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Heterotopic Proliferation in E. S. Thomson's Jem Flockhart Series

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Abstract: This article explores the convergence, inversion, and collapse of heterotopic spaces in E. S. Thomson's neo-Victorian Jem Flockhart series about a cross-dressing female apothecary in mid-nineteenth-century London. The eponymous first-person narrator becomes embroiled in the detection of horrific murder cases, with the action traversing a wide range of Michel Foucault's exemplary Other spaces, including hospitals, graveyards, brothels, prisons, asylums, and colonies, with the series substituting the garden for Foucault's ship as the paradigmatic heterotopia. These myriad juxtaposed sites, which facilitate divergence from societal norms while seemingly sequestering forms of alterity and resistance, repeatedly merge into one another in Thomson's novels, destabilising distinct kinds of heterotopias and heterotopic functions. Jem's doubled queerness as a cross-dressing lesbian beloved by their Watsonian side-kick, the junior architect William Quartermain, complicates the protagonist's role in helping readers negotiate the re-imagined Victorian metropolis and its unequal power structures. Simultaneously defending/reaffirming and contesting/subverting the status quo, Jem's body itself becomes a microcosmic heterotopia, problematising the elision of agency in Foucault's conceptualisation of the term. The proliferation of heterotopias in Thomson's series suggests that neo-Victorian fiction reconfigures the nineteenth century into a vast network of confining, contested, and liberating Other spaces.

Keywords: agency; garden; gender; heterotopia; Jem Flockhart series; Michel Foucault; Otherness; E. S. Thomson



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1. Introduction: E. S. Thomson's Heterotopic Jem Flockhart Series

Beloved Poison (2016), the first instalment in E. S. Thomson's Jem Flockhart series, consisting of five novels as of 2021, introduces readers to Jem, a disfigured, cross-dressing, sleuthing apothecary in mid-Victorian London, born biologically female but raised as male to fill the role of their¹ twin brother, who died at birth along with the siblings' mother. Thomson's as yet critically neglected series² embroils the protagonist-narrator and their friend and partner in detection, the aspiring architect William ('Will') Quartermain, in a series of brutal murders. In their pursuit of the perpetrators across the urban landscape, Jem and Will negotiate myriad heterotopic spaces, visited in person or else vicariously via third-party testimonies and confessions in epistolary, diaristic, and juridical modes. These spaces encompass hospitals, prisons, asylums, brothels and prostitutes' rooms, gardens, ships, anatomy schools and museums, exhibitions, graveyards, slums, and even colonies. This article begins to fill the current gap in neo-Victorian criticism on Thomson's work, by considering the latter's potential contribution to better understanding neo-Victorian literature's strategic uses of heterotopic spatiality.

Thomson's novels, I argue, destabilise Michel Foucault's "counter-sites" (Foucault 1986, p. 24) or "counter-emplacements" (Foucault 2008, p. 17), first theorised in his 1966 radio talk 'Les hétérotopies' for Radio France (German translation 2013) and reworked in 1967 as a talk presented to the architects group *Cercle d'études architecturales*, which was subsequently published as 'Des espaces autres' (1984) and 'Of Other Spaces' in English

(1986).³ Foucault conceptualises heterotopias as real, physical and localisable sites within society that contain and sequester designated forms of ‘Otherness’⁴ from mainstream culture, which constitutes its integral self-image by way of juxtaposition to these liminal spaces existing at once inside and outside of the normative community. Daniel Defert thus views heterotopias as intimately connected to Foucault’s concern with “limits” interpreted as “those obscure gestures [...] through which a culture rejects what will be the outside for that culture”, thereby “shap[ing] the figure of its positivity” (Foucault qtd. in (Defert 2007, pp. 55–56)). However, society’s very reliance on heterotopias to maintain its sense of homogeneous identity by way of self-differentiation from Otherness exposes its own denied heterogeneous nature as an always contested space, a quasi-multifractal system of competing, reactionary *and* resistant, normative *and* non-normative voices, positions, and existential states. The subversion of Foucault’s concept in Thomson’s novels proceeds by way of repeated convergences between different kinds of heterotopias, their heterotopic functions and governing principles, with heterotopias depicted as overlapping, ‘nesting’ within, or collapsing into each other. Additionally, Thomson’s series invites readers to revisit the possibility of a bodily heterotopia, briefly touched on in ‘Les h  terotopies’ but disregarded in ‘Of Other Spaces’.

Readings of Thomson’s novels through the lens of heterotopia at times push Foucault’s term to its conceptual limits,⁵ highlighting confusing inconsistencies in what critics have called Foucault’s “notoriously ill-defined”, “inherently contradictory” (Knight 2017, p. 141), and “sketchy, open-ended and ambiguous accounts” of the concept, which imbue it with a frustrating “elusive quality” (Johnson 2013, p. 790). The term’s slippery problematics are foregrounded in particular through Thomson’s complication of heterotopic agency and her substitution of the garden for the ship as “the heterotopia *par excellence*” (Foucault 1986, p. 27, original emphasis). Meanwhile, the protean proliferation of heterotopias in Thomson’s series suggests that Other spaces have become the predominant lens for re-imagining the Long Nineteenth Century in the present. Hence, this article further considers the crucial memory work performed by neo-Victorian heterotopias in sustaining today’s cultural imaginary of the period.

2. Otherness and Heterotopic Embodiment

As detection narratives, Thomson’s novels foreground aberration and Otherness through their focus on murderous criminality, but also through the first-person narrator’s non-normativity and male impersonation. In Jem’s own words, they are “a skilled and practiced dissembler”, an “imposter” strategically “deceiving the world about who and what I am” (Thomson 2017, p. 72). Jem’s hidden ‘deviance’ from gender norms and out-of-placeness in their masculine profession, initially based at St Saviour’s Infirmary,⁶ is accentuated by the protagonist’s ambiguous sexual orientation as a cross-dressing lesbian and Quartermain’s queer love object.⁷ Both Jem’s work and desires transgress established gender norms or what Will early on calls “the natural way of things”, with other working women at the hospital restricted to the menial roles of “domestics, cooks, cleaners, washerwomen” and lowly nurses, while doctors’ wives, in the role of “lady almoners”, engage in philanthropic ‘work’ (Thomson 2016, pp. 12–13). The protagonist’s alterity is compounded by what the narrator describes as “[a] port-wine stain that covered my eyes and nose like a highwayman’s mask” (Thomson 2016, p. 7), rendering Jem “hideous” in their own eyes (Thomson 2016, p. 312 and *passim*), implicitly self-identifying as monstrous. Jem’s intersectional ‘aberrations’ align with recent cultural tendencies to refigure monsters as deserving of empathy, suggesting “that monstrosity, at least in terms of behaviour outside of established social boundaries, has been normalized and appropriated for mainstream culture” (de Bruin-Mol   2020, p. 46). Megen de Bruin-Mol   reads such “increased empathy for the monster” as a potential “subversive tool, advocating the broad-scale social acceptance of otherness” (de Bruin-Mol   2020, p. 46) reflective of today’s diversity politics. Jem’s birthmark “makes him an ugly man but would make her a hideous woman” (Leber 2017, p. 30). Yet, it also protects the narrator from scrutiny,

enabling them “to achieve freedoms and liberties beyond the compass of most women’s lives” (Thomson 2018, p. 10). On multiple levels, then, Jem rejects their socially defined, marginal emplacement as an ‘unnatural’ female, breaches social conventions, breaks taboos, and crosses ideological lines, violating Victorian bourgeois morality.

Jem’s gender deviance is underlined by Thomson’s assertion that she “based” her protagonist on the real-life, nineteenth-century, army surgeon James ‘Miranda’ Barry (Picker 2018, p. 119; Earley 2021, 06:42–06:59), likely born Margaret Bulkley around 1789 (Heilmann 2018, p. 27). Having completed a medical degree at Edinburgh University, Barry pursued “a formidable medical career” (Heilmann 2018, p. 30), rising to hold senior military and civil posts in Britain’s colonies and domains. Yet, upon his death, it was reported that Barry’s body was discovered to be biologically female, precipitating a public scandal. Jem’s resemblance to Barry, however, goes beyond the parallel of gender masquerade,⁸ with Ann Heilmann’s description of the real-life doctor applying equally to Thomson’s apothecary: “Barry operated from within [the system], yet in his unswerving defence of the rights of Othered individuals and groups of people remained resistant to the imperial mindset” (Heilmann 2018, p. viii). In Thomson’s novels, that same mindset characterises both the medical establishment’s dismissive treatment of London’s urban poor as a race apart—relegated to heterotopic slums, regarded as “[h]ardly *people*” (Thomson 2018, p. 358, original emphasis), little more than disposable Guinea pigs for the advancement of science—and the authorities’ lack of concern for murder victims from this underclass, attitudes which Jem’s charitable acts and efforts at detection repeatedly contest.

