SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH

PhD International Programme
Studies in English Literatures, Language and Translation

Double degree
Sapienza University of Rome and University of Silesia in Katowice

Fictional Gay Men and Gayspeak in Twenty-First Century British Drama

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A.Y. 2021-2022

“I love you so much I could burst into flames.”

Philip Ridley

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work presented in the thesis is, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, original and the candidate's own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

This research lies in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies, and examines how playwrights have characterised fictional gay men in 21st century British drama. It analyses a corpus of 61 plays staged between 2000 and 2020, portraying 187 gay male characters. This work explores the corpus from three different perspectives and in the light of methodological triangulation, proceeding from the general to the particular.

It starts with a brief excursus on 20th and 21st century British drama portraying gay characters, considering stage censorship and the laws regulating gay rights in the UK. General trends in the representation of homosexuality in 21st century British drama are traced diachronically.

The second section investigates how the 187 fictional gay men in the corpus are characterised in present-day British drama. The gay characters are classified using variables common to all sociolinguistic studies – e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety – but also variables specific to Language and Sexuality Studies, such as the level of secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness* and their own version of gayspeak.

The final section takes an eclectic approach, and provides a multi-faceted picture of the fictional gayspeak included in the corpus. The variety is analysed both manually and taking a corpus-assisted approach using the software #Lancsbox. Based on previous research, a linguistic framework for analysing present-day fictional gayspeak is presented. The main aim of this section is to assess whether the features of gayspeak examined in past studies (see Sonenschein, 1969; Stanley, 1970; Lakoff, 1975; Hayes, 1976; Zwicky, 1997; Harvey, 1998, 2000, 2002, to name a few) are still found in the corpus.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature for at least three reasons:

(a) to my knowledge and belief, there is no academic research on British drama that deals exclusively with the portrayal of gay characters in the last twenty years;

(b) there are, to my knowledge, no recent academic studies reassessing the purely linguistic features of gayspeak;

(c) thirdly, this study intends to contribute to the field of Language and Sexuality Studies by applying also the methodologies of Corpus Linguistics, which is still relatively rare in this field of research.

FICTIONAL GAY MEN AND GAYSPEAK IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRITISH DRAMA

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	Accent
ACT.	Activist
CL	Corpus Linguistics
D	Dialect
FTA	Face threatening act
GC	*GayCorpus2000-2020*
GI	Gender inversion
INN.	Innuendo
INV.	Invention
MC	Middle class
MENT.	Mentions
NS	Not specified
QT	Question tag
S	Standard
S-BNC	*SpokenBNC2014*
SEC.	Secret
SEX. IND.	Sexual indirectness
SOC.	Social
UC	Upper class
VAR.	Various
WC	Working class

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thesis is always a work accomplished by many more people than the author and thus contains a multitude of voices. I can never thank enough all the people mentioned in the following lines.

This thesis is the result of a long journey that began almost a decade ago when I met my supervisor, Prof. Irene Ranzato – or simply Irene, as she prefers to be called. She has been not only a careful supervisor, but also a good friend, a mixture of rigour and humanity, seriousness and lightness, which are perhaps among the best qualities in a human being.

During this long journey, which also took me to Poland, I have also had the pleasure to meet my co-supervisor, Prof. Adam Wojtaszek, who has been fundamental to the completion of this work. His patience, meticulousness and generosity have enlightened my journey even when the path seemed to be mired in darkness. I will remember the days in Poland as one of the best memories of this journey.

Many thanks also to the two coordinators of the Ph.D. programme, Prof. Giorgio Mariani and Prof. Donatella Montini, for their support, protection and understanding even in the most difficult times.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at Sapienza University of Rome and University of Silesia in Katowice who have helped me with all the bureaucratic matters.

I thank my Ph.D. colleagues, researchers, professors, as well as my friends who have sat next to me during this long journey and shared with me worries, doubts, laughter, trips, conferences, lessons, lunches and dinners.

Special thanks go to Simone, who should actually be the first in the list to be thanked; his daily support, understanding, help and love have been the fuel for my engine. He has been the one who gave me the idea to dedicate my very first articles to the topics of gender and sexuality, which I eventually did also in my Ph.D. thesis. All my recognition, appreciation and affection go to him.

Thanks to my parents who have granted me the opportunity to continue my studies without interfering with my own decisions and time.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is gay literature?

Literature lovers do not find it difficult to imagine fictional characters as real people. Black words on a white page come alive in their imagination and they participate in the characters' feelings, thoughts, decisions and desires. Literature enables them to experience all the lives that they desire, including those that they cannot afford or are not granted for many reasons. Literature can be a refuge or a "springboard", a source of sorrow or joy. It is private even when it is public; personal when it is social. I see gay dramatic literature – in its *relatively* short lifetime – as a mixture of all these contrasting qualities. I have not inadvertently emphasised the adverb "relatively": Gunn (2017), in his majestic work *For the Gay Stage*, lists 456 plays dealing with homosexuality (lesbian and gay) from 424 BC (*Knights*, Aristophanes) to 2014 (*Versailles*, Peter Gill), published mainly in English-speaking countries (with the exception of Latin and ancient Greek plays). Although homosexuality has been portrayed in literature since the dawn of time, it has only gradually gained prominence since the 1920s. Only 18 out of 456 plays that he lists were written and staged before the 1920s (over a period of almost two and a half millennia!), with an impressive increase since the 1960s, when playhouses in the UK were no longer subject to Lord Chamberlain's censorship[1], which banned the portrayal of gay men on stage and the depiction of their sexuality. Gunn himself explains in the introduction to his work that "because of outside pressures, gay plays […] were slow to find a home in theatres,

[1] For more details, see *Chapter 3*, note 13.

not coming into their own until the 1960s" (2017, p. 3). In *Sex On Stage*, Wyllie (2009, p. 84) claims that

> the period 1950 to 2000 saw the development of gay and lesbian plays from virtual nonexistence to a cautious emergence into the twilight, then into a polemical and far-reaching position, followed by emergence into the mainstream and, finally – and arguably – substantial absorption into the mainstream.

Every single element of this literary production is delicate and controversial, even the labels attached to it. The term "gay" is used here exclusively to refer to men who desire other men, as "males who are self-identified as preferring other males as sexual and/or romantic partners" (Baker 2002, p. 6). In this thesis, I take a sexuality-oriented approach in which sexuality is not only used as a shorthand term for sexual orientation, as is common among laypeople, but also as a socially constructed expression of sexual or erotic desire (Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. 2003, p. 4). Sexual or erotic desire is thus only one kind of desire – people can desire anything they long for and do not have, and in the worst cases even death – and it belongs in the realm of sexuality. Echoing Billig, Cameron and Kulick (2003) add that "desires are expressed in social interaction using shared and conventionalized linguistic resources" (p. 125). Lesbians are not included in this study, as Lesbian and Gay Studies do not follow a single path, but there are at least two distinct lines of research. Beasley (2005, p. 117), furthermore, claims that the central subject of Sexuality Studies has always been gay men,

> partly because of a residual traditional privileging of men's perspectives and partly because lesbians […] have often been located under the umbrella of Feminist perspectives rather than as primarily described in relation to (homo)sexuality.

The label *gay literature* itself is controversial. What does the adjective "gay" intend to say about the literature it qualifies? In this study, I do not refer to gay literature as the corpus of works written – exclusively – by men who desire other men; nor do I refer to it as the corpus of works directed at men who desire other men. The adjective "gay" does not refer to someone who lives outside the text. Instead, I will refer to gay literature as that literary production that contains at least one gay character, that is, at least one fictional man who desires another fictional man. Hoffman, in his introduction to *Gay Plays: The First Collection* (1987), defines a gay play "as one whose central figure or figures are homosexual or one in which homosexuality is a main

theme" (p. ix). Since the purpose of this work is to examine gay characters and their linguistic variety, I would limit the definition of gay play to the first part of Hoffman's statement, since not all plays that have homosexuality as a main theme necessarily have gay characters. It follows that the adjective "gay" in this study refers exclusively to a person who appears in the text.

In order to further narrow the field of research, this work will deal with a specific literary genre, namely drama, i.e. texts written for theatrical performances. Why drama? There are technical reasons for this choice, which will be explained in more detail below. Suffice it to say for now that plays are written texts intended to be spoken as naturally as possible – as long as there are no specific indications from the author or director to do otherwise – and the sociolinguistic and language-and-sexuality-studies frameworks used in this work are particularly well-suited for analysing fictional dialogues, which are typical of drama. The image of the characters that people have in their minds comes from the text, and unlike other genres, characters in drama speak directly to consumers and are not mediated by a narrator. The impression of a character is thus created through direct contact with the character itself, and the consumer is not influenced by the perception of a third person, the narrator.

Theatre, moreover, especially in the UK, has always had a powerful impact on society and is highly representative of the state of the nation. Baker (2005, p. 3) claims that

> the "problem" of male homosexuality has dogged governments, churches, armies, opinion formers, medical and teaching establishments, newspaper editorial writers and 'ordinary' people since the sexual category was created in the 1860s and, judging by the frequency of mentions of homosexuality in the media, continues to do so.

The bond between British theatre and society is profound, and British literature has had a vibrant tradition of drama since at least the Renaissance. In *Out On Stage* (1999, p. 15), Sinfield inaugurates the connection between theatre and homosexuality for yet another reason: theatre is a powerful institution, an event that takes place in front of an audience; therefore, the Nation, the Church, political and economic institutions have always been concerned about it and have either censored or patronised it, since the representation of gay people on stage has a great impact on society. It should be borne in mind that although the characters and their language will be referred to as if they were of this world, they are in actual fact fictional.

1.2 Structure of the work

Having established what I mean by gay dramatic literature, I will now briefly outline the structure of this work. To use a scientific metaphor, this research analyses its subject matter – twenty-first century British plays portraying gay characters and their linguistic variety – as if under the lenses of an optical microscope with increasing magnification. Using Leech and Short's (1981, p. 2) statement, "we propose not to dissect the flower of beauty […], but at least to scrutinise it carefully, even, from time to time, under a microscope."

Chapter 1 is an introduction to this work, in which I briefly outline my aims, the corpus to be studied and the methodologies that I will use to achieve my aims. The theories on which this research is based will be discussed in more detail in the respective chapters in which they are used.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background, mainly in the fields of Language and Sexuality Studies, and Corpus Linguistics, on which this research is based. It will not provide an extensive overview of the existing theories, but rather I will focus on the existing academic literature relevant to this study. This chapter will also highlight how this study contributes to the state of the art and how it differs from previous studies.

Following the microscope metaphor, the actual analysis begins at a lower magnification in *Chapter 3*, which focuses on British gay drama. This chapter is also necessary to provide the inexperienced reader with a brief digression on gay drama in the UK over the last century. The history of gay drama will be intertwined with the changes in British legislation governing gay life and rights. I will then focus on British gay drama in the 21st century, on which there are very few, if any, academic studies. A close and careful reading of the plays constituting my corpus will be of great help in this section, which traces general trends in twenty-first century British gay drama.

After setting the general background, *Chapter 4* examines my corpus at a medium magnification, analysing the gay characters and their representation. This section mainly follows the variationist approach, which classifies individuals – in this case, characters – by age, social class, geographical origin and sociolect. In addition, more specific variables are also used for an analysis in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies.

As an introduction to the corpus linguistic and manual analyses on gayspeak, *Chapter 5* provides the reader with a summary of previous research on the linguistic variety allegedly used by gay men. The main aim of this chapter is to collect studies that are fragmentary or scattered across books and journals and to provide the theoretical background for the analyses carried out in the following chapters.

Chapters 6 and *7* analyse the fictional linguistic variety – i.e. fictional gayspeak – spoken by the fictional gay men included in the corpus. The former aims to investigate gayspeak from a corpus-assisted[2] perspective, while the latter involves a manual[3] analysis of the features of gayspeak that cannot be studied through Corpus Linguistics alone.

Chapter 8 draws general conclusions that summarise all the results of the previous sections.

1.3 Corpus

It would be humanly impossible to work with a corpus covering all the plays in which homosexual characters are portrayed. For this reason, but also because of my academic education based mainly on British English and its literary production, I will only consider plays written by British playwrights (regardless of their gender), with particular attention to those staged between 2000 and 2020. Thus, the label "British drama" does not refer to plays first staged in the UK, regardless of the author's nationality, but to plays written exclusively by British playwrights.

My corpus consists of 61 plays selected according to the criteria described earlier; they are plays written by British playwrights, featuring at least one gay character and staged between 2000 and 2020. Presumably due to the coronavirus pandemic that has been ravaging the World since late 2019 and even more aggressively in 2020, performances – at least as we commonly imagine them, i.e. in person – and publications have dramatically decreased, if not stopped; this may be reflected in the very few titles published between 2019 and 2020 included in the corpus

[2] A corpus-assisted analysis does not only rely on the data included in the corpus but also on other forms of data or analysis simultaneously (Partington 2006) as will be clearer in section 2.4.1.

[3] An analysis of fictional gay men and gayspeak conducted only on the basis of technology would be limited to those features that can be processed by software, which mainly concern the form of the words. Other aspects concerning the content and requiring a closer reading and interpretation are investigated manually, as will become clearer in *Chapter 7*.

that I will analyse in this work. While I have done my best to locate as many plays as possible, I am aware of the fact that there are certainly many more that I have not found, or ignore the existence of, or were not readily available for purchase, or were never printed. The following list is chronologically arranged:

1. Adamson, S. (2006). *Southwark Fair*. Faber and Faber.
2. Baker, J. R. (2000). *The Prostitution Plays*. Aputheatre.
3. Baker, J. R. (2006). *Prisoners of Sex*. Aputheatre.
4. Baker, J. R. (2009). *Touched*. Aputheatre.
5. Bartlett, N. (2000). *In Extremis*. Oberon Books.
6. Bartlett, N. (2010). *Or You Could Kiss Me*. Oberon Books.
7. Beadle-Blair, R. (2005). *Bashment*. Oberon Books.
8. Beadle-Blair, R. (2010). *FIT*. Oberon Books.
9. Bean, R. (2012). *The English Game*. Oberon Books.
10. Bennett, A. (2006). *The History Boys*. Faber and Faber.
11. Bent, S. (2009). *Prick Up Your Ears*. Oberon Books.
12. Beresford, S. (2012). *The Last of the Haussmans*. Nick Hern Books.
13. Bradfield, J. Hooper, M. (2014). *A Hard Rain*. Nick Hern Books.
14. Brunger, J. (2016). *Four Play*. Nick Hern Books.
15. Buffini, M. (2015). *Wonder.land*. Faber and Faber.
16. Campbell, K. (2008). *The Pride*. Nick Hern Books.
17. Cartwright, J. (2000). *Hard Fruit*. Methuen Drama.
18. Churchill, C. (2006). "Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?". In Churchill, C. (ed.). (2008). *Plays: 4*. Nick Hern Books.
19. Cleugh, G. (2001). *Fucking Games*. Methuen Drama.
20. Cowan, B. (2014). *Smilin' Through*. Playdead Press.
21. Cowan, B. (2014). *Still Ill*. Playdead Press.
22. De Jongh, N. (2008). *Plague Over England*. Samuel French.
23. Doran, B. (2015). *The Mystery of Love and Sex*. Samuel French.
24. Eldridge, D. (2012). "The Stock Da'Wa". In Eldridge, D. (ed.). *Plays: 2*. Methuen Drama.
25. Elyot, K. (2001). *Mouth To Mouth*. Nick Hern Books.
26. Elyot, K. (2004). *Forty Winks.* Nick Hern Books.

27. Elyot, K. (2017). *Twilight Song.* Nick Hern Books.
28. Evans, R. (2004). *A Girl in a Car with a Man*. Faber and Faber.
29. Gatiss, M. (2017). *Queers. Eight monologues*. Nick Hern Books.
30. Gill, P. (2001). "The York Realist". In Gill, P. (ed.). (2014). *Plays 2*. Faber and Faber.
31. Gill, P. (2002). "Original Sin". In Gill, P. (ed.). (2014). *Plays 2*. Faber and Faber.
32. Gill, P. (2014). *Versailles*. Faber and Faber.
33. Gupta, T. (2013). *Love N Stuff*. Oberon Books.
34. Hall, J. (2001). "Flamingos". In Hall, J. (ed.). (2004). *Three Plays*. Oberon Books.
35. Hall, J. (2002). "The Coffee Lover's Guide To America". In Hall, J. (ed.). (2004). *Three Plays*. Oberon Books.
36. Hall, J. (2003). "Mr Elliott". In Hall, J. (ed.). (2004). *Three Plays*. Oberon Books.
37. Hall, J. (2004). *Hardcore*. Oberon Books.
38. Harvey, J. (2001). *Out in the Open*. Methuen Drama.
39. Harvey, J. (2010). *Canary*. Methuen Drama.
40. Harvey, J. (2020). *Our Lady of Blunsellsands*. Methuen Books.
41. Kotak, A. (2000). *Hijra*. Oberon Books.
42. Laughton, S. (2016). *Run*. Nick Hern Books.
43. Lavery, B. (2004). *Last Easter*. Faber and Faber.
44. Moran, N. (2005). *Telstar*. Oberon Books.
45. Oparei, D. (2002). *Crazyblackmuthafuckin'self*. Royal Court.
46. Placey, E. (2016). "Banana Boys". In Placey, E. (ed.). *Girls Like That And Other Plays For Teenagers*. Nick Hern Books.
47. Ravenhill, M. (2001). "Mother Clap's Molly House". In Ravenhill, M. (ed.). (2008). *Plays 2*. Methuen Drama.
48. Ravenhill, M. (2005). "Citizenship". In Ravenhill, M. (ed.). (2008). *Plays 2*. Methuen Drama.
49. Ridley, P. (2000). "Vincent River". In Ridley, P. (ed.). (2008). *Plays 2*. Methuen Drama.
50. Ridley, P. (2005). "Mercury Fur". In Ridley, P. (ed.). (2008). *Plays 2.* Methuen Drama.
51. Sher, A. (2007). *The Giant*. Nick Hern Books.
52. Thompson, C. (2018). *Dungeness*. Methuen Drama.
53. Todd, M. (2005). *Blowing Whistles*. Joseph Weinberger Plays.
54. Wainwright, T. (2011). *Muscle*. Oberon Books.

55. Wells, T. (2009). “About a Goth”. In Wells, T. (ed.). (2014). *Me, As A Penguin*. Nick Hern Books.
56. Wells, T. (2009). “Notes For First Time Astronauts”. In Wells, T. (ed.). (2014). *Me, As A Penguin*. Nick Hern Books.
57. Wells, T. (2010). “Me, As a Penguin”. In Wells, T. (ed.). (2014). *Me, As A Penguin*. Nick Hern Books.
58. Wells, T. (2011). *The Kitchen Sink*. Nick Hern Books.
59. Wells, T. (2013). *Jumpers For Goalposts*. Nick Hern Books.
60. Wilson, S. (2015). *Lovesong of the Electric Bear*. Methuen Drama.
61. Wright, N. (2011). *Rattigan’s Nijinsky*. Nick Hern Books.

1.4 Aims and Methodology

Theatre scholars are divided between those who prefer to focus on the text and those who have a preference for the performance. The Shakespearean critic Wells (1970, p. ix) believes that “the reading of a play is a necessarily incomplete experience.” Brecht agrees with the fact that “proper plays can only be understood when performed” (1964, p.15), and Stanislavskij similarly states that “it is only on the stage that drama can be revealed in all its fullness and significance” (1968, p. 115). Although plays are by their very nature not texts to be read in the mind but intended to be performed in front of an audience, this study focuses on written texts rather than the stage performance. There are at least two reasons for this decision: first, access to written texts is much easier – although I have had great difficulties finding many plays printed by smaller publishers – than to performances; second, written texts are static, immutable; therefore, a study dealing with the text is necessarily more stable and objective. On the other hand, every performance, even of the same play and production, differs from another, which makes studies of performances much more unstable. Nevertheless, I recognise the great importance of studies analysing the performances of plays featuring gay characters, which would cover not only the content of the texts, but also the manner in which they are expressed on stage, the gestures with which they are accompanied, the voice, the clothes, the make-up and many other paralinguistic and visual features that cannot be taken into account in a written-text approach. For this reason, I prefer to use the term drama (rather than theatre) to refer to the

written text, following the distinction made by Short (1989, pp. 139-143) and Elam (1980, pp. 2-3).

This corpus will be analysed from a three-fold perspective:

(a) first, I will identify new trends in the plays included in the corpus, taking into account the recurring topics;

(b) then, I will examine the characterisation of the gay *dramatis personae*. The characters will be classified according to the sociolinguistic variables of age, geographical and social provenance, as well as the linguistic varieties that they speak – Standard English, non-standard varieties, accents. Characters are also categorised according to their major or minor role in the plays, their level of secrecy or *out-of-the-closetedness*, and other characteristics indicated by the playwrights in the stage directions and within the text itself;

(c) finally, I will investigate the representation of gayspeak, both in the light of Corpus Linguistics and manually, to explore how fictional language constructs the sexual identity of the fictional gay men portrayed in the plays. It seems to me that previous studies that listed features of gayspeak, while extremely useful, are no longer applicable in their entirety to the study of twenty-first century gayspeak. For this reason, I have attempted to create my own framework, inspired by some of the key scholars who have dealt with language and sexuality (Sonenschein 1969; Stanley 1970; Lakoff 1975; Hayes 1976; Zwicky 1997; Harvey 2000-2002, to name but a few), which will be described in *Chapter 5* and used in a corpus-assisted analysis in C*hapter 6*; other features that can only be investigated manually are dealt with in *Chapter 7*.

1.5 Further research

The present research – which, as is now clear, is extremely specific – leaves many areas of investigation open for further study. The research field could be extended to other Anglophone literatures; a contrastive analysis of the various Anglophone literary productions and representations of gay characters and gayspeak could be undertaken. A further area of investigation could be the analysis of lesbian characters and their linguistic variety. In a 1995 reflection on theatre, art critic Billington noted that

> the homosexualities represented in the mainstream have been overwhelmingly male. In this respect the proliferation of gay plays is symptomatic of another distinctive feature of new British drama: the prevalence of plays by and about men.[4]

If Lesbian Studies are already infinitely less developed than Gay Studies, research on the representation and sociolects of the other members of the LGBTQIA+ acronym (bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, and many more) is even weaker.

In the next chapters, I will be engaged with dissecting the richer production by men writing about men, paying particular attention to the strategies used to index one's homosexuality.

[4] The *Guardian*, 27 December 1995.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical background on which the present study is based, mainly in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive review of the scholarly literature on this field of research, which, although a relatively new area of study, has grown ceaselessly in recent decades. Nor is it concerned with sexualities other than male gayness. All other sexual identities grouped under the label queer[5] are not the subject of this study, which aims to use an eclectic approach[6] by combining different

[5] The lowercase term *queer* is used in this study as a broader synonym for LGBTQIA+ to refer to all non-heteronormative sexualities; the uppercase term *Queer* is used instead to refer to its academic usage.

[6] Baker (2005, p. 7) claims that the study of language and sexuality "is an area which emphasises an eclectic approach where there is no single set methodology."

methodologies – including Corpus Linguistics – to examine a corpus containing 61 British plays staged between 2000 and 2020 to explore how homosexuality and fictional gay men have been represented on stage. As will be explained in the dedicated section, this eclectic approach is justified by the fact that Corpus Linguistics can only provide answers to one side of the coin; a triangulated approach, on the other hand, provides a multifaceted picture of the corpus under analysis.

The following sections will clarify key terms that recur throughout this work and are often misused by laypersons (i.e. sex, gender, and sexuality); they will discuss the differences between Sociolinguistics and fictional Linguistics, the relationship between language and sexuality and the application of Corpus Linguistics to Language and Sexuality Studies. The following sections offer an overview of the research that is directly related to the issues addressed in this study. Reference will be made to the methodology used, which will be discussed in more detail in *Chapters 5*, *6* and *7*.

2.2 Sex, gender and sexuality

2.2.1 Sex vs gender

Sex and gender are words that often go together and are treated as synonyms in everyday life. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the term gender as "the physical and/or social condition of being male or female; the male or female sex," whereas *Collins COBUILD Dictionary* accounts that "some people refer to the fact that a person is male or female as his or her gender." Both definitions are indicative of the terminological confusion that surrounds sex and gender, as the two terms are often used interchangeably. Moreover, the term sex has a double meaning, as it refers to both the biological distinction between male and female, and sexual intercourse. However, in daily life, people tend to overlap the two terms, using both nouns to refer to the biological characteristics that distinguish individuals based on their female or male reproductive functions, preferring gender as a euphemism for sex; this may be due to the fact that the term sex is also used to refer to sexual intercourse, which is still taboo in many societies.

Scholars who study sex and gender, however, do differentiate between the two terms. The issue was first raised by Hampson *et al.* (1955, p. 302), who pioneered a definition of gender roles as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as

having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively." In 1968, psychiatrist Stoller's distinction between sex and gender paved the way for future feminist studies, further explored by Rubin (1975, p. 165), who theorised "a set of arrangements by which biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention." This definition was also shared by Oakley (1972), who maintained that "sex is a biological term: gender a psychological and cultural one" (p. 158). *Gender Trouble* (1990) – Butler's seminal study on gender issues, which draws heavily on Foucault's (1978) notion of sexuality and Derrida's (1980) concept of iterability – makes clear in its very title that gender is a problematic concept and that a clearer definition is needed. In the introduction to her book, the author distinguishes between sex and gender, associating the former with the biology of the body and the latter with the culture of a society. Therefore, the two terms cannot be used as synonyms, and

> the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. (Derrida 1980, p. 8)

Butler's theory has often been misunderstood by subsequent scholars. Indeed, sex should not be considered as something that has no social and cultural dimension at all, and likewise, natural bodies should not be completely divorced from the social and cultural contexts that produce them (Zimman 2021, p. 71). However, the greatest innovation of Butler's post-structuralist study is the idea of gender fluidity, which is partly derived from Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) theory of performative acts. While sex is something one is born with – it is stable unless one seeks help through surgery or transgender hormone therapy – gender is fluid because it is the product of cultural and social repeated actions, the performative nature of which is exemplified in West *et al.*'s (1987) idea that gender is something one does. Nonetheless, parents (or someone else on their behalf) tend to give their baby a name at birth that automatically matches his/her biological sex (i.e. male sex > male name), thus participating in the construction of their baby's gender identity. Even before this, when the surgeon announces "it's a s/he," this statement, to cite Austin's speech act theory (1962), has an illocutionary, performative effect, as the announcement immediately effects a change, transforming an "it" (i.e. the genderless foetus) into a "s/he" (Butler 1993), automatically aligning the foetus's gender with its sex. Other elements such as the colours of the baby's clothing, accessories, and toys reflect his/her biological sex, regardless of the fact that a person's sex does not necessarily and automatically

determine their gender identity. This is because "society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments" (Eckert *et al.* 2003, p. 10). Gender fluidity, on the other hand, implies that gender is incessantly constructed and performed. It is

> an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler 1990, p. 191)

The distinction between sex and gender – sex as "the real" and the "factic" upon which gender operates as an act of cultural inscription (Butler 1990, p. 199) – is an appropriation of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, based on the assumption that sex is to nature or "the raw" as gender is to culture or "the cooked"' (in Butler 1990, p. 50). As McIlvenny (2002, p. 6) has it, "sex has been naturalised and gender has become socially essentialised."

Butler's idea of fluidity implies that gender is not a consequence of sex and vice-versa. For instance, if a person was born with male genitalia, it does not necessarily follow that this person will behave, wear clothes, style their hair, and – what this study is mainly concerned with – talk like a heterosexual man. The linear association of sex and gender is promoted by heteronormativity. This term was coined by Warner (1991) and further developed by Chambers (2003) and Nagel (2003), who agree that heteronormativity is based on the "assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions […] are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations" (Nagel 2003, pp. 49–50). Heteronormativity implies that all people can be classified into the binary system male-female, and that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexuality, as only heterosexual intercourse – potentially – leads to procreation. Heteronormativity and all the institutions that promote it assume that sex and gender coincide and that all people are heterosexual. Although the following definition seems a bit restrictive today, Cameron (2005, p. 489) claims that heteronormativity is

> the system which prescribes, enjoins, rewards, and naturalises a particular kind of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive, and based on conventionally complementary gender roles – as the norm on which social arrangements should be based.

However, as de Beauvoir maintains in *The Second Sex* (1953, p. 273; originally published in France in 1949), "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman[7]," and the same is true for men. Gender is relatively independent of sex, and characteristics commonly associated with femininity can also be assigned to male bodies, and vice-versa. As will be discussed throughout this work, gay characters exhibit some linguistic features commonly thought to construct women's gender identities (e.g. a wider range of terms to indicate colours), demonstrating that there is no linearity between the biological sex of gay characters and the cultural expressions of their gendered bodies.

2.2.2 Sexuality

Sex and gender are not the only elements that contribute to defining one's identity, and they are certainly not the focus of this study; sexuality is another characteristic involved in the construction of an individual's identity, which is – a is now clear – the product of a holistic process. The term sexuality is often used as a synonym for sexual orientation and eroticism, that is, a person's sexual preference for opposite or same-sex partners. In the *O.E.D.*, sexuality is defined as "a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which s/he is typically attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual; sexual orientation." This definition shows that sexuality, sexual identity, sexual orientation and eroticism are often used interchangeably. Queen (2014, p. 204) defines sexuality as an umbrella term encompassing both sexual identity and eroticism, recognizing that they are not and cannot be categorically distinct. The term sexuality was first mentioned relatively recently, in 1897, when Havelock, a sexologist, used the noun with the adjective "inverted," which may indicate that sexuality was only considered worthy of attention when it referred to non-heteronormative practices, which were the only ones that were not taken for granted and were still stigmatised as inverted. Sexuality refers to the ways people behave in relation to their sexual desire, that is "how people express and view themselves as sexual beings" (Baker 2008, p. 6). Therefore, sexuality, often considered a highly private matter, is a rather complex social phenomenon. As Weeks (1989) explains, structurally, sexuality is not entirely different from gender; both are social constructs, i.e. cultural expressions of certain characteristics of a person's body. Sexuality and gender are

[7] "On ne naît pas femme: on le deviant" (original).

therefore not as separate as Queer Theory would have us believe. Campbell-Kibler *et al.* (2001, p. 11) distance themselves from Queer linguists such as Livia *et al.* (1997) by claiming that

> undoubtedly, sexuality is qualitatively different from gender; […] however, taking this too far and treating sexuality as a separate domain, we may run the risk of losing sight of the important connections of sexuality with kinship, religion, and most important of all, gender. In fact, sexuality often mirrors gender.

With regard to the terminological confusion surrounding sex, gender and sexuality – which often leads to a linear, heteronormative association of the three aspects of an individual – Cameron and Kulick (2003, pp. 4-5) note that

> the phenomena denoted by the three terms – having a certain kind of body (sex), living as a certain kind of social being (gender), and having certain kinds of erotic desires (sexuality) – are not understood or experienced by most people in present-day social reality as distinct and separate. Rather they are interconnected.

Sex, gender and sexuality are intimately intertwined and contribute to defining a person's identity, which is a set of multi-faceted characteristics distinguishing an individual from another; the same is true for fictional people. Identity is a much discussed topic in Gender Studies and Sociolinguistics, and this work follows Baker's (2008, p. 11) definition of identities as social constructions "that are subject to change throughout the course of our lives, although at any given point, such identities may feel solidified and reflect the real self." Identity is not part of our genetic code, but "it is constructed through a public discourse which is neither planned nor controlled, but rather is the result of a series of images and ideas that emerged when society began to speak openly about sexuality" (Buckle 2018, p. 4). Baker adds that difference plays a fundamental role in defining one's identities, which "are linked to the relationship that these identities have with the possible identities that a person could hold, but does not" (2008, p.12). The gay characters in this work are fictional people with male genitalia[8] (sex identity), who recognise themselves mostly as men (gender identity) and who may enjoy having sexual intercourse with other men (sexual identity). Referring to the creation of a homosexual identity, Buckle (2018, p. 3) claims that

[8] Characters who identify as men but are in fact transgender are not included in this work, as a separate study dealing with them would be preferable.

> the pervasiveness of the language to describe sexuality, and the behaviours and characteristics which define homosexuality, has been created only relatively recently. The postwar landscape, which provided greater sexual freedom in the West, created the space for identity politics and group characterisation to take place – where people began to define themselves, and were defined by others. Thus sexual identities emerged both as a group identity – what the majority understand homosexuality to mean, and as a social identity – how individuals defined themselves.

The fictional gay men as staged by British playwrights in 21st century reveal their gender and sexual identities through all the elements at their (or the actors'?) disposal, most notably voice. In addition to the personal interpretations of the directors and actors, all the elements that characterise *dramatis personae* are provided by the playwrights, either through the lines spoken by the actors or through stage directions. The focus of this study is on the construction of sexuality[9] – more specifically, fictional male homosexuality – primarily through fictional language, that is, the study of the fictional language use by fictional gay men to construct and express their sexuality.

This is a text-based study, examining a corpus of plays treated as purely written texts. All the aspects concerning the staging, especially the acoustic ones, are not the subject of this work. Nevertheless, performance is commonly regarded as the characteristic feature of drama; Brecht (1964, p. 15) believes that "proper plays can only be understood when performed", while Stanislavskij (1968, p. 115) asserts that "it is only on the stage that drama can be revealed in all its fullness and significance." Unlike text, however, performance is highly volatile, as the same text can be performed in completely different ways. Short (1989, p. 140) explains that

> both meanings and value will change not just from one production to another but also from one performance of a particular production to another. There then becomes no play to criticize. Instead we will have to talk about 'X 's production of *Hamlet* in theatre Y on the evening of Z, and critical discussion becomes impossible unless the two critics concerned have both seen and are arguing about exactly the same performance.

[9] For simplicity, the term "sexuality" is used as an umbrella term for sexual identity and eroticism, as defined by Queen (2014, p. 204).

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that sexuality is also conveyed through non-textual elements (e.g. clothes, manners, pitch, etc.) which are set by stage directors or dictated by playwrights through stage directions. Further research could be conducted in these fields.

2.3 Language and Sexuality Studies

2.3.1 Language and communication

One of the fundamental questions underlying this study is: "what fictional language do fictional gay men use in the 61 plays included in the corpus?" Language is a communicative practice mediated by linguistic systems. Not only do speakers master the grammar of a language, but they also communicate (more or less) successfully on the basis of conventions by which people interact in social language practices. Therefore, people develop both linguistic and communicative competences – the latter referring to the language in use (Gumperz *et al.* 1972) – since speakers use language in specific contexts and for specific purposes (e.g. to inform, to make requests, to establish social relationships, etc.), but also to present themselves as particular kinds of people, which includes their gender and sexuality. It follows that language "does not simply *reflect* social reality, but is also *constitutive* of such reality, […] it shapes how we see ourselves and the world" (Litosseliti 2006, p. 9). In other words, people use language in a certain way not because of who they are, but who they are is partly because of the way they use language. In *Woman's Language*, Lakoff (1975, p. 3) claims that

> language uses us as much as we use language. As much as our choice of forms of expression is guided by the thoughts we want to express, to the same extent the way we feel about the things in the real world governs the way we express ourselves about these things.

Sociolinguistics understands language use as an act of identity: speakers use language to signal their identification with a group and their distinction from other groups. The performative indexicality of language, i.e. the idea that language is a construction containing indexical signs, is adopted from Queer Theory. Trudgill (2000, p. 2) maintains that

> two aspects of language behaviour are very important from a social point of view: first, the function of language in establishing social relationships; and, second, the role played by language in conveying information about the speaker.

Similarly, the gay characters portrayed in the plays use language both as a means of establishing social relationships with other characters, and as a way of manifesting (among other things) their sexuality.

2.3.2 Fictional language

The linguistic variety analysed in this work is a fictional representation of gayspeak used by playwrights to characterise fictional gay men. Following Pavesi's discussion on audiovisual language – which I believe is perfectly applicable to dramatic language, since what distinguishes drama from an audiovisual product is only the liveness or "event character" of its performance and the co-presence of audience and actors at the venue (FischerLichte 2012, pp. 54-67) – fictional language is non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated; it is inauthentic orality, a mere imitation of spontaneous spoken language (2015, p. 7). For as much as dramatic language imitates naturally occurring spoken language, it is rather a written-to-be-spoken variety, which lacks linguistic features typical of spoken language *tout court*. Hodson (2014, p. 197) claims that

> any attempt to represent the world as it really is in art is always a representation, not real life itself. In the case of literature, the real world that individuals experience continually in their everyday lives through the five senses is represented solely through sight via strings of 16 characters printed on paper.

Fictional language, besides, aims to characterise fictional people, often relying on stereotypes, i.e. features commonly associated with social types (e.g. gay men). Gross (1991, pp. 26-27) maintains that the use of stereotypes is a common practice in the process of characterisation, as characters are supposed to be easily recognisable to the audience, and studies in the field of Sociolinguistics have shown that media – and I would say fictional language in general – play an important role in reinforcing linguistic stereotypes (Lippi-Green 2012). Following Kozloff's (2000) functions of film dialogues – which, as will be discussed in *Chapter 5*, can also be applied to dramatic language – fictional gayspeak is used on stage primarily for "character revelation" (33), that is, for constructing the characters' personalities from the many different signs deployed by a play.

2.3.3 Language and sexuality

Earlier studies[10] on language and sexuality were made in the late 1960s and focused on issues related to the lexicon, following a correlational approach (Eckert 2012, p. 94), which assumes that "the language practices we observe are directly determined by some element of the underlying social structure" (Levon 2021, p. 38). It implies that the distinctive linguistic features of the language spoken by queer people are due to a pre-existing affiliation with the gay and lesbian community. The assumption was that it was the speakers' sexual identities that caused them to speak in a particular way. Earlier studies simply provided lists of words that were supposedly[11] more commonly used by gay men, defining a secret language that only gay people could understand. The secrecy of gayspeak was due to the fact that in the 1960s, homosexuality was still illegal in the UK, and gay men were not allowed to express their sexuality overtly; the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) stated that

> any male person who, in public or private, commits […] any act of gross indecency with another male person, […] shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

The Wolfenden Report (1957), which recommended the decriminalisation of private gay sex between consenting adults over 21, was rejected, and it was not until ten years later that the Sexual Offences Act (1967) decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men who were both over the age of 21. It is no surprise, therefore, that gay people have had to use a coded language to avoid legal persecution in Britain. Much of the earlier works cited before have a glossary-like quality, very little analysis, and define the language used by gay men as a secret code that requires dictionaries and glossaries to be codified. Research on language and sexuality

[10] Reportedly, the first academic work to examine the lexicon of gay language was *Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraphy in Western north America: a Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary*, published by Read in 1935; it was followed by Legman's *The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary* (1941). More substantial studies on gay lexicon include Partridge, E. 1961. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. New York: Macmillan; Partridge, E. 1964. *Dictionary of the Underworld*. London: Routledge; Goldin, H. E. *et al.* 1962. *Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo*. New York: Citadel; Wentworth, H. Flexner, S. B. 1967. *Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Crowell; Landy, E. E. 1971. *The Underground Dictionary*. New York: Simon; Farmer. J. S. Henley, W. E. 1965. *Slang and Its Analogues*. New York: Kraus; Barrere, A. Leland, C. G. 1967. *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant*. Detroit: Gale.

[11] The use of this adverb indicates that the methods used in the past were not as scientific and objective as in current studies.

examining other areas of the language began in the late 1970s; however, these studies were rhetorical rather than specifically linguistic.

In the early 1990s, research on language and sexuality benefitted from the newly emerging discipline Queer Theory, which challenged the assumptions of the correlational approach. Leap's publication of *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon* (1995) and Livia *et al.*'s *Queerly Phrased* (1997) marked the beginning of what became known as Queer Linguistics, a branch of Linguistics that draws heavily on ideas of performativity and identity construction. The constructionist approach assumes that gay men do not use distinctive linguistic features because of their sexual identity, but rather that their sexual identity is constructed through the language they use. Identity is not to be seen as something stable that an individual is endowed with from birth. Identity, much like gender and sexuality, is seen as a social and cultural construction based primarily on language, as "the relationship between language and identity is rather considered as constructive" (Motschenbacher 2011, p. 153). It is *also* through language that people create and perform their identities, and it is *also* in the language that one's identities are reflected and to be found. Sex, gender and sexuality "do not exist pre-discursively but are constructed socially in the very moment of speaking or writing" (Motschenbacher 2011, p. 161). Language is an index of sex, gender and sexuality, an indication of the identity of the one who speaks; this concept is known in Linguistics as "indexicality". This concept is taken from the work of philosopher Charles S. Peirce and it refers to the relationship between forms of language and the contexts in which they occur. Following Ochs' (1996, p. 411) argument,

> a linguistic index is usually a structure (e.g. sentential voice, emphatic stress, diminutive affix) that is used variably from one situation to another and becomes conventionally associated with particular situational dimensions such that when the structure is used, the form invokes those situational dimensions. (1996, p. 411)

It does not follow that the language that a speaker uses results from a particular identity; rather, language is one of the ways people shape their identities. Identity, much like gender and sexuality, is something an individual does; "rather than *having* identities, people *perform* them" (McConnell-Ginet 2001, p. 8). This definition of identity, drawn from Queer Theory, is adopted in this study, which, as will be discussed in the following section, is not located in the field of Queer Linguistics, but in Language and Sexuality Studies.

A number of contributions on language and sexuality have been published in the 2000s, including the volume entitled *Language and Sexuality. Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice* (Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002), *Language and Sexuality* (Cameron and Kulick, 2003), and *The Language and Sexuality Reader* (Cameron and Kulick, 2006). The annual conference *Lavender Languages and Linguistics*, founded by Leap at the American University (Washington DC) has become a renowned platform for international research. In 2012, Leap *et al.* launched the first academic journal focused on language and sexuality, the *Journal of Language and Sexuality* (John Benjamins), which celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2021, with a special issue titled "Reflections on the Field of Language and Sexuality Studies", co-edited by W. L. Leap and H. Motschenbacher. Research on language and sexuality in the mid-2000s challenged the assumptions of the constructionist approach of the 1990s and turned to a new, emergentist approach (see Angouri 2021). Eckert (2008-2012) distanced herself from constructivist scholars who assumed that sexual identity is constructed through the linguistic variables used by speakers. She claims that this is problematic because it does not acknowledge that a given linguistic variable can have multiple possible meanings, and that more attention should be paid to the more local linguistic uses to perform different identities in different environments (in Levon 2021, p. 39). This means that the same linguistic feature can be used in different contexts and that the meaning of the feature is context-dependent in the process of self-construction. Levon (2021, p. 39) maintains that

> emergentist research looks first at what immediate interactional goals speakers are trying to achieve and only then attempts to explain how the linguistic attainment of those goals may link to the emergence of salient social identities in interaction.

In recent years, Corpus Linguistics has been applied to the study of language and sexuality, as explained in the designated section. As will be clear in the next sections, this work follows a constructionist approach, in that it considers gayspeak as a means among many others to construct the characters' identities. Nevertheless, as will be mentioned in section 5.1.2, although this research focuses on gayspeak as *the* linguistic variety spoken by gay men, I am also aware of the fact that there is not a unique variety, but there are many different varieties spoken by gay men depending on the context in which they are spoken.

2.3.4 Queer Linguistics?

In this work, which, as is now clear, is situated in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies, I prefer to distance myself from scholars who overlap this research field with Queer Linguistics, using the latter as "a cover name for Language and Sexuality Studies but sounds cooler and more academic (hinting at Queer Theory but not really incorporating any of its assumptions as basic principles)" (Campbell-Kiber *et al.* 2001, p. 16). This research, indeed, has not the intention to examine gayspeak and homosexuality in 21st century British drama as a way to criticise patriarchy; it rather seeks to investigate how the sexuality of fictional men is constructed through fictional language. Post-structuralism and post-modernism in the 1980s and 1990s, with their "fetish of the margins" (Walters 1996, p. 840), encouraged research on sexual minorities. At the same time that Butler published her revolutionary research on gender (i.e. *Gender Trouble*, 1990), a new branch of studies appeared, Queer Studies[12] – also called Queer Theory – a paradigm for the critical study of marginalised sexualities, mainly in opposition to heteronormativity. Milani (2022, p. 195) summarises that

> queer inquiry scrutinizes the ways in which feminine female bodies and masculine male bodies are systematically valued as ideal opposites attracting each other in a variety of settings, while anyone who goes against this pattern such as masculine women or feminine men are devalued, their behaviour is policed, or they are even publicly attacked.

Queer Linguistics is a relatively young approach to the study of language that applies Queer theories to Linguistics, based on the poststructuralist ideas discussed in the previous sections about the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality. However, to say that Queer Linguistics studies how queer people speak is tantamount to saying that Feminist Linguistics studies how feminists speak. In the following sections, I will briefly outline the main differences between Language and Sexuality Studies and Queer Linguistics, not to discredit the latter in favour of the former – the aims and contributions of the two disciplines are different and not comparable – but to shed light on two disciplines that are too often – erroneously – overlapped.

Defining "queer" is a difficult undertaking. As Cameron and Kulick (2003, pp. 148–49) note, "scholars working with the term *queer* enjoy pointing out that *queer* denotes that which exceeds definition, that which is undefinable." Originally, the adjective "queer" was used to refer to something "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" (*O.E.D.*); in the late nineteenth century, the adjective was used as a pejorative for sexual deviance. Beginning in the late 1980s, as was

[12] For an extensive overview of the Queer methodologies, see Milani, T. and Borba, R. 2022.

common among radical activists, derogatory forms began to be reclaimed and reappropriated, and "queer" started to be used by LGBTQIA+ people as a neutral or positive term in place of the far more common and medical term "homosexual". In academic contexts, the adjective "Queer" is used to refer to the study of issues relating to non-traditional notions of sexuality and gender. The term "Queer", thus, encompasses all kinds of non-heteronormative sexualities, "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence" (Halperin 1995, pp. 61–2). The first academic use of the term Queer Theory was in the journal *Differences,* in a special issue entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," edited by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991. In Queer Theory, homosexualities are considered as distinct social and cultural forms, whose

> mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity. (de Lauretis1991, p. iii).

Queer Theory owes much to Butler's theory of performativity, which dismantled the earlier, heteronormative view that gender is not a social and cultural construct, but something that people are born with. Therefore, Queer Theory tends to deconstruct earlier assumptions about heteronormativity. Baker (2008, p. 187) claims that

> instead of concentrating on constructing a gay subject (for example, by asking "how do gay people use language?") Queer Theory focuses on deconstructing the underlying logic/rules of a gay subject by examining how the identity itself is constructed through language ("how does language construct gay people?").

This is the fundamental – and simplistic – difference between Language and Sexuality Studies and Queer Linguistics, the former seeking to examine how people use language to express their sexuality, while the latter seeking to investigate how society and culture construct queer identities, often in critical and activist ways. Queer Linguistics, therefore, not only studies the language of queer people, but is an approach "in which identity categories are not accepted as a priori entities, but are recognised as ideological constructs produced by social discourse" (Barrett, 2002: 28); it has been defined by Motschenbacher *et al.* (2013, p. 522) as "critical heteronormativity research from a linguistic point of view" that seeks to examine sexual discrimination in a questionably privileged and normative society. Kulick (2001) recommends

that scholars use the label Queer more carefully, as they often refer to their enterprise as Queer Linguistics and use the label "Queer" as a synonym for gay and lesbian without applying Queer theories to their linguistic studies. Similarly, Queen (2001, pp. 70-71) claims that

> in one way or another, most of the work that gets placed under the label Queer Linguistics is not specifically queer theoretical but rather based on data from queer subjects. […] A Queer Linguistics would necessarily be quite different from the study of the ways in which language becomes a part of claiming a sexual identity as part of the sense of the self.

