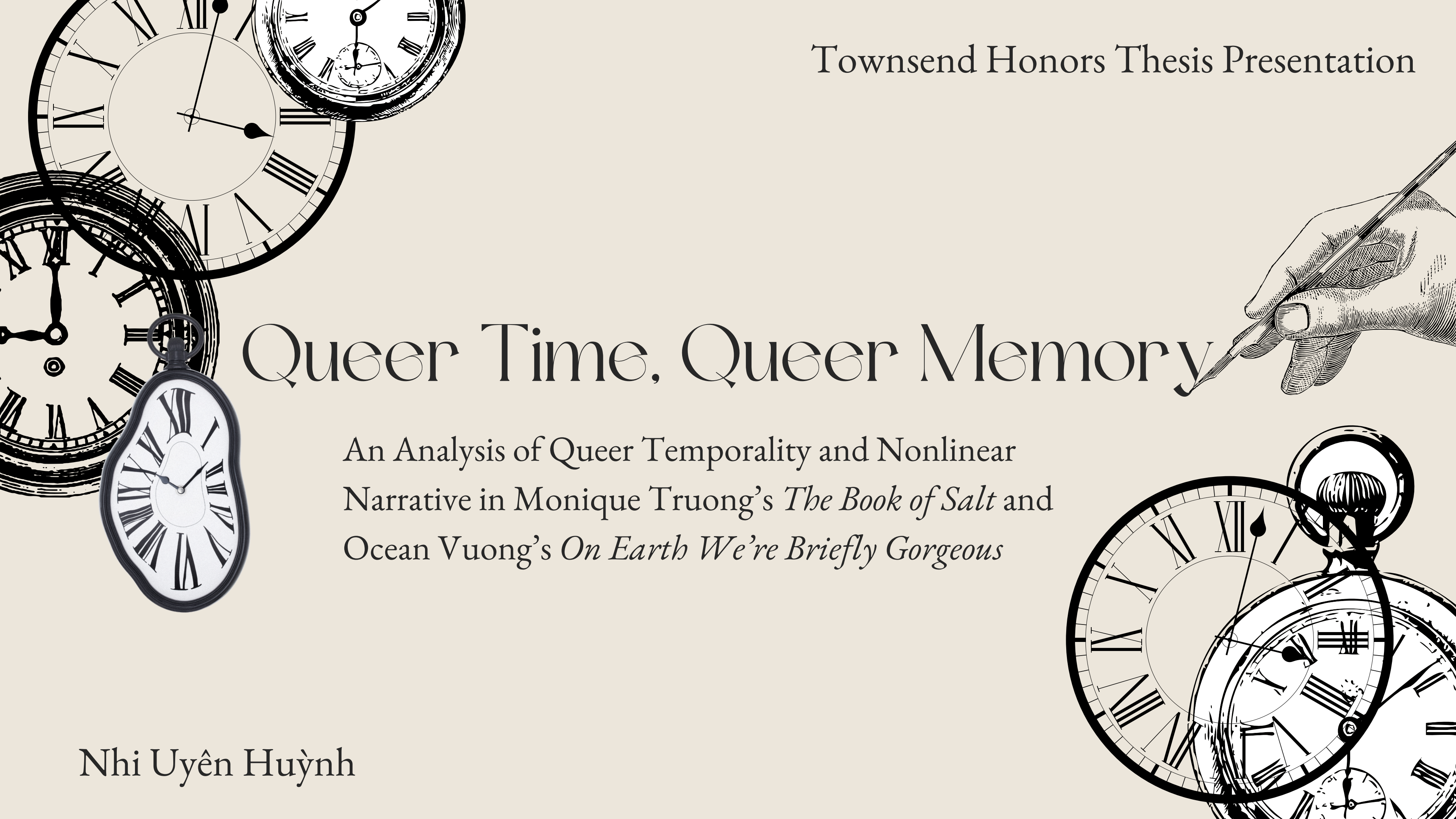