Nonetheless, Jem’s role as investigator and exposé of criminals proves highly equivocal. It positions the protagonist as an ideologically interpellated defender of the status quo, and hence an inadvertent supporter of the same oppressive norms that condemn them to a double life. To borrow from Kevin Hetherington’s interrogation of heterotopia’s seeming valorisation of margins as spaces of resistance, Jem’s paradoxical self-location raises the question “whether resistance is not itself a form of ordering” (Hetherington 1997, p. 27). Heterotopic resistance, Hetherington argues, contributes to the maintenance of the existing social order akin to markets or carnivals that function, almost mechanically, as “controlled moments of disorder” (Hetherington 1997, p. 31), somewhat like safety valves to diffuse societal tensions, “combining, in new ways, aspects of social control and expressions of freedom” (Johnson 2013, p. 792). Jem’s identity is formed as much through their complicity with as resistance to the social control exercised through normative and Other spaces.

Simultaneously, however, the narrator’s existence as ‘Jem’ (and not ‘Jemima’) also situates the protagonist as a liminal disruptive figure that threatens the very social fabric and structures upheld by heterotopias. As Jem remarks upon leaving the Angel Meadow Asylum, “once outside those walls we were in a different world entirely; a world so unlike the one we had just left that it was almost impossible to comprehend the nearness of the two” (Thomson 2017, p. 250). The counter-site, Arun Saldanha explains, functions in part “as a mirror, reflecting mainstream society’s selfness through its otherness”, hence “reproduc[ing] society as a system in dynamic equilibrium” (Saldanha 2008, p. 2084). Foucault’s heterotopias seek to exclude the unwanted Other from the centres of culture as that which society is not (or imagines itself not to be). Through Jem’s effective masquerade as male, however, Thomson’s novels cleverly resituate deviance at the very centre of culture, challenging reader assumptions about the homogeneity or “selfness” of Victorian society. In Saverio Tomaiuolo’s terms, neo-Victorianism thus demonstrates that the stereotypical or “canonical view” of the period’s culture “as characterised by [...] well-defined and stable political, cultural and ideological values” was always shadowed by coexisting “‘deviant’ idiosyncrasies and impulses” (Tomaiuolo 2018, p. 4), like those embodied by Jem. Indeed, Tomaiuolo suggests that via its recovery of marginalised histories and its exploration of alternative “non-normative” perspectives on the nineteenth century, neo-Victorianism itself “comes to be *identified* with the term ‘deviance’” (Tomaiuolo 2018, p. 5, added emphasis). Tomaiuolo’s proposition helps to explain the prevalence of “heterotopias of deviation”

(Foucault 1986, p. 25), like asylums, prisons, and slums, not just in Thomson's series but in neo-Victorian fiction more generally.

Jem's refractory disturbance of the status quo is intensified when their efforts to secure justice for murder victims expose perpetrators of the privileged classes, hence undermining the moral authority of the establishment to represent the norm and order society as it sees fit, specifically by sequestering unruly elements in Other spaces. Akin to the protagonists' detection in Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009), Jem and Will's efforts likewise "reveal the existence of monstrous interconnections between the urban underbelly and the upper-tier world" (Constantini 2015, pp. 179–80), undermining clear demarcations between heterotopic spaces of marginalisation and the normative metropolis. Additionally, Jem allows some killers, especially female ones, to evade public justice because they murder much worse perpetrators in retribution, again eroding the status quo by circumventing due processes of law and order. In Thomson's *The Blood* (2018), for instance, Gethsemane Proudlove, sister to a murdered black doctor, attempts to torture her brother's killer to death via electrocution, used by the latter on former Magdalens as part of galvanic experiments "[t]o re-ignite the vital spark" (Thomson 2018, p. 360). Interrupted by Jem and Will, Gethsemane poisons the murderer with hemlock instead, filched from Jem's own physic garden, and effects her escape without any attempted intervention by the narrator. Similarly, Thomson's *Nightshade* (2021) ends on the revelation of a daughter's vengeful killing of her father's murderer, with no indication of Jem and Will passing this information onto the authorities.

Jem is presented to Thomson's readers with fully formed ideals of equality and gender justice, intimately linked to their knowing navigation of heterotopic spaces that often exclude or exploit women, such as anatomy theatres or brothels respectively. Early on in *Beloved Poison*, Jem thus pillories Will's notion of a 'natural' order by anachronistically echoing Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1936). The protagonist asserts that if women were only taught to think by being granted access to proper education, had their opinions listened to "so that they might gain confidence", and were treated "as you treat a man", they could "succeed at anything" (Thomson 2016, p. 12), as Jem has already proven by their professional achievements. Jem illustrates neo-Victorian narratives' tendency to feature a "solitary extraordinary woman" rather than one embodying the nineteenth-century feminine norm (MacDonald and Goggin 2013, p. 7). However, the protagonist contradicts Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin's claim that "much neo-Victorian fiction narrates the female protagonist's awakening to feminist consciousness and her own self-worth" (MacDonald and Goggin 2013, p. 6), since Jem presents as a fully awakened feminist from the start of the series. Thomson's novels also diverge from the neo-Victorian trend to focus on female singularity at the expense of depictions "of feminist collectives and communities" (MacDonald and Goggin 2013, p. 7) or examples of 'sisterhood'. Indeed, Jem several times becomes a revolutionary empowering role model for other women, including Gethsemane, who follows Jem's example by assuming her murdered brother's persona and building a new life for herself as a 'male' doctor in New York.⁹ In *The Blood* and later novels, Jem, now in private practice, also gives a home to a slum child, Jenny, whom they take on as their apprentice and encourage to aspire to sit the apothecary examinations to become London's first openly female apothecary, announcing, "It's about time they saw what women can do" (Thomson 2018, p. 252).¹⁰

While supporting society's normative structures, several of the novels' heterotopias thus also attempt alternative re-orderings of those same structures, becoming enabling spaces for contestation and initiating potential reforms of institutions and systemic forms of discrimination. Saldanha aptly describes heterotopias as "unconsciously propel[ling] society forward" (Saldanha 2008, p. 2083), affording a glimpse of an altered or reformed futurity. Like heterotopias, Jem too works "in the interstices of what is currently possible" (Saldanha 2008, p. 2093). Thomson's series thus also supports Hetherington's reading of heterotopias as sites "of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, [...] even if they never actually achieve what they set out to

achieve" (Hetherington 1997, p. ix), such as the social justice and more equitable society with equal opportunities and protections for all—more in line with present-day liberal values—which Jem's actions promote.

Jem both mimics and exposes Victorian culture's fractured, dualistic, and morally hypocritical reality. Like heterotopias, Jem stands in relation to their society "in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault 1986, p. 24). As Saldanha explains, Foucault's counter-sites enact "an ambivalent, though mostly oppositional, relation to a society's mainstream", since, although physically "locatable", they "exist 'outside' society insofar as they work differently from the way that society is used to" (Saldanha 2008, p. 2081). The cross-dressing Jem too "work[s] differently" from the mainstream even while functioning within the same, at once inside and outside, rendered placeless through their non-normative embodiment. Pertinently, Robert White, Anthony Faramelli and David Hancock remark that "[t]he consideration of heterotopias is [...] wider than simply political", since "they can be aesthetic and *bodily* as well" (White et al. [2018] 2020, p. 8, added emphasis).

Indeed, bodies too can be read as Other spaces, simultaneously taking up physical space in the world and constituting separate, alternate spaces therein (the biological interiorities of organs, sinews, blood, hormones, etc.), which cannot be readily accessed (except by surgeons/anatomists), remaining mysterious even to their owners/occupiers. Like the mirror and its reflections (see Foucault 1986, p. 24), the externally presented and perceived body (in Jem's case, 'male') thus exists in relation to a phantasmatic counterpart or mirror image (Jem's spectralised biological sex), instantiating Othered space. In 'Le corps utopique' ('The Utopian Body'), Foucault describes the physical body in much this sense as a real counter-site, "the exact opposite of a utopia" and a "shadow" self (Foucault [2013] 2019b, p. 25)—"it too possesses placeless places" (Foucault [2013] 2019b, p. 28). Foucault further stresses the body's paradoxical nature as "easily penetrable and opaque [...], open and closed" (Foucault [2013] 2019b, p. 29) in line with his fifth heterotopic principle, noting that "my body is always elsewhere, it is interconnected with all the world's 'elsewheres', it is elsewhere than in the world. [...] The body itself is nowhere" (Foucault [2013] 2019b, p. 34). Along these lines, Jem's embodiment as/of placelessness can be read as representing Foucault's concept itself. Jem's performative body becomes a microcosmic (neo-)Victorian heterotopia, at once reflecting and contesting social and gender norms, functioning ambiguously as both a potential site of coercion (policing self and others) and of queer resistance.

