

**'Staying in the Mess':  
Gender, Sexuality and Queer Heterotopic Space in  
Sarah Waters's Neo-Historical Narratives**

**Akira Suwa**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Cardiff University

School of English, Communication and Philosophy

August 2018

## Summary

This thesis investigates the way Sarah Waters engages in queer spatiality as well as queer temporality in her historical fiction. Drawing on and extending Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, a space that is established within society but is able to contest its authority, this thesis argues that Waters's characters create heterotopic spaces where their desire for queer fulfilment is, if partially and temporarily, achieved. Chapters Two through Five discuss how Waters utilises various types of space to articulate her gender and sexual politics, to call into question heteronormative authority that confines her characters, and to contribute to the creation of heterotopic space that allows the characters' fulfilment of queer desire: the theatre and space of alternative kinship in *Tipping the Velvet* (Chapter Two), Italy and metatextual space in *Affinity* (Chapter Three), the bedroom and the library in *Fingersmith* (Chapter Three), the kitchen in *The Paying Guests* (Chapter Four), London during the blitz in *The Night Watch* (Chapter Four), and a country house in *The Little Stranger* (Chapter Five). Chapter Six aims to bring all of Waters's novels together to discuss the queer potential of her queer characters' act of walking the city to challenge the heteronormativity which abounds in the streets of London. In my Conclusion/Coda, I will consider the possibility of widening the scope of neo-Victorian/historical fiction by analysing *The Handmaid*, a film adaptation of *Fingersmith* set in 1930s Korea. Discussion of the temporal and geographical gaps between *Fingersmith* and *The Handmaid* provides an apt opportunity to return to the key concern of this thesis with the importance

of queer spatiality and temporality in Waters's novels. This thesis addresses Waters's distinct use of space in understanding the link between her characters' creation of queer heterotopic space and their yearning for a hopeful future, which is the contemporary reader's present.

# Contents

<i>List of Abbreviations</i> .....	i
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	ii
Chapter One: Introduction: Queer Heterotopic Space in the Novels of Sarah Waters .....	
Waters .....	3
Chapter Outline .....	27
Chapter Two: Journeying Through Theatrical Spaces, Returning Home:	
Sexuality and Performance in <i>Tipping the Velvet</i> .....	32
2.1. The World ‘full of queer electric spaces’: Revealing/Concealing of Lesbian Identity in Music Halls and Bedrooms .....	39
2.2. Looking for Utopian Space Beyond the Bedroom: The Street as an Open Theatre and the Closed/Imposed Performance at Diana’s Home .....	46
2.3. ‘It’s a human nature after all’: Biological/ Alternative Kinship and Home as Heterotopia .....	51
2.4. Conclusion .....	65
Chapter Three: Inside Spaces: Domestic and Institutional Confinement in	
<i>Affinity</i> and <i>Fingersmith</i> .....	67
3.1. Metatextual Space and the Potential for Utopia in <i>Affinity</i> .....	71
3.1.1. ‘From one prison to another’: Observation and Suffocation .....	73
3.1.2. ‘A world that is made of love’: Places to Escape and Utopian Visions .....	80
3.1.3. Hoping for a ‘space in which our spirits touched’: The End of Utopian Vision? .....	85
3.2. Performance and Domestic Confinement in <i>Fingersmith</i> .....	93



3.2.1. Dolls to Slide in Grooves: Confinement and Doubling of Performance .....	95
3.2.2. Not a Maid, but a Companion: Sue's and Maud's Utopian Imagination .....	100
3.2.3. Briar Revisited: Ambivalence and Queer Heterotopia .....	107
3.3. Conclusion .....	111
Chapter Four: Moving Away from Utopia: Negotiation of Queer Space and Identity in <i>The Paying Guests</i> and <i>The Night Watch</i> .....	113
4.1 Playing with Genres: Normalisation of Queer Desire and Dual Narrative Structures in <i>The Paying Guests</i> .....	116
4.1.1. Gradual yet Steady Pleasure: Frances's Household Chores and Middlebrow Fiction .....	119
4.1.2. The Fantasy of Becoming Gypsies: Utopia and Bohemianism ...	125
4.1.3. '[T]heir dark clothes bleeding into the dusk': Detective Fiction, Dual Narrative Structures, and the Impossibility of Queer Utopia ..	130
4.2. Looking Backwards, Trying to Move Forwards: The Absence of Utopian Space in <i>The Night Watch</i> .....	139
4.2.1. '[I]f we can't see them, they can't see us': Darkness and Representation of Temporary Freedom and Negative Emotions ...	145
4.2.2. Holding on to the Past: Material Objects and the Impossibility of Utopian Space .....	147
4.2.3. 'You must lift up your gaze': Reaffirmation of Queer Identities .....	150
4.3. Conclusion .....	153

Chapter Five: Trapped in Liminality: Class, Gothic and the Failure to Build Queer Heterotopic Space in <i>The Little Stranger</i> .....	155
5.1. The Palimpsestuous Affair: <i>The Franchise Affair</i> and <i>The Little Stranger</i> .....	159
5.2. 'This was mean and spiteful and wrong': Gothicised Class Conflict .....	164
5.3. 'Or it is the house you want?': Fetishism, Liminality, and Queer Utopia .....	168
5.4. Queer Self in a Window-Pane: Ambivalent Ending and the Haunting by Queer Desire .....	179
5.5. Conclusion .....	183
Chapter Six: Taking Possession of the City: Queer Streetwalking and London .....	184
6.1. The City as 'fundamentally uncertain and ambiguous': Accidental Walking and the Negotiation of Queer Identity .....	191
6.2. Problematic Flânerie: Fragmentation of the Queer Self .....	201
6.3. 'It's all freighted with layers and layers of meaning': Waters's Fiction and London as Urban Palimpsest .....	211
6.4. Conclusion .....	215
Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Coda: The Ambivalent Potentiality of 'staying in the mess' .....	216
7.1. What Makes It Neo-Victorian?: <i>The Handmaid</i> and the Double Internalisation of Cultural Colonisation .....	224
Appendix: An Interview with Sarah Waters .....	240

Bibliography .....	259
--------------------	-----

## List of Abbreviations

References to primary sources will be noted parenthetically throughout this thesis under the following abbreviations.

TV      *Tipping the Velvet* (London: Virago, 1998)

A        *Affinity* (London: Virago, 1999)

FS       *Fingersmith* (London: Virago, 2002)

NW      *The Night Watch* (London: Virago, 2006)

LS       *The Little Stranger* (London: Virago, 2009)

PG       *The Paying Guests* (London: Virago, 2014)

## Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to all the people who helped me to complete this thesis.

First and foremost, I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Professor Ann Heilmann for her guidance, encouragement and valuable feedback.

I would like to thank Assuming Gender, a postgraduate research group based in ENCAP, for giving me a wonderful opportunity to interview Sarah Waters. Robert Lloyd and Stephanie Clayton deserve special mention here for their help in organising the event. Many thanks also go to my neo-Victorian peers, Dr Megen de Bruin-Molé and Dr Daný van Dam. Our informal conversations about neo-Victorian fiction and film certainly inspired and enriched this thesis.

Last but not least, I am much indebted to my grandmother Kane Sato. My four years in Cardiff would not have been possible without her support. Her regular letters always encouraged me to do my best. And I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Atsushi and Noriko Suwa, who would have supported me all the way through.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Queer Heterotopic Space in the Novels of Sarah Waters

Sarah Waters is one of the foremost contemporary writers who has built her reputation on the construction of historical narrative. Her first three novels - *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002) - established her as a neo-Victorian novelist, for they all depicted her lesbian protagonists in the recreated world of Victorian Britain. Although she moved away from the Victorian period after *Fingersmith*, her novels have to date all been set in the past: *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger* (2009) are set in the 1940s, and her latest novel, *The Paying Guests* (2014) is about the 1920s, while her forthcoming work is on the 1950s. Waters combines a variety of literary genres and time periods for her novels as if to signal queerness via the time frame of her writing; as Claire O'Callaghan puts it, 'Waters writes queerly, that is, her novels frequently exceed existing literary categories and theoretical paradigms'.<sup>1</sup> In this composite space, where the readers are allowed to see the past through a contemporary lens, Waters's characters' fantasies can be related to the concept of queer heterotopic space. In my conceptualisation of queer heterotopic space, I draw on Michel Foucault's discussion of heterotopia – space that actually exists in society yet holds utopian potential to interrogate dominant societal norms – in order to argue that heterotopic space in Waters's novels gives her characters a vision of

---

<sup>1</sup> Claire O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics* (London:

queer futurity. This thesis is concerned with the way Waters makes use of heterotopic space to show the subversive potential of neo-historical fiction. Waters engages with, develops and complicates a diverse range of spaces Foucault lists as heterotopic so that her queer characters contest heteropatriarchal norms in these 'other' spaces.

Waters's use of the past for the settings of her novels raises a number of questions, including ethical ones relating to the academic field of historical fiction, for how do historical fiction writers make use of the past? In *The Historical Novel* (1962), Georg Lukács stressed the necessity of 'the specifically historical ... derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age'.<sup>2</sup> He contended that characters in historical novels should be deeply rooted in the period in which they are set, rather than the period in which they are written. This definition, however, is challenged by Waters's historical fiction. According to Laura Doan and Waters, lesbian historical fiction re-constructs the past from the contemporary point of view so as to 'satisfy the lesbian hunger for genealogy and answer feminist anxieties that that genealogy has hitherto been elided or suppressed by patriarchal historiographical practice'.<sup>3</sup> Waters's works focus on the experience of queer characters, those who are seen as unfit for patriarchal, heteronormative society. This paradigm is also present in historical novels of

---

<sup>2</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Doan and Sarah Waters, 'Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History' in David Alderson and Linda Anderson, eds., *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring the Contemporary Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 12-28 (p. 15).

the postmodern era. Postmodern historical novels play with the reader's knowledge of the respective time periods by juxtaposing the past and the present. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Linda Hutcheon calls these novels historiographic metafiction, namely texts which 'are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages'.<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon goes on to state that

historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of the historic record. ... [C]ertain historical details are deliberately falsified to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error.<sup>5</sup>

Historiographic metafiction contests the validity of historical facts, revealing them as mere constructs. For most postmodern writers history is a fragmented archive, and by focusing on the fragmented and constructed nature of the historical record, they raise questions about the way that the marginalised are represented. The marginalised, or what Hutcheon calls 'the ex-centrics', are brought centre stage, for postmodernism engages in 'the contesting of centralization of culture through the valuing of the local and peripheral'.<sup>6</sup> Although the publication dates of Waters's novels move beyond the postmodern period, they are still concerned with questioning the legitimacy of history and in this sense resemble John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990).

Waters uses past settings to interrogate the system of heteronormative and/or patriarchal violence that her queer characters face. In this thesis, I will

---

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.



show the way in which patriarchal heteronormativity manifests itself in both ordinary, domestic spaces and outside spaces and argue that Waters's characters construct queer heterotopic space in order to call into question dominant heteronormative ideologies. These constructed spaces partly fit the description of utopian form given by Frederick Jameson: '[u]topian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness'<sup>7</sup>. For Waters's characters who are subjected to patriarchal and heteronormative pressure, utopian spaces are their only escape where their queer imagination becomes possible. For example, Italy functions as a utopian space for Margaret Prior in her imagination in *Affinity* as much as London and Canada do for Caroline Ayres in *The Little Stranger*. They both imagine these spaces hoping to escape the patriarchal (or also matriarchal) authority in which they are confined. These utopian spaces become sites of defiance against heteronormative codes. However, their wish to be in utopian space remains on the imaginative level, because at the end of the narrative they are still part of the patriarchal and heteronormative society from which they come.

While these utopian spaces are future-oriented and cannot be actualised in the narrative, Waters's characters do find space where some of their wishes are fulfilled. Waters's imperfect but actually established utopian space is similar to what Michel Foucault calls 'heterotopia'.<sup>8</sup> He argues that utopias

---

<sup>7</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> As Peter Johnson explains, 'despite, or perhaps because of, the fragmentary and elusive quality of the ideas, the concept of heterotopia continues to generate a host of conflicting interpretations and research across a range of disciplines' (Peter Johnson, 'The Geographies of Heterotopia', *Geography Compass*, Vol. 7, No. 11 [2013], pp. 790-803 [p. 790]).

are only an imaginary, unattainable goal, while heterotopias do exist as real sites, as 'kind[s] of effectively enacted utopia[s]'.<sup>9</sup> Using the metaphor of a mirror as an example of both a utopia *and* a heterotopia, Foucault goes on to maintain that, when located in a heterotopia, we can perceive both reality and virtuality as well as contrasts between them.<sup>10</sup> Hence a heterotopic space is not a static symbol, but something that reflects a potential reality, a malleable entity subjected to changes. In detailing six principles of heterotopia, Foucault demarcates heterotopias into two categories: 'heterotopias of crisis' and 'heterotopias of deviation'. While 'heterotopias of crisis' exist for 'individuals who are ... in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.', heterotopias of deviation are for 'individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm'.<sup>11</sup> Waters's queer heterotopic spaces resemble the latter, for they are utilised or created for the queer characters – lesbians or those who do not fit in the category of 'normal' because of their norm-defying attitudes.

Using Foucault's idea of a heterotopia as a starting point, Angela Jones conceptualises a queer heterotopia, arguing:

---

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October 1984), pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

<sup>10</sup> As Foucault argues, 'The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface ... But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counterreaction on the position that I occupy. ... The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there' (Ibid., p. 4).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Queer heterotopias are sites of empowerment. They always exist in relation to heteronormative spaces and are shaped by them. Queer heterotopias exist in opposition to heteronormative spaces and are spaces where individuals seek to disrupt heterosexual discourses.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than detached from reality and heteronormative oppressions that accompany it, queer heterotopias are located within the system that they set out to transform.

In what follows I will analyse heterotopic space that Waters's characters create in each novel and discuss the way each space provides them with ways to challenge heteronormativity and to fulfill their queer desire. Waters's novels are filled with various queer heterotopic spaces – the theatre, the bedroom, the prison and psychiatric asylum, just to name a few. These spaces can be classified into two categories depending on how each space functions. The first type of queer heterotopia gives Waters's characters a sense of temporary liberation from their constraints in which they are allowed to pursue their queer desire. This space urges the characters to imagine different futures from the ones that they thought they deserve because they did not dare hope they would get something better. This heterotopic space resembles what Foucault terms 'heterotopias of illusion', which function 'to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory'.<sup>13</sup> By shedding light on the constructed and/or fabricated nature of their surroundings, this type of heterotopia makes the characters' utopian desire seem like a realistic

---

<sup>12</sup> Angela Jones, 'Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness', *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, Vol. 4 (2009), pp. 1-20 (p. 2).

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 8.

possibility, facilitating opportunities of their transition from oppressed queer subjects to liberated ones. In *Tipping the Velvet*, for instance, the theatre provides Nan with an opportunity to realise her queerness and to envision her future with Kitty, instead of staying with her family in Kent. Similarly, Selina's prison cell in *Affinity*, Maud's bedroom in *Fingersmith*, and the scullery and Frances's bedroom in *The Paying Guests* contribute to the characters' recognition of their queer desire and lead them to imagine a new, and utopian, life together.

Unlike such 'heterotopias of transition' as I call them, the heterotopic spaces created at the end of Waters's neo-Victorian novels give the characters a more concrete sense of what they will do to pursue their queer desire. In *Tipping the Velvet*, the house in which Nan and her lover Florence live with Florence's brother and the baby they adopted represents a form of alternative kinship. This relationship allows Nan to establish her lesbian identity, and gives her hope of transforming her biological home into an environment that accepts her sexuality in the future. Margaret's and Selina's union in *Affinity*, which remains on a metatextual level, exposes them as victims of heteronormativity and encourages the contemporary reader to envision a different future for the couple. The library in *Fingersmith* becomes a site where Sue and Maud start subverting the heteronormative literary market by Maud writing lesbian pornography. Waters's neo-twenties and neo-forties novels focus on the transitory nature of heterotopic space, along with the difficulty (or impossibility) of imagining utopian space. The scullery in *The Paying Guests* gives Frances and Lilian a temporary opportunity to pursue their

queer desire, but the death of Leonard makes it impossible to secure this space. Similarly, *The Night Watch*'s London during the blitz is characterised by darkness, opening up opportunities for the characters' queer yearning. Because of the reverse chronology of the narrative, however, we are reminded that there is no place left for their queer heterotopic space after the war. A quest for queer heterotopic space is also made problematic for Faraday in *The Little Stranger*, when his unstable class identity and failed masculinity prevents him from creating heterotopia with Caroline. While utopian novels in the Victorian period, such as William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) and Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana; or the Revolution of 1990* (1890) operate in the style of speculative fiction, Waters's neo-historical heterotopias extend Foucault's heterotopic model in suggesting that a utopian space can be mapped out and inhabited, if not necessarily by those who initially imagine it. Although her later novels emphasise the difficulty of establishing queer heterotopic space itself, the characters are able to situate themselves in their short-lived heterotopia.

Waters's use of space has been discussed to some extent, but not in the comprehensive way this thesis seeks to do,<sup>14</sup> and rarely have her spatial politics been linked expressly to the discussion of utopian and heterotopic space. There are only a few books dedicated entirely to Waters, and they tend to focus on her feminist or queer politics. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical*

---

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Rebecca Pohl, 'Sexing the Labyrinth: Space and Sexuality in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*' in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 29-41. Pohl argues that in *Affinity* 'space and sexuality are (re)produced through social relations and practices, each producing the other: they are relational networks where sexuality is a certain way of inhabiting space' (p. 30).

*Perspectives* (2013), edited by Kaye Mitchell, offers a variety of ways of conceptualising Waters's works, ranging from the neo-Victorian/historical framework to her gender, sexual, and class politics. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (2016), an edited collection by Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, focuses on Waters's position as a feminist writer, and places each of her novels in relation to contemporary feminist criticisms that influenced her writing. O'Callaghan pays attention to the spatial politics of Waters's novels in 'Sarah Waters's Victorian Domestic Spaces; Or, the Lesbians in the Attic' (2014), where she argues that 'domestic and private spaces are significant to [Waters's] representation of sexuality'.<sup>15</sup> In this article she touches on the concept of heterotopia to analyse Waters's use of alternative domestic spaces such as Kitty's dressing room in *Tipping the Velvet* and Micky's boathouse in *The Night Watch*, stating that 'Waters explores the heterotopic qualities presented by non-normative spaces for "non-normative" gendered and sexual subjects'.<sup>16</sup> While my own work resonates with O'Callaghan's conceptualisation of queer spatiality in Waters's works, I argue that Waters's engagement with Foucault's concept of heterotopia is worth more extensive investigation. I distinguish Waters's ultimate heterotopias created at the end of the texts from what I term 'transitional heterotopias' that the characters appropriate at various stages of each novel, for the former

---

<sup>15</sup> Claire O'Callaghan, 'Sarah Waters's Victorian Domestic Spaces; Or, the Lesbians in the Attic', *Peer English: The Journal of New Critical Thinking*, Vol. 9 (2014), pp. 123-138 (p. 123).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 135. Demelza Morgana Hall's MA thesis, 'Space and Sexuality in the Post-Victorian Fiction of Sarah Waters', also applies Foucault's concept of heterotopia to her discussion of Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy, identifying 'heterotopias of deviation' in each novel.

function differently from the latter: whereas at first the characters are willing to escape heteronormative society so as to follow their queer desire, they are inclined to subvert heteronormativity by staying in oppressive environments when located in their ultimate heterotopias. The most recent book, O'Callaghan's *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics* (2017) draws attention to the tendency in academic scholarship to 'fix her scrutiny of gender and sexuality within any one model (feminism or queer theory)'<sup>17</sup> and argues for a combined approach: she aims to tease out 'the rifts, tensions, synergies and overlaps between feminist and queer modes of enquiry as well as Waters's perspectives on their interrelation and dynamic'.<sup>18</sup> What these approaches have not systematically addressed, however, is the prominence of Waters's spatial politics in underscoring her characters' queer desire.

Although critics often discuss the significance of Waters's novels' endings, they do not engage in critical analysis of the endings in relation to queer heterotopic space. Yet, her works invite close reading of the specificities of each place: London theatres and streets in *Tipping the Velvet*, lunatic asylums, prisons and domestic enclosures in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, country houses in *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*, the city at war in *The Night Watch*, and strangers sharing a house in *The Paying Guests*. Each of these texts offers insight into Waters's use of space to depict confinement and a struggle for freedom. I will demonstrate to what extent and in what ways enclosed space in each novel forces the queer characters to conform to the heterosexual paradigm, and whether they manage to create a heterotopic space, if an

---

<sup>17</sup> O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 2, italics in original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

ambivalent one, to enact their resistance. This thesis argues that the spatial shift in Waters's novels from the heteronormative environment to the heterotopic one is as significant as the temporal shift from the present to the past in order to understand Waters's gender and sexual politics. The result of the characters' quest for their liberation from heteropatriarchal confinement is left to the reader's imagination. Since the future which the characters envisage is actually the reader's present, we are encouraged critically to assess the present. Krishan Kumar asserts that what 'the literary utopia ... perform[s] better [at] than any other form [is] to present a "speaking picture" of the good society, to show in concrete detail what it would be like to live in such a society, and so make us want to achieve it'.<sup>19</sup> Waters's novels indirectly participate in this, in that they show us a path that could lead to a better future. I will argue that this is what the literary heterotopia does – it functions as a device by which we evaluate our present condition. Are we living in a utopia, a world the context of which the characters imagined, or would they see it as dystopian? Reading her works and adaptations in terms of ambivalent heterotopias can provide new ways of considering how Waters deploys space for her project to confront heteronormative values both then and now.

Imagining space for queer characters is linked to showing the contemporary reader a past world of lesbian sexuality that has not been much explored. The neo-Victorian stories are firmly grounded in Waters's extensive research into gay and lesbian subcultures during the Victorian age, and also

---

<sup>19</sup> Krishan Kumar, 'The Ends of Utopia', *New Literary Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer 2010), pp. 549-569 (p. 555).



supported by Waters's ambition to explore an imaginative world filled with homosexual desires. In an interview with Kaye Mitchell, Waters comments on her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*:

[Tipping the Velvet aims] to be more playful with history, to 'parade' history and to parade its own status as a historical fiction. I was very interested ... in how of course we can't reconstruct the past or capture the past, we can only reinvent it, so I wanted the novel to be very self-consciously a piece of lesbian historical fantasy[.]<sup>20</sup>

Waters's 'playful' attitude towards the way contemporary novelists deal with history fits the description of neo-Victorianism. As Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn write, neo-Victorian fiction 'must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*'.<sup>21</sup> Although the extent of playfulness becomes moderated in her subsequent neo-Victorian novels, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, Waters's contribution to reconfiguring the Victorian period is consistent in that her novels provide us with new ways of reshaping our knowledge about the past. Waters's reworking of the Victorian applies a dualistic approach towards history: whereas the narrative is sensitive to the past in which it is set, it also introduces contemporary perspectives on the matters discussed within it. This

---

<sup>20</sup> Kaye Mitchell, "'I'd love to write an anti-*Downton*!": An Interview with Sarah Waters' in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 129-141 (p. 131).

<sup>21</sup> Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4, italics in original. Marie-Luise Kohlke proposes a broader definition of neo-Victorianism 'to cover virtually all contemporary fiction prominently engaging with or set outright in the nineteenth century' (Marie-Luise Kohlke, 'Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein: Prospecting for Gold, Buried Treasure and Uncertain Metal' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds., *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* [London and New York: Routledge, 2014], pp. 21-37 [p. 21]).

co-existence of the past and the present, and the reader's active engagement with the neo-Victorian texts as a result are what Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss emphasise in their formulation of neo-Victorianism: 'Despite postmodernity's ongoing relevance, neo-Victorianism calls for newly calibrated tools of analysis which enable us to approach it as a symptom of a contemporary literature and culture'.<sup>22</sup> While acknowledging neo-Victorianism's indebtedness to postmodern literary trends, they see neo-Victorian fiction as an effective tool to investigate 'the manifold strategies catering to today's identity politics'.<sup>23</sup> In *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction* (2014), Elodie Rousselot suggests that similar attention should be paid to fictions set in other historical periods, pointing out that 'if the neo-Victorian has received significant critical attention in recent years, little consideration has so far been given to the "neo" in its other incarnations'.<sup>24</sup> Just as neo-Victorian fiction does, Rousselot continues, 'The neo-historical novel thus offers a compelling means for re-appropriating and reformulating the past'.<sup>25</sup> Even though Waters's playful attitude towards history shifts from text to text because of the different periods with which she deals, her works always engage in examining the past from a queer perspective.

---

<sup>22</sup> Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, 'Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds., *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Elodie Rousselot, 'Introduction: Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction', in Elodie Rousselot, ed., *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

What makes the dualistic approach possible is the conjunction of continuities and discontinuities between the past and the present. As Louisa Hadley analyses, the Victorian era is close enough to the present to remind the reader of the connections of the past to the present, while it is also distant enough for us to recognise differences.<sup>26</sup> This in part explains the popularity of neo-Victorian fiction. The reader can find something ostensibly familiar in these texts, and at the same time there is enough unfamiliarity for Waters to insert her imagination to refashion the narrative. This hybridity is what provides Waters with freedom to 'be more playful with history', which pertains to our inability to capture the 'authentic' history. In the field of gay and lesbian writing, returning to the past with an intention to uncover queer history, according to Jodie Medd, can 'continually inform and animate the challenges of doing the history of (homo)sexuality today'.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Waters's departure from the Victorian period can be seen as her attempt to amplify her historical fiction's effectiveness in encouraging the reader to reflect on the present through consecutive pasts. By writing back to the 1920s and the 1940s, both of which stand in between the Victorian period and the present, Waters can offer these two twentieth-century periods as the settings which bring to the reader different sets of continuities and discontinuities. Regardless of obvious differences between the Victorian age and the twentieth-century inter/post-war periods, Waters's approach is consistent, as

---

<sup>26</sup> Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Jodie Medd, 'Encountering the Past in Lesbian and Gay Fiction' in Hugh Stevens, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 167-184 (p. 181).

