Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

Ask Kristian Bergseth Drågen

"Leaving my body and history behind"

Representations of Transmasculine Identity in Gregory Casparian's *An Anglo-American Alliance* and Austin Chant's *Peter Darling* in a Literary Trans Archive

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Hanna Musiol
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The writing of this thesis has been part of a greater journey in my life for the past year as writing about this topic has pushed me to be more honest not just with myself, but with others as well. If I were to be flippant about it, I might say that I came out of this experience a new man. I would firstly like to thank my supervisor Hanna Musiol for the tremendous academic and emotional support she has provided me with through both my writing and my name change. Much gratitude also goes out to Anja, Idunn and Sandra for the many hours spent together working on and venting about our projects both in person and then digitally as the world turned upside down. I would also like to give a special thanks to Inger, for whom I will eternally be in debt to for her patience toward my many messy drafts.

Abstract

A central challenge when working with archival recovery of minority history is working with sources that might seek to obscure or deny their existence. This is increasingly true for many queer identities. If the aim is not historical accuracy, but rather to enable trans people of today to connect with like-minded and like-bodied people of the past, then a possible mode to understand history is literature. In this context, this can be done both with older works, that was written in a historical period, as well as with historical fiction, that was written about a historical period. This project considers this in the context of one 1906 utopian novel, Gregory Casparian's *An Anglo-American Alliance* and one novel from 2017 that is partially set in the early 20th century, Austin Chant's *Peter Darling.*

Keywords: Trans narratives, Archives, Recovery, Reappropriation

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Introduction

In a sense history and literature are, if not two sides of the same coin, at least two sides located on the same die. The relationship between them has long been a topic of interest in not just in literary studies, but also for historians. An oft-cited quote on the topic is lifted from Aristotle's poetics: "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. (…) The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen." (11). This thesis aims to open two gateways to solving what literary scholar Heather Love refers to as the isolation created by "the damaged quality of the historical archive" by showcasing ways we can expand a trans literary archive (37). The first of these possible gateways entails working to recover forgotten works from the archive and bring them to light where that is possible. Moreover, the latter is changing the archive by using historical fiction, and reimaging a classic text, as a method to imagine the past not as it was, but as it could have been. As a part of these explorations, I will also pay some attention to how these works interact with other transgressive narratives by examining some of their aspects in terms of genre. The topic of genre is relevant not only in establishing context, but also in establish a relationship to other texts in the queer literary archive.

This thesis examines Gregory Casparians's 1906 novel *An Anglo-American Alliance: A Serio-Comic Romance and Forecast of the Future* as an example of how to work with archival recovery of forgotten texts and Austin Chant's 2017 novel *Peter Darling* as an example of how one can work with reimagining and historical fiction as a mode to imagine a trans past. Quite like Jack Halberstam states in *A Queer Place and Time,* this thesis does "not seek to define, explain or delimit who counts as transgender in literary fiction", but rather to examine the possibilities of "representation of characters whose lived gender identity or

expression differs from that assigned to them at birth" (4).[1] Both of the works considered within, explore what I would tentatively label as characters with a trans-masculine identity or gender expression. I say tentatively largely with the awareness that *An Anglo-American Alliance* predates the origin of the term by even by the most generous consideration.[2] The focus is not on the validity of, or precise labels belonging to, these characters' experiences, but rather the way this is presented in two works whose publications are separated by more than a century. How do these very different works create a space wherein trans people can exist in literature.

The thesis will also concern itself with the works' portrayal of gender in general as it would be counterintuitive to examine trans literature without also looking at the broader context of gender within the novels. Gregory Casparian's and Austin Chant's works convey very different ideas about gender both concerning their trans characters and how they portray respectively women and men. This large discrepancy is quite understandable considering that more than a hundred years separate their publication dates. Casparian's novel revolves around an early transitional narrative within a utopian society that is still very much a reflection of the ideas about gender and race at the time the author was writing, where the gender of the body shapes the person's mental attributes. As a contrast, Chant uses a reimaging of the story of Peter Pan to explore the relationship the main character, Peter, has with his body. At first,

[1] This book published under the name Judith Halberstam and it can therefore be found cited as such in the works cited list.

[2] The earliest reference that I can find that relates to the term trans in describing gender identity or expression is German Sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld's *Die Transvestiten; ein Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb: mit umfangreichem casuistischen und historischen Material* from 1910. Although 'transvest' has been used in the context of crossdressing since at least the 17th century (Manion 31, "transvest"). Hirschfeld does not in this book distinguish between those who cross-dress and those who are born as one gender but wishes to live as another on a permanent basis, but rather labels them all as transvestites or crossdressers. Hirschfeld would, in addition, come to coin "Transsexualismus" in an article titled "Die intersexuelle Konstitution" in 1923 that would late come to be translated to the English 'transsexual' by fellow sexologist David Oliver Cauldwell in 1949. The term transgender, which along with the shortened "trans" is often used as an umbrella-term, would first be proposed by Dr. John Oliven in 1965. It is, however, also important to keep in mind that while the origin of the current term came at the start of the 20th century there was a history of gender crossing and alternative gender expressions both within and outside of Europe before this.

we are introduced to him as he imagines himself ideally to be in the fantastical realm of Neverland before we are shown his learned acceptance of the body he was born with towards the end.

The first chapter explores Casparian's novel's portrayal of gender as a feature that is inseparable from their physical body and how the body acts as a force that influences the mind. This mind-body essentialism being a stressed feature of the "metamorphosis" or sex change that the story centres around to the extent that while, Spencer, as the main character is called post-metamorphosis, is not presumed to exist before this, and is considered a "splendid specimen of manhood" afterwards (Casparian 138). It also concerns itself with the ideological implications of the novels 'utopian' plot and how one might work with older works that showcase 'trans capacity' more broadly (Getsy 48)[3].

The second chapter looks at how Chant's novel reappropriates a pre-existing set of characters to portray a trans narrative and how both using these well-known characters and a historical setting can be a way to reclaim or imagine a lost history. It also explores a more contemporary understanding of gender identity that, unlike *An Anglo-American Alliance,* does not rely on heteronormativity and gender essentialism to validate the trans character's identity. Instead, it uses the homosocial and homoerotic connotations of the love interest's piracy as an entryway into exploring both the manhood of the main character, Peter, and his love interest, James.

[3] Getsy uses 'transgender capacity' as the term in his text, but I have chosen to abbreviate this to 'trans capacity' in my text.

Chapter 1: "A Splendid Specimen of Manhood": Diving into the obscure reaches of the archive

There are a number of things to keep in mind when examining a historical work of any kind, but this is especially crucial when considering narratives that concern themselves with sexual or gender minorities. This is not only crucial due to the historical discrimination of these groups, but also because of the ever-evolving terminology used to identify and create a community of likeminded individuals. An important step in working with older works, therefore, become interpreting them not only within their historical context but also engaging in the discussion of how we should tackle the problem of using contemporary labels to describe the past. This chapter's aims are, therefore, twofold. The first of which is to examine the role of literature as a way to examine trans history and the second is to examine the novel within its historical context, largely through the examination of genres, but also concerning its treatment of gender and race. In the context of gender, this not only relates to the assumptions about gendered behaviour or embodiment, but also the historical reality of an assumed relationship between gender and sexuality.

An Anglo-American Alliance is at the centre a showcasing of Gregory Caparian's utopian ideas in the form of a novel, his only published work of fiction. It was illustrated and published by the author himself and printed by Mayflower Presses in New York in 1906. As a result of his lack of commercial fame records regarding him are quite scarce, but we do know that he was born in modern-day Turkey and fought in the Armenian army before emigrating to the United States in the late 1870s (Bleiler 127). The novel centres on Margaret McDonald, who we later come to know as Spencer Hamilton, and her relationship to Aurora Cunningham. We are first introduced to them as students at the Diana seminary, in the United States, where they have cultivated a strong relationship and swear "solemn vows" to each

other (Casparian 138). While it is not entirely clear what their "solemn vows" entail, but in context, they do seem to be at least romantic, if not marital in nature. The novel is set in an alternate 1960s, with the author providing a rough timeline of what changes has affected the world between the novel's publication and setting. This outline is inserted into the narrative as lessons taught at the seminary. When their time at the seminary ends, and Aurora is set to return to England to be with her family, Margaret is very distressed by this and eventually falls into a catatonic state as a result. The only person who can then wake her is Dr Ben Raaba, who has to resort to mysticism. In this encounter with the doctor she also learns of his work as a "Vivisectionist and Re-incarnator", and she seeks him out to undergo a surgical sex change or "metamorphosis" as it is referred to in this novel (Casparian 108). We are not told what the underlying motivation to undergo this metamorphosis is. We are then introduced to the fully "metamorphosed" Spencer Hamilton, who is not only transformed in body but also in terms of his personality and mental capabilities to reflect masculine ideals of the time. For the sake of clarity and simplicity I will from this point onward, outside of quotes, refer to the person we first come to know as Margaret McDonald and later, after the metamorphosis, as Spencer Hamilton by the latter name. After some time, he is reunited with Aurora, and they are presented as an ideal heterosexual couple. Another element that is mostly removed from the rest of the novel's plot, but nevertheless interesting when examining the novel's understanding of gender, are the observations of the astronomer Abou Shimshek about society on another planet where the inhabitants' genders are indistinguishable.

