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‘Dear Ellyn’: A Creative-Relational Inquiry into Intergenerational Resonance
from a Transgender, Jewish Descendant

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Abstract

The ghostly presence of my late grandmother, Ellyn, who died four years before I was born, has been a constant source of curiosity and insight in my life. Through exploring this link to her over my lifetime, I have come to understand myself, Ellyn and the history which precedes us both more profoundly. In this body of work, I write letters to my late grandmother and engage with theorists, such as Stephen Frosh, Galit Atlas and Jack Halberstam, to better understand this bond. As a transmasculine person, I dialogue with my grandmother about my transition and work to make sense of the beginnings, endings and transitions we have both endured. I introduce the term *intergenerational resonance* – a transgenerational connection between two people which seemingly disrupts normative notions of space and time. Additionally, I formulate two concepts – *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption* – as a means of exploring the material which moves backwards and forwards in time as a result of the intergenerational resonance. I bring in my work as a psychotherapist and explore the ways in which these intergenerational dynamics are relevant to counselling and psychotherapy. This dissertation seeks to recognise the haunting nature of intergenerational transmissions while troubling the prevailing notion that the lingering material must be understood, felt and then released. I, thinking and feeling with Ellyn, carve a new way forward in which an ongoing dialogue may be forged with the past.

Keywords: Intergenerational transmissions, intergenerational resonance, inherited wisdom, retroactive redemption, transgender, creative-relational, queer, Jewish, psychodynamic

Word Count: 55,310 words (excluding abstract, declaration, acknowledgements and full references)

Lay Summary

The study of what is passed between generations, from ancestor to descendant, in counselling and psychotherapy literature often focuses on the concept of *trauma*, and many voices, such as queer and transgender ones, are absent. In this dissertation, I acknowledge this gap in literature and introduce *intergenerational resonance*, a phenomenon in which the experiences of one generation seem to parallel those from another. I approach this endeavour through both written letters to my late paternal grandmother, Ellyn, and through engagement with queer and psychodynamic theory. Throughout this dissertation, I think with theory and Ellyn and hold closely my identities as a Jewish person and as a queer, transmasculine person. Additionally, I demonstrate that the reverberations across generations cannot always be simplified as trauma, and I outline a means of engaging in an ongoing way with the past, rather than a linear understanding and letting go. I introduce the terms *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption* to explore what is created from intergenerational resonance, or from dialogue between generations.

Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Additionally, I confirm that, unless stated otherwise by reference, the work is entirely my own.

Signature:

Date: 21 August 2025

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to:

my paternal grandmother

Ellyn Pfeffer Smith

(December 1942- December 1992)

whose life reverberates with my own and, as a result, helped me create this work.

my maternal grandmother

Josephine Tangradi Mueller

who has shown me the value in creating my own future whilst holding closely stories from
the past.

and my wife

Jennifer Rea Andreacchi

who often sat next to me while I wrote and provided brilliant insight, relieving laughter and
encouraging love.

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Writing this dissertation has involved travelling backwards and forwards through time. While I created this project, I started transitioning, got married, moved twice and opened my therapy practice. Undoubtedly, I could not have undertaken all these endeavours and written this body of work without the support and guidance from many.

Firstly, to my supervisor Dr. Fiona Murray, thank you for helping me disrupt long-held assumptions and creatively explore this inquiry.

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To Dr. Judith Fewell, thank you for your sharp wisdom and expertise. My exploration of intergenerational transmissions and Jewish experiences was unequivocally deepened by your input.

I want to thank, as Fiona called them, my many allies, and especially Ocean Vuong, Jack Halberstam and Adrienne Rich. This project is only possible through engagement with the work written by powerful, brilliant queer theorists who precede me.

To my cousin, Jess, thank you for answering my often-contextually-absent questions about those who came before us each and being part of both my chosen and given family.

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Introduction: The Connection

This dissertation is a collection of stories – the story of a woman who was not able to write these words, the story of the person who will write them, and the stories of the people, places and events that precede and, in ways, transcend the aforementioned people. In the following chapters, I will introduce you to the woman, Ellyn, and to myself, and, through my writing, I will explore each of us and our relationship. At times, this writing may feel like a work of nonfiction, and in other instances it may seem invented or imagined.¹ Throughout, you may come to find a significant blurring between real and fantastic, past and present, male and female and Ellyn and me; this ambiguity is intentional and necessary. Within this work, I inquire into the efficacy of existing literature on intergenerational transmissions and I establish a new mode for inquiry – both inside and beyond the counselling room – for these cross-generational connections moving forward.

I approach these stories and my relationship to Ellyn, my grandmother, in this body of work through various forms. The odd-numbered chapters are letters written to her while the remaining chapters are more analytical, marrying queer and psychodynamic theory with Jewish thought and personal experiences. As I write about within the letters, taking the connection I feel to my grandmother and putting it into written words which will be read by others is a messy, complicated practice. In order to preserve the authenticity of our dynamic, I mostly write the letters as I wish to speak to her. However, the letters within this dissertation are filled with footnotes – in these footnotes I intend for you, the reader, to learn more about my engagement with literature and analysis. Initially, I anticipate that these footnotes² may feel jarring, a break from the discussion with Ellyn. I invite you to read the footnotes in whichever order feels most comfortable, alongside the main body of text, before engaging with the letters or perhaps after. The footnotes then take on a new form in the analysis, serving simply as a signpost or reference.

Undertaking the journey embedded in these words demands breaking binaries. Paramount to this endeavour is first disrupting the mutual exclusivity between me and my grandmother, the past and the present, one generation and the next. Existing research primarily demonstrates this connection through the concept of intergenerational trauma and the ways in

¹ ‘I treat all work ... like fiction or poetry,’ writes Gloria Anzaldúa whilst exploring her approach to autohistoria-teoría.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark: Luz en lo Oscuro*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 4.

² Like this one here

which inherited transmissions are entrenched in the lives of those who carry them.³ Often, this work comments on the haunting, permeating quality of the substance passed from one generation onwards⁴, and many scholars outline methods for ending the cycle.⁵ Rarely does research explore the impacts of intergenerational transmissions without heavily relying on the concept of trauma. Yet, the passing of vital experiences and knowledge is lost in the over-emphasis of trauma. The experiences of our ancestors and the lessons, strength and wisdom from their memories are often seen only through the lens of pesky ghosts that linger in our present, separate lives.

Israeli-American psychotherapist Galit Atlas uses the term *emotional inheritance* to refer to the passing on of ‘silenced experiences’ between and through generations and the effects of these transmissions on our lives.⁶ Atlas explores these inheritances through her own family’s experience of exile and persecution as Jews as well as the painful narratives that clients bring to her counselling room. Various themes arise in her work, such as gender and sexuality, birth order and death. Despite the different afflictions and stories brought by each client and Atlas herself, the psychotherapist concludes that ‘each [journey to healing] starts with the decision to search, to open the door, and rather than turn away from the hurt of the past, to walk toward it.’⁷ Her conclusion is not unique; British thinker Stephen Frosh’s research focuses on the hauntings of previous generations especially as they pertain to social phenomena and psychodynamic theories. He states that what is left behind ‘insists on justice and reparation’⁸ and ‘needs to be put right’ through encountering and witnessing.⁹ Despite these overwhelming claims that the past must be attended to, rarely does literature acknowledge what this process entails and the material that is created from it.

Decolonial scholarship establishes a different approach to intergenerational connections. Specifically, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa disrupts these psychodynamic views of

³ These themes are explored in extensive detail by many theorists, notably by Stephen Frosh in *Those Who Come After*, Galit Atlas in *Emotional Inheritance: A Therapist, Her Patients, and the Legacy of Trauma*, and Marianne Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory*.

⁴ ‘I was frozen in terror’ Judith Fewell writes when visited by ‘the ghostly presence.’ Judith Fewell, “Tattered scripts: Stories about the transmission of trauma across generations,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 19 (2016): 82.

⁵ Prophecy Coles, *The Uninvited Guest from the Unremembered Past*, (London: Karnac, 2011), 85-96.

⁶ Galit Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance: A Therapist, Her Patients, and the Trauma of Legacy* (London: Short Books, 2024), 13.

⁷ Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance*, 233.

⁸ Stephen Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 166.

⁹ Stephen Frosh, *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), xi.

ancestors and returns to an older knowledge source. Anzaldúa herself grew up in a liminal space on the border between the United States and Mexico. Presumably using her own experience of existing between worlds, Anzaldúa addresses intergenerational transmissions and the ways in which it impacts her research and life with nuance rather than solely as a haunting. She writes that among the many forces that influence her are the ‘unconscious and collective unconscious forces and residues of those that came before us, our ancient ancestors.’¹⁰ Anzaldúa thinks of her ancestors and the indigenous wisdom and memory that predates her life as a spiritual guide that brings her closer to understanding herself and the world around her. This decolonial paradigm integrates the indigenous knowledge that is historically shunned by Western, positivistic approaches with Anzaldúa’s modern experience of life in America and liminal spaces between and around borders.¹¹ Anzaldúa’s discussion of ancestors as spiritual guides strays from the typical understanding of intergenerational transmissions as lurking, scary and unwanted; instead, she focuses on the power she embodies in this process and the ways in which their knowledge becomes her own.

Throughout my life, I have felt aware of narratives, themes and hauntings from the past that seem to pierce my own experiences. These transmissions seem to vibrate with many pieces of my own life, my queer and Jewish identities, my aspirations and even my fears. The literature by Atlas has enabled me to grapple with the possibility that the feelings and associations I have with these experiences are not mine alone. Instead, they are enmeshed with the lingering material of the past ‘until it [is] too hard to differentiate what was [mine] and what wasn’t.’¹² This entanglement emerges in my life when I am met with a situation similar to one which my ancestors encountered, and I become aware that I carry my own history and feelings as well as theirs. Additionally, thinking with Stephen Frosh, I recognise that experiences are unconsciously passed along and ‘demand reparations.’¹³ In other words, I detect them in my own life because they need to be heard, felt and remembered. Frosh and Atlas’s explorations of intergenerational trauma are vital to my understanding of myself. However, often I have found them lacking.

If I am to abide by the conclusions set out by Frosh, Atlas and other scholars, then I fear I am accepting these intergenerational murmurings as disruptions that must be set right. I

¹⁰ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 64.

¹¹ *Ibid*, xxxiii.

¹² Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance*, 82.

¹³ Frosh, *Hauntings*, 38.

am unsatisfied, even disappointed, with this inference. My ancestors, especially my grandmother, Ellyn, live on in my mind, my dreams, my phantasies¹⁴; in fact, I am often left wondering if they are my dreams, my phantasies, or if they belong to those who preceded me, or if they are somehow shared, ours. I am not motivated to turn towards these lingering experiences with the intent to make them disappear, to set myself free. Instead, I turn towards them with curiosity and hope; I explore these small moments, instinctive feelings, eery parallels as spirit guides or ‘information from ancestors inhabiting other worlds.’¹⁵

I am not new to the process of turning towards, valuing, searching for ancestral communication. This craving and seeking are present in my earliest memories. I recall feeling my late grandmother near me, sensing the story of her life being written and unwritten as I filled the pages of my own. Often, when I was a small child, she felt like the swirling of crunchy, fallen leaves in the autumnal wind. I remember watching the breeze gently pick each leaf up. Fluttering orange, burgundy and brown pieces that swelled in a circle and appeared to me like a spiral staircase. ‘Be close to me,’ I would think. In other moments, Ellyn is a rush of cold air on the back of my neck, reminding me of the connection between us. Her past reaches out and grabs hold of me, and I feel my future shaped by it.

This interaction is like a musical performance. For example, a violin is composed of four strings, G, D, A and E. If a violinist holds down the G string in just the right place and plays it, the string will play a D note. When this occurs, next to the G string the D string will vibrate, untouched.¹⁶ This phenomenon is known as sympathetic resonance: an untouched string responds to another with which it shares a likeness. Ellyn’s life, her memories, her feelings, her pain and her joy reach out and play like a string plucked on a violin. Her string interacts with one of my own; although my string appears untouched, it vibrates. This sensation, one with which I am profoundly familiar, I refer to as *intergenerational resonance*, the sometimes inexplicable, embodied feeling that an experience is not just one’s own but transcends generations.

¹⁴ Here, I am thinking with Anne Hayman’s summary of Freud, Klein, and others’ definitions of phantasy as, ‘every single aspect of unconscious mental activity’ which are ‘omnipresent throughout life.’ Anne Hayman, ‘What do our terms mean?’ in *Within Time and Beyond Time: A Festschrift for Pearl King*, (London: Karnac, 2001): 164-176.

¹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 24.

¹⁶ Todd Ehle, “Sympathetic Vibrations and Playing Violin in Tune,” YouTube Shorts, 13 October 2024, <https://youtube.com/shorts/-e0uVx8-vvg?si=FhrDDyix6aWjtnAD>.

In my experience, intergenerational resonance occurs whether or not it is acknowledged. Nonetheless, awareness of what precedes me has yielded a more insightful understanding of the impacts. The working through of these vibrations in one's own life results in knowledge passed from one generation to the next, which I refer to as *inherited wisdom*. This co-created knowledge provides clarity and understanding for the receiver. Atlas refers to one client for whom inherited wisdom was obtained: '[Her] ghost turns into an ancestor. She finally has a story that she can tell rather than relive again and again.'¹⁷ Atlas is commenting on the ambiguous lack of clarity that surrounds intergenerational resonance when it is left misunderstood or unseen. The act of acknowledging this vibration leads to gained wisdom: a pivotal discovery about the past and a monumental realisation about the present.

My intent in the subsequent chapters is to explore the intergenerational resonance that vibrates across space and time and connects Ellyn and me. To further develop this understanding, I will refer to the resonance that I experience with other ancestors in my family. In a series of letters to my grandmother, I intend to arrive at newly discovered inherited wisdom and also explore that which I already feel. This work is 'unapologetically messy and emotional.'¹⁸ In other words, this writing does not necessarily arrive at answers or definitive points. Instead, I wonder/wander around ideas, theories and sensations and attempt to make sense of them while remaining curious. Thus, the work demands a deep engagement with and then disruption of ontological and epistemological assumptions.

My current position in this inquiry evolved from my early experiences of research. In the years before my training and qualification as a therapist, I studied physics. I abided by the scientific method, and I firmly believed the behaviour of the smallest particles in our universe could produce critical insight into the world around us, even social behaviour. I desperately wanted the physical and emotional world that surrounded me to be clean and predictable. Yet, at this time, I was struggling with forming friendships, navigating family dynamics and maintaining my own relationship to myself. My world felt scary, tenuous and outside of my control. I began attending weekly therapy sessions, and in these hours, I started to unpack the ways in which my experiencing did not make sense. From the messiness, I began to create the person I wanted to become and encounter the one(s) who was (were) already there.

¹⁷ Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance*, 103.

¹⁸ Fiona Murray, "There are two clocks in here and they are not in sync": Counsellors' and clients' struggles with online pornography," *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 17, no. 1 (2017): 34.

This slow journey is not one in which I turned forcefully and linearly from the scientific method to a more qualitative way of inquiring. Instead, I have travelled to a place of uncertainty, and I am learning to find this ambiguity almost tolerable. Yet, much from the past lingers in my present. For instance, as a physics student, I was captivated by the uncertainty principle, or the theory that observing a particular property about a particle impacted the measurement of its other properties. This phenomenon implies that an object measured is inextricably impacted by the subject who is measuring it.¹⁹ As a result, a level of uncertainty will accompany any observation. This theory primarily pertains to subatomic particles and their associated properties, such as their momentum and position; however, if I work closely with my 18-year-old self, then I am inclined to see the impacts of the uncertainty principle in my research now.

Uncertainty is a crucial component to therapeutic work. In my sessions with clients, I often feel unsure and attempt to explore their narratives with curiosity, empathy and openness. Similarly, I approach exploring intergenerational resonance and inherited wisdom within my own life with uncertainty. I recognise that within these letters, I cannot directly speak with my grandmother. As a result, I am not seeking absolutes when exploring her lifetime. Instead, I am acknowledging, as the uncertainty principle states, that I am impacting her life by observing it. In this project and in my connection to Ellyn, I am undoubtedly changing and re-creating the both of us. I will explore the ways in which this intergenerational resonance impacts the past – which I call *retroactive redemption* – in the sixth chapter of this dissertation. My past – my experience of physics research – aids me in this endeavour and, certainly, I am assisted by the queer, psychoanalytic and non-normative allies I collected along the way.

The first methodology I considered when undertaking this project was autoethnography. Admittedly, I am using my own life to delve into this enquiry, and I think with autoethnographers, such as Dora Silva Santana in Chapter One. In fact, reading the work of autoethnographer Robin Boylorn inspired me to undertake such a personal, layered project. In her book chapter titled ‘*My Daddy is Slick, Brown and Cool like Iced Water*,’ Boylorn writes that, ‘I hate him for not being enough to make me feel (good) enough. But I love him with all of my heart. It’s a love-hate-love kinda love, with unconditional and unending forgiveness

¹⁹ Jan Hilgevoord, “The Uncertainty principle,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 12 July 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qt-uncertainty/>.

wrapped around my resentment.²⁰ Boylorn's capacity to hold complicated, seemingly mutually exclusive feelings vulnerably captivated me, and I moved towards autoethnography.

This methodology also assisted me in ethical considerations throughout my work. Most of the stories found within these pages are ones which I have collected throughout my life. However, as I began engaging with my connection to Ellyn in an academic setting, I found I was more curious about her in my personal life. Some of the narratives which I collected, like a story from my great-uncle, her brother, were uncovered as the research began. Where possible, I anonymise my sources or leave the origin ambiguous. However, in certain situations, like with my uncle, the person from whom I received the story were critical to share. While I asked his permissions to incorporate stories, I did not seek out written permission. I made this decision because, as researchers Niroj Dahal and Bal Chandra Luitel outline, 'while crafting autoethnography, the autoethnographer is at the centre of the source of evidential text and meaning making.'²¹ In other words, the stories I collected, either long ago or more presently, were re-told from my own personal framework. I am not wishing to represent or recount the ways that members of my family felt or understood these stories, instead I am attempting to make meaning about my own life and the legacy of the past.

Soon after, however, I journeyed from autoethnography to Creative-Relational Inquiry (CRI). In fact, the freedom to explore this topic and address my inquiry through different formats, like unstructured letters, was made possible through my engagement CRI. This type of research emphasises the personal, the experience-near. This approach to inquiry is born from feminist and queer theory that predates it; Judith Fewell and Liz Bondi led research at the University of Edinburgh before the Centre for Creative Relational Inquiry opened and encouraged research 'in which the personal is central.'²² CRI is similar to other modes of qualitative and post-qualitative research in that it remains close to the personal, political and social, relies heavily on theory and aims to create space for voices that are often left out of mainstream research.²³ My research has found a home in CRI in that it meets these criteria and

²⁰ Robin Boylorn, 'My Daddy is Slick, Brown and Cool like Ice Water,' in *On (Writing) Families*, ed. Jonathan Wyatt and Tony Adams (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014): 92.

²¹ Niroj Dahal and Bal Chandra Luitel, 'Understanding and Encountering the Ethics of Self and Others in Autoethnography: Challenging the Extant and Exploring Possibilities,' *The Qualitative Report* 27, no. 12 (2022): 2675

²² Liz Bondi and Judith Fewell, "Getting personal: A feminist argument for research aligned to the therapeutic practice," *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 17, no. 2 (2017): 118.

²³ Marisa de Andrade, Rosie Stenhouse and Jonathan Wyatt, "Some Openings, Possibilities, and Constraints of Creative Relational Inquiry," *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 3

disrupts it. In using CRI, I am thinking about the creative in a ‘common sense’ way; I am attempting to produce research, to inquire through letters, lyrics, poetry and media that is artistic. Yet, this definition does not fully capture the creative inquiry that is present in this work. CRI is ‘about movement, about process ... sees the process of relating itself as creative’²⁴, and I am transforming myself and the world I perceive around me through relating to my grandmother, relating to the part of her that lives inside me.

Creative-Relational Inquiry was born in moments when Jonathan Wyatt was aware of his ‘sadness for [his] country’²⁵, his grief. This way of inquiry is intrinsically tied to grieving or reflecting on beginnings, endings and transitions. Therefore, CRI fits smoothly into mourning my grandmother and searching for her. By adopting this methodology-that-is-not-a-methodology, I am centring the relational in my research: my (lack of a) relationship to Ellyn, to myself, to my gender, to others and to the world I observe around me. I am working under the ontological assumption that my reality is subjective, dynamic and uncertain and the epistemological assumption that through being in relation with myself and others, I construct and deconstruct my world in an ongoing performance.²⁶ Creative-Relational Inquiry offers me a guidepost from which to venture into the blizzard-like conditions that surround my past, Ellyn’s past and our futures.

The methods I use to explore this inquiry involves engaging with stories which have been passed down to me about my grandmother, exploring her life through inherited items and online databases and creating space for myself to wonder about our connection. The space I create to explore these connections before and while I write often includes listening to music, reading poetry, going on a walk or processing in my personal therapy. In fact, later in this introduction, I will explore my experience in therapy and ethical considerations taken which are relevant to my methods. After taking space to explore and reflect, I think with CRI and enquire through letters to Ellyn and essay-like chapters which tie together my personal experience, research in counselling and psychotherapy and additional literature, such as queer theory and Jewish thought.

²⁴ Ibid, 7-8.

²⁵ Ibid, 3.

²⁶ Karen Serra Undurraga describes reflexivity as an ‘operation that allows the subject to be continuously socially constituted.’ Using this definition, I think of Ellyn and myself as being made and remade through this reflexive work.

Karen Serra Undurraga, “Reflexivities as Affective Ways of Relating that Produce,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 7 (2019): 922.

The genre of this dissertation is the intersection where epistolary, biography and speculative fiction meet. The latter two genres grant me space to record and re-imagine my life, Ellyn's and the lives of our family members and ancestors. Furthermore, the epistolary pillar of the genre of this work emerges in alternating chapters which take the form of letters written from myself to Ellyn as I explore the intergenerational material between us. As researcher Maria Tamboukou asserts, 'Thus, rather than imposing an overarching meaning derived from a central character, letters open up a diversity of perspectives and reveal multiple layers of meanings.'²⁷ Letters create opportunity for my life, Ellyn's life and the lives of our ancestors to make meaning. The use of letters in research is not new. As contributor Chris Stamper outlines in the book *Using Arts-based Research Methods*, health and social science inquiries often use letter writing as a method to explore 'delicate and personal issues with participants.'²⁸ Yet letter writing is also present in research which does not involve participants; in her book *An Autoethnography of Letter Writing and Relationships Through Time*, researcher Jennifer Adams shares romantic letters written between a couple a century ago and uses autoethnography to reflect on the material. This creative approach to my research is possible due to my engagement with CRI. In prioritising both the creative and relational components of this inquiry, I am able to connect to Ellyn in a way that feels authentic and vulnerable. In their exploration of CRI, Dan Harris writes that this approach is 'remaining open to taking both roads, not just the one least or most travelled.'²⁹ With CRI and letter writing, I am able to journey through this enquiry in a way that rejects what research *should* be and instead write into what research *can* become.

My dissertation supervisor, Fiona Murray, writes that Creative-Relational Inquiry research 'is concerned with the messiness of relationships and social life.'³⁰ My research will explore the relationship between me and Ellyn and me and myself; in fact, the following letters will likely leave the reader confused about the distinction between me and Ellyn. I am not sure where I end and Ellyn begins (or, should I say, where Ellyn ends and I begin). However, this

²⁷ Maria Tamboukou, 'Epistolary Lives: Fragments, Sensibility, Assemblages in Auto/Biographical Research,' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Auto/Biography* ed. Julie Parsons and Anne Chappell (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan: 2020), 159.

²⁸ Chris Stamper, "Letter Writing: Life in Letters – A Method of Qualitative Inquiry," in *Using Arts-based Research Methods: Creative Approaches for Researching Business, Organisation and Humanities* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 178.

²⁹ Dan Harris, "Creative-Relational Inquiry: The Power of the Small." *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 21.

³⁰ Fiona Murray, "The Emergencies of Creative Relational Inquiry," *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 26

relationship is not the only one that will be present in this work, and the other relationships may also disrupt the idea of the individual. Near the start of our supervision meetings, Fiona pointed out to me the unique way I refer to and think with theorists. ‘They’re like your allies,’ she suggested. If creativity is ‘linked to the relational rather than to the individual,’³¹ then this way of inquiring demands that I think with, dialogue with, come in relation to the people and voices that fill the following pages. My hope is to centre the relational and demonstrate that inquiry and knowledge are empty without it.

In this body of work, I relate my enquiry into intergenerational transmissions to counselling and psychotherapy research primarily through engaging with psychodynamic literature. As a psychodynamic practitioner, I am intrigued by the concept of temporality in, and beyond, the counselling room. However, other approaches to counselling and psychotherapy are irrefutably relevant to this research and intergenerational connections. For instance, the Milan Approach to systemic family therapy, developed by Luigi Boscolo and his team, can be applied to intergenerational connections between family members. This approach initially involved a practitioner working in a group with multiple members of a family whilst other practitioners observed. Pietro Barbetta, the current Director of the Milan Centre of Family Therapy, describes this method to counselling as a complete deconstruction and transformation of the psychoanalytic setting. Barbetta writes, ‘The transformation from a more private and secret enclave to a kind of open and public space and from a monological style to a conversational and theatrical one was blatant or, in keeping with the style of change, dramatic.’³² Similarly, as I traverse stories from my grandmother’s lifetime and explore our connection, I take that which has been historically quiet and private and transform it into a public experience.

Additionally, Boscolo’s philosophy on temporality further intertwines my enquiry to counselling and psychotherapy. In his book, *The Times of Time: A Perspective on Time in Systemic Therapy and Consultation*, Boscolo explores the various constructs through which time is affected. He writes that, ‘The family is probably the social system in which the individual trait we are most concerned with here – awareness of time – can be observed in its

³¹ Ibid, 27.

³² Pietro Barbetta, ‘Milan Systemic Family Therapy,’ in *Encyclopedia of Couple and Family Therapy*, ed. Jay Lebow, Anthony Chambers and Douglas C. Breunlin (Springer Cham, 2017), 3.

subtlest and most complex form.’³³ In other words, the family unit is a structure that fundamentally yet delicately impacts the way time is both experienced and perceived. Boscolo explains that the continuity of time in families is constructed and transformed through rituals, impactful rituals like births and deaths and even more mundane rituals like daily interactions. The birth of a baby, for instance, causes the family to embrace the individuality of a new person and shift their experience of temporality. As a result, ‘a baby can influence people, including members of the extended family with whom it has no direct contact.’³⁴ Boscolo’s exploration of family temporality demonstrates that through my own family’s rituals, Ellyn’s life has the capacity to impact my own. Furthermore, when considering intergenerational transmissions in counselling and psychotherapy, the Milan Approach to systemic family therapy provides a basis through which practitioners can understand how family dynamics span generations.

Additionally, narrative therapy more broadly is a framework through which intergenerational transmissions can be further understood. Boscolo himself wrote that in narrative therapy ‘meaning is kept open, giving not a blueprint for a reality that can be reproduced if rigorously defined parameters are observed but a story that unfolds in time, a diachronic image of a reality it may be possible to bring into existence.’³⁵ Thus, thinking with narrative therapy in this enquiry enables me to engage with Ellyn’s lifetime in a way that allows meaning to be created, not discovered. Narrative therapy aligns with my epistemological position that the knowledge in this research is co-created between my lifetime and Ellyn’s. Furthermore, thinking with narrative therapy provides opportunity to engage extensively with ethical considerations.

Psychologist and narrative therapist, Alan Carr, explores narrative therapy as developed by Michael White, and writes that within this approach ‘human problems are viewed as arising from and being maintained by oppressive stories which dominate the person's life.’³⁶ In engaging with the deceased, and in my specific case with Ellyn, voice is being given to the voiceless. This activity poses ethical difficulties since a person who is deceased cannot consent to their life being used to co-create knowledge. Carr explains that

³³ Luigi Boscolo, *The Times of Time: A Perspective on Time in Systemic Therapy and Consultation*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 58.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 60.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

³⁶ Alan Carr, ‘Michael White’s narrative therapy,’ in *Clinical Psychology in Ireland, Volume 4*, ed. Alan Carr (Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 17.

‘developing therapeutic solutions to problems, within the narrative frame, involves opening space for the authoring of alternative stories, the possibility of which have previously been marginalized by the dominant oppressive narrative which maintains the problem.’³⁷ Ellyn’s life has already been told and constructed by members of my family who have shared stories with me about her life throughout my childhood and adult years. Thus, a narrative about Ellyn already exists. In this work, perhaps I am also constructing stories about Ellyn without her consent. Yet, thinking with Carr’s exploration of narrative therapy, I instead understand this work as a means of deconstructing dominant and oppressive narratives about Ellyn, about myself and about the past. In this enquiry, I curiously wonder about myself, Ellyn and our connection, and I allow for ‘the authoring of alternative stories’ about how the past and the present resonate with one another.

Similarly, narrative therapy theorists enable me to dynamically grapple with the story of Ellyn’s life and my own. For instance, as researcher and psychologist Jerome Bruner writes, the story of one’s life ‘is not composed of a set of testable propositions in the usual sense, but it is composed as a narrative.’³⁸ Bruner’s assertion moves the author – in the case of this dissertation, me – from a position of simply attempting to verify and report on facts, which are subjective and may change in each person’s account, to instead a place where ‘people and their intentional states,’ are centred.³⁹ In this work, and I would claim broadly in the work of explore intergenerational transmissions, this would look less like ensuring a specific quote is properly remembered and instead prioritising capturing the feelings and sensations that drove the narrative.

Bruner goes on to explain that, ‘narrative solves no problems. It simply locates them in such a way to make them comprehensible.’⁴⁰ Thus, as I explore Ellyn’s life and the ways in which it resonates with my own, I am not looking to identify and solve problems; instead, I am journeying curiously through our experiences in an attempt to understand and create material. Bruner demonstrates that this creating and sharing of narrative does not exist within a vacuum. Instead, the narrative must be understood within the context it exists. Thinking with narrative theory and intergenerational resonance means considering the culture and socio-political discourses which surround intergenerational connections and emphasising the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bruner, page 70

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 72.

meaning these connections create, rather than attempting to solely create a list of verifiable truths.

Many allies, not just those rooted within counselling and psychotherapy, will emerge in this work. Some allies may enter as a short sentence or phrase: my thoughts and their own dancing on the page to make something creative, something new. Other allies will weave in and out of chapters and letters, as if they are leaving comments. Then there are some allies who are so crucial to my research that their theories will act as pillars holding up the fabric which is produced as I write. Two of these allies, Stephen Frosh and Galit Atlas, were crucial to my forming the terms intergenerational resonance and inherited wisdom. However, the first encounter I had with one of these major allies was when I discovered Adrienne Rich.

Upon reflection, Adrienne Rich becoming my first ally is unsurprising. In Rich I find both my identity as a Jew and as an outsider to Judaism (among other shared identities). I was first introduced to Rich in her essay, “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity” in which she explores her unique, and at times confused, identity as a Jew. In the first paragraph of the essay, Rich writes, ‘.... I have to claim my father ... and I have to break his silence, his taboos; in order to claim him I have in a sense to expose him.’⁴¹ Rich was raised by a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father, and her parents raised her and her sister Protestant, and her father refrained from passing onto his children religious or cultural aspects of his Jewish upbringing and ancestry. As she grew, Rich became increasingly curious about her father’s family and her identity as a Jew. This essay, along with other works like her poem titled *Yom Kippur 1984*, explore Rich’s journey reclaiming a Jewish identity that was kept from her.

Admittedly, this essay resonated with my experience as a patrilineal Jew, as a Jew whose only Jewish parent has mostly denounced his Jewish identity. I thought of my father and his experiences, and I thought of myself and my own confusion when I initially read “Split at the Root.” I consider aspects of both my father and his mother, Ellyn, which I am seeking to claim as I read Rich’s work. I will turn to Rich as an ally to explore the pain I feel around being denied my Jewish heritage and the healing and confusion that stems from exploring this split root and reclaiming my identity. Furthermore, inquiring into my Jewish identity in this dissertation given the current conflict in Israel, Palestine and now Iran, the devastating destruction of civilian life in Gaza, as well as the uptick in antisemitism in places like the

⁴¹ Adrienne Rich, *Adrienne Rich Poetry and Prose*, edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Albert Gelpi and Brett Millier, (London: Norton & Company, 2018) 234.

United Kingdom and United States, has been challenging work. I acknowledge these complex events here, not because I will explore them overtly within this text, but as a means of making the reader aware of the pain that is sometimes spoken, yet often unspoken, in this inquiry.

When I stumbled onto the pages of my next ally, I began to wonder more about my own identities and experiences and the intergenerational weight which I carried. My conceptualisation of my relationship with Ellyn certainly comes from psychodynamic literature; however, it is also heavily impacted by the work of Vietnamese-American poet and author Ocean Vuong. Vuong, born in Hồ Chí Minh City, came to the United States at two-years-old when he and his family were granted asylum. His poetry and novels explore his experience of queerness, immigration and race. Vuong writes into the complexity and split aspects of his identities; for instance, he writes,

‘An American soldier fucked a Vietnamese farmgirl. Thus my mother exists. Thus I exist. Thus no bombs = no family = no me.’⁴²

I think alongside Vuong as I explore the intersectionality of my split identities: living in a different country from the one in which I was born, being neither a man nor a woman, having one Jewish and non-Jewish parent. However, Vuong’s life and work differ from my own, especially in his immigration story and experiences of racism. Vuong’s immigration entailed navigating language barriers and anti-Asian prejudice that my move from the United States to the United Kingdom did not entail. Thus, as I write with Vuong, I am mindful of the privileges I hold that he does not.