Medd argues, in that each novel 'demonstrate[s] an attachment to the past as a resource for negotiating the complexities of queer experience in the present'.<sup>28</sup> In her interview with Lucie Armitt, Waters articulated her interest in moving away from the Victorian period after *Fingersmith*, saying that she 'deliberately wanted to move period to see what would happen to [her] writing'.<sup>29</sup> Though she maintains the objective to engage with themes such as sexuality, gender, and class relations, Waters's transition to other historic periods has allowed her to depict characters trying to reconcile their desires with the social demands of each period.

Importantly, both of her twentieth-century settings to date (as also her forthcoming work) are (post-)war periods, when society went through a significant transition. Social instability in these periods of transition led to new ways of imagining queer heterotopic space. The two World Wars, unquestionably different from previous wars in part due to the introduction of weapons of mass destruction, shook the foundations of British society.<sup>30</sup> A time of transition is about the old norms being contested by the new, emerging ones. Building on this premise, Waters depicts characters who are living under the pressure of instability, such as Kay Languish in *The Night*

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Lucie Armitt, 'Interview with Sarah Waters (CWWN Conference, University of Wales, Bangor, 22 April 2006)', *Feminist Review*, No. 85 (2007), pp. 116-127 (p. 117).

<sup>30</sup> The Victorian era, too, saw wars, and can also be seen as a time of transition; thus Isobel Armstrong writes, focusing on poetry, that '[t]he Victorian period has always been regarded as isolated between two periods, Romanticism and modernism. Thus Victorian poetry is seen in terms of transition' (Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* [London: Routledge, 1993], p. 1). Here we are able to see the imaginative impulse which might have propelled Waters.

*Watch* who is trapped in her wartime memory and Frances Wray in *The Paying Guests* who is unsure after the catastrophe of the war if social movements can ever bring about a better future. As Marie-Luise Kohlke argues, the invocation of 'the re-imagined past simultaneously reconfigures the shape of the ensuing present and the possible futures that can be imagined from it'.<sup>31</sup> The sense of insecurity each character feels in the recreated past can be reflected back on the present.

The issue of instability expressed throughout Waters's historical settings is deeply linked with that of sexuality. By allowing space for gay and lesbian culture in past settings, contemporary writers can critique the dominant, heterosexual mode of narrating the past. Although after *Tipping the Velvet* Waters incorporated a variety of generic conventions into her novels (gothic elements, Dickensian plotlines, sensation fiction and detective fiction, to name a few examples), her purpose is consistent. Manipulating the requirements of each genre, Waters attempts to establish a unique queerness that is detached from but also confronted by the pressure of heterosexuality. As Jerome de Groot writes:

Lesbian historical fiction might allow the creation of a new set of possibilities, outside of (or at least not defined by) patriarchal, heteronormative bounds and historiographic limits.<sup>32</sup>

Waters's persistent project to pose a challenge to heteronormativity supports Hutcheon's argument about the role of historiographic metafiction to

---

<sup>31</sup> Marie-Luise Kohlke, 'Into History Through the Back Door: The "Past Historic" in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity*', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), pp. 153-166 (p. 154).

<sup>32</sup> Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 151.

‘espouse a postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference’.<sup>33</sup>

The very presence of lesbian characters who are united in the Victorian settings, in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, can challenge patriarchal norms. Even in *Affinity*, when Margaret Prior’s plan to elope with Selina Dawes fails, this failure is not because of homophobia, but because of Selina’s preference for another woman, Ruth Vigers. In *The Night Watch*, Waters engages in what O’Callaghan calls ‘a holistic critique of heterosociality’ by describing a group of characters considered queer for various reasons.<sup>34</sup> Combined with *The Little Stranger*, which focuses on queerness that arises from unstable class identities, Waters’s neo-forties novels serve to expand the scope of her assessment of heteronormativity in society. While in *The Paying Guests* Frances’s and Lilian’s plan to escape their domestic entrapment turns out to be impossible, the ending suggests their continued attempt to gradually transform their heteronormative environment. Acknowledging the diversity of queer identity in the context of predominantly heterosexual societal norms can be an act of resistance.

Whether successful or unsuccessful at the end, the characters in Waters’s novels attempt to create a queer heterotopic space where they can protect their homosexual desires from heteronormative authority. According to Foucault, one of heterotopia’s several roles is ‘to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled’.<sup>35</sup> While Waters’s heterotopic spaces are similar

---

<sup>33</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> O’Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 123.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 8.

to the latter model Foucault proposes, what he terms 'heterotopia[s] of compensation', those in Waters's novels are far from 'perfect', 'meticulous', or 'well arranged', thus complicating Foucault's theorisation of heterotopia. Waters's queer heterotopic space can be uniquely categorised as ambivalent. In his attempt to elucidate Foucault's fragmentary concept of heterotopia, Peter Johnson argues that heterotopias 'hold no promise or space of liberation. With different degrees of relational intensity, heterotopias glitter and clash in their incongruous variety, illuminating a passage for our imagination'.<sup>36</sup> Located in Waters's heterotopic spaces, the characters realise how their queer space is related to, and at odds with, the rest of the heteropatriarchal society, and this recognition encourages them to continue their efforts to contest heteronormativity. The places where characters end up are not defined by social restraints that hold them back in the sense of 'patriarchal, heteronormative bounds'.<sup>37</sup> After they go through hardships that discourage them to communicate their passion to one another, the heterotopic space of Waters's novels allows characters who are situated within it to pursue their passionate feelings of their own will. However, in spite of their freedom, characters are often more interested in staying in the oppressive world where they are forced to compromise their expression of passion than in moving to a place where they can build an alternative existence. In *Fingersmith*, for example, the library in which Sue and Maud are united is the embodiment of Maud's uncle's bibliophilic desire. In this way they are not completely free

---

<sup>36</sup> Peter Johnson, 'Unravelling Foucault's "Different Spaces"', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2006), pp. 75-90 (p. 87).

<sup>37</sup> De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 151.

from his patriarchal influence. There is, however, potential to move beyond the uncle's influence in the future – the reader may imagine that they could, for example, sell the house and move to Italy together, like Ruth and Selina do in *Affinity*. Frances's and Lilian's union at the end of *The Paying Guests* is more troubling, since there is no immediate hope that they can live together and there is still a possibility that the police will find out what really happened between Leonard and Lilian. Waters's characters' uncertain destination is pertinent to queer heterotopic space. As Waters talks about the endings of her novels, she points to the importance of her characters 'staying in the mess':

We have to live with mess. We have to live with muddle. ... I wanted my novels to, sort of, say 'yes, the world is messy and we do have to live with mess'. And if we can't bear mess, you know, that's at our own peril.<sup>38</sup>

Waters's attitude in favour of her characters continuing to struggle in the oppressive situation in search for a better future is supported by Judith Halberstam, who argues in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) that '[u]nder certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more co-operative, more surprising ways of being in the world'.<sup>39</sup> Also, Waters's own stance towards her characters' future resonates with queer theorists' arguments on queer futurity. David M. Bell points out that '[q]ueers' refusal and/or inability to conform to norms of patriarchy, gender, sex, heteronormativity finds them particularly well placed to identify and produce utopian expressions that take

---

<sup>38</sup> 'Meet the Author' event, Cardiff University, 9 March 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.



them beyond the present'.<sup>40</sup> Queer theory's search for a better future is characterised by a hopeful attitude towards the 'not yet'. As José Esteban Muñoz defines queer futurity, '[t]he utopian function is enacted by a certain surplus in the work that promises a futurity, something that is not quite there'.<sup>41</sup> Muñoz's argument of queer futurity is a response against so-called anti-social queer theory which contends that queer theory should sever its ties to heteronormative sociality by abandoning hope and futurity. In *Homos* (1995), Leo Bersani argues that 'the most politically disruptive aspect of the homo-ness ... is a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself'.<sup>42</sup> Following up on Bersani's queer rejection of heteronormative social relations, Lee Edelman proposes in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) that '[r]ather than rejecting ... this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might ... do better to consider accepting and embracing it'.<sup>43</sup> Instead of acknowledging anti-sociality, the queer heterotopic spaces that Waters's characters create resonate with Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. This is because their decision to remain in the oppressive environment indicates their continuous negotiation for a site that accommodates their queer sexuality. Jones, echoing with Muñoz, notes that 'queer futurity is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society - in which everyone is happy and life is

---

<sup>40</sup> David M. Bell, *Rethinking Utopia: Place, Power, Affect* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 4.

ideal - but [about] making life more bearable in the present because in doing so we create the potential for a better future'.<sup>44</sup> Rather than being liberated into utopian space, the queer characters wish to remain in ambivalence. Although the degree of hopefulness varies, each novel presents a vision of queer futurity.

Furthermore, the open-endedness of Waters's novels points to the queering of the narrative. Sue's and Maud's reunion in *Fingersmith* and Frances's and Lilian's in *The Paying Guests*, for example, can be interpreted both positively and negatively, since they are not completely free but have overcome immediate obstacles. A sense of ambivalence about the future at the end resonates with queer narrative theory's interrogation of happy endings as a device to reinforce heteronormativity. As Judith Roof argues, 'our very understanding of narrative as a primary means to sense and satisfaction depends upon a metaphorically heterosexual dynamic within a reproductive aegis'.<sup>45</sup> A happy union, even though it is of a lesbian couple, is submerged in the very system of heteronormative logic against which the queer characters attempt to struggle. The ending of *Tipping the Velvet* is illustrative of this point. The most optimistic ending of Waters's novels seems dependent on the presence of Cyril, a baby Florence adopted. If this ending is indicative of 'a metaphorically heterosexual dynamic', Waters's subsequent novels break free of this logic. *Affinity*'s dark ending shows Margaret supposedly committing

---

<sup>44</sup> Angela Jones, 'Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice' in Angela Jones, ed., *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

<sup>45</sup> Judith Roof, *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xxii.

suicide while Selina is entrapped in a relationship with dominating Ruth. It is up to whoever pieces together Margaret's journal and Selina's to realise their union on the metatextual level, which suggests that the end of a story does not mean the end of their search for utopian space. The characters' continuous endeavour beyond the end of the narrative reinforces their queerness.

Waters's queer heterotopic space can best be demarcated by its attention to its heteronormative surroundings that can still be seen as oppressive. As Doreen Massey argues,

The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that 'beyond'.<sup>46</sup>

Here in this friction between and blending of utopia and dystopia lies the possibility for the future of queer politics. By inviting readers to imagine a heterotopic space through the historical mirror, does Waters's queer heterotopia imply what course the issue of lesbian identity and sexuality might take on the path that leads to us?

Massey's idea of space as mobile is closely linked with the relationship between space and gender. The connection between these two categories has been widely discussed and scholars such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Gaston Bachelard have pointed to the fact that domestic space is often categorised as female, mainly focusing on the maternal aspect of enclosed

---

<sup>46</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 5, italics in original.

space.<sup>47</sup> While acknowledging this sense of femininity attached to space, Sue Best pinpoints a paradoxical aspect:

feminizing space seems to suggest, on the one hand, the production of a safe, familiar, clearly defined entity, which, because it is female, should be appropriately docile or able to be dominated. But, on the other hand, this very same production also underscores an anxiety about this 'entity' and the precariousness of its boundedness.<sup>48</sup>

Here, Best outlines how the very feminised nature of space provokes masculine force to secure the boundary. This leads to Mark Wigley's argument that the house (the most prototypical site of enclosed space) signifies a form of violence. As he states:

The house is itself an effect of suppression. The classical figure of the feminine is that which lacks its own secure boundaries, producing insecurity by disrupting boundaries, and which therefore must be housed by masculine force that ... is itself already a form of violence.<sup>49</sup>

This idea is shared by Doreen Massey who writes that 'the need for the security of boundaries, the requirement for such a defensive and counter-positional definition of identity, is culturally masculine'.<sup>50</sup> Waters often depicts the house as a main source of patriarchal oppression. In *Fingersmith*, Briar works as a tool of a masculine force that violates femininity in the name of protection. Similarly, Frances's house is a barrier to her happiness as a lesbian woman since she has the sole responsibility to take care of the parental home. According to Wigley, '[t]he virtuous woman becomes woman-

---

<sup>47</sup> Sue Best, 'Sexualizing Space' in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn eds., *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 191-205 (pp. 191 - 192).

<sup>48</sup> Best, 'Sexualizing Space', p. 192.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, p. 7.

plus-house, or, rather, woman-as-housed, such that her virtue cannot be separated from the physical space'.<sup>51</sup> (It is worth noting here that Waters gives Wigley's notion a twist in *Fingersmith*, as Maud's house turns out to be a perverted one, because her uncle taught her to read and index pornographic literature.) These examples of the house as a site of patriarchal abuse is what Waters aims to subvert by building a lesbian utopian space inside the patriarchal setting, thus blurring inside and outside spaces and their gender/power dynamics.

One of the questions my research seeks to pursue is whether and to what extent Waters's ambivalent heterotopia involving her characters' sometimes voluntary entrapment in oppressive environments aims to subvert this masculine/feminine relationship of inside/outside space. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines it, '[q]ueer [is] a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*'.<sup>52</sup> Waters creates space that assumes this queer nature and thus eludes and resists the traditional dichotomy governed by heterosexuality. In *Fingersmith*, Maud's bedroom at Briar, where she and Susan form their lesbian relationship, might be seen to embody a 'paradise', yet it is under the patriarchal influence of Maud's uncle. By stressing and celebrating the establishment of a space that is classified as heterotopic, and by allowing this space to assume a defiant, insubordinate aspect, Waters challenges and explodes heterosexual norms. Focusing on the

---

<sup>51</sup> Mark Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender' in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality & Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 327-389 (p 337).

<sup>52</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), p. xii, italics in original.

ambivalent nature of heterotopic spaces, this thesis aims to examine the way Waters's neo-historical fiction continuously disrupts the heteronormative conceptualisation of gender, sexuality, time and space.

## Chapter Outline

The following chapters are organised so as to demonstrate the wide spectrum of Waters's queer heterotopic spaces. Chapter Two discusses her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, which offers the most optimistic dénouement. Waters uses several types of theatre spaces to demonstrate different ways to perform lesbian sexuality. The theatre space in which Nan performs with Kitty, works as a heterotopic site of illusion, because of which Nan can consciously give expression to her homosexual desire toward Kitty and the idea that forms the basis for a utopian space: mutual caring and understanding. After her dream of building such a space with Kitty is proved impossible, Nan turns her attention to the streets, and then to Diana's home theatre. I discuss how each theatrical/performance space helps Nan gradually realise her lesbian identity and leads her to build a heterotopic space of compensation with Florence which is based on their mutual desire. Through Nan's journey of discovering her sexuality, Waters's *bildungsroman* narrative delineates the process of her resistance to the patriarchal imposition of heterosexual femininity.

In the novels that follow *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters uses a variety of inside spacial settings to show her characters' resistance to patriarchal pressure and domestic entrapment. Chapter Three looks at Waters's follow-

on neo-Victorian novels, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* in comparison, and demonstrates how each setting imposes (internalised or external) violence on the characters and how they attempt to liberate themselves from this paternal/patriarchal authority. Waters also manipulates spaces of institutional confinement, which Foucault sees as 'heterotopias of deviation', to explore the structure of buildings specifically designed for the containment and disciplining of women. I investigate how different characters negotiate the idea of queer heterotopic space in buildings intended to confine women.

In analysing *The Paying Guests* and *The Night Watch*, Chapter Four follows the process in which the characters' desire for heterotopic space is made almost impossible because of the two World Wars. Set in the years when Britain was still recovering from the ravages of the First World War, *The Paying Guests*'s heroine Frances is forced to look after her house without any external help or domestic servants. Although the need to take in lodgers, Leonard and Lilian, enables Frances to transform her domestic chores into expressions of her feelings for Lilian, Frances's utopian imagination that they can be away and together at the same time is shattered when Lilian accidentally kills Leonard. Despite their coming together again at the end, Frances's and Lilian's future together remains uncertain and filled with obstacles. The future visions of queer characters become bleaker in *The Night Watch*, which follows a number of characters' lives. The characters, both heterosexual and homosexual, are categorised as queer because that they do not conform to traditional views of masculinity/femininity. The narrative structure of *The Night Watch*, in moving backwards, shows us queer

characters' hope for a better future at the very end. With each character's future already determined, his or her utopian imagination is doomed from the very start.

This situation that threatens to be counterproductive to characters' utopian imagination continues in the post-WWII period, when I discuss the collapsing country house in *The Little Stranger* in Chapter Five. Similarly to *The Night Watch*, where the word 'queer' signals those who do not fit the traditional definition of gender, 'queer' is here used to reveal characters' precarious class position. At the heart of the narrative is the breakdown of the British class system, which gives Faraday, a doctor with a working-class background, an opportunity to climb up the social ladder. For him the country house is what gives him class stability, and it becomes an erotic object for his queer desire.

While previous chapters discuss each novel separately or two novels in comparison, the penultimate chapter, Chapter Six, brings Waters's novels together by approaching the way their queer characters transform outside spaces by their act of aimlessly walking the streets. Just as they are emotionally confined inside the house, they are subjected to the patriarchal and heteronormative gaze outside. Waters emphasises the sense of freedom that female characters can get from the act of streetwalking, by which they can, if only for a short period of time, escape men's control. Also by granting women a position that is usually taken up by men, streetwalking gives women the potential to invalidate male authority in confining them. Waters reconfigures the concept of a female streetwalker that tends to be associated



with prostitution. Here I will demonstrate how female characters' act of walking can queer concepts of masculinity that are premised on walking the streets.

Chapter Seven moves beyond Waters's use of queer spatiality and temporality by interrogating how her play with historical adaptation has itself been subject to film remediation of her work. Neo-Victorian/historical fiction is indebted to the process of adaptation and appropriation for its use of past settings with the aim to inform our engagement with the past and to address our contemporary concerns. Waters's adaptive play with a variety of literary genres such as Gothic and detective fiction contributes to creating the palimpsestuous network, where different texts from various historical periods influence each other. Adaptations of Waters's novels serve to enrich this textual network, and even when some adaptations attempt to heterosexualise the content of Waters's novels, they invite the viewer to re-examine her gender and sexual politics. Chapter Seven investigates the way *The Handmaiden*, South-Korean adaptation of *Fingersmith*, provides a way of considering neo-Victorian adaptation and appropriation in the globalised context. Although set in Korea under Japanese military rule in the 1930s, the film indirectly refers to the influence of Victorian Britain in the background. Replacing *Fingersmith*'s class conflict with the cultural conflict between Japan and Korea, *The Handmaiden* represents the intricate process of cultural colonisation. *The Handmaiden*'s unique way of bringing together Victorian Britain and the regional politics of 1930s Northeast Asia serves to widen the range of neo-Victorian adaptations, bringing a new perspective on Waters's

engagement with queer spatiality and temporality. By conceptualising queer heterotopic space in the characters' resistance to and defiance of heteronormative and patriarchal oppression, this thesis addresses the prominence of spatiality in understanding Waters's gender and sexual politics. In utilising contemporary feminisms and queer theories for her narratives, Waters's heterotopias problematise the present in making us aware of the issues surrounding gender and sexuality that are yet to be resolved.

## Chapter Two

### Journeying Through Theatrical Spaces, Returning

#### Home: Sexuality and Performance in *Tipping the Velvet*

Monique Wittig claims that lesbians should '[m]ake an effort to remember, and failing that, invent'.<sup>53</sup> By depicting Nan Astley's search for the way in which her lesbian identity can be expressed in her encounter with different lesbian communities, Waters calls attention to the omnipresence of lesbians in the Victorian period. What Waters reveals with *Tipping the Velvet* is, as Sonja Tiernan states, fiction's 'potential to reclaim lesbian culture and history, while addressing issues of (hetero)patriarchal injustice'.<sup>54</sup> Waters's *bildungsroman* narrative delineates the process of Nan's resistance to the patriarchal imposition of heterosexual femininity.

This resistance is enacted by cross-dressing – the main theme of the novel. Nan begins by admiring, then helping Kitty Butler as her dresser, later joins her male-impersonating act, and subsequently engages in a series of different cross-dressing adventures. 'In imitating gender', as Judith Butler writes on drag culture, 'drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency'.<sup>55</sup> Waters's narrative resonates with Butler's

---

<sup>53</sup> Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (New York: Avon, 1973), p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> Sonja Tiernan, 'Tipping the Balance with Historical Fiction: *Tipping the Velvet* as a Lesbian Feminist Device', *Irish Feminist Review*, Vol. 1 (2005), pp. 161-184 (p. 161).

<sup>55</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 187, italics in original.

argument on the constructedness of all gender. Kitty's and Nan's cross-dressing threatens to break down the gender binarism, indicating the performativity of gender. At the same time, Nan uses her act to express her inherent sexual orientation, for through her performance in music halls she becomes able to display her homosexual desire towards Kitty. By being dressed as a man and using her performance as a medium through which she expresses her lesbian desire, Nan's theatrical persona doubly challenges the idea that 'Victorian society validated two gender identities: heterosexual male and heterosexual female, and clothing became an instrument through which these identities were enacted'.<sup>56</sup> However, her performance also functions to limit the space where their lesbian relationship can be exhibited, overtly or covertly: because Kitty insists that they should keep their homosexuality hidden from the public, their room and (covertly) the stage are the only places for their lesbian desire. In this sense, Nan's performative act also serves as a foil, to cover her innate homosexuality.

As a result of finding Kitty in bed with their manager Walter, Nan escapes her theatrical life and starts a new life disguised as a male prostitute. When she intends to degrade men with her new occupation (though the result is quite the opposite), the streets become an open theatre for Nan to transgress the male/female – heterosexual/homosexual boundary as she did in the music hall. By transforming the streets into a theatrical space, Nan continues to masquerade her sexuality, further obscuring her inherent sexual

---

<sup>56</sup> Cheryl A. Wilson, 'From the Drawing Room to the Stage: Performing Sexuality in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*', *Women's Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2006), pp. 285-305 (p. 296).

orientation. When she is picked up by the lesbian aristocrat Diana Lethaby, Diana's grand residence becomes her new theatrical space. Here she exists only as an object to satisfy Diana and to be displayed. Her subsequent journey through various theatrical spaces after her experience in the music hall can be seen as an attempt to retrieve her first lesbian relationship with Kitty, and therefore as mere imitation. As Butler notes, however, 'the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin'.<sup>57</sup> In this light, Nan's homosexual identity, which she thinks is grounded in her relationship with Kitty, is a mere illusion. This notion is presented to Nan by her later lover Florence, as they talk about Kitty:

'I wouldn't have been a tom at all,' I said, more hurt by her words than I was willing to show, 'if it hadn't been for Kitty Butler.'  
She looked me over: I had my trousers on. 'Now *that*,' she said, 'I cannot believe. You would have met some woman, sooner or later.' (TV 434)

Florence's comment is predicated on the idea that Nan is born a lesbian. This, according to Cheryl Wilson, is foreshadowed by an earlier scene when her father explains a unique characteristic of oysters: 'now a he, now a she, as quite takes its fancy. A regular morphodite, in fact' (TV 49).<sup>58</sup> Her theatrical experience with Kitty, accompanied by her disguise as a renter and her imposed performances at Diana's house, is a process through which Nan tries to discover not what her sexuality is but how to (dis)play it.

Although at first she thinks that 'even labor movement politics offer vast theatrical opportunities of their own' as she helps Florence's brother

---

<sup>57</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, 'From the Drawing Room to the Stage', p. 300.

Ralph give a public speech about socialism, using her theatre experience, she realises that there is no longer any need to perform her sexuality.<sup>59</sup> She says to Florence, 'I feel like I've been repeating other people's speeches all my life. Now, when I want to make a speech of my own, I find I hardly I know how' (TV 471). The ending in which Nan kisses Florence in Victoria Park indicates that she is able to display their relationship in the public sphere, thus having finally freed herself of Kitty's influence. In this way a heterotopic space is established where they can fit 'together like the two halves of an oyster shell', which suggests that this space is based on their mutual and natural desire (TV 132). In this way Waters presents lesbian sexuality 'as a positive choice based on desire rather than a negative rejection of men'.<sup>60</sup> From early on, Nan's father and brother are depicted as those who respect Nan's decisions, even if they are not aware of her homosexuality. Rather than the men in her family, it is her sister Alice who strongly objects to her queer nature. This contrast is made explicit when Nan returns home with presents she bought in London. While her brother is impressed by what he gets, her mother's and sister's attitude is a confused one. Although his father exhibits a slight sign of awkwardness when his 'laugh ... didn't sound quite natural', it is her mother and sister that explicitly express their bemusement (TV 157). What Nan did not realise is 'how queer [her presents] would look beside her [mother's] cheap coloured perfume bottles, her jar of cold-cream, on her old chest of

---

<sup>59</sup> Harriet Malinowitz, 'Taking the Road to Ruin', *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2000), p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Claire O'Callaghan, "'Lesbo Victorian Romp': Women, Sex, and Pleasure in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*" in Joel Gwynne and Angelia Poon, eds., *Sexuality and Contemporary Literature* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012), pp. 61-80 (p. 75).

drawers with its chipped glass handles' (*TV* 157). The use of the word 'queer' here illustrates the stark contrast between the poshness and glamour of London that Nan enjoys and the mundane and inelegant nature of Whitstable, emphasising a feeling of discomfort both on Nan's and her family's sides. Although her mother's uncomfortable reaction simply comes from her self-conscious reflection of the shabbiness of her possessions, Alice's aversion to the gift indicates her rejection of Nan's sexuality. Having already known about Nan's romantic relationship with Kitty, Alice very clearly dismisses Nan's queer desire: '[Kitty] took you off, and made you strange. I don't know you at all' (*TV* 162). The difference between London and Whitstable, and Alice's rejection of Nan's queerness make Nan go back to London earlier than she planned.