As will be discussed in the following section, this research contributes to the existing literature in that it attempts to apply also the methodology of Corpus Linguistics to the study of 21st century fictional gayspeak as it is used in the corpus under scrutiny. The adverb "also" was not chosen at random. As will be discussed in the following section, Corpus Linguistics is only one methodology among many others, in what Baker and Egbert (2020) call methodological triangulation.

2.4 Methodological triangulation

Methodological triangulation[13] refers to the application of more than one methodology to analyse the object of research from more perspectives to "anchor findings in more robust interpretations and explanations" (Baker and Egbert 2016, p. 4). Baker and Egbert (2020) agree on the fact that Corpus Linguistics can only shed light on some aspects of the language, and that it is becoming increasingly common to triangulate corpus linguistic methods with methods from other areas in Linguistics; they add that this type of methodological triangulation has proven to be an extremely effective means of explaining linguistic phenomena. McEnery and Wilson (1996, p. 169) claim that "gone is the concept of the corpus as the sole *explicandum* of language use. Present instead is the concept of a balanced corpus being used to *aid* the investigation of language." Baker and Egbert (2020, p. 6) adopt a broader definition of methodological triangulation that extends to:

[13] The term "triangulation" was coined by Newby (1977, p. 123). For an extensive overview of triangulation, see Baker and Egbert, 2016, 2020.

(a) “applying two methodologies separately to the same question” (Marchi and Taylor 2009, p. 5);
(b) ”the combination of two or more […] methodologic approaches […] within the same study” (Thurmond 2001, p. 253);
(c) “the use of two or more different kinds of methods in a single line of inquiry” (Risjord *et al.* 2001, p. 41);
(d) “the observation of the research issue from (at least) two different points” (Denzin 1970, p. 178);
(e) “more than one kind of method to study a phenomenon” (Bekhet 2012, p. 2).

A study that looks at the representation of fictional homosexuality, homosexual men and the language they supposedly speak in a corpus of plays staged in 21st century British drama cannot rely on only one methodology. Although Corpus Linguistics can be applied in this work to the study of the language spoken by fictional gay men to shed light on some recurring structures, there are many aspects of this language that a corpus linguistic approach cannot investigate. As will be discussed in *Chapters 6* and *7*, Corpus Linguistics can shed light mainly on formal aspects of the language (e.g. frequency, concordances, keywords, etc.); when it comes to the meaning, the research requires a manual approach. Moreover, *Chapters 3* and *4* analyse aspects related to the 61 plays included in the corpus (e.g. geographical and chronological settings, common trends, to name but a few) and their 187 characters (e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety, among many others) respectively; information about the aspects just mentioned cannot be provided by software within the scope of Corpus Linguistics, but only through the manual application of other types of methodologies.

The two following sub-sections will deal with Corpus Linguistics and its application to Language and Sexuality Studies, as well as the other methodologies that will be applied throughout the research.

2.4.1 Corpus Linguistics[14]

The language to be examined in this study is contained in a corpus of 61 plays. The term *corpus* (Latin for body; pl. *corpora*) is used here to refer to a more or less large “body” of texts selected

[14] For detailed accounts of the field, see Hunston (2002), McEnery *et al.* (2006-2012) and Biber *et al.* (2015).

for their representativeness of a social group (i.e. fictional gay men), a linguistic variety (i.e. fictional gayspeak), a literary genre (i.e. 21st century British drama) and stored in machine-readable digital files. Sampling and representativeness are thus two fundamental concepts in Corpus Linguistics. This is a specialised (or purpose-built) corpus because it is not representative of the whole language (e.g. BNC, a reference corpus representing British English), but it rather represents the linguistic variety spoken by a particular social group, at a particular time and place (Hunston 2002); besides, it is not intended to represent 21st century gayspeak *tout court*, but it is rather a description of how gayspeak is used in the plays included in the corpus. When scholars need to deal with large amounts of language, they may need the help of technology to use specialised computer programmes to provide objective, unbiased data analyses that can be interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively. This is one of the advantages of Corpus Linguistics, in that technological tools can perform frequency counts and statistical calculations faster and more reliably than the human mind, revealing linguistic patterns that might evade manual observation or run counter to intuition (Baker 2006, pp. 10-14). Therefore, Corpus Linguistics is a relatively new discipline, dependent on the introduction of personal computers. The term discipline, however, may not be entirely accurate. Corpus Linguistics is not a distinct branch of Linguistics, but rather has been defined as a methodology that can be applied to many different fields (McEnery *et al.* 1996, p. 1). Corpus Linguistics has often been discredited for its "inhuman" quality, being mistaken for a purely quantitative analysis of data.

The quantitative aspect of corpus linguistic research is undoubtedly important, but without a subsequent qualitative analysis – which can only be done by humans – it is sterile. Cameron (1998, pp. 45-46) took a critical look at Corpus Linguistics and declared that

> words, and more especially meanings, will always have a hidden history. While computerised corpora do make it easier to bring some aspects of that history to the surface (I think there is value, for example, in the collocational data they can provide), other equally important aspects may be more deeply buried as a result of the methods employed by the compilers and lexicographers: their sampling, their lemmatisation, their emphasis on the synchronic, even the sheer quantity of data they offer may be a hindrance to some kinds of analysis rather than a help. Perhaps the greatest problem implicit in the corpus dream, however, is its location within a powerful scientific or positivist discourse, whose own Keywords are "rigour", "accuracy" and "objectivity".

Like any other methodology, however, Corpus Linguistics is not perfect. As will be discussed in *Chapter 6*, lexis can be easily investigated through Corpus Linguistics methods; however, some features that are commonly believed to be typical of gayspeak, e.g. innuendo and double entendre, cannot be analysed following the aforementioned methodology because they require humans' ability to infer hidden meanings. For this reason, research will be carried out manually whenever technology is not of help. Following Baker's (2014) argument, researchers should beware of the danger of relying solely on corpus techniques, since a corpus alone does not always provide explanations for speech patterns. Only when researchers take into account other forms of context, can they fully explain their findings.

Tognini-Bonelli (2001) distinguishes between *corpus-based* and *corpus-driven* research, the former being used to test the researcher's intuitions with examples taken from the corpus, while the latter is used in studies that are "driven" by the corpus itself, i.e. studies in which the researchers are not guided by their intuitions but by the evidence that comes from the corpus analysis itself. McEnery *et al.* (2006, p. 8), however, believe that the two approaches should be seen as the two poles of a continuum. This study, for instance, is both corpus-driven and corpus-based. It is corpus-driven because, once I have obtained the data (e.g. keywords, collocations, etc.) by analysing the corpus using #Lancsbox, I will be guided by the data themselves in the qualitative interpretation of what I found. However, this is also a corpus-based study as I have my intuitions (e.g. the use of emotionally exaggerated adjectives such as "lovely," "fabulous") before running the software, which I may want to verify quantitatively with empirical data. Baker (2010, p. 8) adds that when conducting research, we may refer to "existing linguistic frameworks or categories […] and as a result […], we may find ways to modify such frameworks." Indeed, in this study I also intend to explore the extent to which previous frameworks including linguistic features typical of gayspeak still hold in present-day British plays. As will be explained in the designated sections, terms and expressions listed in previous studies on gayspeak will be searched in the corpus to assess whether they are still used in characterising contemporary fictional gayspeak, and how they have changed diachronically. In addition to a purely linguistic approach, this study integrates the results with data from other sources, such as reviews of plays, analyses of common trends, etc. Partington (2006) has defined this approach as corpus-assisted analysis, which means that one relies on a corpus when conducting the linguistic analysis, but may also include other forms of data or analysis simultaneously.

Baker (2010, pp. 8-9) claims that Corpus Linguistics and Sociolinguistics "overlap in terms of their epistemology, focus and scope," because they share basic principles, such as collecting and analysing empirical data, using quantitative methods, using sampling techniques that are representative of a broader population, studying variation and change, and attempting to provide qualitative interpretations of the data. However, unlike Sociolinguistics, this study is not concerned with examining how language is used in the real world by real people. Therefore, the reader should keep in mind that all statements and generalisations in this work must be limited to fictional people, languages, and worlds. The use of Corpus Linguistics in sociolinguistic research can shed light on many different aspects of the speakers under scrutiny. This study, however, will mainly focus on one sociolinguistic variable, sexuality. It will also consider the age, social and geographical origins of the characters, but only in relation to the representation of fictional gayspeak as one of the ways of constructing gay male sexuality. In other words, focusing on sexuality does not exclude the other social variables, because

> individuals do not experience life through the prism of a single identity category. Each of us maintains multiple affiliations and identifications, and these different components all influence our own experiences of self. (Levon 2021, p. 40)

This idea is at the basis of intersectionality, a term originally coined by Crenshaw (1989), which refers to the assumption that lived experiences cannot be defined by membership in a single identity category. Levon (2021, p. 40) recognises that

> an intersectionality perspective argues that no one analytical category is sufficient if we are to provide a rigorous analysis of the social practices we observe. Instead, we must investigate how a multiplicity of categories come together in the formation of individual subjectivity.

Research on Corpus Linguistics and sexuality is relatively sparse. Motschenbacher (2018) and Baker *et al.* (2018-2021) provide brief overviews of the ways corpus linguists has studied sexuality. Motschenbacher (2018) claims that while the investigation of language and gender has benefitted from the application of Corpus Linguistics, the use of this methodology in Language and Sexuality Studies is still limited. Furthermore, he laments the fact that previous corpus linguistic studies on language and sexuality have focused on the discursive construction of sexual identities, relationships and desires, rather than on the language in use by social groups

defined by (among other things) their sexualities. Similarly, Baker *et al.* (2018, p. 3) have traced two main strands in previous studies. The first involves scholars interested in language in use (King 2009-2015; Casey 2011; Bogetić 2013), i.e. how language is used by people holding "particular sexual identities or desires or engage in certain sexual practices […], and how that relates to such identities, desires, or practices," whereas the second involves scholars interested in language representation (Bolton 1995; Hoey 1997; Baker 2005; Bachmann 2011; Morrish *et al.* 2011; Baker *et al.* 2015, 2021; Zottola 2018, 2019, 2021), that is, "examination of the talk concerning different sexualities, drawing on the Foucauldian perspective of discourse" (2018, p. 3). This study follows the first strand, as it is a usage-based research that aims to shed light on how language is used by fictional gay men. However, as this investigation is based on fictional gay men who were created and provided with a language by playwrights, the distinction between usage- and representation-based research is rather blurred; the way characters use gayspeak is also part of the project through which the playwrights aim to represent gay men in their plays.

2.4.2 Other methodologies

Corpus Linguistics alone cannot answer all the research questions posed in this thesis. For this reason, it has been supported by other methodologies, mainly from the fields of Sociolinguistics and Language and Sexuality Studies. This eclectic approach, as mentioned earlier, provides a multi-sided picture of the topic under scrutiny. Moreover, it answers questions that would be impossible to answer with software alone, as manual analysis is sometimes required to obtain the data to be analysed.

Chapter 3, for instance, identifies common trends in the 21st century British plays depicting gay men included in the corpus. This includes extradiegetic aspects such as a diachronic analysis of the number of plays staged between 2000 and 2020, and the venues in which they premiered; intradiegetic aspects, such as the geographical and chronological settings of the plays and their common themes. With the exception of the common themes, which can also be partly investigated through Corpus Linguistics by analysing the positive keywords[15] in the corpus, the other elements mentioned above were noted manually when reading the 61

[15] They are words that are unexpectedly more frequent in the corpus under scrutiny than in the reference corpus (i.e. *SpokenBNC2014*); they may provide an idea of the content of the corpus.

plays. They are either explicitly mentioned in the paratext and stage directions, or can be inferred from the characters' dialogues. The data were arranged in tables, which can be consulted in *Appendix 2*.

Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the 187 gay characters portrayed in the 61 plays. As explained in the corresponding chapter, the characters are treated in the light of semiotic theories that consider characters "as signs or structures of fictional texts" (Eder *et al.* 2010, p. 8), and thus follow a de-humanising approach (Culpeper 2001). For the classification, some variables are used that are universal and valid for any sociolinguistic study (e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety), but also other variables that are specific to research in Language and Sexuality Studies (e.g. Hayes' classification). In particular, social class is classified according to the framework created by Trudgill (1974) for his study of a random sample of 60 residents in Norwich, who were classified into social classes on the basis of their occupational status, income, education, locality and housing type. Trudgill's (1994, 2000) studies of accents and dialects are used to classify the characters on the basis of the language varieties that they speak. Some features of non-standard varieties have also been investigated by Hodson (2014), a pioneer in the study of the realisation of dialects in film and literature. Trudgill's and Hodson's studies have provided useful criteria for recognising non-standard varieties and their realisation in fiction.

Gay characters have also been classified according to some criteria that are specific to the nature of this study, i.e. dramatised gayness. The role that gay characters have in plays, for instance, reveals a lot about themselves and how society treats them in real-life. Main characters – generally, but not necessarily – tend to speak more than secondary characters; primary characters are the ones whose development readers follow more carefully. Gay characters were also classified following Hayes' (1976) framework, according to which there are supposedly three settings that influence gay men's language, namely the secret, the social and the radical-activist settings. They were adapted in this study as a way to classify fictional gay men into secret, social and radical-activist characters, according to whether they keep their sexual identity secret or openly display it.

2.5 Aims and contribution

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter has been aimed solely to introduce fundamental concepts that might not be self-evident to the reader, as this type of study is rather new and *niche*. In this chapter, the research fields where this study is situated have only been discussed in their general aspects in order to provide the reader with basic information that might be helpful to move along this work. Further details will be added in the designated chapters. All aspects mentioned in these sections contribute to the structure of the methodology used in this study. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present the methodology extensively; rather, it will be discussed in the relative sections. This work will contribute to the existing literature for at least three reasons:

(a) there are, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no academic studies on British drama that focus on the portrayal of gay characters in the last twenty years; similar studies exist for twentieth-century gay drama, namely De Jongh (1992), Sinfield (1999), and Wyllie (2009, but he examined plays up to 2000);

(b) there are, to my knowledge, no academic studies that have recently reassessed the linguistic features of gayspeak, certainly not in the light of Corpus Linguistics. In the second half of the last century, scholars began to move from studying its mere rhetorical and lexical features to actually determining its linguistic (grammatical, pragmatic) features (Sonenschein 1969; Stanley 1970; Lakoff 1975; Hayes 1976; Zwicky 1997; Harvey 1998, 2000, 2002); these studies will be discussed in *Chapter 5*. Nevertheless, scholars in the latest decades have arguably been more concerned with Queer linguistic issues and language representation of gay men than with their actual language in use;

(c) third, this study aims to contribute to the investigation of language and sexuality through Corpus Linguistics, which, as briefly discussed in the previous sections, is still relatively rare. Furthermore, this work intends to apply intersectionality theory to the study of language and sexuality, as it relates the sexuality of characters to their age, social and geographical origins. The corpus linguistic approach lends objectivity and scientificity to this research and is an inevitable approach when dealing with a large amount of data.

Besides, in the last two decades, many social changes have taken place in the UK, and many laws have been passed regarding the lives of gay people, which could affect the way gay men are seen in real life and portrayed on stage. As British playwrights are no longer restricted in

what they can and cannot portray on stage, what will be their main concerns these days? Is homosexuality a central theme in plays depicting gay men, or is it just one theme among many others? Are gender stereotypes affirmed or rejected in representations of gay men? To what extent does today's fictional gayspeak diverge from the past? How has gayspeak changed diachronically over the past 20 years, depending on the age, geographical and social origins of the characters? These are just some of the questions I will attempt to answer in this work.

2.6 Conclusions

Despite its ever-growing popularity since the 1960s, Language and Sexuality Studies has been characterised by the publication of several framework models that have not managed to provide an objectively measurable study of the linguistic variety allegedly spoken by gay men. The integration of Language and Sexuality Studies and Corpus Linguistics originates from the need to apply a scientific methodology to the analysis of present-day fictional gayspeak as is portrayed in the corpus comprising 61 plays written by British playwrights and staged in the first two decades of the new millennium. This need is very much felt by Paul Baker himself, who claims that in relation to sexuality research within Corpus Linguistics, "currently underexplored types of data which could benefit from a corpus approach could include […] fiction (particularly LGBT fiction […])" (2021, p. 569). However, Corpus Linguistics does not seem to have had much influence in the more sociolinguistic areas of sexuality, gender and language studies. Some exceptions are the study by Shalom on personal ads (1997), the work of McEnery *et al.* (2000) on swearing and demographic categories in the BNC and the study by Schmid and Fauth (2003) on gender differences in the ICE corpus – among some others.

Corpus Linguistics is not the only methodology used in this work. In the light of a triangulated approach, other methodologies adapted from other sociolinguistic and Language and Sexuality studies have been used, as has been discussed in the previous sections.

As if under the zoom lenses of an optical microscope, the analysis begins in *Chapter 3,* which seeks to examine British gay drama with a lower magnification, i.e. it zooms out to take a broader look at the subject. This historical chapter is necessary to give a digression on gay drama in the UK in the 20th and especially 21st centuries and to connect it with the socio-

historical changes in British legislation governing gay life, rights, and stage censorship. It also traces new trends in present-day British theatre.

CHAPTER 3

BRITISH GAY DRAMA

20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

3.1 Introduction: defining *gay drama*

Gay drama in Britain has a *relatively* short lifetime. The adverb "relatively" is not emphasised by accident: Drewey (2017), in his majestic work entitled *For the Gay Stage*, lists 456 plays dealing with homosexuality (lesbian and gay) published mainly in English-speaking countries. Although homosexuality has been depicted in literature since the dawn of time (see Aristophanes, 5th century BCE), its appearance in Britain has only gradually become more prevalent since the 1920s, with an impressive rise in the number of publications from the 1960s

onwards, when British playhouses were no longer subject to Lord Chamberlain's[16] censorship, which banned the portrayal of gay men on stage and the depiction of their sexuality.

The label "gay drama" is controversial. What does the adjective "gay" stand for? The sexuality of the playwright? The main theme of the plays? The sexuality of the characters? The sexuality of the audience/reader? Does it refer to something or someone that exists outside or inside the text? Does it refer to men or women, male or female characters? Does it refer to someone who does not recognise themselves in this binary system? In this study, the term "gay" is used exclusively to refer to men who, in whatever way they prefer, desire other men. As mentioned in the *Introduction*, in this work I do not refer to "gay drama" as the body of plays written exclusively by gay playwrights; nor do I refer to the body of plays aimed exclusively at gay audiences/readers. Instead, the adjective "gay" refers to someone who exists in the text: the characters. The label "gay drama" is therefore used in this work to refer to the dramatic production "whose central figure or figures are homosexual" men (Hoffman 1979, p. ix). As was already discussed in the *Introduction*, female homosexuality is not included in this work because Lesbian and Gay Studies follow different paths, and at least two distinct research lines are available. Further research could be done on the sociolect used by lesbians, also including the linguistic variety allegedly used by other members of the queer community.

Although this study is linguistic in its nature, it is based on fictional people that have been portrayed by playwrights in a specific time and place. For this reason, before delving into linguistic issues, it has been deemed worth analysing the corpus against the backdrop of the cultural events affecting gay lives in Britain in the last few decades. This chapter does not claim to be a literary and critical review of gay theatre in the 20th and 21st centuries; it would be beyond the scope of this work to provide an insightful examination of literary issues. The following sections are intended merely to provide a historical background of gay theatre in Britain. After a brief excursus on British theatrical production portraying gay men in the 20th

[16] The Lord Chamberlain of the Household is an officer of the Royal Household of the UK who, for more than 230 years (i.e. from 1737 to 1968), had the power to decide which plays would be granted a licence to be performed, thus introducing stage censorship for those plays he deemed unsuitable. In 1737, Sir Robert Walpole introduced censorship with the Licensing Act by nominating the Lord Chamberlain as the theatrical censor; in this way, he could prevent the performance of any new play for any reason (and the portrayal of homosexuality was one of them), and theatre owners could be prosecuted for staging a play that had not received prior approval. In the 1960s a new generation of young playwrights (e.g. Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, John Osborne, among others) was gaining popularity with their new, irreverent plays; however, these authors had all been lamentably censored by the Lord Chamberlain, and after a long debate, the Theatres Act 1968 was finally passed, officially abolishing stage censorship.

century, this chapter will focus on British gay drama in the 21st century, attempting to identify common trends in the 61 plays included in the corpus under scrutiny. The cultural production in both centuries will be discussed by focusing on the changes affecting gay lives and their representations, British legislation and stage censorship. *Appendix 1* includes a timeline which chronologically organises the Theatres Acts and the laws regulating gay rights.

3.2 British gay drama: 20th century

Theatre, particularly in the UK, has always had a very strong influence on society and is highly representative of the state of the nation – the title of Sierz's book, *Rewriting the Nation*, is quite representative. The bond between British theatre and society is profound, and British literature has had a vibrant tradition of theatrical production since, at least, the Renaissance. As will be discussed below, the power of theatre over British society has always been so strong that several laws have been passed to control dramatic production in Britain. In a society as "prudish" as the UK has always been, it is not surprising that sexuality has been an issue of paramount importance. Dolan (2010, p. 3) claims that

> theatre and sexuality have always been productive spheres of overlapping influence, especially in contemporary Western performance. […] With its liminal status as both real and not, as ephemeral and transformational, theatre has long been a site where misfits and the marginalized have congregated. Sexual minorities have found among theatre people a generous acceptance sometimes not available in dominant culture's more constrained, conforming way of life.

In *Out On Stage* (1999, p. 15), Sinfield consecrates the union between theatre and homosexuality for one more reason: theatre is a powerful institution, an event that takes place in front of an audience. The representation of gay people on stage, more than in other literary genres, has a great impact on society, in that the relationship between the audience and the characters is not mediated by a narrator. Therefore, the Nation, the Church, political and economic institutions have always been concerned about it and have either censored or encouraged it.

The following sections will deal with homosexuality and its cultural representation from the perspective of British legislation and censorship. The first sections will focus on the 20th

century, whereas the last sections will deal with the 21st century, in a first attempt to reorganise the new trend in British gay drama in the new millennium.

3.2.1 Legislation and censorship in the past

Gay people did not have an easy life in the UK in the past and this is reflected in the legislation and cultural production in which they are portrayed. Male homosexuality was first criminalised in the UK with The Buggery Act of 1533, passed by Parliament during the reign of Henry VIII. At that time, homosexuals (then called sodomites) were persecuted throughout the British Empire and punished by death. The Buggery Act was not repealed until 1828, when it was replaced by the equally homophobic Offence Against the Person Act, under which homosexuality continued to be punishable by death.

As for the stage, in 1737 the Licensing Act stipulated that all new plays had to be approved and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain before being performed, censoring any plays that depicted homosexuality. However, if censorship was introduced to eradicate homosexuality from the theatre, then it was a complete fiasco as it helped to make theatre a queer place (Sinfield 1999, p. 29), that is a place concealedly teeming with and supporting queer people. As a matter of fact, the Lord Chamberlain's control failed to banish homosexuality from the stage, but only made it more latent. Therefore, gay men were portrayed on stage in a covert way, which was also reflected in the language that they used, as they avoided typical features of gayspeak (i.e. gender inversion) to circumvent censorship. The Licensing Act was weakened in 1843, when the powers of the Lord Chamberlain were restricted with the Theatre Act, according to which he could only ban the performance of plays if he felt that "it is fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do." In 1857, the Obscene Publication Act (or Lord Campbell's Act) banned obscene publications and empowered the police to search premises where obscene publications were kept for sale or distribution. This act was weakened only in 1959, when the Obscene Publications Act established that a person should not be convicted if the publication was "in the interest of science, literature, art or learning."

The death penalty for homosexual acts was finally repealed in 1861 with the Offences Against the Person Act, which punished gay people with hard labour for between ten years and life. The penalty was weakened in 1885 with the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which

established that any male person who publicly or privately committed, participated in, or was a party to the commission of, or procured, or attempted to procure the commission of any act of homosexuality was liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour. This law remained in force until 1967, when the Wolfenden Report was published (but only in England and Wales), which decriminalised gay sex in private between consenting adults over the age of 21, with the exception of the armed forces. The same legislation was also passed in Scotland under the name Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act, but only in 1980, and in Northern Ireland in 1982 under the name Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order.

Sinfield (1999, pp. 44-45) notes that while some gay playwrights in the past had the financial support and prestige to challenge stage censorship and to make a change in the portrayal of gay men, they preferred to collaborate with the system as is common among privileged people. However, he also acknowledges that it would be ahistorical to condemn these playwrights, for they operated in a pre-Stonewall era (i.e. before 1969), when homosexuality was illegal and its representation strictly forbidden.

Stage censorship was definitely abolished in the UK only in 1968 with the Theatres Act. The following year, 1969, while in the U.S.A transgender and gender-nonconforming people were among those resisting arrest in a police bar raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village, the first British activist group, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, was formed in the UK, and in 1970 the Gay Liberation Front was established in London. In 1972, the first Gay Pride was celebrated in the same city. In 1981, AIDS was also registered in the UK. In response to the spread of the virus and the mistaken belief that it was solely due to a homosexual lifestyle, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher took a step backwards and introduced Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988, which established that local authorities could not "(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (https://www.legislation.gov.UK/). In protest against Section 28, *OutRage!*[17] was formed in

[17] *OutRage!* is an all-volounteer, non-hierarchical, democratic group founded in 1990 by 35 queer activists to oppose a wave of homophobic murders and the increasing number of queer people arrested and convicted for consenting, victimless behaviour. Its official website claims that the group's main goals were "assert the dignity and human rights of queers; fight homophobia, discrimination and violence directed against us; affirm our right to sexual freedom, choice and self-determination" (http://outrage.org.UK/). The group was active until 2011, holding the record as the longest surviving queer organisation in the world.

1990 to oppose the injustices faced by gay men and lesbians. A "kiss-in" was staged at Piccadilly Circus against the arrests of gay men who displayed physical affection in public (Dolan 2010, p. 10). Section 28 was abolished in England only in 2003. In 1994, the Conservative MP Edwina Currie introduced an amendment to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts from 21 to 16, bringing it in line with the age for heterosexual acts. The vote was defeated and age of consent for gay men was instead lowered to 18. The age of consent for lesbians was not set.

3.2.2 Dramatic production (20th century)

In *Not in Front of the Audience*, De Jongh (1992, p. viii) claims that he will attempt to explore "a neglected terrain" to trace back the history of homosexuality on London and New York stages. He acknowledges that the stereotypical characterisation of gay people emerged in the 1920s around the figure of the Elizabethan, cultured, and wealthy city aristocrat who appeared in late-sixteenth-century satires. In the first half of the 20th century, homosexuality was considered a crime and a disease and was portrayed on stage as an object of ridicule and contempt. Homosexuality could not be openly addressed on stage because the Theatre Act (1843) and The Obscene Publication Act (1857) were still in force. Therefore, gay people could only be characterised through an implicit "homosexual iconography, a series of signifiers and codes that corroborate what the play texts could only imply, […] a series of signs and words alerted audiences to a character's true sexuality" (De Jongh 1992, p. 3). The gay character was extremely effeminate, concerned with his physical aspect and manners; he was artistic and emotional, and his diction was camp, that is artificial, exaggerated. The aesthete Oscar Wilde and his literary production were a recurring source of inspiration for dramatists portraying gay characters. The homosexual on stage was an outcast, a threatening figure to the family life, attempting to convert heterosexual men to the homosexual practice. Oscar Wilde is also the main character of one[18] of the plays included in the corpus, and his dandy figure is a source of inspiration in many others[19].

As a result of the cultural revolution in the 1960s, however, a new polemical theatre, epitomised by John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), established itself, reflecting the

[18] Bartlett, N. (2020). *In Extremis.* Oberon Books.
[19] Gill, P. (2002). *Original Sin.* Faber and Faber.

anger of the new generation struggling against the torpors of "ancient" Britain. Nevertheless, censorship against the portrayal of homosexuality was still in force, and playwrights who wished to include homosexual elements in their plays had to do so implicitly. After 1956, and before the Theatres Act (1968) that abolished stage censorship in the UK, playwrights no longer accepted the stereotypical portrayal of gay men. The gradual discard of the old stereotypical and evil gay character was made possible by the gradual development of UK government subsidies for the performing arts through the Arts Council, which encouraged fringe theatre, which was not solely commercial in its aims, as it was on the side of the counterculture. A cultural revolution took place, epitomised by the formation of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (1969) and the Gay Liberation Front (1970), which rejected the reduction of homosexuality to a mere few traits. Censorship was relaxed by the Theatres Act (1968), and the negative myths by which homosexuals were judged began to be eroded. These changes on stage altered the way gay men were perceived in public, and a gay subculture developed in clubs, bars and bath-houses. A new gay hero was born. This polemical gay theatre was epitomised by the Gay Sweatshop, a company formed during the 1975 Almost Free Theatre's gay season, which had a positive impact on social attitudes towards homosexuality in Britain, as highlighted by Osment (1989, p. vii), who stated that the Gay Sweatshop "has affected the lives of countless individuals and has played a significant role in changing attitudes towards homosexuality within the world of theatre and within society as a whole."

In a time of relative splendour for the cultural production dealing with homosexuality, the first case of AIDS was also recorded in Britain. The spread of the worldwide epidemic was exploited by those who did not accept homosexuality and associated the virus with the biblical sin of same-sex love. Homosexuality and gay people were again demonised. De Jongh (1992, p. 170) acknowledges that "drug-addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals and prisoners are the supposed and revealed disseminators (of the virus). Each of these constituencies is perceived as a component of a stigmatised and anti-social minority group: the dangerous Other." For this reason, Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 banned the promotion of homosexuality, which was seen as a threat to health and family life. The impact of Section 28 on the arts was fear, and Councils withdrew from funding homosexual products. Despite this, homosexuality did not disappear completely from fiction, but rather was reinterpreted. Plays dealing mainly with AIDS were staged, especially in the USA, where the virus had a far greater impact than in Britain; in the UK, on the other hand, as Lucas (1994, p. 64) notes, "theatre […]

has made a very poor response to the subject and challenge of AIDS." Plays dealing with homosexuality focused mainly on the pursuit of lust, love and passion; deeper analyses of the legal, social and cultural issues affecting the homosexual man were rarely undertaken.

Against the backdrop of the social events occurring in the 1980s, the "nervous Nineties", as they were called by Billington (2021, p. 7), saw the development of New Writing. In 1995, Sarah Kane published *Blasted*, embodying the new wave of an angry young generation rebelling against the past and present world. David Eldridge (2003, p. 55) attributes this anger to the shattering of "youthful optimism":

> a generation that had grown up in the UK fearing the five-minute warning, watching the Berlin Wall come down, that had experimented with E and club culture, was finding a voice. This generation had had its youthful optimism pickled by the new horrors that visited their imaginations in the shape of the atrocities in the Balkans and by a sense of outrage at the erosion of the UKs notion of community and society by the mean-spirited Thatcher regency and Major malaise. We responded to that shifting culture with dismay and anger.

It was an era marked by the absence of faith, in which a new generation was searching for something to believe in. New writers rejected the materialism of Thatcherism as much as the formal models of their predecessors. The prevailing model was "In-Yer-Face theatre", described in Sierz's (2000, p. 4) book of the same name as "a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm." Playwrights exploited the new freedoms of expression through an experimental language. In this decade, probably because of the great attention paid to issues of gender and sexuality, it was time for British gay theatre to move away from the margins and into the mainstream. Homosexuality was no longer the main subject of plays, but was instead incorporated into a wider discourse.

As will be discussed in the next sections, following Fragkou's (2018) argument, the social events occurring in the 20th century solidified twenty-first-century impressions of precarity, which are paramount in British contemporary plays; she enumerates

> the exponential increase of refugees from the Middle East and Africa trying to cross European borders and drowning at sea or *en route* to Germany or the UK; the divisive 2016 referendum in Britain which saw 51.9 per cent of voters deciding in favour of leaving the EU and was accompanied by fierce anti-immigration sentiment; the increasing warnings

> about climate change and environmental disasters across the world; several terrorist attacks in major European cities such as Paris, Brussels, London and Barcelona; the outcomes of austerity practices across Europe that threaten essential human needs such as health care, housing, pensions and education and the intensification of nationalist discourses driven by ideologies of national sovereignty which is often presented as a key component in perceptions of identity and belonging.

These events have helped to create what she calls a "social ecology of precarity" that includes "issues of dispossession, intolerance, fear, xenophobia, uncertainty and disillusionment for the future of humans and the planet" (Fragkou 2018, p. 3). Moreover, following Berlant's argument, intimacy's "potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress a life seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability" (Berlant 1998, p. 282). Intimacy is also intertwined with sexual politics, which is reflected in the fact that a significant number of queer plays are now performed on mainstream stages such as the Royal Court Theatre and the West End.

3.3 British gay drama: 21st century

3.3.1 Legislation and censorship

Eighteen years after the last Labour Party victory in the UK, Tony Blair was elected Prime Minister in 1997 and retained his power for ten years, until 2007. The New Labour government was widely perceived as a new era for Britain, a country referred to as Cool Britannia, based on multiculturalism and an open society. In 2000, the Scottish Government abolished Section 28 of the Local Government Act, and the Boyden Report, commissioned by Arts Council, led to a huge increase in theatre investment. The following year, the government lifted the ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual people serving in the armed forces and lowered the age of consent for gay and bisexual men from 18 to 16. In 2002, same-sex couples were given the right to adopt, and in 2003 Section 28 was finally abolished in England. Therefore, even as late as the beginning of the 21st century, homosexuality did not pass for a "legitimate public culture" in the UK (Mills 2006, p. 254) because Section 28 prohibited its promotion. The 2004 Civil Partnership Act allowed same-sex couples to enter into legally binding partnerships, similar to marriage, and in the same year transgender people gained full recognition of their gender with

the Gender Recognition Act. In 2007, a new Labour Prime Minister was elected, Gordon Brown, who served until 2010. In 2008, The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act established that same-sex couples would be recognised as the legal parents of children conceived with donated sperm, eggs or embryos.

While the first decade of the 2000s saw the victory of the Labour Party, the 2010s witnessed the succession of Conservative Prime Ministers, who "immediately launched a programme of economic austerity that shrunk the public realm" (Billington 2021, p. 175). David Cameron was elected in May 2010, when the Equality Act was passed, which established equal treatment in access to employment and private and public services regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. However, the law allows religious and faith institutions in England, Scotland and Wales to refuse to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony if it goes against their beliefs. In 2013, the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act allowed same-sex couples in England and Wales to marry, as did Scotland the following year with the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act. Northern Ireland did not recognise same-sex marriage until 2020, with The Northern Ireland Act. Campaigns against homophobia were launched, and in 2016 Prince William appeared on the cover of the gay magazine *Attitude*, declaring that no one should be bullied because of their sexuality. The same year, Conservative leader Theresa May was elected Prime Minister. In 2017, the Policing and Crime Act pardoned all historic cases of criminal convictions for gross indecency against men. In 2019, the Conservative leader Boris Johnson was appointed Prime Minister. There are no other relevant changes affecting the lives of gay people until 2020.

3.3.2 Dramatic production (2000-2020)

The new millennium has seen important social and legal changes for gay people, which are reflected in the theatrical production of the period, which will be discussed more in detail in the next sections. The 2000s were characterised by a Capitalist approach to Art. The Arts Council funded encouraging programmes that could identify, develop and produce new, young writers. The New Labour state funded the arts with a rare generosity after the Boyden Report of 2000, and British theatre experienced a "golden age" in the new millennium, both artistically and economically. The result was a boom in New Writing in the first decade of the new millennium,

that is "plays which are contemporary in their language, contemporary in their subject matter and often contemporary in their attitude to theatre form (all experiments in dramatic structure implicitly question the past forms of theatrical storytelling)" (Middeke *et al.* 2011, p. ix). Sierz (2011, p. 64) adds that New Writing was characterised by

> rawness, directness and punchy brevity, […] and that not all New Writing is contemporary because in British culture, nostalgia sells. Many plays represent a flight from the contemporary, a refusal to look reality in the eye. Some plays are provocative for their insistent strong language, taboo-itching content and the way they are staged. The best New Writing always divides opinion and leads to controversy.

Following his argument, the 2000s witnessed the rise of the "teen angst play", in which young people appear both fragile and resilient (2011, pp. 189-90).

The renaissance of British theatre under Tony Blair was thwarted by the Iraq War, which heralded the decline of the Prime Minister, and the establishment of an oppositional theatre, thanks in part to the funds the theatre received from the government. By 2005, the invasion and occupation of Iraq had, according to Megson, "triggered an upsurge of political theatre in Britain unparalleled since the Vietnam War" (2005, p. 369). In the case of Iraq, Billington argues, it was the illegality of the invasion that made "political theatre […] a necessity rather than an optional extra" (2009, p. 392). Political drama became a vital necessity, and a factual theatre, also known as *verbatim* theatre, revived. Sutcliff acknowledged that in 2009 "if you want to see something that reflects real British lives now, you will probably need to switch off the television and head to the theatre." Alongside Iraq War, Britain's military involvement in Afghanistan was also crucial to the resurgence of a factual drama. Nevertheless, alongside the resurgence of fact, satire also made a comeback. In the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7, Islamist terrorism established itself as the West's new antagonist, leading to social fragmentation and cultural segregation, which was also evident on stage. Terrorism helped create what sociologists have described as the contemporary "society of fear" (Bude 2018) or "culture of fear" (Furedi 2018). Tony Blair's utopia of multiculturalism and an open society had thus not reduced racism in Britain, particularly in the years following 9/11 (Wessendorf *et al.* 2010). Globalisation led to increased concerns about cultural identity, and ideas such as migration, multiculturalism, Englishness and the alienation of segregated communities were tackled. The discourse surrounding the Brexit referendum led to the "resurgence of nationalism, a pronounced border

mentality, and an island mentality that went hand in hand with nostalgia for former imperial greatness" (Korte *et al.* 2021, p. 8). Typical themes of New Writing were also a critique of Thatcherism and capitalism, the digital world with its virtual communities and social networks (Facebook was launched in 2004, Twitter in 2006), nuclear, military, terrorist and ecological disasters, the threat of climate change, global warming and the melting of the polar ice caps, the culture of fear, religious fanaticism and radicalism, the social problems of poverty, unemployment, the decline of heavy industry, violence, and the domestic problems of abuse and infidelity. British society under New Labour was hit by the financial crisis of 2008–2009, which led to economic decline with rising unemployment, precarious jobs and homelessness. Socio-economic disparities widened significantly, making the UK "one of the most unequal societies in the developed world" (Thane 2018, p. 448). This gloomy atmosphere is underlined by Dan Rebellato (2017), who acknowledges that 21st-century British theatre eschews visual representations of violence in favour of more experimental choices that tend towards the "apocalyptic"; some plays in the corpus (e.g. Ridley, *Mercury Fur*, 2005) depict post-apocalyptic worlds of ruins

> where any sense of safety and morality has been depleted: hospitals are slaughterhouses, people commit suicide *en masse* while the world is about to be bombed, […] everyone is under the influence of […] a highly psychotropic drug which brings amnesia and loosens their morals so they are able to cope with reality. (Fragkou 2018, p. 61)

Precarity is a common sentiment that permeates 21st-century British theatre (Aragay *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, in the 2000s, family becomes a central theme, both in real life and on stage. Family and marriage are a much discussed topic due to the precariousness of the traditional family and the development of new, extended families, which include single motherhood, step-parenthood, and queer civil relationships. Alongside the family, the crisis of masculinity is a common theme in 21st-century British theatre, and the representation of male and female homosexuality is an important issue. Such portrayals include taboo areas such as paedophilia and child abuse, as well as incestuous relationships. Therefore, although writing in the new millennium is heavily political, the plays have become increasingly introspective, where

> a view of modern subjectivity has been attached to a sense of community; this sense of society and responsible interaction has also never been seen apart from the vital interests of the imaginative potential of human individuality. (Middeke *et al.* 2011, p. xv)

Willy (2009, p. 145) claims that "sexuality in the late 1990s tended to be equated more with pessimism and destruction than with the creation of positive identities," and this tendency will be explored further in the next section. He adds that British theatre in the 2000s saw the rise of Asian and black writers, where the stigmatisation of their own sexuality is exacerbated by racist aspects, as will be discussed below. Xenophobia and racism against black people have led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, which protests incidents of police brutality and any racially motivated violence against black people. The movement began in 2013 but reached global headlines and gained international attention during the 2020 global George Floyd protests following his murder by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. Precariousness has been exacerbated by the spreading of the coronavirus disease, which has been limiting the lives of people around the world in every way since the end of 2019. It should be remembered that in the 21st century

> no new wave or easily identifiable movement of writers has emerged, leaving an uneasy climate where by 2004 […] the state of New Writing was very publicly called into question. […] The perspective was that no new movement seemed to have arrived that could shake up what had now become the old guard. (Lane 2010, pp. 28-30)

In the following section, new trends noticed in the corpus of plays under scrutiny will be discussed.

3.4 New trends

In this work, it is customary to analyse the corpus (*GayCorpus2000-2020*, see *Chapter 6* for more details) by dividing the sixty-one plays it contains into four groups of five years each, with the exception of the last group (i.e. 2015-2020), which includes plays published in a 6-year timespan, as little was produced in 2019-2020, probably due to Covid-19[20]. The following data are only intended to show common trends in the corpus. The data in this chapter should therefore not be generalised, as it is humanly impossible to cover the whole 21st-century theatrical production portraying gay men in the UK. Indeed, there are certainly many plays that were staged but never published as written texts, as well as plays that could not be found anywhere and were therefore excluded from the corpus.

[20] For this reason, data have been normalised throughout this work.

The data discussed in this section were obtained after reading the corpus several times and identifying common trends in the plays; recurring elements were noted and counted manually for quantitative analysis. Qualitative interpretations of the data are also given, but the reader should bear in mind that published research on these issues is sparse if not non-existent, and that this section is intended only to provide a cultural background for the investigation discussed in the next chapters. It is beyond the scope of this section to provide an insightful critical and literary analysis of the data, as the nature of this study is mainly linguistic.

3.4.1 Publication dates

The first trend noted has to do with the publication dates of the plays included in the corpus. It appears that the number of publications of plays portraying gay men in the UK has gradually decreased over the last twenty years, as is shown in *Figure 3.1*. Again, this statement should be treated very cautiously given the nature of this research.

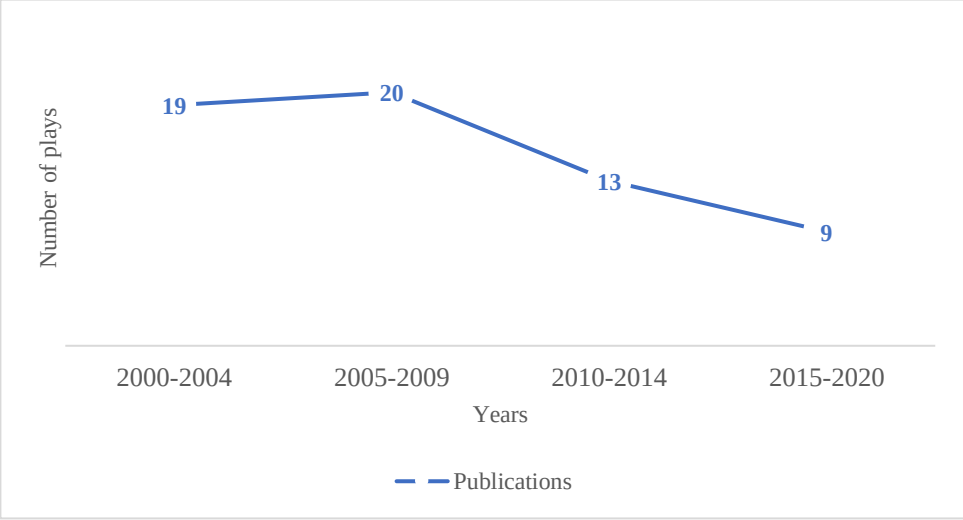

Figure 3.1 Number of plays portraying gay men in GayCorpus2000-2020

The figure shows that in the first decade of the new millennium, 20 plays were staged and published as written texts; this was followed by a decline of -35% in the following lustrum, when 13 plays were published in the first five years of the 2010s; the decreasing trend is confirmed in the last group (i.e. 2015-2020), when only 9 plays portraying gay men were published, with a decrease of -45% compared to the 2005-2009 period. Nevertheless, it is still

early to say with certainty that gay men are gradually disappearing from stage. However, the data seem to show that in recent years there is a new trend towards not labelling characters on the basis of their sexualities or, in other words, sexuality is gradually becoming less and less inferable from the characters' words, as playwrights do not indicate characters' homosexuality in stage directions, as they do not with heterosexual characters. This trend is in line with the general inclusion of homosexuality into the mainstream culture, which had already begun, albeit to a lesser extent, in the 1990s. As Wyllie (2009, p. 110) predicted in the early 2000s,

> the gay play may not have been completely absorbed into a new mainstream of poly-sexuality, but the more successful works of the mid-1990s and onwards featuring gay and lesbian issues have done so by treating these as part of a broader spectrum, a critique of society that extends beyond homosexuality.

Homosexuality, thus, seems to be gradually leaving the throne of foregroundedness and becoming one aspect among many others. Moreover, the significant dramatic production in the first decade of the 2000s could be a reaction to political and legislative issues (see section *3.3.1*): after almost twenty years, New Labourism won the elections with Tony Blair (1997), which remained the first British party with Gordon Brown until 2010, when Conservatism won the elections with David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson. Under the New Labour Party government, many laws were passed that improved British gay people's lives, as explained above. This may have led to an increasing enthusiasm in portraying homosexuality on stage. As will be discussed below, these social issues are reflected in the themes that shape the corpus.