I first read Ocean Vuong several years ago when I found his debut poetry collection, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. In this collection, Vuong explores the wounds left in his body from those who precede him, especially his father. He writes,

‘the way I seal my father’s lips
with my own & begin
the faithful work of drowning.’⁴³

⁴² Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), 67.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 7-8.

Throughout these poems, Vuong captures the sense that pain and experiences from ancestors can feel inescapable and become our own. He ties this painful inheritance into the experience of being queer and diverting the expectations from those previous generations. I found a familiarity in Vuong's work, but he felt most like an ally to me when I read his novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. The novel is loosely structured like a letter – a letter to Vuong's mother who is at the end of her life. Vuong paints a portrait of his mother, her mother and himself through poetry and prose; he explores the themes that stretch across their lifetimes and pour into the past.

Within the prose, he tells his mother that he used to wake from his sleep as a child with a firm belief and fear that a bullet was 'lodged inside him.'⁴⁴ Eventually, he decides that the bullet has always been there and 'his bones, tendons, and veins merely wrapped around the metal shard, sealing it inside him.' Vuong states that the bullet was a seed which he 'bloomed around.'⁴⁵ The poet's description of the bullet reminds me of my own sensation of intergenerational resonance, something that has always been there and from which I have grown around. The metaphor transforms as he continues writing, and eventually he refers to the cyclical transmissions from his mother and grandmother as a spiral, as a 'creating something new from what is gone,'⁴⁶ or *inherited wisdom*. While holding on to their shared identities as immigrants, Vuong explores how each life builds upon and revisits substance from the previous one. Yet, he does this while maintaining his unique identity as a queer person. Ocean Vuong's engagement with intergenerational resonance reminded me of my own connection to Ellyn, the sense that I was returning to a life which has already been lived. As he writes, Vuong shares previously encountered inherited wisdom and uncovers new pieces. The material I produce in the following chapters is influenced by Vuong's capacity to write his own narrative with threads from his mother's and grandmother's.

Another major ally who will appear throughout my dissertation is the transmasculine theorist, Paul B. Preciado. I accidentally fell into Preciado's work when I came across a translated speech which he gave in 2019 at the École de la Cause Freudienne's annual conference. Preciado is invited to the conference to speak about women's issues in psychoanalysis and he is careful to introduce himself as a 'trans man' in a 'non-binary

⁴⁴ Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (London: Vintage, 2019), 77.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

body.⁴⁷ During the conference, Preciado is boo-ed and heckled off the stage. However, he later published his speech in full as he had wished to present it. In this published speech, Preciado states that the concepts of gender and sex, especially in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, are socially constructed. He argues that in order for counselling and psychotherapy to remain relevant in the twenty first century, a paradigm shift must occur. ‘To continue [this],’ Preciado states, ‘is as absurd as claiming to navigate the universe using a Ptolemaic geocentric map, as denying climate change, or asserting the Earth is flat.’⁴⁸ Preciado calls for transition and process to be centred in the work of mental health practitioners.

Thinking with Preciado in this work is critical. I am actively going through a transition; in fact, as I write this sentence, I am two weeks and one day away from my first appointment at Edinburgh’s Gender Clinic. Yet my transition transcends my gender. This dissertation is an act of emerging and transforming. Preciado claims that ‘the monster is one who lives in transition.’⁴⁹ I will take on the form of Preciado’s monster in my exploration of my own non-binary gender, the ways in which I approach my grandmother’s gender and more broadly my attempt to disrupt presupposed binaries. Leaning on Preciado as an ally will aid me as I play within traditional psychodynamic and therapeutic frameworks and seek to expand and investigate imagined boundaries.

The final ally that I will introduce here – though more allies will emerge within my work – is Jack Halberstam. Like Preciado, I use Halberstam’s voice to think into my queer gender and sexuality identities. Halberstam is a Jewish-American scholar who explores themes of gender and sexuality in a way which disrupts traditional academic writing. In fact, Halberstam writes in more accessible language and often thinks with media, like *SpongeBob SquarePants*, that would not often be present in academic work. Inspired by this deconstructing and creating of new academic norms, I build upon Halberstam’s tradition and explore intergenerational transmissions and queer experiences as they parallel media. Additionally, I think with Halberstam’s queering of time, or queer temporality, as I dismantle a notion of linear time and past and present. For instance, the scholar writes, ‘For queers, the separation between youth and adulthood quite simply does not hold, and queer adolescence

⁴⁷ Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 74.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

can extend far beyond one's twenties.'⁵⁰ Throughout this dissertation, I establish, with the help of Halberstam, the ways in which queering time is an ideal position from which to explore intergenerational connections

These allies will not be the only references which appear in my writing; nonetheless, their voices and experiences act as a foundation on which I will attempt to make sense of myself, my grandmother, our intergenerational resonance and the emerging inherited wisdom and retroactive redemption. While these chapters will be written by me alone, they are seeped with relationships and (co-)created dialogues. These relationships are crucial in my consideration of ethics for this project. Firstly, I recognised that this project would demand a certain amount of vulnerability and emotional work from myself. Therefore, I attended weekly therapy sessions throughout the duration of this project. Often, these sessions were a space in which I could explore the content emerging for me as I uncovered Ellyn's life. I also ensured that I could write on days when I did not have client work and, as a result, could sit with any overwhelming feelings which emerged.

Additionally, I recognised that while I was the only active participant in this dissertation, the line between myself and others, like Ellyn, was sometimes blurred. Moreover, I intertwined stories which I collected about Ellyn and my family throughout this work. After careful consideration in and beyond supervision, I acknowledged that I did not need to ask for any outside party's consent to include the stories about my family which I have collected over my own lifetime. Nonetheless, personal information about my family members is embedded in this text, sometimes written and other times implied. To protect these individuals, I often remain vague about who I am referencing or what precise information was shared.

Furthermore, I attempt to prioritise my experience of these stories and of my family in this work so that I am not speaking for others, especially Ellyn. Inevitably, however, Ellyn features strongly throughout this work, and I note that 'there is no reason to think that the wishes of the living and the dead will always coincide,' or in my case, wishes between myself and Ellyn.⁵¹ While I cannot consult Ellyn on her presence in this research, I acknowledge still that she has rights and interests that exist beyond her death. Exploring this scenario,

⁵⁰ Jack Halberstam, "What's that Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subculture Lives," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 2003): 328.

⁵¹ T.M. Wilkinson, 'Last Rights: The Ethics of Research on the Dead,' in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19, no.1 (2002): 32.

philosopher T.M. Wilkinson wonders about the impact on his dead grandmother as he remembers her. He writes that he remembers her ‘not as she is now’ but how she was in the past.⁵² However, in the case of this dissertation, I am not remembering my grandmother as she was in the past; she only ever existed at a time when I did not. Thus, similar to the others who are present in my research and perhaps even more, I am exploring Ellyn through myself. Wilkinson admits that protecting the rights and interests of the dead can be difficult and subjective; he concludes that this work should be seriously considered and compared to the rights and interests of the living.⁵³ In line with this, I greatly consider the impact on Ellyn’s image and personhood this work would make, sometimes wondering about what it would be like if she were alive. Further, my intention with this dissertation is to honour the life my grandmother led and explore our connection, the blurriness between us. The words throughout – while influenced by Ellyn’s life and the ways in which she lives on within me – are indubitably my own.

In the first chapter, I write a letter to Ellyn in which I explore beginnings – her birth and early years as well as my own. I use psychodynamic frameworks, like the concept of containment, to understand our experiences. In this chapter, I seek to establish a relationship with Ellyn through written letters, as our intergenerational resonance has not yet taken this form. In the second chapter, I write an essay in which I explore the impact of transgender and queer identities on the experience of intergenerational resonance. Additionally, I look at the prevalence of ancestor veneration, or the looking to ancestors for guidance and wisdom, across various cultures. Within these first two chapters, I establish my relationship with my grandmother and a working definition of intergenerational resonance.

In the third chapter I write again to Ellyn and this time, inspired by Adrienne Rich, I inquire into my grandmother’s experience of home and belonging. Additionally, I explore my own sense of belonging, especially as it pertains to my trans and Jewish identities. In the subsequent fourth chapter, I engage with the term *inherited wisdom* as it pertains to my relationship with Ellyn. I also uncover the roots for the concept in Jewish culture and Judaism. These twin chapters outline the material that is transmitted forward in time via intergenerational resonance.

⁵² Ibid, 34.

⁵³ Ibid, 39.

The fifth chapter is the final letter to my grandmother, in which I explore the endings and grief she experienced throughout her life. In this chapter, I wonder about the ways our losses and mourning reverberate together through time. In the sixth and final chapter of the dissertation, I introduce the concept *retroactive redemption*. This term refers to the material that moves backwards in time as a result of intergenerational resonance.

Regardless of the themes and terms with which I am thinking in a given chapter, the boundaries between myself and others, especially Ellyn, will blur. As I conceptualise this project, I imagine there are many Ellyns; Ellyns who lived, like the one who raised my father or the one who became sick as a child. However, there are Ellyns who transcend my grandmother's life, like the Ellyn whom I seek out when I need wisdom or comfort. Similarly, there are versions of myself and my allies which will come alive in this writing. These clones need not be consistent with one another, and, as I find in my personal life and client work, they are often not. Each version of myself and Ellyn may hold different inherited wisdom and our intergenerational experiences may resonate differently. I will hold these pieces together, dialogue with them and attempt to make sense of what emerges.

With these layers and pieces in mind, I will now introduce my grandmother. She was born Ellen Harriet Pfeffer on 23rd December 1942 in New York City; she would eventually informally change her name from Ellen to Ellyn. She grew up in the Bronx nestled in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood with her mother and father. At eleven years old, Ellyn grew sick and was diagnosed with Type I Diabetes, and, during the same year, her little brother was born. In her childhood, Ellyn was stubborn, bright and witty with an often-shocking bite; these traits followed her into adulthood. Ellyn wanted to attend university, but her parents refused to send her. Instead of education, Ellyn met my grandfather, Robert Smith, married him, and birthed their first son, my father, by the time she was twenty-three. She spent the following two decades raising him and his younger brother in various locations across the northeast of the United States: Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. When her children grew older, she began a role as an administrative assistant at the family's local synagogue and served as a vital member of the community. Eventually, her health deteriorated, and she died from heart failure and various other complications of diabetes and nearly four decades of smoking just two weeks before her 50th birthday. I was born four years later and given the name Hannah Ellyn.

This dissertation is a collection of stories –the story of Ellyn who was not able to write these words, and the story of me, the person who will write them. In the following chapters, I will explore these stories and the social, cultural and political threads that ebb and flow through them. I will describe the way intergenerational resonance feels in my body and mind, especially as it pertains to the vibrations between me and Ellyn. Furthermore, I will explore the produced inherited wisdom and retroactive redemption which results. This journey is mine and Ellyn’s; yet it reaches far before either of our lives and, quite possibly, far after. This is the story of heritage and its impacts.



Figure 1: Ellyn in high school, 1960

Chapter One: Birth & Beginnings

Dear Ellyn,⁵⁴

I'm torn. I've waited my whole life to talk to you, yet I'm sure that you've been here all along. The transition from you as a spirit guide⁵⁵ or a lingering ghost⁵⁶ to the recipient of a letter I write is strange and unfamiliar.

I'm writing to you now because I'm attempting to integrate my relationship to you with my academic life. I'm curious and excited by what has and will emerge in this process, but I'm also uncomfortable. I'm nervous that others will be reading what I write to you and that I can look back now and reflect on how I think and feel about you. Previously, my perception of our bond has been internal, and I could shield its vulnerability from the outside world. I want to preserve the fragile, authentic way I hold you in my mind, but I also want to share and enquire into it.

⁵⁴ Throughout this first letter, I attempt to write to Ellyn in the way which I would like to speak with her. The content is personal, vulnerable and often familiar. The footnotes here are a slight break from the letters; a place in which I can reflect on my relationship to my grandmother and the intergenerational resonance that flows between us. While I explore these reverberations with her, I use this space to conceptualise these realisations with theory: queer theory, psychodynamic theory, Jewish history, etc.

My intention with the footnotes is to preserve the fragile, authentic relationship I feel to Ellyn whilst also tying in the many frameworks through which I understand this connection. At first, I wrote the letters and added a few unfinished notes below, then I re-read my letters and more thoroughly created the footnotes. There is no authorial intended way for this writing to be consumed; read the letters then the footnotes, the footnotes then the letters, or both simultaneously. The absence of an order highlights the material throughout these chapters: time is not linear, and information is felt, processed and repeated.

⁵⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark, Luz en lo Oscuro*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), xxxii.

⁵⁶ Throughout this letter, I rely heavily on concepts proposed by Selma Fraiberg's "Ghost in the Nursery" article. Specifically, I am interested in Fraiberg's exploration of ghosts as 'uninvited guests from the ... past' who seek to perform the 'family tragedy from a tattered script' (164-165). The description of the ghosts as uninvited implies the inability to choose whether or not the past lingers in the present; I am inevitably reminded of Ellyn's ghostly presence in my early childhood. I suspect neither she nor I actively chose for her to remain in this space, yet there she was. Fraiberg's imagined tattered script acknowledges that the performance in the nursery has been played out time and time again. Ellyn and I are simply re-iterating a performance that, I believe, transcends us both.

Selma Fraiberg, "Ghost in the Nursery: A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant mother relationships," in *Clinical studies in infant mental health: The first year of life*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980).

This balance will be tricky and messy, and I will look to you for help. In fact, I will look to you for guidance and wisdom throughout this project, as I have done throughout my life. I imagine there is a thread that joins us across space and time, and it vibrates when our experiences connect.⁵⁷ When I acknowledge this association, I have been able to better understand my life and yours.⁵⁸ This letter and the ones that follow it, will be an attempt to find and explore these connections while making sense of how these discoveries impact me.

We must start this journey from somewhere. The beginning feels ambiguous, not like a clear, definable point. We could begin with the lives that precede each of us, Ellyn. I can imagine our ancestors in a shtetl, sitting around a wooden table, lighting Shabbat candles as the sun sets. Or, more recently, I picture your father as a young boy growing up in New York City speaking Yiddish at home with his parents, each born in the Pale of Settlement⁵⁹, and English at his American public school. We could begin with any of these lives, and I imagine we would encounter similar experiences.

However, I want to begin with you.

I know very little about the early years of your life. Your father died before I was born, and your mother died when I was five years old. Your brother has shared stories, but each take place after he was born and more than a decade after your own birth. As a result, I'm left mostly to imagine your start, so I remember and create it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ I conceptualise *intergenerational resonance* between myself and my grandmother in a variety of ways. The thread metaphor demonstrates that being in relation in this way defies a linear understanding of time and a physical understanding of space.

⁵⁸ In other words, I gained *inherited wisdom*. Understanding my life as inextricably tied to those who precede me, especially Ellyn, helps me better understand my own experiences and feelings.

⁵⁹ The Pale of Settlement was a term that referred to the western territories of Russia. Jews in the 19th century were restricted to this area and grew from a population of around one million at the start of the century to beyond four million at the end. As this enormous land mass was mostly populated by Jews, Yiddish, the language created by European Jews combining mostly Hebrew and German, was spoken. Small, impoverished villages, known in Yiddish as *shtetls*, were commonplace. The Jewish era in the Pale of Settlement eventually ended, with many Jews fleeing to the United States and Israel to avoid state-sanctioned riots, or *pogroms*.

David Goldberg and John Rayner, *The Jewish People: Their History and Their Religion*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 150.

⁶⁰ Throughout her work, Gloria Anzaldúa blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction, objective and subjective. She writes that western paradigms over-emphasize the 'rational' and the 'objective'; in doing so, however,

You were born on 23 December 1942 in New York City to a 28-year-old man named Paul Pfeffer and a 24-year-old woman named Bessie Pfeffer. They named you Ellen Harriet Pfeffer, a name which you would later change to Ellyn. I wonder how Paul and Bessie arrived at Ellen Harriet, and I wonder why you changed it but only slightly. You were taken home to an apartment in the Bronx, and you were raised, without any siblings, for eleven years.

I've never heard a single story about you in this time. But I imagine some.

I imagine you, even as a young child, being the strong-willed, argumentative and funny person that emerges in later stories. I imagine your parents doting on their only child in these years. They were not particularly religious, but they raised you surrounded by Jewish culture and community. I wonder how you felt about this identity as a young child; I wonder how much you knew about what was happening across the Atlantic Ocean. You parents' aunts, uncles and cousins who did not make the journey to America or Israel were still there, and I suspect many were eventually murdered in the camps. I'm not sure if your parents, school or synagogue told you what was happening or tried to shield you from the pain of the *Shoah*.⁶¹ I wonder how these choices impacted you.

I imagine your relationship to your gender, too. I wonder what it was like to be born and labelled a girl in the first half of the twentieth century. You would later name your first-born son, my father, with the initials D.R.S., and you hoped that he would grow to become a doctor. I picture you hoping the same for yourself as a small child. Perhaps you read books and played pretend fulfilling fantasies of being a future doctor, professor, or some other type of a professional. I imagine you didn't know many women who held these roles, yet I feel that it was with ease you imagined yourself as one. I wonder if I feel this way because this was the

researchers face 'losing touch with ... things and people.' When exploring my grandmother's life, I am faced with the loss of knowing, in an objective sense, very little. Instead, I feel my way through Ellyn's past; I tune into the symptoms of intergenerational resonance: the hairs on the back of neck stand tall, a warm, ticklish sensation on my scalp, or a deep understanding in my gut. Anzaldúa understood that spirituality and feelings, often noted by western academia as fiction, opened up a portal to a world beyond objective knowing. As I explore the connection between Ellyn and myself, I am inspired by Anzaldúa's writing and her own reaching out to ancestors.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2021), 27.

⁶¹ The *Shoah* is a Hebrew term which means destruction. It is often used by Jews when referring to the Holocaust, the process in which approximately six million Jews were murdered by Nazi Germany. In my life and throughout these letters, I attempt to understand my grandmother's experience being born a young, Jewish person during this genocide. I feel certain that her early exposure to such a horrific, personal event shaped the remainder of her life.

way I perceived myself as a child; already, I am encountering the blurriness between you and me in my mind. The expectations that come with the label woman eventually wrapped themselves around your body and squeezed those dreams out. I wish, Ellyn, that I could hear from you what your relationship was to womanhood and how it impacted the trajectory of your life.

Eleven years later, your life changed profoundly. You became an older sister, and you were diagnosed with Type I Diabetes.⁶² I remember when I transitioned from being an only child to an older sibling – sharing space with another felt unusual and unfair at times. Going through this change and getting a chronic diagnosis must have felt incredibly overwhelming. Your entire world changed suddenly. You argued with your parents when they restricted your diet and lectured you on the importance of staying healthy. Eventually, they compromised with you. If you stayed away from sugary sweets, you could smoke cigarettes. Perhaps this logic made sense in 1953⁶³, but I'm flabbergasted by it now. I wonder, if your parents had stopped you from smoking, then would our conversations instead have taken place in your house in New Jersey rather than in my mind.

However, this letter is not necessarily about those years. This letter is about your beginning, my beginning and finding a place to start. I wish I could include your voice here, ask you questions about your birth and early years, and integrate them into this letter. I cannot, so instead of recalling I will continue imagining. If I hold you close enough, I am hopeful that your own experiences, feelings and words may find a home here.

I imagine you were a small baby and that your parents never left your side. The politics, war and atrocities of the time perhaps fed into their anxieties, and they worried about your

⁶² I'm not sure in which order these events took place. Here and throughout my letters, the frustration caused by not knowing is present in my writing.

⁶³ Some studies by the 1950's indicated a correlation between smoking and lung cancer. However, popular opinion on smoking at the time suggests that many viewed the dangers of smoking as not 'medically convincing.' My great-grandparents likely saw the dangers of smoking as much lesser than the dangers of sugar to a diabetic. This process of compromising highlights the way my grandmother's health was handled; likely, witnessing her fears and feelings was less important to her parents than ensuring she was pacified. I explore her health and this dynamic further in my final letter to Ellyn in Chapter 5.

Alistair Cook, "Cancer and Smoking: The American Story," in *The Guardian*, 20 February 1954, <https://www.theguardian.com/century/1950-1959/Story/0,,105180,00.html>.

health and well-being in an all-consuming way. You were a happy baby and you learned quickly; you became aware of your hands and feet, you blew bubbles and laughed. Yet sometimes you saw the anxiety and pain in your parents' eyes, and you held that pain in your body and mind. My fantasies of you feel familiar to me. I remember my parents losing many loved ones and enduring a miscarriage in my early years of life, and I remember seeking to comfort my mother. Her anxieties began to reside in my mind and body. I wonder if this pattern precedes me and was experienced by you and if it made it easier for my father to encourage me to fill this role. I am aware that your mother struggled with various pains, especially abandonment. The events taking place around the world and the experience of being a Jewish person in the early twentieth century seem inevitably alive in your nursery. I imagine that all the lives which were lived in order to produce you were etched into your small body and ready to transfer to the generations which would be created by you.⁶⁴

These intergenerational transmissions, which were once in your nursery, changed and grew and eventually found themselves in mine, inside a one-bedroom apartment in New Jersey. I was born nearly 54 years after your birth and four years after your death. As I grow older, I feel more aware of how young you were when you died – we could have had a significant amount of time together. The grief of this is ever-present in my writing to you. Admittedly, I know many more details around my own birth than I do yours, and I wonder about the possible similarities and differences. Each of us were the first-born in our families and assigned the label of female before even a name. I was born with a head full of dark, fuzzy hair, and – based on my father's baby photos – I suspect you might have been, too. I imagine two small babies with dark fuzzy hair each lying in their own cribs as their parents, who just became parents, look over them and unknowingly begin the process of passing on ghosts.⁶⁵ These babies are

⁶⁴ As I re-read this paragraph, I'm unsure where I am writing about Ellyn or myself. This blurring between my ancestor and myself highlights the sometimes-disorienting nature of intergenerational resonance. Stephen Frosh explores Freud's idea of the uncanny through intergenerational trauma; the uncanny being 'something familiar but out of place, something known yet not quite belonging where we find it.' Frosh explains that this sensation can also be socio-political and transcend generations. This conceptualisation of the uncanny captures the timeless and confusing nature of intergenerational resonance.

Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 192.

⁶⁵ While the ghosts perform the 'family tragedy' for the baby, the parents are the ones through which this intergenerational connection is linked. Just as Ellyn's parents passed on the ghosts of her grandparents and beyond, so too did my parents. Therefore, the connection I feel to Ellyn runs through my father.

Fraiberg, "Ghost in the Nursery," 165.

separated by over half a century of time and around one hundred miles of space. Yet, their nurseries were occupied by much the same presences.⁶⁶

Similarly, Ellyn, I was born near the end of the year to two young people who became parents with my birth. You did not live to see your eldest child become a father, but I wonder what my birth would have looked like if you had. I suspect you would have been in the hospital in Philadelphia to see your first grandchild and that you would have been heavily involved in the planning of a *Simchat Bat*.⁶⁷ Instead, though, I was surrounded by only my mother's family and traditions in my early years. While my parents did spend the first three years of my life deciding with which religion to raise me, eventually, they both decided that my mother should take the lead on my religious upbringing. Thus, I was baptised and began my Catholic education. In choosing Catholicism as my religion, my parents mostly left my Jewish identity untouched.

During the first several years of my life, I was aware of half of the places from which I came. I regularly saw my mother's mother, sisters and their husbands and children. I was told that my great-grandparents had been immigrants and the children of immigrants from European countries like Italy, Ireland and Poland. Like many Americans, these immigrant stories became part of my identity in a confused and longing way.⁶⁸ Despite my young age (or maybe because

⁶⁶ Fraiberg writes that, 'ghosts who have established their residence privileges for three or more generations may not, in fact, be identified as representatives of the parental past.' The ghosts that made up my nursery and Ellyn's may be ancestors from many generations ago, whose names and stories are nearly forgotten. Yet, the material that resonates between and through us certainly will not have started with me nor Ellyn. In processing these narratives and acknowledging our own intergenerational resonance, we are likely engaging with experiences which have repeated again and again across our family history.

Fraiberg, "Ghost in the Nursery," 165.

⁶⁷ The *Simchat Bat* is a Jewish ceremony in which a baby assigned female at birth is introduced to the community and named. I mention the *Simchat Bat* here to establish which Jewish traditions could have been part of my childhood but, due to the absence of an extended Jewish family and Jewish grandmother, were not. I explore the impacts of Ellyn's absence on my identities – especially as a Jewish person – in the third and fourth chapters.

⁶⁸ My grandmother would have been familiar with the way in which third-and-higher-generation Americans claim their heritage. However, I am aware that this is a unique perspective as an American who now lives outside of the United States. Residing in the United Kingdom has allowed me to experience a country in which most residents are not the grandchildren of immigrants and, seemingly, put less significance on their family's origin stories. In his book *A Forgetful Nation*, Ali Behdad explores the roles of the U.S. government and Ellis Island in welcoming certain immigrants at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Behdad explains that the ways in which

of it), I was also aware of the absences in my early childhood. My father's parents and family were completely absent aside from his younger brother, my uncle, and a few other figures that weaved in and out. These absences bothered me, and I longed for more connection.

Additionally, my mother would often tell me stories about her childhood and the people who came before her, but my father did not. This disparity was jarring, and in hindsight I wish my mother demanded less of my emotional labour and my father shared more of himself. Eventually, from my father's rare stories and my mother's teenage and young adult memories, I learned the origins of my middle name. I was formally introduced to your ghost, Ellyn. When you were mentioned, suddenly I was aware of the haunting and distinct manner with which you hung over my parents, my home and my family.⁶⁹ Your absence was painfully loud.

Americans remember this immigration is idealised and, as a result, the less appealing, more hostile events and laws associated with this period are disavowed.

Thus, European-descended Americans, like my mother's family, glorify their immigration stories and view them through the lens of the American Dream – a hopeful but often impossible cultural narrative that living in America grants anyone the right to cross class lines with a bit of hard work. Simultaneously, in order to assimilate into white America, certain aspects of immigration, such as language, are disowned and forgotten; this defines 'belonging as a status that can be achieved through actions, such as immigration and naturalisation' (20). The resulting sensation, at least for me, is a fluctuation between belonging and having no home. While my mother's family was able to assimilate into white America with more ease than my father's Jewish family, all my ancestors benefitted, to varying degrees, from their ability to claim whiteness. As Behdad explores, national identification in the United States has historically relied on the existence of another, one who is not white and does not speak English (112). My ancestors could separate themselves, eventually, from this other. My family's immigration story is messy, filled with instances of belonging and assimilating while also forgetting and rejecting. Behdad's analysis conceptualises the ways in which I, as a fourth and fifth-generation white American with Jewish and European roots understand my ancestors and origins.

Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-22.

⁶⁹ Hauntings are present throughout this body of work. Notably, the term *hauntology* has a rich history, especially in psychoanalytic work. In her feminist reading of Derrida's *Hauntology*, Nancy Holland thinks about Derrida's statement, 'je voudrais apprendre à vivre enfin' which loosely interprets to, 'I would like to learn to live finally!' Holland acknowledges the tradition of learning to live as typically being passed from father to son. She claims that, as a woman, she perhaps cannot learn to live from her mother 'who must be transcended' or her father 'who would not allow me to speak/live in my own name.' Thus, Holland asks, 'from whom?' She contemplates her father's ghosts but ultimately worries that the ghosts will not see her as she is, but instead will see her a reflection of themselves. I think about Holland's query as it pertains to me and Ellyn; certainly, our connection is a prime example of hauntology. Yet, I do not worry that her ghost may see me as her or that I may see her as me. I argue

In both of our nurseries, the ghosts of the past lingered. These ghosts were once babies in nurseries with their own ghosts, and one day they appear in a new nursery as a ghost surrounded by familiar and unfamiliar others. This cycle seems inevitable and necessary; essences of our lives do not pass on with our bodies, and they remain behind to be processed, worked through and continued. If you've ever watched a scary movie, Ellyn, then I'm sure you know the most popular solution to an unrelenting spirit is exorcism.⁷⁰ However, this solution negates the value of the experiences and wisdom which are demanding space in the newest generation.⁷¹

In my nursery, I believe the ghost that was embedded most firmly in the walls was you. My parents were, on some level, aware of this haunting, and I am certain that is why they gave me your name. Specifically, they gave me not your birth name but instead your chosen name. In giving me your chosen name, they left me with a different ghost, an alternative legacy. You weren't the first person in our family to choose your name, and you won't be the last.

Our ancestors also chose names. Starting in the nineteenth century, Ashkenazi Jews in the Pale of Settlement were forced to adopt surnames. Many Jews were given the option to choose their new names.⁷² In other words, both your family and your husband's family would have taken on surnames before their immigration to America. Some of your grandparents' surnames were Pfeffer, Wilkin and Kossar; your paternal grandparents were born in an area of the Pale that is now Russia and your maternal ones in Poland. I wonder how their parents or grandparents arrived at these surnames and if they changed the spelling or pronunciation when

instead that the very nature of haunting blurs the line between Ellyn and me, Ellyn and my father, my father and me and ghost and descendant.

Nancy Holland, "The Death of the Other/Father: A Feminist Reading of Derrida's Hauntology," *Hypatia* 16, no. 1 (2001): 64-71.

⁷⁰ This solution is not only suggested in fictional media. Fraiberg claims that once a parent attempts to 'remember and reexperience [their] childhood anxiety and suffering, the ghosts depart...', and Frosh states that it would be fair to consider the process of psychoanalysis as a 'practice of exorcism.'

Fraiberg, "Ghost in the Nursery," 196.

Frosh, *Hauntings*, 38.

⁷¹ Despite the insistence by researchers and practitioners (like those above) that dispersion of the hauntings is necessary, I argue that inherited wisdom is not found through exorcism or banishment of ancestors. Instead, tuning in and exploring with the intent to gain understanding, rather than to evict ghosts, produces the greatest insight.

⁷² Alexander Beider, "The Notion of "Jewish Surnames,"" *Journal of Jewish Languages* 6, no. 2 (2018): 188-189.

they arrived at Ellis Island.⁷³ As a result, the Jewish, especially Ashkenazi Jewish, legacy of naming is shaped by the demand from Europeans that we adopt their words, language and pronunciation as part of our names and broader identities.

The process through which Jewish people choose names is not just impacted by assimilation. The naming which occurs at birth is a reminder that we continue to live, to survive⁷⁴; birth and naming are a celebration of this feat. Similar to many aspects of Jewish tradition⁷⁵, the naming process acknowledges people and events that have passed and made this moment possible. Many Ashkenazi Jews name their child after a deceased loved one.⁷⁶ I'm not sure if my father named me with this tradition in mind – though given his distaste for tradition, I suspect he didn't. Regardless, I was once a baby in a nursery, haunted by your ghost, and bearing your chosen name. From you, I learned about choices and names.

Like you, I did not like the name which I was given at birth. Quickly, I encountered many other children with my given name, and, as a result, I was often referred to by my first and last names. The popularity of my name wasn't the only reason I disliked it; I felt the name didn't suit me. It reminded me of the frilly shirts my mother would stuff me into or the curly up-do's she would insist upon for my head. I would fight, scream and cry; the expectations on me by my family and society felt wrong and did not resonate with who I was.

I wonder if you can relate to this, Ellyn. I picture you writing your name on school assignments as a small child and replacing the expected 'e' with a 'y'. One small, almost unnoticeable gesture which granted you autonomy over your name, your identity, yourself.

⁷³ Ellis Island was the main port in which immigrants entered the United States from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, and it welcomed over 70 percent of those who entered the country in this time; my and Ellyn's ancestors travelled from Eastern Europe to this port.

Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation*, 1.

⁷⁴ Rayner writes, 'Among Jews [birth] promises, more particularly, the survival of the "Covenant people" which, having so often hung in the balance is held all the more precious.'

Goldberg and Rayner, *The Jewish People*, 366.

⁷⁵ Many traditions of Judaism and Jewish culture reflect on the past and honour the events that led to the present. Our prayers often start 'Eloheynu v'Elohei avoteinu...', or in English, 'Our God and God of our ancestors,' and this commemorates the predecessors that established our traditions and people. The historical and ancestral components of Judaism demonstrate the process of intergenerational resonance when felt by a community rather than solely an individual; both spiritual wisdom is inherited and lessons are learned via this connection.

⁷⁶ Goldberg and Rayner, *The Jewish People*, 367.

Eventually, my parents grew familiar with my distaste for clothing and items which I thought of as *girly*, and I was labelled a tomboy. ‘Do you want to be a boy?’ my mother would ask me. I could hear the anxiety as the last word, *boy*, came out a bit higher than she intended.

‘No,’ I responded, ‘I just want to be cool.’