3. Cornucopias of Heterotopias

If, as Peter Johnson notes, "the uses of heterotopia are bewilderingly diverse" (Johnson 2013, p. 791), their proliferation, reiteration, and cumulative uses in Thomson's series prove even more so. At times, it almost seems as if Victorian London exists as a tapestry of interlaced heterotopias with hardly any contrasting, 'normal', non-heterotopic spaces left in the warp and weft of the weave. The sheer array of Gothicised heterotopias reconfigures the nineteenth century into a virtual space of Otherness and deviance in today's cultural imaginary.¹¹

Underscoring the protagonist's liminality, *Beloved Poison* opens on "the threshold" of Jem's heterotopic bedroom (Thomson 2016, p. 1). As an "emplacement of repose" (Foucault 1998, p. 178), the room bears traces of Jem's publicly denied femininity, such as washed rags to stem their monthly bleeding, a "bottle of *Valeriana officinalis* tincture, which is good for menstrual cramps" (Thomson 2016, p. 4), and the feminine touches of decoratively draped Paisley shawls and a flowering hyacinth. Since part of the apothecary belonging to St Saviour's Infirmary, which services the metropolis's indigent sick and diseased, the Other space of the bedroom in effect 'nests' within another heterotopia, for Foucault, of course, cites "psychiatric hospitals" (though curiously not hospitals *per se*), alongside rest homes and prisons, as examples of "heterotopias of deviation [...] in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault 1986,

p. 25). To Foucault's "behavior", we might add any divergent mental or physical condition or impairment, such as Jem's disfigurement and the degenerative disease possibly inherited from their father. At once *part of* and *set apart from* the institution's hegemonic structures, Jem's bedroom manifests as a private heterotopia of deviation, likewise harbouring alterity. Kelvin T. Knight describes heterotopic liminality as being "caught in a negative in-between, neither inside nor outside" (Knight 2017, p. 147) of society and social life. Meanwhile, Defert explicates counter-sites as spaces "in which *I am and am not* as in the mirror and in the cemetery, or in which *I am an Other*, as for instance in the brothel, in the vacation village or at a celebration" (Defert [2013] 2019, p. 76, added emphasis),¹² terms that again aptly encompass Jem's Othered duality. Heterotopias of deviation thus *dislocate* as much as *designate* identity, as when individuals are 'placed' into related categories such as 'lunatics', 'criminals', or 'prostitutes'.

Simultaneously, however, Jem's bedroom functions as an instance of "crisis heterotopias" (Foucault 1986, p. 24), a class of earlier counter-sites Foucault deemed to be progressively "disappearing" from contemporary society, replaced by heterotopias of deviation (Foucault 1986, p. 25). The bedroom exemplifies Jem's existence "in a state of crisis" (Foucault 1986, p. 24)—only in this case "crisis" connotes not a temporary or transitional phase but a permanent condition, the possibility of which Foucault fails to address.¹³ The bedroom continually confronts Jem with their in-betweenness and precarity as a biological female passing for male in patriarchal society, even as the space allows them intermittent respite from societal surveillance. Consequently, Jem experiences Quartermain's intrusion into their bedroom as a threatening invasion: "I felt naked, exposed, the clues to my secret identity shouting from every corner of the room" (Thomson 2016, p. 4). Ordered by Flockhart Senior to share the room with Will during the latter's stay at St Saviour's, Jem fears exposure by the very space that promised to protect their gender 'deviance' from the gaze of outsiders. Thomson's conflation of counter-sites of deviation and crisis thus immediately disrupts Foucault's distinctions between different types of heterotopia.

In their bedroom, Jem subjects themselves to rituals such as breast-binding and managing their menstrual cycle, which reinscribe the protagonist's difference even while occluding the same. Jem's actions evoke Hetherington's description of heterotopias' constitution through "[l]iminal rituals involv[ing] constraint as well as freedom" (Hetherington 1997, p. 33). Readers witness Jem submitting to an alternative coercive 'ordering' of secrecy, engaging in an obligatory repeat performance so as to maintain their male masquerade. Hence, societal control extends both *into* and *out from* the heterotopia, since these concealing actions constitute repeated rites of passage required for Jem to move freely and safely between the heterotopic private 'female' bedroom and the public 'male' realms of pharmacology and medicine.

The heterotopia's role as a 'safe space' in which Jem can be themselves is underlined again towards the end of *Beloved Poison*, when the protagonist is freed from false imprisonment in Newgate for one of the murders they are investigating. Sinking into a hot bath before the bedroom fire to try and wash away the stench of the prison, Jem wonders, "Was this what it felt like in the womb? Warm, safe and confined, the world outside muffled and soporific?" (Thomson 2016, p. 308). Jem's reflections here conflate the bedroom with the maternal body-as-heterotopia, affording sanctuary as much as confinement. Nonetheless, the threat of exposure remains omnipresent, as emphasised by the intrusion of Jem's secret love interest, Eliza Magorian, just as Jem rises out of the water, revealing the protagonist's secret. Although Eliza implicitly promises not to betray her friend's subterfuge—"I know what it is to keep a secret"—the risk of her doing so reverberates through Jem's question, "What will you do?" (Thomson 2016, p. 310). Eliza's response is to kiss Jem, precipitating their first and only sexual consummation. Thomson's series thus suggests that heterotopias, while hospitable to difference, also facilitate spectacles of perceived or declared Otherness. In a sense, heterotopias *concentrate Otherness*, granting non-normative individuals and groups more visibility and opportunity to assert their difference, but also render them vulnerable to enforced disclosure and exploitative display.¹⁴ The second Jem Flockhart

novel, *Dark Thomson* (2017), specifically dramatizes this risk through the trope of enforced photography of criminal ‘deviants’ in a House of Correction and aboard a convict ship. The resulting calotype images—quasi-miniature, mobile heterotopias that can be passed hand to hand, self-enclosed worlds mirroring the panoptic penitentiary setting outside them at the moment they were taken—become crucial clues in the detection of the murderer.

Thomson’s series develops something akin to a Russian doll structure of overlapping, intersecting, and nested heterotopias. Johnson describes counter-sites as “*embedded* in aspects and stages of our lives” (Johnson 2013, p. 790, added emphasis), with all individuals occupying various Other spaces over the course of their existence, while Defert points out that Foucault’s “counter-sites and all the other sites, which they call into question, reciprocally *interpenetrate* each other” (Defert [2013] 2019, p. 76, added emphasis). Yet, Thomson’s series goes further still, suggesting that individuals may occupy numerous heterotopias *simultaneously* rather than just sequentially, since heterotopias may be physically interwoven, palimpsestically superimposed on or embedded within one another. As much is illustrated by St Saviour’s cellars having “once belonged to [a] medieval monastery” and its “underground passage that led from the dissecting rooms to the churchyard” (Thomson 2016, p. 3). This casts a different light on Foucault’s third principle, which asserts that “[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”, citing the theatre stage and cinema screen as examples (Foucault 1986, p. 25). Foucault’s formulation gestures towards but also obfuscates what Thomson’s series renders explicit: not only may multiple disparate spaces coexist within one heterotopia, but seemingly distinct Other spaces may coalesce into one multi-heterotopic space. In effect, St Saviour’s is made up of several heterotopias in one—the “sacred space” (Foucault 1986, p. 25) of the ancient priory with its medieval chapel, the modern hospital, and the “heterochron[ic]” cemetery (Foucault 1986, p. 26) encompassing past and present time through its collective dead amassed over centuries. All three sites merge to configure St Saviour’s as a sort of heterotopic trinity, with all these spaces identified as counter-sites by Foucault or linked to one of his five heterotopic principles.

Further Other spaces nest within the hospital, which incorporates special ‘foul’ wards for those infected with venereal disease (hence implicated in sexual deviance); the bloody dissection rooms (a place of death symbolically linked to the cemetery); a lecture hall cum operating theatre (a heterotopia of crisis, where the outcome between recovery and death hangs in the balance); an anatomy museum (another heterotopia of deviation dedicated to human “deformities of all kinds” (Thomson 2016, p. 25)); the mortuary (formerly the crypt of the priory’s church); and the chapel that now serves as general storehouse and drying room for the apothecary’s herbs. Within the latter, during Will’s introductory tour to St Saviour’s, Will and Jem discover six miniature paper coffins hidden beside the disused altar, holding crudely carved, wrapped, wooden effigies alongside remnants of flowers and herbs. Will and Jem’s efforts to decipher the meaning of these ‘relics’ sets into motion the subsequent murders in *Beloved Poison*. In effect, the hiding place constitutes a secret heterotopia of deviation, eventually revealed as a symbolic graveyard memorialising fetishised murdered infants, who did not survive the experiments that St Saviour’s premier physician, Dr Magorian, performed on their pregnant prostitute mothers in an attempt to discover a cure for his wife’s barrenness.