3.4.2 Venues

The venues where plays are performed, especially those with queer content, cannot be taken for granted, and they have been visualised in *Figure 3.2*:

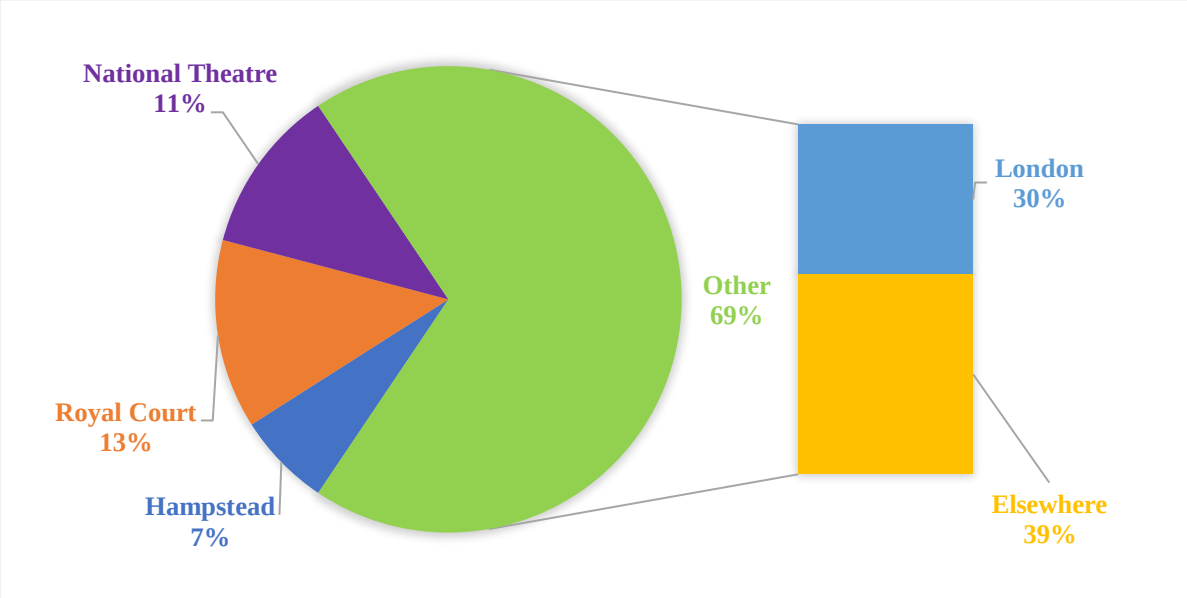

Figure 3.2 Venues where the plays premiered

As is shown in *Figure 3.2*, the plays included in the corpus premièred mainly in the capital city, London, which is not surprising considering that London has always showed a great response to queer activities and, as mentioned in the previous sections, to struggles for queer rights. What might surprise the reader, however, is the fact that gay plays in the new millennium were not only performed in gay clubs, as was common in the previous decades, but many of them reached the Fringe, Off West End (i.e. Hampstead, 7%; Royal Court, 13%) and, more remarkably, national venues (i.e. National Theatre, 11%). Other venues (69%) include theatres in London (30%; e.g. Bush Theatre, Chelsea Theatre, Pleasance Theatre, Soho Theatre, Stag Theatre, The Old Vic) and theatres in other cities (39%), both in the UK and abroad (e.g. Klub Paradise – Warsaw, The Theatre Royal Plymouth, Drum Theatre – Plymouth, Cambridge Arts Theatre, Liverpool Playhouse, Doornroosje Poppodium – Nijmegen, The Netherlands). It should be borne in mind that the prohibition to promote homosexuality – all the more so if on national stages – was repealed only in 2003 in England. These data were obtained by considering the venues where the plays were first performed, as is recorded in the paratexts of the plays themselves. The data do not include the venues of repeat performances.

3.4.3 Geographical settings

Leaving these extradiegetic considerations aside, the focus will now shift to intradiegetic aspects such as space, time and common themes identified in the corpus. *Figure 3*.3 visualises the intradiegetic geographical settings noticed in the plays under scrutiny. As it can be noticed from the figure, there are more geographical settings (77) than plays (61); this is due to the fact that some plays are set in more than one place.

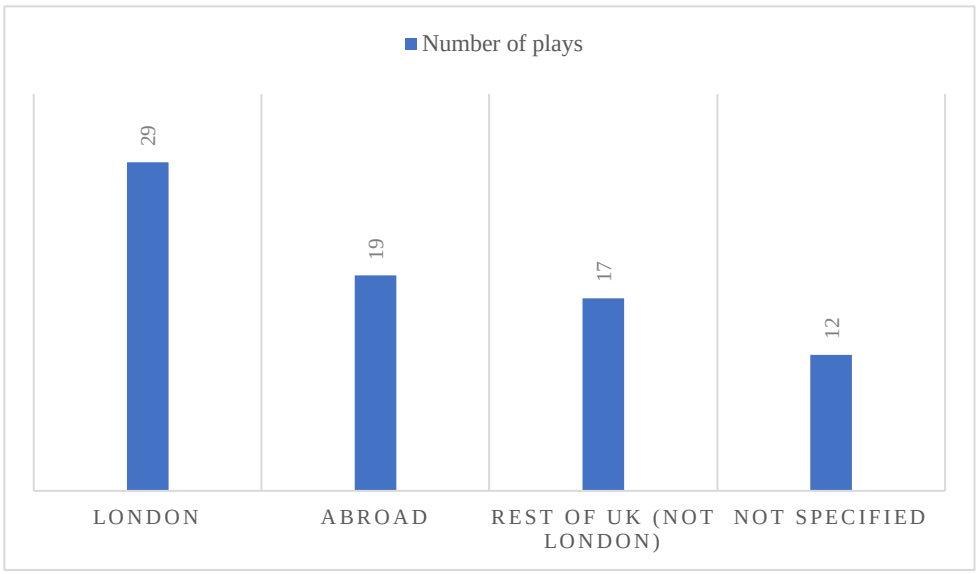

Figure 3.3 Number of plays for each geographical setting

Most of the plays – i.e. 29 – are set in London and portray a metropolitan gay lifestyle. This persistent London-centrism could be criticised, but it could also be justified on the grounds that gay characters have many more opportunities to express their sexuality in such a vibrant city (e.g. Hall, *Flamingos*, 2001; Cleugh, *F***ing Games*, 2001; Oparei, *Crazyblackmythaf***in'self*, 2002; Hall, *Hardcore*, 2004, just to mention some). However, this does not mean that plays set in London portray homosexuality more positively than the others; indeed, London is also a place of personal loss and death (e.g. Ridley, *Vincent River*, 2000; Ridley, *Mercury Fur*, 2005; Moran, *Telstar*, 2005). 17 plays are set in Northern England and 19 are set abroad (i.e. Amsterdam, Belfast, Bombay, Bratislava, Florence, New York, Paris, Vienna, South Africa), while 12 plays are not localised at all. The plays that are not set in London often feature gay men struggling with their sexuality as a result of the more socially restrictive environment surrounding them, both in British rural areas (e.g. Gill, *The York Realist*, 2001; Cowan, *Smilin' Through*, 2005, to name but a few), and in other, more conservative countries (e.g. Baker, *The Prostitution Plays*, 2000; Baker, *Prisoners of sex*, 2006); others – especially the plays set in Eastern Europe – portray homosexual prostitution

and pornography, thus reiterating fixed stereotypes (e.g. Baker, *The Prostitution Plays*, 2000; Baker, *Prisoners of Sex*, 2006). The different geographical settings in the plays are often reflected in the use of accents and dialects by fictional gay men, as will be discussed in *Chapter 4*.

3.4.4 Chronological settings

A further aspect worth analysing is intradiegetic time, as is shown in *Figure 3.4.* As for geographical settings, there are more settings than plays; this is due to the fact that many plays are set in more places.

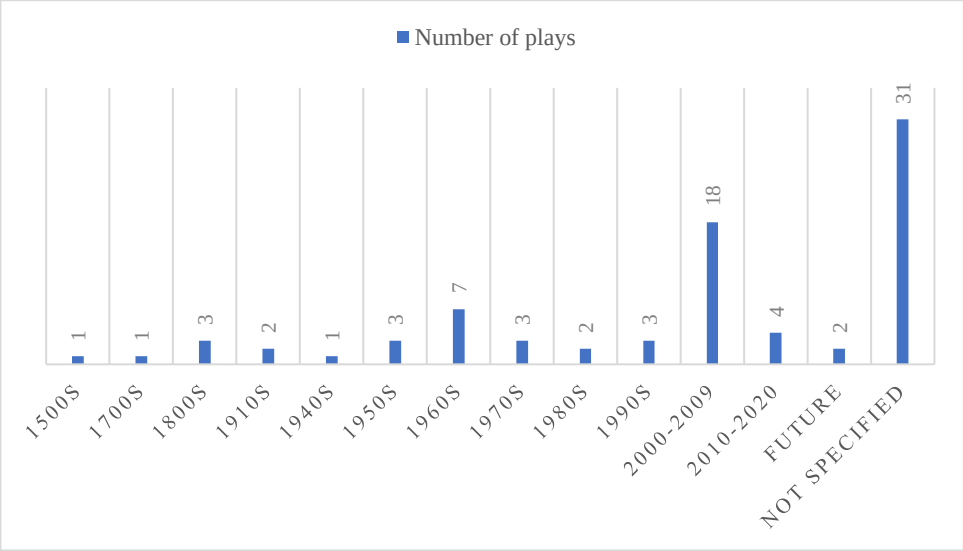

Figure 3.4 Number of plays for each chronological setting

Most of the plays are set in the 21st century (22 plays), if we disregard the "not specified" column, which requires special mention. This could confirm the trend noted by Middeke *et al.* (2011) and discussed in the previous sections, according to which New Writing in the new millennium has produced plays that are contemporary in many of their aspects, such as their language, themes and settings.

It is interesting to note that although the corpus contains only plays staged and published from 2000 onwards, the intradiegetic chronological settings predate this year in most cases, in some cases going back as far as the 16th century (1 play; i.e. Sher, *The Giant*, 2007), 18th century (1 play; i.e. Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, 2001), and 19th century (3 plays; i.e. Bartlett, *In Extremis*, 2000; Gill, *Original Sin*, 2002; Wright, *Rattigan's Nijinsky*, 2011). A fairly consistent number of plays are set in the 1960s (7 plays; e.g. Bent, *Prick Up Your Ears*,

2009; Bradfield *et al.*, *A Hard Rain*, 2014; Elyot, *Twilight Song*, 2017), a turning point in queer people's history that delineates pre- and post-Stonewall eras, when homosexuality moved from outright illegality to partial legalisation. Plays set in the 1960s usually show how gay lives were affected by the social changes occurring in the UK during that decade. It is also common to find gay plays whose plots develop in different time periods (e.g. Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, 2001; Campbell, *The Pride*, 2008; Jongh, *The Plague Over England*, 2008; Barlett, O*r You Could Kiss Me*, 2010; Harvey, *Canary*, 2010; Wright, *Rattigan's Nijinsky*, 2011). This is a way to portray diachronically what being gay has meant over the decades and to engage with political, legal, social and cultural changes taking place in the British society.

The "not specified" column includes plays without a specific chronological setting. Half of the plays in the corpus (31 plays), for instance, take place in a chronological void. Intradiegetic time could also be inferred from references scattered throughout the plays themselves, but *Figure 3.4* only includes data provided by the playwrights in the paratexts; this choice was made in the interest of precision and objectivity of the present study. However, after reading the plays where the chronological settings are not given, I had the impression that many of them are set in a contemporary society, whether because of the language used or the descriptions of places, clothes and lifestyles.

The absence of time and the chronological setting in a remote era, at least in many cases, are not to be considered as a desire to escape reality and take refuge in chronologically exotic worlds. All the plays in the corpus are firmly rooted in reality, dealing with social, public issues and mixing them with privacy and intimacy, in a state of eternal precariousness. Generalising Sanders's (2006, p. 129) argument on the appropriation of Victorian elements that allegedly occurs in the theatre of the new millennium,

> the Victorian era proves […] ripe for appropriation because it throws into relief many of the overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations of law and authority; science and religion; the postcolonial legacies of empire.

It can be considered a strategy to indirectly reflect on major issues of present-day society, thus making comparisons between the past and present conditions of gay people.

3.4.5 Common topics

The previous section has paved the way for the analysis of thematical issues in the corpus. Buckle (2018, p. 204) claims that

> over the course of the previous decades homosexuality had systematically been explored, defined, secured, and affirmed; it was now being presented in all its diversity. […] it also signalled the arrival of sex, drugs, and general misconduct.

The common topics of the 21st century British plays depicting gay men are visualised in *Figure 3.5.*

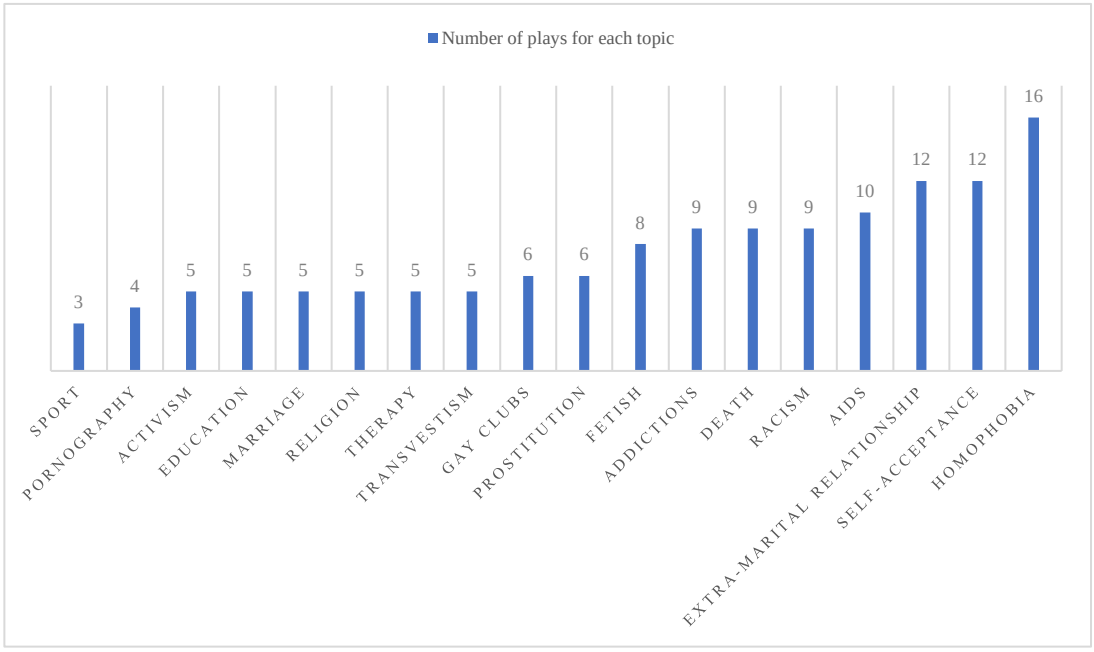

Figure 3.5 Number of plays for each topic

Figure 3.5 shows that the plays in the corpus deal with a considerable number of different themes and that most of them approach homosexuality from a precarious perspective, i.e. considering the problems that gay men face, both as a result of their supposedly permissive attitudes and the criminal behaviour of others. Homosexuality is portrayed as problematic in the sense that it is a condition that brings with it many problems, either public or private or both, for the person concerned. 16 plays deal with homophobia, the most recurring theme in the corpus, often leading to death – i.e. hate crimes, assassinations and suicide – which is dealt with in 9 plays. 12 plays deal also with the struggle with self-acceptance, i.e. problematising one's homosexuality, which is still seen as a problem to be accepted by both the individual concerned

and others. Self-acceptance is often tackled in plays that have the structure of a coming-of-age story, i.e. the protagonist's transition from youth to adulthood, which often, but not necessarily, corresponds to the transition from *in-the-closetedness* to *out-of-the-closetedness*. The path to self-acceptance is often associated with the use of drugs, alcohol (addictions, 7%) and destructive behaviours (e.g. promiscuity, unprotected sexual intercourse), but also with the transition from secrecy to *out-of-the-closetedness*. Another important topic in the plays is AIDS, which has always been a frequent theme in gay literature, especially after the 1980s – and more so in the U.S.A than in the UK – when the virus spread worldwide and was wrongly labelled the "gay plague", as it was believed to be the result of a gay lifestyle. AIDS is often associated with prostitution, pornography and promiscuity. The plays tend to discourage promiscuity, which is portrayed in 12 plays (i.e. extra-marital affairs), i.e. plays that deal with love triangles, often as a result of virtual gay chats or chance meetings in gay clubs. Promiscuity is implicitly discouraged since it often leads to the separation of the original couple and/or health problems. Racism is another major topic (9 plays), due to the increasing number of British playwrights with non-European ethnicity, migrants or children of migrants (e.g. Ash Kotak, DeObia Oparei, Rikki Beadle-Blair, Tanika Gupta). As can be seen in *Figure 3.5*, most plays deal with sexual intercourse, both in the form of private sex (e.g. extra-marital intercourse, 12 plays; fetish, 8 plays) and consumerist sex (e.g. pornography, prostitution); echoing Ravenhill's seminal play *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), sex in the 21st century is often reduced to a mere transaction. Other common themes, especially in plays that treat homosexuality from a diachronic perspective, are aversion therapy (5 plays), gay marriage (5 plays) and gay rights activism (5 plays), i.e. fundamental turning points in the history of queer people and their public rights. This kind of plays allow the playwrights to embark on a reflection on these issues by acknowledging the differences existing in the different eras, with a consequent change in the characters' attitudes towards their and the others' homosexuality.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has merely intended to provide an overview of the social changes affecting the laws and theatrical production portraying gay people in Britain. As has been extensively repeated, this chapter is solely aimed at providing the historical background for the analysis of the gay characters and their fictional linguistic varieties in the following chapters.

The chapter has first briefly dealt with British gay drama in the 20th century, which is strictly connected with the theatrical production portraying gay men in the new millennium. Then, it has provided a more insightful overview of the 21st century British gay drama, taking into account the social and legislative changes occurring in the UK and affecting the representation of homosexuality on stage. The last part of this chapter has been aimed at tracing some common trends in the corpus under scrutiny, with the intention of providing a first attempt to study British gay drama in the last 20 years or so. At the best of my knowledge and belief, there is no research that has extensively discussed gay drama in the latest years, certainly not in the 2010s, and all the conclusions that can be drawn are only based on the observation of the sixty-one plays included in the corpus.

As was claimed by Gambone (1999, pp. 331-337), "after a necessary period of 'gay literature' being a very specific and limited thing, it's now branching out to encompass all sorts of new possibilities…gay writers shouldn't be limited to writing only about gay characters or themes." If on the one hand the number of plays portraying gay men seems to be decreasing over the last years, which is a signal that the characters' homosexuality – similarly to heterosexuality – is increasingly made implicit in the plays, on the other hand its representation on stage is still problematised, as most of the characters seem either to struggle to accept themselves as homosexuals, or to suffer from discrimination, or both. The portrayal of homosexuality on stage is thus strictly dependent on themes like self-acceptance, destructive behaviours (e.g. alcohol, promiscuity) and homophobia. Besides, most of the plays are contemporary, which is in line with New Writing, which has been in vogue since the previous decades. Nevertheless, there is a considerable number of plays that are set in the past, as a way to show the audience how homosexuality has been conceived of diachronically, thus making a comparison with the present situation. Geographically speaking, most of the plays are set in London and in peripheral towns in Northern England, which provides a representation of homosexuality both in urban and rural areas, with their peculiarities and differences.

After this historical chapter, which looks at British gay drama and identifies general trends that can be observed in 21st century British production, *Chapter 4* will zoom in the corpus and look at gay characters and their characterisation based on their age, social class, sociolect, *in-* or *out of the closetendess*, and role in the plays.

CHAPTER 4
GAY CHARACTERS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 has aimed to analyse the corpus with a lower magnification, by focusing on the plays in their entirety. This chapter, on the other hand, intends to zoom in the corpus to examine it with a medium magnification: the 61 plays included in the corpus will be analysed focusing on a specific aspect, i.e. the characterisation of fictional gay men. In line with *Chapter 3*, which has provided a general overview of 20th and 21st century British drama portraying gay men, this chapter aims to discuss common trends in the characterisation of gay *dramatis personae*, on the basis of their age, social origins, the roles that they have in the plays, the linguistic variety that they speak and their position regarding their sexuality – i.e. secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness*[21].

[21] Liang (1997) provides a definition of "coming out":
The term for the act of naming and accepting one's same-sex emotions is coming out, the shortened form of coming out of the closet. It is a metaphor for both the recognition to oneself and the act of disclosing to another one's homosexuality (p. 291).

Whenever these elements were not explicitly mentioned in the paratext[22], the stage directions or the text itself, I tried to deduce them in the way discussed in the next sections.

4.1.1 Character: definition

As is common in this study, key terms (e.g. sex, gender, sexuality; see *Chapter 2*) are quite problematic and deserve explanation. The word *character* itself is polysemous. It derives from the ancient Greek word χαρακτήρ, and according to the *O.E.D.* its first use in English dates back to the Restoration[23], although it became widely used only in the 18th century, after its appearance in Fielding's *Tom Jones*[24]. Today it is used not only in the context of printing, as was especially the case when the first movable-type printing presses were introduced in the 15th century, but also as a synonym for personality, i.e. "moral and mental qualities strongly developed or strikingly displayed" (*O.E.D.*); it also refers to "a person portrayed in a work of fiction, a drama, a film, a comic strip, etc." (*O.E.D.*). In literary studies, the former definition provided by the *O.E.D.* is commonly referred to as *characteristic*, whereas the latter, as *character*. The characters in the corpus may be entirely fictional or based on real-life people (e.g. Oscar Wilde in Bartlett, *In Extremis*, 2000); in either case, as is already clear, they must be treated as fictional constructs, and any generalisation about their characteristics should be restricted to the fictional worlds that they inhabit. In relation to linguistic studies that focus on fictional language – as is the case with this research – Kozloff (2000: 19) claims that "linguists who use film dialogue as accurate case studies of everyday conversation are operating on mistaken assumptions", thus my disclaimer.

4.1.2 Humanising vs de-humanising approach

Culpeper (2001) claims that there are two opposing ways of conceiving dramatic characters, on the basis of a humanising or de-humanising approach. The former considers characters either as representations of real people, or as real human *tout court* who live independently of the text.

[22] Paratext, in this case, refers to whatever may be included before or after the play itself (e.g. a brief introduction, the list of characters, to name but a few).
[23] Dryden, L. 1664. *Rival: "*He may be allow'd sometimes to Err, who undertakes to move so many Characters and Humours as are requisite in a Play." (*O.E.D.*)
[24] Fielding, H. *Tom Jones* : "Whatever Characters any...have for the Jest-sake personated...are now thrown off." (*O.E.D.*)

The second approach considers characters as a textual phenomenon strictly dependent on the text. Readers tend to participate in the lives and emotions of the characters, and imagine them as living people through what Coleridge (1817) called "suspension of disbelief." Eco (2009, p. 84) investigates why readers identify with characters so much, and maintains that

> fictional texts clearly speak of non-existing persons and events […]. In spite of that we do not take fictional assertions as lies. First of all, in reading a piece of fiction we subscribe a silent agreement with its author, who pretends that something is true and asks us to pretend to take it seriously. Secondly, we know that every fiction designs a possible world and all our judgements of truth and falsehood must concern that possible world.

As much as the humanising approach appeals to the most romantic and naïve reader, scholars who study characters and characterisation tend to follow the de-humanising approach, basing their research on textual evidence. Culpeper (2001, p. 9) states that "as far as the de-humanising approaches are concerned, one would have to admit that character is what we interpret from the text", and he supports his statement with Knights' words: "the critic, however far he may ultimately range, begins with the words of which a play is composed" (1963, p. 4). Similarly, van Peer (1989, p. 9) declares that

> the category of character is, for its very formation, dependent on linguistic forms. Character […] is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist. Thus, the linguistic organisation of a text will predetermine to a certain degree the kind of "picture" one may compose of a protagonist. Therefore, the particular *forms* by which this is achieved need to be studied in detail.

This research will follow the de-humanising approach as a way to examine the characterisation of gay characters (i.e. textual entities) through textual elements. I will, then, follow Eder[25] *et al.*'s position with regard to the ontological status of characters, according to whom "semiotic

[25] According to these scholars, there are four positions to the ontological status of characters:
(a) Semiotic theories consider characters to be signs or structures of fictional texts;
(b) Cognitive approaches assume that characters are representations of imaginary beings in the minds of the audience;
(c) Some philosophers believe that characters are abstract objects beyond material reality;
(d) Other philosophers contend that characters do not exist at all. (Eder *et al.* 2010, p. 8)

theories consider characters to be signs or structures of fictional texts" (2010, p. 8). Eder (2008) analyses characters – although he focuses on film characters, his research seems to be partly applicable to literary characters – and finds out that they can be examined from four different levels, which he defines "the clock of character", according to which characters can be analysed as artefacts, fictional beings, symbols and symptoms, based on key questions in aesthetic, mimetic, thematic, and causal respects:

> Firstly, they are fictitious beings with physical, mental, and social properties and relations. Secondly, they are artefacts with aesthetic structures, created by devices of certain media like film. Thirdly, they are symbols conveying higher, more abstract layers of meanings and themes. And finally, they are symptoms indicating socio-cultural circumstances of their production and reception. (no page)

Following his argument, and seen the nature of this study, characters will be treated as *fictional beings*, since this research seeks to investigate the features, behaviour and relations that characters exhibit as inhabitants of fictional worlds.

4.1.3 Characterisation

Characterisation is the "creation or construction of fictitious characters" (*O.E.D.*), i.e. the representation of people or other entities in fictional products (e.g. literary and audiovisual products, art). Since this research is based on drama, it will focus mainly on characterisation as it emerges from characters' words. Downes (1988, p. 226) states that characterisation "essentially involves the manifestation of inner states, desires, motives, intentions, beliefs, through action." In drama, characters reveal their and other characters' personalities in a face-to-face interaction. Culpeper (2001, p. 167) claims that "self-presentation occurs when a character […] provides explicit information about him or herself, and other-presentation occurs when a character […] provides explicit information about someone else." It follows that characters' words not only characterise themselves, but they can also say something about other characters. This is particularly true in what will be discussed in this chapter, where gay characters will be analysed according to what they say about themselves, but also to what others say about them.

Characterisation is a process that involves both the producer and the consumer. Consumers rely on their mental schemata and knowledge of the world when interpreting

characters; this means that they tend to treat fictional characters as real-world people, despite being aware of their fictional nature. Following Toolan's (1988) argument, the character impressions that consumers get is only partially attributable to the words that characters use; exploiting the metaphor of the iceberg, Toolan maintains that characters' words are only the observable part of character impressions; the submerged and deeper part of character impressions comes from the schemata that consumers already have when approaching the text. Not only do mental schemata refer to the knowledge of real world and people, but also the knowledge of types of fictional worlds and characters. The schemata together with textual cues (e.g. the words uttered by the characters) help constructing one's impression of the characters. Thus, textual factors and cognitive factors lead the consumer to have a particular impression of a character (Culpeper 2001). It follows that characterisation is at the same time a bottom-up or data-driven process – i.e. one's impression of a character is determined by external stimuli – and a top-down or conceptually-driven process – i.e. it is based on prior knowledge.

In addition to this, fictional characterisation is a two-layered process: consumers interpret characters' words as if they came out of their "mouths", yet characters' words are put into their mouths by the playwrights. Culpeper (2001, pp. 38-39) maintains that

> reading the dialogue of a play will involve us, minimally, in (1) constructing representations […] for all relevant characters, (2) constructing a representation of the situation the characters appear in, and (3) constructing a representation of what the writer of the text intends us to understand by the character discourse.

Therefore, as he suggests (2001, p. 38),

> the basic issue is not – as often in real life – "What did a speaker mean me to understand by their utterance in this particular context?", but "What did a playwright mean me to understand by one character's utterance to another in this particular context?"

Short (1989, p. 149) shows the two levels of dramatic discourse in the following way (*Figure 4.1*):

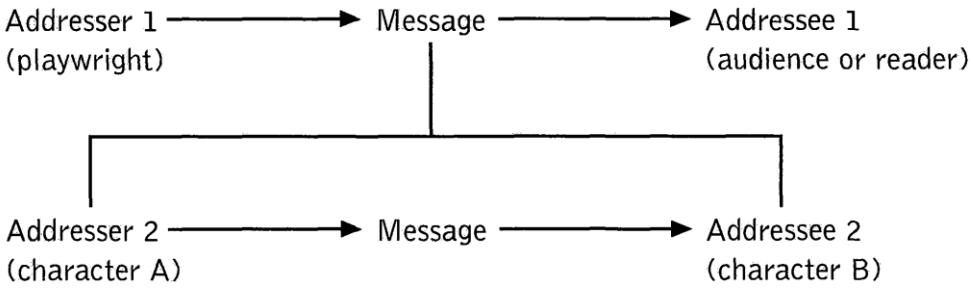

Figure 4.1 Discourse structure of drama (Short 1989, p. 149)

As it can be seen from *Figure 4.1*, the discourse structure in drama is double-layered in that the message that is explicitly exchanged between character A and character B is actually the surface representation of an implicit dialogue between the playwright and the audience. The playwright's message on a particular topic – e.g. homosexuality in this case – is thus conveyed through his/her characters' words. References to this double-layered nature of dramatic language will be made throughout the chapters; however, it would be out of the scope of this study to provide a consistent analysis of this specific feature which might rather fall within the field of Reception Studies.

4.2 Classification of gay characters

The classification of the fictional gay men in the corpus is quite a challenging task. This is due to the ficto-linguistic[26] nature of this study, which is based on speakers who cannot be personally interviewed to get useful information about their lives. The criteria for classifying gay characters are partly universal and partly specific. The former include those variables – e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety – that are universal to all socio- and ficto-linguistic studies; the latter refer to those variables – e.g. role in the play, secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness* – that are specific to the subject of this research. These variables are often implicit in the text, and a personal interpretation of clues scattered throughout the plays is fundamental in determining where to collocate a character. Sometimes characters cannot be classified at all, because the elements available for interpretation are extremely scarce. This is particularly true of social class, which, as will be discussed in the designated section, has proved to be particularly difficult to determine. Nevertheless, in most of the cases the information was explicitly provided either by the playwright in the paratext, or the characters in the text itself. In the

[26] For a deeper understanding of ficto-Linguistics, see section 5.1.3.

following sections, each variable will be discussed both independently and by crossing one or more variables in order to get more complex results.

4.2.1 Age

Figure 4.2 confirms the tendency that was discussed in *Chapter 2*, according to which Contemporary British playwrights tend to be more interested in portraying the new, young generation.

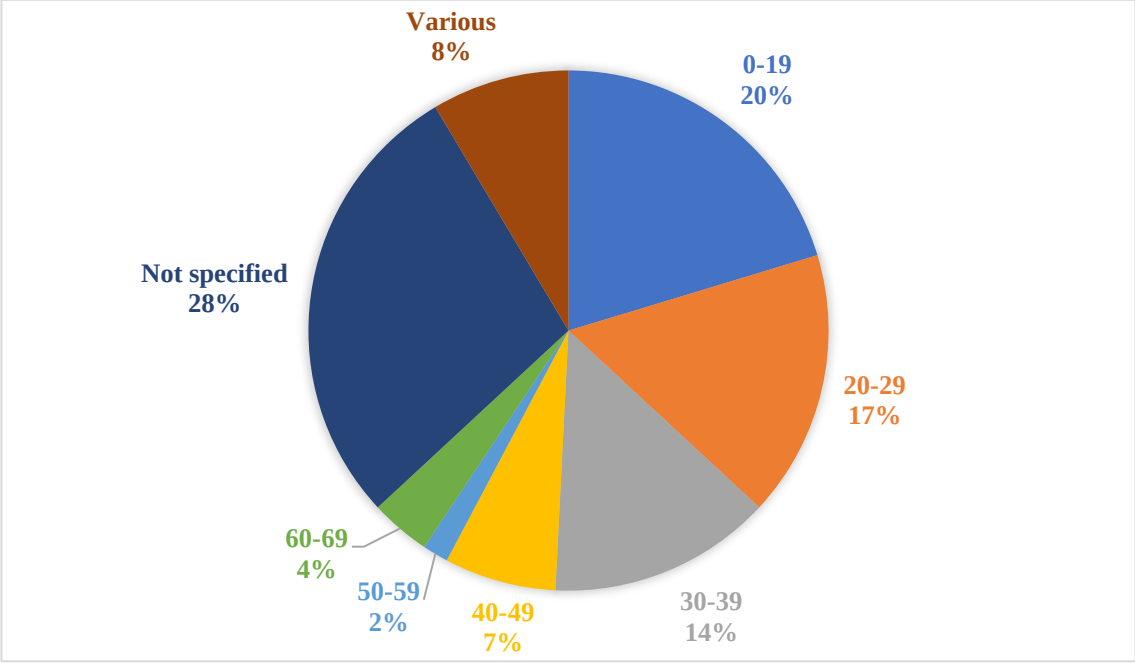

Figure 4.2 Percentages of characters according to their age[27]

51% of the 187 characters in the corpus are aged between 15 and 39 – although gay men characterised with the generic label "young" might be even younger than 15 – with a significant number of characters in their twenties (17%). It is interesting to notice that three characters in the corpus (i.e. Phillip in Elyot, *Mouth to Mouth*, 2001; Tom in Ravenhill, *Citizenship*, 2005; Naz in Ridley, *Mercury Fur*, 2005) are 15 and under the age of consent in Britain, i.e. the age at which a person is considered to be legally competent to consent to sexual acts, which,

[27] Gay men characterised as "young" are classified as 0-19; those characterised as "elderly" are classified as 60-69.

according to the Sexual Offences Act 2003[28], in Britain is 16. Remarkably, characters under the age of consent are to be found mainly in plays where pornography and/or rape are the main themes. A good number of gay men in the corpus are in their thirties (14%), but a substantial decrease is noticed in the number of gay men among older characters aged between 40 and 69 – although the "elderly" characters might be even older. The "various" column includes all the characters that are portrayed in different periods of their lives; they are to be found mainly in the plays that show a diachronic depiction of gayness, i.e. depict the way homosexuality was seen in different decades (e.g. Jongh, *Plague Over England*, 2008; Harvey, *Canary*, 2010; Bartlett, *Or You Could Kiss Me*, 2010). For this reason, they could not be classified in different age categories simultaneously, for the results not to be distorted. The "not specified" column comprises all the instances that were not classifiable because textual elements were too scarce to be analysed with the required objectivity.

4.2.2 Social class

Following Kerswill's (2018, no page) argument, "for class there is no single obvious external measure […] which can be used as a defining principle." The classification of the gay characters into social classes has proved to be a real challenge. The fictional gay men have been classified according to three criteria:

(a) economic conditions, including job and income;
(b) education level;
(c) other elements appearing in the text and paratext (e.g. housing, manners, lifestyle).

These criteria have been chosen following a seminal study carried out by Trudgill (1974) on a random sample of 60 inhabitants in Norwich, who were classified into social class groups based on their occupational status, income, education, locality and housing type.

[28] *Sexual Offences Act 2003*, Part I – Child sex offences (9 – Sexual activity with a child): A person aged 18 or over (A) commits an offence if—
(a) he intentionally touches another person (B),
(b) the touching is sexual, and
(c) either—
(i) B is under 16 and A does not reasonably believe that B is 16 or over, or
(ii) B is under 13

The social classification of fictional speakers, as this is the case, is undoubtedly more challenging than the classification of real speakers, since people living in fictional worlds cannot be interviewed – and the interview is one of the main tools that sociolinguists have at their disposal – and the elements available for the classification are limited to what playwrights decide to include either implicitly or explicitly in their plays. As can be seen in *Figure 4.3*, 18% of the gay speakers in the corpus belong to a non-specified social class, either because they live in fictional worlds where societies are not based on an imitation of real-world societies and are completely imaginary (e.g. Buffini, *wonder.land*, 2005), or because the elements available, both in paratexts and texts, are not enough to decide to which social class characters might belong. Writers, indeed, classify their characters in terms of social class by indexing our knowledge of social classes, that is by activating our mental schemata of what a social class is, and what its recognisable characteristics are.

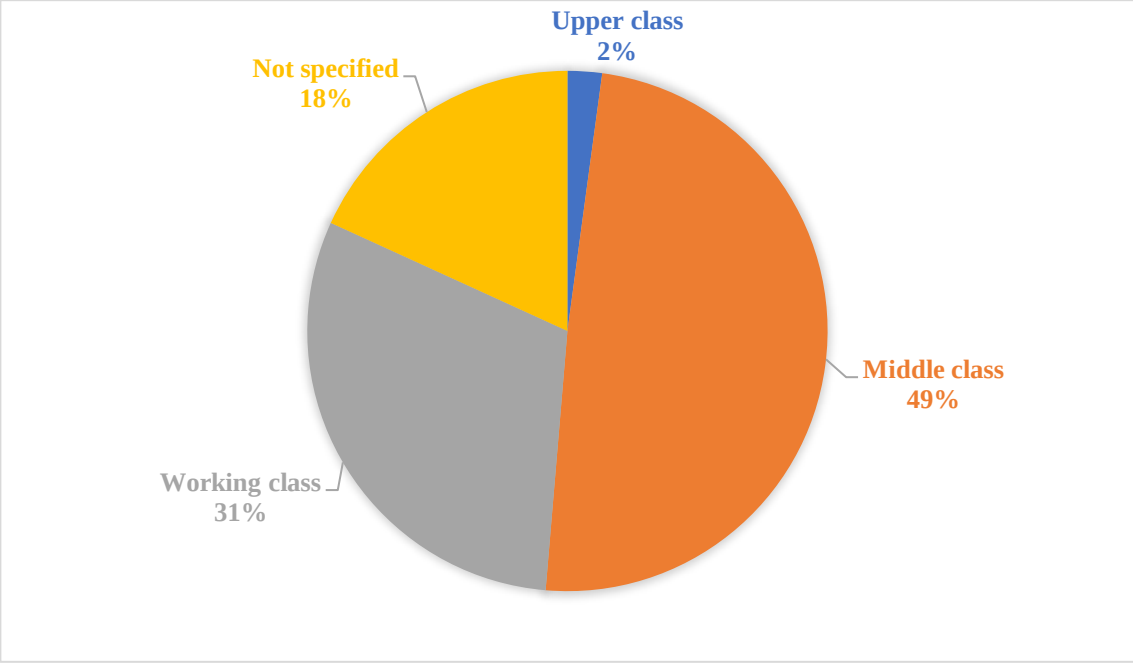

Figure 4.3 Percentages of characters according to their social class

In this study, economic conditions have a major role in the social classification of the characters, as references to their job are quite common in the plays, unlike references to their educational level or other aspects that could hint at their social status. People classified as middle class (49%) differ from those from the working class (31%) in that the former are "white collars", as they occupy managerial positions – e.g. businessmen, doctors, lawyers – whereas the latter are

"blue collars", that is people earning money with manual activities – e.g. shop assistants, waiters, voluntary workers. White-collar workers earn higher salaries than blue-collar workers. People classified as upper class, which are only 2% of the characters (i.e. Oscar Wilde in Bartlett, *In Extremis*, 2000; Euba in Gill, *Original Sin*, 2002; Michelangelo in Sher, *The Giant*, 2007; Sir John Gielgud in de Jongh, *Plague Over England*, 2008), are members of the aristocracy, and they are artists and dandy men. For the sake of clarity it should be said that a classification distinguishing between lower- and upper-middle classes, lower- and upper-working classes would provide more accurate data; nevertheless, the available elements were hardly sufficient to classify the characters according to the three macro-categories mentioned above – i.e. upper, middle and working classes.

The following figure categorises the gay characters on the basis of their age and social class.

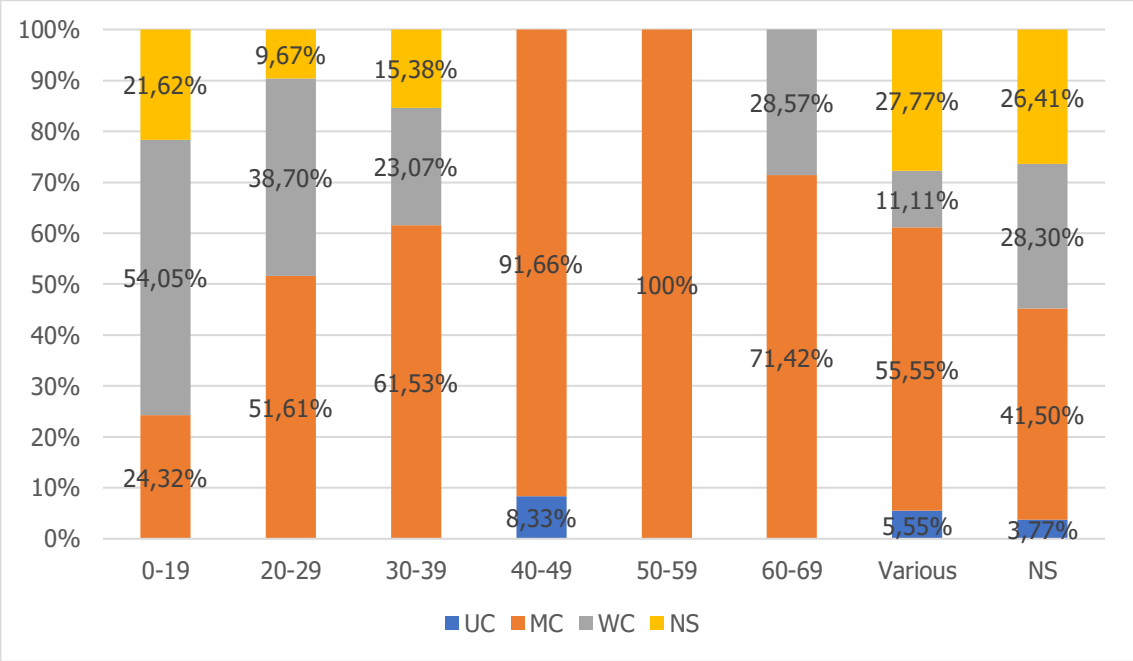

Figure 4.4 Percentages of characters according to their social class and age

As *Figure 4.4* shows, there is a gradual decrease in the percentage of working-class gay characters as they grow older, with no working-class men in their forties and fifties. This might be due to the fact that younger characters occupy occasional job positions, as they are either students who work to earn their daily bread or apprentice and inexperienced workers; gay characters in their forties and fifties, on the other hand, occupy more stable and rewarding job positions, thus their classification as members of the middle class. It is also interesting to note

that working-class gay men reappear in the 60-69 age group; this is particularly true of characters portrayed in plays set in rural northern English towns (e.g. Choke and Yack in Cartwright, *Hard Fruit*, 2000). These figures will also be useful to better understand certain features affecting the linguistic varieties used by the gay men in the corpus, as will be seen in the following sections.

4.2.3 Linguistic variety[29]

The linguistic varieties that fictional characters speak are often used to convey information about their identities. As was mentioned in *Chapter 2*, language has the double function of establishing social relationships and convey information about the speaker (Trudgill 2000). This is because language has a "clue-bearing role" (Trudgill 2000, p. 2), in that it provides the speaker with elements that can be exploited by the receiver to deduce the speaker's identity. It is not only the content of the message, but also the way the message is linguistically delivered that tells a lot about the speaker. In the UK, for instance, language has a prominent function in determining the social class of an individual on the basis of slightly different realisations of certain sounds. Moreover, the way language is used can convey many other characteristics of the speakers, such as their geographical origin, gender, sexuality and level of education.

Before moving on to the analysis of the linguistic varieties in the corpus, a difference should be made between standard and non-standard varieties. Unlike what most laypeople think, the standard variety of a language is not better or aesthetically more pleasant than non-standard varieties. Every aesthetic judgement about a language is unfounded, since the parameters for classifying languages take into account other factors. The standard variety is one of the many varieties available in a country which, for political, economic, social and cultural reasons, has acquired prestige in a given society. What is today considered Standard British English, i.e. the variety that is used in the educational system, studied by foreign learners and codified in grammars and dictionaries, was originally the non-standard variety of the area around London, which was gradually modified "by speakers at the court, by scholars from the universities and other writers, and, later on, by the so-called Public Schools. […] When printing became widespread, it was the form of English most widely used in books" (Trudgill 2000, p.

[29] For a detailed overview of the linguistic issues discussed in this section, see Trudgill 2000.

6). Non-standard varieties, therefore, became less prestigious, developed their own linguistic systems and became gradually more limited to specific areas of the country, since communication between speakers of different localised varieties became challenging.

This leads to a further distinction between dialect and accent. The term dialect[30] can be applied to all linguistic varieties, also the standard language. Non-standard dialects, in particular, diverge from the standard dialect in their grammar, syntax and lexicon. This means that non-standard dialects show completely different systems, being often deeply influenced by the languages that had been spoken before English developed and established as the standard variety; this is the case of particularly rural and traditional dialects, which are today spoken in isolated areas of the country. Unlike dialects, accents do not refer to grammar, syntax and lexicon, but only to pronunciation, that is the way certain sounds are pronounced by the speakers. Unless the speaker has learnt the correct diction (i.e. Received Pronunciation for British English), which is an artificial, non-localised pronunciation learnt mainly by those who use the language for their job (e.g. actors, speakers, presenters) or have studied in Public Schools, everybody has an accent, also speakers of the standard variety. The accent a speaker has tells a lot about his/her geographical and especially social origins, since people belonging to the lower social classes, who tend to be less educated and work in environments where a good diction is not required, tend to have stronger accents than those belonging to the middle and upper classes. Accent is a social status in the UK, and speakers can tell with a certain degree of certainty an individual's social class from the way s/he pronounces certain sounds.

Language and society are thus closely bounded, and different dialects and accents will be evaluated differently, as dialects and "accented voices […] build on a network of references and allusions which are deeply embedded in a precise regional and social context" (Montini and Ranzato 2021, p. 2). The use of accents and dialects in fiction has been extensively studied (see Hodson 2014; Montini and Ranzato 2021, among others). Since accents and dialects provide important clues about the characters' geographical and social origins, their use in fiction is meaningful and worth studying. Accents and dialects are particularly useful tools for characterising fictional people, especially on screen and stage, given the "oral and aural" (Montini and Ranzato 2021, p. 4) nature of cinema and theatre. As will be discussed below, the non-standard dialects and accents used in the corpus are fictional representations used to

[30] In this study, the term "dialect" will be used to refer to non-standard dialects, as opposed to "standard", which refers to the standard dialect.

reproduce voices on stage, i.e. "recognizable, clichéd dialects used […] to sketch in a character's past and cultural heritage" (Kozloff 2000, p. 82); fictional representations of non-standard varieties, therefore, are inauthentic and simplified, often based on forms that have been traditionally established in literature. Dialects and accents, moreover, are not accurately transcribable unless writers use the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is not possible in fiction because of "reader resistance" (Toolan 1992), i.e. readers engage with passages of dialect representation "in a spirit of enforced labour" (Toolan 1992, p. 34) – intelligibility and reading speed. As will be discussed below, most of the plays portraying non-standard speakers use recurring linguistic features, which, in the reader's mind, have been established as representing the speech of a particular area. Along similar lines, Borillo (2021, p. 48) claims that as much as writers can decide to deviate from the standard and use non-standard varieties for realism – i.e. to imitate speakers from a particular geographical and social background – literary conventions impose many limits such as the selection of a number of representative features of that variety. He maintains that "in literary terms the emphasis cannot be on realism but on the added, symbolic meaning acquired by non-standard language, which links it to aspects of characterisation, setting, plot or theme" (Borillo 2021, p. 48). Following Lippi-Green's (1997, p. 81) argument, therefore, non-standard varieties are also used "to draw character quickly, building on established preconceived notions associated with specific loyalties, ethnic, racial or economic alliances." Hodson (2014, pp. 66-67) claims that

> 'matched guise' tests demonstrate that listeners have strong associations between particular varieties of English and the personal qualities of individuals. This explains why filmmakers find language variety such a convenient tool for sketching in character background: it exploits the audience's existing preconceptions about the people who use that variety.

The data discussed in this section take into account 186 fictional speakers, since one of the characters, Mr Tomkins in Gill's *Original Sin* (2002), does not speak at all, thus his omission from the data. The criteria for classifying the linguistic varieties included in the corpus are partly universal and typical of any sociolinguistic approach, and partly more specific to the kind of characters studied in this work. The former will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, whereas the latter will be dealt with in *Chapters 5*, *6* and *7*, as the classification of the linguistic varieties spoken in the corpus is also affected by some linguistic features that may index the gay-speaking community when opposed to other communities.