One of the challenges with archival work within both transgender and queer theory has to do with using terms that could be, and are by some, labelled as "ahistorical" to describe not only historical persons but also characters in literature that predate the coining of the term, "trans" (Carroll; Traub; Halberstam "Perverse Presentism"). However, this does not mean that such terms should be ignored for the sake of historical accuracy as it could serve as a

disconnection between the experiences of contemporary trans people and like-bodied people of the past. The desire to label and identify is deeply connected with what Heather Love refers to as a crucial feature of the queer historical experience, the longing for a community among a group produced by the "historical isolation of individual queers as well as the damaged quality of the historical archive" (37). This disconnect of past and present individuals who have similar experiences are common to most queer communities as there is less of a familial or intergenerational community then one might find in, for instance, racial or religious minorities. Ignoring the possible connection of similar experiences might, in the most extreme circumstance leave us in a place where the mere existence of trans people seems ahistorical or fictional? As Rachel Carroll points out, "the tension between historically specific constructions of identity and the historical records of lived experience which predate them pose further questions of interpretation over time," affecting the recovery of minority history from sources that may obscure or deny their existence (7).

There are different strategies one can employ when faced with what they may experience as an "empty archive" (Love 42). Some, like Valerie Traub, elect to mourn the losses of the archive and move on by giving up the dream of identification in favour of leaving the textual traces of a queer past to exist autonomously. Love suggests that this mourning is more useful as a tool on an individual level than it is on a collective one as it in her mind ensures a continued "melancholic identification with, and dependence upon, the terms of erotic similitude, in a paralyzing enactment of queer trauma" (Love 42). Both Love and Traub here speak about queerness in terms of sexuality rather than in terms of gender. However, the same discussion is also applicable to the question of the historical, or textual, identification of people under the trans-umbrella as well.

So, what is one to do when faced with either an "empty" or very limited archive to work with in terms of historical documentation? (Love 42). One place one could turn is to literature.[4] Jill Lepore argues that "the best novels boast a kind of truth that even the best history books can never claim" (n. pag). The close relationship between history and literature was also remarked upon by Aristotle who remarked that the distinction between history and poetry was that "the one tells what has happened, the other kind of things that can happen" (Lepore n.pag). If we take this even further, we could suggest that fiction is not just what can happen, but also in a sense, what could have happened. Lepore writes that "before his imperfect sources, the historian is powerless", we might extrapolate that this leaves the historian to take into account what the broken fragments and scattered ruins we have and make a choice. A choice between admitting the close relationship between storytelling and the telling of history and ignoring their subjective role as a storyteller and spent their time producing a list of "provable facts". We are left with the realisation that while history does concern itself with facts, a historian, and therefore also history books, is a dealer not of certainties, but instead of probabilities (Lepore n.pag). What is considered first to be possibilities, which can then be upgraded to probabilities, is affected by what the historian has been taught to consider, be this as a result of their socialisation or the historical canon. Fiction might, therefore, serve as an entry point into topics less tackled as a part of the historical canon—one of those topics being people under the trans-umbrella.

Historical exclusion happens as a result of many competing factors like, for instance, gender or sexuality, but also in the context of transness. Lepore, for instance, considers eighteenth-century novels, what she terms "the eighteenth century's fictive history", as a

[4] That is not to say that there are not great works about trans people and transness that bases itself on archival sources and interviews. Some interesting works in this vein include: C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* and Jen Manion's *Female Husbands: A Trans History*.

source in understanding the lives of women of the period. A novel in this context then becomes a history of private life that tells us of "what passes in a man's own mind" and creates a space for the "obscure men" of history. "Who are these obscure men?" she asks herself, "Well, a lot of them are women", she concludes. The use of this type of fictive history that is fiction that serves as a historical artefact can, therefore, be seen as a way to examine lives lived outside the traditional historical canon. Be that the lives of women, ethnic minorities or queer individuals. She writes that many of the "obscure men" of history are women, but I would wager that there are also quite a few queer people among their numbers as well.

One way to work with historical transness without ignoring the bias of the present can be found in David Getsy's notion of "transgender capacity", in this text it is simply referred to as "trans capacity". Getsy stresses the usefulness of this as a methodological tool "for resisting the persistent erasure of transgender lives, gender diversity, nondimorphism and successive identities" (48). In other words, this is a way to examine historical gender non-conformity, or gender crossing by attempting to reach a compromise between creating a historical link and prescribing current labels onto people of the past. In the context of literature, this becomes useful to examine possible early representation of transness and gender non-conformity. The existence of "trans capacity" in a text does not need to be deliberate for it to be present. In fact, Getsy argues that the most important feature of trans capacity is precisely that it can be an unintended result of several divergent conditions and decisions. With this as a basis, a trans critique can be demanded of any text, whether it may seem intuitive or not as trans capacity "may emerge at any site where dimorphic and static understandings of gender are revealed as arbitrary and inadequate" (Getsy 48). This focus not on the author's intent, but on what the reader can experience through the act of reading mirrors the central ideas of Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author." As Barthes puts it "[t]o

give a text, an author is to impose a limit to that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (44). In that sense, both the notions of a "trans capacity" and "Death of the Author" seeks to fracture the power that an author has over a narrative. By fracturing the power of the author, we can create spaces where alternate and even marginalised readings, and identities can exist even if that space is not created by the world the author or their characters inhabit. In this sense speaking of a "trans capacity" is a tool for the archival liberation of a group that is hard to define historically as the evidence presented in the historical record might not be indicative of the diversity that might have been present (Getsy 48). The choice of using these labels can, therefore, turn us away from choosing to focus on an affective history. This might prompt us not to ask are there trans people in the past or who were the trans people of the past, and instead toward an affective history that is more interested in our relationship to queer people in history than the question of universal labels or understandings (Love 31).

In the case of trans history, there is further complication by the competing claims put upon the "historical practice of 'gender crossing'" by women's, lesbian and gay, and queer historiography (Carrol 7). Not to mention the historical reality of the assumed correlation between gender and sexuality in the 20th century, something that can be illustrated by examining several early terms coined to describe trans identities. If we, for instance, look to the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's 1903s *Berlin's third sex* we see him using terms such as 'the third sex' and the 'uranian sex' to describe people who today could be considered either queer in terms of gender or queer in terms of attraction in an indiscriminatory manner.

This assumed correlation is also echoed in *An Anglo-American Alliance*. Here, the importance of Spencer's love for Aurora, cannot be ignored as the novel places great emphasis on the impact it has on him. It could even be read as one of his motivations for undergoing his metamorphosis. It is noted, for instance, that he struggles to control his emotions when parting

with his “beloved friend” as Aurora leaves for England to be with her family. These difficulties are also seen later when he journeys to Wyoming and on the way, finds himself overwhelmed with feelings and left in a catatonic state as a result. He is then revived partly by magic and partly by the mention of Aurora’s name by Dr Ben Raaba. This reading could be corroborated by how afraid they are of the nature of their relationship being discovered by their peers and college faculty as they would risk both expulsion and “unendurable ostracism” by the rest of the students at the very start of the novel (Casparian 17). Using the strategy of gender-crossing to conform to heteronormative standards would also be in line with other works that portray relationships that can be read as homoromantic in order to end with a straight passing couple. One particularly famous example of this, William Beckford’s *Vathek*, from 1786, does this oppositely by having one of the princes be revealed to have been raised to “think, act, and identify as a man”, but being born with a female body (Marshall 29). The choice of raising the prince in this manner is explained to have been done to prevent the people from knowing that their king had failed to produce a male heir. Which by the logic of the time would make any relationship between them that of a man and a woman due to his birth sex, ignoring that the character is more comfortable living as a man. In this way, they both, despite their subversive traits, still enforce a bodily heterosexuality.

However, the reading of Spencer’s transitioning as an act motivated by the attainment of an acceptable heterosexual relationship seems flawed. In order to have this procedure done, he has to sign a contract that absolves the doctor “from any responsibility if the experiment should prove unsuccessful or fatal!” (Casparian 112). While romance might drive people to partake in risky activities, it would seem somewhat improbable that deciding to take part in a potentially fatal experimental surgery would be motivated entirely by a want to avoid the stigma and risk associated with a homosexual relationship. Furthermore, there is his reaction

upon waking after the metamorphosis, which would seem to reflect his joy or even euphoria toward his current state of being:

> The full magical effect of his audacious undertaking was evident, for scarcely had the last syllable of those mysterious and incomprehensible words left his shrivelled lips, when a sudden tremor shook the frame of Margaret and, with a subdued groan, indicative more of a sensation of bliss than of pain, she opened her eyes. A triumphant smile pervaded her countenance, as if awakening from an Utopian dream. (Casparian 114).