Yet, it is pertinent here to point to the fact that even though she grows weary of it when she is immersed in the theatrical world, Nan reminisces often about her home town. Given that the ideal for her utopian space is likened to an oyster shell, it could be argued that her family is a model on which Nan and Florence will build their relationship. Both in Nan's and Florence's home they find family members – though not everyone – who can support their transgressive sexuality. Ultimately Nan and Florence can create their home based on their positive relationship with their biological family. In this way Waters's narrative takes a circular shape: Nan's departure from home to various theatrical spaces leads her back to a home-like space with a firmly established lesbian identity. Born a lesbian, Nan adjusts Simone de Beauvoir's comment that '[o]ne is not born woman, but rather becomes

one', embracing a lesbian identity by turning into a lesbian in her move from performative deviance to public visibility where she is ensconced in an open homosexual relationship.<sup>61</sup> The televisual adaptation in 2002, written by Andrew Davies, ends with a scene where Nan and Florence are preparing to meet Nan's family, thus highlighting the connection/difference between theatre and home which is only suggested in the text. Also, this adaptation uses various visual techniques such as cross-cutting and iris shots, recreating the playfulness that Waters espoused in the novel. In the first episode, after she is disappointed in her sister Alice's (Monica Dolan) reaction towards her romantic relationship with Kitty, Nan (Rachael Stirling) says, 'If they couldn't love me as I am, then I should go wherever I would be loved'. This added line crystallises the idea which governs Nan's journey – physical and emotional – in search for lesbian utopian space.

From the early examples such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668), and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), as Krishan Kumar argues, '[u]topia retains throughout its long history the basic form of the narrative of a journey'.<sup>62</sup> One's desire to go from one place to the next, whilst observing 'the validity and desirability' of each place underpins the search for utopian space.<sup>63</sup> Nan's quest, whose 'ultimate aim [is] the achievement of an "authentic" sense of [herself] as a lesbian subject', at first explores a variety of

---

<sup>61</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 301.

<sup>62</sup> Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.



theatrical spaces, which turns out to be counterproductive to her quest.<sup>64</sup> In the end Nan discovers the place to which she belongs, where performativity is put to practical use, as she and other women in the same district wear trousers for household tasks. The novel, which ends with Nan's and Florence's union, stresses 'a model of alternative kinship'.<sup>65</sup> This form of relationship is different from biological kinship, which is based on heterosexual lineage. Nan's and Florence's relationship creates a unit which is located outside of heterosexual family relations, thus celebrating their lesbian identity. At the same time, the novel reconsiders the significance of home in a gay/lesbian context. Both Nan and Florence have family members who (might) understand their sexuality, enabling them to retain the ties to their biological family. By suggesting the prospect of Nan introducing Florence to her biological family in Whitstable, *Tipping the Velvet* reaffirms the value of home as a potential model of lesbian utopian space. This chapter investigates Nan's journey for her utopian space by first analysing the theatre, which serves to introduce Nan to the world of queer desire.

---

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Gamble, "'You cannot impersonate what you are': Questions of Authenticity in the Neo-Victorian Novel', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, Vol. 20 (2009), pp. 126-140 (p. 135).

<sup>65</sup> Emily Jeremiah, 'The "I" inside "her": Queer narration in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune*', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2007), pp. 131-144 (p. 140).

## 2.1. The World 'full of queer electric spaces': Revealing/Concealing of Lesbian Identity in Music Halls and Bedrooms

From the very beginning, Nan is fascinated by the theatre. The reason for this, she thinks, is related to the effect created by the lighting: when she explains why she likes the seats in the gallery, she tells the reader that

Here you knew yourself to be not just at a show but in a *theatre* ... and you marvelled to see your neighbours' faces, and to know your own to be like theirs – all queerly lit by the glow of the footlights, and damp at the lip, and with a grin upon it, like that of a demon at some hellish revue. (*TV 9*, italics in original)

Whilst being in a theatre gives the audience an opportunity to put themselves in a dreamlike atmosphere and indeed 'queers' them, what is striking is the idea that they assume a demonic trait which people would find unsettling in the real world. Particularly for Nan, this is suggestive of her hidden homosexual nature, which she cannot exhibit in her daily life. Nan's homosexuality is indicated here by her face which is 'queerly lit'. Throughout *Tipping the Velvet*, as well as her subsequent novels, Waters consciously employs the word 'queer' to play upon its definition. Despite its original meaning as 'strange', as Elaine Showalter writes, 'the homosexual significance of "queer" had entered English slang by 1900', when the novel is set.<sup>66</sup> The word is used as a nudge to the reader who is aware of the recent usage in gay and lesbian studies 'relating to sexual identity, dissidence, challenge,

---

<sup>66</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 112.

otherness'.<sup>67</sup> It is interesting to note that in Davies's adaptation Waters herself appears as one of the audience members (fig. 1). It is possible to link Waters's own sexuality to the status of the theatre audience that Nan describes.<sup>68</sup>



Figure 1. Waters as an audience member.

The theatre is a place of escape for Nan, for '[t]he theatre ... licenses the temporary breaking of gender boundaries within its walls'.<sup>69</sup> Her sense of liberation reaches its peak when she becomes enchanted by Kitty's 'masher' acts. This is what actually awakens Nan's lesbian desire. Here again the lighting serves to guide Nan towards her sexuality: she sees Kitty in 'a single shaft of rosy limelight' (TV 12). The ambiguity created by Kitty's cross-dressing leads to Nan's awakening of her lesbian desire: Kitty is 'boylike and slender', but at the same time 'rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boy's ever was' (TV 13). In

<sup>67</sup> Jerome de Groot, "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 56-69 (p. 62).

<sup>68</sup> Waters's cameo appearance as an audience member can also be connected to her stance towards Davies's adaptation: like others, she enjoys how her meta-authorial novel is performed in the visual medium. She also appears in the adaptation of *Fingersmith* (2005) as a maid, and in *Affinity* (2008) as a pedestrian.

<sup>69</sup> Jeannette King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 147.

*Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber argues that cross-dressing threatens to break down the heteronormative boundary of gender and sexuality. As Garber writes, '*transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture*: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself'.<sup>70</sup> The theatre is presented as a liminal space in which the audience's sexuality is made ambiguous, and Kitty's male impersonation maximises this ambiguity. The theatre and Kitty's acts, therefore, allow Nan freedom, if only temporarily.

Given the great influence that Kitty's acts have on Nan, it is not difficult to imagine her nervousness when she is invited to Kitty's dressing room for the first time. Her uneasiness comes from the idea that Kitty's appearance on stage, which leads her to recognise Nan's homosexual nature, could be merely an illusion. After the men who she thinks are salesmen turn out to be the performers she just saw, Nan is gripped with 'a sudden fear that Kitty Butler might after all be ... plain, unremarkable, almost unrecognisable as the handsome girl I had seen swaggering in the glow of the footlights' (TV 29-30). What makes the theatre such a liberating place for Nan is the presence of the lights and their transforming effect, and she fears that without them the Kitty Butler she sees on stage might not exist in the real world. The result, however, is contrary to what she fears and she finds Kitty as attractive as on stage. Because of Kitty's presence, as Nan explains, her world 'was full of queer electric spaces, that [Kitty] left ringing with music or glowing with light' (TV

---

<sup>70</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 17, italics in original.

38). Light is employed metaphorically to represent queer desire: it is what reveals Nan's hidden lesbian nature, what guides her towards Kitty Butler, the object of her desire, and what transforms her world which has been hitherto organised by heteronormative codes.

Having formed a romantic relationship with Kitty, she too steps in the glow of the footlights as a male impersonator. Because of this change of the subject positions, from observer to observed, passive spectator to agent, Nan's performance calls into question the boundaries of gender and sexuality further. Because her female-to-male performance is a foil for her lesbian desire, Nan's transvestite act doubly complicates the conception of gender. As a cross-dressing performer, Nan transforms the theatre into a space where she can disguise her homosexuality as part of her act, which enables her both to masquerade her lesbian identity and yet prompt sexual titillation on the audience's side. It is because of the fact that the theatre allows two different spaces to coexist — 'the real space of the audience and the virtual space of the scene' — that Foucault lists the theatre as an example of a heterotopia.<sup>71</sup> For Nan, the theatre is a 'heterotopia of illusion', which gives voice to her unreal queer imagination with Kitty. As Walter excitedly considers the prospect of Nan's and Kitty's double act, he says, 'How long have we been looking for something that will lift the act above the ordinary, and make it really memorable? ... *two* lovely girls in trousers, instead of one! When did you ever see the like of it before? It will be a sensation!' (TV 112, italics in original) The

---

<sup>71</sup> Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, 'The Space of Play: Towards a General Theory of Heterotopia' in Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, eds., *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 88-102 (p. 93).

presence of two male-impersonators on stage functions to further transgress ordinary societal norms, which makes the theatre a more enjoyable space for the audience, and a more suitable space for Nan's covert display of lesbianism.

As Nan's and Kitty's act and their romantic relationship become indistinguishable one from the other, the theatre begins to assume similar characteristics to their shared bedroom. For Nan, 'the two things – the act, [her and Kitty's] love – were not so very different' (TV 127). Even when she is sharing the bed with her sister Alice, the bedroom is where 'in the darkness' she can 'ease back the mantle of restraint that keeps [her] passion dimmed throughout the day, and let it glow a little' (TV 41). Waters uses the darkness to point to its effect of creating heterotopic space where her characters are given a temporary chance to display their homosexuality: Maud's bedroom in *Fingersmith*, London during the World War Two in *The Night Watch*, and the scullery in *The Paying Guests* all contribute to establishing queer heterotopias. By the metaphorical use of light and darkness, the bedroom is described as a heterotopic place in which Nan is allowed to display her lesbian feeling towards Kitty which she needs to keep hidden in public. As Nan and Kitty undress each other for their first sexual union, Nan describes the scene as if they are in the theatre: they 'might have been at the side of the stage, making a lighting change between numbers' (TV 104). Moreover, Nan regards their act as 'merely [their relationship's] public shape' (TV 127). This idea partly corresponds to Peter Bailey's argument that the music hall 'was both a public and private place, where the multiple

intimacies of its crowd ... paradoxically afforded a kind of privacy'.<sup>72</sup> While his main interest here is in the relationship amongst audience members, the merging of public/private is also applicable to the relationship between the performers on stage, especially when it is Nan and Kitty's cross-dressing act which is itself a disguise for their lesbian love. Because, as Nan writes, '[a] double act is always twice the act the audience thinks it' (TV 128), there is the gap between the performance the audience sees and the meanings hidden behind it. As Nan continues to explain, behind their performance

there was a private language, in which we held an endless, delicate exchange of which the crowd knew nothing. This was a language not of the tongue but of the body, its vocabulary the pressure of a finger or a palm, the nudging of a hip, the holding or breaking of a gaze, that said, *You are too slow – you go too fast – not there, but here – that's good – that's better!* (TV 128, italics in original)

Their private language on stage is a highly sexualised one, thus connecting the theatre to the bedroom. These two places become almost interchangeable in that they both allow the couple to express their lesbian relationship, though only as a disguise in the theatre.

However liberating the theatre and the bedroom are for Nan and Kitty's lesbian relationship, there is a line that should not be crossed. This line which determines where they can display their homosexuality is policed by heteronormativity, which diminishes the theatre's significance as a utopian space for lesbian desire. After a drunken male audience member calls Nan and Kitty lesbians ('a couple of *toms*' [TV 140, italics in original]), Kitty

---

<sup>72</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Introduction: Making Sense of Music Hall' in Peter Bailey, ed. *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), pp. viii-xxiii (p. xvii).

becomes more cautious about their performance. In the theatre the blurring of the gender boundaries is permitted 'as long as [the theatre] sustains the concept of sexual difference'.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the breaking down of the male/female category through their cross-dressing is only possible if the audience can go back to their everyday life with a reinforced belief in rigid heteronormative codes. If the audience are able to see through the performance and identify them as lesbians, heterosexist society is at threat and must act to exclude the subversive element from it. Kitty's fear of that result leads them to move to a new place, where they can have better privacy. Although Nan expresses her wish to 'carry [Kitty] down to the parlour carpet, and kiss [her] there', their relationship is still fully enacted only in their bedroom (TV 146). And even this bedroom is invaded by Walter, the male force which intervenes in their relationship. Their display of lesbianism, as Allison Neal notes, 'must be confined to the music hall stage as the only acceptable place for transvestism to be performed'.<sup>74</sup> Her escape from Kitty after her betrayal, and subsequent journeys through different spaces, can be seen as Nan's attempt — and failure — to widen the area in the world where she can exhibit her identity as a lesbian. Nan's need to act out various roles — a male prostitute and Diana's 'kept boy' — obstructs her recognition of her innate homosexuality.

---

<sup>73</sup> King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, p. 147.

<sup>74</sup> Allison Neal, '(Neo-)Victorian Impersonations: Vesta Tilley and *Tipping the Velvet*', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011), pp. 55-76 (p. 60).



## 2.2. Looking for Utopian Space Beyond the Bedroom: The Street as an Open Theatre and the Closed/Imposed Performance at Diana's Home

After she discovers Kitty with Walter and runs away from them, Nan puts herself in a state of rejecting her homosexual desire towards Kitty. This eventually leads to her new life as a 'renter', for by pleasuring homosexual men who think that Nan is a boy, she is degrading her own homosexual desire as well as theirs. When she first encounters a gentleman who offers money in exchange for oral sex, Nan realises that his sexual desire resembles what she used to have towards Kitty: she notes that 'his love was a love so fierce and so secret it must be satisfied, with a stranger, in a reeking court like this. [She] knew about that kind of love' (TV 200). Although here homosexuality is displayed in an outside space, there is furtiveness attached to the place. The fact that Nan's love also needed to be performed secretly and was limited to the theatre and the bedroom, so that her lesbian desire would not be exposed to the public, links her with the gentleman. The street assumes similar characteristics to those of the theatre because they are both private *and* public. In Davies's adaptation, in the scene when Nan pulls at the gentleman's trouser buttons, the image focuses on Nan opening the slit of the trouser as if it is the curtain in the theatre (fig. 2). When she finishes satisfying another gentleman, the viewer hears a muffled cheer and applause which is presumably in Nan's mind. The film thus uses visual and audio effects to express similarities between the theatre and the street.



Figure 2. Nan opening the slit of a gentleman's trouser.

The effect of her acts of pleasuring men so that their male gaze is 'in some queer way, *revenged*' (TV 201, italics in original) is degrading and far from liberating, for through these acts her homosexuality is also under attack. Moreover, the lack of an audience is another factor which compromises her acts. As she tells the reader,

My one regret was that, though I was daily giving such marvellous performances, they had no audience. I would gaze about me at the dim and dreary place in which my gentleman and I leaned panting, and wish the cobbles were a stage, the bricks a curtain, the scuttling rats a set of blazing footlights. (TV 206)

Without the audience, her performance fails to subvert the gender binaries, thus to create a space in the public sphere in which she can express her lesbian identity. As King argues, 'she alone is conscious of her transgression of gender boundaries, so that its significance as a subversive act is nullified'.<sup>75</sup> However hard she imagines the perfect theatrical space where through her cross-dressing performance she can refuse to be the target of the homosexual male gaze, Nan ends up being subjected to it all the same in the open theatre space. Although the reader can be seen as the audience for Nan's 'street

---

<sup>75</sup> King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, p. 150.

performance', what they can experience is only Nan's retrospective account of the event. Nan's attempt to subvert the gender binary is left unaccomplished, for there is no spontaneous interaction between Nan and the audience. Nan's act is likely to challenge the audience's conception of the gender/sexuality binary, but not the other way around.

The presence of Diana, then, gives Nan the satisfaction of having an audience member again, even though Diana also becomes a participant. As she remembers being engaged in passionate sex with Diana, Nan likens the room to 'a stage-set ... in which [they] had been given a licence to be not [them]selves, or more than [them]selves, as actors are' (TV 246). Nan is attracted to the transformative force of the theatrical space, in which Diana acts to be not only Nan's partner but also her audience, thus almost completing her wish to have a theatrical space for the display of her sexual identity. In Diana's place Nan's lesbianness is the only identity she exhibits, whilst with Kitty she has 'a kind of queer half-life, hiding from my own true self' (TV 250). In this sense, she thinks she is closer to her utopian vision which allows her to pronounce her lesbian identity in the public. What reinforces her conviction is a group of cross-dressing lesbians in Diana's Sapphic circle. In the club Nan finds that they 'wore skirts – but the kind of skirts a tailor might design if he were set, for a dare, to sew a bustle for a gent' (TV 272). In this atmosphere in which cross-dressing is not seen as a threat to the heteronormative society but as part of the norm, Nan can openly advertise herself as a lesbian.

In spite of the sense of liberation she gains from her life with Diana, however, Nan's display of her sexual identity is confined to the walls of Diana's place and her Sapphic club. In this semi-closed world, Nan's role is only to exist as the object of desire for Diana, which is at odds with Nan's utopian vision which is based on mutual love. From the beginning of their relationship, Diana takes control of everything: Diana says to Nan, 'You should eat from my table, and ride in my brougham, and wear the clothes I will pick out for you – and remove them, too, when I should ask it' (*TV* 248-249). Diana dictates Nan's every action, stressing her position as the master. Although Diana distinguishes Nan from the servants at first, it disturbs Nan when she is spoken to by Diana as if she were a domestic servant (*TV* 262). It upsets her further when she accompanies Diana to the club to find her clothes designed to match the sofa there (*TV* 272). In this way Nan is regarded as more or less the same as the dildo she is forced to use so as to sexually satisfy Diana. This sense of uneasiness towards being treated as an object is heightened by Diana's home theatre. The way Diana presents Nan in front of the guests is an attitude towards a trophy rather than a performer: '[she] would be behind the curtain, striking some pose; and when she was ready, Diana would pull a tasselled cord and uncover me' (*TV* 281). Playing with Nan's sexuality, Diana forces Nan to enact a variety of roles for her and the guests' sexual titillation. As Wilson notes, 'Nan is denied all aspects of her identity beyond her sexuality; she exists purely for Diana's pleasure and lives in a state of constant performance'.<sup>76</sup> This imposed theatre makes Nan feel

---

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, 'From the Drawing Room to the Stage', p. 300.

like 'a renter's gent', whose sexuality is degraded (*TV* 281). Nan's relationship with Diana, as well as with gentlemen on the street, is a mere imitation of what she used to have with Kitty. Nan's position, where her lesbian desire is manipulated and then denied, is reflected in how Nan sees each relationship. Nan regards her relationship with Diana as 'a perfect kind of double act. She was lewd, she was daring – but who made that daring visible?' (*TV* 282). With her acts with Kitty she also thinks of herself as a lesser part but nevertheless an important one: she 'was the shadow which, in all [Kitty's] brilliance, she cast across the stage. But, like a shadow, [she] lent her the edge, the depth, the crucial definition, that she had lacked before' (*TV* 127). Her prostitution on the street is, then, her attempt and failure to reverse this position. Despite her initial goal to find a place to exhibit her sexuality openly, she is repeatedly returned to theatrical spaces which are predicated upon the constraint of her lesbian nature. Therefore, as Gamble argues, Nan's relationships after Kitty 'are all tied into performativity in a similarly unproductive way'.<sup>77</sup> It is when she forms a romantic relationship with Florence that she finally liberates herself from her entrapment in theatrical spaces and determines to see her new home, which she has been avoiding, as a potential site of her utopian desire.

---

<sup>77</sup> Gamble, "'You cannot impersonate what you are'", p. 135.

### 2.3. 'It's human nature after all': Biological/Alternative Kinship and Home as Heterotopia

Although Nan comes to accept her sexuality without the power of cross-dressing performance in her relationship with Florence, their first encounter is initiated by Nan pretending to be male. Again the light is employed strategically here:

There were not more than twelve yards between us, and we were almost level; but, as I had guessed, I was only another shadow against my own shadowy chamber, and she hadn't noticed me. I, for my part, had still not seen her face. The window and curtains framed her beautifully, but the light was all from behind. (*TV* 220)

Whilst at the theatre the light functions to reveal both actors' and the audience's queerness, in this scene Nan and Florence's characteristics are mostly hidden. Despite the scene's theatrical atmosphere, the light rather conceals their queer nature: it is later when they meet in broad daylight that they suspect each other's sexuality. On both occasions, however, Nan points to the fact that they are 'level' (*TV* 220, 223), whereas at the theatre the audience either looks up or down at the stage. This foreshadows their future relationship based on their mutual understanding, for they can be both the actor and the audience at the same time.

Nan's relationship with Florence gives her a new perception of the world, guiding her towards her acceptance of herself as a lesbian in the public sphere. Nan's recognition of the possibility that she can display her sexuality in public then leads to change the meaning of her cross-dressing as well as of her performance. When they go to the pub together, Nan is surprised to find

women who are dressed as men, just as she had done in the theatre, which makes her ask Florence whether she thinks her 'very foolish ... if [she] said that [she] thought [she] was the only one' who dresses as a man (TV 417). Also, it is Florence who teaches Nan the meaning of 'tipping the velvet' (a Victorian slang for cunnilingus, which is used for the title so as to point to the widespread presence of lesbians in Victorian Britain), showing her the world of lesbians which she has not experienced before. At home, Nan starts wearing men's clothes 'to do the housework in', using cross-dressing for the first time for practical use (TV 405). Although at first she decides to wear trousers only inside the household, soon she does it out in the street as well: 'I had become known in the district as something of a trouser-wearer, it seemed rather a fuss to take trousers off at night and put a frock on. No one appeared to mind it' (TV 407). In the area where they live, women wearing men's clothes happens occasionally, although this does not mean that people are permissive towards the transgressive nature of cross-dressing, for, as Jeannette King points out, '[p]overty blurs the boundaries of the gendered dress code, trousers being more acceptable on women in Bethnal Green than in more respectable parts of London'.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, in this neighbourhood Nan is allowed to display her queer nature both at home and in the street. This is a hybrid result of her past experiences – her masher act in the theatre and her days as a renter – without any need to hide her sexuality. In her relationship with Florence Nan is encouraged to create a new meaning out of what she has done before.

---

<sup>78</sup> King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, p. 152.

The meaning of her performance is also transformed. As discussed earlier, after Kitty's betrayal Nan's exploration of sexuality through various theatrical spaces is always meant to recreate her first homosexual experience. Even after her first sexual union with Florence, she holds on to this idea, thinking, 'It was Kitty I had kissed first and hardest; and it was as if I had had the shape or the colour or the taste of her kisses upon my lips, ever after' (TV 432). Her journey into acceptance of her homosexuality is an accumulation of performances, each new one layered over the previous ones. However, in order to establish a relationship based on mutual understanding with Florence, Nan realises, she needs to reveal her 'true' self, not her performed one. This becomes evident when Nan helps Ralph give a speech at the socialist rally using her theatrical experience. Although she is successful in influencing the audience to support Ralph, Florence criticises Nan for 'just repeating [speeches] like a – like a dam' parrot' (TV 461). For Florence, performance can only be a medium through which one conceals one's true feelings, not reveal them. This reaction of Florence's then encourages Nan to discard her performance as a way to display her lesbian nature and 'make a speech of [her] own' (TV 471), which is, as Jeannette King notes, 'distinguish[ing] between acting as playing a part and acting as doing'.<sup>79</sup> Here, Nan can finally make a conscious choice to make herself visible. This is supported by what she says to Kitty, which ultimately determines the ending of their relationship: 'what would your neighbours say, if I came visiting you? You'd be too afraid to walk upon the street with me, in case some feller called

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 153.



out!' (TV 468) With Florence Nan is able to escape the constraints of performance as a way of covertly expressing homosexuality and to acquire a more liberatory position in society.

In contrast to Nan's textual transformation into an agent who displays her sexuality, Davies's adaptation limits the space for Nan's sexual emancipation to the theatre. In this light, his take on Waters's sensational account of Victorian London filled with lesbians is often criticised as 'repackag[ing] lesbian sexuality for a heterosexual male gaze'.<sup>80</sup> Compared to Waters's text in which Nan expresses her romantic feeling towards Florence in Victoria Park, which suggests Nan's acceptance of her lesbian identity in public, her renewed masquerade act as a way of delivering the same message in the adaptation serves to restrain her sexual liberation within the parameters of theatrical space. This is because in this scene Nan is encouraged to entertain and play to a double-layered audience: a heterosexual audience who is in the theatre for her 'performance' on the one hand, and Florence and Kitty for her hidden message behind her act on the other. As Kitty suggested that people outside of the theatre would not accept them as a lesbian couple, Nan is made to conform to this idea whether or not she is ready to openly acknowledge her relationship with Florence. Accordingly, the meaning of the rose is altered to illustrate this difference between Waters's text and Davies's adaptation. Waters has Nan buy a rose from a street vendor and ask him to deliver it to Kitty, as a sign of farewell (TV 469). This is indicative of Nan's

---

<sup>80</sup> Heather Emmens, 'Taming the Velvet: Lesbian Identity in Cultural Adaptations of *Tipping the Velvet*' in Rachel Carroll, ed., *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 134-146 (p. 135).

new position that rejects Kitty's idea that they can rekindle their former romantic relation if they could be 'only a little careful' (TV 466). Hence the rose signifies Nan's move away from the deviant aspect of performance that she learned from Kitty. In the television drama, however, the rose is used as a prop for Nan's performance, just as in Kitty's. Nan uses the final part of the act, in which Nan throws the rose at a member of the audience, as a manifestation of where her heart lies: Kitty or Florence. By recycling a part of Kitty's act, Nan remains trapped in the notion of the theatre as the only place to claim her homosexuality. Also, Florence's position in this scene resembles that of Nan when she was a naïve audience member for Kitty's acts. This threatens to reduce Florence's active participation in her relationship with Nan. It becomes possible to argue that Nan obtains her sexual liberation by assuming Kitty's position, therefore, in a sense that is different from the original text, she is still 'repeating other people's speeches' (TV 471).