Figure 4.5 shows that most of the characters (152; 82%) speak Standard British English, whereas only 34 (i.e. 18%) speak a non-standard variety. This might suggest that fictional gay men in 21st British drama are predominantly standard speakers. This may be explained by the fact that most of the gay characters have a major role in the plays, as will be discussed in the next section; the choice of the standard variety is thus a consequence of the "reader resistance" to the dialect representation, since major characters, unlike peripheral figures, tend to be represented as speaking Standard English (Hodson 2021, p. 110). Besides, more than half of the characters belong either to the upper (2%) and the middle (49%) classes, which is reflected in the standard variety that they use.

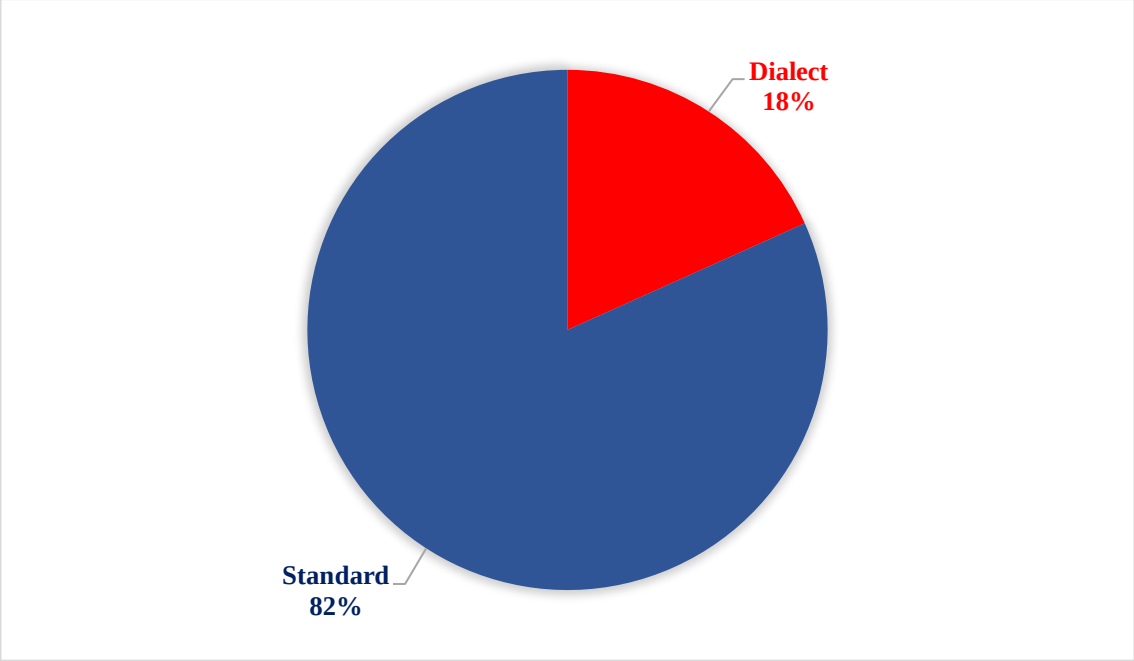

Figure 4.5 Percentages of characters according to their linguistic variety

If we cross the data obtained in *Figure 4.5* with the ages of gay characters (see *Figure 4.6*), paradoxically, there seems to be a gradual increase in the use of Standard British English – and a consequent decrease in the use of non-standard varieties – as characters grow older, at least until their fifties. I said paradoxically because the use of dialects, at least the traditional ones[31],

[31] The adjective "traditional" refers to the classification of dialects provided by Trudgill, who argues that traditional dialects are "much more prevalent in rural areas than they are in urban ones […] and they are easier to find in those parts of the country which are furthest away from London: the southwest of England, parts of northern England, the Lowlands of Scotland, and areas of Northern Ireland. […] Traditional Dialects are mostly, but by no means exclusively, spoken by older people, and are clearly gradually disappearing – they are being replaced by

is often associated with older people. None of the gay characters in their forties and fifties speak non-standard varieties, whereas a significant increase in the use of non-standard varieties is to be noticed among characters in their sixties (28,57%), who are the ones to use dialect the most. This might be due to age grading, i.e. when people of different ages use language differently because they are at different stages in their life (Tagliamonte 2011, p. 47). In other words, non-prestigious features, such as the use of dialectal forms, tend to peak during adolescence "when peer group pressure not to conform to society's norms is greatest" (Holmes 1992, p. 184); in middle age, due to societal pressure and job advancement, "people are most likely to recognize the society's speech norms and use the fewest vernacular forms" (Holmes 1992, p. 186); in old age, "when social pressures reduce as people move out of the workforce and into a more relaxed phase of their life," the non-prestigious forms may resurface (Downes 1998, p. 24; Labov 1994, p. 73).

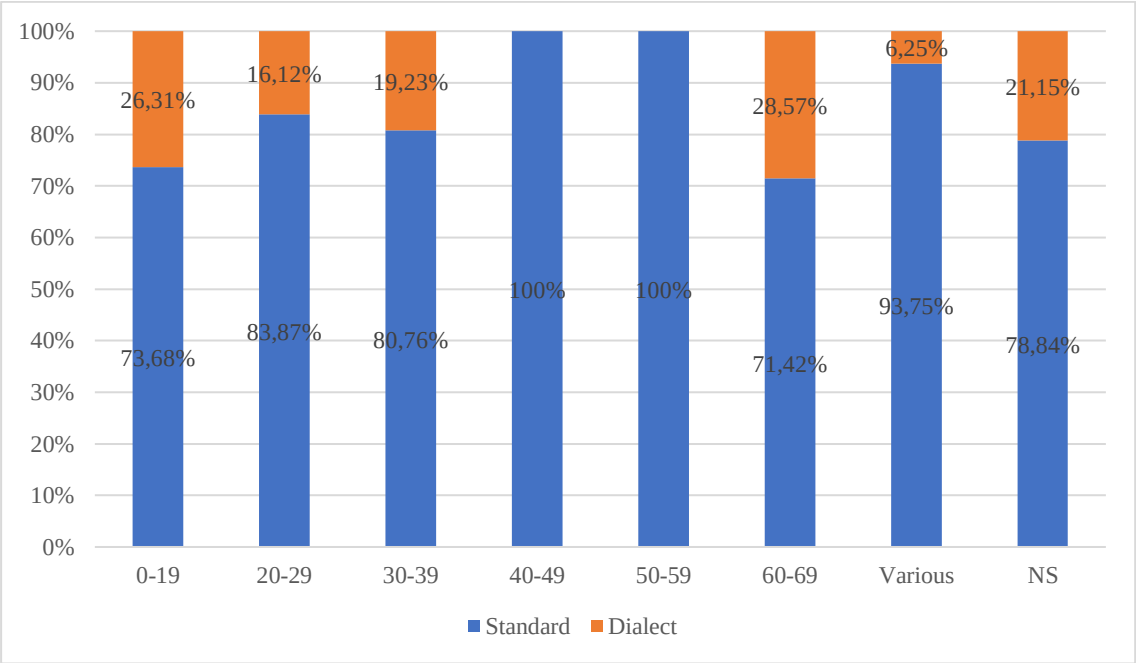

Figure 4.6 Percentages of characters according to their linguistic variety and age

Furthermore, if we compare *Figure 4.4* and *Figure 4.6* similar tendencies can be noticed; the increasing quantity of upper and middle class characters culminating in the 40-49 and 50-59

Mainstream Dialects. Their most typical characteristic, however, is that they are linguistically very different from one another and from Standard English. Mainstream Dialects, on the other hand, which are spoken by a majority of the population, particularly younger speakers in urban areas, are linguistically more similar to one another and to Standard English." (1994, pp. 15-16).

categories is reflected in the increasing use of the standard variety; a higher percentage of working class characters is reflected in a significant use of non-standard varieties. This tendency is also visualised in *Figure 4.7*.

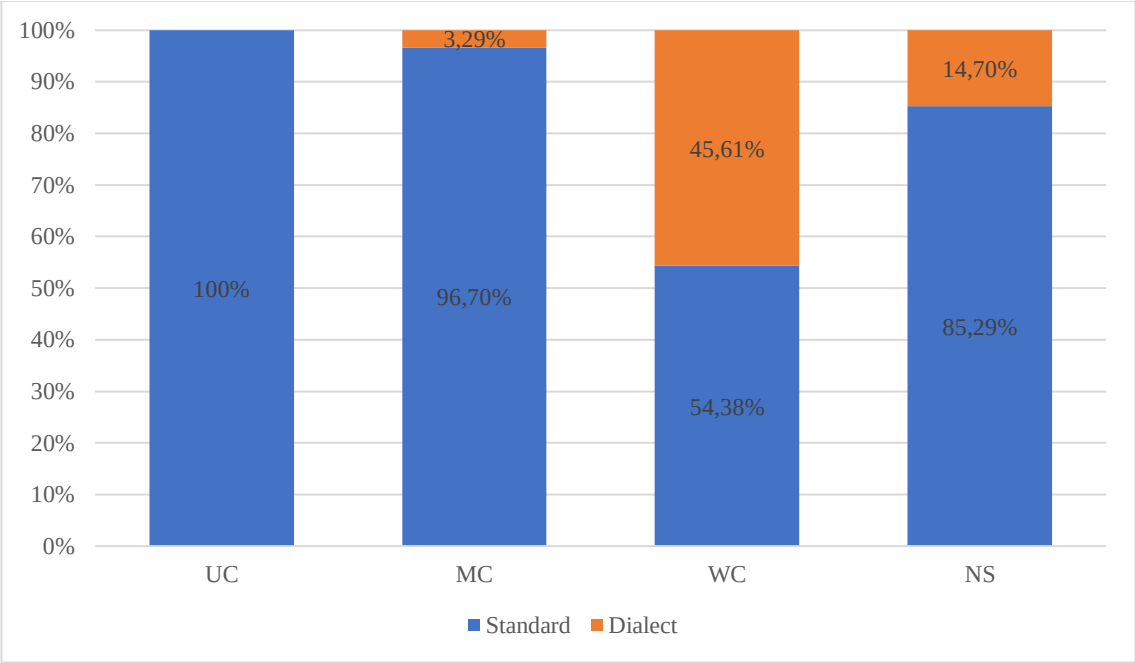

Figure 4.7 Percentages of characters according to their linguistic variety and social class

As was stated before, at least within the British society, there exists a close connection between language and social class. Therefore, speakers' social positions are reflected in the linguistic varieties that they use. Wells (1982) compares the geographical and social situation in England to a trapezium (see *Figure 4.8*) where the longer base represents geographical variation and the height, social variation. The trapezium is broad at the base, since working-class speakers are characterised by a significant regional variation, as is reflected in the use of non-standard accents and dialects, whereas geographical variation decreases at the level of the shorter base, since upper-class speakers exhibit no geographical variation, as is reflected in the use of Standard British English and Received Pronunciation.

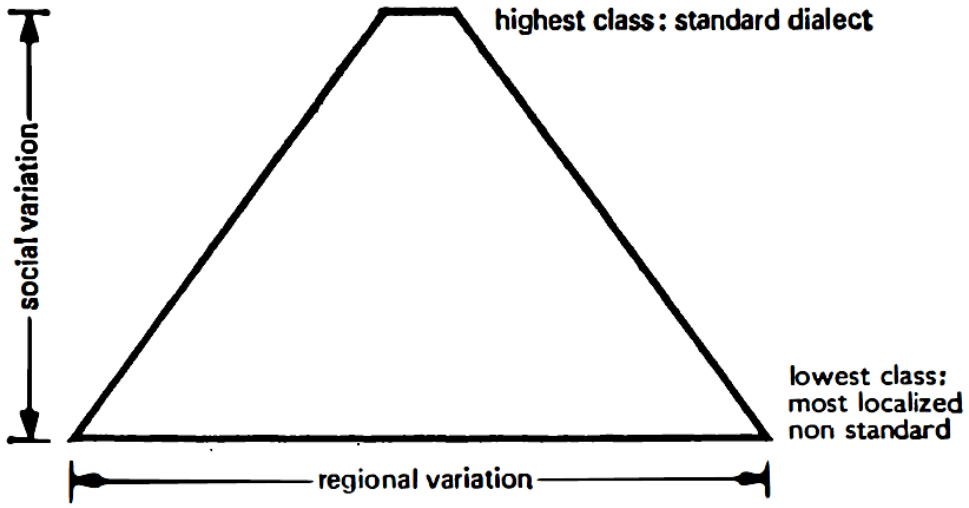

Figure 4.8 Social and regional dialect variation (Trudgill 2000, p. 30)

It should be borne in mind that the linguistic varieties spoken by the gay characters in the corpus were not among the criteria used for attributing the characters their social classes; indeed, if we use language to classify people when we want to find out how those people use that language, the result would be circular. Moreover, language and social class, especially in fiction, are not necessarily aligned; speakers of non-standard varieties do not belong necessarily to the lower classes, just as speakers of the standard variety do not automatically come from the upper or middle classes. As is shown in *Figure 4.7*, most of the working class gay men in the corpus speak the standard variety, and a few middle class characters speak non-standard varieties. There are many aspects and constraints that playwrights have to take into account when choosing the linguistic varieties of their characters (e.g. readability, marketability, to name a few), which may deviate from what actually happens in real life.

The following paragraphs will focus on the use of non-standard varieties in the corpus. The use of accents and dialects in literature is a much studied issue, as it involves the representation of "the audible medium of speech via the visual medium of print" (Hodson 2014, p. 86). Non-standard spoken language, indeed, is not codified in its written form, and writers have to adapt non-standard pronunciations to the writing system of the standard language. Non-standard sounds are certainly the most challenging aspect for a writer to reproduce in written texts, yet it is the most significant feature of dialect representation in fiction. One of the literary techniques that writers have at their disposal is semi-phonetic respelling (Hodson 2014, pp. 90-

95), i.e. the use of alternative spellings to represent a non-standard pronunciation of a word (e.g. make > mek; mother > movah). This manipulation of the standard spelling of a word to indicate a dialectal pronunciation is not completely exact, thus its semi-phonetic nature. An exact representation of the non-standard spoken language, indeed, is only possible through the use of the phonetic alphabetic system which, however, would be incomprehensible to most of the readers. When readers, on the other hand, come across a word that is spelt differently from what they would expect, they will interpret that spelling as a manipulation by the writer to indicate that that word is pronounced in a non-standard way. Following Traugott *et al.*'s (1980, pp. 338-9) argument,

> by convention, when a writer uses normal English spellings in dialogue we infer that the pronunciation intended is the standard of the audience for which the work is written, while special deviant spellings indicate the pronunciation of a dialect that is not the audience's standard.

Another strategy that is used to reproduce non-standard pronunciations is the use of apostrophes (e.g. them > 'em; -ing > -'in), "to indicate that letters have been omitted on purpose rather than as a typographical error" (Hodson 2014, p. 98). Besides, to reproduce the effect of the relaxed spoken language, allegro speech (see Hodson 2014, pp. 98-100) may also be used, i.e. the reproduction of the merge of sounds occurring in the oral language, where speakers do not pronounce each sound separately, but rather in a continuous flow where the different sounds influence each other (e.g. don't know > dunno; want to > wanna). Non-standard varieties differ from Standard British English not only at the level of pronunciation, but also grammar and lexicon. When used in fictional products, however, non-standard sounds, grammar and lexicon are reduced to a limited number of elements, which have been established in literature and become as fixed as stereotypes.

Most of the characters speaking non-standard varieties in the corpus have some linguistic features in common, no matter their social or geographical origins:

(a) the use of allegro speech in the representation of auxiliary and modal verbs, such as "shoulda", "woulda", "mighta", "musta", "coulda", but also grammatical constructions like "gonna do sth", "wanna do sth";
(b) the use of allegro speech for hedges like "kinda" and "sorta";
(c) the use of apostrophes, like "'em";

(d) the use of semi-phonetic respellings like “cuz” or “coz” instead of ‘cause.

These linguistic features are commonly used in literary and audiovisual products to stereotypically characterise a fictional speaker as non-standard. Apart from these common features, each variety is characterised by its own linguistic elements. The three main non-standard varieties noticed in the corpus are Cockney, a generalised representation of the Northern-English variety, and Ulster English.

Cockney is the dialect of English used in and around London, particularly – but not only – by the working and lower-middle classes, traditionally from people born within the sound of St Mary-le-Bow bells, in the East End of London (e.g. Davey in Ridley, *Vincent River*, 2000; Darren, Naz and Party Guest in Ridley, *Mercury Fur*, 2005; Orlando and JJ in Beadle-Blair, *Bashment*, 2005; they all come from the East End of London). It must be said that some of the Londoners in the corpus are actually working-class migrants who speak English as a second language (e.g. Femi in Oparei, *Crazyblackmythaf***in’self*, 2002); their linguistic variety is called Multicultural London English, a sociolect that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st century in multi-ethnic London neighbourhoods. The most common features of Cockney affecting the pronunciation as noticed in the corpus are the following:

(a) non-rhoticity, i.e. the orthographic <r> is not pronounced as /r/ when it occurs before a consonant or word-finally; this phenomenon is represented in the plays with the use of semi-phonetic respelling, like “darling” > “dahling”, “better” > “betta”, “cyber” > “cyba”;
(b) H-dropping, i.e. the deletion of the voiceless glottal fricative [h], as in “hope” > “‘ope”, “here” > “’ere”, “him” > “’im”; this is represented through the use of apostrophes;
(c) TH-fronting, i.e. the pronunciation of voiced labiodental fricative <th> as /v/ instead of /ð/, as in “rava” instead of “rather”, “brov” instead of “brother”, and the voiceless labiodental fricative <th> as /f/ instead of /θ/, as in “mouf” instead of “mouth”, “nuffin’” instead of “nothing”; this is mainly represented through semi-phonetic respelling.

Cockney also differs from the standard variety in its grammar; the elements noticed in the plays are:

(a) use of personal pronoun “me” instead of the possessive adjective “my”;

(b) use of non-standard reflexive pronouns like “meself” for “myself”, and “hisself” for “himself”;
(c) use of double negatives, as in “not…no more/nothing” instead of “not…anymore/anything”;
(d) use of inverted grammatical persons in auxiliary verbs, like “it don’t” instead of “it doesn’t”, “she weren’t” instead of “she wasn’t”;
(e) use of “ain’t” and “in’t” as a the negative form of “to have” and “to be”;
(f) non-standard use of personal pronouns, like “ya”, “yee” instead of “you”;
(g) use of “yer” instead of “you’re”.

Although a typical feature of the London dialect is rhyming slang – i.e. “taking a pair of associated words […] in which the second word rhymes with the one that the speaker actually means to express” (Ranzato 2018, p. 4) – there are no instances of it in the corpus, similarly to other elements of Cockney lexicon. This is due to the simplification in the fictional representation of this variety for the sake of readability.

Other non-standard varieties in the corpus can be grouped under the label Northern-English variety. It is a fictional representation of the most common and stereotypical features of non-standard accents and dialects of the North of England, comprising the area localised mainly in the North-West, including Bradford (West Yorkshire; e.g. Ash in Hall, *Mr Elliott*, 2003), Liverpool (Merseyside; e.g. Frankie in Harvey, *Our Lady of Blundellsands*, 2020) and Manchester (e.g. Iggy in Harvey, *Out in the Open*, 2001). In the corpus under scrutiny, this fictional variety differs from Standard British English merely in the grammar and lexicon; there are no instances of changes in the pronunciation, i.e. affecting the accent. Grammatically, it is characterised by the use of:

(a) double negation;
(b) non-standard negative forms, such as the use of “not” instead of don’t/doesn’t (e.g. I not draw);
(c) “me” and “meself” instead of “my” and “myself”;
(d) “them” instead of the plural demonstratives “these”/“those”;
(e) “as” instead of the relative “that” (e.g. …that comes > as comes);

(f) non-standard forms of auxiliary verbs (e.g. I is/I has; you was; it weren't/don't; they was) and non-auxiliary verbs (e.g. I tries); the auxiliary verb "to have" becomes "a" after modal verbs (e.g. I should a seen), which might be due to allegro speech;
(g) progressive forms with stative verbs (e.g. I am wanting sth).

From the point of view of lexicon, the Northern variety is characterised by the recurring use of the interjection "aye", as well as the adverb "ahind" instead of "behind".

There is only one character in the corpus (i.e. Gay McDaid in Cowan, *Still Ill*, 2014) speaking Ulster English, also called Northern Hiberno-English or Northern Irish English, i.e. the variety of English spoken in Northern Ireland. It is characterised by the use of:

(a) "a" instead of "of", as is common among speakers of the Northern-English variety;
(b) semi-phonetic respelling of "home" as "hame";
(c) non-standard past participles (e.g. I've brung);
(d) elision of /d/ in old [ˈəʊl], represented through semi-phonetic respelling as "oul";
(e) "yer" instead of "your/you're";
(f) interjection "aye" instead of "yes".

4.2.4 Hayes' classification

The term "gayspeak" was coined by Hayes in his 1976 seminal paper, then re-published in Cameron and Kulick (2006). As will be discussed more thoroughly in *Chapter 5*, he lists many linguistic features that gay men allegedly use depending on the context (or setting, as Hayes calls it) where they are; this means that gay men in the late 1970s had to adjust their use of the language depending on the situated context they were in so as to omit, hint at or express their sexual identities to other speakers. The three settings traced by Hayes are not mutually exclusive, in the sense that the same gay man can belong to all three settings simultaneously. They are the following:

(a) secret setting, where gay men hide their sexuality and avoid the use of gayspeak;
(b) social setting, where gay men are open about their sexual identity;
(c) radical-activist setting, where gay men express their sexualities in highly political ways.

The three settings traced by Hayes have been adapted in this study as a way to classify fictional gay men into secret, social and radical-activist characters, on the basis of their secrecy or openness about their sexual identity. Remarkably, the majority of the gay characters in the corpus (63%) express their homosexuality openly, as *Figure 4.9* shows. The previous percentage should be increased with the percentage of characters belonging to the "Various" category, who at the beginning of plays keep their sexuality secret in order to reveal it at a later time.

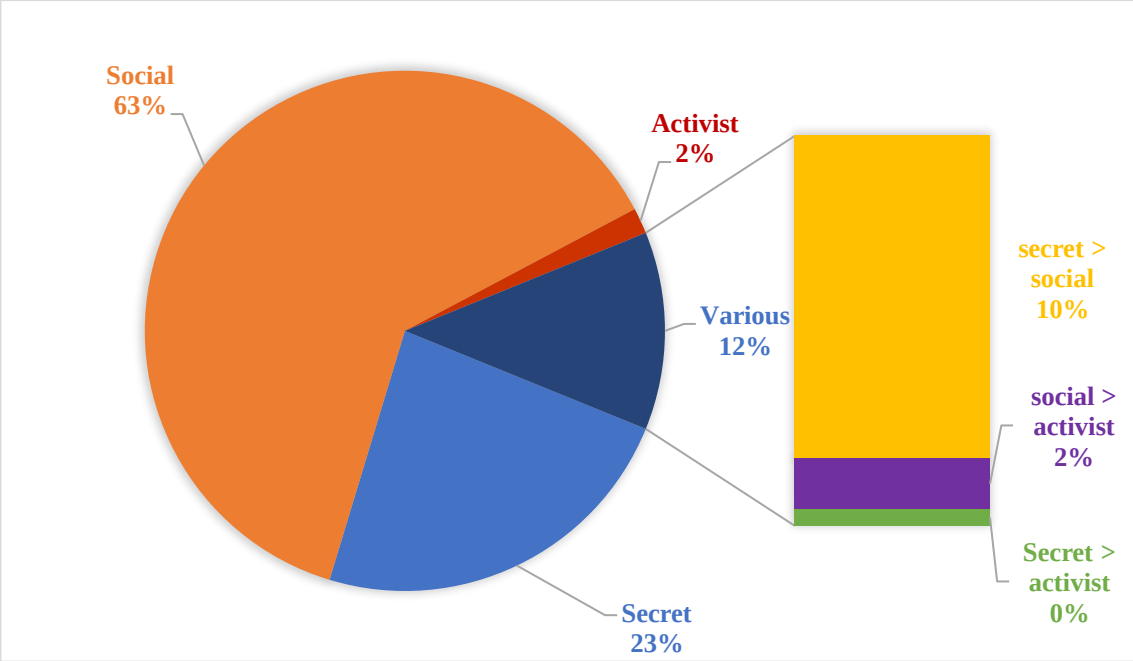

Figure 4.9 Percentages of characters according to their level of secrecy/out-of-the-closetedness

The gay characters who keep their homosexuality secret, on the other hand, tend to be portrayed in plays set far away in time, in decades when homosexuality was still illegal (e.g. Ravenhill, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, 2001; Gill, *Original Sin*, 2002; Moran, *Telstar*, 2005; Sher, *The Giant*, 2007; de Jongh, *Plague Over England*, 2008; Wright, *Rattigan's Nijinsky*, 2011; Gill, *Versailles*, 2014; Wilson, *Lovesong of the Electric Bear*, 2015; Elyot, *Twilight Song*, 2017; Gatiss, *Queer. Eight Monologues*, 2017); other secret gay characters are to be found in plays set in rural areas (e.g. Gill, *The York Realist*, 2001), where people are allegedly more reluctant to welcome homosexuality; besides, secret gay men are also characterised as married heterosexual men involved in extra-marital homosexual relationships either with a gay partner (e.g. Hall, *Mr Elliott*, 2003; Todd, *Blowing Whistles*, 2005; Adamson, *Southwark Fair*, 2006; Wainwright, *Muscle*, 2009; Cowan, *Still Ill*, 2014) or with gay prostitutes (e.g. Baker, *Prisoners*

of Sex, 2006); the struggle between religion and sexuality is a further element typical of secret gay characters (e.g. Laughton, *Run*, 2016).

4.2.5 Role in the play

The role that characters have in plays can reveal much about themselves and how the real people that they stand for are viewed in real life. The representation of fictional gay men as either primary or secondary characters, for instance, is not a meaningless detail. Primary characters are – generally but not necessarily – those who speak the most in a play, but also the ones whose development readers follow more carefully; they are the "stars" of the plays and all the other characters revolve around them. Secondary characters, on the other hand, are the ones to revolve around primary characters; they tend to speak less and to represent social types that are often fixed and stereotyped. 61% of the gay characters in the corpus have primary roles in the plays; this is especially true of plays where homosexuality is the main theme[32]; 39% of the gay characters have secondary roles, which means that they are either peripheral characters in plays where the representation of homosexuality is not the main purpose (e.g. Bean, *The English Game*, 2008; Guota, *Love N Stuff*, 2013; Buffini, *wonder.land*, 2015; Harvey, *Our Lady of Blundellsands*, 2020), or secondary gay characters revolving around other primary gay characters in plays where homosexuality is the main theme (e.g. Yack, Silver and Friar Jiggle in Cartwright, *Hard Fruit*, 2000; Gompertz and Phillip in Elyot, *Mouth to Mouth*, 2001, among others).

Interestingly, the portrayal of fictional gay men as main characters is not necessarily a positive choice on the part of the playwright; in fact, the representation of gay men in the plays as primary characters foregrounds their presence in the plays themselves, which is also a way of distinguishing them from the other non-gay characters. This is related to the double-layered message that theatre conveys and which was mentioned in section *4.1.3*. Further research on the reception of gay characters could be conducted in a future study.

It is interesting to notice that the role that gay characters have in the plays is reflected in the linguistic variety that they use (see *Figure 4.10*).

[32] The presence of one or more gay characters in a play does not necessarily mean that the main goal of the play is the depiction of homosexuality.

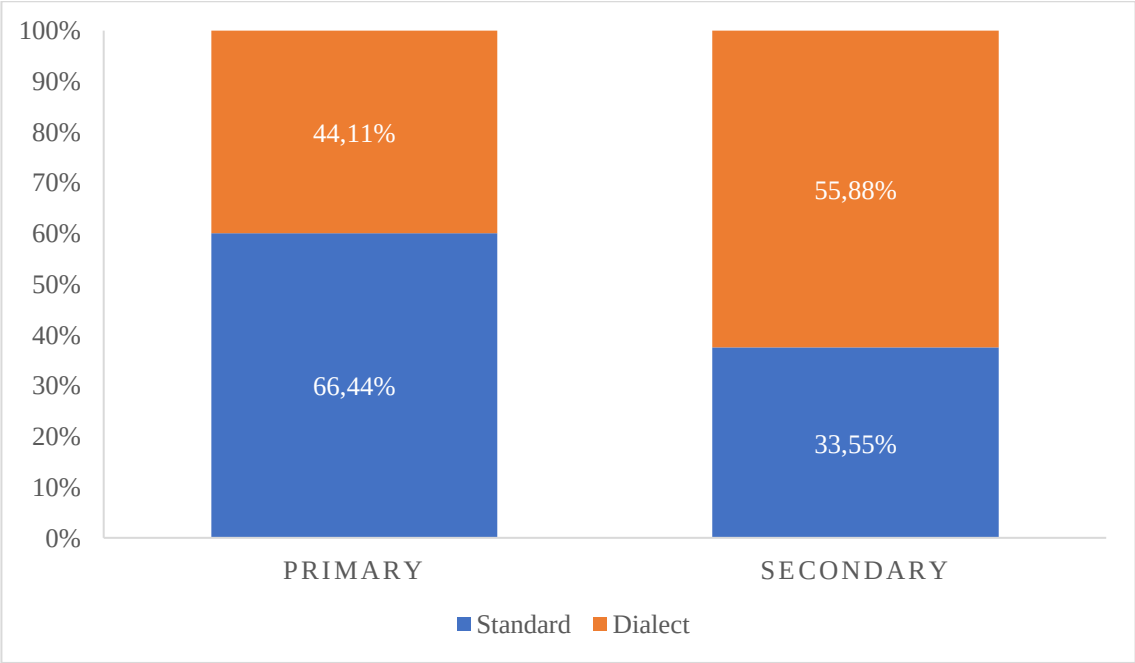

Figure 4.10 Percentages of characters according to their role in the play and their linguistic variety

The majority of primary gay characters (66,44%) speak Standard British English, whereas most of the secondary gay characters (55,88%) speak non-standard varieties. This may be due to the fact that playwrights make primary characters speak the standard language to avoid "reader resistance", and limit the use of non-standard varieties to secondary characters, who generally speak less, and are thus less likely to thwart readers' comprehension.

4.3 Conclusions

This chapter has focused on many facets of fictional gay men's identities, and has provided fundamental features of the speakers whose language will be analysed in the subsequent chapters. Any sociolinguistic (in this case ficto-Linguistic) analysis cannot ignore essential elements of a speaker, such as his/her age, social class and sociolect; besides, since this research is concerned with the investigation of fictional gayspeak – i.e. the manifestation of fictional gay men's sexuality through the fictional language that they speak – aspects such as fictional gay men's level of secrecy or openness, as well as their roles in the plays could not be disregarded. All these elements together influence the way gayspeak is used in the corpus under scrutiny.

To sum up the data provided in the previous sections, it can be claimed that most of the gay characters portrayed in the plays are relatively young men, being either teenagers or in their twenties and thirties. More than half of the gay men are aged between 15 and 39, and 19% of them are aged between 15-19. As has been discussed, age is closely related to other aspects of the speakers' identity, such as their social class; younger and elder characters tend to belong to the working class, whereas the characters in their thirties and forties are more likely to belong to the upper and middle classes. The high percentage of middle-class characters (49%) influences the linguistic variety that is most commonly used, with 82% of the characters speaking Standard British English. These are mainly gay men in their forties and fifties, belonging to the upper and middle classes. The use of the standard variety is particularly common among gay men who have a primary role in the plays (61%; 66,44% of them speak Standard British English), whereas those who use a non-standard variety are secondary characters (46%; 55,88% of them speak a non-standard variety). This might be due to issues linked with the readability of the plays, in that an abuse of non-standard varieties would inevitably lead to a form of resistance by the audience, who would strive to understand and follow the story. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that in the 21st century British dramatic production, gay men tend to be either the protagonists or have some kind of leading role in the plays. It is also quite surprising that 63% of them are openly gay, or "social" to adapt Hayes' terminology. This means that after a long time when British playwrights had to deal with stage censorship and find implicit ways to portray gay men on stage, today they tend to reveal their characters' homosexuality more frequently, by depicting gay men who tend to reiterate behaviours that are commonly attached to homosexual people.

This chapter has sought to be the joining link between the previous and the next chapters, as it has provided useful information to contextualise the use of gayspeak in the selected plays. With its examination of past research on Gayspeak, *Chapter 5* will set the scene for the following sections, where I will delve into the corpus under scrutiny in order to provide a re-assessment of the use of fictional gayspeak in the British plays staged in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 5

GAYSPEAK

5.1 Introduction: Gayspeak

The term gayspeak[33] was coined by Hayes in a paper published in 1976 (then in Chesebro 1981) and re-printed in *The Language and Sexuality Reader*, a collection edited by Cameron and

[33] For an exhaustive review of the studies on gay and lesbian language, see Kulick (2000). He declares that "a number of names have been proposed: Gayspeak (Hayes 1981, Cox and Fay 1994), lgb talk [for "lesbian/bisexual/gay" (Zwicky 1997)], Gay male language, gay and lesbian language, gay male speech (Barrett 1997, pp. 185, 192, 194), lesbian speech (Moonwomon-Baird 1997, p. 203), Gay speech (Zeve 1993), lesbian language (Queen 1997, p. 233), lavender language (Leck 1995, p. 327, Leap 1995), gay English (Goodwin 1991), Gay English (Leap 1996), queerspeak (Livia and Hall 1997), and my personal favorite – Faglish (Rodgers 1972, p. 94)."

Kulick (2006), including research from 1940s to 2006 investigating the relation between language and sexuality. In this study, the term gayspeak will be used to refer to "the modes and ways of homosexual communication" (Ranzato 2012, p. 371), i.e. the linguistic variety that is allegedly used exclusively by gay men, through which they construct and perform their sexuality. This label seems to assume that homosexuals constitute "a language-defined sub-culture" (Conrad and More 1976, p. 25); this idea was later questioned by Stanley and Wolfe (1979, p. 1), who claimed that

> any discussion involving the use of such phrases as "gay community", "gay slang", or "gayspeak" is bound to be misleading, because two of its implications are false: first, that there is a homogeneous community composed of lesbians and gay males, that shares a common culture or system of values, goals, perceptions, and experience; and second, that this gay community shares a common language.

As will be discussed, saying that gay men speak their own homosexual variety (if it exists at all) because of their sexuality is certainly a form of ghettoisation itself. However, in spite of Wolfe's reservations, there are certain features of the linguistic variety used by gay people which have been successfully identified and described by many scholars, whose works will be reviewed in this chapter. Gay men may have developed several linguistic features to hide/reveal their sexuality, which have been reiterated and fixed both in society and the media. Furthermore, there is not a stable definition of gayspeak; it is not clear whether it should be considered a language *tout court*, a style, a sociolect. I would be tempted to conceive it as a "sexualect", a neologism that was coined by Taylor (2011); the term is used in this work to refer to a lect – i.e. a variety within a language – that is used to construct one's own sexuality.

In the following sections, the history of gayspeak will be briefly overviewed, as well as the concepts of speech community and community of practice; it will be clarified that the linguistic variety under scrutiny in this work is a fictional representation of gayspeak; the main aim of this chapter is that of organising past research that is scattered in different journal articles and books; past research will be discussed, and the studies mentioned in the last section will be fundamental for the corpus-assisted and manual analyses discussed in *Chapters 6* and *7*.

5.1.1 Cant and Polari[34]

[34] For a detailed overview of Cant and Polari see Baker 2002a, b.

In spite of the fact that gayspeak is a relatively recent label, the sexualect that it denotes already existed before, albeit under different names. The earliest recorded varieties that probably influenced gayspeak were Cant[35] and Polari (Baker 2002, pp. 20-21). The former was a secret code language used by criminals between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, though it apparently pre-dates to the eleventh century Saxons (Wilde 1889, p. 306). Cant probably originated from the earlier Elizabethan pelting (paltry) slang (Harman 1567) that was used in the criminal subculture. Polari, on the other hand, refers to the linguistic variety used by some gay people in the UK until the 1970s. It was an almost exclusively spoken, secret language, which was popularised during the late 1960s when the BBC comedy radio programme *Round the Horne* showcased two camp actors, Julian and Sandy, who bypassed censorship (see *Chapter 3*) by adopting

> a version of the language which was just sophisticated enough to allow jokes that were high in gay content to get past the censors, and just simplistic enough so that the majority of listeners would be able to understand exactly what they meant. (Baker 2002b, p. 1)

The spelling[36] of the term Polari is very unstable in past research – it is referred to as Parlyaree, Parliaree, Parlarie, and Parlare – and it might have originated from the Italian verb *parlare* (i.e. to speak), signalling its mainly oral dimension and the significant amount of Italian borrowings. The influence of Italian on Polari is possibly due to two reasons: first, there was an influx of Italian Punch and Judy men, organ grinders and peddlers in Britain in the 1840s, working alongside existing showmen and other travellers; the second association of Italian with Polari concerns the importation of large numbers of Italian children to England in the nineteenth century to perform for the financial benefit of people known as *padroni*. It is therefore possible that more Italian entered the vocabulary of the showmen in this way. Here is an example of this language:

[35] It was also known as pedlar's French or St Giles's Greek (Baker 2002b, p. 20).

[36] Spelling is not standardised in Polari as it was rarely, if ever, written down by the people who used it. (Baker 2002, p.19).

> "Oh vada well the omee-palone ajax who just trolled in - her with the cod lally-drags and the naff riah dear. She's with the trade your mother charvaed yesterday. Some omees have nanti taste![37]" (Baker 2002, p. 1)

The verb "vada" and the noun "omee", for instance, are of Italian origins, respectively coming from "guarda" (look) and "uomo" (man). Baker (2002b, p. 13) questions the linguistic nature of Polari, and maintains that it cannot be considered a language, but rather an argot, as it is "associated with group membership and (is) used to serve as affirmation or solidarity with other members." He eventually acknowledges that Halliday's (1978) concept of anti-languages – discussed in the following paragraphs – might better explain the nature of Polari. This anti-language was often called "dancers' language" (Gordeno 1969, p. 140) and was associated to "showmen and strolling players" (Partridge 1948, p. 117), showing that all references to the speakers' gayness were omitted, and that gay men were mostly hinted at as theatrical people. The process of framing gay culture in theatrical terms was a form of "minstrellisation" (McIntosh 1972, p. 8), which rendered gayness more acceptable to the dominant culture. Referring to Gardeno's (1969) article, Hancock (1973, p. 35) states that "it is a fact that almost all of the terms listed in the article are known to, and used freely by, the male homosexual subculture – in London at least – which overlaps into the theatrical world." Moreover, Hancock (1973, 1984) compares Polari to Lingua Franca, which was spoken by sailors who would find employment as strolling players in British port cities (e.g. London, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol), where gay communities have generally tended to flourish the most (Cox *et al.* 1994, p. 4). Sailors speaking Lingua Franca were in contact with gay male prostitutes using Polari, thus influencing each other's linguistic varieties.

The disappearance of Polari and the gradual passage to gayspeak was mainly due to the premature death of many young gay men who could speak Polari, which was due to the spread of AIDS in the 1980s. Besides, the popularity reached by Julian and Sandy, who made Polari known to the mainstream audience, made Polari lose its secrecy and anti-language nature, as well as its *raison d'être*. Furthermore, the Wolfenden Report and the Sexual Offences Acts (1967) legalised homosexual acts in private between consenting men over the age of 21 and improved gay men's legal condition, thus reducing the need for a secret language. The 1970s

[37] "Oh look at that homo (male) nearby who just walked in - with the bad trousers and the hideous hair. He's with the other guy I fucked yesterday. Some people have absolutely no taste." (my translation)

were characterised by movements for gay rights epitomised in the slogans "not gay as in happy but queer as in fuck you" and "we're here, we're queer, get the fuck used to it", starting from Stonewall riots in 1969[38], and leading to the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the USA and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) in the UK, the former being concerned about community building around the notion of gay identity, the latter being concerned about assimilation into mainstream society. Furthermore, in 1970, derogatory words like "gay" and "queer" were re-appropriated by gay activists, and concepts like "gay pride" and "out of the closet" – the latter had finally become an individual's choice and not something that was denounced by others – were created. As a matter of fact, in the pre-liberation era (i.e. before Stonewall riots in 1969), the language that was allegedly spoken by gay men was commonly referred to as "homosexual language" and "homosexual slang", since the word "gay" was not in use; besides, the adjective "homosexual" had a pathological connotation, as homosexuality was still considered illegal and gay men were believed to be insane people. Only with the liberation movements the term gayspeak started to be used. Stanley (1974/2006, p. 54) maintains that

> words that had formerly referred only to one's sexual identification […] or that had been pejoratives […] had become instead politically charged terms that affirmed the new identity of gays. To come out of the closet now has a political meaning; the phrase refers to the assumption of one's identity as a positive thing, something to be yelled in the streets, rather than hidden and whispered about behind closed doors. And once you are out of your closet, you no longer cringe when someone calls you a dyke or a faggot. To be a dyke or a faggot refers to one's political identity as a gay activist.

Baker (2002b, p. 115) adds that

> with the introduction of GLF politics, many people wanted to be as open as possible about being gay. This openness would have meant that Polari's protective status in maintaining the closet would have appeared less attractive. But by this time Polari wasn't just about secrecy, it also allowed the performance of a camp sensibility, and that should still have given it some currency. However, camp itself was under attack – from within gay ranks.

[38] See *Chapter 3*, section 3.2.1.

Camp identities, therefore, were under attack by some activists, who considered the aping of femininity sexually unattractive and promoting ghettoisation. Baker (2002b, p. 121) concludes that "Polari had been over-exposed in the media, made unnecessary by Wolfenden, criticised by the liberationists as one of the prime components of camp, and finally viewed as 'naff' by younger gay men."

Baker does not consider Polari as a separate variety, existing alongside gayspeak, but as the source of many secret terms that in the 1970s – when Polari started disappearing – were already known by wider audiences who did not speak Polari. Many of the words that once constituted Polari have survived in gayspeak (e.g. "butch", "camp", "cruise", "trade"); similarly, Polari linguistic items tended to express categories that continued to be used in gayspeak, namely terms of endearment, body parts (mainly genitalia), sexual activities, types of people (mainly referring to people's sexual preferences), proper names (generally feminised); besides, similarly to gayspeak, Polari relied on foreign languages – including French, with its touch of aristocratism and sophistication –, euphemisms and innuendo, the last two to avoid legal persecution.

5.1.2 Speech community or community of practice?

If we consider gayspeak as an anti-language and as the expression of a social minority, then it follows that gayspeak is at the basis of a speech community, that is a community of people "who are in habitual contact with each other by means of language – either by a common language or by shared ways of interpreting linguistic behaviour where different languages are in use in an area" (Swann *et al.* 2004, p. 293). The concept of speech community was first introduced by Saussure (1967/2009, p. 92), and was developed by scholars like Lyons (1970), Hymes (1972), Labov (1972), Sherzer (1977). Hymes (1974, p. 51) summarises the different studies on speech community, defining it as

> a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech, and knowledge also of its patterns of use. Both conditions are necessary.

However, the assumption that there is only one gay speech community eliminates every possible diversity within the community itself. Sociolinguistics, as a matter of fact, has centred

on identifying the features that constitute a monolithic gay speech variety, i.e. gayspeak. Campbell-Killer *et al.* (2002, p. 177) argue that

> labelling a linguistic feature as gay is at once too general and too specific. First, the assumption that there is a singular gay way of speaking homogenizes the diversity within the gay community […]. Second, while labelling linguistic features as gay is too general, it also runs the risk of not being general enough. By simply assigning gay meanings to linguistic features, one reifies as gay certain linguistic features that are shared throughout society.

Gay community, instead, comprises many different sub-communities (i.e. bears, twinks, in the closet, out of the closet, activists, daddies, to mention but a few), where gayspeak assumes slightly different connotations. Campbell-Kibler *et al.* (2002) argue that it might be advantageous to bring "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) and "community of practice" (Eckert *et al.* 1992) into the discussion. They maintain that "while gay speech corresponds to the imagined gay community, different gay ways of speaking (i.e. different gay styles) correspond to different communities of practice organized around same-sex desire" (Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002, p. 4). They add that since an imagined gay community "privileges putative shared beliefs and ideologies over shared practice" (Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002, p. 4), and a community of practice is "an aggregate of people who come together around some enterprise […] and develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values" (Eckert 2000, p. 35), then it follows that gay speech is to ideology as community of practice is to practice. Therefore

> gay speech is an ideological construct that symbolizes the imagined gay community, and the linguistic features of this ideological construct in turn provide some of the resources that are used in the construction of different gay styles – either personal styles or group styles that symbolize various communities of practice within the gay community. (Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002, p. 4)

This does not imply that research on the linguistic features of gayspeak (or gay speech as Campbell-Kibler *et al.* call it) is fruitless, but it is worth bearing in mind the distinction between ideology and practice; besides, investigating the different gay communities of practice and their linguistic varieties would be impossible and certainly out of the scope of this study. This research, therefore, focuses on gayspeak as the monolithic linguistic variety spoken by the

imagined gay community, aware of the fact that there is not a unique variety, but there are many different varieties spoken by gay men depending on the sub-communities they belong to. This choice is justifiable in the light of the fictional nature of the language under scrutiny, which, for the sake of recognisability, is reduced to a few traits that are overgeneralised to all the speakers of the imagined gay community.

5.1.3 Fictional gayspeak

As was briefly mentioned in *Chapter 2*, the linguistic variety investigated in this study is not gayspeak *tout court*, but a fictional representation of gayspeak, that is a literary construct differing from natural language (i.e. real-world language) in that it has been created to characterise fictional people inhabiting fictional worlds. Within fictional worlds, fictional languages function as natural languages, helping to identify people according to their social groups. Ferguson (1998) defines the study of fictional languages as ficto-Linguistics, as an alternative of socio-Linguistics, that is the study of languages as used in society. Hodson (2014, p. 14) explains that

> the terms ficto-Linguistics is valuable because it provides a way of talking about the patterns of language variety we find within fictional texts, and using terms and concepts borrowed from Linguistics in order to do so, while making it clear that language varieties do not function in the same way as language varieties in the real world. […] The term ficto-Linguistics can be extended to include the study of language varieties in all works of fiction, including narrative poetry, film and television.

Schmidt (2002) differentiates natural from artificial languages in that the former have native speakers, whereas the latter do not; fictional languages only exist within fictional worlds and have no native speakers except for fictional speakers; for this reason, Barnes *et al.* (2006, p. 103) have defined them "virtual natural languages". Famous instances of fictional languages can be found in Burgess's dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* and Orwell's *1984*, both using artificial languages (i.e. respectively, Nadsat and Newspeak). However, despite not diverging completely from its natural source, fictional gayspeak is an imitation of natural gayspeak, which

> has been scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed. Even when lines are improvised on set, they have been spoken by impersonators, judged, approved, and allowed to remain. (Kozloff 2000, p. 18)

This is to say that fictional gayspeak is not a completely invented variety, but it simultaneously originates and departs from a naturally-occurring linguistic variety.

