Coda

In the course of this study, I have been tracing the textual construction and production of masculinities, and their complicated relationship to issues of secrecy, space, and sexualities, covering a period of about one hundred and fifty years, years that were crucial for the development of contemporary notions of gendered and sexual definitions. In particular, I have demonstrated how writers of the Gothic and its 'domesticated' subgenres have, from the eighteenth century onwards, characterised masculinities as being closely connected to the paranoid need to protect a secret. This secret, while taking on heavily 'sexualised' connotations only in the course of the nineteenth century, is, from the start, associated with illegitimate private, always potentially non-heteronormative, behaviour.

Horace Walpole's *Otranto* confronts the reader with a male protagonist whose paranoid need to protect the secret of his illegitimacy and dissociate homosocial power from the threat of homoeroticism makes him a misogynistic tyrant. His 'phallic rage' is not only fatal for the bodies of the women around him, but also ultimately destroys the house of patriarchy itself. Ann Radcliffe takes up this theme in *Udolpho*, creating the fictional architecture of a Bluebeard's castle which, through its labyrinthine structure, and seemingly impenetrable mystery of locked and unlocked doors, enacts patriarchal terror on the female heroine's mind and body. At the same time, however, Radcliffe questions the ultimate efficacy of such masculine violence, and contrasts Udolpho's failing, masculine spaces with feminine 'alternatives' that provide the novel's (dead and alive) women with the means to have a (secret) room of their own. Finally, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* explores the paranoid structure of homosocial masculinities, problematising an obsessive preoccupation with 'honour,' and alluding to the increasingly virulent dilemma of a homoeroticism that gets associated with homosocial secrecy. In eighteenth-century Gothic, then, we already find all the elements of masculine crisis that will continue to preoccupy writers throughout the nineteenth century. With the rise of the middle classes, new forms of privacy, and the emergence of the novel as *the* genre that explores the workings of the private mind, modern concerns with gendered definitions, increasingly troubled by evolving dichotomies of 'sex-

ual' definition, found their expression in the fictional architectures of the Gothic. By the mid-nineteenth century, these 'closets' had been 'domesticated' in, among other forms, the writings of the sensation novelists.

In *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins portrays male characters who struggle (and fail) to define for themselves a stable masculine identity. Weak, ill, and effeminate, the men witness epistemological and spatial power shift to the novel's female characters. The men's paranoid attempts to claim narrative authority over the story and its characters' fictional lives foregrounds the genre's preoccupation with secrecy, and its relevance for a politics and rhetoric of gender and sexuality. In *No Name*, a novel similarly inhabited by male characters of questionable health and virility, Collins further problematises the performative nature of gender roles, and has his actress-heroine subvert the male-homosocial order in liminal spaces which, in themselves, already point towards the unstable ground on which the 'house of patriarchy' is built. Mary Elizabeth Braddon takes these themes a step further. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, she not only reverses the gendered dynamics of the Bluebeard theme, placing a woman at the centre of spatial and epistemological control, but also suggests a 'way out' of the destructive mechanisms of patriarchal-masculine paranoia, providing her 'queer' male characters with a dream-like, triangulated existence in a fairy-tale ending which, albeit ironically, celebrates deviance as an essential antidote to excessive normativity.

Henry James, around the turn of the twentieth century, skilfully turns this praise of deviance into a 'queer rhetoric' which never quite says what it actually 'means,' but always productively opens up textual spaces that invite the 'paranoid reader' to see 'sexual' meaning where it never becomes explicit. In "The Aspern Papers," James takes up the theme of epistemological power and its spatial organisation having shifted to women. The tale's protagonist, a male editor, not only struggles to penetrate a woman's secret where none might be, but also displays a sentimental attachment to the fetishised letters of a dead poet, the editor's desire for whom forecloses any heternormative solution to the story's gendered conflicts. Similarly, in "In the Cage," James demonstrates the blackmailability of paranoid masculinities in creating a female telegraphist whose position at the centre of communication exchange enables her to put pressure on one of her male clients through a mere rhetoric of knowledge. Explicating knowledge *of* a secret, as James shows, can be more powerful than actually knowing the secret's content. In "The Jolly Corner," finally, paranoia finds its 'sexual' expression in the protagonist's agonised wish and fear to confront his suppressed 'alter ego,' the unnameable knowledge which – ironically – his female friend seems to have penetrated long ago. The destructive dynamics of paranoid masculinity, and its excessive need to dissociate itself from the threats of both 'queerness' and 'femininity' are only a problem, James appears to suggest, so long as one insists on the need to 'speak one's name.'