Will’s official appointment and task, however, are rather different to detection, namely to oversee the emptying out of St Saviour’s burial ground to allow the infirmary’s demolition to make way for a railway bridge,¹⁵ while the hospital moves to a new location. The mobility that Foucault ascribes to magic carpets that “roamed” the world (Foucault [2013] 2019a, p. 15) and the ship as a “floating” heterotopia (Foucault 1986, p. 27), thus also, ironically, attaches to both the cemetery and infirmary. Further counter-sites are introduced via St Saviour’s physic garden, tended by Jem; the Angel Meadow Asylum, where Jem’s father undergoes experimental treatment for a degenerative hereditary disease; Dr Bain’s home, which doubles as a laboratory, where he experiments on himself with poisons, assisted by

Jem, before it becomes a murder site; Mrs Roseplucker's brothel, visited by the narrator to elicit 'intelligence' and dispense free medication to the prostitutes; Newgate Prison, where Jem is confined on suspicion of murder; and the execution yard, where Flockhart Senior dies in his offspring's stead, following his false confession to save Jem's life, before the true culprits are exposed. The incessant proliferation of heterotopic spaces in *Beloved Poison* is striking, propelling the plot forward to its climactic graveyard finale (discussed below).

Later novels in the series follow suit, adding further heterotopias into the mix. Besides the eponymous location of *Dark Asylum* (2017), parts of an interpolated journal confession take place aboard a convict ship, conflating Foucault's mobile "ultimate heterotopia" (Lootsma 2008, n.p.) of maritime transport, embodying freedom and imagination, with that paradigmatic heterotopia of deviation, the prison, which curtails inmates' liberty and prohibits free movement by various constraints.¹⁶ Other scenes feature the Prior's Rents slum, a boxing ring, a brothel and a prostitute's room, the asylum mortuary, a disused photographic studio in a House of Correction, the Lock Hospital, the graveyard, and the physic garden, which comes into Jem's sole ownership after St Saviour's relocation. Meanwhile, the brutal convict colony of Van Diemen's Land (renamed Tasmania in 1856), which features in the interpolated confession, affords a much darker version of the religious colonies that Foucault celebrates as "absolutely perfect other places" (Foucault 1986, p. 27). Although also organised on principles of strict regulation, the heterotopia of a freely chosen community of faith, shared values, and utopian aspirations to build a better world is parodically inverted in the dystopian penal colony, in effect an open-air Victorian penitentiary containing an enforced collective of those deprived of their freedom.

The Blood is set mostly on "[t]he Seaman's Floating Hospital", nicknamed "*Blood and Fleas*" (Thomson 2018, p. 10 and *passim*), which again disrupts Foucault's heterotopic distinctions and principles. Not only has the decommissioned naval vessel been rendered immobile, but its cramped, overflowing, stinking wards, filled with patients stagnating in states of existential extremity, hardly evoke the ideal conditions implied by Foucault's description of the ship as "the heterotopia *par excellence*" and culture's "greatest reserve of the imagination" (Foucault 1986, p. 27, original emphasis). The novel also features more brothels, opium dens, anatomy schools, morgues, the "notorious slum" of the ironically named "Tulip's Basin"—evoking a garden but colloquially known as "Deadman's Basin" (Thomson 2018, p. 7), conjuring up a watery graveyard, the reality of which is confirmed by the discovery of a woman's body therein—and Siren House, a refuge for 'fallen' women run by the League for Female Redemption. The latter presents as another combined crisis-and-deviation heterotopia, with its inhabitants occupying a liminal state between 'fallen' and 'saved' during their re-education in Christian virtues and domestic tasks to prepare them for respectable employment as servants and nurses.

Surgeon's Hall opens with the Crystal Palace of the 1851 Great Exhibition, itself a heterotopic space of "illusion" (Foucault 1986, p. 27), seemingly encompassing all the known world in its myriad displays. Immediately upon entry, Will thus points out the exhibition space's liminality in terms that echo heterotopias' equivocal juxtaposition to society itself: "'You see we are now *inside*, Jem? And yet—'He pointed to one of the huge elm trees, dwarfed by the lofty nave of glass and iron that arched high above it. 'And yet to some degree we are still *outside*'" (Thomson 2019, p. 3, original emphasis). Will's words underline the Crystal Palace's heterotopic generation of the illusion of 'Nature', the building having been "[i]nspired by the design of the great Amazonian lily pads", the "gigantic natural structures" mimicked in the artificial glass and iron structure of the transept that intimates the vaulting heavens (Thomson 2019, p. 3). Among the exhibition's anatomical displays, the friends discover an incongruously placed, recently severed human hand, which leads them to Corvus Hall, another anatomy school and museum¹⁷ (the renamed onetime home of the Magorian family, previously featured in *Beloved Poison*, adjacent to Jem's physic garden). Additionally, the narrative is interspersed with juridical 'precognitions' or witness statements concerning investigations into the brutal murder of a disabled pregnant beggar, Mary Anderson, two decades previously in Edinburgh. Evoking

the later real-life Ripper killing of Mary Jane Kelly, the dead woman's slum bedroom, scene of her bloody murder, also served as a heterotopic space of prostitution and an improvised operating theatre for the (posthumous) removal of the infants from her womb. Again, multiple heterotopias of deviation and crisis coalesce into one.

Nightshade focuses more closely on the neatly laid out physic garden, a heterotopia that functions by way of "compensation", constituting a "real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged" as the urban world beyond its walls "is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault 1986, p. 27). For those who discover it for the first time, the garden appears like a magic place. Upon Jenny's first autumnal visit in *The Blood*, for instance, she "stood on the threshold, staring at the garden with her mouth open and her eyes wide", gazing "in wonder" at a "gleaming" apple that Jem's other apprentice Gabriel picks for her (Thomson 2018, p. 188). The apple, Jem notes, "was a good one" among the fruit left on the trees: "Some of them were afflicted with blight, for the London air did not suit them well, but this one was flawless and rosy and plump" (Thomson 2018, p. 188). The ripe fruit embodies the temptation to forget the daily world beyond the heterotopic confines. At the same time, the counter-site reflects the city's corruption in the other spoiled apples, admitting its own illusoriness and hence prefiguring *Nightshade*, in which the discovery of a murder victim buried in the physic garden collapses the escapist idyll into a space of deviance. Further interjected scenes in *Nightshade*, from Jem's dead mother's diary, take place aboard a ship travelling to India and in the subcontinent's jungle. Still other scenes feature prison cells, various botanical gardens in England and abroad, and a hedonistic Sapphist establishment that provides the counterpoint to the series' many brothels pandering to male desires. Thomson's series as a whole thus transfigures the nineteenth-century world into a veritable cornucopia of threatening and inviting Other spaces.

4. Agency in Heterotopic Spaces

Even while providing sanctuaries for forms of alterity, heterotopias in Thomson's series prove spaces in which agency and, above all, power is not just disabled or resisted but also exercised over self and Others. Franco Rella, co-editor of a 1977 Italian edited collection about possible architectural applications of Foucault's counter-emplacements, thus asserts, "[t]he only history of forms of power is a history of spaces in which power shows itself", both concentrated and diffused in "[t]he nonplace of power" that "lies in the centre of an innumerability of heterotopic localisations" (Rella qtd. in (Defert [2013] 2019, p. 83)), at once everywhere and nowhere. Surprisingly, however, unlike Foucault's later work on madness and on the prison, 'Of Other Spaces' elides issues of agency and power, failing to differentiate between authority/controlling/oppressive figures and subjected/controlled/oppressed individuals who occupy counter-sites alongside one another. Nor does Foucault consider how, within the same heterotopic space, subjectivities are differentially constituted and expressed through spatial relations, power, and knowledge—the very thing that most interests neo-Victorian writers re-visioning intersectional forms of discrimination and historical inequalities. We might think of the anatomy theatre, with the erect expert surgeon towering over the prone patient's body under his knife, or of panoptic prisons and asylums, in which wardens circulate freely, albeit to a prescribed rota, directing the inmates' restricted movements and behaviour via surveillance, locks, keys, and disciplinary punishments. In other words, power and knowledge become the very 'opening' and 'closing' mechanisms that grant or withhold access into and egress out of Other spaces. As Hetherington pertinently points out, modern subjectivity is in part defined by agency and free will, including persons' "capacity to make use of their freedom to control others" (Hetherington 1997, p. 40), a capacity unequally distributed within heterotopic spaces. Similarly, Saldanha critiques Foucault's structuralist overreliance on the fallacious notion of "a totality to 'society'", which hinders his recognition of "differentials of power" and heterotopic dynamism (Saldanha 2008, p. 2081). Heterotopias, then, are always simultaneously empowering *and* disempowering sites, a characteristic that Foucault's

heterotopology leaves unexplored but which neo-Victorian writers like Thomson exploit for maximum effect.