Short (2013) provides a detailed list of differences between dramatic dialogue and casual conversation. Unlike casual conversation, which is spontaneous and impromptu, the peculiarity of dramatic dialogue is that of being a written-to-be-spoken language. Therefore, casual conversation abounds with hesitations, reconsiderations, mistakes, which, in Linguistics, are referred to as normal non-fluency. These features occur because, unlike dramatic dialogue, ordinary conversation is not edited before it takes place. Moreover, as Short (2003) adds, normal non-fluency is not noticed in everyday conversation because people produce it constantly; on the other hand, because of its edited nature, people do not expect natural non-fluency to occur in dramatic dialogues. It follows that when this phenomenon occurs in dramatic dialogues, it is immediately perceived but, above all, it is signified. In other words, features that are meaningless in ordinary conversation have "a *meaningful* function precisely because we know that the dramatist must have included them *on purpose*" (Short 2013, p. 177). The occurrence of hesitations, for instance, which is almost unnoticeable in everyday speaking, might be used in fiction to index a character's insecurity and shyness; therefore, the choice of including or not such linguistic feature should not be left to chance. Culpeper (1996, pp. 352-353) suggests that characters' behaviours have greater significance, and more interpretive effort will be spent on behaviours in fictional worlds compared with real.

Barnes *et al.* (2006, p. 115) maintain that fictional languages have two main functions, in that "they help to create the fictional world of which they form an integral part, […] and to construct meaning and identity." Joseph (2004, p. 4) states that the construction of meaning and identity takes place on two levels, the naming and semantic levels, the former giving identities to referents in the fictional world (i.e. objects, animals, plants, abstractions, people), the latter referring to characters' individual lives, values, views, identities. Following the previous definition, fictional gayspeak, therefore, is aimed at constructing fictional gay men's identity on a semantic level. Elgin (1999) defines fiction as "a laboratory for exploring linguistic solutions," since most experiments involving language can only be done in fictional worlds. Therefore, in a poststructuralist vein, characters' identities are constructed and performed also

by the language that they use. As was mentioned in *Chapter 2*, Motschenbacher (2011) acknowledges that language has a primary role in constructing one's identity, that is "the parts of ourselves we show to others, […] an accurate reflection of who we feel we are" (Barnstein 1998, p. 5). In the 1980s, Gleason (1983, p. 918) pointed out that the term identity was relatively new, appearing for the first time in the 1950s and becoming popular thanks to the psychoanalyst Erikson. Gleason maintains that definitions of identity tend to fall into two opposing conceptions, that is essentialist and constructionist perspectives; in the former, identity is considered intrapsychic, in the sense that it originates in an individual's psyche and is fixed; in the latter, identity is a set of conscious adoptions of socially constructed and imposed roles. Baker (2002b, p. 16) reconnects both approaches, defining identity as "a constantly evolving state of being, composed of multiple, interacting, socially acquired and internally inherited characteristics." This is the definition of identity that is to be found at the basis of this study.

5.1.4 Stereotype

Since fictional language is aimed at making characters immediately recognisable mainly according to their age, gender, sexuality, geographical and social origins, playwrights leave nothing to chance when it comes to choosing their characters' linguistic features. It is mainly for the sake of immediacy that fictional languages are mostly limited to a mere few traits, especially when used to characterise fictional people belonging to social minorities. This leads to the use of stereotypes[39], which is a common practice in the process of characterisation (Gross 1991, pp. 26-27), since they provide fixed and recognisable images of fictional characters. They are "uninformed and frequently culturally-biased overgeneralisations about subgroups that may or may not be based on a small degree of truth" (Swann *et al.* 2004, p. 298). Hall (1997, p. 258) maintains that

> stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.

[39] For an exhaustive review of linguistic stereotypes in fictional people's characterisation, see Hodson 2014, pp. 60-82; Lippi-Green 2012, pp. 101-126.

The selective nature of stereotyping is highlighted by Ranzato and Zanotti (2018, p. 1), who maintain that "representation is always the result of an act of selection of traits and features, both visual and verbal", but also by Ives (1971, p. 153), who states that the writer

> selects those features that seem to be typical, to be most representative of the sort of person he is portraying and generalises so that the literary dialect is likely to be more regular in its variants than the actual speech which it represents.

Together with indicators and markers, stereotypes are one of the three categories of the Labovian paradigm, a classification of linguistic variables on the basis of their evaluation by the speech community and the level of awareness in this process. Stereotypes are "forms which are prominently marked in the speech community and of which speakers are overtly aware" (Beal 2010, p. 92). Quoting Labov (1972, p. 314), "stereotypes are referred to and talked about by the speech community; they may have a general label, and a characteristic phrase which serves equally well to identify them." Beal (2010, p. 92) maintains that the three categories represent different stages in linguistic change:

> an incoming form becomes an *indicator* when it has been adopted by all members of a subgroup; it becomes a *marker* when it has spread throughout the speech community and been assigned a common value by that community such that style-shifting will occur; finally, "under extreme stigmatization, a form may become the overt object of social comment, and may eventually disappear. It is thus a *stereotype*, which may become increasingly divorced from the forms which are actually used in speech." (Labov 1972, p. 180)

The variety that will be analysed in this study is a stereotypical representation of real-life gayspeak, as it might diverge to some extent from its natural counterpart for the literary reasons that have been mentioned before. Despite being an interesting field for further research in the future, it is out of the scope of this work to compare fictional and real-world gayspeak; nevertheless, it is my opinion – based on my intuition and reading of the plays – that the literary representation of gayspeak is characterised by a significant use of linguistic features that have been fixed in literature throughout the decades in order to make gay characters immediately recognisable on the page, screen, or stage.

5.2 Past research

5.2.1 Overview

In a diachronic corpus linguistic study published in 2013, Baker analysed a corpus of abstracts from the Lavender Languages and Linguistics (LavLangs) Conference[40], focusing on keywords[41] in order to determine which concepts have become more or less popular over time. He found out that

> conference-goers have evolved more careful language practices around words that relate to sexual and gender identity. There has been a move away from separating, homogenising identity terms like gay and lesbian (and especially plural noun versions of these terms), and a move towards more inclusive terms like queer and LGBT. Related to this, there has also been a move away from the idea of LGBT people as having their own language (or culture) and greater focus on critiquing (hetero)normative discourses. (Baker 2013, p. 201)

The shift in research from the study of the language (supposedly) used by queer people to studies that discuss heteronormative discourses and practices – as is shown in the abstracts presented at the Lavender Language and Linguistics Conference – could also be attributed to the success of Queer Linguistics. The following sections will provide an overview of the main research avenues in Language and Sexuality Studies in the past. Allegedly, the first academic work to investigate gay language was an American-based study titled *Lexical Evidence from Folk Epigraphy in Western North America: a Glossarial Study of the Low Element in the English Vocabulary* (Read 1935), where the author includes one example of male homosexual graffiti. Butters *et al.* (1989, p. 2) note that Read's work

> is also one of the few works by a linguist in which gay or lesbian materials figure at all. Indeed, any notion of what might constitute gay Sociolinguistics, and gay Linguistics in general, is virtually non-existent.

The first studies on gayspeak treated the variety allegedly spoken by gay men as either a distinct language or a slang; they were mainly lists of terms – most of them referring to sexual

[40] Lavender Languages and Linguistics Conference is an international conference founded in 1993 by William B. Leap. The focus of the conference is on LGBTQIA+ Studies. The conference was host yearly at American University in Washington, DC until 2017 when the conference began to move each year.
[41] The most frequently occurring words in the abstracts.

intercourse – which were allegedly used mainly by gay people to signal their sexual identity, such as Legman's *The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary*, published as early as 1941. Many of the terms listed in these earlier glossaries pertain also to the slang of other subcultures, as was notice by Stanley (1970), who provided a list of dictionaries including gay slang[42]. Originally, this study was included in a medical volume entitled *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns*, where homosexuality was clinically analysed through x-ray photographs of homosexuals' pelvises, and sphincter tightness, as well as the language that gay men used. These earlier studies, therefore, reflected the ideas around homosexuality circulating before the advent of gay liberation, when homosexuality was still illegal and seen as medically deviant. Cameron and Kulick (2006, p. 15) refer to the "argot of homosexuals" as an anti-language (Halliday 1976), which is the expression of an anti-society, "a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. […] An anti-language is not only parallel to an anti-society; it is in fact generated by it" (1976, p. 570). The gay community is an anti-society set up within the heteronormative society, using an anti-language – i.e. gayspeak – as a conscious alternative to standard English. The lexicographical structure of early studies on gayspeak echoes in the discussion provided by Halliday on anti-languages, where

> like the early records of the languages of exotic cultures, the information usually comes to us in the form of word lists. […] The principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; but different vocabulary only in certain areas, typically those that are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society. (Halliday 1976, pp. 570-571)

Homosexual language/slang was a secret code based on an ingroup lexicon originating from the standard language, but which went through a process of re-semantisation as a way to exclude outsiders and remain secretive. Taylor (2007, p. 8) claims that "secret languages emerge from situations in which a community feels the need to conceal the content of their utterances from the outside world" and that community is "threatened by other communities."

[42] Partridge, E. (1961). *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. New York: Macmillan; Partridge, E. (1964). *Dictionary of the Underworld*. London: Routledge; Goldin, H. E. *et al*. (1962). *Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo*. New York: Citadel; Wentworth, H. and Flexner, S. B. (1967). *Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Crowell; Landy, E. E. (1971). *The Underground Dictionary*. New York: Simon; Farmer. J. S. and Henley, W. E. (1965). *Slang and Its Analogues*. New York: Kraus; Barrere, A. and Leland, C. G. (1967). *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant*. Detroit: Gale.

In a paper on gay lexicon, Farrell (1972) maintains that "the major function of the homosexual argot seems to be that of ordering and classifying experience within the homosexual community, particularly those interests and problems which are of focal concern to the homosexual" (1972, p. 98). Most of the terms listed in the glossaries refer to same-sex sexual intercourse and fashion, which are typical stereotypes for gay men. Despite their usefulness in portraying homosexuality and the reception that pre-liberation societies had of homosexual men, Cameron and Kulick (2006, p. 16) suggest that researchers treat the evidence originating from these earlier studies with caution, because "mere lists of words tell you nothing about who used them, for what purposes, and in what kinds of contexts." Nevertheless, they add that Part One of their volume *The Language and Sexuality Reader* (2006)

> reprints several texts that are rarely read or cited today – and that in many cases would be hard to find in the average academic library – but that in our view are worth revisiting, both for what they tell us about the history of the field of inquiry they belong to, and for the insights they provide into the social and linguistic realities of the past. (Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. 2006, p. 7)

In the early years of the post-liberation era after 1969 Stonewall riot, there was an unprecedented emergence of homosexuals into public life, fighting for their rights and joining activist movements for legitimisation and against sexual discrimination. Gay people were no longer invisible identities, and the idea of a gay community emerged. Sub-culture communities tend to share common features – such as a common sociolect – to strengthen their sense of belonging; as was mentioned before, gay community can be considered a speech community. Harvey (1998, p. 305) acknowledges that language has an active role in the elaboration of gender identity, and citing Meyer (1994), he declares that

> contemporary sexual identities ultimately depend on "extrasexual performative gestures". [...] For, if the fact of sexual activity itself between people of the same gender appears to be the *sine qua non* for the (self-) attribution of the labels "gay" or "lesbian", it is also true that such activity is actually absent from view and only present through the work of other extrasexual signifying practices which thereby become linked to it metonymically.

Research on language and sexual identities published from 1990s onwards has benefited from the support of a new approach to Linguistics, Queer Theory, with such revolutionising ideas as performativity, implying that "ontology (being; our subjective sense of who we are) does not

produce practice – on the contrary, practice produces ontology" (Cameron and Kulick 2006, p. 97). This idea is taken for granted today, but was not that evident at the time. The revolutionising aspect of studies after 1990s is "the shift from asking how sexual identity is reflected in language to a focus on how different identities are constructed through the co-occurrence of linguistic forms in specific contexts and genres" (Cameron and Kulick, 2006, p. 100). Allegedly, the first edited volume with an explicitly Queer linguistic approach was the collection *Queerly Phrased*, edited by Livia *et al.* (1997). Foundational debates concerning Queer Linguistics have taken place in a number of contributions included in the volume entitled *Language and Sexuality – Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice* (Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002), and the second part of *The Language and Sexuality Reader* (Cameron and Kulick 2006). Motschenbacher (2011, p. 150) notes that the development of Queer Linguistics is a reaction to earlier approaches to language and sexuality, commonly referred to as Gay and Lesbian Linguistics and Lavender Linguistics. The annual conference *Lavender Languages and Linguistics*, founded by William L. Leap at the American University (Washington DC) provides a renowned platform for international Queer Linguistic research. In 2012, Leap and Motschenbacher launched the first academic journal dealing with Queer Linguistics, the *Journal of Language and Sexuality* (John Benjamins).

The latest approach to the study of language and sexuality is through the lens of desire (Harvey *et al.* 1998; Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick, 2003, 2006). Scholars investigating the relationship between language and desire distance themselves from previous studies on sexuality because, allegedly, they lack of a psychoanalytic insight into speakers' ways to express their desires. They also stress that, being desire partly unconscious, speakers are not fully in control of the identity that they perform while speaking, and that language can say more or something different than speakers intend.

The studies that will be discussed in the following sections, which are organised in chronological order, deal with the linguistic features that are allegedly used more often by gay men. As can be inferred from the dates, this kind of studies are quite obsolete today, since most of them date back to the late 1960s-1970s. One of the purposes of this research, however, is to re-assess past studies on gayspeak, to discuss whether or not they are still efficient today. Past studies are fundamental in this work because they will be at the basis of the framework that I have created to analyse 21st century fictional gayspeak, which will be introduced in section 5.3.

5.2.2 Post-Stonewall research

The following sections will summarise some of the main studies done in a Post-Stonewall era, which sought to trace the linguistic features characterising the variety that was allegedly spoken by gay men. Past research will be presented following a chronological order.

5.2.2.1 Sonenschein, D. (1969). The Homosexual's Language. The Journal of Sex Research, 5(4), pp. 281-291.

Despite being included in the Post-Stonewall research for its publication date, Sonenschein's research was carried out before Stonewall, that is before lesbian and gay lives began to claim greater public visibility. In line with earlier studies on gayspeak, Sonenschein's (1969) research treats gayspeak as "a special language or slang of a sexually deviant group" (281); it is an anti-language, a language of outsiders which reflects their alternative lifestyle, with its roles, values, and activities. It follows that homosexuals are allegedly "bilingual", in that they master both standard English and their homosexual slang. Although Sonenschein maintains that slang "is not indirect and isolative but rather it is cohesive, consistent, and above all, communicative" (1969, p. 282), it should be clarified that the homosexual slang in the 1960s was isolative indeed, sometimes within the homosexual community itself, but, to a greater extent, within the heteronormative society.

Sonenschein focuses on the lexicon that is allegedly used more frequently by gay men; he divides the homosexual slang terms into two macro-categories: "sex terms", referring to the sexual sphere, and "role terms", referring to aspects, forms, and patterns of behaviours and orientations. While studying gay men in a city of the Southwestern United States, he observes several different homosexual groups and their linguistic behaviour; of these, lower status homosexuals show the most interesting linguistic features, some of which would be further investigated by following scholars, and be included in the methodology used to carry out this study. The most frequent features used by lower status homosexuals according to Sonenschein are the following:

(a) Effeminization, which is based on the arguable assumption that gay men are "women trapped in men's bodies" (1969, p. 283); this macro-category includes:

i. imitation of the verbal sound of female conversation, such as inflectional and stress patterns, and lisp; it also includes paralinguistic phenomena, which will not be taken into account in my framework, since this research tackles with drama as written text, rather than performance. Further research could be conducted to analyse how paralinguistic features influence the sexualisation of characters;
ii. use of adjectives commonly associated with women's language (e.g. fabulous, lovely);
iii. use of feminine vocatives like "honey" and "darling", as well as the female forms "she" and "her" as terms of address and reference to males;
iv. general nouns and other words are feminized with the result of sounding much like baby-talk (e.g. cigarette becomes ciggy-boo);
v. effeminization of masculine names (e.g. David becomes Daisey);

(b) use of standard terms to refer to sexual activities, behaviours and roles (e.g. queer, fairy);
(c) redirection, which implies a re-semantisation from a heterosexual referent to a homosexual one (e.g. bitch);
(d) invention, "these are the most salient words of a slang vocabulary because of their esoteric nature" (Sonenschein 1969, p. 284).

5.2.2.2 Stanley, J. P. (1970). Homosexual Slang. American Speech, 45(1/2), pp. 45-59.

Similarly to Sonenschein (1969), Stanley's (1970) study focuses on the lexicon that is allegedly used more often by gay men. He divides it into core vocabulary, which is familiar to both gay and heterosexual people, and fringe vocabulary, which is specific to the homosexual community; the latter includes terms and expressions that spread out mainly from large cities. He (1970, p. 47) maintains that

> it is tempting to consider the fringe vocabulary as the slang that sets homosexuals apart from other groups and serves as phatic speech because it shows the most innovation and the greatest restriction to homosexual activities.

Fringe vocabulary is more interesting from a linguistic point of view, because there are favoured structural patterns that result in colourful descriptive terms:

(a) compounds, especially adding adjectives or nouns to *queen* (e.g. drag queen, closet queen, size queen);
(b) rhyme compounds (e.g. kiki, fag hag, peer queer);
(c) exclamations (e.g. Mary!, For days!, Mercy!); "such activities are accompanied by an excess of fluttering and gesticulating, and the exclamations are produced with exaggerated intonation and stress" (Stanley 1970, p. 54);
(d) puns;
(e) blends;
(f) truncations (e.g. bi, homo and hetero). In each case the form that has been ellipsed has the second element sexual.

5.2.2.3 Lakoff, R.T. (1975). Language and Woman's Place. Harper and Row.

Many linguistic features that will be investigated are not used exclusively by gay men. As will be discussed, many of them are shared with other social groups, such as women. In 1975, Lakoff published her ground-breaking study *Language and Woman's Place,* where she investigated the relationship between women and the way they use language. In her opinion,

> "women's language" shows up in all levels of the grammar of English. We find differences in the choice and frequency of lexical items; in the situations in which certain syntactic rules are performed; in intonational and other super-segmental patterns. (Lakoff 1975, p. 8)

She lists several linguistic features that are allegedly more common among women than men, and adds that

> it is of interest to note that men's language is increasingly being used by women, but women's language is not being adopted by men, apart from those who reject the American masculine image (for example, homosexuals). (Lakoff 1975, p. 10)

Some of these features are also typical of gayspeak, and four of the commentaries to the 2010 re-edition of the book focus on Lakoff's ideas and adapt it to the language used by queer people (Hall 1975; Gaudio 1975; Leap 1975; Barrett 1975). For Lakoff, women have much in common with homosexuals, since they share a marginality determined by their exclusion from

institutionalized male power (Hall, in Lakoff 1975, p. 173). The features listed by Lakoff that are also applicable to gayspeak are the following:

(a) Large stock of words related to colours (e.g. mauve, magenta, ecru, lavender, aquamarine); it is added that if a man uses specific terms to define a colour, "one might well conclude he was imitating a woman sarcastically or was a homosexual or an interior decorator" (1975, p. 8);
(b) "empty" adjectives (e.g. divine, lovely, cute);
(c) question tags (e.g. "It's so hot, isn't it?"); "a tag question is a kind of polite statement, in that it does not force agreement or belief on the addressee" (1975, p. 18);
(d) hedges of various kinds (e.g. well, you know, I mean, kind of); hedges mitigate the possible unfriendliness or unkindness of a statement;
(e) intensive "so";
(f) hypercorrect grammar;
(g) super-polite forms;
(h) women do not tell jokes, which sounds strange when one thinks of how gay people are commonly portrayed in literary and audiovisual products;
(i) women speak in italics, and use tone to emphasize certain words.

5.2.2.4 Hayes, J.J. (1976). Gayspeak. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62(3), pp. 256-266.

Hayes investigates the linguistic variety – which he names, for the first time, *gayspeak* – that homosexual men allegedly use depending on the situated context where they are. The three situated contexts traced by Hayes are called "settings", and "any member of the gay community may function in any one or all three of these settings" (Hayes 1976, p. 257). They are the following:

(a) Secret setting; in this setting, gays are covert in expressing their gay identity, separatist from both the straight and gay community, apolitical, and conservative. For this reason, they use any gay mannerisms or gayspeak as little as possible. One of the feature of secret gayspeak is the tendency to avoid specific gender reference through the use of words like "friend" and "partner" instead of "boyfriend"; "secret gays may also use innuendo in referring to

other gays, calling them artistic, liberal-minded, understanding, or sensitive. People with artistic tendencies, unusual tendencies are hinted to be gay" (Hayes 1976, p. 258);

(b) Social setting is the most traditional one, and best known to the dominant culture. It is used by gay men who frequent the social scene and are open about their sexual identity. Hayes declares that if he had to summarise the social setting simplistically, he would say that

> it employs a vast metaphor of theater, which includes role stereotypes, clear notions of approved sexual behavior and the rewards and punishments that are assigned according to one's ability or failure to use the symbols assigned by sex role. (258)

Hayes adds that closely related to the acting behaviour is the habit of categorization; therefore, the richest features of social gayspeak are found in the lexicon. Compounding is the main technique used to categorise gay people, mainly through the stem word *queen* (e.g. drag queen, seize queen). Moreover, social gayspeak has an especially large number of synonyms for sexual organs and sexual acts. Furthermore, it has developed a significant amount of images from stage and film. Famous Hollywood stars' (e.g. Stella Dallas, Sarah Bernhardt, Mae West, Bette Davis, Carmen Miranda) tone, diction, rhetoric, and speech mannerisms are imitated;

(c) Radical-activist setting includes gay people who are the most visible in their behaviour, which is highly political and freely expressive. Similarly to gay men in the secret setting, radical-activists tend to avoid the use of gayspeak; however, they do so not to hide their sexual identity, but "rather to stop both the process of alienation and ghettoization and to reject the value system which gayspeak has incorporated from the mainstream culture" (262). Moreover, similarly to social gayspeak, it has a "spoken quality to it, although this tone resembles the rhetoric of political conflict (the speech) more than gossip" (263). Radical gays strongly believe in Lakoff's statement "language uses us as much as we use language" (Lakoff 1975, p. 3). They feel that gayspeak holds them to the ghetto, and they re-appropriate pejorative terms (e.g. faggot, queer) to convert them into symbols of defiance of the dominant culture.

5.2.2.5 Zwicky, A. M. (1997). Two Lavender Issues for Linguists. In Livia, A. and Hall, K. (Eds.), Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality. Oxford University Press.

In the 1990s, a fluorescence of interest occurred in studies of gay and lesbian languages, and major collections of papers on these themes were published, such as *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality* (Livia *et al.* 1997). Also supporting the emergence of lesbian and gay language research in the 1990s was the emergence of Queer Theory. Zwicky starts from the assumption that

> it is a widespread folk belief that you can pick out non-straight people, or at least non-straight men, by their behavior, in particular by their speech. This belief is probably a corollary of another folk belief, that homosexuality is an (inappropriate) identification with the other sex, that lesbians think and act like men and that gay men think and act like women. (Zwicky 1997, p. 26)

Zwicky argues that the literature on the characteristics of gayspeak – he calls it "lgb talk" – is focused on rhetorical matters rather than on grammatical ones, and he mentions two ground-breaking collections in the study on gayspeak, namely *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication* (Chesebro 1981) and *Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality* (Ringer 1994), which are almost entirely dedicated to rhetorical and lexical questions. Unlike these earlier studies, Zwicky attempts to investigate discourse-organizing and pragmatic strategies that are allegedly characteristic of gay male talk and writing:

(a) subjective stance;
(b) irony, sarcasm (distancing, saying and not saying, "not taking seriously");
(c) resistance, subversiveness;
(d) double/triple/etc, vision, metacommentary;
(e) embeddedness, discursiveness;
(f) open aggression;
(g) seductiveness;
(h) reversal, inversion.

5.2.2.6 Harvey, K. (2000). Describing camp talk: language/pragmatics/politics. Language and Literature, 9(3), pp. 240-260.

After defining the concept of camp, Harvey lists four typical strategies of camp talk, and the surface, verbal features that they generate.

(a) Paradox, which is based on two apparently contradictory notions or views that are held simultaneously:
   i. incongruities of register;
   ii. co-occurrence of explicitness and covertness;
   iii. co-occurrence of high culture and low experience; Opera is a favourite source of allusion;

(b) inversion is based on the reversal of an expected order of or relation between signs:
   i. inversion of gender proper names;
   ii. inversion of grammatical gender markers;
   iii. inversion of expected rhetorical routines;
   iv. inversion of established value system;

(c) ludicrism groups together linguistic features that are all determined by a playful attitude to language form and meaning. Harvey (2000, p. 247) maintains that

> the ludicrist is a speaker who not only delights in intentionally exploiting the proliferating possibilities of the signifier/signified relationship, but also opens himself or herself – passively, we might say – to the processes of instability, indeterminacy and multiplication (of senses and sounds) that are inherent in language.

Among the linguistic features determining ludicrism are:

   i. motivated naming practices, whereby a name has meaning and this meaning is linked to a defining property of the carrier, such as physical characteristics and behaviour, but only when relevant to sexual/gender identity and sexual proclivities. The camp name is often a very public phenomenon, and is chosen precisely in order to be decoded in, and have an impact on, the public arena;
   ii. puns (co-presence of two meanings) and wordplays; a pun can be defined more technically as the co-presence of two meanings entailed by the grammatical reanalysis of (part of) a syntagm with retrospective effect;
   iii. double-entendre (co-presence of two meanings, one of which is always sexual). "Through the double entendre the speaker can intentionally say something

sexually explosive while appearing to say something unremarkable" (Harvey 2000, p. 250);

(d) Parody is arguably the most crucial for camp practice. Following Hutcheon, Harvey defines parody as "an extended repetition with critical difference" (Hutcheon 1985, p. 7). Two key "source texts" that are repeated with critical difference are:

i. aristocratic mannerisms:
   - use of French; appropriation of aristocratic gestures which has a long history in camp;

ii. femininity:
   - innuendo (indirect and allusive manner); its defining characteristic is that it constitutes a depreciatory comment about the addressee in an indirect and allusive manner;
   - hyperbole;
   - exclamation (exclamations are identified as 'feminine' because they are essentially reactive);
   - vocative terms.

In the article "Camp talk and citationality: a queer take on authentic and represented utterance", Harvey (2002) reconsiders his previous article and introduces a new feature which is allegedly typical of camp talk:

(e) citationality, which can be of three types:

i. citationality of cultural artefacts, that is texts, films and music.
ii. citationality of the medium, the language itself;
iii. citationality of femininity, which includes devices of utterance such as exclamation, hyperbole, vocative interpellations of the addressee, as well as the pragmatic device of innuendo.

This section has attempted to summarise the studies dealing with the language (allegedly) in use by gay men that were published in the post-liberation era. The authors included in this section are of particular importance in constructing the framework for analysing of the fictional gayspeak contained in the corpus.

5.3 Linguistic framework for analysing 21st century fictional gayspeak

Section 5.2 has sought to collect the main studies focusing on the language in use by gay men that were scattered across various articles, books, journals; they have been presented, discussed and, where possible, compared. Because of their linguistic insight, which distinguishes the studies collected in the previous chapter from other research focusing on non-linguistic issues or on language representation (i.e. how gay men are represented through language) rather than language in use by gay men, they were chosen as the structural basis for the framework used in this work, which is proposed in this section. The need for a new framework for analysing the fictional gayspeak represented in the 61 plays stems from the fact that previous studies, some of which date back to the 1960s, do not include all the linguistic features that are allegedly used frequently by gay men. The new framework proposed here therefore aims to collect as many linguistic features of gayspeak as possible, and also to investigate them using (also) Corpus Linguistics in order to assess whether the features included in them can still be considered typical of fictional gay men, at least those portrayed in the 61 plays.

The framework that I propose comprises five macro-categories that include the main linguistic features of fictional gayspeak:

(1) directness, which refers to the use of direct words and expressions such as insults and derogatory terms. In this work, two main categories of directness are considered:
    a. open aggression (Zwicky 1997), which refers to derogatory terms that have been "re-claimed" by gay men as a way of depriving them of their offensive potential;
    b. sexual vocabulary (Hayes 1976), which refers to the lexicon belonging to the semantic field of sex.

(2) indirectness, which includes all linguistic strategies to disguise gay men's sexuality, as well as those strategies that they use to be less direct in their statements. In this study, indirectness includes:
    a. sexual indirectness (inspired by Harvey 2000), i.e. the simultaneous presence of two meanings, one of which is always sexual;
    b. genderless terminology, described by Hayes (1976) as one of the strategies used by gay men in the secret setting; it is a way gay men have to avoid expressing their sexuality by using genderless nouns such as "partner" and "lover", instead of "boyfriend" or "husband", etc;

c. hedges (Lakoff 1975), used to mitigate direct statements;
d. innuendo (Harvey 2000), i.e. the indirect and allusive manner used to make a derogatory remark about the addressee;
e. question tags (Lakoff 1975), a type of polite statement conveyed in an indirect way;
f. super-polite forms (Lakoff 1975);

(3) gender inversion, which refers to the inversion of grammatical gender markers, that is the use of feminine grammatical structures even when referring to men;

(4) emotionality, i.e. the use of emotional and expressive linguistic features. These include:
a. emotional terms such as "lovely", "adorable", "fabulous" (Sonenschein 1969; Lakoff 1975);
b. exclamations (Harvey 2000; Stanley 1970);
c. hyperboles (Harvey 2000);
d. intensive "so" (Lakoff 1975);
e. vocatives, such as "darling", "dear", "Mary" (Sonenschein 1969; Harvey 2000);

(5) playfulness, which refers to the use of:
a. mentions (inspired by Harvey 2002);
b. foreignisms (Harvey 2000);
c. inventions (Sonenschein 1969);
d. puns (Stanley 1970; Harvey 2000).

However, not all of the features listed above can be studied with the help of Corpus Linguistics. Some of them – i.e. innuendo, double-entendre, question-tags, mentions, inventions and puns – will be analysed manually in *Chapter 7*. As was mentioned in *Chapter 2*, certain linguistic features of gayspeak do not relate to the form of words but to their sense; for this reason, they cannot be investigated using technology alone but require human interpretation.

5.4 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to clarify what the label "gayspeak" has stood for according to how homosexuality has been viewed over the decades. It has also discussed the differences between naturally-occurring and fictional linguistic varieties, with a particular focus on fictional

gayspeak and its characterising function in fiction. In addition, an overview of seminal past research papers listing linguistic features of gayspeak has been provided. As is now clear, many features of gayspeak recur in past research – albeit under different names – such as effeminisation, explicitness, implicitness, playfulness, to name but a few. The overview provided in the previous section clearly shows the cumulative nature of research on gayspeak, with each study contributing further features of this linguistic variety. This chapter has also provided the reader with a framework that was created on the basis of the studies conducted in the past; it is intended to be a comprehensive framework encompassing the linguistic features of gayspeak that can be analysed in a corpus-assisted study. Besides, a manual analysis of those features of gayspeak that cannot be investigated through Corpus Linguistics will also be undertaken.

Chapter 6 will analyse the corpus at the highest magnification; it will examine quantitatively and qualitatively, through the lenses of #Lancsbox software, those features of gayspeak that would not be analysable with the naked eye.

CHAPTER 6

GAYSPEAK IN 21st CENTURY BRITISH DRAMA

A CORPUS-ASSISTED ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

Some aspects of the language are invisible to the naked eye. Texts can be too numerous to be analysed manually, and comparisons between two corpora just impossible without the aid of software. For this reason, it is the intention of this chapter to apply technology to the study of gayspeak in order to analyse 186[43] texts (414270 tokens, 20440 types, 201662 lemmas) both quantitatively and qualitatively. The former investigation will benefit from the support of a software package called #Lancsbox, while the latter will require human interpretation based on the data provided by technology. As Biber *et al.* (1998, p. 4) point out,

> association patterns represent quantitative relations, measuring the extent to which features and variants are associated with contextual factors. However, functional (qualitative) interpretation is also an essential step in any corpus-based analysis.

As was already mentioned in *Chapter 2*, a corpus linguistic approach is almost a novelty in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies – especially in the research focusing on the language in use by gay men – and the investigation of fictional gayspeak with software certainly is, all the more so in that software is here used to discuss how fictional gayspeak is represented in a highly specific corpus comprising 61 British plays staged between 2000 and 2020. Previous research (see *Chapter 5*) that has attempted to trace the main linguistic features of gayspeak was not empirically derived in that it rarely supported the findings with quantitative analyses; this is because previous studies were conducted in an era when Corpus Linguistics did not exist yet, if we consider that only few studies were conducted with a corpus-based approach before 1970s; it was only with the advent of widely available personal computers in the 1980s that Corpus Linguistics became popular as a method (Baker 2006, p. 2). Therefore, a quantitative investigation of gayspeak, especially when including significant amounts of texts, was simply impossible. The new technologies, therefore, have helped researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses to produce a more reliable picture of the studied phenomena, one which neither one nor the other alone would be able to yield.

[43] Although the gay characters in the corpus are 187, only 186 texts are included in *GayCorpus2000-2020* because one character does not speak.

6.2 Aims and methodology

For the sake of clarity, it should be recalled that *Chapters 3* and *4* attempted to examine the corpus in order to analyse the 61 plays and the 187 gay characters, respectively, on the basis of universal sociolinguistic variables, but also variables that are specific to Language and Sexuality Studies. This chapter intends to close the circle by investigating the linguistic variety that allegedly indexes the sexuality of the 187 characters included in the corpus. It will also attempt to re-evaluate the main studies on gayspeak conducted in the past (see *Chapter 5*).

As is now clear, the language under scrutiny in this work is the fictional representation of gayspeak as it is used in 61 British plays staged between 2000 and 2020. As was already mentioned in section 4.1.3, dramatic dialogue has a double-layered nature (see Short's visualisation of it in *Fig. 4.1*), in that it is through the characters' voice that playwrights can actually convey their message to the receiver; in other words, not only do the characters overtly communicate their own thoughts, but they may also covertly convey the playwrights' real message.

This is a corpus-based study as it uses corpus data "in order to explore a theory or hypothesis, typically one established in the current literature, in order to validate it, refute it or refine it" (McEnery *et al.* 2012, p. 6). This approach to Corpus Linguistics is mentioned by Baker (2010, p. 8), who claims that when conducting research, one can refer to "existing linguistic frameworks or categories […] and as a result […], we may find ways to modify such frameworks." As will be explained in the following sections, scholars studying gayspeak have created frameworks that include linguistic features that are supposedly used frequently by gay men. Although these studies were conducted in different decades, they provide similar results. Therefore, the most common features have been categorised in a new, more comprehensive framework (see section 5.3) that includes aspects of gayspeak that will be re-evaluated in this chapter through Corpus Linguistics. The second part of this chapter will provide a corpus-driven analysis, as the corpus itself will drive the study without any prior idea; this is the case with the section devoted to the analysis of keywords and collocations (see section 6.5). Apart from describing how the fictional gay men speak in the plays under study, the ultimate aim of this research is also to re-evaluate whether it is still acceptable to speak of a linguistic variety used exclusively by gay men – at least those represented in the corpus –, how it has changed in

relation to the gayspeak described in previous research, and which aspects have been retained or lost.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the variety analysed in this study is not intended to be a generalisation of present-day real and/or fictional gayspeak; rather, it is primarily intended to be a description of the linguistic variety chosen by playwrights to index their characters' homosexuality in the 61 plays under scrutiny. In other words, the corpus under study is a highly specialised one and does not intend to be representative of a broader reality; it rather encompasses all the language to be analysed. Therefore, the statistical method appropriate for this kind of analysis is that of descriptive statistics, without the necessity of being followed by statistical inference procedures because the researcher is able to observe the true state of affairs (Brezina 2018, p. 18), the whole population to be analysed, and not just a sample, a representation of it.

6.3 Corpora

Several corpora will be used to carry out this study. It is worth noting that, with the exception of the reference corpus *SpokenBNC2014*[44] (11.5 million words), none of the corpora used in this study were available, which further complicated this research, as building corpora is a time-consuming practise that requires a good amount of precision and patience. The main specialised corpus used in this study is *GayCorpus2000-2020*, which contains all the lines uttered by gay male characters in the British plays included in it. The plays were selected exclusively on the basis of the playwrights' British nationality and because at least one gay male character appears in them. Each character in the corpus corresponds to a different file, titled as "dateoftheplay_nameofthecharacter_age_S/A/D[45]_titleoftheplay" (e.g. 2001_DAVEY_17_S_VINCENTRIVER) in order to be easily identifiable and to allow quick access to basic information about each character during the analyses. In creating the corpus, the

[44] "The 11.5-million-word spoken component of the BNC2014 contains transcripts of recorded conversations, gathered from members of the UK public between 2012 and 2016. The conversations were recorded in informal settings (typically at home) and took place among friends and family members. An innovative aspect of the corpus is that the speakers recorded their conversations using the built-in audio recording device in their smartphones. The corpus comprises 1,251 conversations, featuring a total of 672 speakers." http://corpora.lancs.ac.UK/bnc2014/ [Last accessed: 11/02/2023]

[45] Standard/Accent/Dialect; it refers to the linguistic variety used by a specific character.

data were extrapolated from eBooks and paperbacks; the process was quicker with eBooks, whereas paperbacks had to be scanned with a scanner equipped with an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) programme that recognises the image of each page and converts it into a digitalised text that can be analysed through software. All material was cleaned of paratext, characters' names, page numbers, stage directions, act and scene numbers, which would have skewed the results of the research.

This study mainly uses *GayCorpus2000-2020* as a specialised corpus, as it seeks to investigate how the specialised language under scrutiny (i.e. the fictional gayspeak portrayed in the British plays from 2000 to 2020 included in the corpus) is used. However, a further corpus was built, called *GayDispersion2000-2020*, which categorises the data contained in *GayCorpus2000-2020* into 20 different files, organised on a chronological basis (the 2019 file is missing as no plays with the aforementioned characteristics seems to be found in that year). Through this corpus it will be possible to analyse the dispersion of some words in the texts included, i.e. (dis)homogeneous distributions of words across the different parts of the corpus. *Spoken-BNC2014*, on the other hand, is used exclusively as a reference corpus, i.e. a general corpus used as a term of comparison. This reference corpus was chosen on the basis of the language that it includes, i.e. present-day spoken British English. As a matter of fact, for a collection of texts to be used as a reference corpus, it should be representative of a particular language variety – in this case the language that is spoken in the UK in the 21st century – which also includes the language represented in the specialised corpus, *GayCorpus2000-2020*.

6.4 Re-assessing gayspeak through Corpus Linguistics

This section intends to apply the framework proposed in section 5.3 to analyse the fictional language spoken by the gay characters in the 61 plays included in the corpus. The number of gay men under study in this chapter and *Chapter 7* is 186 – i.e. one less than the total number of characters – as one of them does not speak at all. This chapter should be seen as the completion of *Chapter 4*, which sought to investigate how the gay characters in the corpus are portrayed on the basis of some universal sociolinguistic variables – i.e. age, social class, linguistic variety – and other variables that are specific to Language and Sexuality Studies – i.e. secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness*. Likewise, the variables investigated in this section are specific to this field of study, as this chapter seeks to analyse some linguistic features that are

peculiar of the social group under scrutiny and that supposedly index gay men's sexuality. It does not necessarily mean that these features are only to be found among gay men; in fact, some of them are in common with other social groups, such as women (see Lakoff 1975). However, they are commonly taken as linguistic features indexing the speakers' homosexuality in the previous research in the field of Language and Sexuality Studies.

In the following sub-sections, each macro-category will be analysed taking a corpus-based approach. Some terms have been selected either for their significance or because they are frequently cited as examples in previous research (or both); they will be discussed mainly on the basis of their relative frequency – i.e. the frequency of their occurrence in the corpus per 10k tokens[46]. The relative frequency of these terms in the specialised corpus, i.e. *GayCorpus2000-2020*, will be compared with the relative frequency in the reference corpus, i.e. *SpokenBNC2014*, so as to assess whether there is evidence to declare that those terms that were mentioned in previous research as examples of words indexing the speakers' homosexuality are actually used more frequently in the corpus containing fictional gayspeak than in the one representing present-day spoken British English.

The tool that will be used for this kind of research is called KWIC (Key Word In Context), which is a concordance tool included in the software package #Lancsbox. This tool generates a list of all instances of a search term in a corpus in the form of a concordance, which "shows words in their context" (McEnery and Hardie 2012, p. 35). It can be used to find the frequency of a word or phrase in a corpus, to find frequencies of different word classes (e.g. adjectives, verbs, adverbs), to find complex linguistic structures (e.g. passives), to sort, filter and randomise concordance lines and to perform statistical analyses comparing the use of a search term in two corpora.

6.4.1 Directness

The macro-category called "directness" is here used to refer to the use of direct words and expressions, such as insults and derogatory terms. Brown and Levinson (1987) define insults as threats to an individual's negative face, i.e. threats to one's desire to be appreciated and approved of. A negative face-threatening act (FTA) is produced when this desire is not attended to, and the speaker disregards the interlocutor's positive self-image, thus threatening his/her

[46] Absolute frequencies will also be included for the sake of clarity.

social face. Impoliteness originates when at least one FTA is used to attack people's face. In Culpeper *et al.*'s (2007, p. 209) studies, negative impoliteness is defined as "the use of strategies designed to […] scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other's space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect." Culpeper (2011) adds that impoliteness only occurs when the speaker intentionally communicates the face attack, and the hearer perceives the FTA as intentionally face-attacking. Therefore, intentionality is a fundamental factor, distinguishing intentional cases of impoliteness – where somebody intends to offend with full awareness – from cases where somebody inadvertently causes offence.

Minority groups, however, may also use impoliteness for other purposes, such as "ambivalent solidarity" (Harvey 1998, pp. 301-303), which is a fundamental element in the construction of a shared identity, as both the sender and the receiver of the FTA are mutually affected by it. Harvey (2000) defines ambivalent solidarity as

> a feature of camp interaction in which speaker and addressee paradoxically bond through the mechanism of the face-threat. Specifically, the speaker threatens the addressee's face in the very area of their shared subcultural difference […]. Consequently, the face-threat, while effectively targeting the addressee, equally highlights the speaker's vulnerability to the same threat. (p. 254)

Culpeper (2011, p. 215) asserts that, generally, mock impoliteness ''takes place between equals, typically friends, and is reciprocal.'' This is particularly true of gay men, who may use homophobic insults to address other gay men as a form of cultural reappropriation of heteronormative derogatory terms, equally highlighting both the speaker's and the interlocutor's vulnerability to the same threat. It is common among gay men to re-appropriate homophobic terms that have historically been used as FTAs by (mainly, but not necessarily) heterosexual people and turn them into typical terms of address (e.g. "queen", "fairy", "fag").
In previous studies, directness was usually referred to as "explicitness" (see Harvey 2000). A reference to directness can already be found in Sonenschein (1969), whose work was written before the liberation era. In his study, he describes how gay men reappropriate certain pejorative standard words – e.g. "bitch", "bear", to name but a few – through a linguistic process known

as re-semantisation[47]. These words usually refer to sexual roles and activities. In this work, two main categories of directness will be considered, namely open aggression and sexual vocabulary. It is worth noting that, broadly speaking, the use of swearwords[48] is by and large more significant in *GayCorpus2000-2020* (rel. f. 76.64) than in the reference corpus *SpokenBNC2014* (rel. f. 21.27).

6.4.1.1 Open aggression

Open aggression refers to those derogatory expressions that are used by the fictional gay men portrayed in the plays as either real FTAs or jokes, or both. *Table 6.1* provides a list of derogatory terms that recur in the plays and are often mentioned in previous research as instances of open aggression. The relative frequency (per 10k tokens) of these terms is provided, which allows for a balanced comparison between the specialised corpus under scrutiny (i.e. *GayCorpus2000-2020*) and the reference corpus (i.e. *SpokenBNC2014*). Absolute frequencies (i.e. the number of occurrences in the corpora) are also provided for the sake of clarity.

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Bitch(es)	51	1.23	319	0.31
Bugger(s)	30	0.72	169	0.16
Camp[49]	13/24	0.31	28/222	0.02
Cunt(s)	61	1.47	106	0.10
Dickhead(s)	6	0.14	77	0.07
Fag(s)[50]	2/14	0.04	6/89	0.005
Faggot(s)	13	0.31	16	0.02
Fairy(ies)[51]	3/8	0.07	0/166	0
Knob(s)	22	0.53	86	0.08
Knobhead(s)	5	0.12	16	0.02

[47] Re-semantisation or neosemy is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs when an already existing word holding a certain meaning is assigned a novel meaning (Rastier and Valette 2009).

[48] The data are obtained by typing the smart search term "SWEARWORDS" in #Lancsbox search bar. Smart searches are searches predefined in the tool to offer users easy access to complex searches.

[49] Only the instances where "camp" is used as a derogatory term have been included in the table.

[50] It should be said that only 2/14 of the occurrences of the terms "fag(s)" are used as a derogative term to refer to gay men; the remaining instances are used as a synonym of the term "cigarette". The figures included in the table only refer to the derogative use of the term.

[51] Only 3/8 occurrences of the terms "fairy" and "fairies" are used as derogatory terms to refer to gay men. Nevertheless, its relative frequency is still higher than in the reference corpus, where 0/166 instances of the terms are used with the aforementioned connotation.

Pansy(ies)	2	0.05	9	0.009
Queer(s)	89	2.15	21	0.02
Scumbag(s)	2	0.05	4	0.004
Slut(s)	6	0.14	28	0.03
Wanker(s)	11	0.27	33	0.03
Whore(s)	13	0.31	62	0.06

Table 6.1 Open aggression: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

As can be seen from *Table 6.1*, each noun was searched in its singular and plural forms, thus including any of their instances; this is possible in #Lancsbox by using the string /sing. noun|pl. noun/ (e.g. /bitch|bitches/). To provide a more immediate visualisation of the data, the higher relative frequencies have been red-coloured, whereas the lower ones have been blue-coloured. *Table 6.1* shows that all the terms expressing some kind of open aggression are more frequent in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in *SpokenBNC2014*. It seems thus fair to say that the use of derogatory terms is more frequent in the fictional gayspeak portrayed in the 61 plays than in the language included in the reference corpus, which is representative of present-day spoken British English. However, as is already clear, it should be reminded that the data cannot be generalised to present-day gayspeak, since this research can only provide evidence of the language portrayed in the corpus under scrutiny.

In addition to this, the occurrences of the entries included in the list were also classified on the basis of the characters' age and secrecy/*out-of-the-closetedness* (see *Appendix 4*). As was expected, especially considering that 117 out of 187 characters are "social" gay men (i.e. they express their homosexuality openly), all the terms included in *Table 6.1* are used more often by social gay men, the only exception being the term "queer(s)", which is pronounced slightly more frequently by secret gay men (34 times) than social gay men (32 times). The difference, however, is too small to conclude that the secret gay men in the corpus use the word "queer(s)" more often than the others. What certainly stands out is that, among all the words included in the table, "queer(s)" is the one that occurs more often (89 times) in spite of its obsolescence. Surprisingly, this is the only word, together with the term "camp" – another old-fashioned word –, to be pronounced more often by young gay men in their twenties. The word "bugger(s)", furthermore, has a significant occurrence among the secret gay men (10 times), although it is pronounced mainly by social gay men (17 times).

