Crimp has elucidated, the process of mourning also regarded the loss of "a culture of sexual possibility: back rooms, tea rooms, bookstores, movie houses, and baths; […] Sex was everywhere for us and everything we wanted to venture".[104] Crimp draws attention to a spatial aspect of melancholy in the sense that the social opprobrium of gay culture and spaces preclude their public mourning both of the loss of loved ones as well as the loss of a culture that was liberated in certain spaces. Crimp suggests that the AIDS epidemic had controversial effects on gay culture, given that some gay men displayed "abject repudiation of their sexual pasts", even though "the widespread adoption of safe sex practices vouche[d] for [their] ability to work through it"[105].

He draws his argument from Freud's renowned conceptualization of melancholy as the incapability to mourn, in which the person presents "a profoundly painful

99 *Ibid.*, p. 332.
100 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
101 *Ibid.*, p. 335.
102 Butler, *Precarious Life: the Power of Mourning and Violence*, p. 20.
103 Watney, *Imagine Hope: AIDS and Gay Identity*, p. 137.
104 Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy", p. 11.
105 *Ibid.*

dejection […] a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that […] culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment".[106] For Freud, the melancholic's ego is shown "as worthless", as the person feels "incapable of any achievement and morally despicable".[107] In exhibiting shame or regret towards their non-normative gay culture, Crimp contends that melancholy for many gay men appeared as an introjection of the "moralizing self-abasement"[108] that was so widely spread in the media and public discourse in general. In the last part of the novel, when AIDS is openly exposed in Wani's weakened health and in Leo's death, Nick displays self-abasement, a lack of willingness, and self-doubt. If in the previous years his conviviality with the Tories had given him a sense of omnipotence, in 1987 this feeling is undermined by his confrontation with AIDS and with the Feddens' and the press's homophobic violence towards him.

Interestingly, Nick's processing of Leo's death is narrated in tandem with the media coverage of the 1987 elections. He tries to imagine himself telling someone about Leo's death and he cannot do it. Instead, he sits down to watch the news, which is announcing another Tory landslide. Nick decides to have whisky instead of a line of coke, as the former "showed more respect for the night, and seemed ready to mediate, for three or four hours, between the demands of grief and current affairs".[109] While Nick sinks into his sadness and grief, Rachel celebrates her husband's and his party's victory. Not being in the same mood as the household, he wants to go out into the gardens, but it is too cold. It is the balcony's view of the gardens that allows him to process Leo's death by remembering the first time he had taken him there, and how he had taken so many other men afterwards: "[s]omething basic and unsocial about it, no giving them a drink or a shower".[110] In the impossibility to publicly mourn his former partner, Nick recalls all of the places he had been with him as a private homage to Leo. He remembers a night at the Shaftesbury in which he thinks he had seen Leo,[111] he walks along Knightsbridge through Albert Gate thinking of the times they had met after Leo left work.[112] In this walk, he passes the Clerkenwell Building, Wani's property, which Nick would inherit after his death.

Haschemi Yekani also relates Hollinghurst's representation of melancholy in tandem with spatiality, arguing that he "constructs and aestheticizes these places as belonging to a gay culture of the 1980s that is no more".[113] In writing the novel retrospectively, she explains, Hollinghurst uses "gay melancholy" as "an explicit aesthetic strategy to excavate lost gay lives that have been disavowed by the normative gender

106 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", in Fiorini et al. (eds.) *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"*, p. 20.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

109 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 416.

110 *Ibid.*, 422.

111 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 423–424.

112 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

113 Haschemi Yekani, "Gay Melancholy. Lost Spaces in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", in Tönnies and Buschmann (eds.) *Spatial Representations of British Identities*, p. 222.

order".[114] The aesthetic employment of melancholy in the novel functions as a means to re-appropriate the process of mourning by recognizing the gay lives and spaces that have been lost to the AIDS epidemic.[115] However, Haschemi Yekani claims that Hollinghurst's deployment of gay melancholy "risks evoking a nostalgic and at times conservative image of gay culture that privileges a distinctly white perspective",[116] since death and illness are embodied in Wani's and Leo's characters in the novel.