Two decades passed before I began to fully explore and understand what I meant by *cool*. Ellyn, I’m transgender; I’m transmasculine to be more specific. Perhaps you would be familiar with these words, but I suspect you would be more familiar with the slurs and jokes associated with them. So instead, I’ll explain to you what transmasculine means to me. Admittedly, I struggle to feel that any word or label can fully explain my gender; instead, my gender feels like an act which I reflect on, create⁷⁷ and perform⁷⁸ each day. The word transmasculine is most comfortable to me as I feel that it highlights my adjacency to womanhood, my experience of girlhood and my admiration and closeness to the label and community of lesbianism. Transmasculine also allows me to express my desire to create masculinity in a way which feels authentic and subjective. Coming out as transgender, or trans, has enabled me to see my life as something I am permitted to create, rather than that which I am forced to live.

⁷⁷ Paul B. Preciado describes himself as a ‘transman’ living in a ‘non-binary body’ (19). He writes that his transition is an awakening and that ‘this awakening is revolution ... The process [of transitioning] is a decolonisation of the body’ (35). Preciado’s exploration of his gender is one of discovery and creation; in undertaking this journey he is building something new from something assigned. His work resonates deeply with my own experience of my gender. I follow sensations of euphoria; I recognise it is ‘not a case of *choosing* freedom but of *creating* it’ (29). Yet, both Preciado and I approach our transition from the position of being white scholars. He often uses the experience of transition as a metaphor for crossing borders. While he does move from one world into the next, he maintains his white Europeaness and does not personally understand the experience of those who cross borders and experience racism. Similarly, I hold privilege as a white American that enables me to create my gender, and I hold this in mind as I write to my grandmother.

Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*

⁷⁸ Preciado’s gender transition and political activism is largely influenced by Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is a ‘doing’, a performance in which a person (does not) act(s) congruently with the gender they were assigned at birth. They explore the ways in which labels such as *man* and *woman* are processes in which one becomes rather than inherently is born. This description parallels my experience of my gender: I do not have an innate sense of my gender, rather I perform my gender, I construct my gender, I become my gender in ways which feel *right*. This experience of *right* is similar to the sensation created by intergenerational resonance, an internal harmony.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 2-46.

Yet, I didn't learn this on my own.

My experience not feeling at home in the labels and roles that were assigned to me at birth seemed to reach beyond my lifetime and reverberate with yours. I'm not sure, Ellyn, how you felt about your gender and sexuality.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the small threads of stories about you which have stretched forward to me feel familiar. As I attend my gender clinic appointments, inch towards taking testosterone, sign my emails with my pronouns (they/them), I wonder which ancestors did not have the words or resources to explore their gender as I am. I think mostly about you.

Ellyn, you taught me that the name I am given at birth is not necessarily the name I will choose to bear for life. I am proud to be your grandchild and to bear your name as my middle name. The connection I feel to you and the wisdom I have inherited from you has supported and driven me throughout my life and especially my transition. In fact, months after I came out to my wife, friends and family, I was struggling with panic attacks. I was terrified to transition socially and medically, and I felt uncertain about which changes I wanted to make. At the time, I did not connect my sudden agoraphobia and panic attacks to my gender; yet, in hindsight, I acknowledge the ways in which the impending decisions and changes debilitated me.

One night, several months into my extreme panic, I woke up very suddenly. Before I opened my eyes, I felt as if myself and my sleeping wife next to me were not the only presences in the room. Then, I heard strongly and clearly, 'I'm so proud of you.' I knew at once the voice was yours, despite never having heard your voice. Eventually, I decided the statement was a dream and fell back to sleep. There are countless ways to explain that experience;⁸⁰ regardless

⁷⁹ If gender and sexuality are socially constructed, then modern language impacts the ways in which one can engage with their own and others gender and sexuality. As Ellyn and I never lived in the same time periods nor were we part of the same generations, our understandings of gender and sexuality would differ. As a result of language developments, representation in media and a greater (but still low) rate of social acceptance, I have a greater ability to explore my nonconforming gender than Ellyn would have had.

Susan McCabe, "To Be and to Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism," *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11, no. 1 (2005): 119-121.

⁸⁰ I have considered various possible explanations for this experience; I may have still been sleeping and dreaming, or perhaps I experienced sleep paralysis which is often accompanied by hallucinations. Ultimately, none of these options feels adequate. Instead, I care less about what happened, and I am more interested in how it made me feel. Anzaldúa captures the blurriness between sleep and awake, real and unreal, with her exploration of 'nepantla' a

of these reasons, your experience, wisdom and, I believe, love stretches forward in time and informs me as I embark on the uncertainties of my life.

Our connection has complicated my transition, too. I am proud to be your grandchild and proud to bear your name as my middle name. Yet, the name Hannah Ellyn does not suit me; I did not choose it. I have shortened my first name to Han, and I like the familiarity, the sound, the way my wife says it and the way it looks written on my certificate that qualifies me as a therapist. However, I have not legally changed my full name because I have felt paralysed when I thought about changing my middle name. I did not want to part ways with that piece of you. Eventually, I found a solution that feels right: I want to change it to a name which also begins with an E and holds significance in Jewish culture.

Ellyn, you changed Ellen to Ellyn and passed it along to me. As long as I can remember, I felt a connection to that name and you. As I have grown and changed, I have come to terms with the realisation that Ellyn does not suit me. You have passed more to me than just your name; you have given me the courage to choose. I am changing Ellyn because I know Ellyn is not really that which I inherited from you. Instead, I inherited the wisdom to know and create myself; the more I become and experience myself, the stronger the resonance reverberates between us. Ellyn will not be the final iteration of our name, and maybe someone beyond us will change it yet again. From now, I will be known as Han Ezra, and I hope that this name stretches beyond me and honours you.

I am certain the name Ellyn was not the only way in which your names lingered in my nursery and early years. As I mentioned, you named my father with the initials D.R.S., and I am told you intentionally did this to inspire him to become a doctor. Similar to the stories I know of your childhood and the ones in my own, my father also rebelled against expectations imposed on him, especially as a child and teenager. Your dreams of being a doctor vanished as you grew and discovered you parents would only pay to educate a boy. Now also your dreams of having a son who would grow to be a doctor were squashed again, perhaps because of my father's rebellious nature or perhaps because those dreams were simply not his. However, I do not believe your dream disappeared.

Nahuatl word for 'the space in-between.' (98). As I write to my grandmother, I seek out this liminal space in which we are neither awake nor asleep.

Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 98.

Instead, I believe the dream reformed in my nursery. Your dream could not emerge in your lifetime; it was immobilised against your will. You attempted to pass this dream onto my father, but he rejected it. I believe I understand why it didn't manifest in his nursery the way it did in mine. Ellyn, my father was assigned male at birth; he grew up with the knowledge that he was a boy; he grew up believing that who he could become was not inhibited by a gender label assigned to him and outside of his control. Like you, Ellyn, I was assigned female at birth; I was labelled a girl. Notably, I was born in 1996 and not 1942, and the world was different, but it was also similar. For instance, I was born into a world in which many more women were doctors;⁸¹ however, I was still born into a country which had never (and still has not) been led by a woman, which would revoke a women's right to choose,⁸² and which would elect a president who is known to have sexually assaulted women.⁸³ My father did not understand, nor did he resonate with your dreams. Yet, as a ghost you wrote the scripts that were read aloud in my nursery, and I understood and absorbed them.

My father could not or would not process the grief associated with the loss you experienced in your life as a woman. Instead, this unprocessed material found me and latched on, and I identified with it. I grew and took shape with this entangled transmission; it shaped my personality, my wants, desires, fears and dreams. I became a 'carrier' for your dream, and I was left to 'finish the unfinished.'⁸⁴ Now, I write these letters to you as I attempt to complete

⁸¹ In 1960 women earned just over 1,000 of the doctorates given by U.S. universities, but that same figure rises to 17,493 doctorates by 1999.

Lori Thurgood, Mary Golladay and Susan Hill, "U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century: Special Report," National Institutes of Health (NIH), June 2006, <https://shorturl.at/wdzMH>.

⁸² While writing this bit of the letter, I was reflecting on the state of women's rights and experiences in the United States from my birth in 1996 until the present year. Horrifically, the last several years seem to me to be the worst. The organisation Equality Now outlines the absence of protection for women and girls in the U.S. Constitution, the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and litigation against transgender women.

Shivangi Misra, "Why Women's Rights are Vulnerable in America," *Equality Now*, 8 March 2024, https://equalitynow.org/news_and_insights/why-womens-rights-are-vulnerable-in-america/.

⁸³ The Guardian, "Sexual misconduct allegations against Donald Trump – a timeline," *The Guardian*, 25 October 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/25/trump-sexual-misconduct-allegations-timeline>.

⁸⁴ Zelda G. Knight explores the ways in which intergenerational trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next via projective identification. Like other sources, Knight focuses on the intergenerational material being trauma; I refute that only trauma is passed in this way from one generation to the next. Nonetheless, Knight's focus on material as unprocessed and, as a result, being passed on resonated with my own experiences.

my Professional Doctorate. I am more aware now than in other moments that this dream and task is not mine alone, and I am grateful to have chosen to complete this goal with you.

I am aware of many ways in which our beginnings, my nursery and yours, parallel one another. Perhaps the most significant similarity is the experience of both being the first-born in our families. In your nursery, your parents looked upon you as the first continuation of their own names, their parents, their families. However, the responsibility on you to carry forward a family was, I imagine, much greater and stretched beyond your immediate family. You were born as the extermination of around six million Jewish people was coming to an end. You were born in defiance of those acts. Yet, I'm certain you felt them as I feel them, too. This sense of responsibility to the Jewish people is furthered by cultural tradition. Historically, Jewish firstborns were seen as belonging to God, as needed to be redeemed.⁸⁵ Thus, the firstborn enters a world in which they carry the weight of those who came before them.

In both of our families of origin, our births symbolised the beginning of the family and the start of parenthood. Our nurseries were the first of a new generation which could be haunted. Ghosts which had not been heard and experiences which were aching to be felt discovered a place to land. Fears and dreams of our parents for their children found their first bodies and minds on which to latch. Admittedly, the idea of these ghosts lingering in a nursery feels violating and eerie, especially from the perspective of the baby. Yet I question whether the ghosts solely carry evil hauntings. While these ancestors may bring unprocessed pain and unrealised dreams, they also carry with them already-gained wisdom and insight. Ellyn, most literature⁸⁶ suggests these ghosts need to be understood and dispelled from the child's mind and life. This solution simplifies yet undermines the hauntings.

Instead, I am curious to engage with and learn from the ghosts. I wonder if you ever watched the film *Beetlejuice*, Ellyn. It aired four years before your death, and I suspect you may be familiar with it. Specifically, I wonder if you remember the teenager, Lydia Deetz, who moves into a new house with both her father and stepmother. Throughout the film, Lydia is the only human who seems to easily detect the ghosts which haunt her new home. Through

Zelda Knight. "“If I leave home, who will take care of mum?” Intergenerational transmission of parental trauma through projective identification,' *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 40, no. 2 (2017): 123.

⁸⁵ Goldberg and Rayner, *The Jewish People*, 368.

⁸⁶ See footnote 3.

connecting to the ghosts which haunt her family's residence, Lydia comes to learn about the past and herself. In fact, throughout the film, she even risks her own wellbeing to save the lingering beings from becoming lost souls. Lydia's observation of and care for the ghosts sets her apart from the other living characters in the film.⁸⁷ The couple who haunts Lydia's house could not be helped solely through attempting to understand their experiences and exorcising them – nor would Lydia have found a place in which she belongs. Instead, both the ghosts and Lydia are able to acknowledge their pain and wishes and form a mutually beneficial connection.

As I look back into my nursery and yours, Ellyn, I could attempt to understand and dispel you. Yet, I don't want to lose your presence and wisdom. Instead, I reflect on the experiences of the babies in their cribs and the ghosts which rehearse and perform from their tattered scripts. I recognise the inevitability of being both a baby and a ghost. Some ghosts may bring material and sensations that do not land on me and resonate across my lifetime. However, I am inclined to tune into the ghosts' stories which do resound with my own. As we embark on a new beginning together, Ellyn, I am determined to remain open to the intergenerational resonance that oscillates between us. With you, I seek to learn and grow from what is shared and gained.

We began again here, and I'm excited to see where we travel next.

With warmth, hope and a bit of fear,

Han Ezra

⁸⁷ Jenny He, "Curator's Essay: Inhabiting Tim Burton's Universe," *MoMA*, <https://mcdonaghmat2015.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/inhabiting-tim-burtons-universe.pdf>.

Chapter Two: Transing Intergenerational Resonance

An Explanation

As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, I will now enquire into intergenerational transmissions in a new format – an essay. More letters to Ellyn follow this chapter; however, essays like this one allow me to maintain an authentic dialogue with my grandmother within the letters and then engage in a different, critical way with theory and culture in alternating chapters. Working with Creative-Relational Inquiry enables me to centre the relational component between me and Ellyn, between descendant and ancestor, while also employing a unique, fluid method that helps me to grapple with the many layers this work entails: the personal, political, and social. In other words, the knowledge that emerges from this work is not waiting to be uncovered. Instead, it is created through letters between myself and my grandmother and in my engagement with my life, other lives and theories which already exist.

Additionally, while I will use psychodynamic concepts throughout this dissertation (i.e., containment in Chapter Four and transitional objects in Chapter Six) to consider the echoes of Ellyn’s life in my own, other approaches to counselling and psychotherapy can also shed light on intergenerational resonance. As we embark on this journey, narrative theory is an important consideration. This approach enables me to recall and narrate Ellyn’s life and my own in a way that emphasizes not solely the provable facts but instead the story. More specifically, as researcher and psychologist Jerome Bruner writes, the story of one’s life ‘is not composed of a set of testable propositions in the usual sense, but it is composed as a narrative.’⁸⁸ Bruner’s assertion moves the author – in the case of this dissertation, me – from a position of simply attempting to verify and report on facts, which are subjective and may change in each person’s account, to instead a place where ‘people and their intentional states,’ are centred.⁸⁹ In this work, and I would claim broadly in the work of explore intergenerational transmissions, this would look less like ensuring a specific quote is properly remembered and instead prioritising capturing the feelings and sensations that drove the narrative.

Bruner goes on to explain that ‘narrative solves no problems. It simply locates them in such a way to make them comprehensible.’⁹⁰ Thus, as I explore Ellyn’s life and the ways in

⁸⁸ Jerome Bruner, ‘Self-Making and World-Making,’ *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 1 (1991): 70.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

which it resonates with my own, I am not looking to identify and solve problems; instead, I am journeying curiously through our experiences in an attempt to understand and create material. Bruner demonstrates that this creating and sharing of narrative does not exist within a vacuum. Instead, the narrative must be understood within the context it exists. Thinking with narrative theory and intergenerational resonance means considering the culture and socio-political discourses which surround intergenerational connections and emphasising the meaning these connections create, rather than attempting to solely create a list of verifiable truths.

Introduction

I arrived at the term *intergenerational resonance* whilst exploring my connection to my late grandmother. I have long been intrigued by the parallels in our experiences and her ghost-like presence in my life. Specifically, I am often fascinated to find that the narratives and experiences in my own lifetime echo the ones she underwent. Often, these similarities feel as if she is reaching forward into my life and attempting to share with me material felt, or even created, within her own. As I outline in the introduction of this dissertation, this connection feels like two strings on an instrument, playing the same note, yet never, seemingly, touching. An undetectable force connects us across time and space, unseen yet overwhelmingly present. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which intergenerational resonance can be trans-ed; here, I use trans as a verb, rather than its more common use as a noun, drawing inspiration from trans theorist Susan Stryker. Stryker explains that the act of ‘transing ... is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces.’⁹¹ She explores the ways in which transing involves deconstructing and reassembling gender, and I extend that definition to signify that transing intergenerational resonance includes creating, rupturing and re-creating the past from various gendered perspectives. Specifically, as I journey along in my own gender transition, I am struck by how this resonance between Ellyn and myself transforms. My experience taking on different roles in society and experiencing liminal spaces disrupts my connection to Ellyn, transforms and then solidifies it. In this chapter, I explore how intergenerational resonance is experienced by those of us who leave the confines of the gender which we were assigned at birth.

⁹¹ Susan Stryker. ‘Introduction: Trans- Trans, or Transgender?’ *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2008), 13.

As both a transgender person and a psychodynamic counsellor to transgender clients, I frequently encounter the ways in which a queering of one's assigned gender at birth and the associated expectations that come with it disrupt and reshape connections to the past. Within this chapter, I will rely on Michel Foucault's exploration of queer relational dynamics, Jack Halberstam's concepts of queer time and space and Atalia Israeli-Nevo's trans temporality and her attempt to take her time whilst transitioning to establish the ways in which time is uniquely experienced by transgender and gender expansive individuals. I will use my connection to Ellyn and my own queer and trans identities to demonstrate this distinct understanding of time and intergenerational resonance. I establish that time is reshaped through gender transition and, as a result, transgender people are uniquely situated in our exploration of intergenerational resonance.

Yet, before I explore the experience of intergenerational resonance to transgender and gender queer people, I will first outline that ancestor connection and veneration already exists in knowledge sources beyond British psychodynamic literature. While I am inspired to think about ancestors through Jewish culture and religion – which I will explore in greater depth in Chapter 4 – I recognise that other cultures and communities also share this practice. Thus, I explore one such pre-existing tradition for various reasons. Firstly, I want to clarify that my approach to intergenerational transmissions through intergenerational resonance, which seeks to disrupt a notion of haunting and instead create ongoing dialogue between past and present, is not new. While this body of work introduces current psychodynamic and counselling literature on intergenerational transmissions that focuses on finding and repelling ghosts, many other sources of knowledge and wisdom across the world do not approach intergenerational connections in this manner. In outlining an example of ancestor veneration and connection between generations, I will acknowledge the foundation from which intergenerational resonance is built upon and create a more critical, nuanced exploration of what it can become.

The second reason I explore the concept of ancestral connections in other cultures is to demonstrate that we can learn from our ancestors' stories *and* the stories shaped by the presence of our ancestors. In fact, understanding the narratives of the ancestors of those around us can deepen our own conception of our own past and collective future. This notion is well-demonstrated by two peace activists: Palestinian Aziz Abu Sarah and Israeli Maoz Inon. Sarah's brother was killed in the West Bank at just 19-years-old by an Israeli soldier,

while Inon's parents were murdered in their homes by Hamas during the attacks on 7 October 2023. Both, certainly, could have turned to vengeance, division and hostility as a result of their insurmountable loss. Instead, the two have created a friendship and dream for peace, which they explain starts with the desire to 'know the other's narrative.'⁹² Thus, I will explore the significance of ancestors in a community which is not mine but runs parallel to my family's history and demonstrate how this deepens my own connection to Ellyn and our ancestral past.

Intergenerational Resonance as Not All That New

In the previous letter to Ellyn, I explored my beginning and hers; yet the beginning that separates each of us is my father's. When Ellyn was in her early twenties, she was married to my grandfather and the two were set on becoming parents. My grandmother was told by her medical practitioners that she should not attempt to become pregnant; her health, they explained, would be too detrimentally impacted by labour. As a result, my grandparents considered adoption. I am told that the pair eventually found an agency which they liked, and they were told a baby boy was ready to be brought home. Ellyn, I suspect, was relieved that her chronic condition would not stop her from another dream. I wonder if she wanted to be a mother or if she merely did not want to be told no again. My grandparents went to Ellyn's parents, my great-grandparents, and told them the good news. 'We're going to adopt a baby boy,' I imagine they exclaimed. Eventually, the couple explained to my great-grandparents that the child they were going to adopt was Black, and Ellyn's father reacted in a manner that is difficult for me to both think into and write.

Ellyn's father, my great-grandfather, Paul Pfeffer, was – I'm told – a stoic man. He had fought in the Second World War, and he was born to two immigrants, Philip and Fanny Pfeffer, who came to the United States from the Pale of Settlement near the turn of the century, likely fleeing threats of exile and death from pogroms. Despite Paul's close encounters with the consequences of prejudice, he responded with racism and hate when his daughter told him that she would be adopting a Black baby boy. 'A Black child will not be my grandchild,' he told her. When I learned this story, I realised immediately that I was alive simply because my great-grandfather's racism was more important to my family than my grandmother's health. Furthermore, thinking about this story now brings fizzy, uncomfortable

⁹² Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon, "A Palestinian and an Israeli, Face to Face | Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon | TED." YouTube. 17 April 2024, 7:48, <https://youtu.be/0juLRi90kRg>.

feelings into my chest: shame and discomfort. The legacy of this racist remark and, I am certain, deep-rooted anti-Black prejudice lives on within my family and even in my physical existence. Though I am not sure what happened to this baby boy, I am aware that his ancestors and descendants nearly threaded through my own family.

Ellyn rarely responded kindly to a man telling her no, especially when that man was her father. Yet, while I'm not sure how she did respond to this remark from her father, I infer that his racist views impacted her actions. I do know that my grandparents never adopted a child and that Ellyn gave birth, via caesarean delivery for her health, to my father within a couple of years of this conversation. Desperately, I wish I could ask her what she said, what she felt. Instead, I can simply explore what emerges for me. I wondered initially what would have happened if she had decided to adopt the child despite her father's remarks. I thought about Scottish poet Jackie Kay who was adopted by a white Glaswegian family and is of both Scottish and Nigerian descent. In her book of poetry titled *The Adoption Papers*, Kay explores the experience of being a mixed-race child raised by white parents. In the poem "Black Bottom" Kay writes:

*Angela Davis is the only female person
I've seen (except for a nurse on TV)
Who looks like me. She had big hair like mine
That grows out instead of down.
My mum said it's called an Afro.
If I could be as brave as her when I get older
I'll be OK.⁹³*

I imagine that Kay's experience was filled with moments like this one, left with a sense that she did not see herself reflected in her family, in those around her. If my grandparents had adopted this baby boy, I suspect he would have lived through similar experiences. I wonder now if he was adopted by another white couple, and if he did in fact struggle with similar sensations.

⁹³ Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Bloodaxe Books, 2018), 27.

I outline this story from my family's history to demonstrate that the othering of another is intrinsically tied to our stories. Specifically, my great-grandfather's overt, racist views and the rest of the family's acceptance of these remarks, demonstrates the prevalence of anti-Black racism in America. My father's birth and my subsequent existence stem from this pervasive prejudice. I am thankful to be alive and writing these words, yet I acknowledge that my life exists due in part to a comment rooted in racism. As I think about this boy who was almost my grandparent's child, I think also about the significance of ancestral connection and power that is felt by Black Americans. Originally, when considering this concept, I remembered a song whose lyrics remind me of my connection to Ellyn:

*Sometimes I speak and I feel like it ain't my words
Like I'm just a vessel chilling inside this universe
I feel my ancestors are resting inside of me
It's like they want me to shoot my chances
changing society.⁹⁴*

The song, sung by Jo-Vaughn Virginie Scott, explores Scott's experience as a Black American struggling to heal from the trauma endured by his ancestors as well as the ongoing racism he encounters in modern America. When I first listened to Scott's words years ago, I resonated with the sensation that my ancestors lived within me. Admittedly, however, Scott's experience in America differs drastically from my own, and I think about my connection to his lyrics now and am reminded of my grandfather's adamant statement that he would not have a Black grandchild. Similar to Scott's lyrics, in Cheryl Finley's book titled *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, the historian explores through art the ways in which Black Americans connect to their ancestors whilst processing the trauma of slavery.⁹⁵ Throughout the book, Dr. Finley explores the ways in which ancestral depiction in art enables modern Black Americans to connect to those who precede them and bring forward a wisdom and strength.

⁹⁴ Joey BadA\$\$, "LAND OF THE FREE," by Jo-Vaughn Virginie, Kirlan Labarrie and Adam Pallin, track 4 on ALL AMERIKKAN BADA\$\$, Era/Cinemative Music Group, 2017.

⁹⁵ Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Thus, my creation of the term *intergenerational resonance* and my exploration of the term throughout this body of work differs from pre-existing psychodynamic literature on intergenerational connections. Nonetheless, my critical engagement with this term has origins routed in other wells of knowledge. I recognise that cultures and communities, like Black Americans, have unique relationships with their ancestors and already place strong emphasis on turning towards these connections for wisdom and strength. My desire to explore this pre-existing phenomenon stems in part from my family's own experience of perpetuating and benefitting from anti-Black racism in the United States. Through remembering the words of my great-grandfather, I both understand the pain that my ancestors experienced because of their Jewish identities and the pain that can still be perpetuated as semi-assimilated white Americans. Additionally, I recognise that my concept of intergenerational resonance is informed by my own life and culture, yet, whether consciously or not, has also been inspired by the connection Black Americans feel to their ancestors. I think with this intersectionality of intergenerational resonance as I write into the experience of gender expansive individuals and time throughout this chapter.

Dr. Dora Silva Santana in her autoethnographic work "Transitions and Returnings: Experiments with the Poetics of Transatlantic Water," highlights the experience of what is evoked by Black trans people in the African diaspora throughout the process of transitioning. In fact, drawing on her own experience as a Brazilian Black transwoman, Santana disrupts the notion of transitioning as a *before* and *after* and instead conveys 'the continuum motion of resisting systematic oppression through embodied knowledge' involved in this work.⁹⁶ Specifically, she uses water to describe the fluid-like nature of transition, the process of 'shape-shifting, leaking, bleeding, in-corporating.'⁹⁷ In her writing, Santana expands her process of transitioning and self-discovery as more than just relating to her gender; she explores her transition as also involving her family's forced displacement and enslavement. In other words, Santana's experience of crossing gender borders invokes her ancestral memory of movement. Thinking with bell hooks, she writes that she's interested in what 'the work of love among black women, cis and trans, can do, that is, love embodied in flesh in ancestral energies with potential to heal, to fight death, and to organise, and as a praxis of caring for each other against intersecting oppression...'⁹⁸ Santana's work highlights that

⁹⁶ Dora Silva Santana, "Transitions and Returnings: Experiments with the Poetics of Transatlantic Water," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (May 2017), 183.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

ancestral reverberations which empower and bring about knowledge – in other words, intergenerational resonance – is an experience uniquely felt by Black women in the African diaspora. Building upon the work of gender expansive thinkers like Santana, in the following section, I further develop the term *intergenerational resonance* and explore the subjective experience of this phenomena by transgender people.

The Creative-Relational & Transing Intergenerational Resonance

Relationships are at the core of intergenerational resonance; transmissions of experiences move forwards and backwards in time from one person to another. In exploring my relationship with Ellyn, the creative-relational allows me to be instinctively and congruently curious about our connection and what is produced. In other words, I can pursue this work in a way that feels most natural to me and my family's history. Additionally, Creative-Relational Inquiry (C-RI) allows for experience-near exploration into queer identities and experiences. Working in this way allows me to preserve a natural connection with my grandmother and to explore my queer identities with my own voice. Significantly, the relational is also crucial to queerness. Michel Foucault, reflecting on his own gay identity, argued that the simplification of homosexuality into just sexual behaviour is limiting. Instead, he explained that homosexuality, or I argue more broadly queerness, allows one 'to use one's sexuality to henceforth arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.'⁹⁹ In other words, Foucault experienced his queerness as a potential for friendships and connections. He acknowledges that his experience of homosexuality revolves around relationships between men, but that these interactions are not solely sexual as wider public opinions insisted. Instead, queer relationships are about experiencing life with and relating to one another in a distinct way. We can understand the ways in which queerness impacts connections, space and time by focusing on the relational components, rather than exclusively specific sexual acts. Thus, C-RI has the potential to be a powerful tool when exploring the impact of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning and more) identities on experiences.

In their work exploring gay men's relationships to their identities, Edgar Rodríguez-Dorans uses C-RI. This approach allows Rodríguez-Dorans and his participants to explore their own relationships to their identities, rather than using a 'framework' imposed by

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Ethics*, edited by Paul Rabinow. (New York: The New York Press, 1997), 135.

‘medical authorities, religious bodies, legal and other social institutions.’¹⁰⁰ The ability to create, rather than always be confined by specific socio-political discourses when discussing queerness is paramount, especially when exploring transgender identities. In fact, thinking about queer theory as trans scholar Susan Stryker does allows us to understand that frequently queerness ‘remains a code word for “gay” or “lesbian,” and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity.’¹⁰¹ In other words, while the work of queer theorists aids me as I conceptualise a transing of intergenerational resonance, I will need to think closely with trans theorists and experiences.

As I write this, in January 2025, the vitriolic rhetoric towards transgender children and adults seems to be exponentially increasing each day. The official website of the United States White House states that ‘Gender Ideology’ is a concept from which women (by which they mean only cisgender women) must be protected. The administration outlines that the notion that gender exists on a spectrum and is ‘disconnected from one’s sex ... is internally inconsistent.’¹⁰² Within Scotland, hate also persists. Currently, a nurse has gone to an employment tribunal after being suspended from work due to her transphobic bullying of a colleague. The nurse, Sandie Peggie, is claiming that her assertion that her colleague, Dr. Beth Upton, a trans woman, is a man is not bullying.¹⁰³ A quick search online of Dr. Upton’s name reveals numerous articles, blogs and posts asserting that she is a man looking to prey upon women. Across the world, attitudes and legislation aimed at transgender people signal that transitioning is perverse, unnatural and immoral. These headlines undisputedly impact the ways in which transgender people understand their experiences; nonetheless, working through, around and outside these discourses with C-RI allows for greater autonomy, expression and – hopefully – understanding of trans experiences.

I am personally and professionally aware of the impact from the rampant transphobia in medical, political and other discourses. They creep into my counselling room. As a trans

¹⁰⁰ Edgar Rodríguez-Dorans, “The Confluence of Us: Creative Relational Love (Making) of Gay Men’s Identities,” in *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 104.

¹⁰¹ Susan Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theories Evil Twin.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 214.

¹⁰² The White House, “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government: Executive Order,” The White House, 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government/>.

¹⁰³ BBC Scotland, “Nurse Denies Comparing Trans Doctor to Rapist,” BBC News, 4 February 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2q8zzx0d7o>.

therapist, I worry about the ways in which transphobic legislation and opinions will impact my credibility as a practitioner. I am a transmasculine person with citizenship only in the United States, and I fear that I will be forced to return somewhere in which my gender is not recognised, and my medical care is not available. I feel privileged to have been able to immigrate to Scotland and live in a place where I can access transgender medical care. Likewise, my clients bring concerns and real-life experiences of transphobia to their sessions. Their experiences mingle with my own, and our transgender identities take on new, co-created meanings. Foucault acknowledged that homosexuality is often defined as sexual encounters between people, rather than relationships. Similarly, transitioning is often understood as a clean movement from before to after, discomfort to comfort, pain to joy. Thinking with CRI allows for the subjective and unique expressions of these experiences. As Rodríguez-Dorans argues, we can move the focus to ‘connections between people rather than a ... sexual, behavioural component.’¹⁰⁴ Likewise, CRI allows us to conceptualise the experience of transgender people as more relational and in-motion rather than a linear movement from one point to the next or solely a transformation of one’s body.

Temporality in Transing Intergenerational Resonance

The relational is not the only pillar that must be considered when exploring intergenerational resonance experienced by transgender people. In fact, intertwined with the relational are space and time. Examining the experiences of queer people, Jack Halberstam writes that these identities have ‘the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.’¹⁰⁵ Halberstam elaborates that time is a tool through which information, roles and privilege are passed on; in other words, performing as a cisgender, heterosexual person is passed from one generation to the next. He refers to ‘time of inheritance’ as a concept of time in which ‘values, wealth and goods’ are transmitted intergenerationally onward.¹⁰⁶ The time of inheritance connects families across generations and also upholds certain national and patriarchal systems. For most cisgender people, this passage of information across time instructs them on how to best fulfil the expectations that come with the label man or woman. For queer people in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, these instructions are often rejected and feel irrelevant. As a result,

¹⁰⁴ Rodríguez-Dorans, “The Confluence of Us,” 109.

¹⁰⁵ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (London: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

Halberstam argues that it is through families that ‘normative’ understandings of ‘time and transmissions’ are preserved.¹⁰⁷ With the queer rejection of these ‘normative’ values passed via the time of inheritance, queer people lose a sense of an inherited timeline. Yet, as Stryker acknowledges, the existence of transgender people increasingly ‘secure(s) both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood.’¹⁰⁸ So, while thinking with queerness allows us to conceptualise a rupture of information passed between generations, thinking with transgender experiences allows us to witness a seemingly complete transformation of the normative categories one is expected to fill: man or woman, husband or wife, father or mother, etc. Here, the structures that are in place that encourage when cisgender, usually heterosexual people get married, have children, etc. fall away.

Similar to Halberstam’s exploration of time of inheritance, most literature on hauntings and intergenerational transmissions seem to imply a move from one non-queer generation to the next. This fluid movement takes for granted that the present reflects the past enough that certain material can be mirrored and passed along. Of course, certain theorists, like Frosh and Hirsch with postmemory, acknowledge that the past makes new indentations in the present.¹⁰⁹ Yet, few acknowledge the ways in which queerness disrupts intergenerational material. However, thinking with Halberstam’s time of inheritance, clearly the lives of queer, and especially transgender, people are impacted differently by intergenerational transmissions. This passed on material does not so easily appear in the tasks that come with one’s assigned gender at birth. Instead, the transmissions are disrupted and transformed. Therefore, the reverberations that connect a present life to the experiences of an ancestor are fundamentally different for gender non-conforming people.