Interestingly, in the Davies adaptation it is Nan who teaches Florence the meaning of the slang 'tipping the velvet', not the other way around as in Waters's text. As Nan feels that Kitty has told her everything about Sapphic desire, it is Nan's turn to educate her partner, although Florence had a relationship with another woman before. Whilst in Waters's text Nan's 'move from a night life in the shadows of deviant sexuality to the final scene in broad daylight serves as a metaphor not only for the history of female homosexuality in the Victorian period, but also for our discovery and recognition of the formerly unrepresented' lesbian figures, Nan's solo act in

Davies's adaptation constrains her yet again to theatrical performativity.<sup>81</sup> By making Nan use her former relationship with Kitty as a template, Davies 'heterosexualizes' Waters's text, diminishing the significance of shared agency in Nan's relationship with Florence.<sup>82</sup>

Lyndsay Turner's theatrical adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* takes a different approach to depict Nan's departure from the theatrical realm. What is striking about this theatrical adaptation is the presence of the chairman (David Cardy), who serves as a narrator. He is also a tour guide for the audience, when he introduces the history of Lyric Hammersmith theatre. In explaining various types of performances that were performed in the theatre, the chairman emphasises the continuity of the past to the present. The chairman turns the audience into tourists who consume Nan's journey of self-discovery. What is problematic about this in relation to *Tipping the Velvet* is that the chairman is a representation of male, heterosexual values. Therefore in a way the chairman is an extension of what Walter represents. Just like Andrew Davies's televisual adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* attempts to cater to male heterosexual viewers, the chairman imposes patriarchal and heteronormative authority upon Nan. This is most evident in a scene when Nan chooses Florence over Kitty when the chairman intervenes in the narrative. He tells Nan that her decision is not the right one, and asks her to reconsider:

---

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Schaff, 'On Not being Mrs Browning: The Revisionist Feminism of Sarah Waters's Neo-Victorian Trilogy', *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2013), pp. 63-75 (p. 71).

<sup>82</sup> Neal, '(Neo-)Victorian Impersonations', p. 58.

CHAIRMAN: ... Nancy these people haven't paid their money, come all this way to see you end up settled with someone 'cause she's *good*. To see you settle. They're not here for. Domestic Bliss.<sup>83</sup>

When the chairman refers to the audience, he naturally assumes that they all share patriarchal, heteronormative values and are watching the performance just for entertainment and titillation, regardless of Nan's situation. Therefore, Nan's action of taking the chairman's gavel away and controlling the ending of the play is significant, for it signifies that Nan subverts patriarchal expectations.

Regardless of the heterosexual rewriting of Waters's text which is unmistakable in several scenes, however, Davies's adaptation does allow multifaceted reading of the space which lesbians aim to inhabit. Although it could be argued that the ending of the television series, in which Nan and Florence walk towards Nan's home in Whitstable, indicates the heterosexist desire to confine a lesbian couple within the parameter of the conventional family organisation, I argue that the ending can present a forward-looking potential that they can transform a traditionally heteronormative space into one which accommodates homosexuality. The ending of the novel finds Nan and Florence kissing in the park, which epitomises their lesbian identity displayed in public, with Cyril, adopted by Florence after his mother died, in their midst. What they signify here is alternative kinship, in contrast to their biological family. This argument of the concept of home for gay and lesbian people has been widely discussed by a number of theorists. As Anne-Marie

---

<sup>83</sup> Laura Wade, *Tipping the Velvet* (London: Oberon Books, 2015), II., p. 123, italics in original.

Fortier writes, "'home' is ... re-membered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to make *home* and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way'.<sup>84</sup> Fortier's reading of the concept of 'home' extends its definition beyond the biological family, making way for the formation of a queer family. Duc Dau and Shale Preston support this, stating that '[k]inship ties have not always been held together by biology, marriage, or even romantic love. Indeed, they have sometimes been brought together by choice or by circumstance'.<sup>85</sup> Neo-Victorian fiction's depiction of queer family figures (consisting of gay and lesbian people as well as those who are often removed from the category of conventional family members such as orphans and fallen women) brings to the fore the diverse process of the construction of family.

In the course of creating a queer kinship relation, the figure of the child marks a clear difference between a heterosexual familial unit and a homosexual one. As Lee Edelman notes in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 'the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form'.<sup>86</sup> The presence of Cyril in Nan and Florence's relationship, however, serves to adjust lesbian women's 'fate that cuts the thread of futurity'.<sup>87</sup> It is Cyril who

---

<sup>84</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, 'Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment' in Sarah Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, eds., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 115-135 (p. 131), italics in original.

<sup>85</sup> Duc Dau and Shale Preston, 'Queer Victorian Families: An Introduction' in Duc Dau and Shale Preston, eds., *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-15 (p. 9).

<sup>86</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

invites Nan to see ‘across the years to the queer new world that would have Cyril in it, as a man’ (TV 392). This vision not only suggests, by the use of the word ‘queer’, Nan’s future with Florence as a lesbian couple but also a world in which homosexuality is more tolerated. The environment in which Cyril is located is likely to contribute to creating a utopian space for Nan and Florence: as Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben write, ‘[t]he child’s queer education, so the underlying implication, may secure a society in which heteronormativity will no longer be taken for granted and alternative kinship relations may, after all, have a future’.<sup>88</sup> The figure of the child in *Tipping the Velvet* urges Nan to envisage the future where she will be acknowledged as a lesbian by society, and at the same time invites the reader to see the present from Nan’s perspective.

In addition to Nan and Florence’s relationship with Cyril, there is Florence’s brother Ralph who is always considered to be a member of the group. His presence serves to blur the boundary between biological and alternative kinship, which in turn inspires Nan’s attempt to rebuild her relationship with her own family. Nan’s conversation with Florence about Ralph’s relaxed attitude towards his sister’s sexuality can inform Nan’s mended relationship with her own biological family: “‘he is remarkably forbearing on the matter of your — leanings. Don’t you think?’” [Florence] came and sat on the arm of [Nan’s] chair. “He’s had a long time to get used to them,” she said’ (TV 433). Ralph’s liberal stance is contrasted with Nan’s

---

<sup>88</sup> Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, ‘Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters: Cultural Capital and Reproduction’ in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds., *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 1-42 (p. 28).

sister Alice's repressive one, and it is suggested that the difference partly derives from the length of time they have to get accustomed to their kin's queer nature. Therefore, there is hope that Alice will one day accept Nan as she is. Of course, not everyone in Florence's family is forgiving towards her homosexuality. As she tells Nan:

Mother never was able to figure it out. Janet don't [*sic*] care – she says it leaves more chaps for her. But ... Frank never liked to see girls calling for me, in the old days: he slapped me over it once, I've never forgotten it. He wouldn't be at all tickled to see you here, now. (TV 433-434)

Florence's account shows that there are different reactions from each family member, rendering a family as diverse as society itself. Rather than treating the biological family as a monolithic entity, Waters reveals how it contains conflicting views.

In spite of Alice's hostility towards Nan's queerness, her family has always shown their unconditional love for her. What Nan realises in the end is that she can transform her Whitstable home which has been a symbol of repression into a place included in her utopian vision. Her parents' understanding towards her desire to follow Kitty to London shows how much they respect their daughter's decision: her father says,

'In short, Nance, even was [*sic*] you going to the very devil himself, your mother and I would rather see you fly from us in joy, than stay with us in sorrow – and grow, maybe, to hate us, for keeping you from your fate.' (TV 59)

His metaphorical use of the word 'devil' corresponds to my earlier argument about Nan's impression of the lights at the theatre which make the audience's faces devilish, i.e. queer. Also since Nan is born a lesbian, her 'fate' refers to her sexuality as well as her departure from her home. Nan's parents'

considerate position, which George Letissier calls ‘slightly anachronistic’, is one of the benefits Waters gains from setting this novel in Victorian Britain.<sup>89</sup> Waters invites the reader to associate the Astley family with families in the present, making it possible to critique both the past and the present.<sup>90</sup> As Louisa Yates argues, ‘[i]n a pleasing nod to the dual temporalities at play in the neo-Victorian novel, the foundations for queerer, more contemporary kinship arrangements are placed in the Victorian period whose assumed rigidity is so often positioned as underwriting our own’.<sup>91</sup> Through describing the Astleys as a more contemporary familial unit than would be conventionally the case in Victorian Britain, Nan’s family serves as part of a potentially utopian place which Nan can infuse with a firmly established lesbian identity. This does not mean that Nan will settle back in Whitstable: there is only an indication that she’ll ‘write, and tell them of Florence. And if they don’t care for it – well, at least they’ll know that [she is] safe, and happy’ (TV 468). The house in Bethnal Green with Florence, Cyril and Ralph

---

<sup>89</sup> George Letissier, ‘More Than Kith and Less Than Kin: Queering the Family in Sarah Waters’s Neo-Victorian Fictions’ in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds., *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 365-394 (p. 371).

<sup>90</sup> Victorian families are now thought to have been more diverse than usually expected. In *Deviance in Neo-Victorian Culture: Canon, Transgression, Innovation* (2018), Severio Tomaiuolo considers nonnormative Victorian families, stating that ‘Victorian society was characterised by a sense of fluidity and change that affected parental relationships on different levels; nevertheless, such dynamism was counterbalanced by the wish to offer a static representation of the family as immutable and unchanging’ (Severio Tomaiuolo, *Deviance in Neo-Victorian Culture: Canon, Transgression, Innovation* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018], p. 186).

<sup>91</sup> Louisa Yates, ‘The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Queer Families’ in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds., *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 93-117 (pp. 97-98).



has become the primary site of Nan's heterotopic space. What is notable is that Nan and Florence's union, with an adopted baby and Florence's understanding brother in the same group, acts to obscure the boundary between biological kinship and a family of choice. Also, the idea that Nan will contact her family again suggests that she extends her heterotopic space beyond the community of alternative kinship.

Davies's adaptation, on the other hand, adds a final scene where Nan returns to Whitstable to introduce Florence to her family. This can be used further to emphasise the possibility of transformation of home into a utopian model for Nan and Florence's relationship. The scene begins with Nan's voiceover, saying

I've come so far from the days when I was a girl, standing on this beach, wondering why I didn't care for Freddie like I should. And here I am again, though I shan't stay long, there's a part of me that always belongs here. In Whitstable, where they have the best oysters in the world.<sup>92</sup>

The fact that Nan will always have a sense of belonging in Whitstable resonates with Kath Weston's statement that 'gay families could not be understood apart from the families in which lesbians and gay men had grown up'.<sup>93</sup> Nan's return to Whitstable is indicative of her reconciliation with her family, and of their recognition of her lesbian nature. Nan's likely coming out to her family, as Bonnie Zimmerman argues, signifies 'the rite of passage

---

<sup>92</sup> *Tipping the Velvet*, Episode 3 (BBC, Sally Head Productions, Dir. Geoffrey Sax, Screenwriter Andrew Davies, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 3.

through which the lesbian establishes and affirms her self'.<sup>94</sup> The narrative in the novel, as Emily Jeremiah writes, can be Nan's coming out story for Florence, thus firmly establishing her homosexuality in the lesbian group.<sup>95</sup> The ending of Davies's adaptation, on the other hand, suggests that she wants her queerness acknowledged in the wider community. The last image in which Nan and Florence walk toward Nan's house, hand in hand, in a heart-shaped iris shot (fig. 3) promises their bright future as an openly lesbian couple. Nan's Whitstable home is thus transformed into a heterotopic space, where her and Florence's queer identity is accepted.



Figure 3. Nan and Florence at the end of Episode 3.

This image is accompanied by a song entitled 'It's Human Nature After All' whose lyrics are written by Davies. This song is used at the end of each episode: when Nan finds Kitty in bed with Walter (Episode 1), and when Diana and her friends find Nan in bed with Zena (Episode 2). The conscious

<sup>94</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman, 'Exiting from Patriarchy: The Lesbian Novel of Development' in Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover, NH and London, 1983), pp. 244-257 (p. 244).

<sup>95</sup> Jeremiah points out that Nan's question about whether Florence has ever been to Whitstable (430) corresponds to the first line of the novel, 'Have you ever tasted a Whitstable oyster?' (1). See Jeremiah, 'The "I" inside "her"', p. 140.

use of this song with an ironic line ('It's human nature after all') aptly summarises all the sexual deviancies, both heterosexual and homosexual. In the final episode, it can be argued that the song refers to the inevitability of Nan and Florence's union. Davies's adaptation, for all his attempts to erase the transgressive nature of lesbianism to satisfy a heterosexual male audience, yet extends Nan's coming out narrative beyond the lesbian community, adjusting the heteronormativity of the Victorian home.

Through coming out stories, Zimmerman writes, lesbians can achieve their freedom beyond patriarchal oppression. She concludes by proposing the concept of the 'lesbian nation', which 'exists primarily in imaginative space, but it is also being created through the telling of coming out stories, through the formation of alternative images of lesbians, through the search for lesbian herstory'.<sup>96</sup> The notion of a space for lesbians outside of the dominant heteronormative rule, as Annamarie Jagose argues, proves to be impossible: '[the coming out narrative's] claims to liberation through the repeated articulation of sexual truths do not mark an escape from patriarchal legislation but rather are thoroughly conterminous with that system of control whose major mechanism is the "transformation of sex into discourse"'.<sup>97</sup> Although any trial to go beyond the heterosexist codes paradoxically reinforces the system it attempts to contest, as Jagose proposes, it still remains viable to acknowledge one's lesbian identity through the coming out narrative. Nan's affirmation of her sexuality in public holds the potential that

---

<sup>96</sup> Zimmerman, 'Exiting from Patriarchy', p. 257.

<sup>97</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 9.

she and Florence will create a utopian space for themselves which can serve as a critique of heteronormativity from within. Also, Nan's anticipated delivery of her coming out narrative in Whitstable suggests that she enlarges the utopian territory in which she can confidently claim herself as a lesbian.

## 2.4. Conclusion

*Tipping the Velvet* explores private and public spaces, and the way they serve as an outlet for Nan's queer desire. If the music hall space is constructed as an extension of the bedroom, then the streets act as open-air theatrical spaces that serve to substitute for bedroom space. Nan's journey through various performative spaces ultimately leads her to a heterotopic space where biological kinship and alternative kinship are combined to create a queer family. The heterotopic space that is realised at the end of Nan's journey – a house in which she lives with Florence, Cyril, and Ralph (and possibly Ralph's wife) – securely establishes Nan as a lesbian. This space cannot be achieved by taking advantage of performance to covertly express one's lesbian nature as Kitty does, or by parading one's queerness only in an enclosed space as Diana does. The reconstruction of Nan's Whitstable home as another queer heterotopia, which is only hinted at in the novel but developed in Davies's adaptation, can further interrogate dominant heteronormative mores surrounding sexuality and kinship. In Waters's subsequent novels, however, she focuses on the repressive nature of domestic spaces, rigidly confining lesbian characters within walls. It is as if Waters sets

out to self-critique the established utopian vision in *Tipping the Velvet*.

Nevertheless, Nan's and Florence's heterotopic space remains a reference point for any representations of queer heterotopias that appear in Waters's subsequent novels and thus serves to explore the potentiality of lesbian characters' sexual liberation.

## Chapter Three

### Inside Spaces: Domestic and Institutional Confinement in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*

While *Tipping the Velvet* pays attention to the way public spaces can serve as a means of covertly signalling desire that is only allowed full expression in private spaces, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* shift the focus to the domestic space and its prohibitive effect on female characters' search for queer fulfillment. As Gaston Bachelard contends, 'the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace'.<sup>98</sup> This asserts a protective nature of inside spaces, in a psychological sense as well as a physical one. In *The Little Stranger*, the narrator Faraday explains his excitement as he starts to pay regular visits to Hundreds Hall as if he were in a dream: He would 'have the sense, every time, that ordinary life had fractionally tilted, and that [he] had slipped into some other, odder, rather rarer realm' (LS 75). According to Bachelard, this dreamlike sensation is essential for our imagination of spaces. He writes that '[t]hrough dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-operate and retain the treasures of former days'.<sup>99</sup> Faraday's dreamlike imagination of Hundreds Hall brings back his memory of the time twenty years earlier when he visited the country house with his mother who was employed there as a maid. And his brief

---

<sup>98</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

experience of being inside the house and of taking possession of a fragment of it left an impression he has never forgotten.

When it comes to women, however, the inside of the house has been regarded as a space that restricts their physical and psychological freedom. As Marjorie Garber notes, the house 'reflect[s] and produc[es] sexual law and morality, and guard[s] (or enshrin[es]) female virtue'.<sup>100</sup> This notion of a house underwrites patriarchal authority which categorises women as vulnerable and in need of male protection. Mark Wigley agrees with this idea when he writes that a house is 'an effect of suppression'.<sup>101</sup> Women's imagination plays an indispensable role for their construction of utopian space, and it is constantly suppressed by patriarchal influence which represents the foundation of the house. This solid presence of patriarchal authority, then, calls into question Bachelard's value of a house. Maud Lilly in *Fingersmith*, for example, is forced to stay in her uncle's ancestral house to fulfil her duty as his secretary. Her need to conform to what her uncle demands from her limits her scope of the world. Even when her uncle is absent, Maud is under constant surveillance and subject to abuse by the housekeeper Mrs Stiles. Her abusive presence deprives Maud of a place for shelter.

In addition to Mrs Stiles, Waters presents other female characters who work as substitutes for patriarchal authority. Both Margaret Prior in *Affinity*

---

<sup>100</sup> Marjorie Garber, 'The Body as House' in Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, eds., *The Domestic Space Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 123-127 (p. 125).

<sup>101</sup> Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 137.

and Frances Wray in *The Paying Guests* live in a house where there is no physical figure of male dominance, but they feel suffocated by the presence of their mothers. Margaret's mother constantly complains about her being a spinster, trying to make her yield to her patriarchal ideal. At Millbank Prison, Miss Haxby and the other matrons take over her mother's role to impose a masculine control over Margaret. Since a prison is an institution that serves to discipline those who stray from a path set for them (and this discipline is based on heteronormative codes of society), Margaret, with her lesbian nature and her past suicide attempt, cannot help but be conscious of the gaze of the matrons. Similarly, Frances feels the need to keep her late father's odd furniture because her mother protested at disposing of it, saying 'they have your father's heart in them' (PG 24). After her father's death, Frances is still governed by the memory of her father's patriarchal impact, which is maintained by her mother. In this way the house is no more comforting for women than prisons and lunatic asylums are in that they all attempt to force an already fixed identity on women. Prisons and psychiatric asylums are Foucault's prime examples of 'heterotopias of deviation' — places for those who are 'deviant in relation to the required mean or norm' — and in the course of the novels Waters's queer characters utilise these spaces to accommodate their deviancy.<sup>102</sup>

While trapped by their oppressive households, female characters imagine a utopian space as a way of fighting against confinement. Ironically, however, their utopian vision can have little effect on their entrapment

---

<sup>102</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 5.



because of the traces of nostalgia in it. Margaret's plan of elopement to Italy with Selina Dawes resembles her planned and longed-for research trip with her father, which did not happen due to his death. It is pertinent here to note that Helen, Margaret's former lover, was going to accompany them. It is hardly difficult to assume that Margaret simply attempts to replace Helen with Selina in her utopian imagination. Similarly, in *The Paying Guests*, Frances constructs her utopian vision based on what she could have done with her former lover. When she discusses her future with Lilian, she says that they 'could find a flat, like Christina and Stevie's', which was originally Frances and Christina's plan before Frances succumbed to her parents' pressure and gave her up (PG 270). By aiming for what she planned but could not achieve before, Frances allows herself to be imprisoned in the past. Female characters' attempt to adjust and reconstruct their past only reinforces their sense of entrapment.

In contrast to their initial utopian vision, female characters in Waters' fiction often end up in ambivalent places. As I will demonstrate, the ambivalence of queer heterotopic space created at the end is the very factor which gives them the strength to contest patriarchal power. Maud and Susan Trinder in *Fingersmith* are reunited at Briar, which used to be a place of confinement, and even though they can now express their feeling openly, Maud has to produce pornographic work as this is the only way she can make money. Frances and Lilian realise at the end of *The Paying Guests* that they love each other, but everything else is left unresolved: there is no prospect of living together, and what is worse, there is still the police investigation that

may be reinstated. This ambivalent nature of their newly established space is, I argue, what constitutes queer heterotopic space, which shares some characteristics with Gillian Rose's 'paradoxical space'. In *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993), Rose suggests that '[p]aradoxical space is ... a space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism'.<sup>103</sup> This space is characterised by its duality: it is 'both the centre and the margin, ... at once inside and outside'.<sup>104</sup> This space positions itself within the boundary of patriarchy, and at the same time refuses to be consumed completely in the system. Thus this paradox can question the demarcation of inside and outside that is governed by masculinist norms. The heterotopic space in *Affinity* is different in that that space is never actualised within the novel. Rather, I argue, it is a metatextual space that is brought into being by the way the narrative of *Affinity* is constructed. This space deals with both the Victorian past and the present, proposing reform of the heteronormative codes that displace homosexuality. This chapter shows how domestic and institutional spatial settings act to confine women in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*.

### **3.1. Metatextual Space, and the Potential for Utopia in *Affinity***

In *Affinity*, the theme of female characters' confinement is brought to the fore through its narrative that centres around the protagonist Margaret's visits to

---

<sup>103</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Millbank Prison. 'You see, we are quite a little city here!', Margaret Prior is told by Mr Shillitoe, the governor of Millbank Prison when she first sets foot there as a Lady Visitor (A 9). This prison owes its design to the concept of panopticism, which Michel Foucault analyses as a structure that enables constant surveillance through which an observer gains 'visible and unverifiable' power over those being observed.<sup>105</sup> While by saying 'quite a little city here' Mr Shillitoe refers to the prison's sheer size, the system of surveillance inside the prison can be extended further. As Mark Llewellyn argues, '[w]hat Waters asks us to recognise in *Affinity* is a transference of [the panoptic design of Millbank] to a disciplinary procedure outside the prison, within society itself'.<sup>106</sup> Indeed this prison functions as a miniature of the disciplinary system that permeates the society in which Margaret lives. Paying attention to the relationship between seeing/being seen which is at the heart of panopticism, Foucault argues that

its aim is to strengthen the social forces – to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply.<sup>107</sup>

These 'social forces' he describes here are firmly supported by, and connected to the patriarchal and heteronormative codes – 'to increase and multiply' connotes the process of biological reproduction. As Susie L. Steinbach writes, '[i]n the Victorian era, [middle-class women's] class status imposed on them

---

<sup>105</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 201.

<sup>106</sup> Mark Llewellyn, "'Queer? I should say it is criminal!': Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999)", *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2004), p. 206.

<sup>107</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 203-214 (p. 208).

the requirements and restraints of respectability'.<sup>108</sup> This imposition is justified by 'the centrality of marriage and motherhood to the normative gendered identity of adult women in late Victorian England'.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, just as incarcerated spirit medium Selina Dawes says, 'All the world may look at me, it is part of my punishment' (A 47), so Margaret, a spinster with a homosexual nature, is subject to a similar gaze everywhere she goes.

### 3.1.1. 'From one prison to another': Observation and Suffocation

Inside the household Mrs Prior acts as an enforcer of the male-centred system that attempts to force her spinster daughter to conform to societal requirements, thus substituting patriarchal authority (ironically, her deceased father was much more supportive of Margaret). Her constant complaint about Margaret not getting married derives from society's need to encourage reproduction, ultimately 'to increase and multiply'.<sup>110</sup> In order to keep Margaret on the 'right' path which is dictated by societal norms, to confine her to her role as a middle-class lady, her mother puts her under supervision. After her suicide attempt, her mother gives her chloral hydrate (later laudanum) and makes sure she takes it. Her mother 'watched and nodded' (A 30) as Margaret takes the medicine, imposing her authoritative position on

---

<sup>108</sup> Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 210.

<sup>109</sup> Rachel Carrol, *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 27.

<sup>110</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 201.

her daughter. Also, when Margaret is late for the family supper due to her business at Millbank, her mother insistently repeats where she should belong:

‘*Your place is here!* ... not at the prison. And it is time you showed that you know it. ... *Your place is here, your place is here. You shall be here, beside your mother ...* And your place – how often must I say it? – *your place is here, at your mother’s side.*’ (A 252 – 253, italics added)

Her command-like, obsessive repetition of ‘your place is here’ reminds us of how mindful she is of Margaret’s position within society as a lady. This state of oppressive control which is exerted on Margaret functions to turn her house into a prison-like place. Furthermore, Margaret’s former lover Helen plays the role of an administrator of heterosexual norms, just like Margaret’s mother. Now Margaret’s sister-in-law, she believes in the marriage system (or pretends to do so) despite the fact that she was on the same side as Margaret. In response Margaret says sarcastically, ‘Indeed, *Mrs Prior*, you sound like my own mother’ (A 59, italics in original). Her brusque manner is, however, compromised by the reality that Helen is seen as an appropriate woman, a lady because of the title of ‘Mrs’, associated with her marital status.