While Love writes a extensively about how avoiding queer trauma can be detrimental to examining queer historical narratives as it can lead to a practice of avoiding the unpleasantness and negativity that we cannot transform into something that is politically useful (147). However, there are also other aspects that might be off-putting to a modern reader regarding older works that can be read in a queer or trans context. In the case of Casparian's work, this is not only the strict heteronormative gender roles but also its depiction of people of colour. Rather than avoiding it on the grounds of this it, and thereby contributing to the erasure of these narratives, this should be deconstructed and examined. I will get back to this as I discuss the utopian and gothic traits of *An Anglo-American Alliance* in particular.

An Anglo-American Alliance is above all a work of speculative or imaginative fiction as it is set in a world that is similar to its readers despite being set in a futuristic setting ("imaginative fiction", "speculative fiction"). In this case, this can be seen in how it features both advances in science and technology that had not occurred at the date of its publication, like for instance, a complete surgical sex change or a medical cure for laziness, and also suggests the existence of magic through the actions of Dr Ben Raaba. While the relationship between these two genres and trans narratives might not be immediately apparent, there is, nevertheless, a connection to be found. The connection in both cases come from how either

the supernatural or futuristic elements create a space in which what might be labelled as "unconventional" genders and sexualities can exist in a way that does not directly challenge the current status quo as it creates a distance from the real world. In *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, Wendy Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon point out the importance of science fiction in exploring and imagining a world in which all lives are liveable and that this informs their understanding of queer theory as being both science-fictional and utopian in a sense (5). Taking into account this definition, one could argue that this point could be expanded to the entirety of speculative fiction, not just science fiction, which is sometimes regarded as a subgenre of the aforementioned.

One facet of the status of this novel as speculative fiction comes in its utopian leanings. *An Anglo-American Alliance* presents us with an alternate history of the world that spans from the time of the novel's publication to the setting of the book in the 1960s. By giving us this alternate timeline, Casparian shows us a possible future that he presents as being more advanced and better than the society he lived within in the early 20th century U.S. *An Anglo-American Alliance* does not conform to the general outline of utopian fiction as an extension of a travel narrative as used by, for instance, Thomas More, who coined the term. It does, however, conform to what Fátima Vieira highlights as utopian fiction's most recognisable traits; that of it dispensing "speculative discourse on a non-existent social organisation which is better than real society". (Vieira 7-8). Better here, of course, meaning being better as conceived by the author. Casparian dedicates two entire chapters to the advances made during his fictitious 20th century the chief of which is the formation of the Anglo-American Alliance during the years 1925-1926, which becomes a catalyst for global change. We are told that the power amazed by these two nations had a significant effect as it could be used as an ultimatum for other nations to keep the peace. The peacekeeping is complemented by encouraging the other nations to adopt similar laws to "secure the same

reciprocal blessings of universal brotherhood" in effect, granting the alliance governance over the world (Casparian 73). However, it is also a system that is dependent on the various other countries and colonies, both being dependant and enjoying some "home rule and liberty" (Casparian 73).

It would be remiss here to not only speak about the utopia as a genre but also as an expression of ideology or even as an ideological mode. As one article from the 1930s that aimed to examine utopias from the period Casparian was writing put it in the following way; "Utopias are not only ideal realms but also realms of ideals, not only reflections of the present, but the present itself; for they are not originated in a vacuum, but are children of everyday life and the contemporary milieu" (Normano 287). Which raises the question of for whom could the setting of *An Anglo-American Alliance* be considered to be utopian? This notion, of how a work is rooted in its context, is noted later not only generally by, for instance, new historicism, but also in particular regarding utopian writing by Fatima Vieira. She not only notes the author's role in this but the reader's as well. There is in utopian fiction a delicate balance to be struck to avoid pushing the reader's sense of reality too far as this could make the reader reject the world they are presented. Vieira stresses that the passage from the real world to the fictional must be gradual lest it risk rejection by the reader as a utopian possibility. Both of these elements could go far in explaining the intricate interlacing of ideas that seem very much of their time, such as the racial attitudes and the gender essentialism, and ideas that seem ahead of their time like for instance the description of a surgical sex change.

An aspect to consider while looking at *An Anglo-American Alliance* as both a trans and utopian text is its complicated relationship with gender. This complicated relationship can be seen in how the novel navigates the social roles of women, the relationship between men and women as well as in Spencer's metamorphosis. At the same time, it both showcases the

capability of female characters and reinforce the notion that someone's biological sex imposes certain limitations. We are informed both of the general competence of the students of the Diana Seminary and their athletic ability as we see them winning the race against the nearby all-boys school. Nevertheless, the novel also chooses to comment that the women who campaigned for women's right to enter politics have forgotten "the limitations of their sex" (Casparian 59). Further, we should also consider a statement made by the astronomer Abou Shimshek when he recounts his observations of life on another planet:

> There was no difference in male and female attire. As woman nowadays are speaking of equal rights, and are adopting masculine tendencies, I believe are on the right line of advancement to read the same destination (Casparian 130).

Abu Shimshek's statement seems to welcome this blurring of lines between men and women in terms of presentation and maybe even social roles. Which to some extent stands as a contrast to both the assertion that the sexes have different attributes which are determined by a person's body as we are shown that Spencer's mental traits changed along with his body. In other words, it could seem that there is room for women to present their gender identity in ways that are considered more traditionally masculine. This leeway in gendered expression is present in terms of dress and perhaps even behaviour and social roles in this novel. However, there is always the overhanging caveat of gender essentialism that reinforces what is considered feminine and what is considered masculine. The novel also, in order to reinforce the differences between men and women, notes that co-educational schools failed because the competition between sexes academically caused boys and girls to leave schooling "more like enemies than friends and lovers" (Casparian 19). Although interestingly enough, this does not seem to be the case for Spencer and Aurora. By combining the radical notion of the possibility of sex change with these more traditional notions of gender, Casparian might be said to create a world that while strange does not feel too alien to its reader for it to be accepted. Another

aspect that could be related to both the writer and reader in terms of utopian limitation is the topic of race—leaving us with a supposedly utopian literary reality that it is also undeniably primitivist and orientalist. While this is not a focus, it would be remiss to leave it out. The topic of orientalism will be further explored in the section on the gothic elements as the two elements are irrevocably connected in the character of Dr Ben Raaba.

One of the most striking instances of primitivism can be seen in the descriptions of the singers at the ball where Spencer and Aurora reunite. Primitivism, as seen in the context of modern art ", refers to the attraction to groups of people who were outside Western society, as seen through the distorting lens of Western construction of 'the primitive' which was cultivated in the later part of the nineteenth century" (Rhodes 8). The 'dusky quartette' as they are referred to as is not only made to be othered from western white characters in the contrast of how they are illustrated by the author—see figures 1 and 2 below—,but also thought their descriptions in the text itself. If we look at figure 2, we see a racist caricature quite reminiscent of blackface and minstrel shows. This discrepancy can, for instance, if one examines the description of the South African singer. She is described as possessing "hippopotamic gracefulness" which does not only connect our understanding to an animal but also serves to further exoticize her though the choice of animal (Casparian 136). A hippopotamus would probably only be known to the book's readers in either the context of a zoo or as an illustration of exotic animals.

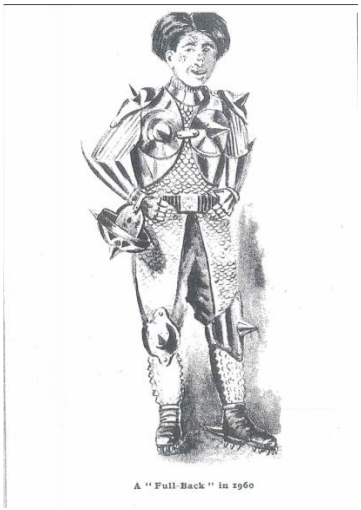

Figure 1: Casparian, G. An Anglo-American Alliance Mayflower Presses. 1906. . p.21

Figure 2: Casparian, G. An Anglo-American Alliance. Mayflower Presses. 1906. p. 137

In addition, their accomplishments are never presented as being truly theirs. They are brought in, through the act of being civilised by the British and Americans and are through that made into vessels that can echo European accomplishments. They are not truly agents of their own, but rather a spectacle to be observed. They are by the tutelage of their colonisers proving to be able to produce "an abundance of men and women of extraordinary talent and capacity in art and music, so as to eclipse their conferences of Hungarian and Polish origin, in days gone by" (Casparian 137). With this as a frame in mind, we could read them as being a means to breathing life back into what might be termed 'European' or 'western' art not creating art of their own. They are vessels for furthering European art, not artists and musicians in their own right. While the elevation of their skills might be intended to indicate a progressive society the portrayal is heavily shadowed by the patriarchal role the 'civilised' westerners have had in cultivating their talent and that they could not have done this on their own.