This change in gender non-conforming lives poses a complicated question: are transgender people less capable of experiencing intergenerational resonance? Perhaps, the rejection of the roles that one’s ancestors were forced to fill disconnects the person from certain hauntings. However, in both my clinical work and personal experience, I find that this is not the case. Instead, troubling gender individually locates transgender and queer people to detect and interact with intergenerational resonance. I make this claim because, as Frosh explains, ‘people who are made ghostly’ are done so by the ‘silencing [of] their voices.’¹¹⁰ In

¹⁰⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Stryker, “Transgender Studies,” 214.

¹⁰⁹ Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, x.

¹¹⁰ Frosh, *Hauntings*, 4.

other words, much of the material that is transmitted from the past comes from sources of pain and oppression. The cause of these struggles certainly varies; nonetheless, the weight of performing one's assigned gender at birth can be crushing to all ancestors, especially those who filled the roles of woman, mother and wife. This position is shared by theorists, such as Jack Halberstam, Judith Butler, and Adrienne Rich; however, to demonstrate my point I will first return to Ellyn's life.

In my grandmother's early adult years, as I explore in the letters to her, she wanted to pursue a degree from a university. Ellyn was witty, thoughtful and passionate, and she desired a life in which she could learn and discover. Unfortunately, her parents refused to pay for this education, and they instead paid for her younger brother to study through to his PhD. I imagine Ellyn then concluded that the life she dreamed she would lead was unachievable, so she married in her early twenties and became a mother by 24. This unrealised dream was buried inside her until she attempted, and ultimately failed, to revive it with the birth of my father, a son, a boy. The socio-political ropes tied to the body with which my grandmother was born determined the rest of her life. In Adrienne Rich's book *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, she dedicates the book to her grandmothers and writes 'whose lives I begin to imagine.'¹¹¹ Like my work with Ellyn, the act of imagining the lives of the women who precede Rich enables her to uncover history which was seemingly buried. Rich goes on in the book to explore a new connection between mother and child rather than the role of motherhood which exists to 'allow a patriarchal society to control women as they bear and raise children.'¹¹² Ellyn's parents upheld the patriarchal values of society in restricting their daughter from accessing a higher education; my grandmother was then forced into motherhood as a way of moving forward with her life. Yet my connection to her as a transmasculine person both recalls and disrupts this legacy.

Nevertheless, my identity as transgender person could perhaps be used to argue that the haunting presence of grandmother cannot fully touch my life. As I leave the box of woman into which I was placed at birth, perhaps I am also leaving the legacy of Ellyn behind. Yet, this sentiment deeply juxtaposes my lived experience. Instead, my playful, open journey with my own gender has further enmeshed my grandmother's experiences with my own.

¹¹¹ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Expectation and Dedication*. (London: Virago, 1986), dedication page.

¹¹² Andrea O'Reilly, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Woman Born* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 27.

Frosh writes about the witness who is capable of good enough listening rather than turning away from or silencing.¹¹³ In my journey to shed the limitations and expectations that were handed to me with the label of female, I move to a position where I can intertwine the aspects of femininity and masculinity which I embody. Away from the concrete box of a binary gender, I can more fully witness the pain of my grandmother and feel the echo between my present and her past. As Rich explores a way to redefine motherhood, so too does my journey with gender enable me to redefine womanhood and its associated labels.

Other aspects of the transgender experience alter the sensation of intergenerational resonance. For instance, space and time are pivotal components both to transitioning and to the process of intergenerational transmissions. In my counselling room alone, clients often express sentiments like ‘I wish I had the freedom to express myself the way I wanted to as a kid,’ or ‘I feel like I don’t get to start living until I’m off the waitlist for the gender clinic.’ Similarly, as I write this, I recently was prescribed testosterone, and I am waiting to collect my prescription and observe the ways in which my body begins changing. Not only is the connection to those who precede transgender people altered by our queerness, but our own pasts begin to take up the title of ‘before’: before I came out, before I transitioned, before I met my wife, or before I was safe enough to be myself. The task of integrating the before with the subsequent afters becomes a lifelong endeavour for many queer individuals. In other words, time is a constant source of tension to those who transition.

Like time, the space that gender non-conforming people occupy differs drastically from others. Here in the United Kingdom, in public locker rooms, toilets and gendered spaces, fear of ridicule and exclusion hangs threateningly over us. Medically transitioning requires ongoing, sometimes uncomfortable, treatment. This process effects our ability to leave our homes and comfortably take up space around others; I recall now the numerous trans clients whom I have worked with that struggle with varying degrees of agoraphobia. Moreso, the same spaces can feel exceptionally different during various periods of transition. The more masculine my appearance becomes, the less comfortable I feel occupying spaces designated for women. Nonetheless, I do not feel fully comfortable in spaces for men. Thus, I am frequently left without a strong sense of belonging. As time passes, my relationship to my body and spaces changes.

¹¹³ Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 149-174.

Exploring her own experience of transitioning, Atalia Israeli-Nevo, an Israeli scholar now based in the United States, emphasizes the significance of taking time with the process. Specifically, Israeli-Nevo highlights the importance of embracing and creating her current and future identities while refraining from erasing her past ones.¹¹⁴ In other words, Israeli-Nevo acknowledges that integrating the past and the present can be empowering during transition. This assertion is a departure from Halberstam's claim that forgetting 'allows for a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future.'¹¹⁵ Admittedly, Halberstam is arguing for a forgetting of a time before our own lives and a rejection of the roles and expectations that bind us to cisgender, heterosexual norms in the present. On the other hand, Israeli-Nevo is specifically encouraging an integration of the individual's – not the family's – past, present and future. However, the past of our ancestors and our own past, the expectations on our ancestors and those on us, are not so separate. As Halberstam acknowledges with time of inheritance, the transmitted expectations of the past resonate intergenerationally with the ones of the present. With Israeli-Nevo's concept of taking time, we can hold the sometimes-painful foundations of the past which help us to create the present.

Israeli-Nevo explores trans temporality further by dissecting narratives of transitioning in modern media. She acknowledges that a split often occurs: before and after, past and present, one gender to the next. She recognises this binary narrative is often enforced by medical professionals providing care for transgender individuals.¹¹⁶ My own experience resonates with her findings. In my two initial consultation appointments at the Edinburgh Gender Clinic, I was met with similar expectations from medical practitioners. In the first assessment, I was asked to explain the gender dysphoria I experienced throughout my life. Immediately, I explained that while I *do* experience gender dysphoria, I tend to understand my transition through euphoria, through following what makes me feel good in my body, rather than what feels bad. The clinician understood yet maintained that in order to diagnose me with *gender incongruence* I would need to prove ongoing dysphoria. My memories from childhood are clearer in some periods, like between five and ten years old, than others, like my teenage years. My inability to recall much dysphoria in my teenage years frustrated the clinician, and she pressed on my narrative in an attempt to make it fit the one she wanted.

¹¹⁴ Atalia Israeli-Nevo, "Taking (My) Time: Temporality in Transition, Queer Delays and Being (in the) Present," in *Somatechnics* 7, 1 (2017): 35.

¹¹⁵ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 83.

¹¹⁶ Israeli-Nevo, "Taking (My) Time," 37.

During my next visit to the clinic, I was told about the Testosterone gel I was being prescribed. I asked the practitioner about micro-dosing, taking small doses of the hormone to achieve gradual, desired effects, and I enquired about the possibility of stopping treatment once the desired effects were achieved. This clinician explained to me that there were few options to stop or slow down and that transitioning was not a ‘pick and mix’ experience. ‘There are a lot of complex gender identities showing up now,’ he frustratedly said when I pushed. I share Israeli-Nevo’s desire to take transition slowly and achieve gradual, desired changes. However, transphobia and a lack of understanding of non-binary identities within medical discourses make this goal difficult.

Israeli-Nevo explores trans temporality and introduces the idea of taking time as a means of exploring the past and present openly and not forfeiting one for the other. She presses on medical institutions which view transition as linear, as ‘turning from one gender into another’ or as completing the task at hand.¹¹⁷ This sentiment echoes the experience of intergenerational resonance. Often, we think of the past and present as binaries; however, when intergenerational material is transmitted from the past and reverberates with experiences in the present, the separation between them fades. Transition creates a process in which transgender individuals may feel sharp distinction between the past and the present. This split is deepened by media portrayals of transitioning and medical discourses. Yet, Israeli-Nevo’s concept of taking time demonstrates the unique position from which transgender people can integrate past and present. In an attempt to take our time, we can move from one point to the next whilst acknowledging the many versions of ourselves that occupy each step. Rather than conceptualising transitioning as a journey from start to finish, we can instead view the process like a journey in which determining a clear departure and arrival is ambiguous or even impossible.

Thus, the complex sense of past and present in a transgender person’s own individual life creates a potential to experience the broader past and present in a less binary way. Additionally, the ways in which space changes as transition occurs transforms the ways in which transgender people connect to the physical world and our ancestors. The movement from one version of ourselves to the next, and the infinitely many selves we occupy throughout that journey, opens up our understanding of space and time. While not all

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 37.

transgender people form this relationship with their bodies and temporality, those that do can integrate their complex experiences of time travel with intergenerational resonance.

Conclusion

The term *intergenerational resonance* was born through my curious exploration of the connection I feel to Ellyn. The strands of our lives seem to be in constant communication, one informing the other, past and present blurring together. As I think with intergenerational resonance, I find ongoing connections between me and my ancestors. Sometimes, I uncover stories, like the one about my great-grandfather's racist remarks, that show the significance in challenging and learning from the mistakes and harm caused by those who precede me. From these encounters, I have had the opportunity to explore the precedence for intergenerational connection and strength in other cultures, like among Black Americans. The act of turning towards ancestors whose voices were silenced creates space for intergenerational resonance to be multicultural and queer, intersectional.

In this chapter, I underline the importance of using Creative Relational Inquiry in this work, which allows for subjective exploration of both trans experiences and time. This methodology enables me to explore the depth and distinction with which transgender people experience intergenerational resonance. Queer identities, especially transgender ones, change the relationship a person has with those who precede them. A rupture is created between one generation to the next when gendered expectations are not followed. However, this disruption creates space for a new relationship in which expectations that resonate with the individual can be maintained and other forces can be rejected. Furthermore, this critical approach creates room for healing from suffering in the past (more on this in Chapters Five and Six). Additionally, the blurring of genders by transgender and gender non-conforming people produces a template with which other matter, like time, can be blurred. The individual's experience of past and present, before and after, one gender and the next allow for a complex engagement with temporality. This reframing of time can be helpful when looking at the lives of those who lived before yourself. The breaking down of walls practiced by transgender individuals is a skill that can be applied to the socially constructed boundaries of time. Thus, the experience of intergenerational resonance by transgender people contains ruptures, repairs and inimitable realisations.

Chapter Three: Home & Belonging

Dear Ellyn,

This morning when I woke up, I brushed my teeth, showered, and then recited a blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמַּעֲבִיר אֶת הָעוֹבְרִים

Next, I took a bottle of gel, pumped out one portion and spread the substance over my stomach carefully with one finger. This routine is new for me; in fact, the first time I did this ritual was five days ago.

How good is your Hebrew, Ellyn? If it's anything like mine, you likely can't understand without a translation. The blessing above in English means: 'Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of Time and Space, the Transforming One to those who cross over (or to those who transition).'¹¹⁸ When I say this blessing, similar to when I say any other, I am left wondering what I mean when I say אֱלֹהֵי, or God. The conclusion I am most comfortable with, Ellyn, is that I mean the inheritance of those who preceded me.¹¹⁹ In part, I mean you.

In a way, then, I say this blessing each day, and I think of you. I continue to think about you as I take the bottle of testosterone gel and as I spread the alcohol-smelling mixture across my skin. I'm thinking about you, and I'm hoping that if I think in just the right way, I will gain some hormones from the gel and some wisdom from you.

As the testosterone is absorbed into my body each day, I'm already beginning to observe some changes. Firstly, around thirty minutes after application, I notice that I have a significant amount of energy. I have so much energy, in fact, that I often overwhelm my timid cat and sleepy wife with the speed and passion with which I speak. Additionally, my

¹¹⁸ Elliot Rose Kukla, "Blessings for Gender Transitioning," Ritualwell, <https://ritualwell.org/ritual/blessings-gender-transitioning/>.

¹¹⁹ My sense of ancestors as spiritual is not entirely a unique idea to Judaism. In fact, the Hebrew term *zekhut avot* means ancestral merit; in other words, Jews are kept in God's good favour as a result of God's relationship to a Jewish person's ancestors. I take that term here, and I reframe the common interpretation. Jews are not connected to a higher power through their ancestors' worship of God. Instead, my experience of divinity is my connection to my ancestors and their wisdom. I will explore this concept further in the next chapter. Sarit Kattan Gribetz, "Zekhut Imahot: Mothers, Fathers, and Ancestral Merit in Rabbinic Sources," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49 (2018): 263 – 296.

throat is sore and my voice a bit raspy. More than any other symptom, however, I am happy, giddy, anxious and euphoric. I feel like I am creating a home inside of my body.

My understanding of home seems to forever be changing. The country I live in, the family I belong to, and the communities with which I identify shift and transform with each year of my life. Perhaps, then, it's not a surprise to learn that the body I inhabit, arguably my most essential home, also transitions.¹²⁰

As a child, I thought of home as the house I grew up in and the yard that stretched beyond it, sprinkled with trees and, in my childhood imagination, filled with mythical creatures. In my first year of school, I had to memorise and recite my address. Home was the string of seemingly unrelated numbers and letters I rehearsed for my teacher. Home was my brown hair and brown eyes which I was frequently told matched my father's. My sense of home was formed by my parents, my siblings and two tabby cats called Cosmo and Wanda.

Then home changed. Not all at once, like the rushing of a river as it turns into a decisive waterfall. The changes were like faint raindrops. If I wasn't paying attention, I may not have even noticed the small plops, yet they still left behind a soaked, transformed world.

Home became the small town to which I decided to move for university and the friends I made in my dormitory. It was my new best friend, who quickly turned into my girlfriend and then, several years later, became my wife. Home was a concoction of labels: bisexual, sometimes lesbian, Jewish when I was confident and half-Jewish when I wasn't. Home became a constant tension in and around myself as I tried to understand who I was and who I wanted to become.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Eli Clare explores the act of making a trans body home. Often, he explains, trans folks find home in the shame that surrounds them in society and politics. However, resistance and healing can be found when trans people are allowed to make a home with community, family and their own bodies. Clare's emphasis on the trans body as home parallels my own experience of creating a home from the inside out.

Eli Clare, "Resisting Shame: Making Our Bodies Home," in *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 8, 2 (2010): 455-465.

¹²¹ In exploring her 'inheritance' as both a 'white, southern woman' and a 'lesbian Jew,' Adrienne Rich writes that throughout her life she has felt tempted to claim one identity and 'push away' the other. In her essay *Split at the Root*, Rich attempts to claim all the various threads of her past and tie them together. Similarly, as I write to Ellyn, I explore identities that I have held for years and ones which I have stepped into in new ways in recent years. In examining these threads and attempting to lay them one over the other, I feel I am messy and full of contradictions. Yet, this is me.

Adrienne Rich, *Adrienne Rich: Poetry and Prose*, 236.

As I embark on this next journey and transform my most essential home, I look to you for guidance and support. I wonder about your experience of home and belonging, and I am curious about what you would do differently in your life, if given the opportunity.

You were born in New York City, and this was your home for the entirety of your childhood. Your parents were also born in New York City, and their parents were born in various shtetls across Eastern Europe. Your grandparents must have had a troubled understanding of home – America, Europe, neither and both. In fact, their parents and grandparents, despite likely being born and dying in the same shtetls, may also have had a confused understanding of home. The countries in which they lived but did not have citizenship were both home and a foreign land.¹²² The disrupted concepts of home and belonging is, of course, fundamental to the Jewish identity.

I wish I could know how New York City felt to you. Was it home? When you married your husband, you both relocated to a small apartment in Connecticut. Later, this time with two children, you moved to Long Island, New York. My father tells me you were happy here. In a suburban town a mere train ride from the city, you were surrounded by other Jewish people. As a family, you engaged culturally and mostly-secularly with your roots. In New York, I suspect your relationship to your past, to your ancestors and to your Judaism was less complicated.¹²³ You could find faces and stories that looked familiar, and you felt at home.

Eventually, you, your husband and your two young sons moved again but this time to southern New Jersey. You relocated to a town just a short drive from the one in which I grew

¹²² My Jewish ancestors all travelled from various parts of the Pale of Settlement to the United States. In this Russian territory, Jews were permitted from 1835 to move about freely; however, they were deemed ‘aliens’ and their rights, such as work they could undertake and the ability to own property, were heavily restricted. As a result, I suspect my ancestors viewed their Eastern European shtetls as a complicated home, and this tension with home and belonging likely followed them to America and dripped down generations. David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries*. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 193.

¹²³ Kumarini Silva explores the experiences of diasporic South Asian Americans of home and a sense of belonging. Silva explains that diasporic experiences create a tension: to fit in and ‘hide our Otherness’ and to ‘flourish as we recreate from memory and myth ... a sense of home that justifies and validates our experiences.’ The split to assimilate and preserve was certainly felt by my ancestors as they left their Jewish villages and immigrated to America. Yet, unlike Silva’s participants, my ancestors would have had a messier understanding of home, being non-citizens and othered in the shtetls they lived within. However, my ancestors were then able to conditionally assimilate into white America in a way that South Asian American individuals cannot. This diasporic experience continued in my family, and I suspect Ellyn felt this tension when she moved to a sparsely-Jewish-populated town in southern New Jersey. Ultimately, she chose to create a home from memory and myth. I seek her guidance and wisdom as I attempt to recreate from memory and myth a home in my Jewish identity, in my gender and, more broadly, in my life.

Kumarini Silva, “Oh, give me a home: diasporic longings of home and belonging,” in *Social Identities* 15, no. 5 (2009): 695.

up. I'm fairly familiar with the way you likely felt in this new town. I remember the way I felt growing up in a heavily populated area, just a twenty minutes' drive outside of Philadelphia, with very few Jews. I remember being around ten years old and another classmate, like me, had a Jewish father. This peer had a sleepover with his friends, friends whom he felt comfortable sharing with that he was Jewish. In the middle of the night, the other boys waited until he fell asleep, and then they drew a swastika on his head in permanent marker. I learned about it the next week in school. I heard that he woke up in the morning, began sobbing and ran home, and after that I stopped sharing so openly that I was Jewish. In this new state and among new people, you were alone in a new way. Loneliness was likely not a new sensation for you. However, in this new part of the country, you were lonely in your Jewish identity in, I believe, a new way.

Seemingly overnight, as my father tells me, you became devoutly religious. You found a synagogue a few towns over and attempted to join. When the fee was much too high for your family to pay, you instead applied to work as an Administrative Assistant to the Rabbi. You began keeping kosher in the home and strictly following the Jewish calendar. Then, you enrolled your sons into Hebrew classes and told them to prepare for *b'nai mitzvot*.

My father hated this new demand on his time, and each week when you would drop him off for class, he would sneak out the back door. He would walk across the street to a nearby soda shop and spend time there until classes ended. At the right time, he would return to you pretending to have enjoyed an hour of Hebrew. I wonder if you knew he did this. He wasn't alone in his distaste for your new piety. Others who knew you at the time have remarked to me that you became sternly, almost judgementally, religious. None of them, though, ever seem to have explored why Judaism became vitally important to you.

What happened, Ellyn? I think I might know; I think you might have been building a home.

You felt alone, and you responded by searching for community.¹²⁴ I admire this response, and I want to learn from it. Admittedly, in lonely periods of my own life, I have

¹²⁴ In Silva's research, she found that the diasporic experience in South Asian Americans inspired immigrants and children of immigrants to create 'a deep and abiding relationship to a distant space that is nostalgically marked as "home".' Interestingly, when an immediate sense of home was disrupted in both my life and Ellyn's, we sought out that distance space, that unmarkable but internally felt sense of home. Silva, "Oh, give me a home," 703.

sought similar solutions. For instance, a few years ago, the world was forced into isolation – or lockdowns, as we called them in the U.K. – as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. My wife and I initially enjoyed the time we got to spend together and the ways in which we got to turn off and inwards. However, as time passed and we moved from our established jobs and friends in Ireland to Scotland to begin new postgraduate programmes, we began to feel lonely in isolation. Separately and unbeknownst to the other, we each searched online for a nearby, welcoming Jewish space and found Edinburgh’s Liberal Jewish Community, Sukkat Shalom. When my wife approached me about joining, I admitted I had the same desire.

At the time, I didn’t think about the similarity between my story and yours, Ellyn. I felt lonely during the global emergency, and, for most of my life, I already held a desire to explore my Jewish roots. However, upon reflecting, I wonder what inspired me in that moment to pursue this identity. Growing up in southern New Jersey meant that I did not know many other Jewish people; however, moving to first Ireland and then Scotland meant I regularly did not knowingly encounter another Jewish person for months on end.¹²⁵ My change in home mirrors your own, and in the face of change and uncertainty, I followed a similar path to you. Our Jewish identities acted as beacons guiding us home in moments when belonging felt challenging.

While this pattern exists between us, I suspect it transcends us too. I wonder about the people who came before us, and what their Judaism meant to them. Specifically, I think about your grandparents, David and Rebecca, travelling from Eastern Europe to the United States. I wonder what the pair did to create a sense of home in New York. They may have joined local synagogues or moved into predominantly Jewish neighbourhoods.¹²⁶ Our more distant

¹²⁵ While the majority of Jewish people in New Jersey live in the northern part of the state, the entire state is home to larger Jewish populations than many other places in the world. For instance, there were over 625,000 Jewish people living in New Jersey in 2022. Whereas the 2011 Scottish Census recorded just under 6,000 Jews living across the country. I felt this difference drastically; growing up, I took for granted that most non-Jewish people had Jewish friends and loved ones in their lives. When I moved to this part of the world, I suddenly found myself answering many more questions about what it means to be Jewish.

Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsy, “2022 United States Jewish Population,” on Berman Jewish DataBank (2022), <https://www.jewishdatabank.org/databank/search-results?search=united+states+population>. “Religion” on Scotland’s Census (4 February 2025), <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/religion/>.

¹²⁶ Like many other groups of immigrants to the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jewish people faced large obstacles when attempting to work in certain sectors and move to certain parts of the country. Initially, rampant antisemitism kept Jewish people from assimilating into white, Protestant America. As a result, Jewish communities in cities flourished. Arguably, exclusion and violence are what kept Jewish people together. I wonder if my ancestors felt safer and more comfortable in these familiar circles. Perhaps, later generations of Jewish people have repeated this pattern in the face of uncertainty around home. Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation*, 346-348.

ancestors had already travelled across continents, from the Middle East to Eastern Europe, carrying with them customs, traditions and a sense of a place from which they came. Perhaps then, you and I are simply reading from a script that was written centuries before we were born.

I wish I could ask you if Judaism felt like home. I imagine it did. Specifically, then, I wonder what aspects of the local community which you joined in New Jersey eased your sense of isolation. I have my guesses. In my apartment, I have a large bookshelf, and on the top shelf there are small pieces that I inherited from my father and from you. The tallit my father wore for his *bar mitzvah* sits inside a blue, embroidered tallit bag. The bag and tallit are nearly fifty years old, and they both smell like the various American basements in which they spent decades. When I married my wife, I wore that tallit. Next to the bag are your old *siddurim*¹²⁷ and several small, loosely bound booklets. One is titled *The Vienna Haggadah*¹²⁸ and was originally published in 1751, though this booklet was made in 1978. Another booklet is titled *Book of Remembrance*¹²⁹ and was made by the synagogue in New Jersey which you attended, Temple Beth Shalom. Sometimes I parse through the pages and trace my finger across small folds in the paper, places I suspect you often touched.

The most peculiar item on that shelf is a book of cartoons titled *The Adventures of Moshe Achbar*¹³⁰ – a collection of cartoons about a Jewish mouse, named Moshe, created by a congregant, Dr. Marv Herring, of Temple Beth Shalom. Some of the cartoons are funny and uniquely Jewish; other cartoons are a bit inappropriate and haven't aged particularly well from their publication in 1990. However, my favourite part of the book is the introduction on the second page which states, 'Moshe has been featured regularly in Temple Talk (courtesy of Ellyn Smith).' The sentence likely seems underwhelming to another person. Surely there are several very funny cartoons, and so it may seem odd that this page is the one I return to the most.

I am fond of this page because on it I have found a small piece of your life which has not been shared with me through the conversations I have had with our family members. Inheriting this booklet accidentally when my father handed me some of his old Judaica gave me a tiny glimpse into your life which I may have otherwise never known. I was already aware

¹²⁷ A Jewish prayer book

¹²⁸ Aaron Shreiber Herlingen, *The Vienne Haggadah*, first printed edition. (New York City: The Orphan Hospital Ward of Israel, 1978).

¹²⁹ Temple Beth Shalom, *Book of Remembrance*. (Cherry Hill: Temple Beth Shalom).

¹³⁰ Marv Herring, *The Adventures of Moshe Achbar*. (Cherry Hill: Temple Beth Shalom, 1990).

that you were involved in the Temple and worked as an Administrative Assistant. Yet now I can look through the cartoons and know that you helped publish them. I wonder which drawings you found funny, or if you helped create any of the scenarios. I feel that I have found a small frame through which I can glance and better understand the ways in which this role and this community may have satisfied your desire for home.

Finding home for me often entails searching for a space in which each part of me is welcome. My own community in Edinburgh is a space in which I feel that I can be both Jewish and queer. Unfortunately, those identities do not often both feel accepted in the same spaces. At times, I feel I need to choose one or the other, and sometimes, I feel drawn to silence both. Spaces in which I can be queer, trans and Jewish, like in my home with my wife, feel like sacred havens to me. Similarly, Sukkat Shalom often fills this need, and I have the opportunity to sit on the council of the community and help ensure it continues to represent a diverse group of Jews. Furthermore, our community's Rabbi, Mark Solomon, has worked as an openly gay leader for decades and officiated the marriage between me and my wife. In fact, our wedding was the first queer, Jewish wedding held in Scotland.¹³¹ My wife and I discovered that we would be making history just weeks before the ceremony, and this event has deepened my sense of both Judaism and Scotland as home.

I wish you could have been there, Ellyn. The day was filled with love and celebration, and I was able to mark years of love and friendship with my partner. In some ways, I felt a bit out of place being part of the first queer, Jewish wedding in Scotland. I was not born in Scotland, and the ancestry on my mother's side that is Scottish goes back over four generations. Yet, Scotland feels like home. The way the air feels when I walk outside of my flat, the experience of being on the beach in early spring days when the sun finally sets after 5 PM, and the attempts I make to avoid Edinburgh's busy city centre during the Fringe Festival in August have all cemented this feeling. I want Scotland to be my home, but I worry that I don't have that claim. Similarly, I am Jewish, and I was born Jewish, but my ties to this heritage feel stunted and messy. My father has mostly rejected his roots and my mother is not Jewish; my reclamation is sometimes filled with doubt and an uneasy sense of being an imposter. Often, I feel that I am half-in and half-out of an identity – or of multiple identities.¹³²

¹³¹ Alix Wall, "This young American couple had Scotland's first-ever queer Jewish wedding," in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (30 January 2023), <https://www.jta.org/2023/01/20/culture/this-young-american-couple-had-scotlands-first-ever-queer-jewish-wedding>.

¹³² In Rich's essay, she delves into the complicated relationship she has with Judaism. Like me, her father mostly hid his Jewish ancestry from his children, and she was raised as a Christian. She writes about both her parents that

I frequently listen to a song that captures this sensation. In the final verse, the artist sings, ‘This is not the place that I was born in, but that doesn’t mean it’s not the place where I belong.’¹³³ This line resonates with many of my identities. I was born in America, but I choose to reside indefinitely in Scotland. I was born the child of a Jewish father, raised Catholic, yet I have always called myself a Jew. I was born and given the label woman, but each day I put hormones inside my body that are apparently for men. Sometimes, Ellyn, I think I do not know who I am. Other times, I think I know exactly who I am, but I worry that the world does not understand. I wonder if you knew who you were, and, if you did, I wonder if you felt understood.

Recently, I read a small book about the joys of transmasculinity, *The Appendix: Transmasculine Joy in a Transphobic Culture*.¹³⁴ This pocket-sized, bright yellow paperback has sat on my bookshelf for years. Two friends of mine bought it for me when they came across it in a bookshop. At the time, I had very recently begun using the term transmasculine to describe myself, and the gift helped me feel seen. However, when I opened the book and immediately encountered details of transphobia and descriptions of medical transition¹³⁵ – I felt scared. I shut the book and stowed it away on the bookshelf. Then, a few days ago, when I was exactly fifteen days on testosterone (obviously, this letter has taken days to write), I read the tiny book in one sitting. Similar to the way I feel when I am at my Jewish community’s services for the High Holidays or when I am at Edinburgh’s Pride event with my friends, I read it and felt connected to something bigger than myself.

In the book, the author explores both the pain from living in a transphobic world and the joys that stem from living as and creating yourself. When I began testosterone, Ellyn, one of the changes which I was most scared to experience was a possible decline in my ability to cry. I usually cry fairly often, and I experience the sensation as a release and, afterwards, a

‘he – they – did not give me the chance to be a Jew.’ Similarly, I cling firmly to this identity which was not offered to me by either parent, and which I recognise as mine through my father, but I come to it at my own effort and volition. Her father’s own rejection of being a Jew leaves Rich ‘high and dry, split at the root, gasping for clarity, for air.’ My messy connection to the past, to being a Jew, to Ellyn leaves me yearning for breath, for life and needing to claim it from a new place.

Rich, ‘Split at the Root,’ 238-241.

¹³³ Martin Edgar Earley, “Bees,” on *Deadeye*, The Ballroom Thieves, Nettwerk Music Group Inc., 2017.

¹³⁴ Liam Konemann, *The Appendix: Transmasculine Joy in a Transphobic Culture* (404ink, 2021).

¹³⁵ In the first chapter of his book, Konemann recounts the story of Brandon Teena, a transman who was raped and killed in Nebraska in 1993 when male friends discovered he was trans. Initially, this story frightened me and made returning to the book a seemingly impossible task. Now I think about Teena often as I traverse between two socially constructed roles, man and woman. I want to honour those that precede me not just biologically and the struggle that has long existed for trans rights and liberation.

Konemann, *The Appendix*, 13-26.

subsequent lightness. When I read this book, I was relieved to find that I teared up often. Near the end of the book, the transmasculine author writes that his body ‘feels ethereal’ and that he ‘had to pass through another realm to get it.’¹³⁶ When I say the blessing in the morning, when I put on my Testosterone gel, or even when I work out at the gym, I find I am creating my body. This work feels magical and transcends my previous understanding of what it is to be human.¹³⁷ I feel similarly when I write to you, Ellyn, or when I think about our lives side by side. This work of building a sense of self through my relationship to myself, through my relationship to you, feels magical.

These magical processes help me to create a sense of home. The author compares his ability to endure transphobia over time to the building of a house. ‘I hadn’t built the kind of house that would hold up in a storm,’ he writes, ‘and a storm was on the horizon.’¹³⁸ I think of my body like a house, especially recently. I started with a foundation and now I am building something unique inside and out. The work around the house is ongoing and multifaceted. I create home through my marriage to my wife, through our partnership and friendship. Home solidifies in queer spaces, such as counselling queer clients and feeling seen by and seeing my queer friends. My engagement with my Jewish community helps me understand from where I come, from where you come, and the person I would like to be. Transforming my body and traveling between and around genders troubles my understanding of a fixed home, and instead I am able to construct a living, breathing house.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Konemann, *The Appendix*, 63.

¹³⁷ Being not-human is a theme commonly found among trans creations. We can consider positive depictions like Konemann’s understanding of transness as ‘ethereal.’ Or we could explore transphobic descriptions, like a now-deleted comment on an article about me and my wife’s wedding: a man writing ‘What is *that*?’ about me and my gender non-conforming body.

Yet specifically when I wrote that transitioning troubles my understanding of what it is to be human, I was thinking with Paul Preciado. In his address to psychoanalysts, he affirms that there are two socially acknowledged roles demanded of all humans: to be a man or to be a woman. He was looking instead for a ‘way out’ and found it through testosterone. He explains that this way out, or liberty, is ‘something that is carefully fabricated and exercised.’ Leaving behind the expectations imposed by society does, to me, feel like transcending and reframing what it means to be human.

Paul Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 25-26.

¹³⁸ Konemann, *The Appendix*, 51.

¹³⁹ My concept of a living, breathing house through growing and transitioning is, at least in-part, inspired by Preciado’s description of transitioning as immigrating, as leaving one home and building another. He writes, ‘a gender transition is a journey marked by many borders.’ Surely, he means the borders between man and woman, masculine and feminine. I think of my other identities, of being (not) Jewish like Adrienne Rich, being an immigrant, being from America and living in Scotland. Again, Preciado comments on this crossing of borders as a white European who did not need to flee his home for safety, and I write from a similar perspective. This crossing of time and space is relevant to this work, but I do not know the experience of crossing borders as a means of fleeing. Nonetheless, I frequently feel as if I occupy a liminal, unsettled space. Preciado states that ‘the crossing’ of these borders ‘demands losses, but these losses are the requirement for the ability to invent freedom.’ My living, breathing house is my way of embodying change, of loss, and the way in which I invent and create my own freedom and life.