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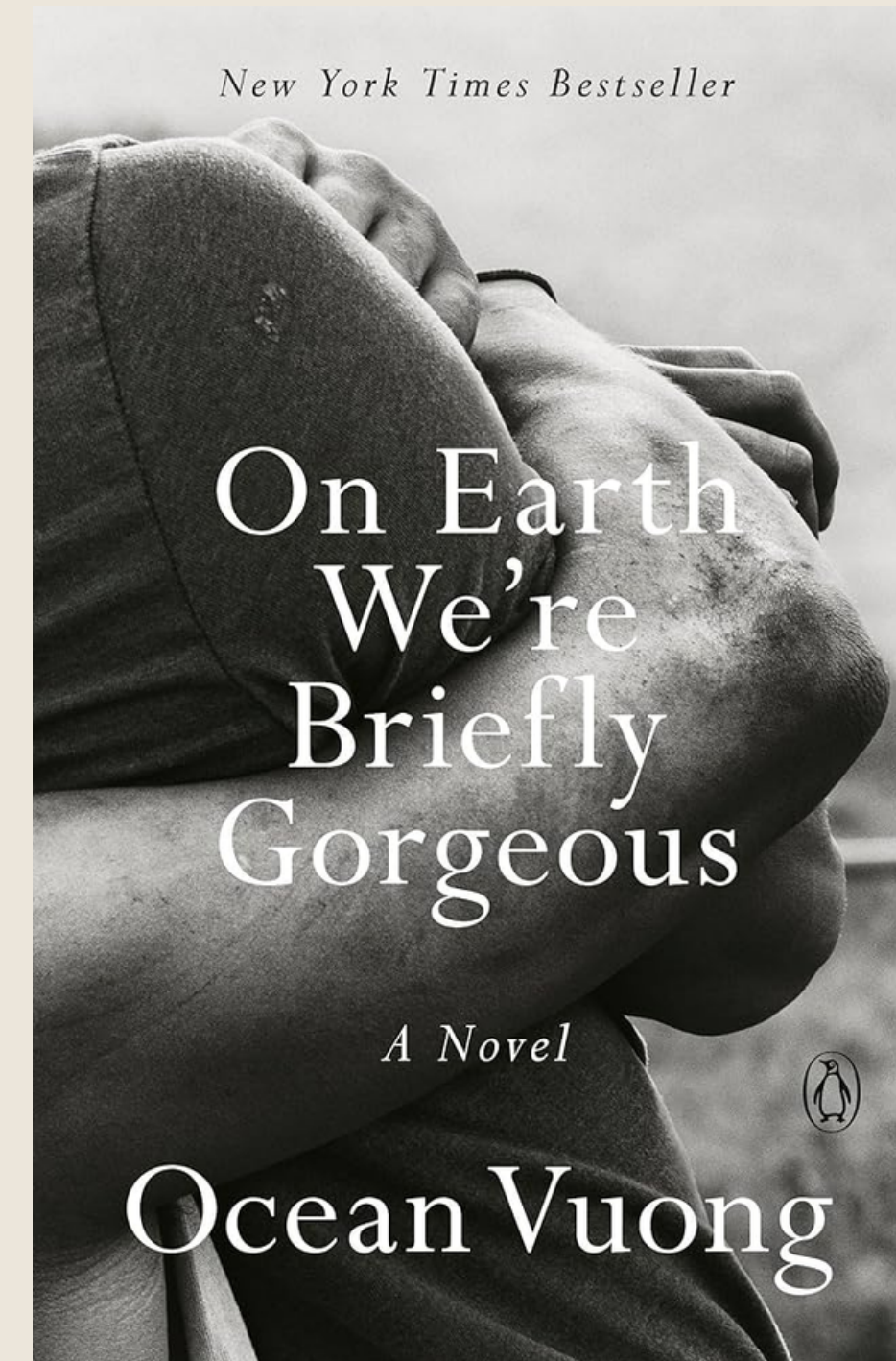