Another genre that informs *An Anglo-American Alliance* is that of the gothic novel. Both George Haggerty in *Queer Gothic* and Jolene Zigarovich in *TransGothic* speaks about

the gothic novel as a "testing ground for many unauthorized genders and sexualities" (Zigarovich 8). Zigarovich expands upon this by writing that by acknowledging the presence of gender variance in history; a transgothic approach partially closes the gap that Haggerty's *Queer Gothic* opened with its exploration of "a transhistorical homosexuality." (8). The Gothic has in certain ways been a space were new possibilities, that are biomedical and not fantastic in nature, of bodily transformation could be explored. The fact that a biomedical transition or transformation is fundamental for some contemporary understandings of transgender identity today leads Stryker to underline the importance of understanding the gothic as "an aesthetic or affective mode" through which the public has confronted medical bodily transformation within trans studies (Stryker "Foreword" xv).

If we again return to the topic of the gothic, Susan Stryker notes in the foreword to Jolene Zigarovich's *TransGothic in Literature and Culture* that biomedical techniques regarding hormones and genital surgeries have a surprisingly long history within the context of Anglo-American culture, becoming more accessible and widely employed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Further, she points out that at the same time that this technology is being developed, one sees quite a large number of works within speculative fiction that concern themselves with medical bodily modification, often in a crosspieces context, but few that tackle the idea of a biomedicalised sex-change. This can, for instance, be seen in the metamorphosis portrayed in Casparian's work. It is not within the realm of 'hard' science fiction one can find tales of sex-change she writes but rather within what she terms as "gothic, horror, and weird fiction" (Stryker "Foreword" xiii).

While *An Anglo-American Alliance* is in no way a purely gothic novel, it does heavily feature gothic elements. These gothic features become especially apparent in the sections that concern Dr Ben Raaba and the transformation that Spencer undertakes under his care. Susan Stryker points to this link in the foreword to *TransGothic* where she states that while it is

concerned with new scientific ideas, it also draws heavily on not only its neo-gothic predecessors but also on orientalism. Despite the fact that the gothic body is a place of contestation that challenges the state's, or society's control over bodies, Zigarovich also states that it is imperative to keep in mind that this challenge might also lead to a reassertion of what was being challenged in the first place. This reassertion can, for instance, be seen in Casparian's work with Spencer's metamorphosis being a challenging factor in terms of his body surgically being turned from that of a woman to that of a man thereby challenging strict ideas about the essential nature of gender. The balance is reasserted by claiming that his mind was transformed along with his body while also painting him as a "splendid specimen of manhood" to complement Aurora's idealised feminine frailness when they reunite after his transition (Casparian 138).

Not only are the gothic elements central to understand how *An Anglo-American Alliance* is in a constant dialogue with gender, but it is also an important aspect to consider when examining the orientalist presentation of Dr Ben Raaba. The doctor is the person who performs the metamorphosis that changes the schoolgirl Margaret McDonald into the "splendid specimen of manhood" that is Spencer Hamilton (Casparian 114). The first link between him and the gothic is the representation of degenerating nobility. The mystique of this is strengthened by his non-western roots. The doctor is described as wearing fine clothes that make it clear that he belonged to a "high caste and noble Hindoo family" (Casparian 97). He is noted to occupy a spacious mansion that had been abandoned by a wealthy merchant. That mansion is described in a quite gothic manner by bringing attention to the "somewhat neglected clumps of pines and shrubberies" and that it is "entirely isolated from the highway" in a manner that made it "most suitable for a man like the Hindoo doctor, who seemed always to desire seclusion" (Casparian 96). The description of his looks is indicative of a gothic mystic. He is tall and lank, with eyes that have catlike pupils that give him "an intensely

hypnotic gaze, which had an irresistible and subjective power" (Casparian 97). He is similarly described as "grotesquely hideous" (Casparian 107). It is noted that he walks in a peculiar manner that has him "swerving from side to side" in a manner that makes his cane convulse in a "serpentine" manner (Casparian 97). The people who live near him have varying reactions to him, he is seen by some, as a monstrosity and by those he has been nicknamed the "Crazy Doctor (Casparian 97).

Not only is he connected to decaying nobility, but he is also significantly linked to magic and mysticism. We first meet him as he wakes the person that we, at this point, known as Margaret from a love induced coma. He solves this issue by, using a method we are informed is also practised by "the father of occult Diagnosis" wherein he uses the name of the persons beloved to elevate their heartbeat (Casparian 105). This mysticism carries over into the metamorphosis itself. In order to do this procedure, Dr Ben Raaba combines his knowledge of the occult and medicine, leading to a transition that is enacted not only by magic but also by science. In this pivotal scene, Ben Raaba is introduced to us not as a doctor, but as a 'wizard', and despite his medical expertise, Margaret has been taken into something reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein's laboratory with glittering saws and scalpels hanging on the walls and animals lurking in the shadows. This connection is also made explicitly in the text as Ben Raaba ponders the viability of the subject of his metamorphosis upon completion. He is worried not only bout whether Spencer will prove to be a proper man without an "effeminate mind and manners", but also whether he will be "a hideous Frankenstein or a monstrosity devoid of finer sense" (Casparian 113).

In addition to being cast as an oriental mystic and a mad scientist Dr Ben Raaba is also trough the descriptions of his lab connected to more traditionally European conceptions of witchcraft: "A big cat-owl perched on a pedestal in one corner, and a black tom-cat with intense green eyes, prowling about the room, gave the scene a cabalistic and weird aspect"

(Casparian 112). This trifecta of his expertise is further stressed later when we are told that the labours of transforming Margaret into Spencer almost "exhausted his consummate skill in hypnotism, surgery and magic" (Casparian 113). It is though this othered, racialised and potentially marginalised individual that our white main character can realise their transition and walk out as what society considers an acceptable man. [5]

If we now return to the matter of gender, the complex relationship that this novel has in its portrayal of gender is also central to one of the main characters of the story, Spencer, who spends much of the novel living as a woman before going through a surgical transformation. As mentioned, both in the introduction and above in this chapter, this book very much subscribes to the notion of gender essentialism. By this, I mean that a character's mind and traits are thought to reflect their body with women having certain traits, such as empathy or gentleness, and men others, like for instance assertiveness or boldness. This can, for instance, be seen in how Spencer is described after going through treatment with Dr Ben Raaba: "The patient at once became conscious that her bodily transformation was complete for it did not take her long to realise it as HE stood there, a beautiful specimen of manhood!" (Casparian 114). The most striking thing here is how within one sentence the author chooses to start the sentence with feminine pronouns before then emphasising this change through the typography when switching to masculine pronouns. We are left with no ambiguity as to the validity of this change. As the state of the body changes the pronouns, presentation and even mental attributes are shown to be impacted.

> This miraculous transformation brought to light another remarkable mental discovery. It was discovered by the doctor that all the accomplishments, knowledge and mental

[5] This tendency to racialize elements undesired elements of sexuality and queerness was not unusual in the early 20th century. More In-depth discussion and examination can for instance be found in Robin Hackett's *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*.

> attributes possessed by Margaret, prior to her re-incarnation, had intensified a hundred fold into those of aggressive daring and strenuous masculinity. (Casparian 114-115)

As can be seen in this quote, while Spencer is the same person as Margaret, the physical change of his body's sex immediately changes his mental attributes. The maleness of this body is not merely physical, but indicative of his mind as well. In this narrative, the body is what defines the person that Spencer is. Before the transformation, his mind is considered to be that of a woman although it is noted that even in his college days, he had "a captivating frivolity and aggressiveness which almost bordered on masculinity" (Caparian 16). The key words there being "almost" and "bordered on" as the novel seems to be reluctant to blur the lines between men and women to a too large extent.

Nevertheless, Spencer, despite these recorded changes, including to ones made to his body, is still somewhat recognisable to Aurora. She cannot recognise him properly, but still, his appearance reminds her of her college days and her "infatuation for her chum Margaret, and the recollection of their solemn vows" which causes her some distress as she quickly develops feelings for Spencer as he is presented as a violinist at a ball held by her father (Casparian 138). She goes as far as to label him "an ideal" and "her affinity", but she is resolved to keep her vow to her college sweetheart (Casparian 139). Spencer proceeds to play a song that is very familiar to Aurora, it is a composition they worked on together, and that is intimately connected to the vow they made to each other. Aurora feels uncomfortable about this as she feels betrayed, thinking that this private song has been made public, as she thinks it must have been for it to be played by Spencer. These intense emotions lead to Aurora losing consciousness at the conclusion of the song. Spencer goes to see her the next day and comments on her strong reaction to the song he played yesterday and tells her the following: " I am your confidant at the Diana Seminary, whom you loved, and am now metamorphosed

into a man by the miraculous powers of the vivisectionist and re-incarnator—Hyder Ben Raaba. I have come to claim you as my own. Aurora, I love you!" (Casparian 142).