Thomson's heterotopic subjects engage in continuous, spatially articulated interplays of power and powerlessness. Yet, the flow of power is by no means only unidirectional between authority figures, who can enter/leave counter-sites at will, and Others whose movements are curtailed by those authority figures' exercise of power or, as in the case of graveyards, by individuals' irrevocable permanent Othering. Paradoxically, in Thomson's series, heterotopias intended to sequester alterity or contain deviance thus often end up *enabling* criminal violence and aberration. *Beloved Poison*, for instance, concludes with Eliza Magorian killing her adoptive father, abuser, and murderer of her biological mother in the St Saviour's graveyard, where Dr Magorian and his wife secretly disposed of their lower-class murder victims. On a torrential rain-swept night, Eliza climbs to the top of the excavated charnel mound of mud and bones, so as to escape her victimiser, and dislodges the human remains, which collapse on the perpetrators below. As the half-buried Dr Magorian desperately searches for his wife, Eliza "force[s] his face into the mud" while "he bucked again, and then again . . . and then was still" (Thomson 2016, p. 378, original ellipses) in a grotesque parody of the quasi-incestuous, paedophilic sex-acts to which the doctor subjected her since childhood. Fittingly, Mariaconcetta Constantini reads neo-Victorian heterotopic depictions of "reeking burial grounds" as staging a violent return of the repressed that "dispell[s]" normative society's "dreams of order and progress" (Constantini 2015, p. 189), here including the dream of upward social mobility instantiated in Eliza. Although the cemetery, like the slum, belongs to the "areas of marginalisation" specifically "created" by Victorian society "to conceal the traumas produced by capitalistic and colonial exploitation" (Constantini 2015, p. 198), it finally transforms into a site of retributive empowerment for those deemed powerless.

Similarly, in *Dark Asylum*, the sadistic, phrenology-obsessed Dr Rutherford is dispatched with a pair of his own callipers used to measure deviants' skulls for the victim's collection of "prize specimen[s]", denied "peace and obscurity" by being put on permanent Othered display (Thomson 2017, p. 91). The instrument is found thrust through the side of the doctor's head in an act of vengeance for Rutherford's pointless experimental lobotomy on Dr Christie's sister, confined in the asylum. Meanwhile, the culprit responsible for another doctor's murder turns out to be Pole, a lowly asylum attendant, able to move freely and unobtrusively throughout the institution and use his quasi-invisibility as a menial subject to protect a female ex-convict and former friend, once viciously abused by Rutherford and now married to the unknowing asylum's medical superintendent. Criminal alterity asserts itself not *in spite of* but *because of* heterotopic segregation, in part because the doctors' assumption of their unassailable superior knowledge and agency obscures their vulnerability to power's *multidirectional* spatial flows within these counter-sites.

Violent acts, such as those by Eliza Magorian, Pole, or Gethsemene Proudlove, are revealed as conditioned self-defensive responses to, and extrajudicial retribution for, individuals' subjection to extremes of socially sanctioned gender, sexual, class, and racial exploitation and abuse. Crucially, these intersectional forms of discrimination are mediated, embedded, enabled, and 'legitimated' through Victorian London's heterotopic spaces, perhaps most prominently by the brothel, which reduces women's bodies to exchangeable commodities, and by the morgues and dissecting rooms, where the bodies of the city's poor are fought over by rival doctors to supply their profitable anatomy classes. In other words, central to diegetic (as well as extradiegetic) heterotopias is the control, use, 'flow' and disposal of human bodies. As a result, criminal acts in Thomson's novels are not simply aberrant or Other but instead reproduce normative nineteenth-century society's dominant logic of ruthless capitalism and dehumanising commodification, which allows the exploited few forms of redress.

Heterotopias of deviation thus reflect back society's worst excesses as well as its utopian reformist aspirations. Accordingly, *Beloved Poison* and its sequels situate Other spaces as crucial building blocks of societal organisation, or as Foucault puts it, heterotopias

“are designed into the very institution of society” (Foucault 1998, p. 178). Ironically, murderous agency and the counter-sites in which it is enacted take on heterotopic connotations of illusion (of victims’ empowerment, justice achieved, order restored) and compensation (creating a counterbalance to iniquitous social conditions and inadequate legal protections). Instead of binary opposites, normative and Othered spaces form part of the same “network that [...] intersects with its own skein” (Foucault 1986, p. 22).

This intersection is exemplified by the case of Eliza, adopted as a newly born infant by the Magorians after her prostitute mother’s murder and raised as their daughter. Yet, as Eliza confesses to Jem after their sexual encounter, her abusive ‘father’ claims she was “sent to tempt him, to test his lust and sinfulness” and makes repeated efforts to “beat the whore’s gleam out of [her] eyes” (Thomson 2016, p. 313). Hence, even within the middle-class family home, Eliza remains inextricably bound up in the heterotopic network that also encompasses the brothel. As Eliza tells her adoptive mother, who conspired in the prostitutes’ killings, “Perhaps I’m not so far from the gutter as you think, for it is he who’s dragged me into it; he who’s made a whore of me” (Thomson 2016, p. 371). The exploitative logic of prostitution infiltrates and ‘skews’ the middle-class family home, celebrated by the Victorians as a sacred space, the absolute inverse of the sex trade’s commodified relations. The domestic sphere of ‘the Angel in the House’ collapses with the heterotopic Other space of the brothel where ‘fallen’ women ply their trade, revealing the two to be inextricably interdependent and conjoined.¹⁸

5. The Garden Heterotopia

Through most of Thomson’s novels, the physic garden, located “half a mile” from St Saviour’s (Thomson 2016, p. 163), remains a constant, usurping the exemplary heterotopic role which Foucault attributes to the ship.¹⁹ Carefully ordered, meticulously planned and cultivated, the garden constitutes a beautiful tranquil sanctuary from the chaotic, frenetic, debased city, simultaneously fulfilling heterotopia’s functions of compensation and illusion. Akin to Foucault’s description of early religious colonies founded by the Puritans in North America or the Jesuits in South America, the physic garden is “marvellous”, “absolutely regulated”, a glimpse of “perfection [...] effectively achieved” (Foucault 1986, p. 27) in an otherwise fallen world, both *making up for* and *showing up* reality’s inadequacies.

The physic garden affords visitors comfort and healing of mind, body, and soul, temporarily ‘transporting’ them to a better place. At one point, Jem reflects that “[t]he city was draining the life” from Will (Thomson 2016, p. 162), and witnessing how their friend becomes progressively “sickened and dismayed” by the horror of the burial ground excavations, “could think of only one remedy” (Thomson 2016, p. 163). Jem brings Will to the physic garden, where his spirits indeed begin to revive. Consequently, the garden also functions as a crisis heterotopia, a place to which Jem and Will repeatedly flee for refuge and respite in times of trouble, “locking the gate” behind them (Thomson 2017, p. 200).

The counter-site’s compensation further evinces heterochronic aspects, since the garden implicitly resurrects St Saviour’s past, as Jem explains to Will in *Beloved Poison*. “‘Five hundred years ago we were surrounded by gardens and small holdings,’ I said, as if talking about it might somehow invoke the fresh scents of the countryside” (Thomson 2016, p. 30). The physic garden thus offers partial restitution for the loss of the onetime idyllic priory environs, before St Saviour’s was “suffocated” by the city (Thomson 2016, p. 30). Just as significantly, however, the garden symbolically recreates paradise lost, reminding Will of his upbringing in the country. In much this sense, “the camomile lawn” interspersed with “zesty lemon thyme”, which Jem planted especially for Will and on which he “love[s] to lie [...] staring up at the sky” (Thomson 2017, p. 200), functions as an escape to a more ideal realm:

He had discovered that if he lay at a certain angle he was unable to see any walls, spires, or windows, and so could indulge his fantasy about being back in the country. It was only the reek from the middens beyond the haven of our walls that threatened to destroy the illusion, though the herbs where he lay did something to sweeten the air (Thomson 2017, p. 201).