James proposes an alternative: a textual celebration of the ambiguous, the 'sexually' non-explicit, and the open space of possibility.

The dynamics carved out in this book obviously did not disappear after 1900. The cultural concerns, patterns, and discourses that slowly and heterogeneously emerged in the course of the long nineteenth century have continued to influence cultural production throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Gendered connotations of fictional architectures, a concern with masculine secrecy, and – probably most importantly and explicitly – a diverse involvement with the homosexual 'closet' (staying in, or coming out of it) are only some of the motifs that – despite obvious trans-historical differences – have continued to 'haunt' social and cultural debate over the course of the last century.

In order to illustrate how these topoi are still being negotiated in contemporary, (post-)postmodern English culture, I will have a quick glance at Sam Mendes' 2012 James Bond film *Skyfall*. Both a relic from the Cold War and its hyper-masculine rhetoric of a defence against the 'Evil Empire,' and, from the start, a never-quite-serious parody of the very machismo Bond has come to represent, the world's most famous secret agent, and his more than half a century old cultural career are a perfect starting point for an analysis of current concerns with gender roles and the importance of secrecy. Bond, after all, works for the British Secret Service, and thus represents one of the organisations that have come to be modern society's abstracted versions of the figure of Count Bluebeard: intelligence agencies are in control of secret knowledge and its circulation, to the exclusion of the majority of the population. I will be using *Skyfall* as an example to demonstrate how the major nodes around which I have built this book's argument – masculinity, secrecy, sexuality, and space – continue, in their interconnectedness, to form an important set of analytical tools for an understanding of some of our culture's most central concerns.

Masculinity in *Skyfall*, as embodied by James Bond, is far from unquestionably stable or invulnerable. Physically and psychologically, Daniel Craig's Bond displays a lot more human 'weaknesses' than his 'predecessors.' In particular, Mendes – whose films, such as *American Beauty* (1999) and *Jarhead* (2005), often address damaged or in-crisis contemporary masculinities – constructs Bond's masculinity to stand in contrast with what seem to be, up to a point, much stronger female characters. The film begins with Judy Dench's female-Bluebeard-like M ordering Bond to leave behind a dying agent. Shortly afterwards, she commands a young female colleague of theirs (Bluebeard's 'daughter') to risk shooting Bond (which she does) for the sake of getting back a stolen hard drive containing top secret information. The woman who stands at the top of an organisation that controls the circulation of knowledge is willing to sacrifice her 'sons' 'for the greater good.' This performance of 'masculine' ruthlessness, however, comes at a price. A dark

shadow from her past, former secret agent Raoul Silva, subverts the Secret Service's digital security system, and challenges M to "think of her sins." Although at the centre of power over knowledge, this female Bluebeard's position (and life) begin to be threatened by a suppressed (and supposedly dead) secret from her earlier life – a secret, as we will see, which is very queer indeed.

Bond's own 'male masculinity,' however, is equally in a state of crisis. Although he survives being shot by Eve (whose telling name foregrounds her ambiguous role as both 'mother'/propagator, and seductress/subverter of the patriarchal order), his body remains visibly wounded. When the audience next encounter him on a tropical island, he is still the sexualised subject/object Bond is supposed to be to other women and the audience, but he also seems hurt and depressed, and is constantly drunk. When he returns to active duty, the doctors confirm this impression: Bond's supposedly indestructible male body is simply not fit for service; his hands shake, and there are still bullet splinters in his shoulder. The film skilfully associates Bond's vulnerability with both a deeply ingrained misogyny – albeit always ironised – and a fear of his repressed past. When asked by a psychologist to do word associations, Bond's response to "M" is "bitch;" and to "Skyfall," his childhood home in Scotland, he, at first, does not answer at all, and then simply offers "done." *Skyfall*, then, constructs Bond's masculinity such that it constantly needs to dissociate itself from 'threats' that might question its status as strong ideal: femininity, psychological depth, and, not least of all, age. Gareth Mallory, who, at the end of the film, becomes the new M, reminds the physically struggling Bond: "It's a young man's game."