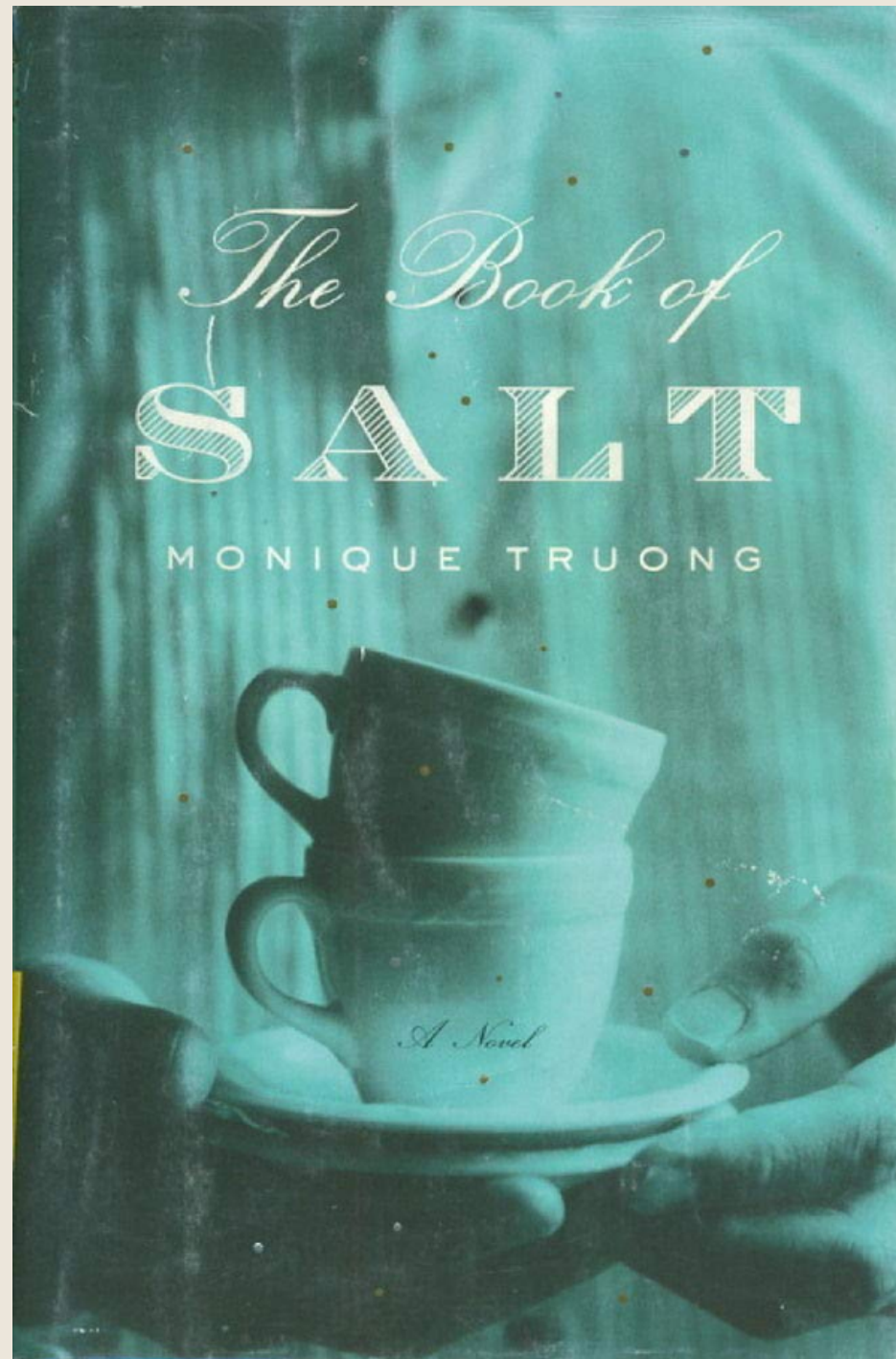
Queer Time, Queer Memory