In *The Blood*, the counter-site's analogy with paradise is made still more explicit the first time Jem shows Gethsemane their sanctuary: "I watched her face as the gate swung open, the sun [...] shining through a gap in the jaundiced clouds like the light of God depicted in a church window, three broad golden beams of celestial light, falling onto my garden" and transfiguring Gethsemane's serious mien into pure "delight" (Thomson 2018, p. 299). Meanwhile, in *Nightshade*, Dorothea Christian announces, "We are closest to God when we are in the garden. Think of Eden" (Thomson 2021, p. 47). However, her own garden has been left to degenerate into a "monstrous" state of "wilderness", "decay and neglect" (Thomson 2021, pp. 52–53), a paradise lost rather than regained. By way of juxtaposition, then, the physic garden's restorative Otherness also highlights the debasement of the thriving metropolis and the mainstream world outside, so that the site's "space of illusion [...] exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (Foucault 1986, p. 27).

In 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault dwells at length on the "sacred space" of ancient Persian gardens, reproduced in the designs of Oriental carpets, "enact[ing]" the "symbolic perfection" of an idealised "totality of the world" in "microcosm" (Foucault 1986, pp. 25–26)²⁰—in effect, generating the illusion of a logical impossibility, but also intimating what a better world might look like. While never rendered explicit, Foucault's garden heterotopia too imitates the Garden of Eden (hence his term "sacred space"), which the typical nature imagery on prayer rugs and Oriental carpets more generally aims to evoke. In Islamic tradition, Farrin Chwalkowski explains, "[t]he garden imagery of the carpet is designed to remind the believer of the garden of heaven as described in the Qur'an as the reward of those who believe and do deeds of righteousness", while "[e]ven the flying carpets of fairy tales were related to a longing for the return to Eden" (Chwalkowski 2016, p. 275). Although Jem's faith is never discussed outright, their deeds of charity and efforts to secure justice for others construct the physic garden as a compensatory reward for their earthly striving and suffering. At the same time, the garden where Jem and Eliza played together as children becomes identified with the protagonist's longing to return to a happier, more innocent time, before the loss of Eliza at the end of *Beloved Poison* when, having committed murder, she flees into the self-punishing exile of prostitution and obscurity.

It is not coincidental that the only two depicted sex-acts besides Jem's onetime consummation with Eliza are closely connected to garden settings. In *Dark Asylum*, the protagonist's tryst with Constance Mothersole takes place in the storeroom at the back of Jem's apothecary used for storing medicinal plants from the physic garden prior to processing into medicines: "It was lined with shelves upon which were baskets full of dried herbs, leaves, seeds and petals. The walls were hung with bunches of calendula, feverfew and comfrey" (Thomson 2017, p. 285). In this confined space, warmed by the heat of the stove in the adjacent room and with the door closed for privacy, the herb-infused air "quickly grew heavy, drowsily floral with hibiscus and heliotrope" with an undertone of "earthy, visceral scents of the green, ground-loving plants" (Thomson 2017, p. 286). The storeroom where Constance propositions Jem, having penetrated their disguise, transforms into a substitute garden heterotopia of deviation, enabling the shameless satisfaction of lesbian desires, albeit still 'closeted'. In *Nightshade*, Jem participates in drug-fuelled lesbianism at the botanist Bathsheba Wilde's Nightshade House, the extensive gardens of which "are laid out like Kew" (Thomson 2021, p. 31, original italics), its glasshouse aptly described as "a place like no other" (Thomson 2021, p. 32, original italics). The interior of Bathsheba's home likewise emulates a garden:

Beneath our feet was a fine Persian carpet [...], behind us the tall casement windows were hung with swathes of midnight blue silk embroidered with flowers and birds. The faces of tigers, peacocks, doves, lions, stared up at us from embroidered cushions. The fire screen was a diorama of stuffed hummingbirds, the hearth a glittering mosaic of lotus leaves (Thomson 2021, p. 264).

The conservatory's "hot house jungle" (Thomson 2021, p. 281 and *passim*) transforms into a sensual pleasure garden of exotic "heavy leaves, thick, thrusting stems, pendulous flowers,

petals as thick and sensuous as bare flesh" (Thomson 2021, p. 282). Here, the protagonist, drunk on liquor and smoking *bhang*, participates in a female orgy of unrestrained sensuality while "[f]rom far away the nightingale sang, like a glimpse of heaven" (Thomson 2021, p. 305), and when Jem wakes the next morning naked in the glasshouse, they stand "like Eve in the gloom" (Thomson 2021, p. 306) of Eden. Garden heterotopias, quite literally, grant Jem a taste of paradise, allowing them to become themselves-as-Other, freed from their gender masquerade to express their denied biological sex and sexual orientation without shame or guilt as if prior to the Fall.²¹

For all their restorative powers and afforded opportunities for enactments of transgressive desires, however, gardens in Thomson's novels also prove illusory, since sojourn within them—in contrast to other heterotopias like prisons or asylums—can never be permanent.²² When a visitor to the physic garden exclaims, "If I were you I would never leave this place", and Jem responds, "I don't intend to" (Thomson 2017, p. 173), the narrator does not refer to taking up permanent residence therein but only returning regularly to tend and enjoy the garden. Moreover, gardens in Thomson's series become implicated in violence and perversity, shattering the illusion of tranquillity, as when Bathsheba tells Jem's mother Catherine of feeding her abusive half-brother's remains—especially "[t]he soft parts" which "had meant so much to him" (Thomson 2021, p. 35, original italics)—to carnivorous plants in her collection. Likewise, the chimerical quality of Jem's own physic garden is signalled by its description as "the most comprehensive poison garden in the city" (Thomson 2016, p. 167) and by the "skull and crossbones" on the name plaque on the gate (Thomson 2017, p. 170), which undermine the garden's positive connotations as "a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity" (Foucault 1986, p. 26). Instead of representing life and cyclical rebirth, the garden becomes linked to death.

Unsurprisingly, then, *Nightshade* stages a repetition of humankind's Fall, with the paradisiacal garden transformed into a heterotopia of deviation upon the discovery of a historical murder victim buried in its midst. Again, different kinds of heterotopia abruptly coalesce, as the physic garden transmutes into a graveyard and Bathsheba, "a lover of gardens" (Thomson 2021, p. 275, original italics), is revealed to have orchestrated the brutal killings of the Delaney brothers. Both botanists themselves, James Delaney was killed in the 'garden' of the Indian jungle when the men intruded upon a drug-frenzied, orgiastic ritual led by the "half caste" (Thomson 2021, p. 146) Bathsheba claiming to be "the embodiment" of Kali (Thomson 2021, p. 324), while the crippled William Delaney, left for dead in India, was killed in the physic garden, having followed his brother's murderers back home to England. Jem's determination to discover the identities of the dead man and the perpetrators is driven primarily by rage at the desecration of their 'sacred' counter-site: "Now everything was spoiled" (Thomson 2021, p. 161), appearing "rotten and malignant" to them (Thomson 2021, p. 168). The text thus underlines the heterotopic garden's interpenetration with, rather than sequestration from, the fallen world outside it, since Otherness collapses into sameness.

6. Conclusion: Neo-Victorian Heterotopia, Where Art Thou?

The multiplying counter-sites across Thomson's series vie with one another to accommodate, contain, and accentuate the protagonist's own and various Others' difference. Yet, this is not to say that Thomson simplistically reduces heterotopia to "a byword for a kind of postmodern spatial alterity", as Knight now finds commonplace (Knight 2017, p. 145). Rather, in an interview discussing the dominant settings of the first four instalments in the series—hospital, asylum, floating hospital, and surgeon's hall—Thomson comments that "each of them is sort of its own world" (Thomson in (Earley 2021, 36:59–37:04)), or, as the interviewer Kirsty Earley adds, a "kind of ecosystem" (Earley 2021, 37:38–37:39). Ecosystems, of course, are relational spatiotemporal 'life bubbles', formed by the interaction of specific physical environments and the living organisms (as well as inanimate things/elements) contained therein, continually adjusting in response to what happens both within and outside them. These bubbles or enclosures interact with adjacent ecosystems to form

Earth as a mega-system or intricate network of such ‘mini-worlds’. Heterotopias, then, might be usefully viewed as human-made (rather than naturally occurring) spatiotemporal ecosystems, seemingly self-contained within culture but with each microsystem continually adapting to and, in turn, influencing societal changes ‘outside’ and in adjacent or intersecting counter-sites. To extend Bart Lootsma’s description of “today’s city” to counter-sites more generally, the heterotopic world is perhaps best understood as one vast “network of networks” (Lootsma 2008, n.p.).