True to Bond tradition, the film's inherent glorification of masculine machismo is always mirrored by an already present ironic subversion of this very notion. In *Skyfall*, the nostalgic inclusion of Bond's old car, the Aston Martin, serves to foreclose any too serious involvement with Bond's gendered struggle. The car, itself a stylish, almost 'camp' reference to the Bond films of the sixties, is the stage of one of the film's most comic encounters between Bond and his 'Bluebeard-mother' M. When Bond, irritated by M's reluctance to simply run off with him in his car, gestures towards the gadgets and technical gear one would expect in a Bond car from its early cultural presence (in particular: a catapult seat), M pokes exasperated fun at the 'camp' masculine extravagance and its associated misogyny the Aston Martin stands for in the Bond universe: "Oh, go on, eject me, see if I care!" The film, and – ironically, 'campily' – its characters are very much aware of this world's gendered anachronisms. Accordingly, when M asks Bond where they are going, he replies: "Back in time."

At the heart of the film's conflicts (gendered and otherwise) lies secrecy. It is the central metaphor that drives plot and characters. As argued above, M is the Bluebeard-like 'female patriarch' who not only tries to protect her nation's

(house's) secret (a list containing the real names of several secret agents), but also her own forgotten past, the agent she sacrificed, the 'queer son' she rejected, who now comes to have his revenge and open M's (and her nation's) secret chambers. Similarly, Bond needs to go back to his home and face his forgotten past, the childhood he does not want to remember, and the house he grew up in. It is striking that M and Bond share both an interest in the protection of public secrecy (and the power that comes with the control of such knowledge), and an equally pronounced reluctance to face their own private secrets, fears, and pasts. In a way, both characters are in the 'closet,' in that they hide behind a power derived from secrets that are not theirs, while their own private selves begin to trouble them and question their position – as 'female-patriarchal' Bluebeard, and macho-masculine hero, respectively. Both, I argue, reject a 'queer' side to the story, which comes to chase them in the person of Javier Bardem's Silva, who turns out to be an expert in exposing the nation's, Bond's, and M's secrets.

Skyfall's preoccupation with 'queerness' is staged in an almost Freudian setup, with M as 'Bluebeard-mother,' who has rejected her 'queer son' (Silva), and now struggles to keep her (supposedly) straight 'other son' from failing both physically and mentally. Silva makes his first appearances as a digital ghost, 'haunting' M and 'her' Secret Service as a destructive and subversive virus that has her lose control over both knowledge and space. When Bond and the audience first encounter him in person, Silva is the epitome of the perfect gentleman. Suave and polite, his body, manners, and gestures nevertheless register crucial elements that mark Silva as 'other.' Telling a story in which he equates humans with rats he makes disgusting munching sounds, and his blond hair looks artificial and out of place. His slightly effeminate mannerisms make him both uncannily attractive and deviant within the gendered logic of the Bond universe. Silva's first encounter with Bond is striking in many respects. Firstly, he explicitly constructs M as both his and Bond's 'mother,' and, in the space of only a few sentences, disconcertingly touches upon Bond's "unresolved childhood drama," and an alleged rivalry between the two men over the affection of their 'mother.' At the same time, he belittles this 'mother' in a misogynistic move that creates closeness between Bond, who is tied to a chair, and his 'queer alter ego:' "Mummy was very bad." Secondly, the film affords the two men a homoerotic moment that campily hovers between irony and 'the real thing:' when Silva starts to touch Bond and unbutton his shirt ("What's the regulation to cover this?"), Bond, instead of being revolted or disconcerted, seems to enjoy himself, first questioning the situation's strangely triangulated setup ("Are you sure this is about M?"), and then answering Silva's provocative homoerotic advances ("Well, first time for everything.") with the sly remark: "What makes you think this is my first time?" Linguistically eliminating their 'mother' enables the two men to have a moment of unabashed homoeroticism. This misogynistic

dimension to homosocial/-erotic bonding takes on a cruel actuality when Silva forces Bond to play deadly roulette against him over the body of Severine, one of the film's Bond girls. Silva approaches her with the words: "Darling, your lovers are here," and provocatively tells Bond: "Let's see who ends up on top," before shooing her in the head. In this triangular setup, the mediating female is literally eliminated once she has served the men's purpose.