An Analysis of Queer Temporality and Nonlinear
Narrative in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* and
Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Nhi Uyên Huỳnh



The Literature



Introduction

“To view Vietnamese American texts only as refugee narratives restricts the full recognition of Vietnamese American experiences and identities ...Viewing Vietnamese American literature in relation to the notion of hybridity, despite my own political desire to uphold Vietnamese American texts as modes of resistance, facilitates paying close attention in the second part to issues and themes raised within the texts themselves, regardless of the positive or negative images they may convey.” (Isabelle Thuy Pelaud 59-60)

We must think of Vietnamese-American literature encompassing not just the limited “refugee narrative” but with even *more*.



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Questions Explored

- How are these stories expressed in nonlinear narrative?
- What defines and makes up a nonlinear narrative?
- How does queerness disrupt time within these novels?
- How does queer temporality and nonlinear narrative interweave within these stories?
- How does the queer expression of these characters affect secondary characters, such as familial figures?





Part 1: Let Me Begin Again – Narratology and Non-Linear Narrative



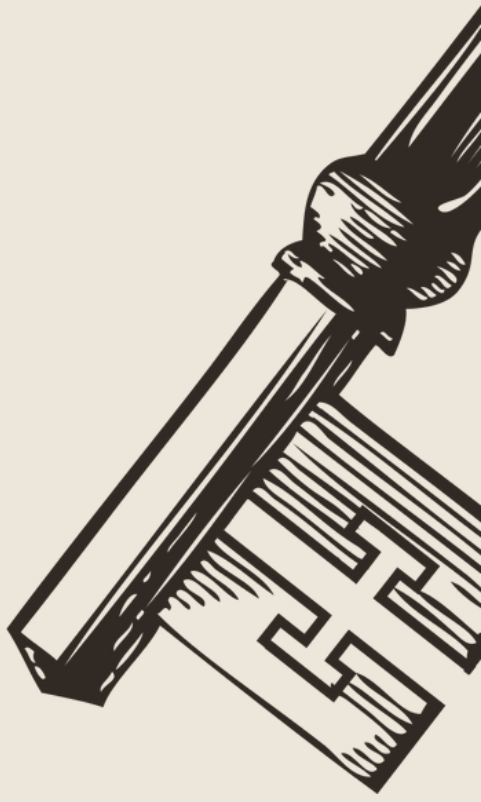
Part 1: Let Me Begin Again – Narratology and Non-Linear Narrative

- Narratology: “the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’ (Bal 3).
- Story: “a fabula that is presented in a certain manner” (Bal 5)
- Fabula: “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (Bal 5)
- If the text is inherently linear, why is the nonlinearity of the narrative important?



Part 1

“The elaboration of parallel strings [the parallel development of several strands of the fabula] of one fabula makes it difficult to recognize one single chronological sequence in that fabula. Several events happen at the same time. It is not always possible to decide whether the coincidence in time is partial or complete; **The vagueness of the chronology is, at times, just as significant as its painstaking representation**” (Bal 213, my emphasis).



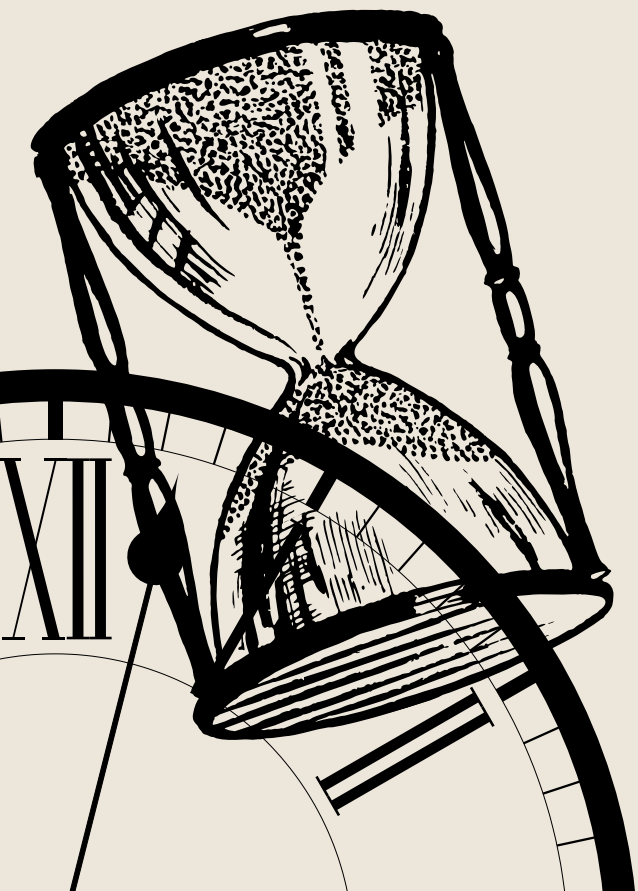
Part 1

“Let me begin again.