If I think about my sense of belonging as a house, I am sure that I am using materials that were once part of your house. The floors in my home are the same ones which you stood upon. They hold the memories of your childhood, perhaps the freedom you once felt to grow and become whomever you wanted. Then they too hold the memories of the constraints your illness and other factors imposed on your life. My walls were possibly recycled from the walls of your home. Behind them, I feel the echoing desire to push past the bounds place on me because of the gender I was assigned at birth. In my ceilings and roofs, I feel the comfort that Judaism and your ancestors brought to you. I feel that you came from somewhere, and that I do too. My home is my own – yet my home exists because yours did. My home has the echoes of your home.¹⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, I have learned from your ability to create a house. Ellyn, I think I also learn from the struggles you endured in creating home. You were undeniably proud of your home, of your Judaism, of yourself. I have often heard you described as passionate, strong-willed, stubborn. I wonder though if you were also scared and unsure. You kept strong walls around your home, and you were meticulously cautious when letting people past those boundaries. I'm familiar with the careful activity of keeping strong walls around yourself. I employ this protective strategy as a means of sheltering myself from harm. I may never have met you, Ellyn, but I think in a way I learned this defensive work from you. While keeping others at a far distance protects me from potential loss and harm, I am beginning to believe that it protects loneliness and isolation above all else.

Writing these letters to you and accepting that they will be read by others has been unexpectedly difficult for me. The relationship I have to you and the way I connect to you is powerfully vulnerable and messy. Yet here I write to you with the awareness that these words will be seen by others, some whom I know and others who are strangers. Each time I write a sentence, I am struck with the urge to immediately delete and start over. Our houses, Ellyn, were built on the foundation that they must protect us and keep others out. From you, I've learned the strength of an impenetrable wall; however, the intergenerational echoes that

Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2023), 45-46.

¹⁴⁰ My thoughts here return to Fraiberg's concept of the tattered script read to the infant. The supplies and bones of my home are shaped by the remains of Ellyn's. I create my home from the material in her tattered, left behind script. While Fraiberg equates these scripts to 'ghost stories,' I am instead acknowledging the inherited pain, wisdom, and in-between substance that are derived from these echoes. Fraiberg, 'Ghosts in the Nursery,' 195.

reverberate from you around me have helped me understand the loneliness of an impassable gate.

I feel you with me when I write these letters, when I put on my testosterone, or when I learn to trust friends with my feelings. You feel like a hand on my shoulder or tears building up behind my eyes. I am struck with a sense of *this is scary, but this is worth it*. In my lifetime, I am learning about the safety and also the dangers of building a home that is not inviting to anyone else. Yet, I am learning from beyond my lifetime. Your own experiences lap like waves upon the shores of my home and teach me that my life is meant to be shared. You, then, are with me as I attempt to include others in my processes and bear their own histories with them.

The wisdom that is transferred from your life to my own stems not only from what it was you did but sometimes also what you did not do. I suspect there is a long chain that transcends our lifetimes, guidance that is passed from one to the next. I suppose then in each generation we repeat and hold the experiences of our ancestors, yet this chain is transformed in each generation. New knowledge is gained and, sometimes, a different outcome is found. As I mentioned in my first letter, we could begin at any point along this queue and find a similar pattern. Nonetheless, I am most interested in the string that connects me and you. This bond feels unique and profound – this bond created this work.

Clearly, your lifetime and experiences impact my own sense of belonging. As I do the work in my life that transforms my home, as I transition, as I find community and as I grow, I am creating change that impacts me. Yet, Ellyn, I wonder as I develop my sense of belonging what will happen to yours. Perhaps in transforming the structure of my home – through changing my body and creating community – I retroactively impact the ones which precede me.

In other words, do the intergenerational echoes that connect us move in more than one direction? I am certain that I feel the residual pieces of your life enmeshed with my own. Originally, I assumed our relationship moved forward in time and information passed linearly from you to me. However, as I write these letters and explore our intergenerational parallels in more depth, I wonder if the product of the resonance moves backwards and forwards. Perhaps instead, the idea of material moving linearly in time is too simplistic; instead the material ebbs and flows across and beyond us. For example, in learning about home from my life experiences and yours, I grow and process what community and belonging means to me. This inherited

wisdom allows me to transcend and develop, perhaps beyond the capacity of you and my other ancestors. As I carry your experience, is it possible that I send my own to you? In this model, the healing that we accomplish together soothingly touches the pain of the past and transforms it into something processed and witnessed. I will explore this retroactive healing more in my next letter to you, Ellyn.

Through exploring our connection and the intergenerational material that passes between us, I gain invaluable wisdom. You uncovered home in your own life, especially through your own Jewish community, and I have learned and done the same, unconsciously at times, in my own. I feel your presence with me as I shape my body and world into a place where I would like to belong and in which I do. The pain and shortcomings of your life are also with me; these reverberations remind me to create a home with others and share my life. I am becoming me because you became you – your learned lessons become the knowledge on which my life is being built.

What more will we uncover together?

Love,

Han Ezra

Chapter Four: Inherited Wisdom, Judaism & Psychodynamic Thought

Introduction

In previous chapters, I established that *intergenerational resonance* describes the connection between generations which, seemingly, transcends the boundaries of space and time. I built upon this term both using pre-existing literature on intergenerational transmissions and through letters to my grandmother. Admittedly, most of the literature discussed focuses on this connection as a result of trauma, yet my intention is to describe intergenerational resonance as containing yet also surpassing traumatic experiences. Regardless, when this resonance is felt and acknowledged material is then transmitted from an older generation to a younger one. In this chapter, I will introduce the term *inherited wisdom* which refers to the co-created knowledge that takes shape in one lifetime and emerges more fully in another. Though, I have admittedly already begun exploring the material transferred from my grandmother to myself, but, in this chapter, I will establish this term more thoroughly and explore its implications. Through intergenerational resonance, information from a previous generation can be felt and experienced as it reverberates with the modern life it touches. This wisdom then takes a new shape as it is absorbed by a new generation and processed with the felt experiences of the past and the present.

Often, this resulting, co-created knowledge is overlooked or even simplified by modern understandings of intergenerational transmissions. For example, Selma Fraiberg explores the intergenerational hauntings that are passed down from parent to child each generation. She and her research team worked to use psychoanalysis to identify these ghosts and dismantle them from the lives of the current parent and child. As she concludes the article detailing this work, she writes, ‘our therapy has brought the parent to remember and reexperience his childhood anxiety and suffering, the ghosts depart and the afflicted parents become the protectors of their children against the repetition of their own conflicted past.’¹⁴¹ This summary clearly outlines that there was an issue which was neatly identified and subsequently resolved. However, this raises an important question: are ghosts from the past merely problems to be acknowledged, understood and then banished? Fraiberg is not alone in this assertion; Frosh’s work on intergenerational transmissions and postmemory often revolves around the concept of reparations. He concludes his book titled *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness* by stating, ‘... this pain continues, and not just as a fixation on the past, but as a statement that the ghosts that surround and

¹⁴¹ Fraiberg, “Ghosts in the Nursery,” 196.

inhabit us still need justice, the one thing that can lay them to rest.’¹⁴² Again, the writer asserts that the connections to the past need to be resolved and terminated. Both of these texts touch on the importance of working through and processing material from the past as it emerges in the present. Fraiberg and Frosh imply that some form of understanding (and, perhaps, wisdom) is gained from acknowledging the connection. However, both theorists also indicate that this new understanding is complete and the connection, or haunting, from the past can – and should – be released.

Therefore, counselling and psychotherapy research and practice has historically focused on the haunting nature of intergenerational transmissions and sought to determine ways to exorcise these demons.¹⁴³ However, in reframing these transmissions as material that is not solely traumatic in nature, we can approach the opportunities presented by these intergenerational echoes differently. For example, in the previous chapter I consider both my and Ellyn’s experiences of belonging. Rather than framing our struggles with this experience as material which I inherited from her, I instead explore the ways in which her (not) belonging influences my own. The term *inherited wisdom* creates the potential to explore the material from these resonances more fully and with a greater sense of curiosity. We can begin to ask new questions: what is the past attempting to inform us about in the present? What can we learn from the past? How will the past and future mirror and become entangled with one another? And, perhaps most importantly, how can the ongoing dialogue between the past and present be experienced?

Inevitably, inherited wisdom, like intergenerational resonance, is informed by the literature on intergenerational trauma that precedes it. For instance, psychotherapist Galit Atlas seems to hint at the concept in her work as she outlines ways in which each client better understands their own lives as they unpack the secrets of their ancestors. Yet, she maintains that this repetition is rooted in trauma which we can ‘search for and unpack.’¹⁴⁴ While I do not deny that traumas from the past call forward to be healed in the future, I maintain that aspects of intergenerational resonance are overlooked in this limited view of the connection between past and present. If, for instance, I solely attempted to search for Ellyn’s challenge in finding a place in which she belongs and unpack it, I would possibly lose my own encounters

¹⁴² Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 222.

¹⁴³ Frosh, *Those Who Come After*.

Fraiberg, “Ghosts in the Nursery.”

Coles, *The Uninvited Guest from the Unremembered Past*.

¹⁴⁴ Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance*, 234.

with home and belonging. In repositioning this co-created knowledge as not exclusively stemming from trauma, I attempt to disrupt the assertion that, once acknowledged, the connection needs to be processed and then released. Instead, inherited wisdom is a form of knowledge that can be approached with curiosity rather than as a lingering which must be laid to rest. From here, I can continue to dialogue with Ellyn and understand how our lives mirror and differentiate each other.

I did not solely derive the concept of inherited wisdom from psychodynamic literature. In fact, this term stretches beyond modern interpretations of hauntings and the past. The belief that wisdom is passed down from one generation to the next is present in many cultures and religions, as I explored in Chapter Two. In other words, as Frosh claims, approaching the material passed down from one generation to the next can be done through various social and religious lenses. Nonetheless, as Frosh asserts, ‘Jewish direction and the richness of certain Jewish assumptions and traditions is the one that constantly draws me in.’¹⁴⁵ As I have done throughout this body of work, I seek to explore these concepts, intergenerational resonance and, more notably in this chapter, inherited wisdom, through the lens of Jewish religion and culture. My intention in this chapter is to outline the term inherited wisdom and argue that this way of reframing the produced material of intergenerational transmissions creates new opportunities to understand ourselves and the past. Furthermore, I will draw on the parallels among inherited wisdom, Judaism and psychodynamic thought while exploring my connection to my grandmother.

I imply I gained an inherited wisdom throughout Chapter Three as I write to my grandmother about my connection to her and my search for home and belonging. Specifically, I explore the ways in which both she, in the mid-twentieth century in New Jersey, and I, nearly fifty years later in Edinburgh, search for a sense of home in a new place. Her past seems to reach out and resonate with my present as we both turned towards local, Jewish communities. When I reflect on my decision, I am not entirely certain why I decided to join the local Liberal synagogue. Ultimately, I am left with the sense that Ellyn’s experience of losing home and needing to rebuild it fuelled my own search for belonging and community. The wisdom which Ellyn developed in her own life echoed forward in my lifetime and transformed into co-created knowledge that preserved a piece of home, a piece of me, and a piece of her.

¹⁴⁵ Frosh, *Hauntings*, 11.

Jewish Thought & Inherited Wisdom

Jewish religious texts, holidays, and even folklore contain themes of ancestral veneration and a blurring between the past and the present. Unsurprisingly, these themes create opportunities for Jews to explore time in a non-linear manner. This tradition may also explain the abundance of Jewish researchers exploring intergenerational transmissions, such as Stephen Frosh, Galit Atlas, and Selma Fraiberg. In my own exploration of intergenerational resonance, especially between me and my grandmother, I often find that Jewish themes, rituals and media are relevant. Furthermore, the idea that wisdom has been passed from Ellyn to me seems to parallel various aspects of Jewish culture and thought. In this section, I will establish the basis for *inherited wisdom* in Jewish culture by exploring ancestral veneration in Jewish holidays, the ritual of Kaddish, Kabbalistic understandings of reincarnation and the folklore surrounding the figure Lilith.

The Jewish holiday *Pesach*, more commonly referred to as Passover, is filled with hints of inherited wisdom in both the origin of the holiday and the ways in which it is presently observed. Passover in the modern day is derived from both springtime festivals for ancient farmers and shepherds as well as the story of Exodus.¹⁴⁶ I will explore the ancestral passage of wisdom in the story of Exodus, but as I do so, I will think with Jewish feminist scholars like Judith Plaskow. In her book *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism From a Feminist Perspective*, Plaskow writes, ‘The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence.’¹⁴⁷ In my letters to Ellyn, I am often attempting to hear a silence left behind by her untimely death and her sometimes-suffocating roles as a mother, wife and woman. As I think about the story – and the protagonist, Moses – I will think about the feminine silence which surrounds it.

The story of Exodus explains that Moses is an Israelite born to a family at a time when the Egyptian Pharaoh declares that all first-born, Israelite sons must be killed. Seeking to save his life, the story describes Moses’ mother and older sister concealing him in a basket and sending him away via the Nile River. Miriam, despite being older than Moses, is seemingly spared by the Pharaoh’s orders. Similarly, Ellyn and I are first-born children in Jewish families and our lives would have been deemed not significant enough to end. Despite their appearance as background characters in both the Bible and other retellings, Moses’

¹⁴⁶ Liberal Judaism, *A Haggadah for All Generations* (London: Liberal Judaism, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (London: Harper One, 1990).

mother and sister, Miriam, bravely save him and are therefore the reason for the remainder of the story. In trying to hear Ellyn's silence, I inevitably tune into the silence of the Jewish women, legendary and otherwise, who have been left out. Eventually, the baby Moses is found and raised by the Pharaoh's daughter, another woman who saves him. The boy grows and is raised as an Egyptian, until one day he kills an Egyptian man who is torturing Israelites; despite his disjointed, split at the root¹⁴⁸ upbringing, he feels some connection to the Israelites. Fearful of punishment, Moses flees Egypt for the land of Midian in which he resides for a long period.

However, according to the story of Exodus, eventually God goes to Moses in Midian and asks him to free the Israelites. God does this because 'God remembered [Her] covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.'¹⁴⁹ Under a literal interpretation of the bible, Moses is compelled to return to Egypt and free the Israelites because God asks for it. Arguably, however, Moses also feels a kinship to the Israelites, which he demonstrates when he kills the Egyptian man hurting them. Therefore, the story of Exodus can also be understood through the lenses of intergenerational resonance and inherited wisdom. In this reframing, God – and the way in which God presents to Moses as a burning bush announcing, 'I am the God of your father,'¹⁵⁰ – acts as a metaphor for intergenerational resonance. Notably, in this story the inherited wisdom is passed from father to son, man to man. Here, God seems to forget the role of women like Moses' mother and Miriam when declaring 'I am the God of your father.' I wonder if, instead of reminding Moses of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God instead reminded Moses of his ancestors Sarah and Rebekah. Perhaps, Moses would have felt compelled to help the Israelites because Rebekah convinced Isaac that Jacob was his heir to assist God. Yet, in this story, like many others, the silence of these women is deafening. Still, Moses seemingly feels a connection to his male ancestors, the men from whom he comes. Initially, he refuses God's request: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?' God, however, responds, 'I will be with you.'¹⁵¹ Certainly, the story of Exodus seems to literally state that God was with Moses on this journey. Yet, the narrative clearly emphasises Moses' connection to God as ancestral – 'I am the God of your father' – and Moses feels compelled to follow God's request because this ancestral power, or knowledge, will travel with him.

¹⁴⁸ Rich, *Adrienne Rich Poetry and Prose*, 234.

¹⁴⁹ Exodus 2.21-3.6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Exodus 3.7-3.15.

The relationship between God and Moses is formed on the basis that Moses' ancestors worshipped and formed a covenant with the same deity. The urge to return to Egypt and save his people presents as a request from God, but Moses seems to only trust this calling when God clarifies: 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'¹⁵² Instead, it seems as if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob call forward to Moses and remind him of their lives and legacy and ask him to preserve it. Again, the *intergenerational resonance* which God employs to convince Moses is connected from one man to the next. Yet, as Plaskow explores, Miriam knows the validity of her own revelation, and it is Miriam who insists to her brother, 'We have both been chosen.'¹⁵³ Thus, connecting to her ancestors, such as Rebekah, Miriam relies on the wisdom gained from her covenant with God, from her intergenerational resonance, to work with her brother. The strength Moses finds to confront Pharaoh and the bravery Miriam possesses to assist her brother and lead the Israelites out of Egypt is bestowed onto them by God. However, if we maintain that God is a metaphor for Miriam's and Moses' connections to their ancestors, then the story of Exodus is instead a tale of the siblings connecting to those who precede them and gaining guidance and wisdom from this resonance. In other words, the Exodus story is a tale of two heroes tuning into intergenerational resonance, uncovering inherited wisdom and changing the course of history.

Fittingly, then, the celebration of Passover, which revolves around the story of Exodus, is also based upon wisdom inherited from previous generations. The holiday is celebrated each year on the 15th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, Nisan, with a special dinner referred to as a *seder*.¹⁵⁴ Throughout the seder, Jewish people and their guests follow a book, called a *Haggadah*, in which they remember the story of Moses and the suffering of their ancient ancestors and reflect on ways to create a more welcoming and just world. This holiday, like many Jewish holidays, places special emphasis on the experiences of one's ancestors and the lessons that can be learned from them. Throughout the evening, certain foods are eaten, stories told, and blessings recited all with the intention that the pain of those who came before may be remembered and their strength continued. At one point during the seder, the youngest child present is prompted to ask four questions, and each question is an attempt to gauge why this evening is different from other nights. The elder participants at the table are encouraged to answer these questions, to tell the story of Exodus and to pass on

¹⁵² Exodus 2.21-3.15.

¹⁵³ Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Seder is the Hebrew word literally meaning 'order,' and here it means the structured dinner and discussion which is traditionally held on the first and second nights of Passover.

generational guidance. Clearly, the ritual of Passover is rooted in engaging with the intergenerational resonance between modern Jews and their ancient ancestors and absorbing the inherited wisdom which is consequently produced.

Holidays are not the only instance during which Jews are compelled to remember those who came before. The process of mourning the death of a loved one is highly structured in Judaism. For instance, mourners are expected to sit *shiv'ah* for seven days in which the deceased loved one is remembered and a memorial candle is kept burning. As time passes, the obligation to mourn changes. Notably, the children and grandchildren of the deceased are expected to acknowledge a day of mourning on one's *yahrzeit*, or the anniversary of death on the Jewish calendar. During the *yahrzeit*, loved ones are encouraged to light a memorial candle for a 24-hour period, attend a service and recite *Kaddish*, the mourner's prayer. Rabbi John Rayner explains that the purpose of this is to bind 'the generations to one another in a continuum of time.'¹⁵⁵ In other words, the process of mourning in Judaism is specifically set forth to connect one generation to the next, to encourage a space in which a past generation can be remembered and, potentially, one can tune into intergenerational resonance.

Each year on my grandmother's *yahrzeit*, the 17th day of Kislev, I keep a memorial candle lit throughout the day and reflect on her life. In this meditative process, I often think about the stories which have been passed down to me about her. Notably, most stories include adult-rated jokes and eccentric behaviour that I am hesitant to include in this body of work. I pause and consider the way she died and her ongoing illness; I wonder if she felt scared to die, and I feel frustrated and upset that I am not able to ask her these questions. On the 17th of Kislev, I think about the many roadblocks that seemed to hinder her life, like her illness and her parents' refusal to send her to university. I reflect too on the ways she responded to these forks in the road, and I am struck by her persistence to live and find community.

On this day, my wife and I will read *Kaddish* together, and we'll often look at one of the meditations that precedes it in our prayer book. The meditation I most prefer reads:

¹⁵⁵ Goldberg and Rayner, *The Jewish People*, 381.

‘... Even when they are gone, the departed are with us. They inspire us to live as, in their higher moments, they themselves sought to live. We remember them now; they remain in our hearts, they are a continual blessing.’¹⁵⁶

I feel close to Ellyn when I read this. The phenomenon that I describe as intergenerational resonance is described with the phrase ‘...even when they are gone, the departed are with us.’ The next phrase, the phrase that describes the departed as encouraging us to live life which ‘they themselves sought to live’ captures my feelings, especially on my grandmother’s yahrzeit. As I look back on her life and reflect on that which she achieved, the pain she suffered and the life she led, I am certain I carry within myself a knowledge that stems from her life. The process of mourning set out by Jewish traditions enables me to listen to and integrate within myself the inherited wisdom from my grandmother.

Through holidays and traditions, like mourning, Judaism creates opportunities to tune into the wisdom passed down from one’s ancestors. Yet, even in the lesser-known corners of the religion and culture, there exists more implications of a knowledge which is inherited. Kabbalistic traditions are less frequently observed in most modern Jewish communities; however, Kabbalah has been around since the twelfth century. The word itself means ‘received’ in Hebrew and refers to a mystical, dynamic interpretation of Jewish thought. Theologian Daniel C. Matt describes Kabbalah as ‘tradition, ancient wisdom received and treasured from the past.’¹⁵⁷ The tradition is filled with concepts from the past, even ancient Judaism, that have been built upon and reimagined in a mystical, ever-changing way. Similar to inherited wisdom, Kabbalah is a marrying of the past, the present and some material not quite known.

The Zohar, the primary text of Kabbalah, depicts a process of reincarnation that is absent in other forms of Judaism. The concept of *gilgul* is present in Kabbalistic literature to refer to the a ‘soul being reborn into a new body and being able to atone for a sin’ which had not yet been forgiven.¹⁵⁸ (In the following chapter, a letter to my grandmother, I explore a term similar to *gilgul*: *dybbuk*). *Gilgul* was used to explore the process of reincarnation, in

¹⁵⁶ Liberal Judaism, *Siddur Lev Chadash* (London: Liberal Judaism, 2015), 522.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

¹⁵⁸ Morris Faienstein, ‘The Dybbuk: The Origins and History of a Concept,’ in *olam he-zeh v’olam ha-ba: This World and the World to Come in Jewish Belief and Practice* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2017), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/62520>.

which a soul would leave the world with the death of one body and then re-enter via a new body. This mystical interpretation sets out that all the souls in the world were originally present in Adam and split into ‘thousands of thousands of fragments’ which now are the souls present in modern life.¹⁵⁹ Literally, this would mean that the essence of each human being is reincarnated generation after generation. However, a less literal interpretation of this mystical tenet is that wisdom from previous generations trickles down to new generations. Notably, the Kabbalistic interpretation centres Adam, the original man, as the beginning. Yet I think about the way Ellyn’s experiences drip down from her generation into my own. I think again with Plaskow when she writes, ‘Remembering and inventing together help recover the hidden half of the Torah, reshaping Jewish memory to let women speak.’¹⁶⁰ In centring and remembering Ellyn, I am tuning into the oft silenced voices of the past. This reshaping of the concept of reincarnation allows for new wisdom to emerge. Thus, experiences and feelings live on in descendants and this inherited wisdom is a way in which lessons learned or, at least, approached, in the past are integrated and reimagined in the present.

Finally, folklore is a means through which inherited wisdom is present in Jewish tradition. In fact, wisdom passed down generationally through folklore is common in numerous cultures, and many stories contain lessons for young children or important pieces of history intended to be preserved. Despite the abundance of information derived from folk stories across each corner of the planet, many thinkers have overlooked the value in this wisdom. One such thinker, John Arnott MacCulloch, was a Scottish author in the early twentieth century and wrote extensively about that which is preserved in folktales. He states that these types of fictions ‘embody traditions, beliefs, and customs of an early stage of civilization,’ yet he also clarifies that he believes these tales are ‘unusual and irrational.’ Additionally, he ascribes the tendency to share folktales and to believe in magic as ‘a stage of savagery’ to be passed through on the way to being ‘civilized.’¹⁶¹

MacCulloch was not alone in his analysis. Other white, Western researchers have drawn similar conclusions: storytelling is an uncivilized, outdated form of inquiry.¹⁶² This

¹⁵⁹ Avraham Brandwein, “Gilgul Neshamot - Reincarnation of Souls,” University of Massachusetts Boston, 1996, https://faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Arcana/Kabbalah/souls.html.

¹⁶⁰ Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, 56.

¹⁶¹ John Arnott MacCulloch, ‘Folk-Memory in Folk-Tales,’ in *Folklore* 60, no. 3 (1940): 307.

¹⁶² Edwin Smith, ‘The Function of Folk-Tales,’ in *The Journal of Royal African Society* 39, no. 154 (1940): 64-83.

colonisation of knowledge and the ways in which it is communicated has meant a movement away from the subjective, personal and cultural and instead towards that which can be repeated and objectively disproved. Nonetheless, many thinkers, like those using Creative Relational Inquiry, are relying on ancient ontological and epistemological assumptions to disrupt this binary method. For example, in their book titled *Narrative Portraits in Qualitative Literature*, Edgar Rodríguez-Dorans uses both stories from their own life as well as participants' narratives to capture the wisdom that can be uncovered from tales. Rodríguez-Dorans asserts that through narrative, research can capture an 'individual's ability to create meaning, stories, and narratives.'¹⁶³ In other words, folktales and legends are a means through which those who preceded us were able to create and transfer experience and wisdom to future generations. Therefore, when attempting to reconnect with the wisdom of a previous generation, folklores are an ideal source to turn towards.

Jewish folklore specifically passes on a unique type of inherited wisdom. As Raphael Patai acknowledges in his book *On Jewish Folklore*, Jewish people have existed in diasporic communities across the world. Therefore, myths and folktales which are shared among Jewish communities often borrow from the other cultures among which we have lived. Simultaneously, Jewish folklore is often based on commonalities, drawing from stories in the bible, topics in *Midrash*¹⁶⁴, the Hebrew language and even the shared diasporic experience.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, storytelling throughout Jewish history has provided an important tool through which a people could adapt and change. The 'rigid dogmatic creeds' of a different religion or culture would not be beneficial to a people 'ever making new adjustments.'¹⁶⁶ Wisdom passed down from previous generations would help Jews as they continue to adapt and grapple with changing social and political landscapes. Thus, Jewish folklore exists as a means through which Jewish people could respond to a need for change and through which change itself could occur.

Perhaps no Jewish folktale has experienced a greater transformation throughout history than the story of Lilith, and this change in narrative demonstrates that the knowledge accompanying the folklore has also altered over time. As a result, Lilith serves as a thought-provoking example when exploring inherited wisdom in folklore, especially as it pertains to

¹⁶³ Edgar Rodríguez-Dorans, *Narrative Portraits in Qualitative Literature* (London: Routledge, 2022), 7.

¹⁶⁴ Midrash refers to texts which serve as commentary, analyses and discussion on the bible, written by Rabbis.

¹⁶⁵ Raphael Patai, *On Jewish Folklore* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 35-44.

¹⁶⁶ Samuel Segal, *Elijah: A Study in Jewish Folklore* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1935), 1.

the connection between Ellyn and me given the feminist themes throughout the tale. Originally, Lilith appears throughout ancient texts as a non-specific, female demon, and she eventually is mentioned in medieval midrash and kabbalistic texts. The actual story of Lilith has transformed across cultures and centuries; however, and notably, the reception to the folklore and legendary character herself has changed dramatically, due in large part to feminist analysis of the story, which I explore below.¹⁶⁷ Broadly, Lilith holds great significance to the Jewish people, and, specifically, the tale holds particular importance when I consider the inherited wisdom I gain from my connection to Ellyn.

Lilith is a seemingly ageless figure, and her roots can be traced as far back as ancient Babylonian religions in which *liliths* referred to female demons. As an individual, she is barely mentioned in the bible, yet becomes a critical figure to Jewish folklore through Midrash and Kabbalistic texts. Eventually, in the satirical, medieval text, *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Lilith is identified as the “first Eve” or God’s first attempt to create Adam’s wife.¹⁶⁸ The Zohar then further describes the story of Lilith and how she became known as a figure to be avoided due to her capacity to fool men and bring harm to children. This representation of Lilith parallels misogynistic caricatures of women also prevalent throughout history, and, originally, the tale would be passed down as a means of warning young women who not to become.

The tale suggests that, like Adam, Lilith is made from the Earth as one of the first human beings, and she is created with the intention that she will be Adam’s wife. She firmly believes that she and Adam are equals and refuses to be subservient to him when he demands it. Adam responds stubbornly to her pleas and reasserts that Lilith is meant to be obedient. Understanding that Adam does not and will not see her as his equal partner, Lilith flees the Garden of Eden. Adam, frustrated by the lack of submission from his wife, asks God for help, and three angels are sent to retrieve the escaped woman. When the angels find her, they demand that she accepts her place as Adam’s wife – and not his equal – and return to the Garden of Eden. She refuses and, like numerous male-depicted female villains¹⁶⁹, states that she will bring harm on the men and children of the world. Midrash implies that Lilith henceforth becomes responsible for death and injury that is brought to newly born babies. In

¹⁶⁷ Rebecca Lesses, “Lilith,” Jewish Women’s Archive, March 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/lilith>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Disney villains like Maleficent, Snow White’s Evil Queen, and Mother Gothel fit this description. However, the story of Lilith seems to parallel the ancient Greek tragedy, *Medea*, in which the female antagonist murders her children with the goal of seeking revenge on her husband.

Kabbalistic text, Lilith is described as a demonic seducer, luring men to bed and using them to create hellish children. Nearly all early sources view Lilith as an evil, monstrous woman.¹⁷⁰

The story of Lilith reminds me, in part, of Ellyn. I believe this is, in large part, due to the nature of myths and stories about those who pass before we are born – both Lilith and Ellyn feel like semi-fictional characters who existed before me. Additionally, as a child, I was often told, especially by male family members, that my grandmother was mentally unwell and, at times, emotionally unpredictable. Sometimes, this depiction is described as an attribute of her diabetes and her fluctuating blood sugar levels. At other times, she is more clearly described as angry, sad and emotional because of her gender. *‘That’s just the way some women in our family are.’* I imagine Adam similarly telling Eve and his children about Lilith. He may share with them that he tried to be a loving husband but that she refused to fulfil her wifely duties. Maybe he would state that she was crazy, unpredictable or mad. For generations and from father to son, this narrative may be accepted and repeated. This tradition is cemented in early psychoanalysis with the concept of female hysteria. The misogyny experienced by other women may reach backwards in time and connect them to Lilith, and, perhaps, these women might understand the story differently.

Plaskow relies on this connection, and her work adds to the drastic changes in Lilith’s status through modern, feminist interpretations of the folklore. Plaskow retells the story of Lilith. As in the old story, in her adaptation, Lilith flees from Adam when he demands that she serve him, and God creates a new wife, Eve, for Adam. However, in Plaskow’s adaptation, Eve eventually grows wary of Adam’s despise towards Lilith, and she feels excluded from Adam’s relationship to God. Intuitively letting this feeling guide her, she climbs over the wall of the Garden of Eden and encounters Lilith. Finally, meeting Lilith is a moment of real connection for Eve. Both feel understood and speak with each other for hours.¹⁷¹ In this retelling of Lilith, the figure is treated unfairly by Adam as in the original; yet, in this version, Lilith encounters an equal in both creation and experience when she meets Eve. The friendship between Lilith and Eve disrupts the patriarchal suppression set forth by God and Adam. In fact, the relationship between the two is seemingly queer in the ways in which it pushes against normative ideas of relationships within the context of

¹⁷⁰ Lesses, “Lilith.”

¹⁷¹ Judith Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 81-88.

Genesis. Through this relationship with another woman, Lilith is explored as a multidimensional character and a representation of the struggle for equity. Finally, the inherited wisdom which is passed along is transformed and queered.

Admittedly, Lilith is a fictional, mythological character with no direct, ancestral connection to Plaskow or other Jewish women and queer people writing modern retellings. Nonetheless, the story of Lilith is one that has connected, specifically Jewish, women across generations. In this adaptation, Plaskow creates an opportunity for marginalised peoples to connect to the experience of Lilith and learn from the strife felt by their ancestors. The retelling is an act of finding and exploring inherited wisdom through a macroscopic, cultural intergenerational resonance. Despite these terms *intergenerational resonance* and *inherited wisdom* being newly introduced in this work, other scholars have commented on the capacity for retellings to capture this sensation. Adrienne Rich describes the act of revision as, ‘looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.’¹⁷² She explores this process as a result of living in a ‘time of awakening consciousness,’¹⁷³ during which women (and, I would argue, more broadly genderqueer people) are afforded the ability to look back on history and rewrite it from the perspective of those who shared our identities. Rich’s understanding of revision, as well as Plaskow’s retelling of Lilith, demonstrate a cultural type of inherited wisdom. In these specific instances, this wisdom is lost between generations by voices who speak loudly and do not fully understand; the wisdom is recaptured when those who do relate turn towards the resonance and seek out the knowledge behind it.

In this section, I outlined the roots of *inherited* wisdom in Jewish religion and culture. While this list is not extensive, my exploration of the story of Exodus, the practice of kaddish, Kabbalistic understandings of reincarnation and Jewish folklore highlight the tendency of the Jewish people to receive wisdom from those who come before. This type of inherited wisdom differs slightly from that derived from my relationship to Ellyn; between Ellyn and me, the inherited wisdom is subjective, personal and pertaining directly, in part, to our family line. In the Jewish examples explored above, I demonstrate that inherited wisdom can be uncovered at a sociocultural and religious level. This distinction is important, but the boundaries between the person and cultural are blurry – as is demonstrated in the

¹⁷² Adrienne Rich, *Adrienne Rich Poetry and Prose*, 183.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

intergenerational resonance between me and Ellyn. The personal and the cultural feed into one another, never fully the same nor entirely separate.