M's position as 'mother' to Bond and his rejected 'queer' alternate becomes more obvious when she meets Silva in his London prison. M not only displays an obsessive need to distance herself from her own emotions ("Regret is unprofessional."), but also tries to reclaim control over the aberrant 'son' by denying him both an epistemological and a spatial presence: "I will have [your name] struck off [the memorial wall]. Soon, your past will be as non-existent as your future. I'll never see you again." Before escaping from the prison he controls better than his keepers, however, Silva confronts M/Bluebeard/'mother' with the very physical nature of the wound she left when she gave him up to do his duty and kill himself. Showing her his acid-disfigured face, Silva, the 'queer-son-turned-monster,' accuses M: "Look upon your work, mother!"

Silva is not only marked as 'queer' through his bodily performances, but both he and Bond are also associated with liminal spaces that contrast with the centres of power over which M rules: London, the MI6 building, and the political arena. In fact, *Skyfall* repeatedly shows these latter spaces of patriarchal power to be invaded by Silva's 'ghost:' he not only manages to blow up large parts of the MI6 building by accessing 'mother's' computer, but also attacks a political hearing at which M has to defend her strategy. Ironically, Bond, in a way, aligns himself with Silva's subversion when he breaks into M's home. Both 'sons' threaten 'mother Bluebeard's' spatial invulnerability. All other spaces in the film are of a strikingly heterotopian nature, in that they are all somehow a bit removed, a bit 'off-centre,' and associated with the past, the nocturnal, or the abandoned: Bond follows an assassin into an empty, high-rise office building, the multiply reflecting and maze-like glass-architecture of which makes it a twenty-first century Gothic space; the Casino in which Bond meets Severine for the second time is a nightmarish place of gambling, complete with man-eating Komodo dragons; Silva's abandoned island city is the epitome of a decaying, ghostly place, dead and alive at the same time; and the London underground tunnels in which Bond tries to hunt down Silva are the 'other city,' the Gothic space which, it turns out, Silva, as opposed to Bond, knows how to access and move in. The most prominent space, however, which returns us to where we started off – the ghostly castle of Otranto – is the Gothic mansion, the liminal domestic: Skyfall, Bond's childhood home in the Scottish moors.

The house has no spatial point of reference. M and Bond approach it through the misty moors. It seems isolated in this ghostly setting, remote from any other

physical manifestation of human life. While Bond thus approaches his forgotten past, he, once again, acknowledges M's position as all-knowing 'mother-Bluebeard' when she asks him to talk about his childhood: "You know the whole story." The house itself is a prototypical Gothic mansion in decay, an abandoned ghost house. It is, however, not completely devoid of life: in it, M and Bond meet Kincade, an old family friend who knew Bond's parents, and who now stands in as Bond's surrogate 'father,' and protector of the house, making this Freudian nuclear family complete. Skyfall, however, is no longer Bond's house: "They sold the place when they heard you were dead." What is more, Kincade explicitly genders the house feminine in answer to M's approving comment: "She is [a beautiful old house]. And like all ladies, she still has her own secretive ways." Bond, it seems, is not only no longer in possession of the house of patriarchy, but it is not the house of patriarchy at all. The 'father' Kincade, it turns out, is this feminine Bluebeard's house's 'male helper' and housekeeper, knowing his way around, and showing M a secret passage that leads out into the moors.

Anticipating the 'queer son's' arrival, Bond, M, and Kincade prepare traps and dynamite in the house, turning it into a weapon. When Silva finally arrives in a helicopter, 'camping up' the scene by playing inappropriately light-hearted music, this moment of irony is heightened by Bond's now actually using the nostalgically charged gadgets in his Aston Martin to fight the 'queer threat' from above. The ensuing showdown begins to reconfigure the 'nuclear family's' structure: M is shot, at first 'heroically' disavowing the seriousness of her wound: "Only my pride is hurt." Shortly afterwards, first the 'parents,' and, after both the Aston Martin and the house (Bond: "I always hated this place.") have been destroyed, the two 'brothers' walk towards the chapel, the patriarchal space in which the 'norm' will be re-established. Directly before his final encounter with M, Silva tells Bond: "Ah well, mother's calling. I'll give her a good-bye kiss for you." Ironically, it is, in the end, not the 'queer son' who kills his 'mother' – in fact, Silva shows a manic kind of love for her, and asks her to kill them both: "Free us both with the same bullet. Only you can do it." Instead, Bond manages to kill his 'queer bother'/'alter ego' first, and M dies in his arms at the alter, in a 'reversed Pietà:' the 'mother' dies in her crying son's arms, while '(F)father' Kincade is watching over them.