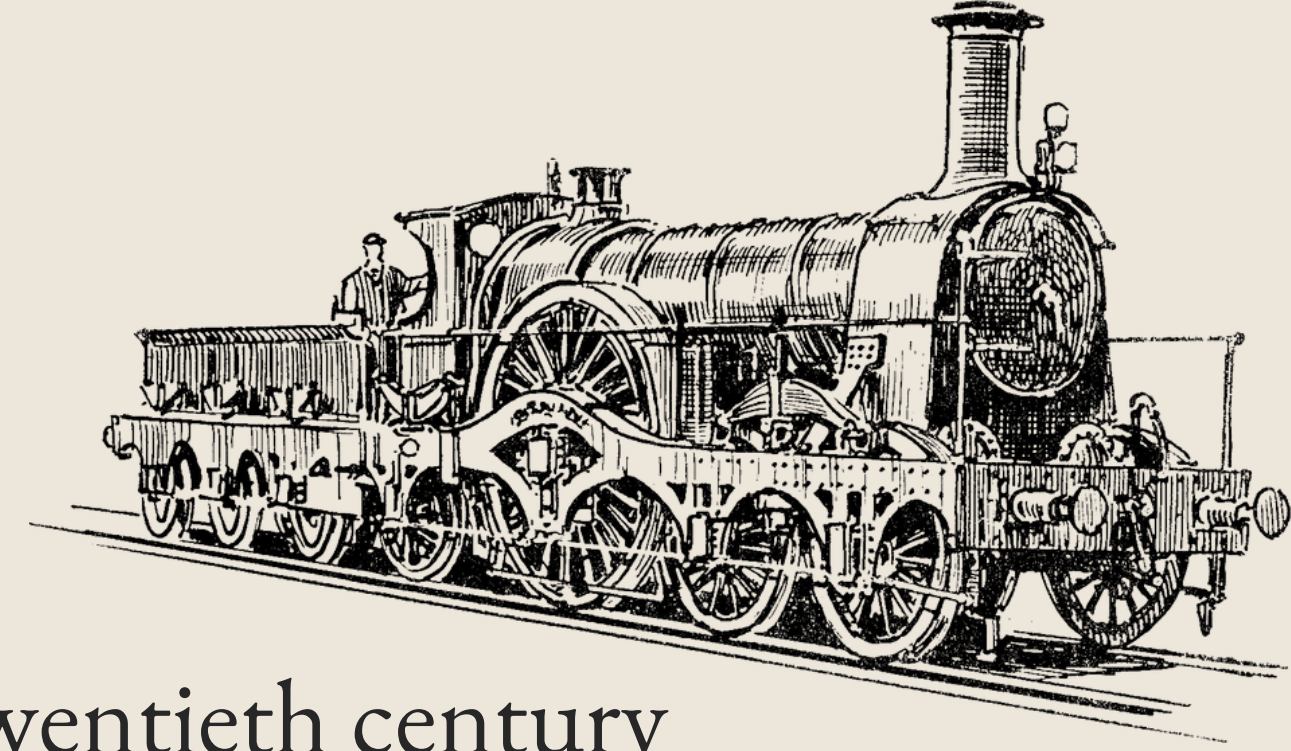
Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you — even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are. I am writing to go back to the time, at the rest stop in Virginia, when you stared, horror-struck, at the taxidermy buck hung over the soda machine by the restrooms, its antlers shadowing your face. In the car, you kept shaking your head. ‘I don’t understand why they would do that. Can’t they see that it’s a corpse? A corpse should go away, not get stuck forever like that” (Vuong 1).