Inherited Wisdom and Psychodynamic Thought

The exploration of intergenerational transmissions is prevalent not just in Jewish culture but also in psychodynamic thought. This parallel can be partially explained by the relationship between psychoanalysis and Judaism. In fact, psychoanalysis has even been labelled, antisemitically, as a ‘Jewish science.’¹⁷⁴ Despite harmful stereotyping behind the comparison, the link between the two is undeniable and formed, in large part, due to the overwhelmingly Jewish, early contributors to the modality. Freud himself, whilst not a particularly religious man, believed that his identity as a Jew played a critical role in the development of psychoanalysis. He described the ‘Jewish brain’ as nonconformist, and he claimed that his experience as a Jew kept him from prejudices.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, whilst being a Jew in the early twentieth century informed Freud of some of the experience of oppression, suffering and genocide, much of his writing still includes other prejudices, like racism, misogyny and homophobia.¹⁷⁶ Claudia Tate, Black professor of English and African-American Studies, writes that anti-Black racism was so prevalent during Freud’s and early psychoanalysis’ era, that ‘[this racism] fades into the domain of epistemological assumption.’¹⁷⁷ Thus, the inclusion of voices who hold identities which were not held by early psychoanalytic thinkers allows for a further disruption of Freud’s notion of conforming. This tradition of comparing Judaism and psychoanalysis begins in and then transcends Freud’s lifetime. As explored by contributors to the book, *Soul Searching: Studies in Judaism and Psychotherapy*, the relationship between psychodynamic thought and Jewish history are multifaceted and plentiful, spanning generations. For instance, Cassie Cooper demonstrates the ways in which stereotypical roles of family members in Jewish households impacted the psychodynamic view of the mother, especially the one put forward by Melanie Klein.¹⁷⁸ This example and others in the book highlight the influence Judaism has had on psychotherapy

¹⁷⁴ Marthe Robert, *From Oedipus to Moses: Freud’s Jewish Identity* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 3.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Various sources are applicable here, but Freud’s “The Psychological Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction Between the Sexes” seems fitting. Within it, the psychoanalyst argues that women ‘oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own.’

Riya Yadav, “Sigmund Freud and penis envy – a failure of courage?” *The British Psychological Society*, 8 May 2018, <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/sigmund-freud-and-penis-envy-failure-courage>.

¹⁷⁷ Claudia Tate, ‘Freud and His “Negro”’: Psychoanalysis as Ally and Enemy of African Americans’ *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1 no. 1 (Spring 1996): 53-54.

¹⁷⁸ Howard Cooper, *Soul Searching: Studies in Judaism and Psychotherapy*, (London: SCM Press, 1988) 6-13.

and the blurred themes that run through both. Thus, the presence of *inherited wisdom* in Judaism is related to the work of uncovering the past for psychodynamic counsellors and therapists. In this section, I further outline the connection between psychodynamic theories and the term *inherited wisdom*.

In order to explore the basis for inherited wisdom in psychodynamic concepts, we must first acknowledge the psychodynamic literature on intergenerational transmissions and, more specifically, intergenerational trauma. In fact, the emergence of intergenerational trauma in psychoanalytic approaches stems from studying the second and third generation descendants of Holocaust survivors. Many of these descendants suffered in various ways and showed ‘difficulties in distinguishing between reality and fantasy, a disturbance of temporality.’¹⁷⁹ Recognising this impact in the descendants of survivors of intense traumas, like war and genocide, led analysts to recognise ‘the death of time,’ or a rupture in temporality so severe that the past, present and future feel inseparable and intangible.¹⁸⁰ Certainly, earlier psychoanalysis already disrupts the notion of chronological time, with Freud writing extensively about material between the conscious and unconscious and the past influencing the present.¹⁸¹ Yet, with the introduction of intergenerational trauma, researchers and practitioners were able to begin applying psychodynamic principles to material that transcended generations.

One such researcher, Stephen Frosh, writes into the concept of intergenerational transmissions through the framework of psychoanalysis. Interestingly, he also uses the experiences of Jewish people and the stories of Jewish culture to highlight these parallels. In his early work, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions*, Frosh explains that ‘psychoanalysis intentionally stirs up demons.’¹⁸² He explains that hauntings create temporal disturbances, or an inability to distinguish between past, present and future. Psychoanalysis, in a similar vein, attempts to blur the, sometimes imagined, boundary between what has happened and what is now occurring. Therefore, in doing psychoanalytic work, Frosh implies that we are intentionally turning towards the ghosts that exist in the past and haunt our present. Similar to much literature on intergenerational transmissions, Frosh uses language that implies an unwanted ringing from the past, a haunting in need of exorcism. Yet, if we

¹⁷⁹ Angela Connolly, ‘Healing the Wounds of our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative,’ *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 56 no. 5 (2011), 610.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 611.

¹⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 135.

¹⁸² Frosh, *Hauntings*, 3.

disrupt the notion that the echoes from the past are inherently unwanted, then we can use psychodynamic theories, like Frosh's, as models for exploring the *inherited wisdom* which may come from these encounters, or from *intergenerational resonance*.

Freud conceptualised the unconscious as containing various processes and material, especially those which were repressed.¹⁸³ The work of psychoanalysis, to Freud, was to understand these unconscious ideas, feelings and impulses. In his work, this often involved exploring a patient's childhood, dreams and experiences – all from within their own lifetime. Yet, similar to Carl Jung's collective unconscious¹⁸⁴, the unconscious can be used to explore that which transcends one's own lifetime yet contributes to certain feelings and impulses felt in the present. Certainly, other fields, such as biology and neurology, have attempted to understand how an ancestor's experiences impact a descendant's mind and body. The study of epigenetics, for instance, demonstrates that traumatic experiences alter a person's genetic makeup and the DNA of their ancestors.¹⁸⁵ Thinking with the psychodynamic concept of the unconscious helps us conceptualise that which is not consciously known but is still felt and impactful.

Intergenerational transmissions as unconscious material is demonstrated in Galit Atlas's work with a client, Leonardo, who reports feeling 'cursed'.¹⁸⁶ Atlas explains that Leonardo is a gay man who comes to therapy after feeling despair years after a breakup with an ex-partner. The client acknowledges that the breakup was inevitable, and he does not wish to be with his ex-partner; yet he explains that there is an unyielding pain around this loss that he struggles to understand. Throughout their work together, Leonardo and Atlas uncover secrets from the past of the client's closeted, queer grandfather. The inability to live openly as himself and the loss of a life with a partner whom he loved drove Leonardo's grandfather to suicide. Leonardo comes to realise that the pain of this lives within himself. The unconscious, intergenerational material which haunts Leonardo in his dreams becomes conscious material which he can begin to process.

As the counsellor and client explore the pain felt by Leonardo's grandfather, and the suffering felt by his father after his grandfather's sudden death, Leonardo begins to make

¹⁸³ Freud, *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis*, 142-183.

¹⁸⁴ Carl Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (Routledge, 2023).

¹⁸⁵ Hunter Howie et al., 'A Review of Epigenetic Contributions to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,' *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 21, no. 4 (2019): 417-428.

¹⁸⁶ Atlas, *Emotional Inheritance*, 71.

sense of his own life. Together they learn that Leonardo's grandfather was unable to grieve the end of a relationship with another man and had to carry this burden secretly. Leonardo, two generations later, holds the pain his grandfather endured despite being able to live as an openly gay man. The unknown yet felt memories of his grandfather are loud in Leonardo's own unconscious, and he feels tormented with nightmares and unexplained pain. In other words, the intergenerational resonance between Leonardo and his grandfather was strongly present but, until Leonardo discovers his family's secrets, not consciously known. In making this material conscious and exploring the past, Leonardo inherits wisdom from his grandfather. He is both able to understand the loss and pain experienced by his grandfather and come to acknowledge the joy of being able to live authentically as himself.

Similar to the unconscious, the psychodynamic concept containment is especially important when considering inherited wisdom. Specifically, in my work with clients and my developing of *intergenerational resonance* and *inherited wisdom*, I think with Laurence Spurling's definition of containment. He describes the term as a place in which 'sanctuary and meaning' can be found.¹⁸⁷ In other words, in experiencing containment, one can derive both a sense of safety and (co-)create knowledge. Spurling goes on to explain that containment involves a 'disturbing experience can be made less disturbing by putting a boundary round it.' He acknowledges that this can be done by a single person within their own mind; however, he explains that this is often instead 'a kind of interchange between people.'¹⁸⁸ In this exchange, intolerable information is communicated from one person to another; in this act, the disturbing information transforms when held by this second person. The changed material is then returned to the first person and able to be held and tolerated. Spurling uses the example of a child telling a parent about a nightmare, and the disturbing quality of the nightmare evolving into something more tolerable in the mind of the parent. This new material is communicated back to the child who is adequately comforted.¹⁸⁹

If we consider Spurling's definition of containment as well as Frosh's explanation of psychoanalysis as blurring the past and the present, then we can explore the ways in which containment is present in *intergenerational resonance*. During *intergenerational resonance* the connection between the ancestor and the modern person weakens the boundary between the two individuals and between different periods of time. Thus, we can integrate both of

¹⁸⁷ Laurence Spurling, *An Introduction to Psychodynamic Counselling* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 20.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 21.

Spurling's definitions of containment – a process happening in one's own mind and an interchange between people. In this process, material, which feels intolerable and distressing, may emerge in the life of a person, and this sensation may transcend the first person's lifetime and resonate with the experiences of an ancestor. In this ancestor's lifetime, the material has a new shape, holds a new flavour as it is altered by both the past and present persons' lived experiences. This newly produced – and co-created – material is given back to the person living in the present and emerges as inherited wisdom.

If we consider the themes of which I wrote to Ellyn in the previous chapter, we can explore how containment is present in the intergenerational resonance between me and my grandmother. Specifically, both Ellyn and I experienced loneliness in our lifetimes. In the chapter, I wonder if I do not know myself or if I know myself but if the world does not understand me. The sensation of not feeling understood, particularly as it pertains to my transgender identity, is persistent in my life. I struggle with the experience of being misgendered, being seen externally in a way that is not consistent with who I am internally. Furthermore, I often encounter strangers and loved ones who do not understand my desire to make this internal sense of myself apparent externally. '*But why do you have to change your name?*' When I feel this loneliness, I think about Ellyn. I remember her desire to become more involved in a Jewish community and connect to her roots. I also recall the reactions those around her had to this endeavour; they viewed her as disconnected, overly religious – they did not understand. Yet she persisted; she that path which felt right to her. Her experiences mingle with my own and give me strength and wisdom as I attempt to pursue the life which feels genuine to me. I inherit this co-created wisdom, and I am also contained. In this process of tuning into *intergenerational resonance* and finding *inherited wisdom*, I find 'sanctuary and meaning.'¹⁹⁰

Therefore, through the lens of psychodynamic thought, we can more profoundly explore the experience of *intergenerational resonance* and the impacts of *inherited wisdom*. Freud's concept of the unconscious troubles the notion that time moves in a linear manner and that the past is always separate from the present. Instead, the unconscious allows for an understanding of time that is blurry and of knowledge which is co-created through dialogue between the past and present, between ancestor and descendant. Furthermore, the concept of containment, especially the one explored by Laurence Spurling, demonstrates the ways in

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 20.

which *inherited wisdom* is formed in the present through connection to the past. Engaging with psychodynamic, like Jewish, thinkers further develops the concept of *inherited wisdom* and the potential for the past to inform the present.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I formally introduce the term *inherited wisdom* to describe the material which is passed forward in time as a result of *intergenerational resonance*. This knowledge is co-created between ancestor and descendant and is shaped by the lived experiences of both individuals. While I coin the term *inherited wisdom* and acknowledge the lack of counselling and psychotherapy literature which exists to describe a wisdom from ancestors, I simultaneously recognise that seeking guidance from ancestors is not a new idea. Specifically, I use Jewish thought and Judaism to explore the prevalence of looking backwards to understand the present. This pattern is demonstrated through Jewish traditions, like the holiday of Passover and the mourner's prayer, or kaddish. Additionally, exploring the concept of folklore, especially the Jewish folklore Lilith, enables us to understand how *inherited wisdom* can emerge from a cultural *intergenerational resonance*, rather than a more personal one like that between me and Ellyn. I examine the parallels between Judaism, Jewish culture and psychodynamic thought, especially through exploring the origins of psychoanalysis. Finally, I engage with psychodynamic concepts, like the unconscious and containment, to further acquire a definition of *inherited wisdom* and establish its connection to counselling and psychotherapy.

Chapter Five: Grief and Endings

Dear Ellyn,

This letter will be the last one which I write to you for this dissertation. While I know our relationship will continue to resound across time and space, I am struck with a grief. I am finding it difficult to end this project – it feels like an ending with you. I wonder now about the endings which we have both experienced and parallel one another. In fact, the intergenerational cycles in our family are riddled with untimely deaths and difficult endings. I am curious about how you experienced grief and loss in your lifetime.

You encountered many instances of death before your own. For example, in 1988 your father, Paul Pfeffer, died. From what I have learned, you felt a close connection to him, despite the often-argumentative nature of your shared dynamic. On the flight from New Jersey to Florida for his funeral, my mother, your soon-to-be daughter-in-law, cried. She loved your father and was deeply impacted by his death. When you noticed, you sat next to and comforted her. I am told that this was one of the few warm moments between you both. I'm curious about this story. Someone expressing the pain you felt on the inside moved you, and I wonder if you often felt your experiences and feelings were mirrored by others.¹⁹¹

I suspect your father's death was painful, in part because of your love for him but also likely because of your other experiences of grief and your own impending ending. Yet, Ellyn, when I think about the loss and grief you endured, I first wonder about your relationship to your own grandparents. Specifically, I wonder about the deaths of your maternal grandparents, David and Rebecca.

¹⁹¹ Reflecting on this story, I think about Winnicott's concept and Ogden's playful exploration of mirroring, specifically as it pertains to the development of the infant. When the infant begins to acknowledge the otherness of the world around them, they look to their mother's face to see themselves reflected. Ogden explains that this reflection is not exact but instead imaginative. The infant sees a created reflection by the mother that contains 'her physical and emotional response to what she sees in her infant' (416). This communication between infant and mother is crucial to the child's development and self-understanding.

I wonder here about Ellyn's early experiences of (not) being mirrored. My mother expressing emotions that Ellyn surely felt seemed to break a barrier that existed between them. My sense is that this experience was rare for Ellyn (as I will continue to explore in this chapter), her experiences were not often shared and certainly not mirrored. My mother likely did not intend to mirror Ellyn's experience back to her; nonetheless, even an emotion loosely shared between the two of them stirred something within Ellyn. As I explore Ellyn's and my grief throughout this letter, I think about our early (lack of) experiences of mirroring, and I wonder what I (we) are (co-)creating as a result now.

Thomas Ogden, "Giving Back What the Patient Brings: On Winnicott's "Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development,"" *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 93, no. 3, 413-430.

David Wilkin was born in 1884 in an area of the Pale of Settlement that is now modern-day Poland, and Rebecca (nee Kossar) was born in the same territory just two years later. Likely fleeing pogroms,¹⁹² David arrived in the United States in 1901 and Rebecca in 1902, both around 17 years old. The two met and were wed in Manhattan in New York City on 30 August 1909. Three years later, their first daughter, Alice Wilkin, was born, and then, in 1918, your mother, Bess, was born. They spent the remainder of their lives in the Bronx in New York City. The information I can find about them is listed on marriage and birth certificates, passenger lists and United States Federal Censuses. Similar to when I think about your life, I am frustrated by how much I feel I'm missing.

You grew up nearby to them and even lived with the pair for some of your early years. I wonder if they knew much English or if, instead, they spoke to you in Yiddish. You were close to your grandmother, and as a teenager you would visit her often. I wonder if Rebecca told you about her childhood in Poland and the world and family she left behind. Additionally, I wonder if your close relationship to your grandmother formed because you felt understood by Rebecca. Your grandmother had experienced immense loss, and, as a child and teenager, you were frequently encountering your own losses as a result of being chronically ill. Thus, on 24 August 1960, a few months before your 18th birthday and almost exactly a week before their 51st wedding anniversary, you wanted to go visit David and Rebecca, but your mother forbade you. Did she know, Ellyn? Little information about that day has survived and been passed to me, but I am told that your grandparents both committed suicide.

For the rest of your life, you harboured resentment towards your mother for not letting you see David and Rebecca that day. I wonder how your grief and your mother's coexisted after this tragedy. Specifically, Ellyn, I wonder if there was space for you to process your loss. From what I know about Bess's feelings of abandonment and hurt in the face of these deaths, I gather that she was all-consumed by the events. I suspect, then, that you were left to hold this unexpected and enormous pain alone.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Pogrom is the Russian word meaning devastation or riot. Pogrom often refers to the organised, often state-sanctioned, violence against Jewish populations across Europe, primarily in the Russian Empire. During these riots, non-Jewish groups would destroy Jewish businesses and homes as well as rape and murder Jewish victims. My family, as well as many other Ashkenazi Jews, fled this violence and travelled to the United States.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Pogroms," In *Holocaust Encyclopaedia*.
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/pogroms>.

¹⁹³ In the absence of mirroring, Winnicott writes that perception 'replaces' apperception. In other words, the infant's ability to make sense of themselves and the world through this creative 'two-way process' is replaced by

I cannot find any obituaries for the two of them, and no stories about their lives have trickled down to my generation. I suspect that there was a great shame around their deaths and that you were discouraged from exploring and expressing your grief.¹⁹⁴ I wish you could tell me how you found out about their deaths. Did your mother and father find out first? If so, long did they take to pass the information along to you? Six years later, you became a mother, and you named your first son, my father, David Russell. David for your grandfather, and, in line with Jewish tradition, the first letter in Russell for Rebecca. I am aware, Ellyn, that you carried the heavy deaths of your grandparents with you throughout your life.

The sudden loss of Rebecca and David are confusing and distressing. I have spent days trying to find information about either of them on various newspaper catalogues and record databases, but there is nothing. I wonder if your grandparents missed their homes in Poland and if anyone in their family came with them. The family that stayed behind likely would not have survived the Holocaust.¹⁹⁵ I am curious if they spoke to you or your parents about the shtetls they came from, their trips via boat to the United States, or the world and families which they left behind. I wonder what lingered behind from their lives and haunted you and now, what haunts me. Additionally, I am curious about how your grief – and maybe even Bess' and other family members' grief – is transformed as I consider it now. If, through our connection, I gain wisdom and guidance, then I wonder what retroactively is altered for you.

Both David and Rebecca lived the first two decades of their lives in Poland. They likely attended weekly services in their shtetl's synagogues, lit Shabbat candles with their families

the infant's preoccupation with the mother's expression. When Ellyn looked to her mother, Bess, after the deaths of her grandparents, she did so much in the same way I imagine she did throughout her childhood. She looked to see her pain, grief and confusion – she looked to see herself. I believe that Bess was unable to mirror this back to Ellyn, and I suspect this stems from Bess's early relationships to Rebecca and David. Ellyn was not seen, and, as a result, her existence was filled with unprocessed confusion. Ellyn was left scrambling to create herself.

Ogden, "Giving Back What the Patient Brings," 419-420.

¹⁹⁴ When a person dies by suicide, the family members of the victim are often left with shame. Suicide is sometimes acknowledged by the family as a final act of rejection or abandonment. Near the end of Bess's, Ellyn's mom's, life, she spoke regularly about feeling abandoned. This rejection likely was fortified with the double suicide of her parents, and I suspect this shame meant that Ellyn was left unable to process her own grief with her family. As one family member of a loved one who died by suicide said: 'It is best to bury what happened with [the victim]' (1998).

Ana Elisa Bastos Figueiredo, et al., 'Impact of suicide of the elderly on their families,' *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 17, no. 8 (2012), 1993-2002.

¹⁹⁵ 1.7 million Polish Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

"Murder of the Jews of Poland," *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/fate-of-jews/poland.html>.

and helped their parents earn income. They may each have left their villages when they found out about impending pogroms; however, I imagine that they left their shtetls after experiencing these riots and possibly even receiving eviction notices. I wonder what they lost and if they ever shared this with you. Possibly, their family members or friends were murdered, their parents' businesses destroyed, or their synagogues burnt down. I cannot be sure what they endured; however, I have a sense of the terror that it left with them. Rebecca and David were familiar with loss, and they knew the consequences of feeling attachment and love, and traces of these painfully learned lessons live in our family still.¹⁹⁶ As I unearth and process these lessons from the past and my present is recreated, I suspect the material of the past will also change. The meaning placed on loss, avoidance and love shifts and moves with time.

In exploring our connection, I feel interested about the grief you experienced and the ways in which it resonates with my own. I am familiar with grief, yet my relationship to it is varied and, at times, unclear. As a small child, I lost great-grandparents, and as a teenager I lost suddenly an aunt and a cousin in a car accident. These losses were, and still are, difficult to process and understand. Yet the grief I experience in my life is not restricted to death.

As I think about grief, Ellyn, I think primarily about other types of losses in my life. My mind wanders to my immediate family: my parents and my younger siblings. Growing up, I had confusing and anxious relationships with my parents, and I fluctuated between a loving caretaker and a frustrated bully to my siblings. My household, especially in my later childhood and teenage years, was dictated by my mother's emotional distress and addictions and my

¹⁹⁶ Extensive literature exists on the experience of intergenerational trauma passed down from the survivors of concentration camps. Yet far less literature is available on the intergenerational transmissions from pogroms. Mildred Antonelli explores the ways in which her mother's experience of a pogrom impacted her own upbringing and self. Specifically, she highlights the fear of loss and the subsequent avoidance of attachment that survivors and their kin endure.

I imagine it was immensely difficult for Rebecca and David to form attachments to each other and their family members after the losses they experienced as teenagers. As a child, my father would tell me that his mother's family 'hated everyone': they took issue with each other, their extended family and friends. My father replicates this avoidant, protective behaviour, and I feel drawn to it now. My family has, through generations of transmissions, learned that attachments are dangerous, and loss is less painful when intimacy is avoided. This intergenerational resonance is felt across Ellyn's lifetime and my own; our experiences of loss are tainted by our ancestors'.

Mildred Antonelli, "Intergenerational Impact of the Trauma of a Pogrom," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 17, no.4 (2012): 388-401.

father's feelings of overwhelm and indecision. I felt angry with my situation, parents and the events which led all of us to this situation, but more than that, I felt exceptionally alone.¹⁹⁷

My parents were both all-consumed by my mother's emotions and her resurfacing traumatic experiences. My home felt haunted. As a result, I felt overwhelmed by the emotions and experiences I was holding; I needed a space in which I could process them.¹⁹⁸ This space became you, Ellyn. When the world felt too unbearable, I imagined you were with me, placing a hand on my shoulder, gently brushing my hair, or simply telling me that it would all be okay. This coping strategy was easy; I had imagined you as a source of support or a guardian angel from a small age. By the time I was a teenager, the place where I ended and where you began felt blurred. You had become part of me.¹⁹⁹

However, while I found comfort in the idea of you, I was also introduced to a new, ungraspable grief. Frequently, I missed you. This feeling confused me; I did not understand how I could miss someone whom I never met. In search of consolation, I would remind myself that I did not know you and, as a result, I could not lose you. Sometimes, this would work. However, I often felt unsatisfied, and the painful absence of you lingered.

When I think about grief now, I think about you; I think about whether or not I'm allowed to grieve you or miss you.²⁰⁰ I think also about your experience losing your

¹⁹⁷ Like Ellyn, my parents were often emotionally overwhelmed and preoccupied. Thus, as a small child, I could not create myself when I looked to them. Ogden explains that 'one cannot become oneself without another person's response to who one is.' My relationship to Ellyn is an attempt to be mirrored, to mirror Ellyn, to become myself and witness her become herself.

Ogden, "Giving Back What the Patient Brings," 420,

¹⁹⁸ I now understand this space through the concept of containment. Specifically, Spurling's definition of containment which I introduce in Chapter Four: a process through which 'disturbing states of mind' are communicated from one person to another and in this other person's mind the material is made less disturbing and sent back. In my childhood, I lacked a container, so I created one in Ellyn.

Spurling, *An Introduction to Psychodynamic Counselling*, 20.

¹⁹⁹ Again, the separation between me and Ellyn is uneasy. Winnicott implies that when a mother fails to mirror the baby, the baby becomes something other than a separate individual. The baby may even become what the mother needs. I believe my sense of being a separate individual was profoundly impacted by my parents' preoccupations. Thus, I naturally created an other, who was also simultaneously me, as a means of understanding myself. This strife is intergenerational and shared between us both. I am Ellyn, Ellyn is me, and the grappling for a sense of self across each of our lifetimes resonates and blurs together.

Ogden, "Giving Back What the Patient Brings," 417.

²⁰⁰ This letter is filled with traces of disenfranchised grief, or a grief that occurs when 'persons experience ... a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned' (4). Ellyn's loss of

grandparents. I wonder if you felt like you were allowed to grieve them, and, more specifically, whether you were permitted to explore the ways in which their cause of death impacted you. The sense that a grandparent is not allowed to be grieved stretches from your lifetime and inhabits my own.²⁰¹ In recognizing your experience, I am seeking to identify the cycle and further understand my own sense of loss, especially of losing you. But the line between us is fragile; then, as I understand myself will I also understand you? I suspect that processing my grief will in turn impact yours.

Your absence in my life is not the only confusing, unclear grief which I have encountered. Throughout my childhood and into my early adulthood, my mother struggled with a similar pain as did Rebecca and David, or so I assume. Multiple times, she attempted to end her own life. Each attempt was unsuccessful; however, Ellyn, I often conceptualise each attempt as a moment when my mother died a bit inside my mind. Eventually, my mother's struggles pressed so firmly into my life, even across the Atlantic Ocean, that I made the decision to cease contact with her.

This separation has been unnerving and painful for a variety of reasons. One of the greatest losses from cutting contact with my mother is the newfound distance between me and my father and siblings. While I have made one decision, they have made others. In the absence of a connected family of origin, I have looked to you more frequently for guidance and a sense of belonging. As a result, Ellyn, I simultaneously grapple with the grief of losing them and you. Uncertainty hangs like a cloud over my family relationships, and I wonder what secrets and lost experiences from the past, perhaps from your past, can help guide me through this, and other, grief.

The loss of your grandparents from suicide was not the only complicated grief you endured. I suspect one of the first losses you experienced was that of your own body and capabilities. When you were eleven, you were diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. The changes

her grandparents due to suicide and the loss of Ellyn, someone I never met, both contain elements of a grief that is not socially acceptable to feel.

Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow* (Lexington Books, 1989).

²⁰¹ Thinking with Doka's disenfranchised and Frosh's postmemory as something that demands to be witnessed (see Chapter 1), I argue that the intergenerational resonance of disenfranchised grief amplifies these sensations and creates a need to be heard, felt and processed that transcends lifetimes.

Ibid, 4.

Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 5-6.

that took place in your body were likely frightening and confusing, and I wonder how suddenly you noticed them. Common symptoms of diabetes in children include urinating more frequently, feeling hungry despite eating, constant fatigue and irritability.²⁰² These symptoms may have crept up on you, and you, as a child, did not pay them much mind. Instead, perhaps, your parents felt anxious. Or you may have noticed the symptoms and felt frustrated with your body constantly signalling that something was wrong. I struggle to understand what this experience was like for you as a young person; I struggle to understand what it was like for you to face your own mortality at such an early stage in your life.

While I'm not entirely certain how you felt about these changes, I am told that you were angry and frustrated by the time you were diagnosed, and these feelings intensified once you needed to start making changes to your life. Your brother recalls the volatile nature of your household during your pre-teen and teenage years. You would sneak downstairs to your family's small apartment kitchen and eat cakes and sweets. When your parents found you, your father nearly exploded with anger. Your brother attempted to take responsibility and claimed he had eaten the treats. He recalls your response as stubborn and unrelenting; you asserted that you *had* eaten sugar and that no one could tell you what to do.

I was told this story a few years ago, and I'm surprised how familiar the frustrated and determined girl seems to me. Chronic illness certainly plays a role in feeling helpless, frustrated and alone.²⁰³ Your parents could not understand the restrictions you endured from an early age. Your reaction to their new rules demonstrates feelings of injustice; I imagine you were upset about such a controlled diet. However, you must also have felt scared and uncertain about what was happening to your body. I can easily picture you as a young girl responding to this fear and uncertainty as I remember a similar feeling and reaction in myself.

²⁰² Andrew Muir, "Spotting the Signs of Type 1 Diabetes," *Children's Healthcare of Atlanta*, 23 April 2022. <https://www.choa.org/parent-resources/diabetes/signs-of-type-1-diabetes>.

²⁰³ Ellyn's experience of chronic illness is unlike any experiences I have had. In an attempt to understand, I rely on a case study about an anonymised person, Dan, who experienced a terminal diagnosis of cancer. Dan explains that 'the experiences that surrounds me sharpens the boundaries of my communication with the world.' In other words, the grief felt when living with a chronic illness and anticipating an early death is shrouded in loneliness and not feeling understood by others.

Gillie Gabay, 'A Nonheroic Cancer Narrative: Body Deterioration, Grief, Disenfranchised Grief, and Growth,' *Journal of Death and Dying* 83, no. 2 (2019), 295.

Unlike you, I did not grow up with a chronic disease that threatened to disrupt my abilities and body. Nonetheless, I grew up in a home that was filled with uncertainty²⁰⁴, and, at times, patience felt impossible to me. I regularly felt angry and acted defiantly. I would engage in screaming matches with my father, and I insisted that something *needed* to change. I locked myself in my room, and I defied rules and punishments imposed on me when I, in my parents' eyes, failed to respond to the events in my household with calmness and indifference. At nearly the same age as you, I felt angry, misunderstood and alone.

Your life continued on for decades more, and most stories I know contain themes of ongoing loneliness and injustice. Near the end of your life, you had grown very ill. In 1988, you retired from your job as an office manager at your local synagogue, and you were soon receiving frequent dialysis treatments. Your organs were slowly failing. Your relationships were following a similar trajectory. The marriage you shared with your husband was possibly once built on love, but as you raised children together, your differences were fierce, and his absence was strong. Your eldest son rejected the life you so firmly imposed on him, and the distance between you strengthened; your youngest son left home and attended university in a different state. For a period of time, your widowed mother looked after you. Eventually, though, she fell, was injured and was no longer able to care for you.

In your final years, you were packed and shipped between homes: sometimes with your mother, moments with your husband and, for a period of time, with your brother and his family. You were especially frustrated and ill when you stayed with your brother's family in New York City. During this time, as throughout your life, you smoked daily. Your brother, who was able to pursue his doctorate in oncology, was frustrated with the impacts the smoking had on your health as well as the health of his young children. After various arguments, he took your packs of cigarettes and hid them from you. Later that same day, he was pushing you in a wheelchair to your dialysis treatment. You began to argue, and you pleaded with him to return your cigarettes. He refused.

'Please,' you sobbed, 'they're the only thing I have to live for.'

²⁰⁴ Uncertainty about the long-term health and wellness of the substance-user and, as a result, uncertainty about the future more broadly is often felt by families living with those impacted by substance use disorders.

Sar Kaarina Lindeman, et al., 'An unknown invisible intrusion. Impact of an adult family member's problematic substance use of family life: a meta-ethnography,' *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 29, no. 5 (2022): 464-476.

Your brother returned your cigarettes to you immediately. He tells me that story via a video call nearly thirty years later, and the guilt in his voice is undeniable.²⁰⁵ I wonder now what it was like for him and his family to watch you die, to observe the helplessness you felt and the loneliness you carried with you. The situation likely devastated him and lit a similar fire of helplessness and injustice inside him. I suspect, then, the final weeks you spent together were painful and tense. Moreso, I wonder if you felt like a burden, if you could see the ways in which your pain and nearing death impacted the households you occupied. I imagine you as a child feeling the limitations of your body and arguing with your father; then, you as an adult, anticipating your end, and arguing with your brother. The changes in your body and your grief unable to be understood nor tolerated by those around you bookends your life. It seems to me that your illness and subsequent death were often felt through the lenses of those around you and not your own.²⁰⁶

I want to learn from you, Ellyn, and I want to process what remains unprocessed. When I endure endings, or transitions, I am often prone to experience those changes through the perspectives of those around me. I value this insight, but I want to centre myself.²⁰⁷ My recent gender transition has troubled and simultaneously emphasised my tendency to experience my own grief through that of others'. Gender transitions are generally accepted by wider society if the changes are exclusively felt as wholly positive to the person transitioning²⁰⁸; nonetheless,

²⁰⁵ I wonder how the guilt felt by Bess after David and Rebecca's suicide mingles with his guilt around Ellyn's approaching death. Though the intergenerational resonance is not necessarily acknowledged, I'm certain it is present.

²⁰⁶ Again, containment is relevant. Ellyn was not able to share her intolerable experiences with a container who could then hand them back to her more processed. This experience is not unique among chronically ill patients. Reflecting on Dan's illness and death, Gabay writes that he was expected to be 'passive' and regulate his own emotional needs.' When this did not happen, the clinical staff would grow angry while taking care of Dan. Eventually, he learned to be silent about his pain, confusion and grief. Dan 'contained the clinician's frustrations' rather than being contained himself. This same reversal took place for Ellyn; as a result, her death and her grief remain unprocessed and live within me.