While the clues concerning their relationship have not been few before, this is the first instance where it is made so explicit; Aurora has a strong reaction to this as well; she utters a piercing shriek and falls into Spencer's arms. This shriek calls not only Aurora's father but also several other people, among them soldiers and servants, to the room where they are said to behold a "highly surprising tablean of romantic love" (Casparian 143). This entire reunion very much frames Aurora as something of a fragile emotional maiden with no particular agency of her own. She is entirely driven, or paralyzed, by her own intense emotions and is made entirely passive as a contrast to Spencer's masculine agency. From the very start, even before the transformation, he is noted to be "entirely the opposite of Aurora, —her very antithesis", but also that the two of them are equal in natural gifts and accomplishments (Casparian 16). At the very end, the former is played up while the other is downplayed.

As can be expected from a narrative from the start of the 1900s, self-identification is not explicitly tackled in *An Anglo-American Alliance.* Despite the explicit lack of self-identification that would be immediately recognisable to a modern audience, there are still several aspects that through the lens of trans capacity can be indicative of a possible trans identity. The first of which comes to us when Spencer after Aurora's departure revisits the card given to him by Dr Ben Raaba. As he inspects the card, he has a strong emotional reaction as he realises what services the doctor can provide.

> "(…) the strange and significant words, vivisection and re-incarnation began to assume a deep meaning. (…) Her quivering frame, the rise and fall of her heaving breast and the change of color of her face alternatively from pallor to a feverish flush, indicated that there was a revolution going on within her immaculate bosom." (Casparian 108).

Of course, at this point, one might argue that this emotional reaction might just as well be related to finding a way that he and Aurora might be together without judgement. However, we as readers are not privy to Spencer's inner thoughts on the matter as we are told that the content of the letter he writes to Dr Ben Raaba "never became known to any but herself and the Hindoo doctor", but we are told that he receives an answer that seems to satisfy him (Casparian 108).

An Anglo-American Alliance does create a space for trans characters to exist within the context of a heavily gendered society by using tropes borrowed from the transgressive genres of both gothic and speculative fiction. In moving though these genres and though the care of the racialized individual of Dr Ben Raaba our white, western, protagonist can go on to leave a proper heteronormative life with his beloved as a man.

Chapter 2: "…then I was just a boy, and I knew I must've been one all along": Creating the archive through the reappropriation of fiction and history.

In my first chapter, I examined an older work of fiction that used the transgressive genres of speculative fiction and the gothic to enable trans representation. This chapter will move from a historical focus into the present by examining how through the reappropriation of well-known characters, and the mode of historical fiction can be used not to imagine a queer future, as Casparian does, but instead a queer past. This chapter seeks to explore more the value that such a text might have for our current day relationship to trans people of the past, what Love terms 'affective history' than it seeks to explore how we might explore the historical realities of the past (31). I aim to do this by looking at Austin Chant's 2017 novel *Peter Darling*. Chant's novel is in a sense a reimagining of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, but more than that it is a reimagining of Peter Pan, as a cultural icon and a topic of numerous cinematic and pop-cultural adaptations. In most, if not all, of these adaptations, we meet a youthful and magical individual that is said never to grow up. Commonly he is also introduced to us through Wendy Darling and her brothers that he brings to Neverland to have adventures before the Darling siblings return to the real world. In *Peter Darling* Peter and Wendy are not separate individuals; instead, Peter Pan is created by the oldest of the Darling children as a way to express his gender identity. The focus in this adaptation is not on his boyhood adventures in Neverland, but on his return as a young adult. In *Peter Darling* we are shown his interactions with two other queer men—the first being his childhood rival James Hook and the second being the original character of Ernest—and how that affects his understanding of himself.

The developing romantic relationship between Peter and James makes up the centre of the story. For most of the novel, there is a clear antagonistic relationship between Peter's lost

boys and James' pirates propagated by their respective leaders. Both of these groups are created by Neverland to fulfil their wishes for an accepting community and adventure. The only other real person, Ernest, has kept peace between the two groups while serving as a leader of the lost boys in Peter's absence, and endeavours to keep this status quo for large parts of the novel. As a result, Peter and Ernest's relationship starts off quite tense, and they discuss their different views on violence and masculinity at length. In the reescalation of the conflict, Peter is poisoned by James, and Peter loses his most trusted companion as Tinkerbell sacrifices herself to slow the spread of the poison. After one of the conflicts between the two groups leads to Peter and James being isolated, their relationship changes dramatically as they rely on each other to escape a partially collapsed cave system. As part of this journey through the caves they bond both over their relationships to Tinkerbell and in nursing each other back to health Both of their ailments are inflicted by the other, Peter has to recover from the aforementioned poisoning while James has to recover from an infection that has developed from a wound made by Peter. They part ways as they leave the caves but agree to reunite to discuss the possibility of peace between their two groups. As they meet to discuss a possible peace agreement aboard the pirate ship, it is attacked by a kraken the ensuing chaos and need to cooperate further strengthens their relationship. James, shortly after this realises the falseness of Neverland in the wake of experiencing sexual and emotional intimacy with Peter, a real person. He starts to question if Neverland might do more harm than good. It does provide them with a safe place where they can safely express themselves and live out their dreams, but it also makes them forget their lives in the real world, their personal history, as a way to keep them there. Peter struggles significantly with the choice between having a body that harmonises with his understanding of himself and going back to the real world to live out his life, but eventually, all three of the characters from the real world decide to leave

Neverland. Peter and James leave with the hope of carving out a life together, and Ernest leaves hoping to gain acceptance from his family.

A phenomenon that is very much relevant in examining the queerness in *Peter Darling* is that of fan fiction. While it might not be what first comes to mind when one thinks of fan fiction as it is, in fact, a published novel and it might be more accurate to call it either an adaptation or a reimagining than fan fiction proper. However, it is a transformative work that uses characters and elements that originated within another author's work. Unlike a lot of fan fiction, the work Chant repurposes elements from, J.M Barries *Peter Pan*, is no longer under copyright.[6] While this work has been published, it still occupies a quite niche space and online oriented space as it was published by a small publisher that was focused entirely on queer-romance, with a tendency toward speculative fiction. [7]

Fanfiction is traditionally considered to be primarily written by straight or bisexual women (Busse 60). However, Diana Koehm notes the role fandom and fanfiction has as a vehicle for the exploration of identity for queer youth, both people who consider themselves queer in terms of sexual orientation and those who consider themselves queer in terms of gender. Jonathan A. Rose also remarks that "while fanfiction engages with any conceivable topic, it is especially well suited to represent (marginalised forms of) embodiment" as it frequently deals with issues of intimacy and how bodies interact. Further, he writes that this lends itself to "explorations of gendered embodiment" (Rose 27). We can, for instance, see this in Peter's negotiation with his body throughout his relationship to James.

[6] However, it should be noted that there are in fact a lot of older fandoms that are still active and popular, but a number of those, such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* and the works of Jane Austen, also have quite a lot of published fanfiction in their communities.

[7] The publisher, Less than Three Press LLC, closed its doors in late 2019 after 10 years in the business. They used to describe themselves as "a strong rising presence in the LGBTQ romance community" and a ' LT3 is a labor of love between three women who wanted to write and publish books' prior to their closing (lessthanthreepress).

When adapting a work, whether it be through fanfiction or more traditional mediums, the act of creating or writing is also, in a sense one of reading. What I mean by this is that in the act of writing a queer version of *Peter Pan* one must first have read and seen the queer potential, or trans capacity, in either the work itself or in its many adaptations. The act of reading and interpreting, then follow the author in their writing. Their interpretation shapes the choices they make both in terms of what to include and exclude from the source text, but also in how they frame those aspects and what they chose to add to it. Like with the act of writing historical fiction, they take the fragments of queerness within the work, like for instance the flamboyant pirate, and the boy who never wants to go through puberty, and ask themselves not what did happen, but what could have happened. What is the trans capacity of this story? Looking into who they could be if understood through a queer lens. If we again examine the idea of a boy who does not wish to grow up and consider the complicated relationship a number of trans people have with puberty it becomes apparent how this allows for a queer reading of the character. Chant addresses Peter's statements and relationship with puberty and growing up at several points, but does so most poignantly nearing the end were Peter tell us the following: " I always thought the only way to grow up was to be… her. I don't know what to do as me" (*Peter Darling* 202).