It is also worth noting that the polysemous words listed in the table above - i.e. "camp(s)", "fag(s)", "fairy(ies)" – occur with a significant relative frequency in the study

corpus also when they are used with a derogatory connotation and not just in their basic sense. For example, the noun "fairy(ies)", which occurs in the study corpus 3 out of 8 times (rel. freq.: 0.07) with its pejorative connotation, occurs 166 times (rel. freq.: 0.16) in its basic sense in the reference corpus, but 0 out of 166 occurrences are used to refer to an "effeminate or homosexual man" (*O.E.D.*). Similarly, the terms "camp(s)" and "fag(s)", which occur significantly frequently in the reference corpus, are only used with a pejorative connotation in a few instances in *SpokenBNC2014*, while their relative frequency in the study corpus is much higher, even when only the pejorative uses are taken into account.

The entry terms "bugger(s)", "faggot(s)" and "queer(s)", which were chosen as examples of derogatory words that were especially used in the past to refer to gay men, are not evenly distributed in *GayCorpus2000-2020*, as is shown in *Figure 6.1*. Distribution provides information about the frequencies of entry terms in different parts of the corpus. The search for the distribution of the three entry terms below was possible thanks to Whelk tool, which is one of the tools included in the software #Lancsbox. The data have been searched throughout 20 files, which comprise the dialogues between the gay men organised diachronically; each file includes all the dialogues shown in the plays staged in a different year, from 2000 to 2020. No plays included in the corpus were staged in 2019.

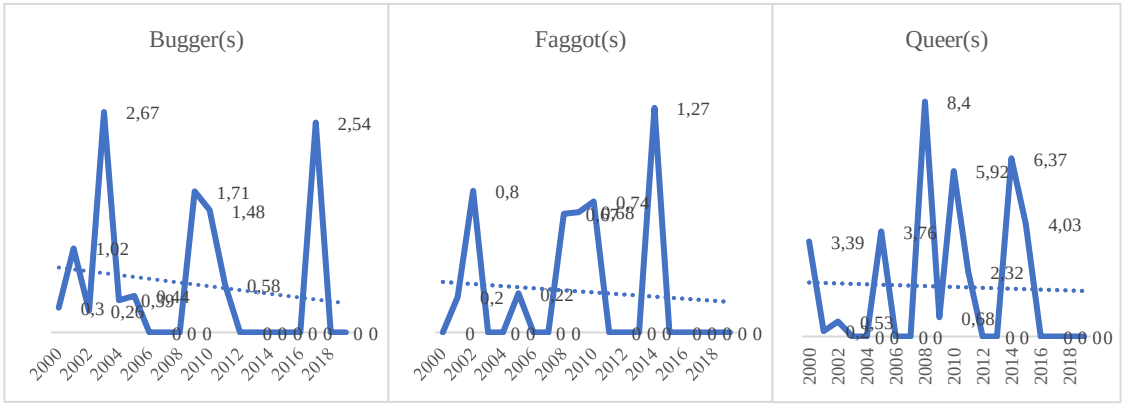

Figure 6.1 Dispersion of the terms "bugger(s)", "faggot(s)" and "queer(s) in GayCorpus2000-2020

Figure 6.1 includes the relative frequencies (per 10k tokens) of the three terms on a diachronic basis. It shows that there is a general tendency among the fictional gay men portrayed in the 61 plays to avoid the use of obsolete derogatory terms such as "bugger(s), "faggot(s)" and "queer(s)", as is confirmed by the trendlines that are automatically generated on the basis of the data included in the graph, which have a descending trajectory.

6.4.1.2 Sexual vocabulary

This category comprises the lexicon belonging to the semantic field of sex. It differs from the previous category in that the terms included in *Table 6.2* are not commonly used as derogatory terms of address; they are rather nouns and verbs describing parts of the body and activities related to sex.

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
*Arse**	91	2.20	259	0.25
*Ass**	18	0.43	91	0.09
Bareback	17	0.41	8	0.008
*Cock**	89	2.15	77	0.07
*Cum**	13	0.31	7	0.007
*Dick**	47	1.13	311	0.30
Fuck(s)/fucked/fucking	1,300	31.38	5,917	5.69
Lick(s)/licked/licking[52]	20	0.48	126	0.12
Rim(s)/rimmed/rimming	9	0.22	19	0.02
Shag(s)/shagged/shagging	69	1.67	66	0.06
Shit	247	5.96	3,145	3.03
Suck(s)/sucked/sucking	62	1.50	296	0.28
Threesome	0.27	0.27	18	0.02
Toss(es)/tossed/tossing	16	0.39	46	0.04
Wank(s)/wanked/wanking	26	0.63	46	0.04

Table 6.2 Sexual vocabulary: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

The data provided in *Table 6.2* seem to suggest that the discourse produced by the fictional gay men in the corpus is more sexualised than the discourse included in the reference corpus. The term "discourse" has a wide range of meanings in Linguistics, yet in this context it is to be understood as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker 1992, p. 5) or, following Foucault's definition, "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, p. 54). Along similar lines, Burr (1995, p. 32) maintains that discourse is "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way

[52] Only the sexually connotated uses of this term have been taken into account. It is worth saying that all the occurrences in the corpus were actually sexually connotated, as in the following lines, among many others:

(a) Does he at least let you lick out his arse? That must be nice.
(b) Well, go and fucking lick someone out
(c) I didn't tek off my shoe an' lick yu myself! Puhrleese!
(d) never found a pussy ass I couldn't lick
(e) And you kept licking my face and swallowing me!
(f) Will you want to lick his body when he is old?
(g) Now lick my fucking boots. Shut your fucking mouth.
(h) And tongues and wetness in the dark. Licking and sucking and fucking till dawn.

together produce a particular version of events […] surrounding any one object, event, person, etc." These definitions imply that there are multiple discourses around the same object, reflecting the different attitudes that people have towards it. Therefore, the discourse that people produce around certain topics may vary on the basis of many factors, and the discourse included in *GayCorpus2000-2020*, which is produced by fictional gay men, differs from the discourse included in the reference corpus *SpokenBNC2014* in that the relative frequency of terms referring to sexual practices (e.g. "bareback", "threesome") and those referring to sexualised parts of the body (e.g. "arse", "ass", "cock", "dick") is significantly higher than in the reference corpus. One possible interpretation of the data may be that the presence of sexual vocabulary differentiating the linguistic variety spoken by the gay men portrayed in the plays from present-day British speakers reiterates the stereotype according to which gay people are characterised mainly on the basis of their sexual preference. In the light of the double-layered nature of drama, the playwrights decided to put a sexualised language in the mouth of their characters, thus portraying them as "self-ghettoising" people.

6.4.2 Indirectness

This macro-category, which is called "covertness" in Harvey's (2000) framework, comprises all linguistic strategies that, according to previous research (Lakoff 1975; Hayes 1976; Harvey 2000), are used by gay men to cover their homosexuality. Indirectness includes many features listed by Lakoff (1975) in her ground-breaking book *Language and Woman's Place*, which discusses the linguistic features that are allegedly used more often by women; for historical and cultural reasons that she explains in her study, women tend to be less assertive than men also through the language that they use. Some of these features are also typical of gayspeak, as was stated in the commentaries to the 2010 re-edition of the book. For Lakoff, women have much in common with other groups such as homosexuals, hippies, and academics; they all have in common a marginal condition determined by their exclusion from institutionalised male power (Lakoff 1975, p. 173).

Unlike directness, indirectness has to do with the politeness strategies that people adopt to pay attention to other people's social faces. Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument, the aforementioned features can be seen as FTA-minimising strategies that are used to perform both positive and negative politeness; the former refers to the set of strategies used to maintain and enhance people's positive face, i.e. "the want of every member that his wants

be desirable to at least some others" (p. 62), the latter refers to the set of strategies used to maintain and enhance people's negative face, i.e. "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (p. 62). Strategies to maintain positive face include mitigating devices, which are used to mitigate expressions of disapproval, criticism, ridicule, challenges, disagreements, accusation, expression of violent emotions, irreverence, and mention of inappropriate or taboo subjects. Negative politeness includes strategies to be conventionally indirect, not to presume/assume (e.g. question tags, hedges), not to coerce (e.g. minimise the imposition), metaphors, euphemisms, irony, vagueness and ambiguity.

In *GayCorpus2000-2020*, indirectness is mainly achieved through the use of sexual indirectness, genderless terminology, hedges, innuendo, question tags. However, this chapter will only deal with two of the strategies listed above, i.e. genderless terminology and hedges. This is due to the fact that a corpus linguistic approach can shed light on the form of the words; when it comes to the sense, as is the case with sexual indirectness and innuendo, a manual approach is required (see *Chapter 7*).

6.4.2.1. Genderless terminology

Hayes (1976) describes the use of genderless terminology as one of the strategies used by gay men in the secret setting in order to avoid expressing their sexuality. The label "genderless terminology" refers to all those terms that do not reveal the gender of the person that they refer to, as is the case with nouns like "partner" and "lover", which may be used in certain contexts in lieu of the more gender-explicit terms "boyfriend" and "husband". *Table 6.3* includes the relative frequency of the two genderless terms mentioned above. Other forms of genderless language are also possible; recently, the issue of pronouns has often been discussed in connection with it, for example the use of plural "they" anaphorically linked to singular nouns. Nevertheless, not all instances of these pronouns and adjectives are used to hide one's gender, and analysing each occurrence in both the study and reference corpora would be humanly impossible. The focus on terms such as "lover(s)" and "partner(s)" is due to the fact that much of the previous research on gayspeak has mentioned these two terms, which tend to be used to hide the gender of a gay man's lover and thus his homosexuality. It should be noted that the two terms are not always used with this specific function; however, the data included in the table take into account only the instances where the terms "lover(s)" and "partner(s)" are used as a way to hide the gender – and sexuality – of the beloved gay men.

Terms	*Abs. freq. GC*	*Rel. freq. GC*	*Abs. freq. S-BNC*	*Rel. freq. S-BNC*
Lover(s)	42	1.01	54	0.05
Partner(s)	61	1.47	281	0.27

Table 6.3 Genderless terminology: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

Table 6.3 shows that the use of genderless terminology is more frequent in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in *SpokenBNC2014*, though the relative frequency in both cases is only relatively high when compared to other features in this study. This might be due to the fact that the majority (59%) of the gay characters in the corpus are "out-of-the-closet" (see *Chapter 4*, section 4.2.4), which means that they do not necessarily need to hide their sexuality with genderless terms. It is also true, however, that despite not being very frequent, this linguistic feature is still used on stage to index gay men's sexuality.

6.4.2.2 Hedges

This category comprises the expressions that are used to mitigate direct statements. This feature is also mentioned in Lakoff (1975) as one of the linguistic features that gay men have in common with women. Lakoff, however, based her study not on quantitative evidence, but on her own intuition, as was common at that time. *Table 6.4* includes the data that have been obtained by analysing the instances of hedges included in the 61 plays with the software #Lancsbox.

Terms	*Abs. freq. GC*	*Rel. freq. GC*	*Abs. freq. S-BNC*	*Rel. freq. S-BNC*
I mean	405	9.78	19,446	18.73
Kind of	148	3.57	11,647	11.20
Kinda	27	0.65	848	0.82
Like[53]	1,841	44.44	113,065	108.77
Sort of	232	5.60	13,951	13.42
Sorta	0	0	50	0.05
To be like	584	14.10	52,101	50.12
You know	752	18.15	45,612	43.88
You see	183	4.42	3,429	3.30

Table 6.4 Hedges: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

[53] This only includes "like" as a preposition and subordinating conjunction (in #Lancsbox they are tagged as IN); the verb "like" is not included in the count.

Table 6.4 shows that, with the exception of the hedge "you see", which is slightly more frequent in *GayCorpus2000-2020* (rel. freq. 4.42) than in *SpokenBNC2014* (rel. freq. 3.30), all the other instances of hedges are not particularly relevant in the corpus under scrutiny. The data show that the relative frequencies of hedges in *GayCorpus2000-2020* are significantly lower than in the reference corpus. This might hint at the fact that in the fictional gayspeak represented in the corpus this linguistic feature is no longer among those features that have been chosen to index the characters' sexuality. After all, as the previous sub-sections suggest, the majority of the gay men in the plays show their sexuality openly, and the gayspeak that they use appears to be irreverent and explicit, rather than being implicit and indirect.

6.4.2.3 Super-polite forms

Super-polite forms comprise all the polite forms that gay men allegedly use more often than heterosexual men; this is a further category that gay men share with women (Lakoff 1975). Lakoff (1975, p. 80) maintains that

> women don't use off-color or indelicate expressions; women are the experts at euphemism; more positively, women are the repositories of tact and know the right things to say to other people, while men carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking.

Table 6.5 includes some of the most common polite forms found in the corpus under study:

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Excuse me	36	0.87	366	0.35
Pardon	51	1.23	477	0.46
Sorry	644	15.55	5,521	5.31
Thank you	226	5.46	3,729	3.59

Table 6.5 Super-polite forms: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

As *Table 6.5* shows, super-polite forms seem to be used more frequently among the gay characters included in the plays than in the reference corpus, which is representative of present-day spoken British English. This seems to confirm the intuitions expressed by Lakoff (1975), which she could not base on scientific evidence because of the lack of corpus linguistic tools.

6.4.3 Emotionality

This macro-category, which is also referred to as "expressive language" (Hayes 1976), is based on the assumption that – allegedly – gay men tend to use emotional and expressive terms more often than heterosexual men (Lakoff 1975). This is one of those linguistic features that homosexual men allegedly have in common with women. As a matter of fact, heterosexual men are said to be rational whereas women are believed to be emotional. Men are supposed to be competitive, whereas women are co-operative (Baker 2008). Women are focused on the personal and interactional aspects of conversation, whereas men tend to be more interested in conveying information (Holmes 1995; Lakoff 1990). Baker and Balirano (2018, p. 3) claim that men are socially expected to be strong, aggressive, self-confident and in control of all situations. They have to learn not to cry when they are hurt and are often pushed into "manly" activities regardless of their talents or preferences, as they are forced to constantly prove to themselves and others that they are masculine.

Stereotypically, gay men are seen as delicate and hyper-sensitive people; gay men, unlike heterosexual men, are allegedly allowed to express their inner feelings without the fear of undermining their masculinity. The following sections will discuss the use of emotional terms, exclamations, intensive "so" and vocatives.

6.4.3.1 Emotional terms

Emotional terms – e.g. "lovely", "adorable", "fabulous", to name but a few – are stereotypically used to characterise gay men both in literature and the media. They are generally attached to a certain type of gay men, i.e. the "camp", which is a term that designates "mannerisms, speech, etc., in a man that are regarded as flamboyant, arch, or theatrical, especially in a way often characterized as feminine or unmasculine, and stereotypically associated with male homosexuality" (*O.E.D.*). As a form of overgeneralisation, this linguistic feature is usually chosen to characterise all kind of gay men, regardless of the differences existing within the gay community; it is used as a recognisable feature indexing gayness in that it is easily and immediately recognisable, which is what playwrights want to achieve when characterising their characters. These expressions are included in *Table 6.6*.

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Adorable[54]	2	0.05	40	0.04

[54] In this case the difference in the two relative frequencies is almost negligible.

Adore(s)/adored	3	0.07	28	0.03
Divine	8	0.19	19	0.02
Fabulous	18	0.43	108	0.10
Glamorous	2	0.05	23	0.02
Lovely	101	2.44	3,959	3.81
Marvellous	15	0.36	71	0.07

Table 6.6 Emotional terms: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

The terms included in *Table 6.6* are often used in contexts that do not require such an exaggerated emotional response, as in the following lines:

(a) And his face – his cheek! The countenance: *divine*! My arse was snapping like a
(b) The old town is *lovely*, the castle and everything. And you can get *fabulous* clothes
(c) The main thing is she got her hat back. It's a *fabulous* hat.
(d) all this standing in Maggie's dressing room, with the smell of her *fabulous* scent
(e) One of my doctors in Bermuda […] has given me this *marvellous* new painkilling

Therefore, following Lakoff's (1975) argument, there are certain areas of vocabulary that are allegedly used differently on a gender basis. This is the case of the group of adjectives and adverbs included in *Table 6.6*, which indicate the speaker's approbation or admiration for something and are largely confined to women's speech (p. 45). Lakoff argues that for a heterosexual man to use the aforementioned expressions is a way to damage his masculinity; however, there are certain categories of men who tend to use the previous expression more often, i.e. academic and homosexual men.

Broadly speaking, furthermore, the use of adjectives is slightly more frequent in *GayCorpus2000-2020* (rel. freq. 561.40) than in the reference corpus (rel. freq. 511.72), as *Table 6.7* shows.

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Adjectives	23,257	561.40	531,940	511.72
Verbs	88,372	2133.20	2,235,183	2150.22

Table 6.7 Adjectives and verbs: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

Adjectives – especially those expressing the speaker's feelings towards the subject under discussion – are one of the linguistic features that Lakoff (1975) lists as characterising women's language; women are generally more focused on the personal/interactional aspects of

conversation, whereas men tend to be more interested in conveying information (Holmes 1995; Lakoff 1990). The former function of language is generally performed by adjectives, which are used to personally qualify and show one's emotional response to something or someone. Verbs, on the other hand, are generally used to perform the latter function, which is commonly attached to men; it is true that verbs outnumber adjectives in both corpora, but it is also true that if adjectives are more recurrent in the corpus under scrutiny, verbs occur the most in the reference corpus, showing that the fictional gay men in *GayCorpus2000-2020* use adjectives slightly more and verbs slightly less than in present-day spoken British English, thus confirming Lakoff's (1975) statement. The difference between the two relative frequencies, however, is almost negligible.

6.4.3.2 Exclamations

One's emotional outburst can also be expressed through exclamations. Stanley (1970, p. 53-54) argues that "any camping […] session is frequently punctuated by exclamations. […] Such activities are accompanied by an excess of fluttering and gesticulating, and the exclamations are produced with exaggerated intonation and stress." Exclamations are also mentioned in Harvey's (2000) study as a way to parody femininity by using an emphatic style of utterance, which also includes hyperboles and vocatives. He claims that "exclamation is realised variously by the presence of exclamation marks and sublexical interjections ('oh') and is often (though not exclusively) realised in moodless clauses" (p. 255), that is when such emotional outburst would not be required. *Table 6.8* includes some instances of exclamations and their absolute and relative frequencies in the two corpora:

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Goodness	6	0.14	682	0.66
Gosh	12	0.29	1,054	1.01
Jesus Christ	11	0.27	62	0.06
Oh dear	28	0.68	1,623	1.56
Oh God	43	1.04	2,042	1.96
Oh my God	30	0.72	2,580	2.48
Wow	38	0.92	3,105	2.99

Table 6.8 Exclamations: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

Despite the fact that previous studies on gayspeak (e.g. Stanley 1970; Harvey 2000) mention exclamations as a typical feature of gayspeak, the relative frequencies of the expressions

included in *Table 6.8* seem to suggest that they are not to be considered as indexing features of gayness in the corpus under study. Apart from the expression "Jesus Christ", all the others included in the table have lower relative frequencies in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in *SpokenBNC2014*, which means that they occur more frequently in present-day spoken British English than in the language chosen to index the characters' homosexuality in the 61 plays. This is one of the stereotyped features of gayspeak that are being dismissed by the playwrights whose plays have been included in *GayCorpus2000-2020*.

6.4.3.3 Intensive "so"

Intensive "so" (e.g. I like him so much) is another feature used to express an intense emotional reaction. It is generally used in place of an absolute superlative; it is heavily stressed, and seems more characteristic of women's language, though also certain men can use it (Lakoff 1975, p. 48-49). The use of intensive "so" in a pre-adjectival position is only slightly more frequent in *GayCorpus2000-2020* (rel. freq. 12.24) than in *SpokenBNC2014* (rel. freq. 12.09).

What is perhaps more interesting to notice is that 7 instances of intensive "so" are used to accompany the adjective "gay". The collocation "so gay" has two functions in the corpus:

(a) derogatory term of address used to refer to the interlocutor's homosexuality, as in the following lines:

   i. Girls can play football. You're *so gay*
   ii. You're *so gay* you listen to Coldplay.
   iii. Will you stop being *so gay*?

   Note that the homosexuality of the interlocutor seems to be determined by the music that he listens to or the sport that he does;

(b) the expression "so gay" has also another connotation, especially among the younger generations, as it is also used for things that, in fact, do not display any sign of homosexuality. "So gay" can mean very stupid or pointless, dull, lame or boring (*Urban Dictionary*). This is evident in the following lines:

   i. You're *so gay*, you believe anything I say!
   ii. That's *so gay*, man...fuck's sake!

As was maintained before, intensive "so" replaces the use of absolute superlatives. Relative superlatives, on the other hand, seem to be more frequent in the corpus under study (rel. freq. 12.31) than in the reference corpus (rel. freq. 9.58), showing that the use of superlatives among the gay men in the 61 plays is more recurrent than in present-day spoken British English. Note that both absolute and relative superlatives are used to emphasise something, to show one's emotional response to something; relative superlatives, besides, are sometimes based on an exaggeration, in that they are often used in contexts where the superlative form would not be required, as in the following lines:

i. I might as well, I'm the oldest living virgin.
ii. he idolised me for some reason. Completely hetero, married, the sweetest guy.
iii. You ended up with the whitest boy on the planet.

Neither of the previous examples is completely true, if taken literally. However, they are used by the gay men in the corpus especially to convey the emotional engagement with the statement itself.

6.4.3.4 Vocatives

Similarly to exclamations, Harvey (2000) included vocatives in the list of the linguistic features of gayspeak that he defines as "parody of femininity". The massive use of vocative terms is a characteristic of women's speech, but this feature is also shared by gay men. Harvey (2000) maintains that

> the high incidence of vocatives often combines with exclamation and creates a verbal style that is addressee-oriented and gossipy. Through this style the parodic female powerfully draws in her interlocutor in a kind of discoursal intimacy that is as brittle as it is shrill. (p. 255)

Table 6.9 includes a list of vocative terms that are generally mentioned as examples in past studies, and are commonly used to characterise gay men's speech. As can be seen, vocative terms seem to occur more significantly in the corpus under study than in the reference corpus, which means that the gay men in the 61 plays make a more significant use of them than in present-day spoken British English.

Terms	*Abs. freq. GC*	*Rel. freq. GC*	*Abs. freq. S-BNC*	*Rel. freq. S-BNC*
Babe	19	0.46	191	0.18
Baby	66	1.59	1,509	1.45
Darling	92	2.22	967	0.93
Dear	102	2.46	2280	2.19
Honey	17	0.41	234	0.23
Luv	1	0.02	1	0.0010
Sweaty	4	0.10	58	0.06
Sweetheart	13	0.31	45	0.04
Sweetie	2	0.05	38	0.04

Table 6.9 Vocatives: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

It is interesting to note that some vocatives (i.e. "sweaty" and "sweetie") exploit a further linguistic feature that is common among gay men, i.e. the diminutive form. Diminutives are typical of women's language, which is a way to show one's emotions and mitigate one's statements (Lakoff 1975); diminutives are among those features of women's language that are also shared by homosexual men.

6.4.4 Playfulness

Playfulness is a macro-category that is also mentioned by Harvey (2000) under the label "ludicrism", which comprises those linguistic features that are determined by a playful attitude to language form and meaning, signifier and signified. Playfulness will be dealt with more thoroughly in *Chapter 7*, as it can hardly be analysed through the use of technology; it rather requires human interpretation in order to be recognised in a text and to be classified as such. Therefore, this chapter will only deal with foreignisms, which is one of the strategies included in this macro-category.

6.4.4.1 Foreignisms

The term foreignism refers to the use of foreign words and expressions. Harvey (2000, p. 252) maintains that "it is typical in English camp for a speaker to sprinkle his/her speech with elements of the French language." He is of the opinion that the use of French in English grows out of an appropriation of aristocratic gestures which has a long history in camp. The use of French expressions in gayspeak has been reiterated in literature and the media, and it has become a fixed stereotype used to index gay men's sexuality in literary and audiovisual

products. The use of French foreignisms, as is the case with those included in *Table 6.10*, dates back to Polari, probably to make the language even more difficult to understand; moreover, the use of French may also have helped to

> glamorise the speaker, suggesting that he or she was well-travelled or multilingual. French, therefore, would enable Polari speakers either to claim a sophisticated identity, or to mock those people who thought they were sophisticated, by imitating them. (Baker 2002b, p. 57)

Terms	***Abs. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Abs. Freq. S-BNC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***
Chic	0	0	12	0.01
Fiancé	1	0.02	0	0
Madame	1	0.02	22	0.02
Mademoiselle	5	0.12	2	0.002
Merde	2	0.05	1	0.0010
Monsieur	12	0.29	6	0.006

Table 6.10 Foreignisms: absolute and relative frequencies in GayCorpus2000-2020 and SpokenBNC2014

Table 6.10 shows that the use of the French words included in the list is more significant in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in *SpokenBNC2014*. The term "madame" has the same relative frequency in the two corpora; it is called a "lockword", i.e. a word that occurs with similar frequencies in the two corpora under study (Brezina 2018, p. 80). It is worth noting that even though foreignisms occur more often in the specialised corpus than in the reference corpus, their relative frequencies are relatively low, suggesting that only very few instances can be found in the corpus. The following lines include some examples where foreignisms are used; as can be seen, most of them are in French, but some are also in Italian:

i. Anyway – tonight. *Ce soir*. New Orleans or Flamingos?
ii. A fucking big Pimms *pour moi*.
iii. I'll hear you from you later on – *Ciao*.
iv. So it's okay in there? *Les auditions*?
v. *Felicitations* to you all.
vi. *Bien fait, mes enfants. Bien fait*.
vii. No shady *boîte* for me.
viii. *Il Formaggio Grande!*

Not only is it possible to find the frequency of a word or phrase in a corpus with #Lancsbox, but it is also possible to search for frequencies of different word classes (e.g. nouns, verbs,

adjectives) and complex linguistic structures (e.g. the passives, split infinitives, foreign words, to mention but a few). When searching for foreign words in general[55], that is without manually specifying the words to be searched as was done in *Table 6.10*, the data confirm the tendency outlined before, as it turns out that foreign words occur more often in *GaySpeak2000-2020* (rel. freq. 5.17) than in the reference corpus (rel. freq. 2.07).

Foreignisms have also been investigated diachronically. *Figure 6.2*, which visualises the dispersion of foreign words in the corpus, shows that foreignisms occur more often in the plays staged in the first decade of the 21st century, more specifically between 2001 and 2004.

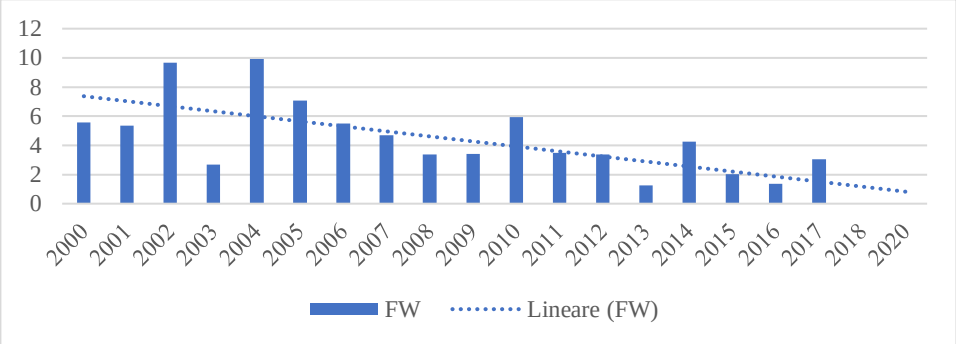

Figure 6.2 Dispersion of foreign words in GayCorpus2000-2020

Furthermore, the trendline shows that the use of foreign words in the fictional gayspeak represented in the corpus is declining considerably, with 0 instances in 2018 and 2020, which might probably hint at the fact that more recently this feature that has historically – and stereotypically – been reiterated in literature and the media to characterise gay men has been gradually disappearing.

The following section will investigate the 61 plays with a corpus-driven approach; this means that, unlike the corpus-based approach adopted in section 6.4, it will be the corpus itself to drive the research, as will be clearer in section 6.5.

6.5 Keywords and collocations

A keyword is a word that is more or less frequent in a study corpus than it is in a larger reference corpus, where the difference in frequency is statistically significant (Brezina 2018, p. 80). Scott (1997, p. 236), who first introduced the term "keyword", underlined that the frequency with

[55] This is possible by typing the tag "FW" in the part of speech (POS) bar in #Lancsbox.

which the keyword occurs in a given text by comparison with a reference corpus has to be unusual. Unlike a simple word list, which only provides evidence of frequencies, a keyword list gives a measure of saliency (Baker 2006, p. 125). If a word is used more often in the study corpus than in the reference corpus, then it will be called "positive keyword"; if, on the other hand, a word occurs statistically less frequently in the corpus of interest than in the reference corpus, then it will be called "negative keyword". Keyness analysis, therefore, usually aims to identity keywords, which is a way to get a general idea of the content of a corpus, or of what is missing in it[56].

A fundamental distinction is to be made between the concepts of effect-size and statistical significance of keywords. The former "indicates the magnitude of an observed finding" (Rosenfeld and Penrod 2011, p. 342), i.e. it shows "whether the difference or relationship we have found is strong or weak" (Mujis 2010, p. 70); the latter indicates "the high probability that the difference between two means or other finding based on a random sample is not the result of sampling error but reflects the characteristics of the population from which the sample was drawn" (Sirking 2006, p. 306). This study will focus on effect-size of keywords, which is a way to establish keyness in a corpus (see also Gabrielatos and Marchi 2011, Gries 2010, Kilgarriff 2001).

To help in this process, effect size metrics such as simple maths parameters (SMP) can be used. The most common statistical techniques of keyword analysis are chi-squared test and the log-likelihood test. As Kilgarriff (2009) pointed out, however, these two tests are not entirely appropriate for this type of comparison, especially because they do not work if one of the two relative frequencies to be compared (i.e. either the relative frequency of the word in the specialised corpus or in the reference corpus) is 0, since " you can't divide by zero. It is not clear what to do about words which are present in *focus corpus* but absent in *reference corpus*" (Kilgarriff 2009, p. 2). Therefore, he suggests using the SMP, a simple ratio between relative frequencies of words in the two corpora we compare (C is the corpus under scrutiny; R is the reference corpus). This procedure avoids the problem of the division by zero, which is not

[56] Much research has not paid enough attention to what is not represented in the corpus. The missing elements are just as significant as the elements that are included in the corpus, in that they say a lot about the discourse represented in it.

defined in mathematics, by adding a constant k[57] to both the relative frequencies, as is shown in the formula below:

$$\text{simple maths parameter} = \frac{\text{relative frequency of w in C} + k}{\text{relative frequency of w in R} + k}$$

This procedure has also been implemented in #Lancsbox, which is provided with the Words tool that allows in-depth analysis of frequencies of words and comparison of corpora using the keywords technique. The threshold value for the identification of positive keywords that will be used in the following sections is the default one established in the software, i.e. positive keyword with s > 1.1.

6.5.1 Positive keywords in *GayCorpus2000-2020*

The positive keywords included in *Table 6.11* have been selected among the first 50 positive keywords which have been sorted out on the basis of their SMP. It is worth saying that most of the keywords in the first 50 positions are grammatical words (e.g. articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, among many others), as is common in this kind of studies.

Keywords +	***Rel. freq. GC***	***Rel. freq. S-BNC***	***SMP***
Gay	8.09	0.40	6.49
Fuck	14.44	1.91	5.31
Sex	6.71	0.48	5.20
Man	5.33	0.87	3.90

Table 6.11 Positive keywords in GayCorpus2000-2020 (s>1.1)

As can be seen from *Table 6.11*, the positive keywords included signal that the discourse of the fictional gay men in the study corpus revolves around sex and manliness. The first non-grammatical term among the 50 keywords is "gay", immediately signalling the relevance of the topic in the texts included. The keywords included in the table will be analysed more thoroughly in the following sections. If it is true that keywords provide information about the main topics treated in the corpus, it is also true that they should be analysed in their context, because words are rarely used alone, and the words occurring just before or after them can shed light on many

[57] In #Lancsbox, k=100.

interesting aspects, as Firth (1957) famously wrote, "you shall know a lot about a word from the company it keeps." This is going to be analysed in the following sections.

6.5.2 Collocations

As is now clear, words are rarely found alone, as they rather tend to co-occur – or collocate, to use the technical term – with other words. Firth (1968, p. 196) argues that

> important aspects of the meaning of a word (or another linguistic unit) are not contained within the word itself, considered in isolation, but rather subsist in the characteristic associations that the word participates in, alongside other words or structures with which it frequently co-occurs.

One reliable way of identifying the collocates of a given word or phrase is to study patterns of co-occurrence in a corpus by using corpus linguistic software. The term under study is called "node", whereas the terms that co-occur with the node within a specified span are called "collocates". However, collocates are subject to a further filter which determines whether a collocation is statistically significant or not (Sinclair *et al.* 2004, p. 35). #Lancsbox is provided with a tool for the identification of collocations (among other things) called GraphColl.

In this study the statistical[58] test that will be used is MI2[59] and the span is 5<>5[60]; as for the threshold[61], the random #Lancsbox statistic value is 6.0, but I decided to restrict it to 9.0 – as suggested in the manual of the software – because the results became overpopulated and hard to interpret; the collocation frequency is 5. The MI-score is usually described as a measure of the strength (Hunston 2002) of word combinations in terms of tightness (González Fernández and Schmitt 2015), coherence (Ellis *et al.* 2008) and appropriateness (Siyanova and Schmitt 2008). The MI-score uses a logarithmic scale to express the relationship between the frequency of collocation and the frequency of random cooccurrence of the two words in the combination (Church and Hanks 1990). However, the MI-score is negatively linked to frequency because it

[58] Statistics: the association measure used to compute the strength of collocation. (Brezina *et al*. 2021, p. 24)

[59] MI2= $\log_2 \frac{O_{11}{}^2}{E_{11}}$, where O_{11} is the frequency of the word of interest in the study corpus, and E_{11} is the frequency that one would expect by chance in the study corpus.

[60] Span: how many words to the left (L) and to the right (R) of the node (search term) are being considered when searching for collocates [default: 5L, 5R]. (Brezina *et al.* 2021, p. 24)

[61] Threshold: The minimum frequency and statistics cut-off values for an item (word, lemma, POS) to be considered a collocate. (Brezina *et al*. 2021, p. 24)

rewards combinations with lower frequency for which there is less evidence in the corpus. The low-frequency bias of the MI-score is remedied in MI2, where collocation frequency is squared, a version of the MI-score that does not penalise frequency. Unfortunately, MI2 has not yet received much attention. Words tool also generates a graph that displays three dimensions, i.e. the strength of collocation, collocation frequency and position of collocates. The strength of the collocation is indicated by the distance (length of the line) between the node and the collocates; the frequency of collocation is indicated by the intensity of the colour of the collocate; the position of the collocates around the node in the graph reflects the exact position of the collocates in the text (Brezina *et al.* 2021, p. 26). The following sections, therefore, seek to provide a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the most significant keywords mentioned in the previous section by taking into account the context where they occur.

6.5.2.1 Collocates of "gay"

Table 6.12 and *Figure 6.3* include the statistically significant collocates of the keyword "gay".

Collocates of "gay"	***MI2***
You're___	11.6
___Men	11.2
___Man	9.4
I'm___	10.5
___People	10.1
___Club	10
___Pride	10
So___	8.9

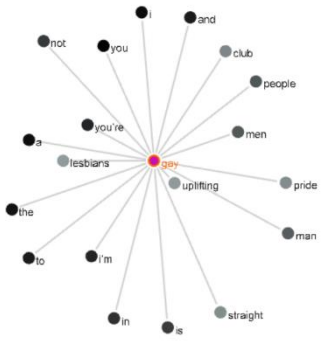

Table 6.12 Collocates of the node term "gay" in GayCorpus2000-2020
Figure 6.3 Collocation graph: collocates of the node term "gay" in GayCorpus2000-2020

The node "gay" tends to be preceded by the verb "to be" in the positive form of the present simple, which is usually used to identify something or somebody; it refers to a present or general state, whether temporary, permanent or habitual. This collocate is used in the corpus by gay men to refer to their interlocutor (hence the second person "you") for several reasons:

(a) to convey the idea of suspicion of the interlocutor's homosexuality, thus making the interlocutor reflect on the possibility of being gay, as in the following lines:

i. Sam, you're gay. I noticed. You're black. And the enemy…

ii. unhappy, sir? You've got a boyfriend? You're gay, sir. I don't mean that in a…
iii. for the British science Olympiad. 'Everyone's saying you're gay.' I blush bright red
iv. a fan club. For what? People think you're gay. Is it? That's stupid too. And what's stupid
v. Whatever. ...I'm sorry, mate. People thinking you're gay. That's so stupid. That's
vi. what about you? Well – do you reckon you're gay?
vii. Shit. Fuck's sake. I... Listen, I wanna...you're gay, Gary. Everyone says it. Everyone call you it.

In this case, these examples can be considered as instances of outing – not to be confused with coming out – in that they "expose someone's undeclared homosexuality" (*O.E.D.*) as the interlocutor is almost forced to declare his homosexuality;

(b) to address the interlocutor in a derogatory way, as in the following lines:

i. guys always fall for straight guys! Are you gay! Huh? You're, you're in love with my
ii. You're the gay! You're the gay! You're so gay - you listen to Coldplay. You're so gay,
iii. Bournemouth Pride that got small. You're a shit gay, Orson

In all the previous examples the term "gay" is used by gay men to address other gay men in a derogatory way. It is interesting to notice that the adjective "gay" is sometimes preceded by the intensifier "so", which seems to negatively characterise the adjective "gay", as was mentioned in section 6.5.3.3.

6.5.2.2 Collocates of "fuck"

As can be seen from *Table 6.13* and *Figure 6.4*, the term "fuck" has a double function in the corpus in that it is used both as a derogatory term to refer to sexual intercourse and as an interjection or part of expressions that have nothing to do with sex but are rather used to dismiss the interlocutor.

Collocates of "fuck"	***MI2***
___*Off*	13.2
___*Buddies*	13
___*Buddy*	12.4
___*Me*	12.4
___*You*	12
What (...) ___	11.2
Shut (...) ___	11
___*It*	10.3
Who (...) ___	9

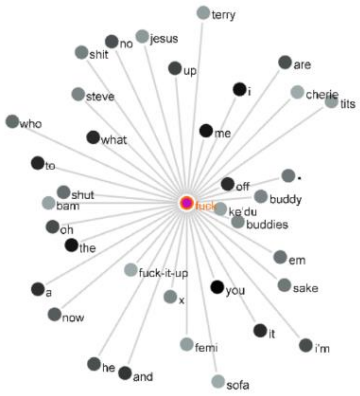

Table 6.13 Collocates of the node term "fuck" in GayCorpus2000-2020

Figure 6.4 Collocation graph: collocates of the node term "fuck" in GayCorpus2000-2020

One of the most recurring collocates of the node "fuck" is "buddy/buddies"; the expression "fuck buddy/buddies" refers to "a friend or acquaintance with whom a person (regularly) engages in sexual intercourse without the expectation of a romantic relationship" (*O.E.D.*). It might hint at the promiscuity of the gay characters in the corpus, which was already mentioned in *Chapter 3*, in the section devoted to the main topics noted in the 61 plays under study (see section 3.4.5). "Buddy/buddies", moreover, are among the statistically most significant collocates in the corpus (i.e. MI2: 13.01 and 12.44 respectively). However, most of the collocates are only superficially sexual; the right-collocate[62] "me" in the expression "fuck me", for instance, seems to be an invitation to the interlocutor to have sexual intercourse with the speaker; nevertheless, only after analysing the expression in the context of the dialogues, it can be maintained that it is often used in its figurative meaning, that is as an exclamation "expressing astonishment or exasperation" (*O.E.D.*). Similarly, the collocates "you" and "it" in "fuck you/it" are used as exclamations expressing, respectively, "hostility, contempt, or defiant

[62] A right-collocate is a collocate that occurs after the node term; a left-collocate precedes a node term.

indifference" (*O.E.D.*) and "dismissal, exasperation, resignation, or impetuousness" (*O.E.D.*). Likewise, all the other collocates of the node "fuck" tend to be used as instances of open aggression rather than as references to sexual intercourse. This is the case with "off" in "fuck off", which expresses "hostility or aggressive dismissal" (*O.E.D.*), as an intensifier expressing annoyance, hostility, urgency, exasperation, especially if preceded by the article "the" as in the expressions "what the fuck", "who the fuck", "shut the fuck up".

6.5.2.3 Collocates of "sex"

Another keyword worth analysing is "sex". *Table 6.14* and *Figure 6.5* include the most statistically significant collocates of this node:

Collocates of "sex"	***MI2***
Having___	11.7
Had___	11.3
Have___	11.1
___Drugs	9.6
Good___	9.4

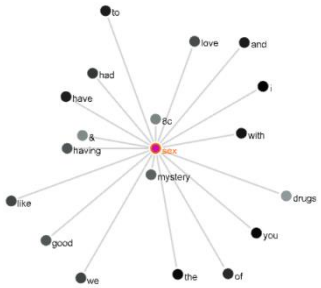

Table 6.14 Collocates of the node term "sex" in GayCorpus2000-2020
Figure 6.5 Collocation graph: collocates of the node term "sex" in GayCorpus2000-2020

The collocate "have" and its conjugated forms was expected to appear in the list in that, together with the node term "sex", it refers to the engagement in sexual intercourse with someone. However, it is interesting to notice that "sex" collocates with the term "drugs", thus distancing the sexual intercourse from an emotional involvement – bear in mind that the collocate "love" does not appear in the list, which de-humanises the sexual act among the gay men in the corpus – and this is especially true of plays like Baker's *The Prostitution Plays* (2000) and Cleugh's *F***ing Games* (2001), which revolve around gay clubs, love triangles, prostitution, fetishism, as well as a lascivious, promiscuous and corrupted lifestyle. The collocate "good", along similar lines, is used in the corpus as a way of evaluating the sex that is sold by gay prostitutes (e.g. in Baker's *The Prostitution Plays*, 2000; Hall's *Hardcore*, 2004) or the sex that is made by the gay men's partners (e.g. Hall's *Flamingos*, 2001; Hall's *The Coffee Lover's Guide to America*, 2002). This way, it deprives sex of its more emotional side and limits it to a mere performance to be judged.

6.5.2.4 Collocates of "man"

Table 6.15 and *Figure 6.6* include the main collocates of the node term "man" in *GayCorpus2000-2020*. The fact that the term "man" is a positive keyword in the corpus under study might signal that the discourse among the gay men in the plays revolves around manliness and men.

Collocates of "man"	***MI2***
Young___	11.45
Old___	9.97
Gay___	9.47

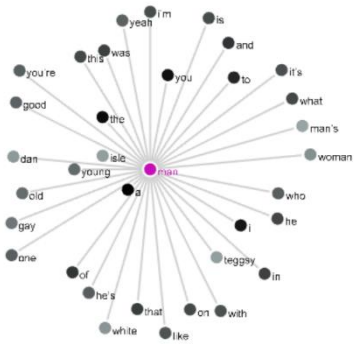

Table 6.15 Collocates of the node term "man" in GayCorpus2000-2020
Figure 6.6 Collocation graph: collocates of the node term "man" in GayCorpus2000-2020

As can be seen from the table, most of the collocates are adjectives referring to the age of the characters, i.e. "young" and "old". In the former case, young men are sexualised in that their age is a characteristic that arouses the speaker. Young gay men are portrayed as the object of older men's sexual fantasies, as in the following lines:

(a) and whisper obscenities to a grave young man who knows nothing of my life.
(b) here in London. What a charming young man. I hope there are more like you
(c) You're all right, you, a young man. A nice bit of flesh, but it's…
(d) I married a man who fetishizes the young. But in marrying…
(e) You can find yourself a posh young man up there too. I don't care. I'm

If youth is a rewarded characteristic among the gay men in the corpus, old age tends to be associated with physical, sexual and spiritual decay, as is evident in the following lines:

(a) he was like this little old stick man. I had to feed him, clean him
(b) I am an old man in a dry season. Enough. The boys
(c) That old man really has problems. He is sixty!
(d) Look at that horrible old man. A full life is finished after fifty!
(e) hate to end up being an old man who simply sits at home.

(f) he wants the nice fresh meat, old man. Not the tough mouldy old stuff.
(g) You're a tired old scared old man who hates how the world's changing and

Lines (c) and (d) clearly fix the age limit to 50 for a man not to be some horrible "tough mouldy old stuff". It is no surprise that the term "man" is a positive keyword; after all, the study corpus comprises dialogues between men who desire other men; women are, thus, under-represented in the corpus.

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to zoom in the corpus and analyse the characters from the point of view of the words that they speak. The linguistic features analysed in the previous sections are drawn from research conducted in the past, from the 1960s to the 21st century. Past research on gayspeak, however, was not empirically derived as the resources that scholars had at their disposal were not enough to investigate this linguistic variety with a quantitative approach. As outlined in *Chapters 5* and *6*, previous studies on language and sexuality rarely relied on evidence, but rather on scholars' intuition or observations of small groups of people. This was due to the fact that the social group including gay men was not easily accessible, also considering that homosexuality had long been illegal in the UK; besides, it is only with the advent of personal computers and the development of software packages capable of processing thousands of texts simultaneously that scholars dealing with gayspeak have finally been able to get a considerable amount of data from which to analyse and draw their conclusions and generalisations.

The importance of this chapter lies in the fact that it has attempted to apply the methodology of Corpus Linguistics to the study of gayspeak; furthermore, it has intended to analyse the fictional representation of this variety, which playwrights have chosen in order to construct the sexuality of their characters. #Lancsbox has been used to explore the framework that has been proposed in the previous sections, which is based on some macro-categories encompassing several strategies that previous scholars have considered as typical of gayspeak. Two chapters have been devoted to the investigation of the fictional gayspeak used in the corpus; in particular, this chapter deals with all the features that can be analysed in the light of

Corpus Linguistics, in that they relate mainly to the form rather than the sense of the words under scrutiny.

The first part of this chapter has sought to investigate the relative frequencies of some terms with a corpus-based approach. In the light of what has been investigated in the previous sections, it can be claimed that most of the features that have been frequently mentioned in past research do occur more often in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in the reference corpus *SpokenBNC2014*. This is the case with those features comprised under the macro-category of directness – i.e. open aggression and sexual vocabulary –, which confirms that the fictional gayspeak portrayed in the corpus is more irreverent and sexualised than the spoken British English of the 21st century. The direct expressions tend to refer to sex and sexualised body parts, reinforcing the stereotype according to which gay men are only interested in sex; besides, if this can be considered as one of the strategies used to differentiate gay from heterosexual speakers in the corpus, then it follows that gay men are still differentiated on the basis of their sexual desire. However, it is interesting to notice that certain terms such as "bugger(s)", "faggot(s)" and "queer(s)" have been gradually disappearing in the corpus; this is probably due to the fact that obsolete terms have become insulting slurs under the spotlight in recent years. Other features that occur more often in the language used by the gay characters in the 61 plays are comprised under the macro-category of indirectness, which includes all the strategies used to conceal the characters' sexuality. Indirectness, however, is not so ostensibly exploited as a marker of homosexuality, in comparison to directness, and the relative frequencies of the features included in it are considerably lower than the frequencies of the strategies included in the directness macro-category. There are, however, a few sub-types within indirectness whose relative frequency is in fact quite visibly higher than in the reference corpus. I am referring to genderless terminology – i.e. "lover", "partner" – and super-polite forms – e.g. "sorry", "thank you", to mention but a few – which tend to occur more often in the plays under scrutiny. Along similar lines, emotionality seems to be quite a fruitful macro-category in the characterisation of fictional gay men. Similarly to indirectness, emotionality comprises several strategies – i.e. emotional terms, exclamations, intensive "so", vocatives – that gay men allegedly share with women. These strategies are used in contexts that do not require such an exaggerated emotional response; this might be due to the fact that, unlike heterosexual men, gay men – especially the out-of-the-closet ones, who are the majority in this study – do not perceive these strategies as a threat to their masculinity. It is worth saying that emotionality reiterates the stereotype

according to which gay men are more sensitive and prone to express their emotions than heterosexual men; some expressions like “adorable”, “fabulous”, “divine”, but also some vocatives like “darling”, “honey”, “luv” are commonly attached to gay men in literary and audiovisual productions, and the plays in the corpus are not an exception to this. In addition, within the macro-category of playfulness, which will be dealt with more thoroughly in *Chapter 7*, the strategy of foreignisms seems to occur more frequently in the specialised corpus. However, the analysis of dispersion of foreign words proves that in the 61 plays this linguistic strategy that has commonly been associated with gay men is gradually disappearing. Nevertheless, there are some strategies – i.e. hedges and exclamations – included in the previous macro-categories that occur more often in the reference corpus than in the specialised corpus. This means that these strategies that have stereotypically been attached to gay men are actually not significantly frequent among the gay men in the corpus; they are rather more representative of present-day spoken British English than the fictional gayspeak under scrutiny.