Gabay, "A Nonheroic Cancer Narrative," 301.

²⁰⁷ Upon reflection, I am interested in my claim that I want to centre myself, yet this dissertation highlights my tendency to explore myself through Ellyn. Admittedly, I am uncertain what are the limits of myself. The *intergenerational resonance* between us, though, impacts me such that I understand myself better when I understand her.

²⁰⁸ In an interview with TIME, Elliot Page explores his experience coming out as a transman. He explains that this period was filled with 'trans joy' but also 'trans anxiety, trans grief and anger.' (2:24) In my experience as a trans person and as a counsellor to many trans clients, I am frequently engaging with the narrative that trans people who are *validly* trans feel only joy after transition. This binary invalidates the grief that many trans people feel during and after transitioning, such as the grief of losing friends and family due to a lack of acceptance or the grief of the life one has lived until this point.

the process of transitioning is filled with loss and, at times, mourning.²⁰⁹ While this transition impacts me primarily, those in my life, especially close friends and family, are also touched by my changes.

As you sat in your brother's home, smoked your cigarettes and neared death, you were likely anticipating your own end. I wish I could speak with this version of you. I wonder if you were scared and uncertain about this transition from life to death. Alternatively, you may have felt exhausted with your dependency on others and the unending decline in your physical abilities and comfort. You must have felt angry. Why was this happening to you, and why did no one seem to understand the way it felt for you to endure it all? These are all guesses, Ellyn. When I ask other people for stories about you, I inevitably hear what an experience of *you* was like for *them*. I wish I could hear from you.

I think often about this ending now as I approach an ending of my own. As I mentioned in my previous letter to you, I have recently started low dosing on testosterone; in other words, I am applying to my body and absorbing small amounts of testosterone gel. I want the effects this substance brings; I want to have a deeper voice, I want the fat on my body to re-distribute, moving from my hips and chest to my stomach. I think I would like to have some facial hair, and I certainly would like to grow darker, thicker hair on my arms and legs. I am excited by the minor changes I have already begun to experience – I crave to feel like my body is my own, is a home.²¹⁰ Yet, Ellyn, I am also scared, anxious and even sad. In this process of transitioning, much will change and be lost. When I think about this upcoming change in my life, I remember your bodily transitions: from healthy to chronically ill, from life to death.

TIME, "Elliot Page on Coming Out as Trans and Finding Hope," YouTube, 24 April 2024, <https://youtu.be/GLCEsw0mAiw>.

²⁰⁹ Paul Preciado echoes Page's nuanced view on the experience of transitioning. Preciado writes that he has become a 'gender migrant' by crossing borders and existing in liminal spaces. I am familiar with both the experiences of migrating from one country to another and one gender to another. Preciado, with this metaphor, brilliantly captures the freedom and congruence that comes with transitioning yet also the potential for a loss of belonging.

Paul Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 45.

²¹⁰ Eli Clare writes that trans people often find a home in shame due largely in part to socio-political discourse around trans people being born in the wrong bodies, with a 'defect' (460). They write that empowerment comes when trans people work instead to rid themselves of this shame and 'make our bodies home' (463).

Eli Clare, "Resisting Shame," 455-465.

Your illness seemed to create distance between you and others in your life.²¹¹ My transition has done the same. Before and during my transition, I have created a life which is filled with my partner, my friends, and a community of, mostly, lesbian and sapphic²¹² people. When I came to the realisation that I did not need to inhabit the box of female which I was assigned at birth, I was also forced to acknowledge that those around me understood me through this box. Initially, my wife worried, would my transition from a woman to a non-binary person, to transmasculine, impact her identity as a lesbian? Additionally, I wondered if I would still be accepted in lesbian spaces, especially if I medically transitioned. Would I have to erase that part of my life and identity?

These worries crept upon and paralysed me for months. I did not pursue medical transitioning, and I made only changes which I felt would be acceptable to those around me. My transition, I imagine like your death, started to take the shape of the perceived wants and needs of others. Within these boundaries, I was initially excited to make small changes: to start using new pronouns, to shorten and masculinise my name, and to wear clothing exclusively from the men's section. However, these changes strengthened a suspicion: I could feel even more at home in my body. I had previously felt indifferent towards my body, but small changes were opening doors to other larger changes, and I was thrilled, yet often scared, by them.

Ellyn, I arrived somewhere crucial. I knew that my gender was a performance²¹³ and would inevitably be moulded by the relationships around me; yet, it was my body, and I desired one in which I felt at peace. I wanted to pursue gender euphoria, to find joy in my gender and body.²¹⁴ I look backwards in time at the sacrifices my ancestors, like David and Rebecca, made to ensure their descendants would survive. I am reminded of the limitations you lived and died within. My life is made possible through lives which were heavily constrained by insurmountable boundaries. This reminder encourages me to do more than survive; I want to

²¹¹ Dan explains: 'I am so alone ... this experience that surrounds me sharpens the boundaries of communication with the world.' Like Dan, Ellyn seemed to recognise that those around her did not understand her experience, and this created a sharp divide between her and others.

Gabay, "A Nonheroic Cancer Narrative," 295.

²¹² A word used to describe women and genderqueer people who experience attraction and love towards other women and genderqueer people.

²¹³ See footnote 78.

²¹⁴ Soren Hodshire, "Your Guide to Understanding Gender Euphoria," *Healthline*, 13 March 2023, <https://www.healthline.com/health/transgender/gender-euphoria>.

claim my life and live it.²¹⁵ The reclamation over my body is gradual and hesitant, and the process shimmers with resonations from the past, your past.

I feel the intergenerational echoes from your life in my own as I experience an ending with the gender and body which I have inhabited. I tune into this connection as I write this letter and realise that you and I are approaching an ending of our own. I remember the ways in which your ending was (un)processed through the emotions and experiences of others. I look to you for wisdom when I encounter similarities, as I change my relationship to my body, my loved ones and my communities. Additionally, I look to you for wisdom on what could be different.

There is an intergenerational pattern in our family of complicated and unprocessed grief, loss and change. I wonder about your experience of change which you did not and would not choose. I suspect there was a sense of being out of control. The changes I undergo are chosen by me; I get to decide when the changes begin and, to an extent, how long they will last. There are aspects of this process which I cannot control. I do not precisely know how my body will continue to respond to testosterone, and I feel less excited about some changes than others. These possibilities are scary and uncertain, yet the decision is still mine. I am choosing them. While I look to the past, to you, for guidance, I also look to my future as a means of healing changes, mine and ours, which were not chosen, and which did not have space to be processed.²¹⁶

I dwell on the way your losses seem to linger in my own life. I can feel the ways in which our experiences resonate, and I take value in the gained insight. At times, I wonder about your role in this dynamic. Perhaps, through this seemingly cyclical connection, you heal retroactively from material that could not be processed within your own lifetime, but which has space to be healed in mine. The Jewish concept of the *dybbuk*, ‘a lost soul seeking

²¹⁵ Winnicott differentiated being alive from surviving in that when one is alive, one is creating oneself. With this distinction in mind, I can fathom no one more alive than a trans person – one actively working to create themselves. Ogden, “Giving Back What the Patient Brings,” 418.

²¹⁶ Stephen Frosh argues that working through intergenerational transmissions involves ‘re-encountering troubles’ and then ‘letting [them] go without repudiating’ (202). Again, I agree and disagree with Frosh’s analysis of hauntings. I agree that the presence of intergenerational transmissions demand to be encountered, heard and felt. Through this process, a wisdom is acquired. However, I argue that the letting go is at best unnecessary and at worst limiting to the growth and healing that can continue retroactively and into the future. I explore this idea more in Chapter Six.

Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 202.

reincarnation or redemption,²¹⁷ feels relevant. The *dybbuk* shows up across Ashkenazi folk stories and lore. The being is often depicted as a spirit looking for a human body to inhabit as a means of completing that which could not be done in their lifetime. Ellyn, I imagine you as a sort of *dybbuk* who lingers within me. To understand our connection through this lens is to grapple with the wisdom which you embed into my life but also the healing which I propel across time to you. Together, we understand and repair that which has hitherto gone untouched.

This Jewish and mystical framework explains my experience of our connection and provides greater insight into my transition as a process that somehow transcends my lifetime. Through your lingering presence, I am able to explore the ways in which my body changes alongside knowledge from generations past. Specifically, I am able to grapple with the ways in which my imposed endings and changes in my life are felt through the confusion and fear of others. On the other hand, while my transition parallels your own experience of a changing body, it also creates an empowering opportunity in which change can be chosen. The communication that travels backwards and forwards between us in space and time provides clarity and redemption.²¹⁸

The stories about your grandparents and your deteriorating physical health are filled with grief. Throughout your life, there is an undeniable pattern of suffering and injustice met with a lack of space to process that which has occurred. You endured chronic illness and poor health from a young age, lost beloved grandparents and eventually found yourself without a stable home in which you had autonomy. Elements of the pain of your early childhood is reflected decades later in my own. Another small, dark-haired child felt the unfairness of their situation. As I grew, I had the ability to make changes, and I created a life in which I could choose and a life in which I could grieve.

Now, as I approach enormous changes to my body, I feel your persistent presence. I look to your past grief and my own to help me process these beginnings, endings and transitions. I hold us both in mind as I experience changes that are, in-part, outside of my control. The uncertainty of this journey has already resonated in time with the experiences you endured, and I will look to you as I am met with the unfamiliar. Nonetheless, I recognise the

²¹⁷ Frosh, *Hauntings*, 141.

²¹⁸ *Intergenerational resonance* produces *inherited wisdom*, and also produces *retroactive redemption*. In other words, exploring the connection across generations creates a space in which the wounds from ancestors can be felt and healed. I will explore *retroactive redemption* and the ongoing nature of this dialogue in the next chapter.

privilege I have in my life to make these decisions for myself. I am aware that your past guides my present, and my experiences, which extend backwards, may help heal that which you could not in your own lifetime.

Your memory helps me. You help me grieve, help me to acknowledge the body in which I live and create, and you help me to choose. In turn, I feel the meaning of your experiences and life shift as they become intertwined with my own. Already, in this work and beyond, our connection has yielded change. Now, we are approaching an end together, as this is, for now, the last letter I will write to you. I acknowledge that the resonance between us will persist, yet I feel grief reaching this conclusion. Like the rings of a tree, these letters are simply one iteration of our relationship. As I move forward in time – and backwards with you – I am certain we will encounter more layers to this connection. I hope that you stay nearby and that we continue to transform together.

Thank you, Ellyn, for being part of this journey.

Love,
Han Ezra

Chapter Six: Becoming Consumed, Letting Go, or Something Else: Towards Retroactive Redemption

Queen: To whom do you speak this?

Hamlet: Do you see nothing there?

Queen: Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.

Hamlet: Nor did you nothing hear?

Queen: No, nothing but ourselves.

Hamlet: Why, look you there! Look how it steals away!
My father, in his habit as he lived!
Look where he goes even now out at the portal!²¹⁹

Grief has the potential to be all-consuming and disrupt perceptions of space and time. This phenomenon is perhaps most famously portrayed in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The protagonist is haunted by the ghost of his father, the previous King of Denmark, who tells him that his brother, Hamlet's uncle, murdered him, stole his throne and married his wife. Searching for certainty and, eventually, revenge, Hamlet feigns madness. In this orchestrated performance of insanity, he begins to experience authentic distress, questioning his existence in the world. Simultaneously, a young woman, Ophelia, loses both Hamlet's admiration and her father, and she is driven truly to madness and her own death. In experiencing loss and grief, both characters are overwhelmed, and their lives take irreversible turns. Later in the play, Hamlet receives confirmation that his uncle did murder his father, and then the prince and newly appointed king scheme to kill one another. In the end, the pain and secrets of the past are exposed, yet both Hamlet and his uncle die as a result of actions taken by the other. The story of the Prince of Denmark demonstrates that hauntings can overwhelm and, in extreme cases, destroy the lives of those still living.

If we consider Hamlet's fate, or the fate of others consumed by grief, like Ophelia, perhaps we could conclude that transmissions from the past are inherently harmful and must, eventually, be let go; in other words, *intergenerational resonance* is meant to serve a purpose and then be released. For instance, if Hamlet encountered the ghost of his father and sought to understand, forgive and then forget the actions of his uncle, perhaps the prince, his uncle and Ophelia would all be spared. This sentiment is expressed by Stephen Frosh when he writes about the lingering presence of those who precede us that the act of working through requires

²¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Sylvan Barnet (New York, Signet Classics: 1998) 90-91.

‘letting them go, remaining in some kind of relationship with them but also managing to move on with one’s life.’²²⁰ If, for instance, Hamlet encountered the ghost of his deceased father and let him go while maintaining some type of dialogue, the play would likely end differently. The prince could, instead, have told his father he was not interested in revenge for the past, and the ghost, realising the futility in his goals, would leave Hamlet to carry on as before. Whilst exploring the process of working through for queer people and women, Jack Halberstam uses the concept of forgetting in a way that echoes Frosh’s letting go. He writes,

‘We may want to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place, not the place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the new begins afresh, unfettered by memory, tradition and usable pasts.’²²¹

Thus, in queering Hamlet from Halberstam’s perspective, Hamlet may loosen the chains of the past that keep him shackled to his father and vengeance (and maybe even flee the haunted castle with his *very* good friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). Arguably, via the act of letting go, of forgetting, Hamlet could rewrite history and save himself, even possibly his uncle and Ophelia, from an early death.

Yet, Hamlet does not choose to walk away, forget and let go of the past. Instead, he becomes consumed entirely by the ghost of his father and the hope of righting the wrongs of the past. The prince seems almost incapable of choosing to let go. As Frosh writes, ‘we are never free of our conscious or unconscious memories.’²²² In other words, the events of the past haunt Hamlet; he is unable to turn away. Is it then the case that we must always choose whether to be consumed by or fully let go of what has occurred? Were Hamlet’s only options to abandon the wishes of his ghostly father or become ensnared by them? Or instead, does an alternative exist? In this chapter, I explore the pull to flee from the past, to become overwhelmed by it or to seek out an alternative. In searching for this third path, I introduce the concept of *retroactive redemption* and the capacity for processing as an activity involving layers. This nuanced approach creates an opportunity for a subjective, ongoing reflection of the past and transforming of the present and future.

²²⁰ Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 202.

²²¹ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 70.

²²² Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 201.

What is Grief?

Throughout this body of work, my connection to my Ellyn serves as vessel through which I trouble the notion that intergenerational transmissions contain exclusively traumatic material. This work brings about complex, dynamic feelings, and it especially carries a grief. In the previous, third letter to my grandmother, I more overtly engage with the grief I feel around this loss. This feeling is complicated; I never met Ellyn and yet I grieve her, her life and the possibility of our relationship. In the above letter, I conceptualise this complicated grief with Kenneth Doka's disenfranchised grief, one which is not 'openly acknowledged, socially validated or publicly mourned.'²²³ Even still, I sit with a discomfort when I tune into the heartache I feel when I think of Ellyn. I wonder, 'am I allowed to mourn someone I do not know?' In this section, I will expand upon my own experience of grief and explore how it relates to pre-existing counselling and psychotherapy literature on the topic. Through this endeavour, I will locate the significance of grief in intergenerational resonance and, eventually, use it to introduce retroactive redemption.

Researchers Caroline Pearce and Carol Komaromy explore the embodiment of grief in their article '*Recovering the body in grief: Physical absence and embodied presence.*' The two authors highlight that western models of grief emphasise the process as 'time-bound and linear.'²²⁴ This restriction, they argue, 'fails to adequately capture the continued agency of the deceased person.'²²⁵ This finding is similar to my exploration of intergenerational resonance and transgender experiences in chapter two. In other words, the material that lingers from previous generations is not a linear, enclosed process. Instead, the past changes alongside the present; for example, the gender of a descendant transitioning impacts the material from the past that is felt in the present. Pearce and Komaromy seemingly acknowledge that recognising this process as embodied and dynamic helps preserve the autonomy of the deceased. Emphasising the significance of this agency, the researchers introduce a way through which the autonomy of the deceased lives on both psychologically and also 'in the body of the survivor.'²²⁶ Through interviews with participants, Pearce and Komaromy uncover that the survivors manage both the absence and presence of the deceased as part of their grieving.

²²³ Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow* (Lexington Books, 1989).

²²⁴ Caroline Pearce and Carol Komaromy, 'Recovering the body in grief: Physical absence and embodied presence,' *Health* 26 (4): 2020, 396.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.

Similarly, researchers Samuel Marwit and Dennis Klass, enquired with participants into the possibility that the deceased lives on internally for survivors. The two set out to disrupt the predominant notion that ‘successful grief resolution’ involves ‘the eventual withdrawal of emotional ties to the deceased.’ Instead, they make the case that an ongoing relationship with the deceased can provide a ‘healthy resolution.’²²⁷ Admittedly, the research by Marwit and Klass acknowledge a binary between healthy and unhealthy grief resolution which they fail to adequately define. Nonetheless, their work demonstrates the messy, nuanced ways in which grief can be experienced and processed. Ultimately, their findings with participants demonstrate that, like Pearce and Komaromy suggest with embodied grief, a part of the deceased lives on with the survivor. The two conclude, ‘the idea of an active inner representation of a valued deceased individual seems to be a concept readily and naturally available to many people.’²²⁸

Thinking with Pearce and Komaromy enables for a deeper understanding of intergenerational resonance. Rather than a traditionally-psychodynamic understanding of intergenerational transmissions which involves remembering, processing and letting go, instead grief can be conceptualised as an embodied, evolving journey. The descendants of those who have gone are in an ongoing conversation with the past which involves navigating the absence of that which has passed and the presence of that which lingers. These findings are further corroborated by the study conducted by Marwit and Klass; those who survive maintain an internal sense of those who have passed. Integrating the work of Pearce and Komaromy and Marwit and Klass with Doka, we can better grasp the impact of disenfranchised grief. Specifically, when the inner representation of the deceased is done in silence and isolation, the grief becomes complicated in a new way. For example, as I recall the stories which I have learned throughout my lifetime about Ellyn, I historically have managed the haunting absence and lingering material this produces on my own. In creating this work, in working through this resonance in my own therapy, the grief transforms and so does that which is produced.

Retroactive Redemption

²²⁷ Samuel Marwit and Dennis Klass, ‘Chapter 17 Grief and the Role of the Inner Representation of the Deceased,’ in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* ed. Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman (Washington DC: Taylor & Francis, 1996): 297.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 305.

In Chapter Two, I set out the framework for *intergenerational resonance*, a reverberating connection between the past and the present. This communication transcends boundaries of space and time when threads of the present vibrate with parallel ones of the past. In the fourth chapter, I explore the material that is created in the present as a result of this connection, which I call *inherited wisdom*. This knowledge transforms the modern experience, allowing the reverberations of the past to inform the here-and-now. The terms *intergenerational resonance* and *inherited wisdom* create a foundation for a one-way connection in which material from the past is communicated to the present. Yet, similar to the Newtonian Laws of physics which assert that one force acting on another is equally but oppositely acted on by the first force, this reverberation through space and time is multidirectional. *Retroactive redemption* refers to the transformational impact that *intergenerational resonance* has on the events of the past. As this connection is recognised and reflected on in the present, the meaning of what has happened in the past shifts. In acknowledging and processing the vibrations between the past and the present, the history of what has occurred is reshaped and carried forward.

We can further explore the meaning of *retroactive redemption* through the metaphor of a story arc. For instance, in a three-act structure, the protagonist is often met with a painful, difficult moment in the second act. Often, at this point, the characters and audience are left with a sense that all hope is lost. However, in the third act of the film, knowledge from the second act is maintained, the protagonist is transformed, and a different future is forged. The different result which occurs in the third act reshapes the previous pain experienced in the second act. In other words, the connection between the second and third acts communicate with each other and the significance of one is impacted by the other. Similarly, when an event takes place in the past which reverberates with an occurrence in the present, the present is shaped by the past and the past retold by the present.

We can look at this metaphor in further detail through an example – the film *Shrek*, which has a three-act structure. In the film, the ogre, Shrek, is sent by the power-hungry Lord Farquaad to rescue and bring him Princess Fiona so that Farquaad may marry her and become a proper monarch. In his rescue mission, Shrek and his sidekick, the donkey named Donkey, manage to remove the princess from her dragon-guarded castle. However, on the journey home, Shrek and Fiona form an unlikely yet seemingly

romantic relationship. In the second act, the mid-point involves Shrek building the courage to tell Fiona about his feelings; yet he overhears her speaking to Donkey and mistakenly believes that she is calling him unlovable. Believing all hope is lost, Shrek decides not to reveal his true feelings to the princess and coldly departs after introducing Fiona to Farquaad. Luckily, in the third act of the film, Shrek learns from Donkey that he misunderstood the conversation and that Fiona shares Shrek's feelings. Uncovering the events of the past with more clarity allows Shrek to return to Fiona and finally share his feelings. In the final act, the protagonist responds to the situation with a greater wisdom, yet he also reshapes the past. The moment in which he thought all hope was lost is healed, redeemed and transformed.

This metaphor clarifies that ways in which engaging with the past in the present transform the way we understand that which has passed. Nonetheless, the concept of redemption that I offer in this chapter differs from that of a redemptive story of a protagonist or hero, such as the definition explored by theorist Dan McAdams. McAdams explains that redemption offers us hope, 'no matter how bad the situation.'²²⁹ He claims that this redemption can come from a number of places: such as the hard work of an individual or assistance from others. The concept of retroactive redemption, however, focuses less on the narrative arc of an individual's life. Instead, this term is used to explore the way narratives from previous ancestors linger in our own lives and transform. In exploring retroactive redemption between ancestor and descendant, perhaps hope will appear. The modern person may make new choices, have more resources and choose a path different from that which was possible for the ancestor. Yet, retroactive redemption does not require that some tangible action is taken or life rerouted. Instead, it is simply the act of looking backwards, engaging with an ancestor, and the way the ancestor's story is impacted and is transformed in the mind of the descendant. In other words, redemption is often used to describe an individual, or perhaps even a community's, reckoning with the past and changing in the future. Retroactive redemption, on the other hand, refers to the way in which engaging with intergenerational resonance transforms the meaning of the past.

We can apply this type of transformation of the past in an intergenerational dynamic. For instance, in my final letter to Ellyn, I explore the ways in which we have

²²⁹ McAdams, Dan. *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18.

both experienced loss and grief throughout our lifetimes. Specifically, I enquire into the loss which Ellyn endured as a result of her illness and change in function of her body. Simultaneously, I think about the drastically different yet strangely similar changes that I experience in my own body as I take testosterone. At the end of her life, Ellyn was met with immense pain, loss and a sense of purposelessness. As I uncover these memories – in a way, as I remember them – I am inspired to live in a way that honours my grandmother and myself. I feel fear and trepidation as I continue to transition – the United Kingdom and the wider world feel increasingly less safe as a transgender person. In fact, in the spring of 2025, the UK Supreme court ruled that the definition of woman is based on the gender one is assigned at birth, not gender identity. Subsequently, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) quickly introduced new guidelines instructing transgender women not to use women’s spaces and transgender men not to use men’s spaces. Thus, as a transgender person living in this country, I am constantly fearful of how I am perceived and which spaces I may be harassed in if I enter. Yet Ellyn’s life gives me strength, and my present is impacted by her past. Simultaneously, as I hold her and her experiences in mind, her past is also transformed. The dreams and hopes which she could not reach in her own life are carried along by me, and the steps she took become the foundation on which both of our lives are built. Ellyn’s past is retroactively altered by the connection that bonds us both.

Considering *retroactive redemption*, we can return to the original question set forth in this chapter: is there an alternative to either letting go of or becoming all consumed by the past? Hamlet demonstrates a situation in which one is overwhelmed with the past and, ultimately, dies in his quest to correct it. Shrek, on the other hand, seems to follow Frosh and Halberstam’s narratives of letting go and forgetting. The past is felt, clarified and then, once a happy ending is achieved, it can be left behind. However, if we consider the premise of *Shrek 2*, it becomes clear that the problem which occurs in the second act and is seemingly resolved in the third act of *Shrek* is still lingering. In *Shrek 2*, Shrek and Fiona visit the land of Far Far Away and Fiona’s parents – the King and Queen. Throughout the film, Shrek uncovers that Fiona grew up very differently from him and was expected to marry someone more conventionally attractive, powerful and wealthy. These realisations lead the protagonist to believe that he is unworthy of Fiona’s love; in fact, Shrek faces nearly the same dilemma at the end of the second act

of this film which he experiences at the same point in the first film. Thus, the past has not been fully processed and the protagonist must return to the original issue.

Rather than becoming consumed like Hamlet or processing and discarding the past, the Shrek films demonstrate that dealing with what has passed is often a process which involves layers. Rather than recalling, processing and then being able to walk away from it, the past sticks around and demands to be understood and experienced in new, ever-changing ways. When exploring the past – specifically, traumas from the past – psychiatrist and trauma-expert Bessel Van Der Kolk acknowledges that simply ‘telling a story about the [past] does not guarantee that the traumatic memories will be laid to rest.’²³⁰ Instead, he asserts that in order to fully process the past, one must also ‘relive the physical sensations, emotions, images, smells, or sounds associated with the event.’²³¹ Yet, he acknowledges through a case study, that the memories of the past may evolve with these interventions yet remain an ‘ongoing, evolving story’ which is part of one’s life.²³² When considering that which has passed as intergenerational echoes, it would be nearly impossible to, as Van Der Kolk suggests, relive all of the physical and emotional sensations from our ancestors. Instead, these emotional transmissions emerge and can be processed but are likely to return again in some new, unpredictable way.

Thinking with *intergenerational resonance*, *inherited wisdom*, and *retroactive redemption* allows us to explore the past with an ongoing, layered approach. Throughout this chapter, I will explore the arguments set forth by Stephen Frosh on letting go of and Jack Halberstam on forgetting that which precedes the present. I will demonstrate the ways in which processing the past and tuning into intergenerational resonance is inevitably an ongoing, constantly transforming process. Understanding the process of engaging with the past as an unending activity will ultimately allow us to resist the pull towards binary solutions of becoming overwhelmed or forgetting and walking away. Furthermore, throughout the chapter, I will further develop the concept *retroactive redemption* and address if the term is always possible or even desirable.

An Argument Against Letting Go and Forgetting

²³⁰ Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (London: Penguin, 2015), 219.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid, 229.

The last chapter of Stephen Frosh's book *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness* explores endings. Throughout the book, Frosh further develops the pre-existing term *postmemory*, which he underpins as a sensation in which 'a person might feel inhabited by memories that come from somewhere or someone else.'²³³ Like in his earlier work, Frosh uses psychodynamic and Jewish thought to uncover the ways in which the past is ever-present in the modern day. In fact, he even outlines the ways in which the *post* in postmemory is misleading; the post implies an ending which has not fully been realised.²³⁴ Despite seeming to imply that this work is ongoing, in the last chapter, Frosh attempts to find a point of closure and to create an ending in which the past is still remembered but the echoes are lessened.

At the start of this final chapter, Frosh concedes that the past is never an element of which we can fully let go. He expresses that even if we could leave that which haunts us, perhaps we should not as 'we would lose the benevolent as well as the troubling ghosts.'²³⁵ Seemingly, Frosh is maintaining that the process in which the past is understood and acknowledged does not end. Nonetheless, he goes on to state that this does not mean that we are perpetually haunted by the past; instead, he calls for a holding on to 'these histories' without 'being in a permanent state of mourning for what we have lost.'²³⁶ Frosh seems to be acknowledging the possibility that we may become consumed, like Hamlet, if we cling too tightly to the past. In an attempt to find a clear, clean ending, Frosh suggests that we can feel the burden and joy of the past but must move away from a constant grieving. With these assertions, Frosh appears to believe there is a safe middle-ground in which the past can be remembered and felt but not become overbearing.

While I agree with Frosh that there is an alternative option, I am left confused by his call to both remember yet cease mourning the past. I am unsure what Frosh means when he asserts that the working through of the past involves 're-encountering troubles, then letting them go, remaining in some kind of relationship with them but also managing to move on with one's life.'²³⁷ Clearly, Frosh is attempting to find a balance between remembering or acknowledging and allowing one's own life to be taken over. He goes on to explore various frameworks through which the reader can conceptualise a

²³³ Frosh, *Those Who Come After*, 10.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 211.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 201.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 202.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, 202.

processing and letting go of material. Specifically, he wonders if the past may be let go of when ‘it is no longer needed and has achieved sufficient of its purpose to be let go.’²³⁸ To demonstrate this idea, he introduces British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s concept of the transitional object. This object is used by a child to help them to endure the transition from total dependence on caregivers towards independence. Frosh claims that when ‘the transitional object has served its purpose, it can literally be let go.’²³⁹ When there is an inability to let the object go, it signifies that this transition has not fully been processed. Thus, Frosh acknowledges a binary: fully processed or not processed.

This metaphor seems apt; like the transitional object, the past is held onto until it can be completely processed. Nonetheless, it raises the question: is it possible to *fully* process and then let go of the past? If we continue to consider Winnicott’s transitional object as a metaphor, for instance, the answer to this question becomes less clear. Traditionally, the transitional object is seen as something that either is or is not in use. The child will form a special relationship with the object, like a plush toy or soft blanket, and discard it when independence from the caregiver is more tolerable. However, recent research on transitional objects demonstrates that often these items transcend childhood. In fact, researcher Georgia Whitwham found that 80% of participants in a questionnaire maintained their transitional objects into adulthood, with 66% owning the item for at least two decades.²⁴⁰ Whitwham establishes that while these objects are used during the first transition process from total dependence on caregivers towards independence, they are returned to again when other transitions are encountered. In other words, when adults are met with transitions, they are reminded of the first one they endured and the object which helped them through it.

If we apply Whitwham’s findings to the process of working through the past, we may reach a similar conclusion. Pieces of the past – or, more specifically, experiences of intergenerational resonance – can be remembered and processed; however, the work is returned to throughout one’s lifetime as the reverberation is repeatedly recalled in new ways. Thus, when Frosh suggests that we remain in contact with those who come before us but also move on with our lives he is failing to acknowledge the way in which what

²³⁸ Ibid, 205.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Georgia Whitwham, ‘No so transitional objects: The extent to which relationships with transitional objects persist beyond childhood,’ in *BPS Branch Awards* 1, no. 1 (2023): 34.

has passed transforms and returns cyclically to us. If we consider the work of processing *intergenerational resonance* as a layered, ongoing activity, we can explore the ways in which *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption* are also revisited and transformed over time. As a connection to an ancestor is reopened – or as the *intergenerational resonance* resurfaces – the wisdom which is inherited changes. Simultaneously, the past is being reconsidered and its significance is shifting; thus, *retroactive redemption*, or the transformation of the past because of its dialogue with the present, is fluid.

Similar to Frosh, Jack Halberstam writes into the experience of intergenerational transmissions. In his book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam specifically focuses on the ways in which queer people and women are impacted by the lives and traditions of those who precede us. Additionally, Halberstam acknowledges that women are often responsible for receiving and transmitting these traditions across generations.²⁴¹ Halberstam's claim resonates with my own life: my disconnect from my father's family and my Jewish heritage seems directly connected to the absence of a matriarch, an absence of Ellyn. While I feel a sense of loss and sadness around this missing relative, Halberstam is clear that the information transmitted across generations is not always positive. For instance, these traditions can often be oppressive and patriarchal: women teach daughters to be mothers and wives and to serve others at the expense of themselves. In Ellyn's own life, her father and mother refused to pay for her education and encouraged her to find a husband and start a family. Perhaps, forgetting would have allowed her to choose a different path. Halberstam emphasizes that 'resistance lurks in the performance of forgetfulness itself... waiting for a new erasure to inspire a new beginning.'²⁴² Therefore, if I embrace Halberstam's concept, I could work to forget the restrictions that confined Ellyn – perhaps even forget Ellyn herself – and endeavour to create a new, limitless world for myself.

Yet, the act of forgetting seems impossible, like an unconscious process which is beyond our control. Perhaps recognising this possible dilemma, Halberstam writes, 'Can we recognise the new without discarding the old?'²⁴³ He writes that while he believes that we can do this, there are consequences. Normative perceptions of 'time and

²⁴¹ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 70.

²⁴² Ibid, 69.

²⁴³ Ibid, 71.

transmissions' are maintained, even by queer people, when the old is remembered.²⁴⁴ As a result, queer people and women are at risk of repeating these oppressive roles if the past is not forgotten. Thus, Halberstam asserts, that resistance is found in forgetting and believes that traditional structures, like marriage, should be left behind.²⁴⁵ While this approach seems potentially liberating and certainly appealing, I argue that forgetting is both not possible and has the potential to erase that which needs to be remembered. For instance, the union of a couple – or more than two people – with intent of starting a family transcends Western, patriarchal context. Examples of queer unions are found across the ancient world – like in ancient Mesopotamia – and in more modern history like the role of the female husband.²⁴⁶ In forgetting these traditions, we forget the diverse cultures and histories from which we as queer people come. In attempting to forget that which is oppressive, we may also forget that which is human.

Frosh puts forward a theory of remaining in contact whilst letting go and moving on, and Halberstam calls for a forgetting of the past and the, often, oppressive traditions with which it comes. These options both seem alternatives to Hamlet's experience of becoming overwhelmed. In a different story, perhaps Hamlet could have listened to the words of his father but still moved on with his own life or even forgotten the ghostly story. Yet, in letting go or forgetting, Hamlet would have sacrificed knowing what had happened to his father. Moreso, Hamlet's own safety and the safety of his mother and kingdom may have been threatened had his uncle's deadly desire for power remained unknown and uninterrogated. In the next section, I will explore in greater depth an alternative – layered processing – to Hamlet, Frosh and Halberstam's approaches.