If we further expand upon a queer and trans reading of Peter Pan, one venue to explore is that of what is conventionally considered to be adulthood. Many might consider parenthood and financial independence to be a large part of it as well as the willingness to compromise and maybe even conform to certain standards. Chant raises an interesting point regarding this in his blogpost "you can't catch me and make me a man: Peter Pan as a trans metaphor". He asks himself what becomes of the people who are systematically denied the chance of becoming the kinds of adults they would wish to be because they due to factors such as

gender, race, sexuality and disability cannot, or will not conform to normative ideas of adulthood.

While also addressing dismissals of other experiences of adulthood that might focus more on gaining an understanding of yourself and seeking out a community that will validate your true self. He eventually concludes that:"(…) many of us are denied the opportunity to grow up into our happy, full-fledged queer selves and are instead given a choice between conformity and tragedy" (Chant "you can't catch me" n.pag.). *An Anglo-American Alliance* chooses the mode of conformity, albeit in a non-traditional manner, to create a space for queer lives, whilst countless other queer and trans narratives use the mode of tragedy to lament the lack of space. *Peter Darling* and its author does not accept these as sufficient options to understanding the lived trans experience. Chant likens the act of identifying with Peter Pan as also being an act of rejecting "the lure of a respectable, but inauthentic adulthood" ("you can't catch me" n.pag.).

Another avenue in which the lines between reading and writing are blurred is in the act of writing of queer historical fiction. If we again return to the problem Heather Love highlights as a damaged historical archive one might see how historical fiction might serve as another way to explore a queer past both in terms of writing and reading. In that sense, it might be seen as either an alternative to the archival work needed to find and examine novels like *An Anglo-American Alliance* or it could be seen as another entry point to imagining a trans past through literature. If we, for instance, look to gay and lesbian historical fiction as an example of a genre that seeks to contribute to a queer literary archive we find works that, according to Norman W. Jones, "peer through the obscuring shadows of a largely heterosexist history, finds evidence of homosexuality, and tells the story—artistically filling the gaps that evidence cannot supply" (2). In that sense, the writing of queer historical fiction becomes an act that is as much one of reading a queer past as it is an act of writing about it.

While the *Peter Darling* is mainly set in the fantasy world of Neverland, we are also shown glimpses of the real world in the conversations had between the characters, Peter's flashbacks, and at the end of the novel when James and Peter leave Neverland forever in order to live together in the real world. The setting in terms of its time-period is ambiguous, but it can be read as being set sometime in the first half of the 20th century. There are several reasons for this: the first relating to James' lover Samuel. James tells us that he lost his previous partner when he was sent away to 'the war' and never came back (Chant *Peter Darling* 160). Him here speaking about 'the war' here makes me think it is likely he is speaking about one of the world wars. It may, of course, refer to another war, but considering both the fact that Peter remarks on the cars in London and that contemporarily the phrase "the war" is mostly used to refer to the two world wars in an Anglo-American context so it would make sense for this to be the authors intention in terms of setting. There is also the fact that Peter remarks that as a child his nightgown was "only a little lacier than the ones his brothers wore" which could suggest that the war he refers to here is more likely to be the first world war rather than the second as the popularity of nightshirts for men and boys declined considerably in the interwar period (Chant *Peter Darling* 43). As a piece that therefore has some aspects of historical fiction, it could serve as a way to explore a queer past through the eyes of a contemporary author harking back to the relationship between fiction and history that was discussed in the previous chapter. Especially considering Aristotle's notion that history tells us what has happened and that fiction, or in his case, poetry tells of "things that can happen". As well as Lepore's reflections around the historian as a storyteller. If we suppose that history and fiction exist on a spectrum, *An Anglo-American Alliance* would as a piece fiction that informs us on the time it was written in be further toward history than *Peter Darling's* imagined past.

Jones highlights one of the main issues when recounting minority histories in the genre of historical fiction as being that, due to the sometimes-scant historical evidence, they could be criticised as being "too much fiction, not enough history" (2). However, Jones also argues that historical fictions can help shed light on gay and lesbian histories rather than serve to obscure the past and might serve as a tool in the debates that question their very existence (3). He here concerns himself with the perspective of gay and lesbian history, but nevertheless historical fiction could serve this function for a large number of queer identities, including that of trans individuals. In fact, the act of writing and reading historical fiction, no matter the content, is a gateway into interacting with the past. Jeremy De Groot emphasises in his book *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions*, that while historical fiction might not present us with history, works of historical fictions does present us with "modes of knowing the past" (De Groot 3).[8]

De Groot notes two important aspects of the relationship between fiction and history in historical fiction. The first is that historical fiction can contribute to a person's historical imagination and the second is how historical fiction can enable reflection on "how the past is constructed as history" which can again provide an accessible and engaging way to "critique, conceptualise and reject the process of historical representation" (De Groot i). In other words, historical fiction can give us another way to examine the past that does not only concern itself with the historical content of the texts in question but also in how it might affect the historiographical understanding of its readers. Therefore, this might also be a way to engage with an 'empty' or unsatisfactory archive for minority groups as it provides a challenge to the idea of a past that is entirely male, straight, cis and white.

[8] De Groot in fact goes so far as to suggest that using terms like 'historical' and 'history' to describe fiction at all might be problematic as they are "texts that suggest an experience of a 'past' that cannot and does not exist, insofar as it is fictional and the past is irretrievable" (3).

According to Jones one of the most prevalent narrative tropes used in gay and lesbian historical fiction to both articulate and explore the erasure of queer identities is what Tzvetan Todorov refers to as the "fantastic" (34). The fantastic by this definition is an event, that takes place in the real world, that cannot be explained by the know rules of reality that is not explained away by way of natural phenomena so that reality turns out to be organised according to "laws unknown to us" (Todorov 25). This description does not hold true in the case of *Peter Darling,* however, as the setting for the fantastical happenings is not the real world, but another entirely. In that case, it fits better into the related genre of fantasy which is separated from the fantastic by the inclusion of a fantasy world whose rules, by definition, differs from ours. The centre of the fantastic is that it resists explanation in a way that fantasy does not (Jones 34). This distinction between the fantastic and fantasy is not crucial in terms of discussing *Peter Darling* as a work of fiction, but it is nevertheless important to point out that while it does have the inclusion of fantastical elements in common with other queer historical works it handles it differently. In Chant's book, as mentioned above, the magic, with the exception of how the characters come to enter Neverland, is confined to exist outside of the real world. Here we again see speculative fiction splaying a role in the foundation of this trans narrative, albeit in a less all composing manner as the fusion of the historical and fantastical setting serves to ground this as a narrative to a larger extent than the utopian setting of *An Anglo-American Alliance.*

The writing and reading of transformative works like this one are for some a way to explore ideas that they feel are lacking in respective works' canon, as well as a way to explore and understand their own identity.[9] As one of the people interviewed by Koehm put it: "in exploring characters as trans or gender-nonconforming long before I found my own gender, I

[9] Canonical here being meant not in the sense of "literary canon". Canon, in the context of fandom and fanfiction refers to sources considered authoritative by the fan community, often the work the fandom surrounds itself.

was able to express a feeling I didn't know how to put into words for myself" (25). In other words, for some queer individuals, the act of writing or reading queer fanfiction is a way to create their representation, whether it is present in the original works or not. It can be, as the writing of queer historical fiction, or applying the notion of 'trans capacity' to an older textual archive a way to create a space for trans existence in literature and fiction. If we, for instance, look to Henry Jenkins' work on the relationship between fans and their chosen work or fiction he echoes this sentiment as fans become "active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" through a hermeneutical process of asserting mastery over mass-produced texts as their raw materials (Jenkins 30). One way to do this is through the medium of the transfic—A transfic being a type of fanfiction that uses already existing narratives and characters to create in their reimaginings a variety of trans representations (Rose 25). The term is used both when describing works that already concern themselves with transness and those who do not. In the case of the latter, like *Peter Darling*, they might be considered as a type of narrative intervention into the media they reimagine or adapt. Rose considers the transfic to be a genre in which one can, by centring on the trans experience in a way that promotes making transness relatable and real rather than exotic and sensational, stand apart from more normative representations of transness (33).

One aspect that both the transfic in general and *Peter Darling*, in particular, has that stands in stark contrast to *An Anglo American-Alliance* is whom it is written for. Casparian's novel could be said to be very cautious in creating a space for the trans experience that would not be too outrageous for its readers to accept. In contrast, both the transfic in general, and *Peter Darling*, in particular, are not only narratives that create this space by telling narratives about trans people, but that also tells these narratives that centre on the trans experience without having the motivation of making it palatable for cis people (Rose 33). This, of course, does not mean that it strives not to be, but rather that the focus is on Peter's experience of his

gender and how that relates to his experiences with his body rather than having to affirm us that he is indeed a "splendid specimen of manhood" as was done in Casparian's work. His body is not a vehicle for societal acceptance, nor is it a vehicle for heteronormativity. Peter's relationship with James is not made any more or less gay as a result of the state of his body. This makes an interesting contrast to how *An Anglo-American Alliance* uses its character's transition to enforce heterosexuality, but even more interestingly how it contrasts with William Beckford's *Vathek.*[10] Wherein the characters are in a very similar homoerotic relationship which is excused by the fact that one of the characters has a body that conventionally might be considered female.