Thomson’s work emphasises that the British nineteenth-century capital and its counter-sites, much like Robert Louis Stephenson’s protagonists Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, are intrinsically relational, interdependent, and reciprocally constitutive, queering the metropolis itself. Hence, Jem functions as the city’s and period’s paradigmatic doubled Othered subject. As in the case of normative and heterotopic spaces, Jem does not embody an ‘either-or’ dichotomy but rather a ‘both-and’ symbiosis. Thomson’s series illustrates the essential porousness and permeability of Foucault’s heterotopias, which seep into one another and into mainstream society, undermining any homogenous totality of the latter by diffusing diversity and Otherness into their environs.

The Long Nineteenth Century, Thomson’s series suggests, cannot be re-imagined today without recourse to heterotopic spaces associated with hegemonic constructions and demarcations of Otherness. Indeed, our sense of the period, particularly as mediated by neo-Victorian fiction, is *predicated* on Foucauldian counter-sites and their dialogic interplay with myriad forms of spatiotemporally designated Otherness, such as freakishness, criminality, gender non-conformity, sexual non-normativity, and racial difference—to the point that the act of re-imagining itself becomes a kind of retrospective Othering as a new “form of ordering” (Hetherington 1997, p. 27) the past. Heterotopias thus do crucial work in sustaining the contemporary cultural imaginary of the Long Nineteenth Century as Other to our own historical moment. Yet, they do so in problematic and reductive fashion, since homogenising the period as Other undermines the very heterogeneity and diversity which neo-Victorianism highlights. Hence, neo-Victorian fiction not only calls into question nineteenth-century normativity but also its present-day counterparts, particularly our presumed superior liberal respect for equality and commitment to inclusivity compared to the Victorians’ hierarchical worldview. For repeatedly the neo-Victorian obsessive fascination with heterotopias exploits their most spectacular, exclusionary, and commodifiable aspects as much as celebrating Other spaces for their promotion of subversive resistance, self-liberation, and societal reform.

The recurrent cancellation or collapse of one kind of heterotopia by/into another in the Jem Flockhart novels recalls Foucault’s early theorisation of his concept in ‘Les hétérotopies’, in which he describes heterotopias as “[p]laces that resist all others and in some way seem intended to *wipe them out, replace, neutralise* or purify them” (Foucault [2013] 2019a, p. 10, added emphasis), implicitly also deconstructing their Otherness in the process. The sheer proliferation of counter-sites in Thomson’s fiction re-imagines Victorian London as a vast conglomeration of heterotopic spaces, as though the entire city and the wider British Empire, extending even to its colonial domains, mutate into a network—and spectacle—of Otherness displayed for our fascinated perusal. Hence, what Saldanha calls “the neat dichotomy of heterotopia-versus-mainstream” (Saldanha 2008, p. 2093), of oppositional margins versus centres of normative power, implodes in Thomson’s series.

Seemingly residing everywhere rather than ‘elsewhere’, heterotopias and Otherness take over neo-Victorian spatiality. In *The Blood*, for instance, London’s docklands metaphorically transform into another country, as Jem and Will find themselves “surrounded by all manner of different coloured skins” and ethnicities (Thomson 2018, p. 10), as well as disfigurements. These range from “a Chinaman” with “a thick white scar across his forehead”, “a Lascar with one eye”, and “a tall black man with a Dutch sailor’s cap” to “[a] group of blue-faced men [...], their skins stained with the indigo they unloaded all day; the hands and faces of others glowed yellow from hours spent amongst saffron and spices” (Thomson 2018, p. 9). In these environs, William remarks of Jem, “You fit in perfectly” (Thomson 2018, p. 9).

The crowded waterfront streets function as a kind of mobile carnival, one of Foucault's "temporary heterotopias" (Foucault [2013] 2019a, p. 16), inverting 'normality' and creating a divergent fluid space of embodied Otherness in motion, wherein Jem's birthmark appears "less singular" (Thomson 2018, p. 10): "Faces were pale, or black, or brown, or yellow. Some were stained or scarred, others disfigured, blighted by disease or inked with tattoos" (Thomson 2018, p. 213).²³ Otherness becomes the norm.

No longer the exception but the rule, Otherness reveals an indiscriminate assimilative tendency in neo-Victorianism, which aligns closely with critical readings of heterotopia's apparent ubiquity. Discussing Benjamin Genocchio's work, which speculates that "anything and everything could be described as an example of heterotopia", with "most if not all social sites shar[ing] some aspects" of counter-sites, Johnson thus queries whether we are "not led into the realm of the everyday rather than the different" (Johnson 2013, p. 793).²⁴ In similar vein, Saldanha notes that "[o]ne wonders where there is still space left for mainstream society" (Saldanha 2008, p. 2083). In the Jem Flockhart series, the prevalent Other spaces indeed leave little room, if any, for "mainstream society", at times almost cancelling out normative space altogether. The constant permutation, coalescence and collapse of counter-sites in Thomson's novels, and in neo-Victorian fiction more generally, thus risks voiding the Otherness of Other spaces themselves. Adapting Lootsma's resonant formulation, we might conclude: "All [neo-Victorian] heterotopias melt into air" (Lootsma 2008, n.p.).

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Notes

- ¹ At times, Jem seems to approach what is today termed non-binary identity. Hence, I use the personal pronouns 'their' and 'them' to refer to the protagonist, who at one point describes themselves as "neither man, nor woman" (Thomson 2017, p. 235). The plural pronouns also evoke Jem's psychological duality, living publicly as a Victorian man in full cognisance of the freedoms thereof, but still thinking of themselves as a woman in terms of embodiment. Nonetheless, when speaking about her books, Thomson consistently refers to Jem as 'she', describing her protagonist as "somebody that has feelings for women as a woman herself" (Thomson in (Earley 2021, 30:24–30:39)). This suggests more of a transvestite than non-binary or even transgender identity, though for some readers the character may well read differently.
- ² The absence of any neo-Victorian criticism to date on Thomson's work is surprising since the series covers so many of neo-Victorianism's favourite themes, such as queerness, cross-dressing, sexuality, prostitution, slums, and gender, class, and racial inequality. Thomson also published a prior neo-Victorian novel, *The Peachgrowers' Almanac* (2008), reissued as *A Proper Education for Girls*, under the pseudonym Elaine di Rollo.
- ³ In the course of this article, I cite from three extant English translations of Foucault's 1967 lecture by Jay Miskowicz (1986), Robert Hurley (1994), and Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene (2008), as well as from Michael Bischoff's German translation (2013) of 'Les hétérotopies', Foucault's 1966 radio talk.
- ⁴ Although henceforth inverted commas are dispensed with for 'Other', 'Otherness', and 'Othered', the qualification should be read as implicit, since Otherness is always a constructed and externally declared/projected rather than intrinsic condition.
- ⁵ While her novels positively invite these Foucauldian readings, in private email correspondence, Thomson has stated that she is unfamiliar with the concept of heterotopia and Foucault's writings thereon (Kohlke and Thomson 2021).
- ⁶ An actual St Saviour's Cancer Hospital opened in 1872 in a nunnery constructed from 1850–1852 for the Anglican Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, amalgamated in 1856 with the Society of the Most Holy Trinity, which ministered to St Pancras's poor and needy (Lost Hospitals of London 2021, n.p.). However, Thomson's St Saviour's dates back to the Middle Ages and is based on St Thomas Hospital, with the writer using "plans of the old hospital" and drawing "inspiration for the apothecary and the operating theatre" featured in *Beloved Poison* from "The Old Operating Theatre", now "a museum" (Kohlke and Thomson 2021; see Old Operating Theatre n.d., <https://oldoperatingtheatre.com/>).