In the end, then, the homosocial-heteronormative system is restored. Both the gender-bending 'Bluebeard-mother,' and her 'queer son' have been sacrificed at the altar of patriarchy. Back in London, the female agent/'femme fatale' Eve becomes re-incorporated into a macho-patriarchal logic, un-becoming the agent, and becoming Moneypenny, secretary and Bond's nostalgic, never-quite-fulfilled heterosexual love-interest – a relationship, though, which has been, from its beginnings in the sixties, 'queer' in that it is clear that it can never actually be consumed. Mallory becomes the new M, making a return to a purely homosocial Secret Ser-

vice complete. Bluebeard is a man again, the 'house of female patriarchy' (Skyfall) is destroyed, the 'queer son' has died, and Bond's position as macho-masculine hero is – albeit never without irony – confirmed.

Skyfall shows, then, that, in the twenty-first century, a cultural preoccupation with issues of gendered power relations and sexualities has lost nothing of its allure. The Gothic, too, still provides today's storytellers and audiences with a rich imagery of spaces that illustrate and make graspable a psychology of the self that has its roots in the eighteenth century. Considering the history of the cultural processes I have been tracing here, then, what theoretical conclusions can we draw?

Firstly, the gendered dimension of how power over knowledge and space is distributed is a theme that dominates much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The question of who keeps what from whom, and who shares what knowledge with whom finds its expression in diverse texts throughout the long nineteenth century.

Secondly, this preoccupation with gender, knowledge, and power is always, albeit never exclusively, linked to issues of 'sexuality.' The rise of Gothic literature coincides historically with the emergence of first modern discourses of sexual identities. As I have demonstrated, homoeroticism (or at least non-heteronormativity) is always already a *possibility* in the early Gothic, and occupies an increasingly central position in the paranoid plots of nineteenth century fiction. It is worth noting, again, that none of the texts I have been analysing allow for a mere 'gay' reading, not least of all because such a reading would, more often than not, be historically inaccurate. All of these narratives, however, explore masculine paranoia, and the paranoid reader's need to increasingly identify himself and others along the axes homosocial-heterosocial and homosexual-heterosexual as a narrative and plot device that reveals a great deal about the cultural anxieties of the time. It is safe to say that, throughout the long nineteenth century, Gothic literature and its offshoots have produced narratives that represent masculinities in a definitional state of crisis: 'modernity' produced Bluebeards that struggled to dissociate themselves from the threats of both femininity and homoeroticism, desperately gesturing towards a fictional ideal of 'masculinity' that would be safely couched within the boundaries of heteronormativity.

Thirdly, and lastly, many of the stories I have explored here not only expose the paranoid, self-destructive obsessiveness of normative masculinity, but provide narrative spaces for 'queer' alternatives that embrace the possibility of 'otherness,' and strive for a more open, reparative engagement with what constitutes 'knowledge,' and an individual's gendered and 'sexual' (self-)identification.

One of the aims of this book has been to fruitfully bring together research that has been done in gender and queer studies, history, philosophy, and sociology, in order to demonstrate that any attempt to thoroughly understand the ways

masculinities have been negotiated and defined in literature since the eighteenth century needs to take into account the difficult (and exciting) relationship between genders and 'sexualities.' Homosocial, patriarchal masculinities, in the long nineteenth century, were not only, albeit crucially, structured around misogyny, but also around varying degrees of homophobia. Literary explorations of the homosocial, heterosocial, homoerotic, and heteroerotic dynamics of modern Western patriarchy have, as I have illustrated, been 'queer' before they could be 'gay,' but this queerness, far from being a marginal phenomenon, makes up much of the allure of these stories, and accounts for the pleasure of engaging with them as the (no-longer-so-)paranoid reader.