In addition to this, we are also shown the complexity of his relationship with his body. The complicated nature of this relationship can first be seen in an early scene where he examines himself were we are told that he likes it, but also that after he describes it, we are also told that he was filled with a "nagging, uncomfortable awareness that this had not always been true" (Chant *Peter Darling* 29). This duality of enjoying the body granted to him in Neverland and the awareness of how while he might like it, it also does belong to him is also reflected on how he considers his voice in the same scene: "Had it always been so low? He liked it, the deep resonance in his chest, but at the same time, it was unsettling. Different. New" (Chant *Peter Darling* 29). This scene is the first indication the reader gets concerning Peter's gender identity, which is not discussed explicitly until later in the novel.

The relationship is further explored in a flashback to Peter before the start of the novel. In this scene, we meet Peter as he prepares to return to Neverland. He almost changes his mind, but the fear of being put in an asylum for dressing in his father's clothes and cutting his hair strengthens his decision to leave. We later learn that his father threatened to do this the

[10] See Chapter 1 for further description of this novel.

first time he returned from Neverland claiming to be Peter, to be their son and brother. A threat that ultimately sends him back into hiding. This fear might relate to what he experiences after reliving his moment of escape. He again feels that "his skin didn't belong to him (…) That he was playing a character, while the real frightened Peter was buried inside him" (Chant *Peter Darling* 47). In other words, while we are shown that he is secure in his identity, first as a boy and then as a man and that he enjoys how his new body looks, he is still very much aware of his experience as a trans man. That his body did not always look like this, but also that he has internalised the idea that he must look like a man in order to be seen and treated as one. In that sense, the cis male body he inhabits becomes a kind of armour against the threat of those who at best do not recognise his identity and at worst want him to be institutionalised and locked away from the world.

His disconnection from his body once more becomes apparent the first time he has sex with James. At first, he experiences a strong connection with his body he goes as far as to state that he had "never had inhabited his skin so fully" as a result of the deep connection he feels to James at this moment (Chant *Peter Darling* 157). However, as he becomes aware of his surroundings once more, his experience of disconnecting from his body returns; it is only settled when he again experiences the emotional validation through their shared intimacy through the use of his name. This connection and recognition of him and his chosen name, not his body, here make "him feel settled, fully himself" completely for the first time (Chant *Peter Darling* 158).

After returning to the real world once more, Peter confronts not only these feelings but also considers the cause of them as he once more examines his body. This time the body he was born in.

> He had given this body up. He had thought it belonged to Wendy, to the girl he wasn't. He had let his family make him believe that the only way he would ever be a boy was

> to be born again in a different shape, leaving everything of his body and history behind. He breathed out and settled in the feeling of being himself, of being something whole (Chant *Peter Darling* 200).

The recurring theme of the novel in terms of Peter's gender identity is his active identification as a boy, and later a man is more central to his experience than obtaining a body that is read as a man, by the rest of society. His insistence on his gender can, for instance, be seen by examining the conversation he has with his brothers as he returns from Neverland the first time. In this conversation, he insists that his name is "not Wendy anymore, it's Peter" and that he has realised that he is in fact their brother, not their sister (Chant *Peter Darling* 176). He expands upon this point by saying: "I didn't know I could be until I went away to Neverland—and then I just was a boy and I knew I must have been all along (Chant *Peter Darling* 176). It is not the act of transformation, but rather the act of realisation that leads him to eventual manhood. This stands as a stark contrast to Spencer's 'birth at the time of transition' storyline. Peter has, and always will be himself independent of the state of his body so therefore there is no body for him to leave behind. There is only the act of reframing it to be in congruence with his identity as a man.

In Chant's novel, Neverland serves as a safe space for queer people where they can be free, but they are stuck and cannot grow up or establish themselves within a real community. We see this in all the three characters who have come from the real world. The most prominent of these being the titular character who runs away from home twice to be able to express his gender identity as he puts it "No one would let me do what I wanted or be who I wanted before … "In Neverland, they can't stop me" (Chant *Peter Darling* 30). Not only does Neverland grant him a body that he is more comfortable with, but it also, more importantly, gives him playmates and rivals that affirm his identity and join him in doing what he experiences as gender-affirming and masculine activities such as fighting pirates and living in

the wilderness. In addition to Peter's experience, we also see Ernest and James express similar sensibilities as men who love men. Ernest expresses this very early on in the novel where he tells us about his experience of feeling different and that he ran away because his family thought something was wrong with him and he was afraid of what they might do. After relating this, he expresses how liberating he finds Neverland to be as "In Neverland, nobody cares about that … You can be free" (Chant *Peter Darling* 30). James' statement regarding this does not have to do with freedom, but rather with the perceived safety of having relations with other men. He states the following about his lover Samuel; "He was a dream. Someone to warm my bed where it was safe to imagine such things." (Chant *Peter Darling* 98). The Samuel he speaks about here has been created by James in the image of the one real lover he had in the real world. "I loved him. I'd only ever dreamed of men before, but he was real. I knew I'd never have to come back here [to Neverland] so long as I was with him" (Chant *Peter Darling* 160). In this last quote, we see how this safe space is not necessarily a permanent solution to the issue of queer isolation that these characters experience. The freedom to exist as yourself without fearing harm is not enough for these characters in the long run as while Neverland does provide them with that they are still for the most part alone surrounded mostly by people from their imagination and left without the support and recognition from other people. It can also be seen in how at the end of the novel, all three of them come to the decision that they have to leave Neverland to continue living. We are not given extensive insight into Ernest's reasons for leaving, but for both Peter and James their developing relationship and intimate recognition of each other seem to serve as a tipping point for their respective decision to leave.

Peter Darling's ending is, in a sense a challenge both to the general ideas of what is responsible adulthood and to the ending of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan.* None of the characters returns to the real world with an intention to conform into respectable adulthood; they return

intending to find a way to carve out a life for themselves that they find liveable. While Ernest's fate is left somewhat ambiguous, we are shown that Peter and James aim to make a future together on their own terms. Where Peter is free to live as himself, and they both can love whom they choose, at least in the privacy of their own home. It also, despite its speculative leanings, create a space wherein trans people exist not only as a part of our recognisable world but also in a historical setting.

In terms of gender, *Peter Darling* presents a very different picture than *An Anglo-American Alliance.* Not only in the sense that it very much centres around Peter's identification as a man and treating that as more or less the sole determiner of his gender, but also in how it explores different facets of the character's masculinity. The exploration of gender in this novel relates mostly to its portrayal of men, as the only female character that is important to the story is Peter's fairy Tinkerbell. This lack of female characters is in itself interesting in the context of understanding the homosocial world that both James and Peter have sought to create for themselves. As a consequence, it showcases a spectrum of behaviours within its male characters that showcase different ways to be a man. The most interesting characters to examine in this context are the ones originating from the real world: Peter, James, and Ernest. If we first look to the contrast of Peter and Ernest, we see one man who is very much enamoured with romanticising conflict and violence, perhaps as a way to try to affirm his own masculinity or to reclaim a lost childhood, and another who is concerned with avoiding conflict and creating peace. Ernest, in a sense, functions as a moderating force that through their interactions, challenges Peter's preconceived notion of the connection between aggressiveness and masculinity.

Peter's relationship with James then is a stark contrast to his relationship with Ernest as it shaped by the preoccupation that they both have the rivalry and violence between them. At the very start of the novel, James' notes his displeasure of the fact that Neverland had

become “no more threatening than an unkempt lawn” in Peter’s absence (Chant *Peter Darling* 9). If we look at their relationship in the context of other gay historical fiction, Jones, for instance, notes that the novel *An Arrow’s flight* by Mark Merlis served to illustrate that gay history could very well remain coextensive with “the Western tradition of masculinity that not only equates sex with war but also prizes war more highly than sex—and in this tradition is defined as an affair between men” (133). While not entirely descriptive of the relationship between Peter and James, as Jones links this back to its Mediterranean setting, it the relationship between, sex and war or conflict is very much present. For most of the novel, the violence and competition between them serve largely as an exciting and sometimes even erotic factor in their relationship. As can be seen in the subsequent interaction between the two:

> “I had to”, he [Peter] said finally. “If you’d died there, I wouldn’t have been the one to defeat you.”
>
> Hook gave a low chuckle. “Your obsession is flattering, Pan. And I share it.”
>
> “Obsession?”
>
> “Is that not what they call it”, Hook said. “when two men can think of nothing but each other?” (Chant *Peter Darling* 151).