In the second part of this chapter, an attempt was made to analyse the corpus taking a corpus-driven approach, in that it has dealt with keywords and collocations. Keywords have been classified on the basis of their keyness (i.e. SMP) after comparing the keywords in the study corpus with those in the reference corpus *SpokenBNC2014*; the collocations have been classified on the basis of MI2 statistical test. The positive keywords and their collocates show that the discourse among the gay men in the corpus revolves around homosexuality (i.e. “gay”) and sex (e.g. “fuck”, “sex”). Therefore, the data obtained are in line with the trends in 21st-century British drama portraying gay men, which were discussed in *Chapter 3*.

The next chapter can be considered as a continuation of *Chapter 6*; it will look at the strategies included in the framework proposed in this work which could not be satisfactorily accounted for with a corpus linguistic approach. Therefore, *Chapter 7* will apply a manual approach to a sample of dialogues extrapolated from the plays, and will analyse the remaining features of gayspeak that have more to do with the sense than the form of words.

CHAPTER 7

GAYSPEAK IN 21st CENTURY BRITISH DRAMA

A MANUAL ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

For as much as technology has improved research, the latter cannot rely exclusively on the former. As was mentioned in *Chapter 6*, Corpus Linguistics, which has undoubtedly explored terrains that could not be explored without the help of technology, has its limitations, as there are aspects of the language that can hardly be analysed with software alone. This issue is rooted in the fact that language contains not only a signifier, the mere form – either written or spoken – but also a signified, the sense, the meaning of the word itself. Therefore, the study of word forms such as hedges or exclamations is easily achieved with the help of technology. However, when the investigation goes to a deeper level, as is the case with word sense, technology can only support the research to a certain extent. The study of puns, innuendos or sexual indirectness

(to name but a few) requires the intervention of a human being, as their detection in a text necessitates inferences that go beyond the automatic recognition of the mere letters written on the page.

The linguistic features of gayspeak not covered in the previous chapter are explored in the following sections. The element that these features have in common is their double-layered nature, for an expression can only be classified as a pun or a sexual indirect expression if its figurative meaning is grasped, and this can be done by activating mental schemata of both real and fictional languages and worlds.

7.2 Aims and methodology

Unlike *Chapter 6*, which combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, this chapter is mainly qualitative, as a manual investigation of language can only provide partial quantitative data. This does not mean, however, that no quantitative data are provided, but that they have rather been collected manually and only by analysing a sample of the corpus; the data are therefore only representative of the sections of the corpus investigated, and they may differ if other sections were inspected. Indeed, it would have been impossible to analyse the entire corpus manually while simultaneously taking into account several different linguistic features at the same time. Since technology could not help with this process for the reasons mentioned above, I decided to analyse a sample of the corpus, comprising 10 pages for each play, starting with the first line in which a gay character speaks. This choice can be justified by the fact that the first words used by the characters serve to build up the mental image that the audience has of these characters. This means that the first words may contain elements that index the characters' homosexuality. This results in a manageable amount of texts – more than 600 pages – that can be interpreted on the basis of a close-reading approach, that is the careful interpretation of short passages of texts, paying special attention to the particular over the general. As mentioned earlier, a close-reading approach encompasses both the content of the passage and the form, i.e. the manner in which the content is presented.

The framework used for the manual analysis provided in the following sections has already been proposed in section 5.3. This chapter, however, focuses on those features of fictional gayspeak that have not been covered before in this work. *Chapter 7* approaches the

investigation of these features manually and from the point of view of Language and Sexuality Studies. The framework that I propose in this chapter comprises:

(a) indirectness, which encompasses all the linguistic strategies that gay men allegedly use to express their sexual preferences less directly. In this chapter, the strategies of indirectness include:
   i. sexual indirectness; this can be seen as an umbrella term comprising vagueness, understatement and double entendre (Harvey 2000), i.e. the simultaneous presence of two meanings, one of which is always sexual;
   ii. innuendo (Harvey 2000), i.e. the indirect and allusive way in which a derogatory remark is made about the addressee;
(b) gender inversion, which refers to the inversion of grammatical gender markers, i.e. the inverted use of feminine grammatical structures when referring to men;
(c) playfulness, which refers to the use of:
   i. mentions (Harvey 2002);
   ii. inventions (Sonenschein 1969);
   iii. puns (Stanley 1970; Harvey 2000).

The categories of interest were identified by reading the sample carefully several times and by annotating all possible categories with different colours. The occurrences of each category were then entered into a table (see *Appendix 5* and *Appendix 6*) in order to be discussed in this chapter.

7.3 Re-assessing gayspeak: a manual analysis

With the exception of directness and emotionality, which have been dealt with in *Chapter 6*, the remaining macro-categories, which will be examined in more detail in the following sections, contain linguistic features that could not be analysed with technology alone. Examples from the samples extrapolated from *GayCorpus2000-2020* will be presented in order to describe how the linguistic features of gayspeak are used, but also to assess whether they can still function as markers of homosexuality in 21st century British plays.

7.3.1 Indirectness

Indirectness encompasses all linguistic strategies used by gay men to disguise their sexuality or express themselves less directly. The following subsections provide a discussion of those double-layered strategies that can only be investigated manually.

7.3.1.1 Sexual indirectness

The category of sexual indirectness comprises all those strategies allegedly used by gay men to make statements with sexual content in an indirect way. Sexual indirectness is one of the most frequent features in the sample studied, as *Appendix 5* shows; it is also true, however, that it occurs only 22 times and is found in 15 out of 61 extracts. Most instances of sexual indirectness (i.e. 13 out of 22) belong to out-of-the-closet gay men – or social gay men, as they have been called in this work – who tend to use their language more disrespectfully. There are constant references to male genitalia, as in the following lines:

(a) It is getting increasingly hard though. In my pants.
(b) It's half hard down there.
(c) Don't tell me big boy Dave's got problems down below.
(d) His trousers are very tight, so that you can see his…front room.
(e) A. How do you take it?
B. Black, like my men.

Lines (a) and (b) make reference to the penile erection that the speakers are having, while lines (d) and (e) refer to the size of the penis. In particular, line (e) reinforces the idea of the hyper-masculinity of black men, who are praised for their physical beauty and sexual power. Line (c) refers to sexual impotence, which is seen as an unspeakable problem among the gay men in the sample, which could reiterate the stereotype that gay men only think about sex. It is interesting to notice that the word "penis" and its variants are never mentioned in the lines above, but are rather implied by terms such as "down there", "down below" and "front room".

Line (e) is an example of double entendre. Double entendre is the use of expressions characterised by the simultaneous presence of two meanings, one of which is necessarily sexual; both of these meanings are compatible with the context in which they are embedded. This means that the speaker intentionally conveys an ambiguous message whose second meaning, hidden behind the utterance, is to be inferred by the interlocutor. Therefore, "through

the double entendre the speaker can intentionally say something sexually explosive while appearing to say something unremarkable" (Harvey 2000, p. 250). In other words, a double entendre is created by ascribing a second, covert sexual meaning to the overt meaning of the utterance. Double entendre requires mention of one of the features of implicatures, namely their cancellability (see Grice 1975), which distinguishes double entendres from mere vagueness, understatement and overgeneralisation, as represented by the other examples included in this section. Implicatures – i.e. implied meanings – can always be cancelled, if necessary, without causing a contradiction. Similarly, the sexual references contained in the double entendre could theoretically be denied without causing any contradiction, if the character expressing them felt in any way threatened. The responsibility for inferring taboo meanings, moreover, lies with the interlocutor, since the speaker is seemingly only making an innocuous remark, thus "trapping the other into the production of the event desired by the queer subject – a kind of homosexual seduction" (Harvey 2000, p. 250). Double entendres share several elements with innuendos, although there is a significant difference between the two features, as will be discussed in the following section. The double entendre in line (e) originates from the fact that the dialogue takes place while the speakers are having coffee, hence the double-layered meaning of the verb "to take" and the adjective "black", the latter referring only superficially to coffee without the addition of milk. An important mechanism implied in the identification procedure of such a category is that one of the two possible senses must be (homo)sexually related. The other lines above and those included below cannot be classified as double entendre, since only in one of the examples provided could two different meanings, compatible with the context, be understood. Most of the examples can only have a sexual interpretation, albeit masked in various ways; therefore, the cancellability test would not work as there is no meaning other than the sexual one.

Other allusions are made to sexual intercourse, as in the following lines:

(f) A bit of you and me time. One thing could lead to another and you know…

(g) The burning question is: D'you want to go in the shower first or shall I – shall we both…

(h) I wondered if, sort of. Maybe we could, you know I mean, if you…

(i) A. Let's go into the room. Come on Please

B. What do you want?

C. You know.

(j) I have an appointment with a gentleman in a toilet on the Holloway Road. We are the only person…the other one has…*been*[63] with.

It is interesting to notice that lines (f) and (h) make significant use of expressions such as "you know", "sort of" and "I mean", which leave the statements open-ended while showing the speakers' hesitation and discretion. Hesitations and interruptions are also exploited in lines (f), (g), (h) and (j), and are graphically represented with suspension points, dashes and repetitions. This may be interpreted as a way of reproducing the spoken nature of the dramatic dialogue, which is a written-to-be-spoken text. However, one should bear in mind that while hesitation is a typical feature of the spoken language, when it also occurs in the written-to-be-spoken variety – as is the case with dramatic dialogue – it means that it has been deliberately represented by the author and thus acquires its own meaning within the text. In this case, hesitation, which is used to shape the characters' personalities, conveys the mixture of sexual tension and shyness that characterise the gay men in the sample. Line (j) is also worth discussing, as sexual intercourse is only implied here with the verb "to be with someone". It is interesting to notice that the past participle "been" is written in italics, which underlines that something else is being expressed at this point in the text besides the visible form and overt meaning of the word.

There are also allusions to the promiscuous lifestyle with which certain gay men in the sample are characterised; in particular, some instances of sexual indirectness refer to prostitution and lasciviousness, as in the following lines:

(k) I'da though a pretty boy like you would've been heading up to Soho.
(l) Down here…if you agree to go back with someone. That's it. There has to be nakedness.
(m) Snort a line off his stiffy in the lav.
(n) A. Let your hair down, do you?
(o) B. Not exactly. I'm not the hair-letting-down type – although I used to…let it down. In fact, I let it down quite a bit…and even now, if I think about it, once in a while…I'll let the odd lock…drop.

In line (k), the sexual indirectness is based on the culture specific reference "Soho", an area in London's West End, one of the capital's main entertainment districts since the 19th century. Soho has a reputation for being a base for the sex industry and nightlife, as well as the centre

[63] Italics present in the original text.

of London's gay community. Line (n) is based on a word-play with the expression "to let one's hair down", meaning "to throw off reserve; to become confidential" (*O.E.D.*). The speaker claims that he used to let his hair down quite a bit in the past and that now he would have no problem letting it down with his interlocutor, also considering the sexual tension that is represented in the scene. It is worth mentioning that the speaker (i.e. Barry in Elyot's *Twilight Song*, 2017) is a secret gay man in his mid-fifties.

7.3.1.2 Innuendo

This linguistic feature is also mentioned in Harvey's (1998, 2000) framework for analysing camp talk and refers to the indirect and allusive way in which an opinion, a derogatory remark about the addressee, a statement are conveyed. The lack of explicitness on the part of the speaker forces the interlocutor to infer the meaning and thus take responsibility for it. Unlike sexual indirectness, the implicit meaning expressed through innuendos is not limited to the sexual sphere.

In the sample studied, there are only 7 instances of innuendo, all of which indirectly refer to the characters' homosexuality. In the following examples, the speakers' homosexuality is only implied, either through the use of expressions such as "a kind of" or through self-censorship of explicit references to homosexuality:

(a) Tomorrow The News Of The World are running a story about your father having…a kind of affair.
(b) You think I am, don't you?
(c) I thought you might be one of them. Where I work, if they discover you're a – it's ruin.

Interestingly, the three lines above belong to three secret characters (respectively, Russel in Harvey's *Canary*; Romek in Baker's *The Prostitution Plays*; Matthew in de Jongh's *Plague Over England*). In lines (b) and (c), the speaker's homosexuality is referred to either by using the verb "to be" without its subject predicative or by using a general turn of phrase like "one of them" instead of saying "gay" (or its variants).

An implicit allusion to homosexuality is also made through meta-linguistic comments, as in "I thought you had a little twang. Your accent, just a hint of…whatever", where the term "twang" refers to the nasal pronunciation that gay men are said to have when articulating certain sounds. Hayes (1976) argues that "even in a gay social group or alone with a friend the secret

gay may refuse to refer to his subculture life in any but the mildest euphemisms" (p. 258). All the instances of innuendos are made by gay men in-the-closet or secret gay men as they are commonly referred to in this work.

7.3.2 Gender inversion

Gender inversion refers to the use of gender-inverted terms, i.e. the use of terms that refer to the opposite gender of the interlocutor. This category was also referred to as "inversion" in Harvey (2000) and Zwicky (1997). Since the corpus only includes dialogues between gay men, gender inversion involves the use of feminine forms while referring to men. It has already been mentioned in *Chapter 2* that there is a fundamental difference between sex and gender. The former refers to the biological body, the latter to the cultural body. Unlike sex, gender is performative, i.e. it is a cultural construction that emerges from repeated behaviours, gestures, linguistic features, clothing, etc. (Butler 2006, p. 45). Following Butler's argument, "gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes; [..] (it) is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body" (Butler 2006, p. 9). In *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that "gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing. It is not, for this reason, automatic or mechanical" (2004, p.1). In other words, gender is a performative phenomenon and language is one of the tools available to people to perform their gender, as speakers engage in acts of identity and employ language to present themselves as certain kinds of people belonging to certain kinds of groups.

In this chapter, gender inversion is analysed manually, as it requires human interpretation. In fact, by using technology alone it would be impossible to determine whether each of the thousands of occurrences of feminine forms is used with the intention of feminising the male interlocutor, or whether it simply refers to a woman. Gender inversion occurs 26 times in the sample under scrutiny. More interesting, however, is the fact that gender inversion seems to be condensed in the plays of the first decade of the 21st century (17 out of 26 occurrences), while there are only 9 out of 26 instances between 2011 and 2020. Gender inversion is thus not evenly distributed in the sample, as only 15 out of 61 extracts contain instances of gender inversion. Of course, one has to be aware that these findings may be accidental and that other fragments of the plays, if inspected, might show a different distribution. However, there seems

to be evidence to hypothesise that gender inversion is going out of fashion in the extracts included in the sample, as its use as a means of indexing the characters' homosexuality seems to be decreasing.

The most common gender-inverted term is "queen", which is used in compound constructions such as "drag queen", "disco queen" and "size queen"[64]. Compound constructions are also mentioned by Hayes (1976) as one of the most frequent processes of categorisation among gay men, who allegedly tend to employ the stem word "queen", whose traditional meaning implies effeminate behaviour in a man. Hayes argues that

> in its wider context, it may be used to build a limitless series of images: to describe sexual preferences – *dinge queen* (one who prefers blacks), *size queen* (one who likes men with large penises); to describe a subculture type – *queen mother* (older man who serves as counsellor or social arbiter), *queen of tarts* (a pimp for hustlers); to make fun of a man's hobbies or interests – *Chippendale queen* (likes antiques), *poker queen* (likes to play cards); or as an all-purpose term of derogation – *Queen Mary* (large or fat), *Queen of Spades* (black with high status). (Hayes 1976, p. 259)

Other gender-inverted terms used in the sample are "princess" and its adjectival form "princessy", the terms "fairy"[65], "cunt", "pussy" and "bitch". Note that the last three terms have sexual connotations, as they are commonly used to refer to "a woman as a source of sexual gratification; a promiscuous woman; a slut" (*O.E.D.*).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the use of a wide range of colour terms, which Lakoff (1975) associates with feminine and homosexual language, is negligible in the sample examined. Lakoff maintains that

> women make far more precise discriminations in naming colors than do men; words like *beige, ecru, aquamarine, lavender,* and so on are unremarkable in a woman's active vocabulary, but absent from that of most men. […] If the man should say (specific colour terms), one might well conclude he was imitating a woman sarcastically or was a homosexual or an interior decorator. (1975, p. 43)

There is only one instance of a specific colour term in the sample, namely "cerise colour" (Tony in Harvey's *Out in the Open*).

[64] A "size queen" is one who likes men with large penises. (Hayes 1976, p. 259).

[65] An effeminate or homosexual man. Frequently derogatory (*O.E.D.*).

7.3.3 Playfulness

As the name suggests, this macro-category encompasses a group of linguistic features that are determined by a playful approach to the form and meaning of language. As was mentioned in *Chapter 5*, playfulness, also referred to as ludicrism in Harvey's (1998, 2000) framework, is one of the features that supposedly index the speaker's homosexuality.

7.3.3.1 Mentions

In an article published in 2002, Harvey argues that verbal camp demonstrates a citational approach to utterance. It may reflect the fact that theatre and theatricality are often associated with gayness, as Lucas (1994) notes. Citationality is often related to theatricality, as it is common in the portrayal of gay men in literature and audiovisual products (see also Ranzato 2012) to include references to their dialogues, particularly to major Hollywood stars, as Hayes (1976/2006, p. 71) mentions in the following excerpt:

> famous Hollywood stars of the thirties and forties figure importantly, especially if the roles they play are campy or treat of tragic love. A melodramatic loser, for instance, is a *Stella Dallas*. A man who is suspected of actually enjoying his constant misfortune becomes a *Camille* or a *Sarah Bernhardt* (sometimes *Sarah Heartburn*). Stars such as Mae West, Bette Davis, and Carmen Miranda are mimed along with some of their famous scenes or routines probably because they exaggerate the various stereotyped roles that women play in general society. Gayspeak has, thus, an idea of acting within acting. Mimicking the tone, diction rhetoric, and speech mannerisms of those camp heroines would seem to show the subculture's perception of how seriously the dominant culture takes the language by which it maintains rigid images of sex stereotyping. At its very core, camp is the art of the put-down, especially of one's self and culture.

Following Harvey's (2002) argument, gay men supposedly cite cultural artefacts[66], the language itself, and femininity. In this work, however, the citations of femininity have been included partly in the macro-category of indirectness and partly in the macro-category of gender inversion. Rather, this section focuses on mentions of cultural artefacts, which have minimal impact on other aspects of the surrounding language, unlike, for instance, citationality of

[66] A study of gay icons can also be found in Balirano (2020).

femininity, which implies some degree of distortion of the rules of the language, such as gender inversion (see section 7.3.2). The mention of cultural artefacts also raises another question, that of authenticity and fictionality, since "gestures and actions that we make in the 'real' emerge as elements of an elaborate repertoire that we all share and have learned" (Harvey 2002, p. 1152). This shared repertoire might be a unifying element that binds gay men together in subcultural solidarity. This section is therefore inspired by Harvey's category of citationality, and includes direct mentions of cultural artefacts noticed in the extracts examined.

In the sample, which includes more than 600 pages from the 61 plays included in *GayCorpus2000-2020*, 227 mentions were found. A similar analysis has been carried out with heterosexual characters (see *Appendix 6*), and 173 mentions have been found in the sample. There seems to be evidence that gay men tend to produce more mentions than the other characters, but only in the extracts analysed. It should be borne in mind that if other sections were investigated, the result would likely be different. *Figure 7.1* shows the number of mentions included in the sample under scrutiny; the mentions have been grouped on the basis of their common sources.

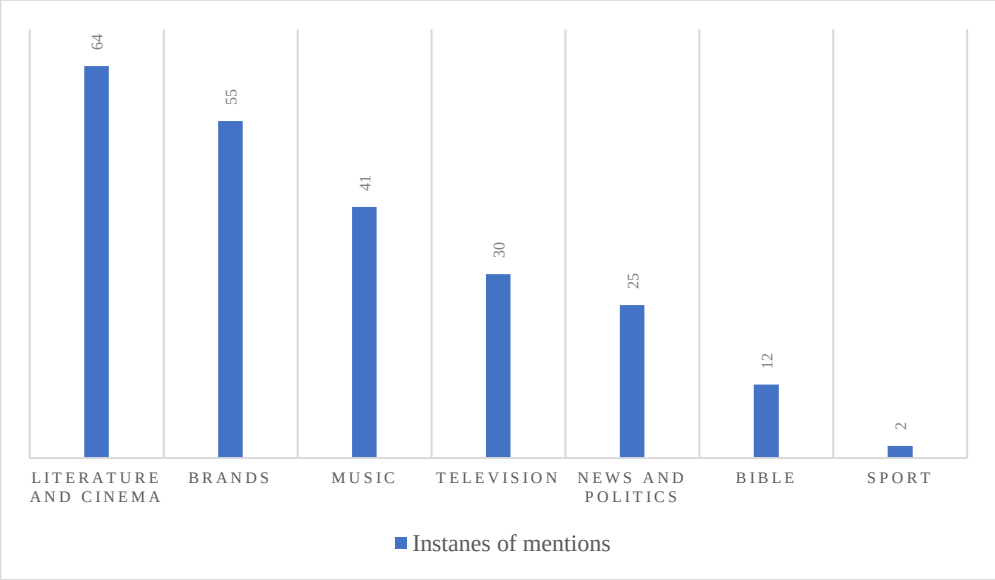

Figure 7.1 Mentions in the sample extrapolated from GayCorpus2000-2020

Compared to the other features that are investigated manually in this chapter, the category of mentions is certainly the most frequent. The instances of mentions that will be discussed are to be found in 39 out of 61 plays, more than half of the plays. The category of mentions of artefacts discussed in this section includes, in order of frequency:

(a) literature and cinema (64 occurrences). William Shakespeare is certainly one of the most cited playwrights in the sample, along with his plays and characters; explicit mention of the author's name is found in plays such as Oparei's *Crazyblackmythaf***in'self* (2002), where the characters are also the actors in a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*, mentioned both as the title of the play and as the name of the character, along with Desdemona and Iago; other mentions to Shakespeare's works include *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *The Tempest*; moreover, the English playwright is also indirectly mentioned through the use of quotations, as in Bennet's *The History Boys* (2004), where quotes taken from *Othello* and *King Lear* are constantly used; "the star-crossed lovers" are mentioned in Elyot's *Forty Winks* (2005).

Other British playwrights mentioned are Harol Pinter, Joe Orton and Oscar Wilde; the latter is the protagonist in Bartlett's *In Extremis* (2000). The plays *Bent* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which are landmarks in gay drama, are also mentioned in the sample. Other writers mentioned in the sample are Bertolt Brecht, Isabel Allende, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Hemingway, Emily and Charlotte Brontë (whose famous novels – i.e. *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* – are also mentioned) and many others. Other classics include *Crime and Punishment, War and Peace, Pride and Prejudice, Moby Dick, Alice in Wonderland, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, to name but a few.

Film characters, actors and films are also mentioned in the sample, such as Marlon Brando, James Dean, Alan Rickman; *Forrest Gump, Alien, ET, Indiana Jones, Jaws, The Bridge on the River Kwai* are just some of the references to cinema;

(b) brands (55 occurrences). Brands are only mentioned in the dialogues and are not aimed at promoting products. Several brands refer to supermarket chains, such as *Sainsbury's, Asda, Tesco*; multinational chains such as *McDonald's, Ikea, Starbucks, KFC* are also referred to; food brands are also mentioned, such as *Coco Pops, Capri-Sun, Werther's Originals, Smarties, Pepsi Max*; other references are related to technology and social networks, such as *PlayStation, Xbox, Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, Siemens, Polaroid, i-pods*. However, most of the brands mentioned come from the fashion sector, such as *Armani, Versace, Moschino, Gaultier*, but also top models such as Kate Moss or casual brands such as *Timberlake, Calvin Klein* and *Dr. Martens*;

(c) music (41 occurrences). There are mostly references to pop singers and songs; this is the case with singers such as Beyoncé, James Blunt, Cher, Céline Dion, Eminem, Kylie Minogue, Lady Gaga, Justine Timberlake. Their songs are constantly referenced throughout the sample, such as Lady Gaga's *Bad Romance*, Céline Dion's *My Heart Will Go On*; further references are made to Bob Dylan, George Michael, ABBA, Dolly Parton, Liza Minelli;

(d) television (30 occurrences). Apart from references to television channels such as *Channel 4*, *BBC*, *CNN*, most references are to TV products such as *South Park*, *Murder, She Wrote*, *Doctor Who*, *XFactor*, *Twin Peaks*, *Little House On the Prairie*, *Miami Vice* and many others;

(e) news and politics (25 occurrences). This is a broad category, as it includes mentions of newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, but also newspapers that no longer exist such as *The St James Gazette*, *The Illustrated London News*.

There are also references to British history and politics, such as Henry V and Henry III (mentioned in Well's *About a Goth*, whose characters pretend to live in the Middle Ages), but also Margaret Thatcher, Kate Middleton, Nicholas Fairbairn, Princess Margaret, Lady Olga Maitland. References to foreign politics are also given, such as John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Hugo Chávez, Patrice Lumumba, Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot, Nicolae Ceaușescu;

(f) Bible (12 occurrences). There are also some references to the Bible, or "the Book", as it is called in Sher's *The Giant* (2007). 9 out of 12 biblical references (e.g. David, New Testament, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Saul, to name but a few) occur in Sher's play;

(g) sport (2 occurrences). There are almost no references to sport in the sample. Only two references (i.e. Monaco Grand Prix and Michael Schumacher) are made in Gupta's *Love N Stuff* (2013).

The elements discussed above seem to indicate that most of the mentions in the sample come from the Arts, especially literature, cinema and music. However, most references from music are to pop songs and singers, and especially to contemporary gay pop icons such as Lady Gaga, Kylie Minogue, Céline Dion. Pop culture references are also found in mentions of TV shows and brands of food, shops, multinational chains; several brands from the world of fashion are also adopted, stereotypically reinforcing the idea that gay men are supposedly into fashion, as

Orrù (2014, p. 78) claims. References to sport are almost absent from the sample, which could be a reiteration of the stereotype that gay men are not interested in sport, which is seen as a male activity.

7.3.3.2 Inventions

This category is also mentioned in the list of features of the "homosexual language" in Sonenschein's (1969) study. However, while he describes invention as the creation of "a new and unique meaning, the use of which in a slang sense is not to be found outside the homosexual circle" (e.g. "nelly", "bitch", etc.[67]), I use the term "invention" to refer to the playful creation of neologisms. There are only two instances of invention in the sample under scrutiny:

(a) *A. Release of Tension* was nominated for three Stiffies last year.
B. What-ies?

(b) Look at you, touching another man's face and staring into his eyes…you're a great big faggamuffin.

In the first short dialogue, the term "what-ies?" is invented based on an analogy with the term "Stiffies". In the second example, the word "faggamuffin" is formed based on a fusion of the words "fag" and "raggamuffin". This term is used in Blair's *Bashment* (2005), which depicts the world of the dance-hall reggae. Raggamuffin music is a subgenre of dancehall and reggae music. In the line above, Orlando is referring his lover JJ's homosexual promiscuity.

7.3.3.3 Puns

Puns have been categorised as "a prominent feature of homosexual slang" (Stanley 1970, p. 54). Harvey (2000) defines puns as "the co-presence of two meanings entailed by the grammatical reanalysis of (part of) a syntagm with retrospective effect" (p. 249). Similarly to double entendres and innuendos, puns are characterised by their double-layered nature; however, unlike double entendres, the meaning implied in puns is not necessarily sexual.

There are few instances of puns in the sample studied. One of them is based on a word-play with the phrasal verbs "to get over someone" and "to be over someone", as is shown in the following dialogue from Harvey's *Out in the Open* (2004):

[67] Many of these examples have been included in other categories in this study (see *Chapter 6*).

Iggy: Sounds to me like you're getting over him.

Tony: You're over him too. His ashes are buried right under you.

Iggy is here referring to the fact that Tony is trying to survive the death of his lover, but Tony replies by playing with the double meaning of the phrasal verb "to get over someone". Another significant instance of pun can be found in Blair's *FIT* (2010), where Ryan exclaims "you're so gay you go to Uranus for your holiday!", in which the name of the planet is used to indirectly refer to the anal orifice and intercourse.

7.4 Conclusions

Similarly to *Chapter 6*, this chapter has intended to analyse the characters from the point of view of their voice, i.e. the words that the playwrights have put in their mouths. In the light of the double-layered nature of dramatic dialogue (see section 4.1.3), the features of the fictional gayspeak represented in the corpus could be attributed to either the characters or the playwrights, or both. The variety analysed, for instance, abounds with mentions; however, should the mentions be attributed to the fictional gay men represented in the plays, or rather should they be attributed to their creators, the playwrights? Is it really possible to precisely separate the characters from the authors? This is a long-standing question in literary and ficto-Linguistic studies. In this work, however, I have taken for granted the dual level of dramatic dialogue, since it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine this aspect of fictional varieties. The words used by the gay men in the corpus have rather been considered as part of the means available to the playwrights to index the characters' homosexuality. As argued in section 5.1.3, everything in a text, even the features that are meaningless in ordinary conversation, have "a *meaningful* function precisely because we know that the dramatist must have included them *on purpose*" (Short 2013, p. 177).

The linguistic features analysed in the previous sections are inspired by past research discussed in *Chapter 5*. However, in this chapter I have taken a manual approach to the study of gayspeak, since certain features have a double-layered nature which is difficult to analyse with software alone. For this reason, a small sample of *GayCorpus2000-2020* has been investigated, as it would have been impossible to handle the entire corpus of 414,270 tokens. This chapter has primarily intended to follow a qualitative approach, although quantitative data based on manual calculations have also been provided. Similarly to the previous chapter, the

variables and methodology considered are those specific to the studies in the field of language and sexuality.

From the analysis presented in the previous sections, there seems to be evidence to say that there are three linguistic features commonly attributed to gay men that are particularly recurrent in the sample under scrutiny. Mentions are the most recurrent and evenly distributed ones, with 227 mentions of cultural artefacts, 54 more than heterosexual characters (see *Appendix 6*). Most of them (64) come from literature and cinema, notably from William Shakespeare and seminal gay icons such as Oscar Wilde and Joe Orton; moreover, most of the mentions of brands refer to the world of fashion, which is stereotypically associated with gay men (Orrù 2004); mentions of music (41) are also frequent, most of which refer to today's pop singers who are considered gay icons, such as Beyoncé, Céline Dion, Kylie Minogue and Lady Gaga; very few references are made to sport, reiterating the idea that gay men are not interested in it. Gender inversion is a further feature that occurs quite significantly in the sample (26 instances; there are no instances of gender inversion among the heterosexual characters in the sample under scrutiny; see *Appendix 6*). Most of the gender-inverted elements are found in the texts extrapolated from the plays of the first decade of the 21st century, which may indicate that this feature, which is always cited in previous research, is now gradually disappearing. It must be taken into account that this statement is only partially true, as it only applies to the extracts analysed. Most instances of gender inversion are compounds of the term "queen", which is in line with what is maintained in past studies (Hayes 1976, among others). Sexual indirectness is also common in the sample, albeit significantly less frequently than mentions and gender inversion. As expected, most of the instances of sexual indirectness are made by social gay men, also considering the sexual connotation of this feature; references are made to male genitalia, sex and promiscuity.

The other features analysed in the previous sections – i.e. innuendos, inventions and puns – are not particularly recurrent in the sample under scrutiny. Innuendos, in particular, are used as a way to avoid the words "gay" and "homosexuality" (and their variants); it is no surprise that they are more commonly used by secret gay men, and are often accompanied by hesitations.

This chapter completes the analysis of the fictional gayspeak represented in the 61 plays included in the corpus. *Chapter 8*, which includes the conclusions of this work, will attempt to summarise what has been investigated and discovered in this thesis. It will attempt to provide

the reader with a multi-faceted picture of the present-day British drama, with a particular focus on fictional gay men and their linguistic variety.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Conclusions

This final chapter is intended to be a synthesis of the main conclusions reached in this study. The ultimate aim of the few remaining pages is to provide the reader with an extensive picture of the gay men represented in the plays included in *GayCorpus2000-2020* by overlaying all the levels examined with a triangulated methodological approach. Each chapter in this thesis has focused on a different aspect of the characterisation of the 187 fictional gay men. This work first described the fictional worlds in which the gay men operate (*Chapter 3*); it then discussed how these men are characterised as gay based on some universal variables (e.g. age, social class, linguistic variety), but also variables that are more specific to Language and Sexuality Studies (*Chapter 4*); the sexuality of the characters is also constructed through the language that they speak, which was analysed through the use of technology (*Chapter 6*) and manually (*Chapter 7*). All findings are summarised in this chapter to provide the reader with a complete picture of what the gay men included in *GayCorpus2000-2020* sounded like on British stages in the first two decades of the 21st century. This chapter also attempts to answer the questions raised in *Chapter 2*, namely, what the main concerns of playwrights are in the representation of gay men today, whether homosexuality is a central theme or just one among many others, whether the stereotypes related to the representation of gay men are reiterated or rejected, to what extent the fictional gayspeak portrayed in the corpus differs from previous research, and how it has changed diachronically over the past 20 years, depending on some variables analysed in this work. In addition, this chapter highlights the relevance of this study within previous

research on gayspeak, and suggests new avenues of research that could be explored in the future.

8.1.1 Comprising analysis

61 British plays staged between 2000 and 2020, featuring 187 gay characters, were included in the corpus analysed in this thesis. Following the New Writing wave, many (22 out of 61) of the plays analysed are contemporary in their chronological setting, as they are set in the 21st century. The influence of New Writing is also to be found in the contemporary, raw themes presented in the plays – summarised by the positive keywords "fuck", "sex", "alone", "hurt", "dead", among many others – which seem to represent what it means to be gay in contemporary British society, with a particular focus on the precariousness of gay life, sometimes portrayed in apocalyptic scenarios where there are no certainties and reality is seen through a distorted lens. Violence and homophobia are the main themes in 16 out of 61 plays, followed only by the struggle for self-acceptance (12 out of 61), i.e. the difficulties that gay men have with society and especially with themselves in dealing with their homosexuality. The idea of precariousness that permeates 21st century British drama, as was discussed in *Chapter 3*, is also reflected in the consumerist vision of gay sex, which is sometimes depicted as a product to be sold through pornography and prostitution (there are also instances of paedophilia, as three characters are under the age of consent, as discussed in the dedicated chapter) and also via chats and social networks[68]. Promiscuity and infidelity are certainly two of the main themes in the plays, and they are problematised as they lead the gay characters to health problems such as HIV/AIDS (10 out of 61 plays) and death (9 out of 61 plays), but also to domestic problems such as the destruction of romantic relationships, resulting in the manifestation of self-destructive behaviour such as the use of drugs and alcohol (9 out of 61 plays). Homosexuality is further problematised from the point of view of religion and medicine, the latter being portrayed negatively when aversion therapy[69] was still in use in the UK. This gloomy tone is also evident in some of the positive keywords in the corpus, such as "alone", "hurt" and "dead". In addition,

[68] Many citations of brands, which have been analysed manually in *Chapter 7*, refer to technology and social networks.

[69] Aversion therapy is a form of behavioural therapy in which an unwanted behaviour is repeatedly associated with discomfort. The conditioning process aims to get the person to associate the stimulus with unpleasant or uncomfortable sensations.

HIV/AIDS and the social condition of being gay are among the collocates of the keyword "alone". The contemporary subject matters are also reflected in the metropolitan geographical setting of most of the plays (29 out of 61), in which London is portrayed as the great modern city where gay men long to live because of all the opportunities and open-mindedness that they can enjoy, although it also proves to be a city of loss and death for some of them. The contemporaneity of most of the 61 plays is also due to the fact that more than half of the characters (i.e. 51%) are either teenagers (also younger than 15, which raises the question of what is legal and illegal in the sexual sphere) or in their twenties and thirties. Therefore, the corpus mainly features a young type of gay men, which is another element in line with New Writing, which gives voice to the "angry young" generations. Interestingly, some plays approach the issue of homosexuality from a diachronic perspective, as they intend to compare what being gay has meant over the decades. Therefore, these plays are not entirely contemporary in their chronological setting, but they still aim to shed light on some aspects of contemporaneity, as their characters are portrayed at different stages (and ages) of their lives. These plays reflect the social, political and legal changes that have taken place, particularly in 20th and 21st century British society.

Not only are the changes depicted from a chronological point of view, but also from different geographical perspectives. As was mentioned before, most of the plays are set in London and portray a metropolitan lifestyle; however, some of them are also set in rural, more conservative British areas and foreign countries, where the problematisation of homosexuality becomes even more apparent. This diatopic variation is reflected in the language used by the gay men (186 out of 187, as one character[70] does not speak) in the corpus. Among those who speak a non-standard dialect (i.e. 18%), Cockney – i.e. the London metropolitan dialect – appears to be the most commonly used variety; a generalised Northern English variety is used to portray the characters originating from the rural areas of the North. It is interesting to note that non-standard dialects are mainly spoken by younger gay men (0-39), who tend to use local varieties as a way to identify with the groups they wish to belong to, as most of them might find it embarrassing to use the "grammatically correct" language, as discussed in the related section. Another reason could be that most of these younger characters belong to the working class, mainly because they have not yet reached a stable professional position. The standard variety,

[70] Mr Tomkins in Gill's *Original Sin* (2002).

on the other hand, is used by the upper class (100%) and middle class (97%), which mainly include gay men in their forties and fifties who have achieved a stable professional position. By and large, 81% of all the gay men in the corpus speak the Standard variety, even considering that almost half of them (49%) belong to the middle class.

Standard British English is the most frequently used variety in the corpus, not only because of the social class of its speakers, but also because the majority (61%) of the gay men in the corpus are the main characters in the plays. Since they play a leading role, they are almost always on stage and most of the story is conveyed through their words. Therefore, the use of the standard variety may also be due to commercial reasons, as well as readability. Similarly, gay secondary characters do not usually speak the standard language, as the use of dialects does not affect readability or meet resistance from readers, especially because they speak less than characters with primary roles. Unlike secondary characters, gay main characters are given prominence because they are the protagonists in the plays in which they are portrayed, they speak less and the audience/reader can identify and empathise with them. This means that in most of the plays in the corpus (61%), the theme of homosexuality is still foregrounded, which raises the question of whether gay characters are truly included in the fictional worlds portrayed or whether they are ghettoised in the same way that they often are in the real world.

63% of the gay characters, furthermore, are social gay men, which means that they openly express their homosexuality. This irreverence is sometimes reflected in the fictional gayspeak that they use – which was analysed both taking a corpus-assisted approach and manually – as the macro-category of directness, which comprises open aggression and sexual vocabulary, but also the strategies of sexual indirectness[71], gender inversion[72] and intensive "so"[73] seem to distinguish the variety spoken by the gay men in the corpus from present-day spoken British English, and reveal the irreverence of the speakers. In addition to this, all the instances of inventions and puns – which occur very rarely in the manually analysed sample and, thus, seem to give no indication of the characters' homosexuality – have a sexual

[71] The category of sexual indirectness includes double entendres, vagueness and understatement, which are allegedly used by gay men to make statements with sexual content in an indirect way. Many instances of sexual indirectness refer to male genitalia, sexual intercourse and promiscuity.

[72] Many instances of feminised forms (e.g. "cunt", "pussy", "bitch") have a sexual connotation.

[73] Intensive "so" occurs slightly more in *GayCorpus2000-2020* (rel. freq. 12.24) than in the reference corpus (rel. freq. 12.09). Some instances of intensive "so" are used to emphasise the adjective "gay" used in its derogatory connotation, thus indexing an irreverent kind of language and gay man, although this feature belongs to the macro-category of emotionality.

connotation. The use of a direct type of fictional gayspeak could therefore suggest that the gay men portrayed in *GayCorpus2000-2020* are irreverent and have no problem in openly displaying their homosexuality. Although on the one hand this can be seen as a positive portrayal of gay men compared to secret gay men (23%) who have difficulties accepting themselves and hide their sexuality, on the other hand this representation implies that some features that are commonly associated with social gay men are stereotypically reiterated, as the general image that the audience/readers have of gay characters is actually based on a certain type of gay man – namely, the camp character – who tends to be stereotypically disrespectful and flamboyant. This is also evident from the positive keywords in the corpus – i.e. "fuck", "sex", "gay", "cock", "piss", "men", to name a few – which shed light on the general content of the plays, which mainly revolves around sex and manliness. Most collocates of the node terms "fuck", "sex" and "cock", moreover, refer to sexual intercourse, which is often dehumanised and deprived of any emotionality, as the collocates of the term "sex" show (i.e. "drugs", "good"). The irreverence of the fictional language used in the corpus, which is a way of indexing mainly social gay men, is also due to the low occurrence of some features that are historically associated with secret gay men. This is especially true for features that fall under the macro-category of indirectness, such as hedges[74], innuendos[75], but also for features that occur more frequently in the corpus studied than in the reference corpus, but whose overall frequency is very low when compared to other features, such as genderless terminology (i.e. "lover", "partner"). Flamboyance is also found in linguistic features such as emotional terms (e.g. "lovely", "fabulous", "adorable", among many others), vocatives (e.g. "darling", "dear", "honey", to name but a few), foreignisms (e.g. "fiancé", "mademoiselle", "monsieur", among many others), which, despite being more common in the corpus studied than in present-day spoken British English, are low in frequency and, as with foreignisms, gradually decrease over the years. Exclamations such as "oh dear!", "oh (my) God!", "Gosh!" contribute to the construction of the camp character as well; however, their relative frequency is lower in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in the reference corpus, which may be a further evidence of the decline of the stereotypical flamboyant gay character, which is too often reiterated in literary and audiovisual products. The only exceptions are mentions, which occur 227 times in the

[74] This feature occurs less in *GayCorpus2000-2020* than in the reference corpus.

[75] There are only 7 instances of innuendos in the sample analysed manually, which are all produced by secret gay men. They indirectly refer to homosexuality.

manually analysed excerpts (54 more than heterosexual characters). Most mentions refer to the world of fashion (e.g. Armani, Moschino, Versace, to mention but a few) and pop music (e.g. ABBA, Beyoncé, Céline Dion, Cher, Kylie Minogue, Lady Gaga, among many others), but also to gay literary icons such as Oscar Wilde, Joe Orton, and plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Interestingly, only 2 out of 227 mentions refer to sport[76], an activity stereotypically said to be of no interest to gay men. Diachronically, moreover, the number of plays featuring explicitly gay characters seems to be decreasing: 39 out of 61 plays feature gay men in the first decade of the 21st century, and 22 out of 61 between 2010 and 2020. Despite the fact that the majority of the gay men portrayed reiterate some stereotypes entrenched in literature and the media, it seems fair to say that, at least in the corpus under scrutiny, gay characters have gradually been incorporated into the mainstream culture of the fictional worlds represented.

8.2 Future research

The assumption underlying this work is that fictional gay men speak their own linguistic variety. This seems to be evidenced in a number of previous studies that have focused mainly on the audiovisual representation of Anglo-American gayspeak and its translation into other languages (e.g. Ranzato 2012, 2015; Chagnon 2014; De Marco 2009-2016; Lewis 2010; Villanueva 2015)[77]. The evidence for the existence of a specific linguistic variety, also called sexolect in this work, comes from research carried out in the past (see *Chapter 5*), which was mainly based on personal observations and rarely relied on empirical evidence. This is due to the historical period in which earlier studies were conducted, i.e. before technologically advanced methodologies were applied in Linguistics. The ultimate aim of my study, therefore, has been to determine whether there is sufficient evidence for the existence of a linguistic variety spoken by fictional gay men, and to what extent the features discussed in earlier studies are still in use and which of them are in decline.

However, I am aware of the fact that this work has limitations that leave the conclusions open to new avenues of research. First, all the data discussed in this thesis cannot be generalised

[76] Only 3 out of 61 plays deal also with sports.

[77] I have devoted some papers (Passa 2021a, b; 2022) to the analysis of the rendering of Anglo-American gayspeak in audiovisual products into Italian and Spanish.

to present-day British fictional gayspeak; the corpus analysed was not intended to include every single play written by a British playwright, staged in the 21st century and containing at least one gay character. As much as I have tried to include as many plays as possible, there are certainly many others that, despite having the aforementioned prerequisites, have not been included in *GayCorpus2000-2020* for the reasons outlined in *Chapter 1*. Second, some features of fictional gayspeak could not be studied using a corpus-assisted approach; these were examined manually using a small sample of the entire corpus considered, thus losing the objectivity that technology would bring to the analysis.

Despite these limitations, I believe that this work has shed light on some aspects of 21st century British gay drama, on the way gay men have been portrayed on stage according to some universal sociolinguistic variables, but also on other features specific to Language and Sexuality Studies, such as the linguistic variety that gay men are said to speak. I hope that this work will contribute to the existing literature, as there are, to my knowledge and belief, no academic studies of British drama that have focused on the portrayal of gay characters in the last twenty years. Nor, to my knowledge, are there any academic studies that have recently reassessed the purely linguistic features of (fictional) gayspeak in the light of Corpus Linguistics.

This study can be the starting point for further research in the field. The variety analysed in this work belongs to present-day British English, which means that diatopic and diachronic comparisons with different varieties of (fictional) gayspeak could be made. Moreover, gayspeak could also be looked at from a different perspective. This is a text-based study, which means that the data were collected from the text itself and all elements characterising the performance of the plays were neglected. The visual and aural representations of the gay men included in the corpus will certainly generate extremely rich and interesting research, especially since the phonetic realisation of certain sounds, as well as various paralinguistic features to be considered may play a fundamental role in the construction of the gay characters. In addition, other LGBTQIA+ communities could also be explored, which may provide readers with new and interesting data on the fictional representation of their less explored members.