Wani, who is depicted as an irresponsible playboy in the first parts of the novel due to his class privilege, becomes a gay man who was commonly represented in the media at the time: his "face, gaunt and blotched had taken on new possibilities of expression – the repertoire of someone not only older but quite different, someone passed unknown in the street, was unexpectedly his". From Nick's perspective and thoughts about him, Wani probably would not recognize himself in the mirror anymore; he might have seen himself as "this unbearable stranger mugging back at him. Clearly he couldn't be held responsible for the latest ironies and startlements of his face, though there were moments when he seemed to exploit them".[117] Hollinghurst's description of Wani's deteriorating body is carried out alongside the decline of beauty in the novel, which is associated with wealth and social status. In the heydays of Nick's life with the Feddens, Nick describes Wani as "the most beautiful man [he'd] ever met".[118] In 1987, however, Wani's body is publicly perceived with "fear and displeasure, as if [his] presence was no longer good for business".[119]

Wani's disease is not only depicted as physical vulnerability, but also as a body that loses financial value. Thinking of Foucault's notion of the neoliberal subject as an entrepreneur of himself, once his body decays, it can no longer be used as a body that is productive, profitable, and self-sufficient. Though Wani is still shielded by his family's fortune, being able to access treatment more easily than working-class gay men, his body, also a racialized body, begins to be seen as destructive and contagious. The projection of death, debilitation, and danger onto black bodies, both Leo's and Wani's, is a problematic aspect of the novel, something that has been elucidated by Flannery and by Haschemi Yekani. Flannery writes that "both Nick and Hollinghurst's novel owe their futurity to the sacrifice of a black man".[120] Haschemi Yekani goes further into this analysis by arguing that "the 'sacrifice' of both Leo and Wani repeats a form of disavowal that has a distinctly racialized aspect",[121] which she directly associates with Britain's colonial past. In perpetuating the futurity of white men and the death

114 *Ibid*.

115 *Ibid*., p. 230.

116 *Ibid*.

117 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 432.

118 *Ibid*., p. 348.

119 *Ibid*., p. 431.

120 Flannery, "The Powers of Apostrophes and the Boundaries of Mourning: Henry James, Alan Hollinghurst and Toby Litt", p. 302.

121 Haschemi Yekani, "Gay Melancholy. Lost Spaces in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", in Tönnies and Buschmann (eds.) *Spatial Representations of British Identities*, p. 229.

of black bodies, Hollinghurst portrays "a loss that centres somewhat too negligently on a specific aestheticized conception of racialised difference as erotic spectacle".[122]

As is the case with *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Line of Beauty* emphasizes the viewpoint of privileged, white gay men, in which the choice of narrator is central to the novel's critical effects, as well as to its limitations. On the one hand, it is Nick's character that offers the reader critical and ironic comments about his traditional environment; on the other hand, this criticism is only made visible in Nick's thoughts and not necessarily in his actions, which mostly reproduce the conservative behavior of the social environment in which he circulates. If there are risks in giving voice to white, education, and class privileges, as Haschemi Yekani suggests, then it seems that Hollinghurst confronts them precisely to show that representations of privileged gay identities in a British context have been formed according to cultural, historical, and literary traditions that are indeed elitist, racist, and sexist; this is a topic that I will discuss further in Chapter 8. These traditions are deeply ingrained in institutional and conservative spaces, such as the country house, Oxford, public schools, and the British parliament, spaces that have historically legitimated white, male, upper-class, and heterosexual privileges. While Hollinghurst's novel certainly gestures towards mourning the homosexual lives that were lost to the epidemic, it seems to suggest that the lives of gay men of color are still excluded from that public mourning process.

122 *Ibid.*, p. 230.