Because of the oppressive confinement by her mother, Millbank Prison first ironically becomes a place for Margaret to shift her position from being seen to being in the position of seeing. As Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble argue, ‘[i]n conducting her own research, Margaret takes on the role of ... the “vigilant citizen-observer”’.<sup>111</sup> This attempt to reverse her prisoner-like position, however, turns out to be a futile one and she is returned to a lesser, powerless place. At first the status of a Lady Visitor allows her to walk freely

---

<sup>111</sup> Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble, ‘The Haunted Geometries of Sarah Waters’ *Affinity*’, *Textual Practice*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2006), pp. 141-159 (p. 143).

through the prison and inspect prisoners in almost the same way as the matrons do without being closely tied to a particular place. However, despite her wish to be an observer, Margaret soon finds this desire compromised by the prisoners' curious gaze. For example, when she listens to Selina, she imagines 'taking morphia or chloral to her, and watching her drink' (A 112). This action in Margaret's imagination that resembles her mother's behaviour further explains her desire to be in a superior position to others. Right after this thought, however, she finds herself manipulated by Selina's gaze: Margaret realises that Selina 'still had her eyes upon the book at [Margaret's] pocket – that made her put her hand to it' (A 112). Margaret's action, guided by Selina's stare at her, complicates her wish to take control. She experiences similar obstacles with other female prisoners when she writes in her journal that 'just as I looked for the details of their hair and frocks and bonnets, so they looked for the particulars of mine' (A 24). Here, Margaret describes the gaze of the female prisoners she meets almost as being equal to hers. Her intention to observe others, thereby being able to assume the role of a warden, is constantly undermined by the gaze being directed back at her.

Unlike the female prisoners over whom Margaret attempts and fails to assume a controlling role, the matrons at Millbank assume authority by their stern gaze from the very start. Their look reminds Margaret of her mother's, rendering it difficult for her to distinguish the prison from her home. When she realises the matrons look at her, she thinks 'suddenly of Mother, scolding me when I was two-and-twenty, saying I must talk more when we went calling' (A 21). On another occasion '[She] said, "Miss Haxby" – but [she]

stumbled over the words, for [she] had almost said *Mother*' (A 267, italics in original). In addition to this close association of the matrons with her disciplinarian mother, Margaret writes that '[i]t had never occurred to [her] before that [she] might be the subject of "reports", or of any kind of exchange, between Miss Haxby and her staff' (A 213). This idea of being assessed by the matrons further emphasises Margaret's failure to subvert the relationship between observer and observed.

Her attempt to be an inspector in the central tower of the panoptic system, mixed with fear of being put in a cell, is also present in Margaret's observant behaviour in her room at night. After her first visit to Millbank, Margaret likens her own house to a prison: 'I can hear the maids upon the attic stairs, Cook slamming bolts – that sound will never be the same to me, I think, after to-day' (A 30). Here, Margaret imagines herself as a prisoner and her maid as a matron who walks around the prison before bedtime. The sound of 'slamming bolts' vivifies her imagination of her own imprisonment. On other occasions, however, she displays her vigilant attitude towards the sounds she hears in the house: 'Only I sit awake — only I, and Vigers, for I hear her stir above me, in Boyd's old room' (A 116). Margaret fantasises herself as being at the centre of the house, keeping close watch over others. What is problematic, however, is the fact that her information only comes from what she hears. Although she hears her maid Vigers move about her room, she is only left to wonder 'what ... she heard, that makes her so restless' (A 116). Therefore she is unable to arrive at the truth that Ruth Vigers is the conniving figure who takes control of her and Selina. As Margaret waits

for Selina to appear at her house, she again hears Ruth move about and thinks that 'she has gone back to [the bolts] now, as if to check their fastenings' (A 313). Later she finds out that she did not go and double-check the doors, but to open them in order to let Selina in. Servants can be invisible to their middle-class masters, and Ruth makes use of 'Margaret's, and our own, class blindness'<sup>112</sup> to accomplish her scheme. As Armitt and Gamble argue, '[b]elieving [herself] at the centre of power, what the Victorian middle class sees' and in this case, hears, 'is ... skewed'.<sup>113</sup> Whilst Margaret's struggle to look and eventually to control is problematic, her attempt to listen proves to be even more so.

In the film adaptation (2008), additional lines and the mise-en-scène work to reinforce Margaret's sense of entrapment in domestic and institutional spaces. As Margaret (Anna Madeley) says to Helen (Ferelith Young) jokingly, 'I've been visiting at Millbank, so from one prison to another'; this added line clearly reveals Margaret's frustration and sense of suffocation in her own home. Throughout the film the oppressive effect of the gaze in the novel is replaced by mise-en-scène and rhythm created out of a careful selection of shots and zoom in technique. In the dinner scene, when Margaret's fiancée Theophilus Finch (Vincent Leclerc, a character in the film who has no equivalent in the novel) talks to her, the audience is not allowed to look at them in full because of the candlesticks placed in front of the camera (Fig. 4). Furthermore, at another dinner scene, glass decanters are set

---

<sup>112</sup> Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism*, p. 188.

<sup>113</sup> Armitt and Gamble, 'The Haunted Geometries of Sarah Waters' *Affinity*', p. 158.



up in a closer position to the camera than those who sit at the table (Fig. 5). These obstacles work to make their vertical lines resemble bars of a prison cell, rendering the connection between Margaret's house and Millbank Prison stronger. In addition, these objects contribute to creating a visually cramped *mise-en-scène* as they fill in spaces, reinforcing the idea of suffocation. The film also utilises zoom in technique so as to limit the vision that is available to the audience. When the camera zooms in to show a close-up shot of a character, the background is flattened and the audience's attention is naturally turned to the facial expressions of the character. This technique is effectively used when Margaret first visits Selina's cell. In the beginning a long shot seeks to establish the relationship between Margaret and Selina (Zoë Tapper) as that of a Lady Visitor and a prisoner. While Margaret maintains her higher position by standing and looking down, Selina assumes her lower one by sitting down and looking up (Fig. 6). This power relation is soon overturned by the camera switching to (medium) close-up shots. When Margaret starts asking Selina about her past, she is presented in a frame of a medium close-up (Fig. 7). Then, as Selina rudely accuses Margaret of 'com[ing] to Millbank to look at women more wretched than yourself to see if that will comfort you', she defends herself as the camera quickly zooms in to show a close-up of her face (Fig. 8). By means of this sequence, which moves from a medium close-up to a close-up shot, Margaret is stripped of her desire to assume the superior position of an observer and ends up revealing her own insecurity. While the novel tries to exhibit Margaret's confinement through multiple gazes of characters who surround her, the film makes use of its

visual devices to present similar feelings of entrapment. Objects blocking the screen and sequences which move through different kinds of shots can skillfully showcase the oppressiveness of the environment in which Margaret is situated in the filmic medium.

In order to escape, if only temporarily, from the confinement imposed by her mother and the matrons at Millbank, Margaret writes her journal at home. Her journal creates a private space to which only she is supposed to have access and where she is able to express herself freely: she thinks 'if [she] may not talk of [her] visit, then [she] can certainly sit and write about it, in [her] own book' (A 29). Her room, in the same way, gives Margaret an almost private space.



Figure 4. Margaret and candlesticks.



Figure 5. Dinner guests and glass decanters.



Figure 6. Selina's cell (1).



Figure 7. Selina's cell (2).



Figure 8. Selina's cell (3).

### 3.1.2. 'A world that is made of love': Places to Escape and Utopian Visions

It is usually assumed, as Gill Valentine writes, that 'sexuality would appear to belong in the private space of the home'.<sup>114</sup> Since the living and drawing room

---

<sup>114</sup> Gill Valentine, '(Hetero)Sexing Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces' in Linda McDowell and Joanne P Sharp, eds., *Space,*

parts of the house are exposed to heterosexist codes, Margaret can only take refuge in her room to express her homosexuality. As she gradually realises her romantic feelings towards Selina, a reproduction of a Carlo Crivelli drawing becomes an indicator of how she desires to possess scholarly knowledge (which is 'extensive ... and in that sense masculine'<sup>115</sup>). In a portrait of the Venetian Renaissance painter Margaret finds some similarities with Selina, and her action of hanging up this portrait suggests her desire to gaze at and take possession of Selina. This masculine hankering for keeping Selina under her control is pushed further when she finds that the 'real' Selina evades the attempt to capture her characteristics. Selina's portrait at the British National Association of Spiritualists 'looks not at all like the Crivelli *Veritas*' (A 154), which encourages Margaret to want to possess more knowledge of Selina before she was incarcerated. The Crivelli picture in Margaret's room becomes her object of desire and means of furtively exploring her sexuality. For Margaret, her room and her journal constitute temporary sources of comfort. While Margaret's room with her journal in it is a place of short-lived pleasure, Selina's cell in Millbank also offers them a chance to form a romantic relationship. Margaret notes how Selina's claustrophobic cell helps them to be physically close to each other: 'the cell being so close, there was nowhere [Margaret] could step that [Selina] could

---

*Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings* (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 284-300 (p. 285).

<sup>115</sup> Tatiana Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 184.

not reach [her]' (A 271). The cell, if only briefly, provides them with a heterotopic space where they can express their homosexual feelings.<sup>116</sup>

These spaces, Margaret's room and Selina's cell, can appear as private and heterotopic only in Margaret's imagination. Her imagining of these spaces as utopian is undermined by the fact that they are constantly invaded by the presence of Ruth. As a maidservant Ruth is allowed access to Margaret's room, which gives her the opportunity to plant several items such as orange blossoms and Selina's hair within it. Also Ruth gains information about Margaret's private feelings by reading her journal: Margaret sees 'the smears of Vigers' gaze upon the pages, sticky and white' (A 348). The private space in Selina's cell, too, is under Vigers' gaze, even when the matrons are checking other cells. Through constant exchange of letters, which remains hidden until the last revelation, Ruth manages to invade the space which Margaret thinks only belongs to her and Selina.

Whereas Margaret's room and Selina's cell work as temporary and flawed places for escape, Italy exists for them as a permanent utopian space that is located outside of England. This location contains a multi-layered fantasy of Margaret which leads her to think that it is a place where her homosexuality would not cause a problem. A trip to Italy hovers in

---

<sup>116</sup> O'Callaghan aptly points out that Selina's cell also functions as her bedroom, identifying both bedrooms and prison cells as spaces that hold queer heterotopic potential: '[Bedrooms] register the carnality of lesbian desire and become spaces where sexually different practices are indulged and enjoyed. ... Selina's prison cell cum bedroom at Millbank Prison ... is another albeit atypical example of Waters's sexualised queer bedroom' (O'Callaghan, 'Sarah Waters's Victorian Domestic Spaces; Or, the Lesbians in the Attic', p. 129)

Margaret's mind from early on, for she was supposed to accompany her scholarly father there in the company of Helen, who was her lover then. One of the reasons of Margaret's longing for Italy is its collection of intellectual and cultural heritage. She explains to Selina her yearning for 'all the marvellous paintings and statues of Italy, in books, and prints' (A 212). As her scholarly father's assistant, Margaret would be allowed the masculine act of pursuing knowledge without being categorised as queer, namely someone who does not conform to heteronormative codes of society. This potential for intellectual pursuit in Italy is starkly contrasted with the scholarly constraints in England. At the British Museum, she finds scholars 'like flies ... in a paperweight of amber' (A 57). Their quiet attitude implies that they are trapped in the spinster-gender structure, as insects are trapped in resin. For Margaret scholarly research in Italy gives her the opportunity as an 'Englishwom[a]n [to] walk freely' (A 212), an opportunity to be freed from the constraints of class and gender in Victorian England.

Also, a trip with her lover suggests a possibility that they can express their romantic relationship more freely than in England. Just as the spinster scholars at the British Museum are depicted as quiet, almost lifeless figures, lesbians in literature are usually associated with spectrality. As Terry Castle argues in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993), '[t]he literary history of lesbianism ... is first of all a history of derealization ... Passion is excited, only to be obscured, disembodied,

decarnalized'.<sup>117</sup> Her argument resonates with the talk between Margaret and Selina about the spirit world: when Margaret says 'It would be a world without love', Selina counters by saying, 'It is a world that is *made* of love. Did you think there is only the kind of love your sister knows for her husband?' (A 210, italics in original) Here, Selina suggests that a same-sex relationship is made possible in the realm of the spirits. Margaret and Selina's plan of travelling to Italy is, then, filled with the hope that there is a place in the world in which they can live where female homosexuality exists without being spectralised. What Margaret desires, as Kym Brindle states, is 'a meeting of mind *and* body'.<sup>118</sup> When Margaret tells Selina that 'Italy had become ... a kind of emblem' (A 208), what she means is that Italy represents a place of freedom from the oppressive gaze to which they are subjected in England. By planning to elope to Italy with Selina, Margaret is trying to revisit her erstwhile desires (both intellectual and sexual), which have been left unfulfilled since her father's death. However, these utopian visions turn out to exist only in Margaret's imagination at the end of the novel.

---

<sup>117</sup> Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 34.

<sup>118</sup> Kym Brindle, 'Diary as Queer Malady: Deflecting the gaze in Sarah Waters's *Affinity*', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 2009/2010), pp. 65-85 (p. 75), italics added.

### 3.1.3. Hoping for a 'space in which our spirits touched': The End of Utopian Vision?

The ending of the novel finds Margaret's utopia exploited by the runaway couple Selina and Ruth, leaving Margaret in a world where she 'could not find a place ... to live and be content' (A 316). Therefore, for her Italy as a place which liberates her of confinement remains valid only in her imagination. It is important here to explain a literary source which feeds Margaret's imagination: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Margaret is inspired by this epic poem in which the protagonist Aurora Leigh travels to Florence with the working-class Marian Erle. Margaret's plan to run away to Italy partly resembles the plot of *Aurora Leigh* in terms of the use of names: Aurora is what Helen used to call Margaret (Selina too calls her by the same name), and Margaret forges Selina's passport under the fictitious name of Marian Erle. Just as Margaret borrows the idea from this literary piece, Selina and Ruth use Margaret's idea for their escape. As Mrs Prior warns Margaret ('You are not Mrs Browning ... as much as you would like to be' [A 252 – 253]), she has to recognise that the world of *Aurora Leigh* is one which will not be realised for her. In the film, however, Margaret's utopian space is visualised in dream form. Compared to the dark, sombre atmosphere throughout the film, this scene presents a rose-tinted vision where Margaret and Selina are united at last in Venice (Fig. 9). Also a similarly optimistic atmosphere is present when Margaret reminisces about her former romantic relationship with Helen (Fig. 10). In both scenes, Margaret is situated on the



right hand side, with Selina/Helen on the left, which stresses the similarity between Margaret's utopian imagination of going to Italy with Selina and the memory of her relationship with Helen. Given the result of Margaret and Helen's relationship, the parallel in the two shots is an ominous indication as to what is in store for Margaret and Selina. Either as a literary piece or as a dream, Margaret's unfulfilled utopian desire remains in the imaginative field.



Figure 9. Margaret and Selina.



Figure 10. Margaret and Helen.



Figure 11. Margaret and Selina's reunion under water (1).



Figure 12. Margaret's and Selina's reunion under water (2).

The film gives us another glimpse of what Margaret's utopian space might look like: Margaret reunites with Selina under water (Fig. 11 and 12). In this scene, the camera circles around them, followed by a succession of shots in which the position of Margaret and Selina is switched several times. This highlights their equality, encouraging the viewer to see Margaret as Selina's 'affinity'. In spite of this seemingly happy ending, it creates more problems than solutions in terms of Margaret's utopian vision. Since this reunion takes place under water, and in the imagination only at the very moment when Margaret presumably drowns herself, Margaret and Selina's happiness is always predicated on their immediate deaths. This contradiction can be explained as a result of male insecurity about female homosexuality. To cite Castle's argument, this insecurity is related to a male 'panic over love, female pleasure, and the possibility of women breaking free — together — from their male sexual overseers'.<sup>119</sup> To prevent lesbians from escaping patriarchal control, Margaret and Selina are forced to drown and to 'fade into the spectral'.<sup>120</sup> This is underpinned by the fact that both the director (Tim Fywell) and the screenwriter (Andrew Davies) are male. In their attempt to

<sup>119</sup> Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

turn *Affinity* into a romantic story with a happy ending, they created an ambivalent dénouement that betrays their fear of Margaret and Selina's permanent reunion.

Although what she wanted is a place outside of England for liberation from all the constraints she has been suffering, Margaret, if only briefly, imagines a heterotopic space — a space within the society in which she situates herself. This transient imagination of a place within English society implies her ultimate ideal for utopia, which is the construction of a society with systems which allow Margaret's sexuality to be recognised without being cast off as spectral. The place she imagines is a house of her sister's who recently got married:

I imagined how it would be if I took [Selina], not to Italy, but only to Marishes, to my sister's house; if I sat with her at supper, and shared her room, and kissed her[.] (A 315)

If this vision were at all possible, Margaret would be able to do the same in England as she hopes to do in Italy: live in an open union with Selina without becoming spirits. It can be argued that this is a future vision of Britain that Margaret imagines. As Frances Bartkowski explains of feminist utopian fictions, they 'tell us as much about what it is possible to wish as they do about what it is necessary to hope'.<sup>121</sup> It is possible to argue that Waters lets Margaret hope for a future that goes beyond the Victorian setting and can be extended to the present. *Affinity* shows both a queer utopian space and a queer heterotopic space, albeit in an unbalanced way: Italy ('what it is possible to hope' for Margaret) and reformed England ('what it is necessary to

---

<sup>121</sup> Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 4.

hope'). This dual approach to the past and the present is further strengthened by the way the narrative of *Affinity* is constructed.

*Affinity*'s narrative consists of a compilation of Margaret and Selina's journal entries that each cover different time periods. This accumulation of journal entries is what creates metatextual space which can reveal both of them as confined victims, which then suggests something of a heterotopic space where their union is made possible. Whilst we are encouraged to empathise with Margaret as her journal is filled with her emotions, we have little to go on to understand Selina. Armitt and Gamble point to this fact, stating that '[i]n existing purely as a curious mixture of personal anecdote and business-like records of séances, her entries reveal little about her, since they are guarded and allusive in the extreme'.<sup>122</sup> This passivity, according to Alex Owen, can be connected to her status as a renowned spirit-medium. In her book that discusses the relationship between the rise of spiritualism and gender, Owen writes that '[p]assivity became, in the spiritualist vocabulary, synonymous with power'.<sup>123</sup> While Selina offers herself up as an empty vessel through which spirits materialise themselves, Ruth assumes a dominating presence by carrying out actions as Selina's spirit guide Peter Quick. This dominant/submissive relationship between Selina and Ruth is most apparent in the last journal entry. It is clear that Ruth is the mastermind behind their spiritual business, when Selina asks 'what are you thinking of?' (A 352) and

---

<sup>122</sup> Armitt and Gamble, 'The Haunted Geometries of Sarah Waters's *Affinity*', p. 154.

<sup>123</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 10.

simply follows Ruth's orders. And Ruth's higher and domineering position is established firmly by her last line, 'Remember ... whose girl you are' (A 352). As Brindle argues, 'Selina's shadowy presence in her own text can be read as symptomatic of her powerless role as a pawn for others to play with at will'.<sup>124</sup> This assessment of Selina's passive character is also true in her relationship with Mrs Brink. The latter invites Selina to live with her, saying Selina is 'too rare a jewel to be kept in a poor box' (A 95). Here, Mrs Brink attempts to commodify Selina by comparing her to jewelry. At Sydenham Selina is asked to wear dresses that once belonged to Mrs Brink's mother, and to call on her spirit frequently. Hence, as Kontou explains, '[t]he "poor box" ... is substituted for confinement at Sydenham, Mrs Brink's aristocratic household'.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, Selina feels Mrs Brink's gaze as she at the same time is portrayed like a dog that is chained: 'I saw Mrs Brink looking at me, & my own neck with the necklace on it, but the setting of the necklace was not gold then but grey, it seemed made of lead' (A 172). If Margaret is victimised by the gaze of her mother and matrons, so is Selina by Ruth and Mrs Brink, which brings both closer to each other.

The connection between Margaret and Selina, in that they are both under constant surveillance and domination, comes to the fore when we focus on how their journal entries are arranged. This connection makes them 'affinities' in the metatextual space, modifying Margaret's assessment that

---

<sup>124</sup> Kym Brindle, *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Diaries and Letters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>125</sup> Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing*, p. 193.

there is 'never a space in which [her and Selina's] spirits touched' (A 348). As Louisa Hadley writes,

The narrative structure of *Affinity* provides an alternative model for the relationship between the present and the past ... [which] seeks to understand the present and the past in their own historical moments, while also drawing out the connections between them.<sup>126</sup>

Whilst *Affinity* encourages the reader to consider the implications of class-centred society in a late-Victorian England in which Margaret suffers from its disciplinary system of surveillance, it also points to the necessity of reform of English society today which is still not without awkwardness toward lesbians. Hence, this metatextual space shares some characteristics with Foucault's 'heterotopia of compensation', in that it creates a neatly arranged space for Margaret's and Selina's queer desire, while exposing the unfair circumstances to which they are subjected. The diaries might only be a space where the spirits of Margaret and Selina are united, but this metatextual space of *Affinity* presents an opportunity for the contemporary reader to see the present – the future for Margaret and Selina – in a new way. Furthermore, in the same way the future is shaped by how the reader perceives the present.

As Scott Bravmann suggests:

we continue to imagine new futures from the diverse perspectives of the present, and gay and lesbian historical imaginations are central to those musings. In this sense, queer fictions of the past are equally visions of the future, making provisional statements about conditional, undecided, perhaps alternative worlds which we might someday inhabit.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 112.

<sup>127</sup> Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.129.

This metatextual space created in *Affinity* allows the reader to see history through a contemporary filter while at the same time they are encouraged to see the present in a new light. Margaret's fantasy about spending time with her family with Selina as her lover is made possible in the present. This can in turn provoke the reader into envisaging how lesbian desire will be viewed in the future.

*Affinity* follows Margaret's various attempts and failures to control the gaze, which deems her unfit because of her homosexual desire. Subject to her mother's surveillance at home, and to the matrons' and the prisoners' gaze at Millbank Prison, she takes refuge in her journal, where she can assume a detached, journalistic, and 'objective' approach towards the prisoners she visits. However, this attempt also fails when her journal is filled with her subjective accounts of her longing for Selina. Although it is possible to see Margaret's writing as a positive sign of her rebellious action against heteronormative codes, the fact cannot be ignored that Ruth has accessed her journal so as to manipulate her feeling for Selina.<sup>128</sup> In this way Margaret is far from 'succeed[ing] in liberating desire and refusing to follow normativity' as Arias argues.<sup>129</sup> What is significant in *Affinity* is how Waters interweaves Margaret and Selina's journal entries so that she can draw attention to the metatextuality of the narrative. By juxtaposing Margaret's entries filled with hopes for the fulfilment of her lesbian desire for Selina with Selina's practical

---

<sup>128</sup> See Rosario Arias, 'Epilogue: Female Confinement in Sarah Waters's Neo-Victorian Fiction' in Frank Lauterbach and Jan Alber, eds., *Stones of Law, Bricks of Shame: Narrating Imprisonment in the Victorian Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp.256-277.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

record of séances, their similarity as victims of the gaze is revealed. This metatextual space which acts to connect Margaret and Selina as 'affinities' can be seen as heterotopic – this space stands between the Victorian past and the present, helping to articulate the issues lesbians face in both times and encouraging the reader's vision for the future. Waters invites the reader to search for traces of characters' (unaccomplished) utopian visions, which not only strengthen the reader's sense of connectedness to the past but also diversify the way the reader perceives the present. This in turn stimulates our imagination for the future. The narrative structure of *Affinity* serves to diversify the reader's viewpoints, so that we can take over Margaret's utopian imagination from where she left off, revising our perception of the past and modifying our hope for the future. While *Affinity* treats the gaze as a potent factor to confine Margaret both in her house and at Millbank Prison, everyday performance functions to entrap characters in the domestic sphere in *Fingersmith*. The house as a place for confinement resonates with narratives of sensation fiction writers such as Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and others.

### **3.2. Performance and Domestic Confinement in *Fingersmith***

In *The Woman in White* (1859), Collins presents an extreme example of how the household is presented as a space for forced performance when the patriarchal figure Frederick Fairlie talks of his servant: 'At present he is



simply a portfolio stand'.<sup>130</sup> Here, by forcing a servant to perform a role at his command, Frederick assumes dominance over those who live under the same roof. Performance is, therefore, seen as a tool for entrapment. Through narratives often organized around plots of deception and crimes, the reader catches a glimpse of the secrets of middle-class households. This way the authors expressed, as Lyn Pykett argues, the 'anxieties concern[ing] the nature and status of the family, [which was] generally considered to be the cornerstone of Victorian society'.<sup>131</sup> For this reason, sensation fiction tends to depict how characters suffer from and rebel against domestic confinement. For example, the protagonist in *Basil* (1852) observes some disturbance in Mrs Sherwin's attempt to play the role of a wife:

I could see one of those ghastly heart-tragedies laid upon before me, which are acted and re-acted, scene by scene, and year by year, in the secret theatre of home; tragedies which are ever shadowed by the slow falling of the black curtain that drops lower and lower every day[.]<sup>132</sup>

What is emphasised here is that domestic life is likened to a theatrical space by terms such as 'act', 'scene' and 'falling of the black curtain'. Here, one has to perform one's act repeatedly and endlessly. The domestic sphere as 'the secret theatre' suggests that one's every motion is conceptualised as a performance, thus not an expression of natural feeling.

This uncanny repetition of movements over time in the domestic setting is illustrative of Judith Butler's argument that gender 'is an identity tenuously

---

<sup>130</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (London: Everyman's Library, 1974), p. 138.