Part 2: The Mark of Backwardness – Queer Temporality and Othering



Part 2



“If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind — and so seriously compromised the ability of these objects ever to catch up. Not only sexual and gender deviants but also women, colonized people, the nonwhite, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness” (Love 5-6)

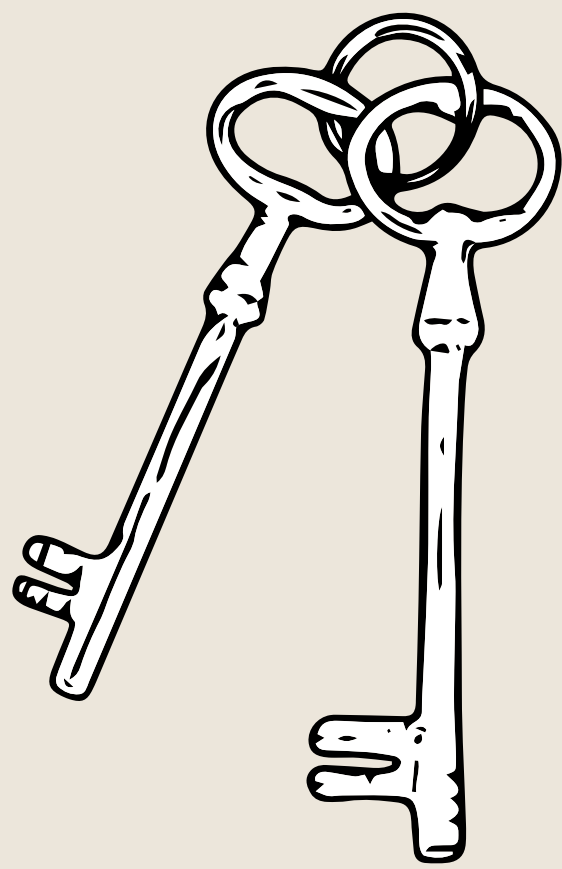
Part 2

Within a few seconds that [these passerbys] have left to consider me before they stroll on by, they conclude that I am a laborer, the only real option left. Every day when I walk the streets of this city, I am just that. I am an Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate, easily spotted and readily identifiable all the same. It is this curious mixture of careless disregard and notoriety that makes me long to take my body into a busy Saigon marketplace and lose it in the crush. There, I tell myself, I was just a man, anonymous, and, at a passing glance, a student, a gardener, a poet, a chef, a prince, a porter, a doctor, a scholar. But in Vietnam, I tell myself, I was above all just a man. (Truong 152).





Part 3: Interweaving Theories of
Nonlinear Narrative and Queer
Temporality within Ocean Vuong's On
Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous and
Monique Truong's The Book of Salt



Part 3



Did you [Ma] ever feel colored-in when a boy found you with his mouth? What if the body, at its best, is only a longing for body? The blood racing to the heart only to be sent back out, filling the routes, the once empty channels, the miles it takes to take us toward each other. Why did I feel more myself while reaching for him, my hand midair, than I did having touched him? (Vuong 106).





Conclusion



Conclusion

“The heifer, the farm, the boy, the wreck, the war – had I made it all up, in a dream, only to wake up with it fused to my skin?

Ma, I don’t know if you’ve made it this far in this letter — or if you’ve made it here at all. You always tell me it’s too late for you to read, with your poor liver, your exhausted bones, that after everything you’ve been through, you’d just like to rest now. That reading is a privilege you made possible for me with what you lost. I know you believe in reincarnation. I don’t know if I do but I hope it’s real. Because then maybe you’ll come back here next time around. Maybe you’ll be a girl and maybe your name will be Rose again, and you’ll have a room full of books with parents who will read you bedtime stories in a country not touched by war. Maybe then, in that life and in this future, you’ll find this book and you’ll know what happened to us. And you’ll remember me. Maybe” (Vuong 240).



Conclusion

- Queer temporalities represented within these novels take it upon themselves to be crafted within complex, nonlinear narratives to encompass these protagonists in their *entirety*
- Queer stories take on these different temporal forms in order to express the protagonists complicated existence of being marginalized in a multitude of factors, such as the racialization of their body, the societal class they were placed upon, and their queerness, most of all.



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Questions?
Thank you so much :)