This aspect of their relationship is also brought up as part of the narrative and through that made more nuanced. The violence between them is not motivated by a want to damage or hurt the other, but instead as one of the ways they fixate on each other. It is not ultimately rooted in animosity, but in trust and the expression of vivid emotions whether they be positive or negative

> You liked it when Hook was trying to hurt you, Ernest had said. That wasn’t quite right, because he had liked it when Hook wasn’t trying to hurt him too. (…) It was the

> way he had given Peter his full attention, the full force of his attention, the full force of his ruthlessness, without ever worrying if Peter could handle it. (…) Hook had matched him, and had never tried to protect Peter, had always done his worst. That was what felt so good" (Chant *Peter Darling* 141).

It is ultimately the intensity and trust in the other's capabilities that seem to drive their attraction to each other into this vein of conflict and at times, playful rivalry.

An aspect to consider in the characterization of James' masculinity and homosexuality is the cultural conception of the pirate and their sexuality as this mirrors his simultaneously flamboyant and more traditionally masculine traits. James is portrayed as a person who is rather flamboyant as can be seen in his obsession with fine clothing. His appreciation of beautiful attire can, for instance, be seen in how he imagines the greatest treasure to be not gold or diamonds, but instead "a coat made of spider silk that took a million spiders to spin, and a pair of merskin boots made from the freely given scales of a mer queen. A wardrobe fit for a god" (Chant *Peter Darling* 125). This fixation on clothes mirrors the fascination some of the chroniclers of historical pirates had with their dress. It might, in addition, give him an area to explore and express his interest in flamboyant fashion without having to engage with the feminine stereotypes attributed to gay men in the early 20th century. This is possible due to the duality traditionally found in the deceptions of pirates—where violence and masculinity is combined with transgression and flamboyance.

Henry Turney uses an example concerning a Captain Roberts from Captain Charles Johnson's A *General History of the Pyrates*, first published in 1724, to illustrate the way these two aspects are intertwined in the narrative portrayals of pirates. There we are told that even during battle Captain Roberts would be dressed in a "glamorously dazzling way" and that he "revels in the explicit dichotomy between his behaviour and his distinctive costume" (Turney 90). This dichotomy is also present in Chant's were James is described as "such a

dastardly villain that he could stand to do everything in twice as many ruffles as the next man." (Chant *Peter Darling* 54).[11] Both in general discourse and in Johnson's depiction of them, pirates are thought to be antiheroes who buck tradition and live by their own rules; rules that "challenge conventional depictions of masculinity and masculine desire" (Turney 90). The duality of violence and flamboyancy is not only relevant in the context of Chant's characterisation of him, but also in the context of James' journey of self-identification as a gay man in the early 20th century. He creates this space for himself where he could live out his fantasies of adventure and homosexuality in a manner that combines both elements that are considered traditionally masculine, but also flamboyant. He bases his entire imaginary community, both when he first comes to Neverland as a child and when he returns later as an adult, on his idea of how pirates might be. He might be a flamboyant dresser, but at his core, he is also someone who thrives in a masculine homosocial environment that is in accordance with his want for adventure and conflict.

While examining the literary and cultural depictions of pirates in eighteenth-century literature, Hans Turley highlights how the portrayal of them as both a political and economic transgressor, as well as a sexual one, has shaped our conceptualisation of the pirate since.[12] The pirate, according to Turley, can serve as an alternative to the noncriminal "hero", he is also seen as opposed to the heroine and "the feminized, effeminate, sodomitical subject" serving as transgressive both in terms of their relationship to society's general expectations, but also their ideas regarding gay men (41). The piratical subject, unlike the sodomitical subject, [or the heroic subject] will not stay in a fixed position, either as an economic [and sexual] transgressor or as a romanticized hero (81). In other words, giving himself the role of

[11] This duality of queerness and transgression is also seen in the queer coding of villains in cinema, including in the Disney adaptation of Hook's character in Peter Pan.

[12] He here considered not only literary example like for instance William Defoe's Captain Singleton but also sensationalised "histories" such as Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates*

a pirate in his journeys in Neverland gives James a greater room for agency and flexibility than either of the two categories he might be seen as inhabiting in the real world.

Further, he finds it curious that in the context of a cultural history of masculine desire that the homoerotic implications of pirates' hypermasculine homosocial world are left out of popular and serious history, literature and culture (2). While at the same time "the literary and historical representations of the pirate are rife with homoerotic imagery, and that imagery infects our conceptions of the pirate" (Turley 8). Which would not only serve as an influence on Chant as an Author and the book's readers but could also play a part in determining how James chooses to have Neverland play out his fantasies being able to live a fulfilling and safe life without hiding his desire for men. It could, in that sense, serve as safe space not only form bigotry but also from heterosexist stereotypes. It should also not be ignored here that Peter also creates a homosocial world for himself in Neverland—perhaps as a way to explore both his gender identity and sexuality—or—as a way to avoid reminders of how he is seen and treated in the real world. In his book, Turney gives special attention to the pirate as a "radical hypermasculine transgressor who in fact glories in all his transgressions" which also could serve as part of James' constructed identity as a pirate captain in the sense that—not only is he now safe in exploring his love for men—he is also in a position to do this proudly without shame (42). In a sense, mush of *Peter Darling* revolves around its characters reaching a point where they no longer feel shame and therefore no longer need the world of Neverland as a safe space to express themselves. It is about three queer individuals showcasing their pride and dignity at this distant point in time.

Conclusion

Both of the works considered in this thesis creates a space for trans characters to exist within the context of their novel. *An Anglo-American alliance* uses not only a utopian and futuristic setting to accomplish this but also the orientalist and racially othering trappings of gothic and neo-gothic fiction. It also carefully negotiates with the time period's conceptions of gender and sexuality; Namely, how it considers the body to be a shaper of the mind and decider of metal characteristics and how it also assumes a correlation between gender and sexuality. Peter Darling also dips into the genre of speculative fiction, but in the end, does not assume that a futuristic or utopian world is needed for trans people to be able to exist in it. In fact, Chant chooses instead to place his characters in an early 20th-century setting, claiming the past as a viable area for trans existence and representation as well. It also, unlike *An Anglo-American Alliance* creates a character at the intersection of gender and attraction, a trans man who loves men, while considering this to be two separate facets of the character, and including other queer men that are cis. Spencer is born and created by his metamorphosis but Peter eventually comes to consider himself a man independently of how others might read his body. Peter Darling establishes a space within literature that rejects the idea that we, as trans people have to leave our bodies and histories behind in order to live fulfilling lives.

If we now return to the trans literary archive, these two works are examples of two different ways, among endless ones, we can work to fill it while still viewing them as modes of knowing the past. To engage with *An Anglo-American Alliance* as a mode to interact with history is an act of seeing and recognising its problematic aspects along with the possibility it gives for identification and interpretation. As a contrast, to engage with Peter Darling as a mode to know the past need not be an act of engaging with actual history, it can also be the act of writing yourself into it. Both these modes can be read as containing the affective

element of enabling a connection between trans people living today and those like-minded and like-bodied individuals that might have come before us.

Appendix: On the Pedagogical Relevance of This Thesis

In the new core curriculum, the department of education states that "[a] good society is founded on the ideals of inclusiveness and diversity" and that this is a value that should be implemented at all levels in the Norwegian school system. While it does explicitly address language and culture as areas of diversity, the question of diversity in terms of sexuality and gender is not addressed. Despite this it is, in my mind, still central to consider the development of both queer pupils as well as the attitudes their classmates have toward them. If we look to the work of sj Miller on the topic, we find that in when school environments support the normalization of heterosexist, cisnormative, Eurocentric, and gender normative beliefs—be this consciously or unconsciously— " forces students who fall outside of those dominant identifiers to focus on simple *survival* rather than on *success and fulfilment in* school" (6). Thus, leaving these already vulnerable pupils at a disadvantage to those of their classmates that conform to the norms. This is why I believe it is central to talk about queerness and transness in an intersectional historical context in schools in most, if not all subjects when that is possible to normalise the experiences and existence of queer people.

One of the core values of education and training, as outlined by the department of education, is that the pupils should get sufficient historical and cultural insight to gain a good enough foundation to preserve and develop their own identity in an inclusive and diverse environment. While it is not explicitly stated, this should also be the case for queer pupils. My project is not only relevant in the context of giving queer pupils—be they trans, gender non-conforming, gender creative or those who experience attraction in a queer manner— a gateway to understanding their own identity and the lives of those came before them, it could also serve to broaden both the understanding among non-queer students as well as nuance their understanding of history as something more than heterosexual and cisgender.

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