<sup>131</sup> Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 75-76.

constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*'.<sup>133</sup> Domesticity is seen as a performative act, as gender is considered in the same light. Appearances, then, can be misleading, as in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), where Braddon draws the reader's attention to the disconnectedness between what is presented and what is real in the first chapter, using 'as if' repetitively. In *Fingersmith*, most characters need to pretend to be what they are not in order for the scheme of the switching of identities to work out. Whilst in *Tipping the Velvet* for Nan performance is a means of searching for, then expressing her sexuality, to perform in *Fingersmith* means to hide. Sue, brought up amongst thieves in the Borough, plays a lady's maid whereas Maud, exposed to her uncle's pornographic literature, assumes the role of a naïve lady.

### 3.2.1. Dolls to Slide in Grooves: Confinement and Doubling of Performance

There is a thin line between theatre and reality in *Fingersmith* from early on. As she tells a story of going to a theatrical performance of *Oliver Twist* when she was little, Sue shows that she was incapable of distinguishing performance from reality. During the performance she was so frightened by Sykes that she thought the audience 'should all be killed', and when one woman 'put her arms to [her] and smiled, [she] screamed out louder' (FS 4). The difference between theatre and ordinary life, according to Richard

---

<sup>133</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988), pp. 519-531 (p. 519), italics in original.

Schechner's performance theory, 'depend[s] on the degree spectators and performers attend to ... pleasure ... or routine'.<sup>134</sup> Whilst what happens on stage is supposed to be purely for entertainment, Sue construes it as connected to her daily life because crime is a key part of her experience. Also, as she grows up she sees performance as one of the routines amongst those who live at Lant Steet. For example, she observes Mr Ibbs's act when people bring in stolen goods for him. He plays a kind-hearted person after being stern with them in order to make them believe that he is doing the best he can (FS 8-9). Here is where *Fingersmith's* link to *Oliver Twist* is explored further: as Linden Peach writes, 'Like Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, [*Fingersmith*] stress[es] the "othering" of fraud, deception, and petty crime but the masquerade and performance necessary to carry them out'.<sup>135</sup> Sue's perception of the world clearly consists of myriads of performers: 'it had had Bill Sykeses in it, and good Mr Ibbses' (FS 7). For Sue, the world is one big stage where performance is necessary for survival. This sense of masquerade is also present when Sue explains the hidden passages at the back of the house:

What there was, was a little covered passage and a small dark court. You might stand in that and think yourself baffled; there was a path, however, if you knew how to look (FS 10).

Lant Street life offers layers of masquerade and performance, and you need to know the tricks to see through them.

At Briar, the manor house where Maud lives with her uncle Mr Lilly, performance is also incorporated into daily routine, though to a different

---

<sup>134</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 152.

<sup>135</sup> Linden Peach, *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 52.

extent. Sue feels as if those who live there act according to a particular set of routines:

the days at Briar were run so very regular, you could not change it. The house bell woke us up in the mornings, and after that we all went moving on our ways from room to room, on our set courses, until the bell rang us back into our beds at night. There might as well have been grooves laid for us in the floorboards; we might have glided on sticks. There might have been a great handle set into the side of the house, and a great hand winding it (*FS* 108).

Sue's life at Briar is made mechanical by the sound of the bell. What makes her life more machine-like is her imagination of grooves in the floorboards and of sticks attached to her. This points to the imagery of puppet theatre: at Briar Mr Lilly is a puppet master who controls everything. However, even he is turned into as a mere puppet in the plot in which Sue, Maud and Gentleman are intertwined. In the wider context, Mr Lilly loses his status as the man behind the curtain, and when all the narrative twists are brought to the fore, Mrs Sucksby is revealed to be the one behind the curtain. This choreographed life threatens to deprive Sue of her feelings and passions.

Maud experiences the same sentiments, as when Sue likens her to 'a little clockwork doll' (*FS* 137). By setting guidelines for everyday behaviours, Briar is rendered a 'secret theatre of home', confining everyone to their positions. In this house controlled by Mr Lilly's patriarchal power, he intends to 'make a secretary of' Maud (*FS* 187). As Butler explains, 'gender performances in non-theatrical context are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions'.<sup>136</sup> Hence, when Maud refuses to conform to the rules he sets out for her, she is punished by him and the housekeeper

---

<sup>136</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 527.

Mrs Stiles. Mrs Stiles acts as a substitute figure for patriarchal authority, just as in *Affinity* Margaret's mother imposes heteronormative codes on her. Mrs Stiles's 'carr[ying] keys about her, on a chain at her waist' makes her look like a prison matron (FS 57). While the matrons at the asylum where Maud was raised were kind and motherly figures, Mrs Stiles represents the opposite. Also, the gloves Maud has to wear function as a prop to confine her to the role Mr Lilly dictates. As Sarah Gamble points out, gloves 'showcase rather than disguise the corrupting substances with which they come into contact, such as ink, blood and food', signalling her status as a blank sheet of paper whose fate is determined by her uncle.<sup>137</sup> As Maud recalls, moreover, any rewards she receives from Mr Lilly are what she wears such as 'new gloves, soft-soled slippers, a gown' (FS 196), thus further stressing her femininity and her status as his secretary. This situation changes when Gentleman is in the house, albeit only for a short while. His arrival at Briar causes some ripples on the surface, but soon the whole system 'went on, smooth as before, but with the scenes in a different order' (FS 108). Any attempt to get out of the set courses leads to 'mak[ing] new grooves ... to slide in' (FS 115). Once one is derailed, one is left to perish: Mr Lilly, after Maud damages all his books, eventually dies. This stifling environment is what encourages double role-playing.

To get the most out of their positions in which they are stuck for the foreseeable future, the servants at Briar rely on what Sue calls 'two-facedness'

---

<sup>137</sup> Sarah Gamble, "'I know everything. I know nothing": (Re)Reading *Fingersmith's* Deceptive Doubles' in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 42-55 (p. 48).

(FS 91). They try to obtain what they can while pretending to believe what they do is for the benefit for the house. Sue notices them, for instance, 'holding off the fat from Mr Lilly's gravy to sell on the quiet to the butcher's boy' or 'pulling the pearl buttons from Maud's chemises, and keeping them, and saying they were lost' (FS 91). This way they are creating two sets of performance: one as a faithful servant and the other as a cunning thief. Although she tells the reader that she hates their attitude, Sue cannot be exempt from blame. She also plays the role of a maid when she is scheming to trick Maud into an asylum so she can get her three thousand pounds. Maud, as it turns out, is the same as Sue in pretending to be a naïve girl when she is in on Gentleman's scheme from the start.

When Sue is incarcerated in an asylum, it is as if she experiences the discipline and punishment Maud suffered at Briar. Sue feels awful when she finds out that the asylum 'had once been an ordinary gentleman's house; that the walls had used to have pictures and looking-glasses on them, and the floors had used to have rugs' (FS 408). Here, even an asylum is revealed to have two faces, indicating that Briar and the psychiatric hospital are two sides of the same coin. As Kate Mitchell argues, '*Fingersmith* performs the sensation novel's inscription of the domestic sphere as a site of danger characterised by threatened and actual incarceration'.<sup>138</sup> Drawing on the generic conventions of sensation fiction, Waters presents the world of *Fingersmith* as if all the domestic spaces are potentially suggestive of confinement. Regardless of whether incarceration really happens or not, whether confinement is domestic

---

<sup>138</sup> Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 134.

or institutional, inside spaces are presented as inescapable. Sue's eventual escape from the madhouse, however, indicates that she is able to move out of the grooves on her will. Maud notices this, though she is not conscious of what this means for her, when Sue walks 'over the carpet – heedless of the design, the lines and diamonds and squares, beneath her feet' (*FS* 247). The lines and shapes of the carpet are evocative of the grooves, and Sue's movement shows her potential for being the driving force that gives reality to her and Maud's utopian space.

### **3.2.2. Not a Maid, but a Companion: Sue's and Maud's Utopian Imagination**

Although Sue and Maud have to deceive each other to obtain what they wish for – money in Sue's case and freedom away from Briar in Maud's – their homosexual desire toward one another fractures their performance. As they come to verbalise feelings other than the lines provided by Gentleman, their lesbian identities supersede their faked ones. This process begins when they start to improvise their lines in which their willingness to move the plot forward is interwoven with their reluctance to trick each other. Gradually, then, their improvised lines give in to more honest, spontaneous expression of sentiments. When Maud tells Sue her plan once she gets to London, she includes Sue in it: as Sue recalls, 'she said she wouldn't call me her maid then, but her companion. She said she would get me a maid of my own' (*FS* 127). Although this is indicative of Maud's desire to fool Sue further into the plot, Maud at the same time expresses her affection toward Sue in the form of a

prospect for their future companionship. Friendship between women in Victorian Britain, as Sharon Marcus writes, 'was defined in terms of affection and pleasure, not instrumental utility'.<sup>139</sup> Although female friendship was often seen as an effective way for women to learn how to form a similar relationship with their husbands, Marcus emphasises that friendship between women also promoted their emotional maturity for their own benefit.<sup>140</sup> Inclusion of Sue in Maud's (if only fictitious) future vision, then, indicates the fact that she has grown used to the life she shares with Sue and begins to develop caring feelings for her. Maud's affection is answered by Sue when she feels that they are '[q]uite like sisters' (FS 89) after they start sharing a bed. Also, when she rubs at Maud's pointed tooth with a silver thimble, she uses the trick she learned at Lant Street from seeing 'Mrs Sucksby do it many times, with infants' (FS 97). Here, Sue tries to assume Mrs Sucksby's motherly position, placing Maud in that of an infant. Having difficulty explaining her affection for Maud, which can stem from either her naïvety or her reluctance to spoil the plot, Sue mixes up various aspects of her life at Lant Street to make sense of her feeling: Dainty's quasi-sisterly presence and Mrs Sucksby as a mother figure. As Georges Letissier observes, 'Waters calls up situations in which characters improvise kinship relationships to make up for their inability to conform to the traditional model offered by socially stable heterosexual couples'.<sup>141</sup> Maud and Sue's improvised lines, in spite of the fact

---

<sup>139</sup> Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 26.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-32.

<sup>141</sup> Letissier, 'More Than Kith and Less Than Kin', p. 379.



that they use them to keep the plot afloat, also reveal their affectionate feelings toward one another.

Their emotional attachment to each other, in the form of companionship on Maud's side and kinship on Sue's, soon leads to their lesbian desires, which is constantly overshadowed by the impossibility to be openly expressed. The scene with her sharp tooth and a thimble, while it promotes Sue's familial attachment to Maud, can be seen as the starting point of Maud's lesbian desire. She is reminded of her knowledge from the books to explain her feeling when she thinks: 'May a lady taste the fingers of her maid? She may, in [her] uncle's books' (FS 256). By having Maud compare her own experience with what happens in pornographic literature, Waters challenges the view that 'love between women has been primarily a sexual phenomenon only in male fantasy literature'.<sup>142</sup> Although she does not realise her own lesbian passion until much later, Sue also evinces a similar desire to Maud's in explaining Lady Alice's character, her former employer whose fictitious identity is made up by Gentleman. She tells Maud that Lady Alice knew 'grand clothes meant nothing, since it was the person inside the clothes that ought to be judged' (FS 68). While this hints at the narrative in which Sue is mistaken for Maud because of the clothes, it can also suggest Sue's hope that she will not be judged for her homosexual desire. For when she realises that she loves Maud, she instantly thinks of what John Vroom, a boy in the Borough who always teases her, would think: she 'thought of John, more than

---

<sup>142</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 17.

any one of them. [She] thought of his look, his laugh' (FS 136). His reaction is symbolic of how her lesbian desire will be seen by a society organised by heteronormative codes. Through her descriptions of Lady Alice, Sue expresses her yet unconscious longing that her queer desire is appreciated by Maud. As Barbara Schaff points out, '[t]he shift from the consolidating model of sisterly love to the potent and potentially socially destructive dynamics of female homosexual desire is a major aspect of Waters's revisionist approach to Victorian femininity'.<sup>143</sup> By depicting the transition of Maud and Sue's feelings from friendship to lesbian desire, Waters contests the idea held by the Victorians that relationships between women are asexual.<sup>144</sup> Whilst Sue and Maud are forced to act by the rules given to them as I argued earlier, their hidden desires slip through their performance in the form of spontaneous expressions of feeling.

Despite their reluctance to spoil Gentleman's plot for their own sake, Sue and Maud's romantic feeling toward each other materialises the night before Maud's and Gentleman's wedding. To have intercourse at Briar, the site of Mr Lilly's patriarchal power, signifies their defiance of the gender norms that have been imposed on them. This imposition of patriarchal authority is often identified with permeating darkness, which is a compelling characteristic associated with the estate. Sue describes the hall of Briar as 'all dark and dim and shabby, as it was everywhere in that house' (FS 74). Furthermore, 'the walls in that house were all of dark oak panelling, very gloomy on the eye and very baffling, for the doors were set so pat in their

---

<sup>143</sup> Schaff, 'On Not Being Mrs Browning', p. 68.

<sup>144</sup> Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 154.

frames, you could not spot them' (FS 71-72). Briar is a house filled with darkness, and the fact that you cannot find a door because it is black and perfectly shut stresses a sense of entrapment. During their sexual union, however, darkness becomes a liminal space in which Sue and Maud's lesbian desire takes shape. When Sue kisses Maud, she says that 'it was like kissing darkness. As if the darkness had life, had a shape, had taste, was warm and glib' (FS 141). Then she tells the reader that touching Maud's body 'was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness – as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand' (FS 142). These expressions mark the reversal of Terry Castle's argument that lesbian desire in literature tends to be de-materialised.<sup>145</sup> Here, Sue materialises her desire towards Maud out of the darkness, just as Selina calls on spirits in a darkened room in *Affinity*. When we reach Maud's account of the same event, we can see that she is feeling the same way: she feels '[Sue's] fingers ... gather me, out of the darkness, out of my natural shape' (FS 282). Until this moment she has associated herself with darkness as in ink, for her identity is based on what Mr Lilly thinks of her. Thus, Sue's fingers gathering Maud out of the darkness are indicative of Sue releasing Maud of her entrapment, if only psychologically. In this way, Maud's bedroom at Briar is transformed to a queer heterotopic space.

While in the novel Sue and Maud's desire is expressed through their interaction with darkness, the televisual adaptation (2005) relies on its soundtrack. Throughout the episodes, they are accompanied by ominous,

---

<sup>145</sup> Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 34.

suspenseful score mainly of brass instruments. During the intercourse scene, and when Sue and Maud's performances slip away to reveal what they really feel, the score is replaced by that of piano, violin and flute, thus contributing to the scenes' soft ambience. The same score is used first in the scene when Sue smoothens Maud's pointed tooth. The adaptation clearly defines this scene as the inception of Sue and Maud's mutual homosexual desire by introducing the romantic tune. Moreover, we hear the same romantic music afterwards as both Maud and Sue remember the time at Briar. The repeated use of this score, as Annabel J. Cohen analyses, is dependent on 'the assumption that the audience will recall the theme presented some time earlier and will pick up on the slight changes in the repeated theme that illustrate character development'.<sup>146</sup> This use of soundtrack encourages the viewer to think of Sue and Maud's relationship as romantic from the early stage, while the novel, in its slower transition from friendship to lesbian desire, calls into question the Victorian concept of women as indifferent toward sexual matters.

Sue and Maud's sexual union before the night of the wedding makes a great impact on Maud, leading her to imagine a utopian space where she can stay with Sue as lesbians, hence without being disturbed by Mr Lilly or Gentleman. In this way, the bedroom represents Sue's and Maud's 'heterotopia of illusion', which allows them to see their respective queer imagination as a real possibility. She fantasises what they can do after they

---

<sup>146</sup> Annabel J. Cohen, 'Film Music from the Perspective of Cognitive Science' in David Neumeyer, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 96-130 (p 108).

escape Briar the next morning: 'We can make our own secret way to London, find money for ourselves...' (FS 284). Although she imagined the freedom she would have in London before, this time London appears in her mind as a clear destination in which their lesbian love is made possible. As she expresses her feeling as if she is 'filled, as with colour or light, with a sense of the life [they] will have, together' (FS 284), she is not thinking of them merely as companions. However, Maud pretends to dismiss their sexual experience as a dream, and Sue denies it altogether by saying it must have been Gentleman who appeared in her dream. Therefore, in spite of the fact that they actually arrived at a space where they could enact their homosexual desire, which is therefore the closest they can possibly be to their utopian space, they turn away from it for the sake of Gentleman's plot. Maud's desperation on her wedding night, then, is filled with her desire to staying with Sue, even if that means going back to Briar. As Sue recalls the event, Maud says to her: 'You said I dreamed you. I'm not dreaming now. I wish I were! ... I wish I were dreaming, and might wake up and be at Briar again!' (FS 161). After they have abandoned their heterotopic space and their utopian imagination, London loses its attractions for Maud. She tells the reader, 'London, I think. The word means nothing to me now' (FS 296). London becomes another prison-like place for Maud, for after she arrives at Lant Street, she is constantly watched by Gentleman and Mrs Sucksby.

### 3.2.3. Briar Revisited: Ambivalence and Queer Heterotopia

Although they initially dream of travelling to London together as female companions, Sue and Maud are reunited at Briar at the end of the novel. It is notable that this reunion takes place in the library. As Sue describes the room, it is 'a dark one, like all the other rooms there. Its walls were panelled all over in an old black wood, and its floor ... was also black (FS 65). Also curtained to protect books from fading, the library is most likely the darkest room at Briar. When Sue enters the library, however, she 'saw [Maud] clearly, because of the light' (FS 541). Given that, as Mitchell argues, 'lesbian desire ... [has] exist[ed] only as *shadows* at the margins of Victorian literature and history', this ending with light coming into the library is suggestive of the bright future awaiting Sue and Maud.<sup>147</sup> The library as Sue's and Maud's ultimate queer heterotopic space is pertinent, for Foucault sees libraries as 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time ... in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit'.<sup>148</sup> Temporal discontinuity is one of the principles for heterotopia, as it symbolises the co-existence of different spaces that are linked to specific time periods in the past. The transformation of the library into a place that is filled with light and promises optimism for Sue and Maud is related to the question Hilde Heynen asks about 'whether the heterotopic space-time constellations that [Foucault] describes ... have the same meaning

---

<sup>147</sup> Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, p. 117, italics added.

<sup>148</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 7.

for all actors involved'.<sup>149</sup> Until Maud escapes Briar with Sue, the library represents a heterotopic space for Mr Lilly, since it contains his collection of pornographic literature from various periods. As Heynen argues, heterotopias 'might provide places for transgression and excess, but it seems very well possible that what is transgression for one actor means oppression and domination for another'.<sup>150</sup> At the end of *Fingersmith*, Maud and Sue reconstruct the library for *their* heterotopic space.

However, the future suggested here, ironically, posits several problems. The fact that Maud earns her living by producing pornography which is circulated to the male-centred literary market and readership does not necessarily mean that she managed to free herself from her uncle's patriarchal influence. Although Maud manages to mock the literary market of pornography by writing pornography to satisfy Sue (which is intended by Maud when she says to Sue, 'it is filled with all the words for how I want you' [FS 547]) while appearing to satisfy male readership, it hardly distinguishes itself from the doubling of the servants' performance at Briar. Also, there is the possibility that Maud and Sue will not be freed from their past, just like in *Tipping the Velvet* Nan's past career as a male impersonator continues to haunt her as she moves on to become a rent boy: as Sue explores Briar, she 'made no sound, and might have glided' (FS 540), reminding the reader of how she as a maid used to glide in grooves mechanically. Furthermore, as Maud admits, 'I am still what [Mr Lilly] made me. I shall always be that' (FS 546). Rather than offering an easy way out, however, Waters draws the reader's attention to the

---

<sup>149</sup> Heynen, 'Heterotopia Unfolded?', pp. 321-322.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 321-322.

possibilities of the future that lie beyond the ending of the novel. As Letissier notes, 'the queer family reconfigures the traditional family by positing that domesticity is not a "given", but instead produced through discourse or repetitive performance'.<sup>151</sup> It can be argued that the novel suggests that Sue and Maud are going to form a queer family. It is then significant that Maud begins to teach Sue how to read using what she has written. This way Maud encourages Sue to be engaged in 'discourse or repetitive performance' as we all are in the course of learning. Thus, the library at Briar exists as a starting point for further calling into question heteronormative codes. The library becomes Sue's and Maud's queer heterotopic space, which is similar to what Gillian Rose calls a 'paradoxical space', the place which assumes both the inside and outside of patriarchy and makes it possible to critique the male-dominated literary market.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, as Mark Llewellyn suggests, it is possible to speculate that 'the secret women pornographers of the 1860s and 1870s [in which *Fingersmith* is set] made it possible for women's lesbian relationships to be positive acts' as is depicted in *Tipping the Velvet*.<sup>153</sup> In this light, the combined accounts of Sue and Maud's which constitute the narrative of *Fingersmith* can be seen as their first collaborative literary production. Although '[t]he room got darker, the rain still beat the glass' (FS 548) at the end of the novel, implying further hardships that Sue and Maud

---

<sup>151</sup> Letissier, 'More Than Kith and Less Than Kin', p. 366.

<sup>152</sup> Rose, *Feminism & Geography*, p. 159.

<sup>153</sup> Mark Llewellyn, 'Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre' in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, eds., *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 195-210 (pp.205-206).



will encounter, Waters suggests a possibility that they will transform Maud's uncle's patriarchal library into their ideal heterotopic space.

Using conventional tropes from sensation fiction, Waters blurs the boundary between theatre and the domestic sphere. Brought up in the Borough where crime is a part of everyday life, Sue mixes the domestic with the theatrical quite naturally. Since performance is inseparable from criminality, Sue is naturally immersed in the idea that performance is part of reality. Maud, on the other hand, is trained to perform the role of Mr Lilly's secretary. In the world constructed as if everyone is a mechanical doll that moves in grooves, thus unable to escape its multi-layered structure of power relations, Sue and Maud stick to the movement provided by Gentleman (but ultimately by Mrs Sucksby) in order to execute the plot. As the narrative goes on, however, their scripted lines change to improvised ones, finally to their impromptu expression which reveals their homosexual desire. Their sexual union in Maud's room at Briar holds significant meaning, since through this heterotopic space their act represents a rebellion under the roof of Mr Lilly's patriarchal authority. As they feel each other's body in the darkness, Waters attempts to shed light on lesbian desire without spectralisation, subverting the view that constructs lesbians as peripheral. The ending with their reunion in the library at Briar, too, works to raise the issue of where lesbians should be located in the society both in day-to-day life and in literature. Though not without problems, the library is their new queer heterotopia and has the potential to become the place where Sue and Maud's utopian imagination may be realised.

### 3.3. Conclusion

Both *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* draw on themes of female confinement in order to demonstrate the dominance of patriarchy in Victorian society. Patriarchal authority permeates social life and overtly controls the way characters think and behave: in the form of the gaze in *Affinity* and of everyday performance in *Fingersmith*. While it is possible that one can escape institutional confinement (both Selina and Sue escape their entrapment with the help of others), domestic confinement is defined in both narratives as inescapable. Margaret fails to elope to Italy with Selina, and her dread of having to remain at home is what drives her to suicide. *Affinity* ends with Margaret's death and sheds light on another structure of dominance between Ruth and Selina, thus emphasising the impossibility of liberating oneself from regimes of confinement. *Fingersmith* ends with a more positive, if ambivalent, note. Maud's decision to go back to Briar similarly points to the impossibility of escaping the domestic sphere. In spite of this ending that does not mean straightforwardly happy scenarios, what Waters offers here is how to challenge the dominant norm from within. In order to ultimately discredit heteronormative codes, one needs to be in a liminal space. Situating themselves where friction between ideal and reality constantly takes place, Sue and Maud can continue to challenge the dominant structure of heterosexist hierarchy. In spite of the fact that the locations where characters end up in these narratives are hardly ideal, the heterotopic nature of these

spaces means that their attempt to transform patriarchal and heteronormative forces has just begun.

## Chapter Four

### Moving Away from Utopia: Negotiation of Queer Space and Identity in *The Paying Guests* and *The Night Watch*

Waters's move away from Victorian England after *Fingersmith* marks a significant change in terms of the characters' queer utopian and heterotopic space. Each of her neo-Victorian trilogy ends with a hopeful future; in *Tipping the Velvet* Nan's home is filled with possibility to be transformed into a lesbian-alternative space for her and Florence, and in *Fingersmith* the reunion in a library, though abounding with patriarchal, heteronormative authority, does hold potential for Sue's and Maud's lesbian sexuality. Even in *Affinity*, despite the bleak ending in which Margaret and Selina are physically separated, the narrative structure binds their diaries together in a way that is suggestive of their metaphysical union. By contrast, the two World Wars in Waters's subsequent novels make it difficult for the characters to imagine a utopian space for themselves. This is either because of their disillusionment with the future Britain seemed to have in store in the 1920s, or because of the horror of the blitz in the 1940s. As one character says in *The Night Watch*, the possibility of being bombed at any moment inhibits the possibility to imagine any future, let alone a queer one. Even after the war is over, the sense of paralysis persisted. As Gill Plain writes, 'while the hostilities ceased in 1945, the impact of the war continued to be felt – psychologically, emotionally and economically – in the state of the nation, the grief of the inhabitants and the

pain of readjustment'.<sup>154</sup> This sense of hopelessness is furthered by the narrative structure of *The Night Watch*: the reverse chronology undercuts the characters' hope for a better future. *The Paying Guests*, though it is narrated in chronological order, has a big plot twist in the middle, which drastically changes the characters' lives as the First World War did if on a different scale. Nevertheless, they are still willing to negotiate a queer space in society. Their negotiation takes many forms – a normalisation of lesbian desire through household duties and a subversion of the conventions of literary genres in *The Paying Guests*, and the relinquishment of material objects which constantly remind the characters of their painful, traumatic past in *The Night Watch*. While in Waters's neo-Victorian trilogies heterotopic spaces realised at the end are filled with possibilities to call into question heteronormative values, the ephemeral nature of heterotopias is much more highlighted in her neo-twenties and -forties novels. By negotiating a temporary space for their homosexual or non-normative desire, the characters can affirm or sustain their queer identity.