Layers

Acknowledging that the dialogue with the past is work which is cyclical and ever-changing allows us to turn away from the imagined binary between becoming all-consumed and letting go or forgetting. As Ocean Vuong writes in his novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, '... the past [is] never a fixed and dormant landscape but one

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Cara Buckley, 'Gay Couples Choosing to Say "I Don't,"' *New York Times*. 27 October 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/style/gay-couples-choosing-to-say-i-dont.html>

²⁴⁶ Mariti Nissinen, 'Are There Homosexuals in Mesopotamian Literature?' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 1 (2010), 73-77.

Matthew Willis, 'The Long History of Same-Sex Marriage,' *JSTOR Daily*. 2 June 2022. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-long-history-of-same-sex-marriage/>.

that is re-seen. Whether we want to or not, we are traveling in a spiral, we are creating something new from what is gone.²⁴⁷ We can neither let go of nor forget the past because it is rising and falling like waves of water, asking to be witnessed and transforming our present. Like a spiral with no end point, the work of uncovering and connecting to the past never ceases. This layered work of processing the past can be understood in conjunction with the experience of *intergenerational resonance* and the resulting *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption*. Specifically, I will demonstrate this through my connection to Ellyn.

Throughout Ellyn's life, as explored in the previous chapters, she experienced loss, grief and endings. As a child, Ellyn was met with the loss of capacities and abilities within her own body; her diabetes meant that Ellyn could no longer hold the same relationship with her body. She had to be mindful of what she ate and how she felt, and in response, she felt angry and misunderstood. She demonstrated these feelings in arguments with her parents and acts of rebellion. In response, her parents allowed her to smoke cigarettes, and Ellyn learned to self-soothe – or perhaps pacify – her grief and loss. Years later, my grandmother hoped to attend university and was met with another ending. Her parents refused, and she learned that a different life was expected of her. Within just a few years of this loss, Ellyn married my grandfather and had given birth to my father. Near the end of her life, Ellyn then lost one of the only spaces which she created for herself, not for her spouse, child, brother or parents: she was forced to retire from her role as an administrative assistant at her synagogue because her health was deteriorating rapidly. Eventually, Ellyn lost her life. When I think about my grandmother, I am struck by the immense amounts of grief and loss which she endured. I return again to Vuong's words as he watches a hummingbird move rapidly to levitate above a bird feeder: 'What a terrible life, I think now, to have to move so fast just to stay in one place.'²⁴⁸

When I encounter endings in my own life, I recall Ellyn's losses. I think about the ways in which my own losses reverberate with hers. At 14, my mother suddenly lost her sister and niece in a car accident. Incidentally, I also lost my aunt and cousin, but that's not often how I conceptualise it. Instead, I think back on that traumatic time as the

²⁴⁷ Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 28.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 64.

period in which I lost my own mother. In her grief, she turned to alcohol and isolation, and I often felt profoundly alone. I thought of Ellyn often in the months that followed the car accident; I wondered if I would feel less alone and more supported if she were still alive. I wasn't sure, but the thought comforted me. Now, as I reflect on this period, I notice the similarities in my experiences with Ellyn. At a similar age, her mother lost both of her parents. Relatives tell me that my great-grandmother, Ellyn's mother, felt deeply abandoned and suffered greatly in this time. I wonder if Ellyn, too, felt like the deaths of her relatives took her own mother away. I responded to the changes in my home by becoming overly focused on my work at school and my future at a university. I dedicated myself to a route that would allow me to leave. Ellyn's dream, first for herself and eventually for my father, of a higher education was my way out. The emotional loss of our mothers as teenagers seem to echo one another; her unfulfilled dream reached forward in time and offered me hope.

I am met with loss again at the start of 2025, and I again return to Ellyn's experiences. In recent months in the United Kingdom, the government has sought both to take away the rights to privacy of transgender people and make the process of immigrating and settling in the country more difficult. My identities – as both a trans person and an immigrant – are at the centre of these two political discourses. I am left feeling terrified and unwelcomed; the place I have poured myself into to create a home seems to not want me. Again, I can feel the intergenerational resonance with Ellyn. This time, the connection is unique from the last – the meaning of both of our losses has changed yet again. Our two chords, which do not touch or meet within the same space and time, seem to vibrate together and impact each other in a new way. I recall, as if it were my own experience, Ellyn's pain in moving to southern New Jersey and being isolated with very little Jewish community. Beyond Ellyn – I imagine her grandparents, David and Rebecca, leaving their shtetl, their home, because they were not wanted nor welcome there. When I recall these ancestors, recent and distant, I feel less alone in my experience; I gain hope. I remember that each of these relatives needed to carve out a home for themselves and found a sense of belonging in shared community.

I find an *inherited wisdom* within their stories, but I also feel the wisdom in my body: like goosebumps down my arms or a tear in my eyes. I sense that a fire is lit within me that has burned before and will burn after my own lifetime. The wisdom which I

inherit from Ellyn transforms my present. I dedicate myself to creating this home in Scotland with my wife, to securing my rights as a transgender person and to dedicating myself to fighting injustices that do and do not impact me. Yet my present is not the only one that changes. As the past informs me, it alters too. Ellyn's past is retold and reconceptualised and becomes a piece of the fabric of my own life. Vuong says that we 'travel through time in a circular trajectory, our distance increasing from the epicentre only to return again, one circle removed.'²⁴⁹ This point, one circle removed, transforms the epicentre – it is no longer merely a point, but a complex shape made up of multiple (infinite) points. Ellyn's life is reflected like a mirrored image by mine, but both of us are rearranged by the presence of the other.

Retroactive redemption does not mean that we can literally travel backwards in time and restructure the past. In fact, that definition maintains that time is linear and able to be traversed backwards and forwards. Instead, *retroactive redemption* acknowledges that time is unbounded and complex -- queer; time is unable to be distinctly separated as past and present. With this term, I refer to the ways in which the past is transformed through its dialogue with the present. Ellyn's life is now intrinsically tied to my own and mine to hers. Through my lifetime as I engage with the pieces of my experience which parallel hers, both of our chords resonate, and the symphony created changes meaning across space and time.

Therefore, as we consider the ways in which the past lurks in the present and how to manage this haunting, it is overly simplistic to claim that we can either let go or forget it. Instead, the past and the pain from it appear, transform and reappear again. As I grapple with various endings and losses in my own life, I reconsider the grief that Ellyn endured. Through this connection, both of our experiences are changed again and again. The relational component of the past and present is like an ongoing dialogue. The connection presents different layers and aspects and the working through of this link has no clear start and end. Frosh insists that we must process and let go and Halberstam argues that we must forget, yet both of these approaches negate the never-ending, layered way in which the past resurfaces in the present. With this developed understanding of a layered approach to the past, let us further consider the concept of redemption.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 23.

Retroactive Redemption and the Unredeemable

As I was developing the concept *retroactive redemption*, I went for a long walk through the wooded Water of Leith trails in Edinburgh with my wife. When I was finished explaining the idea, she turned to me and asked, ‘But what about the ancestors you don’t want to redeem?’ This question stumped me. Previously, when considering *retroactive redemption*, I was solely focused on my relationship to Ellyn and other (primarily women) in my family whose voices legacies I wished to connect to and uplift. Immediately, my thoughts shifted from my paternal grandmother to my maternal grandfather, to Frank.

Frank was born in the 1930's in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to the now-adult children of Irish, Scottish and German immigrants. From what I have come to learn, Frank’s parents, Frank Sr. and Reba, were born into families with histories of immense poverty, domestic violence and devastation – for instance, Reba’s father was stabbed and murdered when my great-grandmother was a young girl. Frank’s childhood was defined by addiction, neglect and physical violence from his own father. I am told that Reba and Frank’s sisters were forced into sex work to help pay for the small apartment the large family shared. Frank grew up and, as my grandmother has told me, turned into an attractive, deceptively charming man. He met my grandmother, Josephina, when the two were young adults, and they wed and started a rapidly growing family consisting of my mother and her four sisters.

My aunt, my mother’s eldest sister, tells me that she cannot recall a time before her father’s behaviour was unpredictable and terrifying. Perhaps, he was like this since his own traumatic childhood. Frank, I can gather from various sources, had the capacity to both make someone feel as if they were incredibly special and, even moments later, as if they might be gravely harmed. He would come home from work each day, and my grandmother and eldest aunt would sit in the window, side-by-side, waiting to see which version of the man would walk towards the front door. On some occasions, he was mostly sober and unlikely to cause harm, though possibly still dangerous. Other evenings he would walk towards their home in Philadelphia with a glaze over his eyes and an intensity in his face. These evenings, my grandmother and her small girls knew, would be different from the others.

Over the years, Frank presented as a monstrous force in the home. He would ridicule his young daughters and his wife – spewing derogatory, misogynistic words at them if they looked at or spoke to boys and men. He was physically violent to his family; he would corporally punish his daughters when he was angry. At one family dinner, my grandmother began to choke on her food, and he forced the young family to sit, watch and not help as she gasped for breath. Towards my mother's fifth year of life, his aggression reached new levels. He soon began lining up my grandmother and his daughters against a wall and holding a gun to each of their heads. On one such occasion, when the police were called, he charmingly told them that there were no issues, the neighbours misunderstood, and the police left.

Finally, after a night much like this one, my grandmother, with the help of her older brother, rushed her five children into a car and drove away to her parents' home in New Jersey. Frank and his gun followed them, but he was sent away by my great-grandparents. For several months after this escape, Frank would come and visit his children once a week. Eventually, however, Frank stopped showing up. My mother and her sisters have not heard from him since 1971, and, though I have attempted to find him, there are no known traces. Possibly, Frank ran away and started over; perhaps, he began a new family to torture. However, I believe, given his addiction and impulsivity, Frank likely died shortly after his last visit to his daughters.

I reflect on Frank's behaviour and life now as I think about *retroactive redemption*. I think about Frank as well when I put testosterone on my body and recall the legacy of the men who have come before me. My entire life, I have been scared to be related to Frank, to be like him, and the traveling from the box of female to a more masculine, undefined space sometimes feels like travelling towards him. Sometimes, I feel angry at Frank – I blame him for the events that drove my own mother towards addiction and took away my parent. Yet, often, I feel sad thinking about Frank; I think about the physical abuse and neglect he experienced as a young boy. I reflect on the intense pain I assume one must feel internally to commit such heinous acts externally. In this moment, as I write, I feel uncomfortable pairing the word redemption with Frank. Nonetheless, I am sure that *intergenerational resonance* stretches across space and time and connects us too.

Specifically, I believe that my connection to Frank and his family has inspired me to move to Scotland. His mother's father, who died from a young age, spent his early years here, and I wonder if he felt homesick in America. Frank's grandparents on his father's side travelled to the United States from both Ireland and Scotland, likely fleeing the Great Hunger and looking for financial opportunities. This place feels like home to me, and I certainly think that sense is linked to those who precede me. Additionally, like my mother and Frank, I often struggle with a sense of being abandoned and feel, as a result, jealous. When I felt this way as a child and young adult, I would punish those around me and isolate myself. As an adult now, I sometimes think about Frank, and I wonder how my experiences of abandonment mingle with his and create something new.

Certainly, these experiences demonstrate that there is an *intergenerational resonance* between us and a resulting *inherited wisdom*. Yet does material move backwards in time too? I suspect it does. As I spend years in therapy – processing my childhood and the childhoods of those who came before me – I am creating space for pain which has cried to be seen but has not yet been witnessed. As I witness my pain, my mother's and Frank's, I believe that the past is not rewritten but perhaps, finally felt. Thus, in part, I redeem Frank; however, in part, I also remember and assign responsibility to Frank. This example demonstrates that *retroactive redemption* is not solely the act of giving voice to those disenfranchised ancestors who have been silenced. Instead, *retroactive redemption* includes making space for the pain felt and harm done by ancestors whose stories continue to live within ourselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I set forth a new concept – *retroactive redemption* – to explain the material that travels to the past as a result of *intergenerational resonance*. I use the metaphor of a three-act structure to explain the way the third act (or the future) changes the meaning of the first and second acts (or the past). Additionally, I outlined the arguments by Frosh on letting go of those who come before and by Halberstam on forgetting the legacies of the past. Ultimately, I demonstrate that neither of these approaches feels realistically possible, and instead I argue for an ongoing, layered dialogue with the past. Finally, I introduce complexity and nuance to the term *retroactive redemption*, and I wonder if all ancestors can or should be redeemed. The material that

impacts the past through *intergenerational resonance* involves witnessing, processing and accountability.

Conclusion: Endings & Beginnings

As I draw to an end, I am left reflecting on the complexity and messiness of this work. My aim within this dissertation was to explore the pre-existing literature on intergenerational transmissions and disrupt them with queer theory, Jewish thought and a non-linear understanding of time. Thinking with many theorists and writing to Ellyn allowed me to question onto-epistemological assumptions around time and create new ones. This project, at times, felt impossible to approach. Yet when I was able to think about Ellyn's life and my own, I discovered endless parallels and arrived at deeply buried, complex feelings. Upon reflection, one of the most complicated discoveries was the ambiguity around Ellyn's own ending, her death. When I asked for their experiences, some family members reflected on how abandoned she had been by her husband, while others were certain that he was with her in her final moments. The Ellyn depicted in these final months and years was painted as frustrated, angry and without hope. I found processing Ellyn's ending – hearing stories about it – a viscerally difficult task. While the details of her death did not find themselves on these pages, learning them and processing them became a painful assignment. Admittedly, I hold her final hours in mind now as I reach an ending of my own. One universal seemed present in each story about her death: material was left unprocessed. Clearly, the unfelt grief and complex feelings that shrouded her death live on in our family, and, I hope, have found a new home in this body of work.

In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong writes to his mother, 'Except I was no shore, Ma. I was driftwood trying to remember what I had broken from to get here.'²⁵⁰ Throughout the novel, Vuong is attempting to understand the lives and events that have occurred and led to his own. Similar to Vuong, when I began this dissertation, I saw myself as driftwood attempting to better understand where I had come from and how I ended up where I was. In the chapters of this dissertation, I uncovered numerous stories and delved into the connection between me and my grandmother, me and ancestors. Each story, I suspected, would bring me closer to a large tree or a sunken ship – a place from which my driftwood had broken. Yet the more I discovered and felt my way into this material, engaged with Ellyn's life and encountered theory, the more I came to a crucial realisation: Ellyn too was a piece of driftwood. Now as I come to an end, I wish I could present a clean, clear summary. However, this enquiry has opened as many questions as it has answered. In this chapter, I will summarise the dissertation and explore the transformation I and my research have undergone. Furthermore, I

²⁵⁰ Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 108.

will continue to establish that *intergenerational resonance* does not allow for neat closure. Instead, this work is coming to one ending, but the terms themselves, my connection to Ellyn and this phenomenon will carry on.

Intergenerational Resonance

In the first two chapters, I introduced *intergenerational resonance*. This connection, which I felt all my life to grandmother, and finally I gave it a name. This sense that she's been with me all along prevails. Even as I approach the end, I'm still uncertain of what in particular causes the experience of *intergenerational resonance*. Perhaps, this echo permeates my life because feeling close to Ellyn is a defence from the distance which I feel from my family members. Maybe instead my connection to Ellyn – or, more broadly, people's connections to ancestors – is a religious experience. This link acting as a bridge for spiritual guidance to move into our physical world.²⁵¹ Possibly the link forms as a result of unprocessed material from the past screaming to be heard and felt in the present.²⁵² I suspect that the answer incorporates all these reasons and more. Certainly, the purpose of this work was not to arrive at a decisive conclusion. Instead, the creative and relational task was to remain curious about that which emerges when one tunes into the resonance.

Exploring my connection to Ellyn in this written, academic way has been difficult. I struggled with the vulnerability this work demanded, and I often felt that writing to Ellyn and being mindful of others reading this created a tension in the project. Additionally, the act of writing to Ellyn, rather than thinking or feeling with her, has felt unnatural and uncomfortable at times. For periods over these past few years, I occasionally felt profoundly close to the past, to Ellyn's life, to the experiences of our ancestors. In other moments, I felt dissociative and numb; the act of trying to connect to the past, or even myself, felt impossible. Through the task of writing this dissertation, creating the term *intergenerational resonance*, and exploring the concept within myself, I came to a funny realisation: one cannot *really* control when or how this reverberation is felt.

Intergenerational resonance was explored in this dissertation primarily through my relationship to Ellyn. However, the concept now seems to permeate many areas of my life. I am aware of the stories being rewritten and acted out when I meet with clients in my

²⁵¹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 33.

²⁵² Frosh, *Those who Come After*; Fraiberg, "Ghosts in the Nursery."

counselling room. Their pasts, parents, grandparents and ancestors seem to fill the space with us; each demanding that their stories and voices to be heard, be witnessed. I am now overwhelmingly aware of the haunting-nature of this presence; yet I am also certain of the value that can be found in forming ongoing relationships with these lingering echoes. The material in the therapeutic relationship is transformed when we stop attempting to listen to and then disband the ghosts. Instead, we sit in the room among the others and attempt to disentangle and integrate the reverberations that exist around us.

Crucially, when exploring *intergenerational resonance* and its impact on myself and others, I became aware of the ways in which this phenomenon uniquely impacts queer, and especially trans, individuals. Jack Halberstam's concept of queer temporality married with Atalia Israeli-Nevo's exploration of trans temporality guided me as I demonstrated the non-normative, subjective ways in which queer and trans people move through the world.²⁵³ Admittedly, being queer often ruptures an individual from their ancestors in unique, vital ways – typical life milestones like marriage and parenthood are fully rejected or rewritten. Yet this cessation of knowledge flow from previous generations opens up new channels in which lost experiences and feelings can be uncovered and explored. As I conclude this research project, I am drawn to future projects in which I can continue to explore the experiences of transgender people in counselling and psychotherapy, and I hope to bring my understanding of *intergenerational resonance* to this work.

Introducing this term allowed me to explore a sensation with which I have been familiar most of my life. Additionally, this research journey enabled me to integrate this deeply personal and vulnerable encounter with work from researchers, like Stephen Frosh and Galit Atlas. The space and time to formulate this connection in a more developed way allowed me to consider the specific impacts *intergenerational resonance* has on identities – like transgender ones. These discoveries are carried into my work as a practitioner of primarily queer and trans clients. Furthermore, articulating the concept and tuning into the connection made me curious about what is produced from this experience. From *intergenerational resonance*, I could further explore the material that flows forwards and backwards through time.

Inherited Wisdom

²⁵³ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*; Israeli-Nevo, "Taking (My) Time."

As I thought about and felt into *intergenerational resonance*, I started to wonder about that which was co-created. Originally, I thought about the transmissions that seem to be present in my current life – that which I inherited. The material that flows forward in time seemed to transcend the concept of a pesky haunting. Instead, I gathered that by engaging with the intergenerational connection, remaining curious about what might emerge and creating a dialogue with the past, I could co-create with Ellyn a type of knowledge. *Inherited wisdom* is the knowledge that is produced in the present when one turns towards *intergenerational resonance*. This material develops when a link between the past and present is acknowledged and explored; thus, it is co-constructed between descendant and ancestor.

Like *intergenerational resonance*, *inherited wisdom* is a concept I engaged with long before academically creating the term. Thinking about – or rather *with* – Ellyn as a child helped me as I grew and developed. Hearing stories about Ellyn’s life and imagining a dialogue with her enabled me to engage with my own life and identities on a different level. Specifically, learning about the dreams Ellyn wanted but could not achieve deepened my drive to discover my own goals and strive for them. Co-creating this wisdom with Ellyn has led to my pursuing of this degree and writing this dissertation. In a sense, the knowledge created within these pages is an example of *inherited wisdom*.

The concept of a guidance that comes from ancestors is not unique. An abundance of literature exists exploring this type of wisdom – like Gloria Anzaldúa’s ancestral spirit guides.²⁵⁴ However, my coining of the term *inherited wisdom* and engagement with the concept is primarily rooted in Judaism and Jewish thought. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I explore the various places in Jewish culture that the concept of wisdom passed on from previous generations arises – such as holidays like Passover and Jewish folklore like the story of Lilith. Exploring *inherited wisdom* and holding closely my, Ellyn and our ancestors’ identities as Jews was significant. The Jewish tradition of recalling and holding near to us the past acted as a parallel to *intergenerational resonance* and the produced *inherited wisdom*.

I then demonstrated that the link between Judaism and *inherited wisdom* is related to the similarities between Jewish and psychodynamic thought. Namely, the emphasis on the connection between the past and the present runs as a thread through each, and this similarity seemingly stems from original psychodynamic contributors’ Jewish identities. This then

²⁵⁴ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*.

formed a bridge through which psychodynamic psychotherapy connected to *inherited wisdom*. Intergenerational trauma has long found a home in psychodynamic thought, with thinkers like Stephen Frosh exploring hauntings and psychodynamic theory. I used this pre-existing psychodynamic literature and applied it to *intergenerational resonance* and *inherited wisdom*. For instance, thinking with Freud's concept of the unconscious allowed for a deeper understanding of the way material from the past – from the past of our own lifetimes and from the lives that precede us – are frequently at play with the events of the present. I also engaged with the connection between the process of containment and *inherited wisdom*; I demonstrated that dialogue with the past can act as a container and create insight on current experiences while also helping transform material from intolerable to tolerable. The psychodynamic concepts which deepened the definition of *inherited wisdom* allowed for a fuller exploration into the relevance of this research and counselling and psychotherapy.

Chapters Three and Four were spaces in which *inherited wisdom* was defined and roots in pre-existing literature and cultures could be explored. The material which is created in the present from *intergenerational resonance* is similar to the practice of ancestor veneration or looking to the past for insight in the present. Additionally, connecting this new term to Jewish and psychodynamic thought seemed natural and fitting – especially given my emphasis of exploring *intergenerational resonance* with my Jewish grandmother. By this point in the work, I had strongly emphasised what happens in our present lives as a result of this phenomenon. From here, I sought to explore the ways in which this link moves backwards and alters the significance of the past.

Retroactive Redemption

In the final two chapters of the dissertation, I turned my attention to the impact this work has on the past. Initially, this focus felt unnatural and difficult. We cannot travel backwards in time and rewrite history that has already occurred. The past seemed to linger in the present, but I struggled to understand how the present impacts the past. However, I quickly discovered that attempting to abandon this part of the *intergenerational resonance* made the work feel unfinished. The *inherited wisdom* seemed to be a co-created knowledge made from the dialogue of what has occurred and what is occurring. This back-and-forth was reminiscent of my work in the counselling room. Clients share their narratives, and I listen; overtly, their lives are impacted from this sharing and co-creation of meaning. Yet I am transformed by these interactions too. It seemed impossible that a process through which meaning is co-constructed

would only impact one party involved. Ultimately, thinking about story arcs as a metaphor helped with this work. While the third act of a film does not change what occurred in the second act, the meaning of the work done earlier in the narrative is altered by that which takes place later. Thus, from this metaphor, I explored *retroactive redemption*, the transformation of the significance of the past when *intergenerational resonance* occurs.

Introducing *retroactive redemption* created space to begin to explore the ongoing impacts of *intergenerational resonance*. I engaged with literature that suggested that the past acts as a haunting and must be remembered but, ultimately, let go.²⁵⁵ I also included literature by Jack Halberstam which argues that forgetting the past can be an act of resistance by women and queer people.²⁵⁶ The arguments set forth in both instances were compelling; if the echoes of the past linger on in our present, perhaps we should quiet them in order to move forward with our own lives. However, the acts of letting go and forgetting seemed impossible when considering *intergenerational resonance*. Therefore, I encountered a dilemma: must we either let go of the past or risk becoming entirely consumed by it? I found a solution by reflecting on my own dynamic with Ellyn. Throughout my life, the dialogue with Ellyn has remained open and fluid; the past arises in the present at different moments as different pieces reverberate with that which has already occurred. Thus, I instead proposed that tuning into *intergenerational resonance* and the subsequent *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption* demands an engagement with the past which is ongoing and cyclical. This approach neither encourages one to become overwhelmed with the past and cease to differentiate it from the present, nor does it treat that which precedes us as something that can linearly be recalled, processed and released.

Eventually, working with *retroactive redemption* created unease. I wondered about the inclusion of the word redemption and if all ancestors are deserving of such an act. Specifically, I thought about the concept and my maternal grandfather – a person to whom I grapple with being related. Despite this discomfort, I recognised that his experiences, and more specifically, his pain live within me. If I pause and allow it space, there is an *intergenerational resonance* between us at times; thus, something is being co-created. Complicated ancestors do not miss out on this reverberation across space and time; wisdom from them is created in the present as their experiences linger and are remembered and felt. Therefore, the past is transformed, and some aspect of our ancestor's experience is witnessed, healed or redeemed. When I set out to

²⁵⁵ Frosh, *Those Who Came Before*, 201-222.

²⁵⁶ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 69-82.

create this project, I clearly established that I sought to blur binaries. Some binaries are easier to dismantle, such as male or female, fiction or non-fiction, than others. The binaries of good ancestor and bad ancestor or redeemable and unredeemable were more difficult. Nonetheless, these ancestors' experiences reverberate with our own and are part of transmissions that move forwards and backwards across time. A crucial aspect of sitting with *intergenerational resonance* is being with that which is not easily or comfortably absorbed.

In the final chapters, the introduction of *retroactive redemption* allowed me to fully explore the phenomenon of *intergenerational resonance*. Arguably, the material which impacts the past is less accessible than that which is transformed in the present. Nonetheless, understanding this shift in meaning of that which has occurred is crucial to fully engaging with *intergenerational resonance*. Furthermore, addressing the past and ancestors as a relationship which is ongoing and involves a layered approach allowed for the disruption of the binary between letting go or becoming overwhelmed. Thus, with these chapters, the connection between past and present was explored in both directions.

Implications for Counselling & Psychotherapy

The concepts intergenerational resonance, inherited wisdom and retroactive redemption carry with them possible applications across a variety of fields. Engaging with the past in a more nuanced way that looks beyond the concept of trauma can transform the way historians explore the past, sociological researchers consider intergenerational transmissions in research around family and inheritance and even the way educators engage with legacy in the classroom. Yet, in my experience, the field that this work most directly impacts is research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy. Throughout this dissertation, I draw on research from leading voices in the fields of psychotherapy, psychiatry and psychology, such as Stephen Frosh and Galit Atlas. While these thinkers contribute substantial material to the understanding of intergenerational transmissions, they often lack a nuanced exploration of ongoing dialogue with the past and the ways in which the past is experienced by gender expansive individuals. Thinking intergenerational resonance, inherited wisdom and retroactive redemption, allows for a different type of dialogue with the past. For practitioners engaging with these concepts, I offer three different guidelines: (1) create an ongoing dialogue with the past, (2) consider the impact of experiences and identities on inheritance and (3) disrupt the notion of a unidirectional transmission of information.

In chapter six, I explore the tendency either to forget and walk away from the past or to become consumed by it. Moving away from this binary, I instead propose an ongoing dialogue with that which has occurred. For practitioners and researchers in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, this dialogue naturally emerges when we work to disrupt the intergenerational transmissions as material that needs to be identified and fixed. Rather than a haunting that lingers in a client's life, we can reframe the past as material which transforms in time with the client's own life. For instance, the legacy of suicide in a family may create a sense of urgency in both practitioner and client to understand the pain and then let go of the weight it carries. However, as the individual client grows and changes, the weight and sense of this legacy will also transform. The work of the practitioner is to remain curious with the client as this material appears and intersects with various layers of the person's own life. This inheritance would not then be simply understood and eased but instead experienced as a piece of the client that changes with them in time.

I then recommend that practitioners and researchers consider the ways in which the clients' identities and experiences, as well as possibly their own, impact intergenerational resonance. As explored in this dissertation, my identity as a migrant impacts the material from the past which I carry. My concept of home and belonging inevitably is shaped by my grandmother's own disjointed homes and my further ancestors' experience of displacement and migration. Additionally, alongside work by theorists like Atalia Israeli-Nevo and Jack Halberstam, I demonstrate the ways in which gender – especially transgender identities – affect the inheritances we receive from the past. I invite practitioners and researchers engaging with intergenerational resonance to think about the ways in which these identities bring us closer to or further from the past. Furthermore, consider all the identities in the room: the practitioner's, the client's and those who linger.

Finally, thinking especially with the concept of retroactive redemption, I implore practitioners and researchers to reconsider the way we perceive intergenerational transmissions. Historically, material from the past is seen as experienced in and impactful to the present. When working with these reverberations, think critically about how engaging with them also transforms meaning in the past. For instance, you may wonder with the client how the life of an ancestor takes new shape in dialogue with the life of the client. In disrupting the normative framework in which the past linearly impacts the present, we are blurring time. As a psychodynamic practitioner, I often explain to new clients when we meet that my way of

working often assumes time to be non-linear, the past and present to be in dialogue with one another. Intergenerational resonance helps us to explore this messy construction of time in new ways.

Ellyn, Us & What Happens Next

Reaching the end of this dissertation has been difficult. I wrote the final sections of Chapter 6 and made edits to all of the chapters in a rented flat on the coast of Whitley Bay in Newcastle. This area of the United Kingdom was new to me, and my wife travelled with me to work on a writing project of her own. Throughout the days, we sat by a window looking out over the sea; we watched the windmills off the coast spin and the waves, especially the first two days, crash heavily against the beach. Most of the hours of this trip seem blurry – filled with making our first, second, or fifth cups of coffee, typing while instrumental music played in the background or getting up to stretch while I moaned that we were getting old, and my wife told me not to say that. However, each day we spent a few hours walking along the beach in the evenings, and these moments stand out to me. I felt dissociated, sometimes preoccupied with neck pain or worrying about a job application I wanted to complete, and other times a bit numb and devoid of thoughts.

I grew increasingly curious about my preoccupations and dissociations. Finally, I said aloud to myself or my wife or maybe no one in particular, ‘I think I feel grief.’ For years, the end of this dissertation felt like an imaginary fantasyland, something wonderful but certainly not reachable. I suspected that coming to the end of this project would bring me pride and relief, and maybe it still does. However, the feeling I have been encountering and by which I have been surprised is grief. In closing this piece of research, some aspect of my relationship to Ellyn and my relationship to myself is changing and, in doing so, ending. Thus, the *intergenerational resonance* between Ellyn and me is taking a new shape and reverberates around a new grief. In writing this project, I have taken my connection to Ellyn from an internal, vulnerable place, and I have explored it in a written, academic way which will be read by others. In ending this project, I will no longer be exploring my *intergenerational resonance* to Ellyn in this manner, but the connection can no longer return to the way it was before. Our dialogue has shifted, much has been uncovered, yet there is still material left to be processed. Therefore, the future of our connection is uncertain.

Over these last few years, I have learned much about Ellyn's life. This project gave me an opportunity to ask more questions and think more critically about my connection to my grandmother. Yet it has also put me in touch with my grief. Many questions arose while I wrote, and I desperately wanted to ask her, to understand what Ellyn would say or think. I carry forward these learned memories and events in Ellyn's life, and I take with me a more self-aware connection to the disenfranchised grief I experience in her absence. Just as the prior chapters trouble the separation between Ellyn and me, so too will I do that here. My relationship to myself has changed perhaps even more dramatically than my relationship to Ellyn. As I reread and edited this work, I was struck by how present my gender and medical transition were throughout. In the initial chapters, I am waiting to attend to the Gender Identity Clinic in Edinburgh, and by the end, I am experiencing the symptoms from Testosterone. Truly, I feel that I have gone through such significant periods of my transition with this body of work and with Ellyn. I feel resistance internally when I realise that I am ending this dissertation and carrying on with my transition.

Nonetheless, this work has helped me understand that, even in death, endings are not so defined. In part, this research ends here. I will not write another chapter of this dissertation. However, I suspect I will write more letters to Ellyn throughout my life, and I will think of her and the *intergenerational resonance* I share with her as I encounter different events in my life. My transition will go on, and I am certain I will think about my ancestors and their experiences of gender as my own shift. The terms I coined, *intergenerational resonance*, *inherited wisdom* and *retroactive redemption* will remain alive in my counselling room, as clients share with me their narratives and the narratives of those who precede them. I hope that this work is read by other therapists, especially other therapists who do not often see themselves reflected in traditional literature on counselling and psychotherapy. Through engaging with this research, my aim is to disrupt notions of separateness from ancestors and the past. Additionally, I intend to pursue further research exploring the non-linear, complex nature of time and the ways in which queer and transgender people uniquely experience temporality. Specifically, I am interested to enquire into the experiences of gender-expansive people in counselling and psychotherapy. Like Ellyn, this project will transform and live on in unexpected ways which I cannot yet predict.

The last piece I will write in this dissertation is to you, Ellyn. Thank you for living, hoping, failing, succeeding and above all else dreaming. You are both a stranger to me and a

constant, familiar presence. My life stems from yours, and I am honoured to complete this work from the threads of both of our lives which have become, or maybe always were, entangled. While I do not know where my path goes next, I remember that many lives, like yours, will continue to inform it. An old Yiddish saying states, ‘the sea has no shore – the Torah has no end.’ I look forward to the beginnings this ending creates.

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