- 7 It remains ambiguous at what point Will realises Jem’s biological sex, and the friends’ relationship, similar to that of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John Watson, has homoerotic undertones. It should be noted, however, that Thomson has expressly stated that “I didn’t want it to be a ‘gay book’ or [...] anything of that kind, [...] because I just want[ed] to make it normal [...] it’s not the Other, it’s not different, it’s just a way to be” (Thomson in (Earley 2021, 30:24–30:39)). Nonetheless, most characters in the novels beyond Jem’s close circle would certainly read the protagonist’s gender non-conformity, if known, as deviant.
- 8 Debate continues as to whether Barry may have been a hermaphrodite or an intersex subject rather than male impersonator; no such possibility is ever alluded to with regard to Jem Flockhart in Thomson’s series.
- 9 The murderess’s Christian name evokes another heterotopic space—the garden on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was arrested on the night prior to his crucifixion—while Gethsemane’s travels for self-reinvention evoke the “legendary flying carpets” of Oriental tales, “which flew around the world” (Foucault [2013] 2019a, p. 15). The foregone and all subsequent translations from Foucault’s radio talks ‘Les hétérotopies’ and, later on, from ‘Le corps utopique’ are my own, mainly from Bischoff’s German translation of the talk’s transcript; the same applies to translations from Daniel Defert’s afterword to the collected talks, ‘Raum zum Hören’ (2013).
- 10 Fittingly, Thomson wrote her PhD on the history of women trailblazers in medicine, specifically “the first generation of female doctors” in Edinburgh, the so-called ‘Edinburgh Seven’ (Earley 2021, 3:29–03:31).
- 11 While much neo-Victorian scholarship prior to this special issue has focused on the same Gothicised Other spaces featured in Thomson’s novels, particularly prisons, asylums, and cemeteries, it is worth noting that, bar work by Mariaconcetta Constantini and Cheryl D. Edelson, this criticism does not discuss these sites as heterotopias.
- 12 Defert stresses that Foucault’s concept explodes spatial organisation based on binaries of “inside and outside, margin and centre or public and private” space (Defert [2013] 2019, p. 86). Instead, heterotopias stand “in a formal interplay of differentiation and mirroring”, which Defert links to Edward W. Soja’s notion of “the Thirthing as othering” (Defert [2013] 2019, p. 86), i.e., a transformation of “the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also” (Soja 1996, p. 60). The figure of Jem engages in exactly such continuous “formal interplay” and “logic of both/and also”.
- 13 Foucault only discusses ‘crisis’ in terms of a transient stressful rite of passage between different states of being, rather than considering how some counter-emplacements involve ongoing upheaval and liminal precarity for individuals. Examples of the latter include cases of domestic abuse in the heterotopia of the private home/bedroom or cases of permanent confinement in treatment facilities for degenerative diseases, such as Jem’s father fears.
- 14 The history of the Bethlehem Royal Hospital or ‘Bedlam’ proves a case in point. As Tom Quinn notes, “by the mid-eighteenth century”, Bedlam became a popular attraction: “every weekend hundreds arrived to be shown around the madhouse”, with the asylum treated akin to “a sort of circus or amusement park” by London’s “entertainment-hungry populace” (Quinn 2008, p. 13). This practice persisted until the early nineteenth century, when the hospital moved again and such visits were subsequently stopped (Quinn 2008, p. 13). Bedlam as a heterotopia of deviation thus overlapped with Foucault’s “chroniques” of the festival, or heterotopias linked to “fleeting, transitory” time (Foucault 1986, p. 26), which arguably also afford “compensation” (Foucault 1986, p. 27), since temporarily overturning or suspending everyday order akin to Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival. At one point in *Dark Asylum*, Jem describes the titular institution as “descend[ing] into misrule”, with “doctors straight-jacketed” and “patients roaming the hallways unlocking doors” (Thomson 2017, p. 102), while Dr Mothersole, organising a musical therapy session for the inmates, reminds Jem “of a ringmaster I had once seen at Cremorne Gardens” (Thomson 2017, p. 158), the extensive Chelsea pleasure grounds (1845–1877) offering various public entertainments and dissipations. The nineteenth-century Bedlam was eventually repurposed as a heterochronic museum space, today housing the Imperial War Museum.
- 15 According to Thomson, she based the emptying out of the St Saviour’s burial ground and Will’s traumatisation thereby on Thomas Hardy’s commission to empty out the cemetery at St Pancras Old Church (Kohlke and Thomson 2021). The latter undertaking took place in 1865 as part of the Midland Line’s expansion into North West London, the graveyard giving way to new railway lines for St Pancras Station, and is marked by the surviving so-called ‘Hardy Tree’, an ancient Ash whose roots are now surrounded by and in turn embrace the disused tombstones (Röttgers 2020, n.p.).
- 16 In *Beloved Poison*, Jem’s arrival at Newgate emphasises the constraints applied to the prisoner’s body as well as the facility’s heterotopic architecture, with its “system of opening and closing that both isolates [counter-sites] and makes them penetrable (Foucault 1986, p. 26), as per Foucault’s fifth principle: “My manacles were thick, heavy things, rough at the wrists [...]; the gyves around my ankles chafed and rattled. [...] Inside, I was brought along a narrow winding passage. So many gates were locked and unlocked, so many gratings and doors creaked and slammed before and behind me [...] that I was soon lost in confusion” (Thomson 2016, pp. 281–82). Fittingly, the prison’s male wing reminds Jem of St Saviour’s, which sequesters the diseased instead of the criminal from the healthy body politic.
- 17 Cheryl D. Edelson, one of the very few critics to have discussed heterotopia in relation to neo-Victorian, specifically postcolonial texts, aptly notes the shared Gothic connotations adhering to scientific laboratory and museum spaces, both linked to death and hence to cemeteries in the popular imagination. Discussing the appropriation of indigenous people’s bodies as ‘specimens’ for natural history museums, Edelson notes that “[h]eterotopic graves could be opened, but only by overriding this kind of place with another containment facility such as the laboratory, the lecture hall, or museum”, with the latter “becom[ing] a surrogate cemetery” and “new repository of human remains” (Edelson 2012, p. 91). In Thomson’s novels, the dead of London’s underclasses repeatedly

suffer a comparable fate to non-white peoples' remains. Constantini pertinently discusses Jean Baudrillard's description of the cemetery as the paradigmatic ghetto and Other space of "segregation" (Constantini 2015, p. 198) comparable to white-classified museum spaces, which arguably function akin to heterotopic burial grounds "as sites of negotiation of a national identity construed by expelling [...] the non-identical" (Constantini 2015, p. 189), relegating it to the status of Other.

- 18 Indeed, the sanctity of the marital and family home was used to justify nineteenth-century prostitution, as Michael Pearson explains: "Men needed sex and, if 'modest' women were to be protected, there was virtually only one outlet—the prostitute" (Pearson 1972, p. 18), to the point that by 1857, "The Lancet [...] estimated that one house in every sixty in the capital was a brothel" (Pearson 1972, p. 25).
- 19 Interestingly, Foucault's first use of the term 'heterotopia' in *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966, first English translation in 1970 as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*) related to another fictional garden: Jorge Luis Borges's 'The Garden of Forking Paths' (1941).
- 20 Foucault notes that "our modern zoological gardens spring from" the same "source" (Foucault 1986, p. 26), creating an uncanny link with the numerous anatomy museums in Thomson's work. These mirror the meticulous ordering of both gardens and colonies (religious colonies, of course, being another kind of attempt to recreate Eden on Earth): whereas zoological gardens display animal curiosities, anatomy museums replace these exhibits with human specimens, creating another kind of scientific 'garden' to dwell in.
- 21 Additionally, the Tree of Knowledge and serpent imagery from Genesis are introduced when Jem's drug-induced hallucinations make Bathsheba appear "as tall as a tree" and transform her into a Medusa with "a mass of serpents about her head" (Thomson 2021, p. 305).
- 22 Note that in Christian mythology, paradise too is not, strictly speaking, an eternal dwelling place of permanent bliss in the presence of God but rather an intermediate transitional non-place (like Hell), where the dead await the weighing of their souls at the final judgment and their resurrection at Christ's Second Coming to establish Heaven on Earth. Paradise itself might thus be read as a crisis heterotopia in Foucault's terms.
- 23 Though not a prominent heterotopia, which the protagonists inhabit or dwell in at length, but rather an Other space they merely pass through, the docklands are noteworthy for their imperialist undertones that also pervade later novels in Thomson's series, particularly *Nightshade*. This aspect of Thomson's work affords scope for valuable further research related to on-going theoretical debates about the "implied imperialism" of neo-Victorianism's prevailing Anglocentric focus and its extension "into international and global contexts" in ways that risk homogenising and "eras[ing]" cultural differences and "specificities" (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2013, p. 26). Elizabeth Ho has argued more positively "that 'the Victorian' [...] has become a powerful shorthand for empire in the contemporary global imagination", offering "a highly aestheticized code for confronting empire again and anew" (Ho 2012, p. 5), with the trope of the ship in particular "creat[ing]" such "new contact zones" (Ho 2012, p. 25) of self-conscious encounters with imperialist legacies. Note, however, that neither Ho's nor Llewellyn and Heilmann's cited work specifically discusses imperialism in relation to heterotopia.
- 24 Johnson here refers to Genocchio's 'Discourse, discontinuity, difference: the question of other spaces' in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson's edited collection *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (1995).

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