This chapter is concerned with Waters's wartime fictions, *The Paying Guests* and *The Night Watch*. The first section explores how Waters subverts popular literary genres in inter-war Britain to create space for lesbian characters in *The Paying Guests*. The house, which serves as a necessary trope for middlebrow fiction, is employed to standardise Frances's homosexual feelings towards Lilian. While illustrating how the murder of Leonard destroys Frances's and Lilian's utopian fantasy of living together as a lesbian

---

<sup>154</sup> Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 1.

couple, Waters plays with the genre conventions of detective fiction. This turns Frances into a queer detective who attempts to decipher Lilian's ambiguous sexuality. In *The Night Watch*, in contrast, Waters does not so much subvert popular literary genres of the 1940s as apply a postmodern framework to the experience of the Second World War. As Linda Hutcheon argues, what postmodern literature consistently reveals is the 'provisional, indeterminate nature of historical knowledge', pointing to the fact that 'both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past'.<sup>155</sup> With the manipulated narrative structure, which is also used in other contemporary novels such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* (2013), Waters attempts to 'reinstate dialectics and contradictions, reintroduce little known or suppressed aspects of war'.<sup>156</sup> In Waters's case, attention is paid to queer and non-normative characters, and how their utopian longing is made impossible by the Second World War. Their hope for a future is undercut by Waters's use of darkness and material objects. These represent futile promises of utopian space, and serve to entrap the characters in their past. In her wartime fictions, Waters shows that the characters' desire for utopian space is compromised due to changes in British society brought about by the two world wars.

---

<sup>155</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 88.

<sup>156</sup> Petra Rau, 'The War in Contemporary Fiction', in Marina Mackay, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 207-219 (p. 209).

#### 4.1. Playing with Genres: Normalisation of Queer Desire and Dual Narrative Structures in *The Paying Guests*

One of the prominent changes in society after the First World War is the blurring of class boundaries, and this point is made explicit in Waters's most recent novel, *The Paying Guests* (2014). The narrative begins when the upper-middle-class Wrays welcome the lower-middle-class Barbers as their lodgers. Additionally, in *The Paying Guests*, the setting is indebted to middlebrow fiction, which emerged in the late 1920s. The middlebrow, as Rosa Maria Bracco explains, situated itself 'between lowbrow fiction, [which is] designed merely to entertain, and highbrow works, [which are] increasingly alienated from a common reference of values'.<sup>157</sup> This hybrid form of fiction, according to Nicola Humble, was largely consumed by women, making it 'a feminine literature' as well as a 'literature of the middle classes'.<sup>158</sup> Thus, middlebrow fiction often reflects 'feminine aspects of life, a fascination with domestic space, a concern with courtship and marriage, a preoccupation with aspects of class and manners'.<sup>159</sup> This is reflected in Frances Wray, an upper-middle-class spinster who has to maintain her servantless household. Although at first she is not enthusiastic about her domestic tasks, once she and her mother bring in Mr and Mrs Barber, Frances's household vocabulary starts to function as an outlet for her lesbian desire. Through combining middlebrow

---

<sup>157</sup> Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), p. 12.

<sup>158</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

fiction's genre conventions with the theme of lesbian sexuality, Waters plays with how domesticity in middle-class homes can become a heterotopic space for transgressive desires.

In conjunction with its murder and police investigation plot, Waters combines middlebrow with detective fiction. After the First World War, detective fiction became one of the most popular literary genres. As Melissa Schaub states, '[m]ystery novels by women ... took on an interesting and repeated set of similarities in form and content combining a light ironic tone with a consistently ambiguous feminism'.<sup>160</sup> Although often seen as conservative, detective fiction in the 1920s offered insight into the changing role of women. Waters makes effective and ironic use of the literary categories which emerged around the time in which her work is set, with the aim to recreate and reinterpret the issue of lesbian sexuality in the 1920s.

Other than playing with literary genres, Waters's novel queers aspects of the sensational Thompson/Bywaters case for its plot.<sup>161</sup> In 1922, Percy Thompson, the husband of Edith Thompson, was stabbed to death by Edith's young lower-middle-class lover Frederick Bywaters. Although Frederick took full responsibility for the murder, the police discovered an exchange of letters between Edith and Frederick, in some of which Edith talked about poisoning Percy, and both of them were subsequently tried and hanged in 1923. Despite the fact that they all belonged to the lower middle class, Edith's ambivalent

---

<sup>160</sup>Melissa Schaub, *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>161</sup>The Thompson/Bywaters case has inspired a number of fictions and non-fictions. One of the examples is Fryniwyd Tennyson Jesse's *Pin to See the Peepshow* (1934).



class status – financially successful as a manageress and a book-keeper at a millinery firm – boosted ‘an inter-war (upper-middle-class) anxiety about young lower-middle-class women adopting new products and lifestyles’.<sup>162</sup> This class anxiety of the inter-war years is reflected in Waters’s narrative, which articulates the conflict between the declining upper-middle-class Wrays (who used to live on inherited property) and the rising lower-middle-class Barbers (where the man is the breadwinner). Moreover, in her article in *The Guardian*, Waters writes that when she came across the Thompson/Bywaters case she ‘found [herself] wondering how differently a case like hers would have played out if its dynamics had not been so classically heterosexual’.<sup>163</sup> As she explains, the love triangle is given a homosexual twist in *The Paying Guests*. The change in the characters’ sexuality transforms the nature of the murder investigation that follows, and serves to explore heteronormativity in Britain in the 1920s. In the following sections, I am going to show how Waters makes use of the literary genres that were popular in inter-war Britain – middlebrow fiction and detective fiction – so as to call into question the patriarchal values which these genres were expected to support. The tropes of middlebrow fiction allow Frances’s lesbian desire to be standardised within the heteronormative household, while those of detective fiction distract the attention of the police investigation away from Frances’s and Lilian’s lesbian relationship.

---

<sup>162</sup> Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) p. 114.

<sup>163</sup> Sarah Waters, “I wanted *The Paying Guests* to be sexy without being a romp”, *The Guardian* (6 June 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/06/sarah-waters-writing-the-paying-guests> (accessed 23 Sep 2015, para. 2 of 6).

#### **4.1.1. Gradual yet Steady Pleasure: Frances's Household Chores and Middlebrow Fiction**

Of the themes which were often taken up in middlebrow fiction, domestic space assumes particular importance, for '[i]n many [feminine middlebrow] novels the home is foregrounded, becoming the central concern, an emblem of difficult and disturbing change'.<sup>164</sup> The necessity for the formerly genteel, upper-middle-class Wrays to bring in lodgers so as to address their economically declining lifestyle is what propels Waters's narrative forward. The term 'the paying guests', which Frances Wray and her mother prefer to use to describe the lodgers, can barely hide their class uneasiness as they have to share the house with the lower-middle-class couple Leonard and Lilian Barber. Frances's house becomes a microcosm of British society after the war where a blurring of class boundaries took place.

The loss and then reinsertion of a male presence is another change in Frances's house. In the 1920s, the existing values of society and family were called into question by the First World War. The Wrays' household is typical of British society, in that all the young male members of the family were killed in the war. Furthermore, Frances lost her father and his misguided investment plunged her and her mother into economic hardship. She resents her father for sending all her brothers to the front only to see them killed. The way middle-class houses are maintained also changed during and after the

---

<sup>164</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s*, p. 111.

War. As Lucy Delap writes, '[t]he atmosphere of World War I ... led to numerous proposals for servantless homes or simpler living'.<sup>165</sup> A large number of women were employed in the munitions factories or other jobs related to the War, and later decided to look for other occupations than those of domestic servant. The Wrays' household, as with most of the middle-class houses of the time, is not equipped with servants because 'the munitions factories had ... lured them away in 1916' (PG 10), leaving Frances in charge of all household tasks. She verbalises her struggle with housework as she likens the house to a human body whilst cleaning it: '[i]t seemed to her that the house must produce [the dust], as flesh oozes sweat' (PG 25). Just as we need to take care of our body every day, housework is seen as an endless process which requires Frances's constant attention.

Furthermore, to maintain the house is made difficult for Frances because of the fact that the house is haunted by her late father's patriarchal influence, which is represented by his furniture. The furniture her father collected, despite his belief in its authenticity, turns out to be a collection of 'Victorian fakes' (PG 24). However, Frances's mother is reluctant to dispose of it, saying it has her 'father's heart' in it (PG 24). Frances is frustrated with her mother's adherence to out-dated Victorian values. The generational conflict between Frances and her mother again reflects cultural developments of the time. As Chris Baldick states, '[m]utual incomprehension between the Young

---

<sup>165</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 103.

and the Old is one of the most recurrent topics of the period's literature'.<sup>166</sup> Young people who had to suffer most in the war often blamed the older generations; and writers in the 1920s, such as Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf and others, expressed that frustration in their fiction. Waters frequently depicts the conflict between her protagonists and their parents (or parental guardians): Margaret's mother functions as a substitute for the patriarchal father in *Affinity* (however, ironically Margaret's father was supportive of her), and Mrs Stiles for Mr Lilly in *Fingersmith*. Similarly to Waters's previous novels, Frances's mother assumes patriarchal authority within their household after her father's death. As a result Frances is under pressure to maintain her father's 'passion for "Olde England"' (PG 24). Because of her mother's imposition of patriarchal authority in the house, Frances has to agree that the furniture remains, which forces her to 'go scuttling around like a crab' (PG 24). The existence of her father's furniture not only physically restrains Frances's freedom but also serves as a constant reminder of the heteronormative codes which govern the house. Her parents' opposition to Frances's lesbian relationship with Christina made her abandon it, and since then she has been trapped in the house. Frances's sense of entrapment chiefly comes from the haunting presence of her father's patriarchal order. This patriarchal order is maintained through Frances's daily housework, especially when she needs to take care of her father's furniture. As Leonore Davidoff states, 'housework is concerned with creating and maintaining order in the

---

<sup>166</sup> Chris Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s: Writers among the Ruins* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 28.

immediate environment'.<sup>167</sup> However, in the Wrays' household, Frances's task is merely to preserve her father's patriarchal authority, which is at odds with her lesbian sexuality, rather than to create a new environment that suits her. The presence of her father's legacy, and her duty to honour it, work to constrain Frances both physically and emotionally.

Because her role of 'housewife' is an imposed one, Frances acknowledges her lack of interest in the household chores. As she gets accustomed to them, however, they start to form an inseparable part of her life, influencing her vocabulary. In order to manage her day-to-day tasks, she acquires an economical, servant-like attitude towards cooking:

She had no real interest in food, neither in preparing nor in eating it, but she had developed a grudging aptitude for cookery during the War; she enjoyed, anyhow, the practical challenge of making one cheap cut of meat do for several different dishes. (PG 24)

According to Nicola Humble, 'the cookery books of the years between the wars try to persuade the newly servantless middle-class woman that the cooking she must now do is a high-status, fashionable activity'.<sup>168</sup> In contradiction to the books published during the war, which promoted economical use of rationed food, women were encouraged to develop their passion for cooking.

Although Frances retains her practical stance in spite of society's trend, she needs her '[l]ittle successes in the kitchen' as they give a small,

---

<sup>167</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 75.

<sup>168</sup> Nicola Humble, 'Little Swans with Luxette and Loved Boy Pudding: Changing Fashions in Cookery Books', *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2002), pp. 322-338 (pp. 322-323).

uneventful, but significant pleasure to her everyday life (*PG* 25). Gradually, her vocabulary around cooking starts to give voice to her feelings towards Lilian, which leads to the transformation of her home into a queer heterotopic space. When Frances first realises that her feelings might grow into fully-fledged love for Lilian, she organises her thought with expressions related to cooking:

There was a quickening, a livening – Frances could think of nothing to compare it with save some culinary process. It was like the white of an egg growing pearly in hot water, a milk sauce thickening in the pan. It was as subtle yet as tangible as that. (*PG* 91)

These processes involving the white of an egg and a milk sauce, which usually take some preparation time, are indicative of the gradual, yet steady progression of Frances's yearning for Lilian. Also, when Frances realises that there are biscuit crumbs on Lilian's clothes, , she feels 'a housewifely urge – a housespinsterly urge, she supposed it ought to be called, in her case – to brush them free' (*PG* 79). These household-related expressions illustrate Frances's unconscious attempt to transform her house, which has been a place of domestic entrapment, into one which allows her to explore her homosexuality.

For this reason it is significant that Frances's and Lilian's first sexual union takes place in the scullery (*PG* 220-224).<sup>169</sup> It is also important that the scullery is characterised by its darkness: '[t]he scullery was dark as blindness

---

<sup>169</sup> Hall points out that Nan and Florence have sex in the pantry (Hall, 'Space and Sexuality in the Post-Victorian Fiction of Sarah Waters', pp. 21-22): '[Florence] led [Nan] into the pantry, and put a broom across the door, and [they] caressed amongst the packets of flour and tins of treacle while the kettle whistled and the kitchen grew woolly with steam' (*TV* 436).

after the gaslit kitchen, and the darkness was abashing' (PG 222). Their sexual union in the dark scullery symbolises Frances's attempt to rebel against heterosexist codes in the house, just as in *Fingersmith* Sue and Maud's sexual union in the dark bedroom of Briar works to subvert patriarchal heteronormativity. By making a comparison between the two places, both of which are associated with cooking – the bright kitchen and the dark scullery – Waters points to the way patriarchal domesticity paradoxically serves as an outlet for Frances's homosexual desire. Through this interrelationship between cooking and homosexuality, Waters allows Frances's lesbian desire to be naturalised within the framework of middlebrow fiction. Cooking is conventionally considered a contributing factor to maintaining patriarchal structures, and this is reflected in the experience of both women: returning from the picnic in the park, Frances says, 'I've to start thinking about my mother's dinner', and Lilian adds, 'And I've to start thinking about Len's' (PG 105). By employing cookery imagery as a means of expressing (at first unrealised) homosexual desires, they are able to escape their domestic confinement, which gradually helps them to form a lesbian relationship in the darkness. The darkness in the scullery, while it can undermine patriarchal influence in the house, at the same time suggests that their lesbian desire should be hidden. Frances and Lilian are far from capable of announcing their new-found feelings: Frances's mother does not understand or approve of her lesbian sexuality, while Lilian is married to Leonard. Their occasional outing is made possible so long as they are seen only as friends.

#### 4.1.2. The Fantasy of Becoming Gypsies: Utopia and Bohemianism

While they gain freedom because of the fact that people do not realise they are having an affair, it makes it all the more difficult for Frances to disclose her lesbian identity. She 'almost wish[es she] were a man' (PG 269), so that she could openly declare her love for Lilian and possibly confront Leonard. It is only inside the house and within the house in their rooms that they can express their love for each other. These spaces, however, cannot fully promise privacy: they are easily threatened, as when Frances's mother almost walks in on her and Lilian (PG 257-258). They situate themselves in a liminal space within the house, then between their private rooms and the rest of the house which remains semi-private. Outside of their private spaces, by choosing places where they can be seen as friends, they are able to hint at their feelings openly. At the skating rink to which Lilian takes Frances, for instance, they can show their intimacy to each other:

it *was* like making love: the thrill and intimacy of it, the never letting go of each other, the clutching of fingers and the bumping of thighs, the racing and matching of heartbeats and breaths. (PG 278, italics in original)

The skating rink is their heterotopic space, because it gives them an opportunity to show intimacy without drawing unnecessary attention to themselves. The fact that Frances and Lilian are able to communicate with each other in their own secret language while at the same time looking simply like friends having fun reminds the reader of the public relationship of Nan and Kitty in *Tipping the Velvet*: during their cross-dressing acts their language on stage is juxtaposed with that in their bedroom. In *Tipping the Velvet*,



however, once outside of the theatre and their bedroom, they have to conceal their lesbian identity as Kitty fears that society does not accept them. This is also the case in *The Paying Guests*: the skating rink, their heterotopic space, can only offer them a temporary escape. They need to go back to Champion Hill in the end, where they are reconfined to patriarchal, heteronormative codes.

In contrast to heterotopic spaces where they are given only temporary freedom to display their intimacy, Frances and Lilian are attracted to the fantasy of bohemian life, which signifies their utopian imagination. What they seek is a life separated from the society in which they are currently confined:

We're like gipsies! Like the gipsy king and queen. Oh, don't you wish we were? We could go miles and miles from Camberwell, and live in a caravan in a wood, and pick berries, and catch rabbits, and kiss, and kiss... (PG 245)

For this utopian vision, a 'china caravan' that Frances buys for Lilian comes to symbolise their ideal future together (PG 389). Other than this caravan, Lilian's room is filled with objects from all around the world, representative of bohemianism. Bohemian artists of the time, as Virginia Nicholson writes, decorated their houses 'to resemble sultan's palaces or Moorish pavilions', reflecting their artistic temperament.<sup>170</sup> As Humble explains, in middlebrow fiction, an 'association with the bohemian creative artist is offered to the middle-class women through the activity of house-decoration'.<sup>171</sup> Lilian, if in a less elegant style, exhibits a similar attitude towards life through her skill for interior decoration, and this attitude can be characterised by its cultural borderlessness. Frances's mother, who does not understand Lilian's style, is

---

<sup>170</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 107.

<sup>171</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s*, p. 143.

shocked by Lilian's room, saying 'It looks like the house of Ali Baba! Or the Moulin Rouge! Or the Taj Mahal!' (PG 80) Due to the fact that elements of various cultures exist in the same place, Lilian's room represents the heterotopic imagination. Foucault regards 'the traditional garden of the Persians' as an instance of heterotopia, since it 'bring[s] inside its rectangular four parts representing the four parts of the world'.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Lilian's room juxtaposes different spaces that are symbolised by each object, thus disrupting temporality and spatiality.

Mrs Wray's references to oriental locations to describe Lilian's room underpin the way the East was perceived in the West. Through a number of popular Hollywood films of the time, such as D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and George Melford's *The Sheik* (1921), as Gaylyn Studlar notes, the Orient was seen 'archetypally as mysterious and sensuous'.<sup>173</sup> As Bland points out, in *The Sheik* '[Rudolph] Valentino's Ahmed Ben Hassan is remarkably effeminate in his dress and heavy eye-make-up', which allows the heroine as well as the female audience to be in control of the male gaze, thus to assume the masculine position.<sup>174</sup> The exotic locations on screen created an imaginary space for women in which they could dream of liberating their sexuality. Frances's mother relates Lilian's exotic taste for interior decoration to her potentially voluptuous nature, although she does not connect this to Frances's lesbian sexuality. In spite of her mother's negative response, this

---

<sup>172</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 6.

<sup>173</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, "'Out-Salomeing Salome': Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism' in Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Vision of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997) pp. 99-129 (p. 99).

<sup>174</sup> Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, p. 160.

eccentric artistic inclination which is not confined by boundaries is attractive for Frances, and becomes the source of her and Lilian's fantasy. This wish, however, does not go beyond the realm of fantasy. Frances's desire to be in an openly lesbian relationship with Lilian is complicated by her marriage. Soon their fantasy plan of being gypsies starts to turn into a way of avoiding facing reality. In a similar way, the china caravan, which used to symbolise their ideal future together, loses its power to promote their daydreaming. The caravan's unrealistic, impractical nature is revealed to Frances when she meets her late brother's fiancée Edith and sees her diamond engagement ring, which is '[t]he real thing' (PG 295). As she sees her relationship with Lilian as 'perfect in the way that something's perfect when it's under a glass dome, or trapped in amber', Frances realises that, as long as they are content with their fantasy plan, they will not be able to escape their confinement (269). A glass dome, which represents Frances's and Lilian's utopian imagination, is a possible image of 'heterotopia of illusion' in miniature form. They are doubly confined, in their utopian imagination as well as in their domestic roles. This leads Frances to a more practical plan of renting a place for them to live together.

Frances's plan of living with Lilian in a flat is based on what she used to hope to have with Christina. As she explains her former romantic relationship to Lilian, Frances indicates that they planned their new life assiduously:

We began to want to live together. We planned it, seriously. We did everything seriously in those days. Christina took typewriting and book-keeping classes. We looked at rooms, we saved our money. [...] Christina and I talked as though we were part of a new society! Everything was changing. Why shouldn't we change too? (PG 177)

Frances first met Christina at a social activist event against the war, and their future plan was meant to be part of the social change they tried to promote. After the war, however, Frances's disillusionment about what they could do to change society made their plan 'look rather flimsy' (PG 178). Now Frances is doubtful about the belief Christina maintains that she can somehow 'shake off tradition, caste, all that' with her Bohemian lifestyle with her new lover Stevie (PG 177). Although, given Christina and Stevie's lifestyle, they can have their hair cut really short, they are incapable of bringing about any actual social change. As Laura Doan argues, 'boyishness denoted a certain fashionable youthfulness that was never threatening' for society.<sup>175</sup> For Frances, their 'free' way of living is just an act which has no substantial power to transform society. Still, in Christina and Stevie's relationship Frances sees something once 'meant to be [hers]' (PG 179). By imagining a similar lifestyle with Lilian, she attempts to accomplish what she could not achieve before, just as in *Affinity*, Margaret uses her erstwhile plan to travel to Italy with her former lover in order to elope with Selina. The fundamental problem with this plan, as well as with Frances's daydreaming about their living as gypsies, is that she has to take a passive position. When Frances says to Lilian, 'I want you to leave [Leonard], Lilian. I want you to leave him and live with me', Frances is dependent on Lilian for a decision to separate from her husband (PG 300). When Lilian accidentally murders Leonard, their plan for a new life

---

<sup>175</sup> Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 105.

is made impossible, as neither of them has a choice left in determining what happens next.

#### **4.1.3. '[T]heir dark clothes bleeding into the dusk': Detective Fiction, Dual Narrative Structures, and the Impossibility of Queer Utopia**

It is significant that Lilian uses an ashtray to murder Leonard: her and Frances's imagination of their lesbian utopia begins with cookery metaphors, and ends with a similar household-related object. Smoking, which can be coded as unfeminine with the cigarette representing the phallus, is symbolic of Frances's (and influenced by her, Lilian's) rebellious attitude against heteronormativity. Therefore, the use of an ashtray for murder can be seen as Lilian's (if unconscious) attempt to overturn male-female power relations. As Penny Tinkler argues, the implication of women's smoking was dependent on which class they came from.<sup>176</sup> However, for middle-class women, smoking

... was a sign of gender rebellion and it signaled a break from traditional forms of femininity. More specifically, smoking represented a rejection of the passive, subordinate, and domesticated 'angel in the house' and the embrace of an identity characterized by qualities such as intellectuality, an active sexuality, and physical prowess, previously assigned exclusively to men.<sup>177</sup>

For Frances, who needs to take care of the house so that her father's patriarchal authority can be maintained, her occasional smoking is her attempt to retain her rebellious nature which she will not allow to be fully

---

<sup>176</sup> Penny Tinkler, 'Sapphic Smokers and English Modernities' in Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, eds., *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 75-90 (p. 86).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

subsumed into the patriarchal system. Also, for Frances and Christina, smoking helps them maintain their image and status as lesbians. Lilian, who was not an occasional smoker, learns from Frances to establish her newly found lesbian sexuality through smoking cigarettes. Therefore, Lilian's use of an ashtray to murder Leonard, as a result of which action their utopian imagination is suspended, is representative of her inadequate attempt to assert her lesbian sexuality. This unsuccessful action of Lilian's can be classified as what Patricia Juliana Smith calls 'lesbian panic ... the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character ... is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire'.<sup>178</sup> Smith goes on to argue that lesbian panic often leads a character 'to commit irrational or illogical acts that inevitably work to disadvantage or harm of herself or others'.<sup>179</sup> Lilian's effort to take a step further towards establishing her identity as a lesbian paradoxically ends up confusing her sense of sexuality, when her action results in the death of her husband and the following investigation reaffirms her sexuality.

Once the police investigation begins, Frances realises that it is conducted in a way that promotes heteronormativity, as the police narrow down the cause of the murder to a heterosexual love triangle. The function of the police to reinforce heteronormativity is similar to that of detective fiction in the inter-war era. As John Scaggs writes, the genre served as 'a particularly powerful ideological tool that consolidated and disseminated patriarchal

---

<sup>178</sup> Patricia Juliana Smith, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

power, and its voice was the rational, coolly logical voice of the male detective or male narrator'.<sup>180</sup> Waters employs this characteristic feature of the detective fiction genre to undercut the patriarchal authority it is supposed to endorse. In the course of the police investigation, it is discovered that Leonard had an affair with a young woman, and he was assaulted by her boyfriend before, and because of this history the police arrest the boyfriend. Instead of looking at the ashtray in Lilian's room, the police decide that the boyfriend's cosh — a clear marker of masculinity — is the murder weapon. It is also worth noting that the police missed the remains of the yellow cushion on Leonard's head which Frances used to 'staunch the bleeding' (PG 337). It is the same cushion Lilian throws at Leonard right before the murder: "'I hate you!" she flung a cushion at him' (PG 333). Lilian's action of throwing a light object is an obvious sign of femininity, and the change of objects Lilian uses to protect herself and Frances, from a cushion to an ashtray, can suggest her gradual acceptance of her new identity as a lesbian. Nevertheless, because Lilian's act is the result of lesbian panic, it remains uncertain whether Lilian is willing to accept her identity as a lesbian, or whether the accidental murder ends her lesbian relationship with Frances. In her review, Arifa Akbar comments on Lilian's ambiguous position towards her relationship with Frances: 'there is something under-investigated about Lilian's "turning" ... and because we have no access to her thoughts, her intention chips away at the reader, opening up doubt, and the expectation she might be duplicitous'.<sup>181</sup> Just like

---

<sup>180</sup> John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>181</sup> Arifa Akbar, 'The Paying Guests by Sarah Waters, Book Review: Novel Tackles Big Themes but Lacks Bite', *Independent*, 21 August 2014,

the reader, Frances is unsure about Lilian's feelings and thus turns detective herself, especially when the police investigation focuses increasingly on the heterosexual love triangle. She picks up clues from her visits to Lilian's house, as well as from what Lilian had said to her before, and eventually finds out the true motivation behind Lilian's murder of Leonard. The information that Leonard's life was insured and that Lilian is to receive five hundred pounds leads Frances to reassess Lilian's nature (PG 456-457). Furthermore, after discovering the fact that Lilian knew about Leonard's affair, Frances sees the letter from Lilian in a new light: '[t]he letter wasn't about me at all. It was simply about hating *him*' (PG 492, italics in original). As she gathers evidence, Frances concludes that Lilian does not ultimately see herself as a lesbian and has been using her relationship with Frances as a temporary escape from her wifely identity.