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APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE

			Theatres Acts	Gay Rights
King Henry VIII (1509-1547)		**1533**		**The Buggery Act of 1533**, passed by Parliament during the reign of Henry VIII, is the first time in law that male homosexuality was targeted for persecution in the UK. Completely outlawing sodomy in Britain – and by extension what would become the entire British Empire – convictions were punishable by death.
King George II (17274-1760)		**1737**	**Licensing Act:** all new plays had to be approved and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain before production.	
King George IV (1820-1830)		**1828**		The Buggery Act 1533 was repealed and replaced by the **Offences against the Person Act** 1828. Buggery remained punishable by death.
Queen Victoria (1837-1901)		**1843**	**Theatre Act 1843**: it restricted the powers of the Lord Chamberlain, so that he could only prohibit the performance of plays where he was of the opinion that "it is fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do".	
		1857	**Obscene Publication Act:** (or Lord	

			Campbell's Act) it outlawed obscene publications and empowered police to search premises on which obscene publications were kept for sale or distribution.	
		1861		**Offences Against the Person Act**: it revokes the death penalty for homosexual acts between men and replaces it with a prison term of hard labour between 10 years and life.
		1885		**Criminal Law Amendment Act** - death penalty was abolished for acts of sodomy. Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof, shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.
Edward VII (1901-1910)		**1910**		Gay men in London begin to gather openly in public places such as coffee houses and tea shops.
Queen Elizabeth II (1952-2022)		**1957**		**Wolfenden Report**: (The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution) The Wolfenden Committee released its report,

				recommending the decriminalisation of gay sex between consenting adults over 21, except in the armed forces. It stated: 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence.' The Government rejected the report and it wasn't until 10 years later that the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men, both over the age of 21.
		1959	**Obscene Publications Act:** a person shall not be convicted if publication was "in the interest of science, literature, art or learning".	
		1964	**Obscene Publications Act:** minor additional provisions in addition to OPA 1959.	
		1967		**The Sexual Offences Act** decriminalised homosexual acts between two men, both over the age of 21, in private. The age of consent was set at 21 (compared to 16 for heterosexuals and lesbians). Homosexual acts taking place in the presence of more than two people however, were deemed not 'in private' to prevent premises being used for communal activities. The Act only applied to England and Wales.

		1968	**Theatres Act**: it abolished censorship of the stage in the United Kingdom.	
		1969		First British activist group, **The Campaign for Homosexual Equality**, is formed.
		1970		**The Gay Liberation Front** is established in London.
		1972		First **gay pride** in London.
	1979-1990: Margaret Thatcher	**1980**		**The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980** decriminalized homosexual acts between two men over 21 years of age "in private" in Scotland.
		1981		**First UK case of AIDS**
		1982		**The Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order** decriminalised homosexual acts between two men over 21 years of age "in private" in Northern Ireland.
		1988	**Section 28 of the Local Government Act:** (1)A local authority shall not (a)intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b)promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.	

			(2)Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease. **Section 28 was repealed in 2003.**	
	1990-1997: John Major	**1992**		World Health Organization removes homosexuality from its list of mental disorders
		1994		The Conservative Member of Parliament Edwina Currie introduced an amendment to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts from 21 to 16, in line with the age for heterosexual acts. The vote was defeated and the **gay male age of consent was lowered to 18** instead. The lesbian age of consent was not set.
	1997-2007: Tony Blair	**2000**	**Scottish Government abolishes Section 28 of the Local Government Act**	
		2001		The UK Government lifts ban on lesbians, gay and bisexual people serving in **armed forces.** **Age of consent for gay/bi men lowered to 16.**
		2002		Equal rights for **adoption** to same-sex couples.
		2003	**Section 28** was repealed in 2003.	Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations.

		2004		**Civil Partnership Act** allowed same-sex couples to legally enter into binding partnerships, similar to marriage. **Gender Recognition Act** gave transgender people full legal recognition of their gender, allowing them to acquire a new birth certificate – although gender options are still limited to 'male' or 'female'.
	2007-2010: G. Brown	**2008**		**The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act** Same-sex couples were recognised as the legal parents of children conceived through the use of donated sperm, eggs or embryos.
		2010		**Equality Act** The Equality Act 2010 legislates for equal treatment in access to employment as well as private and public services, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Act also has several restrictions that cause concern, however. It allows religious and faith institutions in England, Scotland and Wales permission to refuse a same-sex marriage ceremony if it contravenes their beliefs.
	2010-2016:	**2013**		**Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act** allowed same-sex couples in England and Wales to marry.

	David Cameron	**2014**		**Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act**. Northern Ireland is the only country in the UK which does not have marriage equality in law.
		2016		**Prince William** appears on the front cover of gay magazine, *Attitude*, stating that no one should be bullied because of their sexuality.
	2016-2019: Theresa May	**2017**		**The Policing and Crime Act 2017** pardoned all historic instances of criminal convictions of gross indecency against men. This has become known as the '*Alan Turing law*'. The Act only applies to convictions in England and Wales. A campaign for the pardon to be implemented in Scotland and Northern Ireland is ongoing.
		2019		***The Northern Ireland Act*** recognised same-sex marriage.

APPENDIX 2: GAY PLAYS

Year	Author	Title	Theatre	Publisher	Place and Date	Themes
2000	P. Ridley	*Vincent River*	Hampstead Theatre	Methuen	Dagenham, East London / NN	Homophobia; Hate crime; Lover's death; Aftermath of crime; Mother discovers son's homosexuality.
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays: BROTHEL*	Klub Paradise (Warsaw)	Aputheatre	Amsterdam, house of male prostitution / 2000	Prostitution; Flee from East; Legal documents for West; Fetish (shit, violent films).
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays: PAARDENSTRAAT*	Klub Paradise (Warsaw)	Aputheatre	Amsterdam, room / 2000	Prostitution; Racism; Drug; Homophobia; Flee from East; Homophobia in Poland.
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays: HOTEL*	Klub Paradise (Warsaw)	Aputheatre	Amsterdam, hotel room / 2000	Prostitution; Flee from East; Fetish (rough/pain/S&M); AIDS; Lover's death; Homophobia in Romania.
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays: AMSTERDAM CS*	Klub Paradise (Warsaw)	Aputheatre	Amsterdam, Central Station / 2000	Prostitution; AIDS; Fetish (dirty talk); Drug Lover's death.
2000	N. Bartlett	*In Extremis*	Cottesloe Theatre	Oberon	London, 1895/1995	Oscar Wilde's trial; Palm reader
2000	A. Kotak	*Hijra*	The Theatre Royal Plymouth	Oberon	Bombay, Mumbai, Wembley (England)	Hijra; Transvestism; Marriage; Law.
2000	J. Cartwright	*Hard Fruit*	Royal Court Theatre	Methuen	Backyard, Northern town / 2000	Struggle to accept one's homosexuality; Masculinity Friendship > homosexual attraction.
2001	J. Harvey	*Out in the open*	Hampstead Theatre	Methuen	Garden, London / 2000	AIDS; Lover's death; Love triangle.
2001	M. Ravenhill	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	Royal National Theatre	Methuen	London / 1726 - 2001	Prostitution / Mollies; Transvestism; Fetish Pornography;

						Capitalism; AIDS; Sexual diseases.
2001	K. Elyot	*Mouth To Mouth*	Royal Court Theatre	NHB	South London	AIDS; Self-centredness; No communication; Under-age sexual scene.
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Bush Theatre	Oberon	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Club; Love vs casual sex.
2001	P. Gill	*The York Realist*	The Lowry, Salford Quays	Faber	York, early 1960s	Theatre; Social classes; Town vs country.
2001	G. Cleugh	*F***ing Games*	Royal Court	Methuen	Chelsea, London / 2001	Drugs; Alcohol; Gay clubs; Unfaithfulness; Love triangle; Fetish; AIDS; Beauty; Power.
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	The Crucible, Sheffield	Faber	London/Paris, 1890s	Victorian sub-world; Prostitution; Art.
2002	J. Hall	*The Coffee Lover's Guide to America*	Chelsea Theatre	Oberon	America, 2000	British vs American: Tormented love.
2002	D. Oparei	*Crazyblackmyth af***in'self*	Royal Court	Royal Court	St John's Wood (North London) / North Peckham estate (South London)	Blackness; Prostitution; Drag queenism; Coming of age; Fetish.
2003	J. Hall	*Mr Elliott*	Chelsea Theatre	Oberon	Bradford, present (2003)	School; Extramarital sex; Racial problems; Closeted gay;
2004	J. Hall	*Hardcore*	Pleasance Theatre	Oberon	London	Pornography.
2004	A. Bennett	*The History Boys*	National Theatre	Faber	Scheffield (North of England), 1980s	School; Education.
2004	R. Evans	*A Girl in a Car with a Man*	Royal Court	Faber	North England	Clubs; Narcissism; Loneliness.
2004	K. Elyot	*Forty Winks*	Royal Court	NHB	Hampstead Heath (London), hotel bedroom/verandah	Obsessional love; Abuse; Death.
2005	M. Ravenhill	*Citizenship*	National Theatre	Methuen		School; Struggle to accept homosexuality; Homophobia.

2005	P. Ridley	*Mercury Fur*	Drum Theatre, Plymouth	Methuen	East End, Future	Pornography; Fetish; Drug; Post-Apocalyptic.
2005	B. Cowan	*Smilin' Through*	The Drill Hall	Playdead Press	East Belfast (Northern Ireland), 1998	Homophobia; Family life; Acceptance; Religion.
2005	R. Beadle-Blair	*Bashment*	Theatre Royal	Oberon	East London, 2005	Racism; Homophobia; Music.
2005	N. Moran	*Telstar*	Cambridge Arts Theatre	Oberon	London, 1960s	Homophobia; Illegal homosexuality; Music; Suicide; Murder; British pop culture; Drugs.
2005	M. Todd	*Blowing Whistles*	Warehouse Theatre, Croydon	Josef Weinberger	Clapham, London	Homophobia; Extra-marital relationship; Online sex; Menage a trois; Gay Pride; Drugs.
2006	C. Churchill	*Drunk Enough To Say I Love You*	Schauspielhaus, Hanover, Germany	NHB		UK vs USA; Politics; Sick love affair.
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex: NUMBER 12*	Doornroosje Poppodium, Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Aputheatre	Hotel room, Berlin	Prostitution; Gay chat; Condom use.
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex: CARLO*	Doornroosje Poppodium, Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Aputheatre	Apartment, London	Extra-marital relationship; Condom use.
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex: BOHEMIAN BAREBACK*	Doornroosje Poppodium, Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Aputheatre	Apartment, Bratislava	Pornography; AIDS; Condom use.
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex: AN ACT OF KIDNESS*	Doornroosje Poppodium, Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Aputheatre	Apartment, Amsterdam	Prostitution; AIDS; Condom use.
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex: LA RONDE*	Doornroosje Poppodium, Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Aputheatre	Small hustler bar, Vienna	Prostitution; Condom use.
2006	S. Adamson	*Southward Fair*	National Theatre	Faber	Southwark, London, 2000s	Extra-marital relationship; Paedophilia; Civil partnership; Aversion therapy; Metropolitan life.
2007	B. Lavery	*Last Easter*	The Door, Birmingham	Faber	Easter, 2000s	Cancer; Religion;

			Repertory Theatre			Assisted suicide.
2007	A. Sher	*The Giant*	Hampstead Theatre	NHB	Florence, 1501-1504	Sculpture; Sodomy; Extra-marital relationship.
2008	A. K. Campbell	*The Pride*	Royal Court	NHB	London, 1958/2008	Extra-marital relationship; Aversion therapy.
2008	J. R. Baker	*Touched*	Hel Plein Theater, Amsterdam	Aputheatre	Studio apartment, Amsterdam	AIDS; Paedophilia.
2008	R. Bean	*The English Game*	Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre	Oberon	London, 2008	Cricket; State of England/Englishness.
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	Finborough Theatre	Samuel French	London, 1950s-1970s	Homophobia; Aversion therapy; Gay clubs; Social classes; Activism; Gay rights; Acceptance; Drugs.
2009	T. Wells	*About a Goth*	Òran Mór, Glasgow	NHB		Coming of age.
2009	T. Wells	*Notes for First Time Astronauts*	Soho Theatre	NHB	Space	Masturbation.
2009	T. Wells	*Me As a Penguin*	Arcola Theatre	NHB	Hull (Northern England)	Family; Parenthood.
2009	T. Wainwright	*Muscle*	Bristol Old Vic Studio	Oberon	Gym	Masculinity; Obsession; Extra-marital relationship; Fetish.
2009	S. Bent	*Prick Up Your Ears*	Richmond Theatre	Oberon	Islington (London), 1962-1967	Writing; Prison; Relationship problems; Fame; Death.
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	Liverpool Playhouse	Methuen	London/Liverpool, 1960 - 2010	AIDS; Aversion therapy; Activism; Homophobia; Acceptance.
2010	N. Bartlett	*Or you could kiss me*	National Theatre	Oberon	Port Elizabeth (South Africa), 2036/ Capetown, 1971	Puppetry; Love story.
2010	R. Beadle-Blair	*FIT*	Drill Hall Theatre	Oberon	London college, 2000s	School; Homophobic bullying; Sport.
2011	T. Wells	*The Kitchen Sink*	Bush Theatre	NHB	East Yorkshire	Family life; Art.

2011	E. Placey	*Banana Boys*	Hampstead Theatre	NHB	Hampstead Heath (London)	Puberty; Masculinity; Homophobia; Fetish; Acceptance.
2011	N. Wright	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	Chichester Festival Theatre	NHB	London, St Petersburg, 1898-1974	Metatheatre; Dance; Madness; Homophobia; Sexual repression; Blackmail.
2011	D. Eldridge	*The Stock Da'wa*	Hampstead Theatre	Methuen		Terrorism; Assassination; Homophobia; Racism; AIDS; Drugs; Adoption.
2012	S. Beresford	*The Last of the Haussmans*	Lyttelton auditorium, National Theatre	NHB	South Devon Coast	Family life; Generation gap; Drug addiction; Cancer.
2013	T. Wells	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	Watford Palace Theatre	NHB	Hull (Yorkshire)	Football team; AIDS; Acceptance.
2013	T. Gupta	*Love N Stuff*	Theatre Royal Stratford East	Oberon	Heathrow, London	Religion; Married life; Parenthood.
2014	B. Cowan	*Still ill*	The Lowry Studio, Salford	Playdead Press	County Down (Northern Ireland), 2008	Extra-marital relationship; Cruising.
2014	J. Bradfield, M. Hooper	*A Hard Rain*	Stag Theatre (London)	NHB	New York, 1968-1969	Racism; Homophobia; Army and homosexuality; Activism; Extra-marital sex; Gay clubs; Stonewall riots; Mafia.
2014	P. Gill	*Versailles*	Donmar Warehouse, London	Faber	Kent/Paris, 1919	Race; Englishness; First World War; Politics; Economics.
2015	M. Buffini	*Wonder.land*	Palace Theatre, Manchester	Faber		School; Homophobia; Virtual reality; Race.
2015	B. Doran	*The Mystery of Love & Sex*	Lincoln Center Theater	Samuel French	Outskirts cities of American South	Racism; Homophobia; Bi-sexuality; Acceptance; Religion; Writing; Sex vs Love.

2015	S. Wilson	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	Hope Theatre (London)	Methuen drama	New York, 1950s	Artificial intelligence; Academia; Chemical castration; Suicide; Dragqueenism.
2016	J. Brunger	*Four Play*	Theatre503 (London)	NHB	2000s	Online dating; Open relationship; Extra-marital sex; Jealousy.
2016	S. Laughton	*Run*	VAULT Festival, London; Bunker Theatre	NHB	London	Sexuality vs faith; Judaism; First love.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – The man at the platform (Gatiss)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	1917	Secret homosexuality; Army.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – Safest spot in town (Jarrett)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	1941, London	Model; Gay clubs; Police; War.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – I miss the war (Baldwin)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	1967, London	Prostitution ; Army; Polari; Offence Acts 1967.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – More anger (Fillis)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	1987	AIDS; Thatcher.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – A grand day out (Dennis)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	1994	Age of consent.
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queers. Eight monologues – Something borrowed (Mclean)*	The Old Vic (London)	NHB	2016	Gay marriage.
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	Park Theatre, London	NHB	North London, 1961/1967/2017	Before/After decriminalisation of homosexuality; Family life; Concealed homosexuality/love.
2018	C. Thompson	*Dungeness*	PACE Youth Theater	Methue Drama	Remote part of the UK (Kent)	Community life; Racism; Journey of self-discovery; Acceptance; Commemoration.
2020	J. Harvey	*Our Lady Of Blundellsands*	Everyman Theatre, Liverpool	Methuen Drama	Blundellsands, Liverpool, 2020	Family life; Drag queenism; Madness; Family Secrets.

APPENDIX 3: GAY CHARACTERS

Year	Author	Title	Intradiegetic place and year	Character	Role	Age	Job	Social Class	D/A/S[78]	Hayes' position
2000	P. Ridley	*Vincent River*	Dagenham, East London	Davey	Protagonist	17	Student	WC	D	Social
2000	N. Bartlett	*In Extremis*	London, 1895	Oscar Wilde	Protagonist	41	Artist	UC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - BROTHEL*	House of male prostitution, Amsterdam, 2000	Frank	Protagonist		Owner of the Club	MC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - BROTHEL*	House of male prostitution, Amsterdam, 2000	Milan	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	WC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - BROTHEL*	House of male prostitution, Amsterdam, 2000	Paul	Protagonist	Young	Client	MC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - PAARDENSTRAAT*	Room, Amsterdam, 2000	Romek	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	WC	S	Secret
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - PAARDENSTRAAT*	Room, Amsterdam, 2000	Tadek	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	WC	S	Secret
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - HOTEL*	Hotel, Amsterdam, 2000	Daniel	Protagonist		Guest	MC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays - HOTEL*	Hotel, Amsterdam, 2000	Radu	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	MC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays – AMSTERDAM CS*	Central Station, Amsterdam, 2000	Peter	Protagonist	Young	Client	MC	S	Social
2000	J. R. Baker	*The Prostitution Plays – AMSTERDAM CS*	Central Station, Amsterdam, 2000	Vasily	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	WC	S	Social
2000	J. Cartwright	*Hard fruit*	Small backyard of a terraced house, Northern town (England)	Choke	Protagonist	Elderly	Wrestler	WC	D	Secret
2000	J. Cartwright	*Hard fruit*	Small backyard of a terraced	Yack	Secondary	Elderly		WC	D	social

[78] D: dialect; A: accent; S: standard.

			house, Northern town (England)							
2000	J. Cartwright	*Hard fruit*	Small backyard of a terraced house, Northern town (England)	Silver	Secondary	Young		WC	D	Social
2000	J. Cartwright	*Hard fruit*	Small backyard of a terraced house, Northern town (England)	Friar Jiggle	Secondary		Bouncer	WC	D	Activist
2000	A. Kotak	*Hijra*	Bombay, Mumbai, Wembley	Nils	Protagonist	Young		MC	S	Secret >Social
2000	A. Kotak	*Hijra*	Bombay, Mumbai, Wembley	Raj/Rani	Protagonist	Young		MC	S	Social
2001	P. Gill	*The York Realist*	York, early 1960s	George	Protagonist	Young	Farmer/actor	WC	S	Secret
2001	P. Gill	*The York Realist*	York, early 1960s	John	Protagonist		Assistant director	MC	S	Secret
2001	K. Elyot	*Mouth To Mouth*	South London	Frank	Protagonist	46	Playwright	MC	S	Social
2001	K. Elyot	*Mouth To Mouth*	South London	Gompertz	Secondary	35	Doctor	MC	S	Social
2001	K. Elyot	*Mouth To Mouth*	South London	Phillip	Secondary	15	Student	MC	S	Secret
2001	J. Harvey	*Out in the Open*	London, 2000	Tony	Protagonist	33	Shop assistant	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Out in the Open*	London, 2000	Iggy	Secondary	21	Photography student	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Out in the Open*	London, 2000	Kevin	Secondary	33	Video assistant	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Princess	Secondary		Man in dress	WC	D	Secret
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Orme	Secondary		Apprentice	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Martin	Secondary		Apprentice	WC	D	Secret >Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Josh	Secondary				S	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Will	Secondary				S	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Tom	Secondary				D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726 /2001	Edward	Secondary				S	Social

2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726/2001	Phill	Secondary				S	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726/2001	Kedger	Secondary		Working man	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726/2001	Philips	Secondary		Working man	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Harvey	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	London, early 1726/2001	Lawrence	Secondary		Working man	WC	D	Social
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Gavin	Protagonist	Late 30s	Halifax civil servant	MC	S	Social
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Mark	Protagonist	Early 40s	Estate agent	MC	S	Social
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Cliff	Protagonist	Early 60s	Proprietor	MC	S	Social
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Phil	Protagonist	Early 40s	Geography teacher	MC	S	Social
2001	J. Hall	*Flamingos*	Cliffdean Private Hotel, Blackpool (gay B&B)	Richard	Protagonist	30	Software expert	MC	S	Social
2001	G. Cleugh	*F***ing Games*	Chelsea, London / 2001	Terrance	Protagonist	49	Head Manager	MC	S	Social
2001	G. Cleugh	*F***ing Games*	Chelsea, London / 2001	Jonah	Secondary	35	Owner of private members club	MC	S	Social
2001	G. Cleugh	*F***ing Games*	Chelsea, London / 2001	Jude	Secondary	29	Actor	MC	S	Social
2001	G. Cleugh	*F***ing Games*	Chelsea, London / 2001	Danny	Secondary	20	DJ	WC	S	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Angel	Protagonist	18	Model	WC	S	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Eugene Black	Secondary	28	Painter	MC	S	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Arthur S.	Secondary		Playwright/theatre director	MC	S	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Leopold S.	Secondary		Newspaper proprietor	MC	S	Secret
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Slavin	Secondary		Itinerant	WC	D	Social

2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Mr Tomkins	Secondary		Client	MC	NN[79]	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Euba	Secondary		Client	UC	S	Social
2002	P. Gill	*Original Sin*	London/Paris, 1890s	Jack	Secondary		Client	MC	S	Social
2002	J. Hall	*The coffee lover's guide to America*	America, 2000	Joe	Protagonist	Late 30s	Town planner	MC	S	Social
2002	J. Hall	*The coffee lover's guide to America*	America, 2000	Gregg	Protagonist	Late 30s	Finance	MC	S	Social
2002	D. Oparei	*Crazyblackmythaf ***in'self*	St John's Wood (North London)/North Peckham estate (South London)	Femi/Shaneequa/ Laurence	Protagonist		Actor/drag queen/prostitute	WC	D	Secret >Social
2002	D. Oparei	*Crazyblackmythaf ***in'self*	St John's Wood (North London)/North Peckham estate (South London)	Colin	Secondary		Drag queen/Prostitute	WC	D	Social
2002	D. Oparei	*Crazyblackmythaf ***in'self*	St John's Wood (North London)/North Peckham estate (South London)	Raef	Secondary		Actor	MC	S	Secret >Social
2002	D. Oparei	*Crazyblackmythaf ***in'self*	St John's Wood (North London)/North Peckham estate (South London)	Mr Wilson Dickson	Secondary		Client	MC	S	Social
2003	J. Hall	*Mr Elliott*	Bradford, present (2003?)	Mr Elliot	Protagonist	45	Teacher	MC	S	Secret >Social
2003	J. Hall	*Mr Elliott*	Bradford, present (2003?)	Ash	Protagonist	19	Student/Ikea worker	WC	D	Secret
2003	J. Hall	*Mr Elliott*	Bradford, present (2003?)	Steve	Secondary	28	Theatre teacher	MC	S	Activist
2004	A. Bennett	*The History Boys*	Scheffield (North of England), 1980s	Posner	Protagonist	17/18	Student	WC	S	Social
2004	A. Bennett	*The History Boys*	Scheffield (North of England), 1980s	Hector	Protagonist	50s	Teacher	MC	S	Social
2004	A. Bennett	*The History Boys*	Scheffield (North of England), 1980s	Irwin	Protagonist	40s	Teacher	MC	S	Secret

[79] He never speaks in the play.

2004	K. Elyot	*Forty Winks*	Hampstead Heath (London), hotel bedroom/verandah	Charlie	Secondary	31	Playwright	MC	S	Social
2004	K. Elyot	*Forty Winks*	Hampstead Heath (London), hotel bedroom/verandah	Danny	Secondary	Early 40s	Cardiologist	MC	S	Social
2004	R. Evans	*A Girl in a Car with a Man*	North England	Alex	Protagonist	Young		MC	S	Social
2004	R. Evans	*A Girl in a Car with a Man*	North England	Policeman	Secondary		Policeman	MC	S	Social
2004	J. Hall	*Hardcore*	London	Craig	Protagonist	23	Actor/model/escort	WC	S	Social
2004	J. Hall	*Hardcore*	London	Martin	Protagonist	22		WC	S	Social
2004	J. Hall	*Hardcore*	London	Robert	Protagonist	26	Finance	MC	S	Social
2005	M. Ravenhill	*Citizenship*		Tom	Protagonist	15	Student		S	Secret >Social
2005	M. Ravenhill	*Citizenship*		De Clerk	Secondary	22	Teacher	MC	S	Secret
2005	M. Ravenhill	*Citizenship*		Martin	Secondary	21	Systems analyst	MC	S	Social
2005	P. Ridley	*Mercury Fur*	East End	Darren	Protagonist	16		WC	D	Social
2005	P. Ridley	*Mercury Fur*	East End	Naz	Secondary	15		WC	D	Social
2005	P. Ridley	*Mercury Fur*	East End	Party Guest	Secondary	23		MC	D	Social
2005	B. Cowan	*Smilin' Through*	East Belfast (Northern Ireland)	Kyle Morrow	Protagonist	22		WC	S	Secret >social
2005	B. Cowan	*Smilin' Through*	East Belfast (Northern Ireland)	Donal O'Shea	Secondary		University student	MC	S	Social
2005	R. Beadle-Blair	*Bashment*	East London, 2005	JJ	Protagonist	21	Hip-hop styling	WC	D	Secret
2005	R. Beadle-Blair	*Bashment*	East London, 2005	Orlando	Protagonist	21		WC	D	Social
2005	R. Beadle-Blair	*Bashment*	East London, 2005	Sam	Secondary			WC	S	Social
2005	R. Beadle-Blair	*Bashment*	East London, 2005	Daniel	Secondary	28	Lawyer	MC	S	Social
2005	N. Moran	*Telstar*	1961	Joe Meek	Protagonist	32	Record producer	MC	S	Secret
2005	M. Todd	*Blowing Whistles*	Clapham, London	Jamie	Protagonist	30	Bank employee	MC	S	Social
2005	M. Todd	*Blowing Whistles*	Clapham, London	Nigel	Protagonist	31	Public relations	MC	S	Social

2005	M. Todd	*Blowing Whistles*	Clapham, London	Mark	Protagonist	17	Waiter	WC	D	Secret
2006	C. Churchill	*Drunk Enough*		Sam	Protagonist				S	Social
2006	C. Churchill	*Drunk Enough*		Guy	Protagonist				S	Secret
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – NUMBER 12*	Hotel room, Berlin	Joey	Protagonist		Tourist /Prostitute		S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – NUMBER 12*	Hotel room, Berlin	Hans	Protagonist	Young	Public relations	MC	S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – CARLO*	Apartment, London	George	Protagonist				S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – CARLO*	Apartment, London	Martin	Protagonist				S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – BOHEMIAN BAREBACK*	Apartment, Bratislava	Ivan	Protagonist		Producer of pornography	MC	S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – BOHEMIAN BAREBACK*	Apartment, Bratislava	Tomas	Protagonist	Young	Porn actor	MC	S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – AN ACT OF KIDNESS*	Apartment, Amsterdam	Florian	Protagonist	Young	Prostitute	WC	S	Secret
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – AN ACT OF KIDNESS*	Apartment, Amsterdam	James	Protagonist		Client	MC	S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – LA RONDE*	Small hustler bar, Vienna	Stefan	Protagonist		Hustler/Female impersonator	WC	S	Social
2006	J. R. Baker	*Prisoners of sex – LA RONDE*	Small hustler bar, Vienna	Boris	Protagonist		Tourist /client/airline pilot	MC	S	Social
2006	S. Adamson	*Southward Fair*	Southwark, London, 2000s	Simon	Protagonist	32	Property consultant	MC	S	Social
2006	S. Adamson	*Southward Fair*	Southwark, London, 2000s	Aurek	Secondary	24	Waiter	WC	S	Social
2006	S. Adamson	*Southward Fair*	Southwark, London, 2000s	Patrick	Protagonist	38	Writer	MC	S	Secret
2006	S. Adamson	*Southward Fair*	Southwark, London, 2000s	Alexander	Secondary	45	Deputy mayor	MC	S	Social
2007	B. Lavery	*Last Easter*	Recent Easter	Gash	Protagonist		Singer, female impersonator		S	Social
2007	A. Sher	*The Giant*	Florence, 1501-1504	Leonardo	Protagonist		Artist, inventor	MC	S	Secret
2007	A. Sher	*The Giant*	Florence, 1501-1504	Michelangelo	Protagonist		Artist	UC	S	Secret
2008	R. Bean	*The English Game*	London, present	Nick	Secondary	25			S	Social
2008	J. R. Baker	*Touched*	Studio apartment, Amsterdam	Piotrek	Protagonist	Young	Barman	WC	S	Social
2008	J. R. Baker	*Touched*	Studio apartment, Amsterdam	Tim	Protagonist			MC	S	Social

2008	A. K. Campbell	*The Pride*	London, 1958/2008	Oliver	Protagonist	Mid-30s	Writer/journalist	MC	S	Social
2008	A. K. Campbell	*The Pride*	London, 1958/2008	Philip	Protagonist	Mid-30s	Estate agent/photographer	MC	S	Secret >Social
2008	A. K. Campbell	*The Pride*	London, 1958/2008	The man	Secondary		Ex actor/ prostitute	WC	S	Social
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Daniel Arlington	Secondary	40ish	Ex-American government employee	MC	S	Secret
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Police Constable Terry Fordham	Secondary	Early/ mid 20s	Policeman	MC	S	Secret
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Matthew Barnsbury	Secondary	Young	Civil servant	MC	S	Secret >Social
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Sir John Gielgud	Protagonist	49/71	Actor	UC	S	Secret >Social
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Gregory Lightbourne	Secondary	19/41	University student		S	Secret >Activist
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Douglas Witherby	Secondary	41-63	Manager public lavatory/waiter	MC	S	Secret
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Brian Mandeville	Secondary		Queen Mab's co-owner	MC	S	Social
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Chiltern Moncreiffe	Secondary		Theatre critic	MC	S	Secret
2008	N. de Jongh	*Plague Over England*	London, 1950s-1970s	Binkie Beaumont	Secondary		Managing director of HM Tennent	MC	S	Secret
2009	T. Wells	*Me As a Penguin*	Hull	Stitch	Protagonist	22	Ex shop assistant	WC	S	Social
2009	T. Wells	*Me As a Penguin*	Hull	Dave	Secondary	20ish?	Aquarium	WC	S	Social
2009	T. Wells	*About a Goth*		Nick	Primary (only)	17	Voluntary work	WC	S	Secret >Social
2009	T. Wells	*Notes for First Time Astronauts*	Space	Astronaut	Primary (only)		Cameraman/Astronaut	MC	S	Secret
2009	T. Wainwright	*Muscle*	Gym	Steve	Protagonist	Early 30s			S	Secret
2009	T. Wainwright	*Muscle*	Gym	Terry	Protagonist	Early 30s			S	Social
2009	T. Wainwright	*Muscle*	Gym	Dab	Protagonist	Early 30s			S	Secret
2009	S. Bent	*Prick Up Your Ears*	Islington (London), 1962-1967	Kenneth Halliwell	Protagonist	30s	Writer	MC	S	Social
2009	S. Bent	*Prick Up Your Ears*	Islington (London), 1962-1967	Joe Orton	Protagonist	Mid-30s; 40s	Writer	MC	S	Social

2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Tom	Protagonist	Various	Police Commander	MC	S	Secret >Social
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Billy	Protagonist	Various			S	Social >Activist
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Russell	Protagonist	Various	Musical leading man/ TV host	MC	S	Secret >Activist
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Mickey	Protagonist	Various			S	Social >Activist
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Robin	Secondary	Various	Violinist	MC	S	Social
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Dr Tony McKinnon	Secondary	Various	Specialist in aversion therapy	MC	S	Secret >Social
2010	J. Harvey	*Canary*	London/Liverpool, 1960 - present	Toby	Secondary	Various	Dancer	WC	S	Social
2010	N. Bartlett	*Or you could kiss me*	Port Elizabeth (South Africa), 2036/ Capetown, 1971	Young A/A/Old A	Protagonist	19/50s /85			S	Social
2010	N. Bartlett	*Or you could kiss me*	Port Elizabeth (South Africa), 2036/ Capetown, 1971	Young B/B/Old B	Protagonist	20/50s /86			S	Social
2010	R. B. Blair	*FIT*	London college, 2000s	Tegs	Protagonist	17	Student/dancer		S	Secret >Social
2010	R. B. Blair	*FIT*	London college, 2000s	Jordan	Protagonist	17	Student/footballer		S	Secret >Social
2010	R. B. Blair	*FIT*	London college, 2000s	Ryan	Protagonist	17	Student		D	Secret >Social
2011	T. Wells	*The Kitchen Sink*	East Yorkshire	Billy	Protagonist		Art student	WC	S	Social
2011	E. Placey	*Banana Boys*	Hamptead Heath (London)	Cameron	Protagonist	16	Student		S	Secret >Social
2011	E. Placey	*Banana Boys*	Hamptead Heath (London)	Ben	Protagonist	16	Student		S	Social
2011	N. Wright	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	London, St Petersburg, 1898-1974	Terence Rattigan (Terry)	Protagonist	63	Writer	MC	S	Secret
2011	N. Wright	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	London, St Petersburg, 1898-1974	Vaslav Nijinsky	Protagonist	Various	Dancer	MC	S	Social
2011	N. Wright	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	London, St Petersburg, 1898-1974	Sergei Diaghilev	Protagonist		Impresario	MC	S	Social

2011	D. Eldridge	*The Stock Da'wa*		Mr Wilson	Protagonist	60	Retired teacher/ novelist	MC	S	Social
2012	S. Beresford	*The last of the Haussmans*	South Devon coast	Nick	Protagonist	Late 30s		WC	S	Secret >Social
2013	T. Wells	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	Hull (Yorkshire)	Beardy Geoff	Protagonist	25	Busker	WC	S	Social
2013	T. Wells	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	Hull (Yorkshire)	Danny	Protagonist	22	Football coach	WC	S	Social
2013	T. Wells	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	Hull (Yorkshire)	Luke	Protagonist	19	Librarian	WC	S	Social
2013	T. Gupta	*Love N Stuff*	Heathrow, London	Akbar	Secondary		Gymnast	MC	S	Social
2014	B. Cowan	*Still Ill*	County Down (Northern Ireland), 2008	Tommy Mills	Protagonist	39		WC	S	Social
2014	B. Cowan	*Still Ill*	County Down (Northern Ireland), 2008	Gary McDaid	Secondary	39	Criminal	WC	D	Secret
2014	J. Bradfield, M. Hooper	*A Hard Rain*	New York, 1968-1969	Ruby	Protagonist	26-35	Ex-soldier Drag queen	WC	D	Activist
2014	J. Bradfield, M. Hooper	*A Hard Rain*	New York, 1968-1969	Josh	Secondary	22-26	Wall Street banker	MC	S	Social
2014	J. Bradfield, M. Hooper	*A Hard Rain*	New York, 1968-1969	Jimmy	Secondary	16	Singer/Head bartender	WC	D	Social
2014	P. Gill	*Versailles*	Kent/Paris, 1919	Leonard Rawlinson	Protagonist	Late 20s	Soldier/teacher	MC	S	Secret
2014	P. Gill	*Versailles*	Kent/Paris, 1919	Gerald Chater	Protagonist	Late 20s	Soldier	MC	S	Secret
2015	M. Buffini	*Wonder.land*		Luke Laprel	Secondary		Student		S	Social
2015	B. Doran	*The Mystery of Love & Sex*	Outskirts cities of American South	Jonny	Protagonist	20s	Student	MC	S	Secret >Social
2015	S. Wilson	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	1950ish	Alan Turing	Protagonist	40s	Mathematician	MC	S	Social
2015	S. Wilson	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	1950ish	Arnold	Secondary			WC	S	Secret
2015	S. Wilson	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	1950ish	Kjell	Secondary				S	Secret
2016	S. Laughton	*Run*		Yonni	Protagonist	17	Student		D	Secret
2016	J. Brunger	*Four play*	2000s	Rafe	Protagonist	Mid 20s		MC	S	Social
2016	J. Brunger	*Four play*	2000s	Pete	Protagonist	Mid 20s		MC	S	Social
2016	J. Brunger	*Four play*	2000s	Michael	Protagonist	Late 20s			S	Social

2016	J. Brunger	*Four play*	2000s	Andrew	Protagonist	Mid 20s			S	Social
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	North London, 1961-1967-2017	Skinner	Protagonist	Late 40s	Local estate agent	MC	S	Secret
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	North London, 1961-1967-2017	Barry	Protagonist	Mid 50s	Pharmacist	MC	S	Secret
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	North London, 1961-1967-2017	Charles	Secondary	62/68	Doctor	MC	S	Secret
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	North London, 1961-1967-2017	Harry	Secondary	56		MC	S	Secret
2017	K. Elyot	*Twilight Song*	North London, 1961-1967-2017	Gardener	Secondary	Late 30s	Gardner	WC	S	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – The man at the platform (Gatiss)*	1917	Pierce	Protagonist	30s	Soldier		D	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – Safest spot in town (Jarrett)*	1941, London	Frederick	Protagonist	20s	Model	MC	S	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – I miss the war (Baldwin)*	1967, London	Jack	Protagonist	60s	Soldier	MC	S	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – More anger (Fillis)*	1987	Phil	Protagonist	29	Actor	MC	D	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – A grand day out (Dennis)*	1994	Andrew	Protagonist	17	Student		D	Secret
2017	M. Gatiss	*Queer. Eight monologues – Something borrowed (Mclean)*	2016	Steve	Protagonist				S	Social
2018	C. Thompson	*Dungeness*		Jotham	Secondary	Young		WC	S	Social
2018	C. Thompson	*Dungeness*		Orson	Secondary	Young		WC	S	Social
2020	J. Harvey	*Our Lady of B.*	Blundellsands, Liverpool, 2020	Mickey-Joe	Secondary	46	Drag queen	MC	S	Social
2020	J. Harvey	*Our Lady of B.*	Blundellsands, Liverpool, 2020	Frankie	Secondary	38	Manager	MC	D	Social

APPENDIX 4: OPEN AGGRESSION – SECRECY/*OUT-OF-THE-CLOSETEDNESS*, AGE

The table includes the number of times the terms included in the first column are pronounced by the gay characters in the corpus; the frequencies have been sorted out on the basis of the speakers' social classes and ages.

	Sec.	**Soc.**	**Act.**	**Var.**	**0-19**	**20-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60-69**	**NS**	**Var.**
Bitch(es) (51)	5	32	1	13	8	12	13	1	-	2	14	1
Bugger(s) (30)	10	17	1	2	4	2	10	3	1	3	-	7
Camp (13/24)	5	7	-	1	3	5	3	-	-	-	1	1
Cunt(s) (61)	21	36	-	4	9	9	32	3	-	-	-	8
Dickhead(s) (6)	2	3	-	1	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	-
Fag(s) (2/14)	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
Faggot(s) (13)	3	7	2	1	1	1	6	2	-	-	1	2
Fairy/Fairies (3/8)	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Knob(s) (22)	4	16	-	2	5	2	3	6	-	1	4	1
Knobheads(s) (5)	-	2	-	3	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
Pansy/Pansies (2)	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Queer(s) (89)	34	32	6	17	13	22	7	4	-	5	21	17
Scumbag(s) (2)	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Slut(s) (6)	1	4	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	3	-
Wanker(s) (11)	1	10	-	-	3	2	4	-	-	-	2	-
Whore(s) (13)	3	9	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	-	8	1

APPENDIX 5: MANUAL ANALYSIS – Gay characters

Year	Title	Pages	QT[80]	Ment.	Pun	GI	Sex. ind.	Inn.	Inv.
2000	*Vincent River*	46-55	-		-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: BROTHEL*	7-16	2	2	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: PAARDENSTRAAT*	33-42	3	-	-	-	-	1	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: HOTEL*	61-70	1	3	-	-	1	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: AMSTERDAM CS*	89-98	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*In Extremis*	22-31	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*Hijra*	21-30	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
2000	*Hard Fruit*	3-12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*Out in the open*	9-18	6	4	1	-	2	-	-
2001	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	5-14	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
2001	*Mouth To Mouth*	15-24	7	6	-	1	1	-	-
2001	*Flamingos*	11-20	2	8	3	-	1	-	-
2001	*The York Realist*	228-237	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*F***ing Games*	3-12	9	-	-	2	1	-	-
2002	*Original Sin*	302-311	-	2	-	-	2	-	-
2002	*The Coffee Lover's Guide to America*	79-88	1	25	-	-	-	-	-
2002	*Crazyblackmythaf***in'self*	5-14	2	8	-	-	-	-	-
2003	*Mr Elliott*	155-164	5	1	-	-	1	-	-
2004	*Hardcore*	11-20	2	3	-	-	-	-	1
2004	*The History boys*	27-36	-	10	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*A Girl in a Car with a Man*	14-23	1	3	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*Forty Winks*	11-20	2	2	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Citizenship*	235-244	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Mercury Fur*	122-131	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Smilin' Through*	12-21	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Bashment*	29-38	1	10	-	2	-	-	1
2005	*Telstar*	11-20	1	3	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Blowing Whistles*	1-10	11	10	-	1	-	-	-

[80] QT: question tag; Ment: mention; GI: gender inversion; Sex Ind.: sexual indirectness; Inn.: innuendo; Inv: inversion.

2006	*Drunk Enough To Say I Love You*	168-177	-	12	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: NUMBER 12*	62-71	4	-	-	1	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: CARLO*	76-85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: BOHEMIAN BAREBACK*	88-97	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: AN ACT OF KIDNESS*	102-111	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: LA RONDE*	115-124	-	2	-	2	-	-	-
2006	*Southward Fair*	3-12	-	7	-	-	-	-	-
2007	*Last Easter*	9-18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007	*The Giant*	10-19	-	17	-	-	1	-	-
2008	*The Pride*	8-17	4	2	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*Touched*	10-19	5	2	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*The English Game*	11-20	1	2	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*Plague Over England*	4-13	2	3	-	-	-	3	-
2009	*About a Goth*	56-65	-	21	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Notes for First Time Astronauts*	75-80	-	11	-	-	3	-	-
2009	*Me As a Penguin*	7-16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Muscle*	7-16	4	-	-	3	1	-	-
2009	*Prick Up Your Ears*	7-16	-	9	-	-	3	-	-
2010	*Canary*	16-25	2	4	-	-	-	1	-
2010	*Or you could kiss me*	24-33	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	*FIT*	117-126	5	6	1	3	-	-	-
2011	*The Kitchen Sink*	5-14	1	5	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*Banana Boys*	6-15	-	8	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	4-13	4	1	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*The Stock Da'wa*	323-332	3	2	-	-	-	-	-
2012	*The last of the Haussmans*	7-16	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	3-12	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
2013	*Love N Stuff*	20-29	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
2014	*Still ill*	134-143	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
2014	*A Hard Rain*	3-12	3	-	-	2	-	-	-
2014	*Versailles*	9-18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	*Wonder.land*	57-67	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
2015	*The Mystery of Love & Sex*	7-16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	3-12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2016	*Run*	10-19	-	5	-	-	-	-	-

2016	*Four Play*	4-13	1	4	-	-	1	-	-
2017	*Twilight Song*	8-17	9	4	-	3	2	2	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – The man at the platform (Gatiss)*	3-10	5	2	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – Safest spot in town (Jarrett)*	23-29	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – I miss the war (Baldwin)*	43-48	2	6	-	2	1	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – More anger (Fillis)*	51-58	7	13	-	1	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – A grand day out (Dennis)*	61-68	4	12	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – Something borrowed (Mclean)*	71-78	1	16	-	-	-	-	-
2018	*Dungeness*	4-13	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
2020	*Our Lady of the Blundellsands*	23-32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		TOTAL	133	227	10	26	22	7	2
		X/61 plays	33/61	39/61	7/61	15/61	15/61	15/61	2/61

APPENDIX 6: MANUAL ANALYSIS – Heterosexual characters

Year	Title	Pages	QT	Ment.	Pun	GI	Sex. ind.	Inn.	Inv.
2000	*Vincent River*	46-55	3		-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: BROTHEL*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: PAARDENSTRAAT*	33-42	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: HOTEL*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*The Prostitution Plays: AMSTERDAM CS*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*In Extremis*	17-26	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*Hijra*	21-30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	*Hard Fruit*	3-12	3	2	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*Out in the open*	16-25	5	7	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*Mother Clap's Molly House*	5-14	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*Mouth To Mouth*	15-24	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*Flamingos*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*The York Realist*	232-241	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001	*F***ing Games*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2002	*Original Sin*	305-314	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
2002	*The Coffee Lover's Guide to America*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2002	*Crazyblackmythaf***in'self*	9-18	1	23	-	-	-	-	-
2003	*Mr Elliott*	159-168	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*Hardcore*	12-21	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*The History boys*	27-36	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*A Girl in a Car with a Man*	12-21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2004	*Forty Winks*	7-16	5	7	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Citizenship*	235-244	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Mercury Fur*	122-131	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Smilin' Through*	12-21	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Bashment*	34-43	2	18	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Telstar*	11-20	4	7	-	-	-	-	-
2005	*Blowing Whistles*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Drunk Enough To Say I Love You*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: NUMBER 12*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

2006	*Prisoners of sex: CARLO*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: BOHEMIAN BAREBACK*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: AN ACT OF KIDNESS*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Prisoners of sex: LA RONDE*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2006	*Southward Fair*	3-12	1	5	-	-	-	-	-
2007	*Last Easter*	9-18	-	8	-	-	-	-	-
2007	*The Giant*	9-18	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*The Pride*	10-19	3	2	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*Touched*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*The English Game*	8-17	-	9	-	-	-	-	-
2008	*Plague Over England*	1-9	-	3	-	-	-	1	-
2009	*About a Goth*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Notes for First Time Astronauts*	75-80	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Me As a Penguin*	7-16	1	4	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Muscle*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	*Prick Up Your Ears*	16-25	2	2	-	-	-	-	-
2010	*Canary*	16-25	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
2010	*Or you could kiss me*	23-32	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
2010	*FIT*	118-127	3	10	-	-	1	-	-
2011	*The Kitchen Sink*	5-14	1	8	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*Banana Boys*	6-15	-	18	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*Rattigan's Nijinsky*	4-13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	*The Stock Da'wa*	323-332	1	2	-	-	-	-	-
2012	*The last of the Haussmans*	7-16	3	7	-	-	-	-	-
2013	*Jumpers for Goalposts*	3-12	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	*Love N Stuff*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	*Still ill*	134-143	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	*A Hard Rain*	3-12	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	*Versailles*	1-9	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	*Wonder.land*	3-12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	*The Mystery of Love & Sex*	7-16	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
2015	*Lovesong of the Electric Bear*	2-11	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
2016	*Run*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2016	*Four Play*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Twilight Song*	20-29	4	-	-	-	-	-	-

2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – The man at the platform (Gatiss)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – Safest spot in town (Jarrett)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – I miss the war (Baldwin)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – More anger (Fillis)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – A grand day out (Dennis)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2017	*Queers. Eight monologues – Something borrowed (Mclean)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2018	*Dungeness*	3-12	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
2020	*Our Lady of the Blundellsands*	3-12	-	4	-	-	-	-	-
		TOTAL	69	173	-	-	1	2	-
		X/61 plays	27/61	30/61	0/61	0/61	1/61	2/61	0/61