In this way, Frances becomes a detective herself, attempting to figure out Lilian's sexuality. As Faye Stewart argues,

In some queer detective novels, the gender and sexuality of a character is not easily decoded and becomes another riddle in addition to that of the crime. ... The pursuit of the criminal entails an attempt to decode gender and sexuality.<sup>182</sup>

In the second half of *The Paying Guest*, Waters sets up a dual narrative: the police investigating the murder from a heterosexual point of view and Frances as a queer detective trying to decode Lilian's sexuality so that she can

---

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-paying-guests-by-sarah-waters-book-review-novel-tackles-big-themes-but-lacks-bite-9683573.html> (accessed 16 February 2019, para. 5 of 10).

<sup>182</sup> Faye Stewart, 'Of Herrings Red and Lavender: Reading Crime and Identity in Queer Detective Fiction', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2009), pp. 33-44 (p. 36).



gauge the practicability of their utopian imagination. There is thus a twist on Waters's use of the detective fiction framework. After the First World War, detective fiction became one of the most popular literary genres. As Elizabeth English argues, there are a number of detective novels that deal with lesbian criminals in the Golden Age of detective fiction, which is often seen as conservative.<sup>183</sup> As English argues, however, often in those novels the female detective character has an ambiguous sexuality, and '[a]s the object of pursuit the lesbian criminal represents all that the female detective could be in other circumstances or all that she is but cannot admit to'.<sup>184</sup> Frances's sexuality is not an ambiguous one, but the relationship between the lesbian criminal and the female detective is similarly complete in *The Paying Guests*. Frances's search for clues to determine Lilian's intention behind the murder points to her own doubt about their queer future together. At a police hearing, for example, Frances harbours feelings of resentment towards Lilian while observing her attitude. When Frances wonders, 'How could [Lilian] involve [her] in all this?', she forgets the fact that it was she herself who invited Lilian into their lesbian affair (PG 510). Moreover, Frances's doubts about their utopian future reveal the anxieties that existed right from the beginning of their relationship. Frances's sense of uncertainty mainly comes from the insurance money Lilian receives, and it prevents her and Lilian from rekindling their desire towards one another in Lilian's home when Frances says, 'I'm afraid you didn't quite get your money's worth today' (PG 545).

---

<sup>183</sup> Elizabeth English, *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 137.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

While Lilian gives Frances the rent, Frances sees this gesture like a payment to a prostitute for temporary pleasure. This is indicative of the reversal of their class status, something about which Frances has been concerned since Leonard and Lilian moved in. Frances's attempt as a detective figure to pin down Lilian's sexuality in turn makes her verbalise the impossibility of their utopian imagination based on her 'detective' work.

Just as Frances realises the impracticability of living together with Lilian as a couple, the police investigation puts them in a new set of liminal spaces, which deprives them of their private spaces and puts an extra layer of heteronormative pressure on them. When Frances remembers the places in which she was put in the course of the investigation, they all point to liminality:

She thought of all the lobbies, corridors and ante-rooms in which she and Lilian had to sit and wait since Leonard's death, all the institutional spaces, not quite public, not quite private. (PG 583-584)

As Frances and Lilian are situated in a liminal space between their supposedly private rooms and the rest of the house, they are once again caught in an in-between space. In this space, which Frances calls 'a kind of limbo', they are incapable of taking control of their actions, wavering passively between two positions (PG 584). The loss of a space where Frances and Lilian can enact their desire for each other appears in the form of Frances's dream:

suddenly she found herself in an unfamiliar house with crumbling walls. How had she got there? She had no idea. She knew only that she had to keep the place from collapsing. But the task was like torture. The moment she got one wall upright, the next would start to tilt; soon she was rushing from room to

room, propping up sagging ceilings, hauling back the slithering treads of tumbling staircases. On and on she went, through all the hours of the night; on and on, without pause, staving off one impossible catastrophe after another. (PG 403-404)

This dream suggests that her attempt to normalise her lesbian desire within the household through dealing with domestic chores is made ineffectual, as all the places in the house she has been tending to – walls, ceilings, staircases – are in the process of disintegration. Situated in ‘an unfamiliar house’, she has lost her ties to the place, and she is trapped in an in-between space.

Moreover, these institutional spaces serve to impose heteronormativity, minimising the significance of Frances’s and Lilian’s sexuality. Frances likens the police inquest to a wedding ceremony, with a disturbing twist:

The whole thing, she decided, was like a nightmarish wedding, with Lilian the unhappy bride, Leonard the eternally jittering bridegroom, and none of the guests wanting to be there or quite knowing what to do. Even the coroner, Mr Samson, looked a little like vicar-like, in a chinless, wet-lipped sort of way. (PG 427)

The ritualised process of the investigation legally binds Leonard and Lilian into a heterosexual relationship, which positions Frances on the outside. By the sheer force of heteronormativity which permeates society, the police overlook the true cause of the murder in favour of a heterosexual love triangle. The Thompson/Bywaters case, on which Waters based the murder in her narrative with a lesbian twist, is important in British inter-war history because, as Bland explains, it ‘clearly demonstrates how trials were a central site for the contesting of societal moral boundaries’.<sup>185</sup> Although in *The Paying Guests* the issue of morality is one of the topics in the court, that of social

---

<sup>185</sup> Bland, *Modern Women on Trial*, p. 106.

boundaries related to lesbian sexuality is not taken into account. Playing with the detective genre, Waters points to the way the issue of homosexuality is overshadowed by that of heterosexuality. As is represented by the floor in Lilian's room on which Frances can spot the blood stains only because she knows what to look for, Frances and Lilian's lesbian affair is completely hidden from public view because of the pervasiveness of heteronormative codes (*PG* 371).

Although they escape being charged with murder, Frances and Lilian remain in a passive state. In the course of the police investigation, Frances's and Lilian's plan to escape their families is revealed to be a mere fantasy. Their imagination loses its significance, as Frances looks at the china caravan which used to symbolise their future together and realises 'how light it was [and] that it was hollow, with a hole in the bottom' (*PG* 531). Also, when Frances visits Christina's flat, all she could observe is 'the sham Bohemianism of it' (*PG* 480). Their fantasy of living as gypsies, when it is imagined for real, only gives her a sense of falseness. Although they eventually manage to secure themselves a heterotopic space, it is closely linked with darkness. When they become aware that they still have feelings for each other in the end, they realise the situation is what 'they could have hoped for ... the two of them in their stone corner, their dark clothes bleeding into the dusk, lights being kindled across the city, and a few pale stars in the sky' (*PG* 595). This is symbolic of their attempt to rekindle their lesbian desire, through their clothes blending in the darkness, which reminds the reader of their first sexual union in the dark scullery. The stone corner in which they situate themselves,

however, indicates the temporality of their heterotopic space, as they are still in a liminal space: there is a possibility that the investigation could be reinstated, and this time they might be found guilty. Even though they are fleetingly reunited as a couple, the temporary, in-between situation in which they are placed and with the darkness slowly consuming them indicates that their relationship does not promise any utopian prospect. The contrast between 'lights being kindled across the city' and 'a few pale stars' emphasises their gloomy future: because Frances's 'mother would be waiting' and 'Lilian's family would be waiting too' (both of which are among the city lights), they need to return to their domestic, heteronormative position from which they will forever dream of escaping (*PG* 595).

Thus, by manipulating the literary genre conventions of middlebrow fiction and detective fiction, Waters examines lesbian women's position in British society after World War I. Frances's use of cookery vocabulary to express her lesbian desire for Lilian, for Waters, serves to normalise homosexuality, allowing them to queer the kitchen space which is often organised by the heteronormative idea that it is for women to cook for men. As Frances and Lilian move from their escapist fantasies of living as gypsies to a more realistic plan of living together in a flat, they are held back by their passivity. While the possibility of actually accomplishing their utopian imagination is scarce, their semi-private rooms and the scullery that serve as their heterotopic space can only offer them temporary freedom. Not being able to initiate actions by themselves, they are gradually but surely dragged into the murder case. The heteronormativity that regulates the police

investigation allows the couple to avoid detection and persecution, but their passivity remains in place. In the meantime, Frances assumes the role of the detective in order to decode Lilian's sexuality in the hope that her attempt will restore their utopian imagination, which, however, is in vain. Despite their apparent reunion in the end, they are only able to find a temporary heterotopic space in the alcove on a bridge, waiting to be subsumed back in the heteronormative system. Their dismal future is closely associated with darkness, as it is about to consume them. This metaphor is taken further in *The Night Watch*, which is set in the 1940s — here, darkness plays an even more powerful role in limiting characters' utopian imagination.

#### **4.2. Looking Backwards, Trying to Move Forwards: The Absence of Utopian Space in *The Night Watch***

Following the 1920s, when Frances's and Lilian's heterotopic space is about to be consumed in darkness and their utopian longing is made almost impossible at the ending of *The Paying Guests*, it becomes increasingly problematic for Waters's characters to imagine the future. In the 1940s, Kay Langrish, one of the protagonists in *The Night Watch*, expresses her interest in experiencing the distorted temporality of cinema:

Sometimes I go in half-way through, and watch the second half first. I almost prefer them that way – people's pasts, you know, being so much more interesting than their futures. (NW 105-106)

This attitude of Kay's, her fascination with the past rather than with the future, is understandable, as in wartime the future may well be death or

horrible injury. Naturally, Kay is not the only character who is unable to envision a safe future. When asked about the future of her relationship with Kay in 1944, Helen Giniver says, 'We might get blown to bits tomorrow. Until then – well, I'd never want to advertise it. I'd never dream, for example, of telling my mother' (NW 275). Whereas Nan's intention of disclosing her lesbian identity to her family members can be a positive step towards the creation of her utopian space with Florence in *Tipping the Velvet*, Helen is more interested in protecting and savouring the secret and privacy of her relationship with Kay. Uncertainty of what might happen tomorrow prevents her from visualising her future, creating a sense of stasis.

The devastating condition of war affects not only the characters' attitude towards the future but also the narrative structure of *The Night Watch*. The novel is Waters's first attempt to write in the third person, and also she deploys a narrative that moves backwards in time. As the story begins in 1947, and goes back to 1944 and then to 1941, the reader witnesses how a group of people's lives is affected by their experiences during the war, which makes it hard for them to look forward to the future. Kaye Mitchell links this retrospective narrative structure to the conditions in 1940s Britain, when she argues that

war is sufficiently disruptive of normative temporalities (in putting the characters into some perpetual present, denied the ability to make plans for some nominal future) that queer temporalities prevail in wartime.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Kaye Mitchell, "'What does it feel like to be an anachronism?': Time in *The Night Watch*" in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 84-98 (p. 86).

Because of this disruption, *The Night Watch* is different from Waters's neo-Victorian trilogy in that the characters do not (and cannot) imagine their utopian space. Their desire for queer utopian space is disturbed by their trauma and sense of guilt, both of which originate from their past. Vivien Pearce's heterosexual relationship with Reggie Nigri is equally constructed as 'queer' in the sense that it is situated outside of societal norms because of the nature of their affair – he is married. Their sense of guilt comes from the fact that Viv got pregnant and had to get an abortion in 1944, and although they continue this affair in 1947, they are unable to envisage a future together. As Emma Parker writes, '[c]ountering the romanticized, sentimental, and utopian tone of much lesbian feminist fiction, *The Night Watch* addresses the trauma, pain, and anguish' of the characters.<sup>187</sup> Because of the clear absence of utopian space for both heterosexual and homosexual characters, the atmosphere of the novel is undeniably bleak.

Indeed, the sombre atmosphere of the novel is heightened by the way Waters structures the narrative. As Adele Jones notes, '[t]he novel ends with the beginning of the war, so ... the possibility of change through the forward movement of time is as curtailed as love and hope in their lives'.<sup>188</sup> In her previous novels, lesbian characters start dreaming of their utopian space right after they form intimate relationships. In *The Night Watch*, however, although the reader sees the beginnings of romantic relationships (both heterosexual

---

<sup>187</sup> Emma Parker, 'Contemporary Lesbian Fiction: Into the Twentieth Century' in Jodie Medd, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 204-218 (p. 214).

<sup>188</sup> Adele Jones, 'Disrupting the Continuum: Collapsing Space and Time in Sarah Waters's *The Night Watch*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014), pp. 32-44 (p. 43).



and homosexual) in 1941 and 1944, how the relationships develop is buried in the three-year gaps between each section. For example, the novel ends on Kay rescuing Helen out of the ruin in 1941, when Kay is 'unable to believe that something so fresh and so unmarked could have emerged from so much chaos' (NW503). Given that the reader knows from the earlier 1947 section that their relationship will end under dramatic circumstances, as Victoria Stewart comments in relation to the ambivalent effect of this ending, '[o]n the one hand, this optimism has already been undercut, but on the other, it is, in this ending, nostalgically recalled'.<sup>189</sup> This sense of nostalgia, however, highlights the irreversible nature of time, further denying any possibility of utopian space.

In the BBC adaptation (2010), the inevitability of temporal disruption is expressed in a visually effective way. In the 1947 section, Kay (Anna Maxwell Martin) walks to the warehouse where she worked as an auxiliary ambulance driver and tries to look inside through a little window. As Kay stares into the darkness, we start to see images played in reverse. It is this darkness that invites Kay to remember her past, when at the same time she is forced to go back to her past through the visual technique which displays the characters' actions in reverse. While darkness helps Waters create an atmosphere of bombed-out London in the 1940s, it is also employed as a metaphor to represent the characters' sense of hopelessness in not being to imagine any future. Moreover, even after the war, darkness reminds the characters of their traumatic past, entrapping them in it. Darkness, assisted by the filmic

---

<sup>189</sup> Victoria Stewart, *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 154.

manipulation of temporality which suggests the characters' inability to escape from the disrupted narrative time, encapsulates the impossibility of imagining utopian space.

In the stage version of *The Night Watch* (2016), adapted by Hattie Naylor and directed by Rebecca Gatward, the novel's queer temporality is expressed through the play's stage set. It is built with two sets of circles, with the outer rim moving in one direction and the inner rim in the other. In her review, Susannah Clapp writes that 'Georgia Lowe's slowly revolving design makes a virtue of being in the round. These lives are not followed in a straightforward linear fashion'.<sup>190</sup> This disorientating effect created by enacting multiple scenes at once and the stage set contributes to a sense of queerness. The audience and the characters share their feeling of disorientation, which functions to create a sense of community. Indeed, the theatrical adaptation functions to immerse the audience in the confusion caused by the war, making the connection between the queer 'then' and the queer 'now'. When I went to see the performance at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester on 14 June 2016, the cast stayed on stage after the performance and Jodie McNee, who played Kay, gave a little speech about the significance of representations of queerness in theatre for recognition of LGBT communities in society. It was only two days after the shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida on 12 June 2016, and the news shed light on the need to fight against the long-standing issue of homophobia (both internalised and externalised). The

---

<sup>190</sup> Susannah Clapp, 'The Night Watch review - the swish of the blackout curtain', *The Guardian*, 29 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/29/night-watch-review-royal-exchange-manchester-sarah-waters> (accessed 15 December 2017)

enactment of queer characters' struggle for freedom in 1940s London and McNee's speech emphasised the connection between the past and the present, and how the present can be addressed by looking back. As Gay McCauley argues, '[t]heatre is a social event, in the auditorium as well as on the stage, and the primary signifiers are physical and even spatial in nature'.<sup>191</sup> It is crucial, then, to take into consideration how the audience is encouraged to see the performance, as well as the cast's interaction with each other. In the case of *The Night Watch*, because of its narrative structure that goes back in time, and the fact that different scenes take place at the same time, the audience will experience what Fraser does, after the war: 'it was as though I had been plucked out of time and then dropped back in it, and I just took up where I had left off'.<sup>192</sup> As Alfred Hickling reviews the play, he comments on how '[i]t dispenses with the usual courtesies of exposition; plunging you without ceremony into a drab, postwar world full of drab, postwar people whose interrelationships and experiences are entirely opaque'.<sup>193</sup> Gatward's *The Night Watch* places the audience *in medias res*, and thus they share a sense of confusion and disruption of linearity with the casts.

In this part of the chapter, I will examine how Waters explores traces of the characters' desire for utopian space through representations of darkness and material objects. Darkness, which is often used in Waters's previous

---

<sup>191</sup> Gay McCauley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>192</sup> Hattie Naylor, *The Night Watch* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), I. 2., p. 17.

<sup>193</sup> Alfred Hickling, 'The Night Watch review - captures the heart of Sarah Waters's love story', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/25/the-night-watch-review-adaptation-sarah-waters> (accessed 15 December 2017, para. 2 of 5).

novels as a space where lesbian desire is materialised, is employed in *The Night Watch* differently to undercut the characters' hope for queer utopian space. Similarly, material objects remind the characters of their indebtedness to the past, intervening in their attempt to move forward. Despite the obstacles that constantly tie the characters to their painful past, towards the end of the 1947 section, there is an ambivalent sense of self-affirmation. The beginning of the novel, which is the end of the narrative, can be the starting point to re/build their utopian space. As I will suggest, this point is clearly expressed in the adaptation whose narrative returns to the 1947 setting in the end.

#### **4.2.1. '[I]f we can't see them, they can't see us': Darkness and Representation of Temporary Freedom and Negative Emotions**

Depending on the time setting, the imagery of darkness in *The Night Watch* contributes to creating several meanings, ranging from a liberating one to an oppressive one. Because of the war, the boundaries of gender and sexuality have become less rigid. Kay, for example, volunteered to be an ambulance driver, and can wear the same uniform as men. As Rachel Wood states, '[n]ew possibilities for gender and sexual identities flourish in the destroyed spaces, open spaces, dark spaces, and invisible spaces of London under attack'.<sup>194</sup> As a result, darkness comes to represent (if temporary) heterotopic freedom for the characters, which allows them to explore their lesbian sexuality. As I

---

<sup>194</sup> Wood, "'Walking and Watching" in *Queer London: Sarah Waters' Tipping the Velvet and The Night Watch*', p. 313.

discussed earlier, this subversive use of darkness is also available to the lesbian characters of Waters's other novels: in *Fingersmith*, the darkness in Maud's room creates space in which she and Sue materialise their lesbian desire for each other, just as Frances and Lilian do in the scullery in *The Paying Guests*. When in *The Night Watch* Helen visits Kay's friend Julia Standing and they decide to explore deserted London, darkness gives them freedom. As Julia says, 'if we can't see them, they can't see us. Besides, they'd probably take us for a boy and his girl' (363). In the case of Helen and Julia's case, darkness renders London one big heterotopic site where they can be seen as a heterosexual couple. When they kiss, the space they find is 'impossibly dark', which again plays an important role in concealing their presence (NW 374). The issue of in/visibility has been a crucial one for lesbian identity, since, as Annamarie Jagose writes, 'the cultural lot of lesbianism is invisibility'.<sup>195</sup> By transforming darkened London into a heterotopic site which enables and sustains Helen and Julia's lesbian affair, as well as which makes lesbians visible for the reader, Waters attempts to reverse the injustice to which lesbian identity has been subjected.

When the reader encounters the darkness metaphors in the 1947 section, however, they carry a negative meaning. Helen, now working at a matchmaking agency, thinks '*There's that curtain come down*' (NW 18, italics in original), whenever Viv tries to avoid giving too much information about her brother Duncan. Here darkness is indicative of Viv's hesitation to let Helen in, unlike the time when darkness united Helen and Julia. In a similar way,

---

<sup>195</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 1.

darkness serves to make Helen feel isolated, while Julia seems to form an intimate relationship with one of her friends, Ursula Waring. When Helen meets Ursula for the first time, she notices Ursula's 'mischievous dark gaze' (NW 60). Julia's features, like Ursula's, are associated with darkness for Helen: she once describes Julia as 'smooth and self-possessed as a cool dark gem' (NW 263). The way Helen describes Julia and Ursula respectably links them together, thus threatening Helen's sense of hope for her future with Julia. Also, her sense of loneliness increases when she returns home to find the room unlit, making her 'aware ... of a sort of deadness to the place' (NW 140). Darkness, which gives Helen freedom in which to explore her lesbian identity with Julia in wartime, now serves to intensify her fears that Julia no longer loves her. As society returns to the 'normal' state after the war, darkness loses its power to allow lesbian characters space in which to subvert heteronormativity, and comes to symbolise negative feelings such as shame, fear, and jealousy. These equivocal meanings attached to darkness stresses the ephemeral nature of the characters' heterotopic space.

#### **4.2.2. Holding on to the Past: Material Objects and the Impossibility of Utopian Space**

While darkness is indicative of the transient freedom the characters have during the war, material objects in *The Night Watch* carry with it their sense of guilt. Like the ashtray in *The Paying Guests*, the impossibility of establishing heterotopic space, as well as characters' hope for a utopian future, manifests

through material objects. Duncan's collection of antique objects, for instance, betrays his yearning to escape his past by going further back into the period before he was born. Just as the ashtray first indicates Frances's and Lilian's future as a lesbian couple which is then foreclosed by the same object in *The Paying Guests*, Duncan's wish is always already made impossible. As he shows a jug he found to Viv, he imagines the life of those who used to use it: 'I think it must be eighteenth-century [*sic*]. Imagine ladies, V, taking tea, pouring cream from this!' (NW 26). He collects, as Mark Llewellyn writes, 'materials from an unknowable yet more comforting and earlier period'.<sup>196</sup> Through situating himself in a distant past, and indulging himself by immersing himself in his imaginative world, he attempts to blot out his memory of his friend Alec's death and his own attempted suicide. Duncan and Alec were discussing their plan to run away to Ireland before Alec receives a draft order, although whether the purpose behind their plan is an implied homosexual relationship is unclear (NW 478-480). Their plan of leaving England in search for more freedom echoes Margaret's plan to elope to Italy with Selina in *Affinity*. It could be argued that by returning in the imagination to the period when the war did not yet disturb their plan, Duncan fantasises about his utopian union with Alec. In the television adaptation, while he does not collect antique objects, he is still surrounded by outdated objects owned by Mr Mundy. Viv (Jodie Whittaker) displays her concern when she says to Duncan (Harry Treadaway), 'You don't belong in this museum.' The fact that she uses the word 'museum' stresses his

---

<sup>196</sup> Llewellyn, 'Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre', p. 207.

detachment from the present as well as his entrapment by Mr Mundy. Also, like libraries, museums are one of the examples Foucault uses as a heterotopic site which accumulates time, thus signifying a disruption from normative temporality.

Similarly, Viv hides a ring in 'a little tobacco tin' (NW 79). Kay gives this ring to her so that she can appear married, so it symbolises her non-normative nature, as well as her guilt, because it reminds her of the time when she went through an abortion. In addition to this ring, the show flat that Reggie takes Viv to rest to illustrates the liminal status of their illicit relationship. As she observes the flat, she finds that it is decorated in an elegant manner, but it is all fake:

it was done up outlandishly. There was a tiger-skin rug on top of a carpet, and satin cushions on the bed. ... But everything was chill to the touch and dusty; and here and there were piles of powder: paint and plaster, that must have been shaken down in raids. The room smelt damp, unlived-in. (NW 398)

Exotic objects such as 'a tiger-skin rug' and 'satin cushions' hint at the association of the East with sensuousness as I discussed earlier in this chapter, and point to the fact that this show flat is meant as a secret location for illicit affairs. Moreover, the 'unlived-in' quality of the flat and furnishings signal that Viv's happiness is only ever temporary and for show, for, as long as Reggie is married, their relationship remains non-normative and cannot be publicly acknowledged. Therefore the text examines the way in which Viv's relationship with Reggie constantly blurs the boundaries of normative and non-normative. While material objects could imply the characters' desire for utopian space, they also serve to encapsulate the characters' guilt and in-



between status, always pulling them back to their traumatic past. Viv's and Reggie's desire for each other is always predicated on its liminal nature. Their first encounter takes place on a train to London, and its liminality is emphasised because 'it was impossible to say where exactly, for the train kept stopping at what might or might not have been stations' (NW 457). Also, when they have an affair at a hotel, they start by pretending they do not know each other. This role-playing, while it is necessary so that people will not know about their affair, is again indicative of the blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy, a permissible encounter of strangers and a 'queer', illicit affair. It is not until Viv decides to end her relationship with Reggie that she can start to reaffirm her identity. In order to move forward, she (and other characters) need to establish a new relationship with their material objects, through abandoning or disregarding them.

#### **4.2.3. 'You must lift up your gaze': Reaffirmation of Queer Identities**

Towards the end of the 1947 section, the characters attempt to re-evaluate their identities. The purpose of their attempt is summarised by Mr Leonard, Kay's landlord, in his advice to her: 'You must lift up your gaze, dear. You must learn to look away from perishable things' (NW 169). 'Perishable' objects such as Kay's ring are constant reminders of the characters' painful past, and in order to reconstruct the utopian vision for their queer future, they need to give up what they cling to. After re-encountering Kay in 1947 and giving back her ring, Viv 'felt capable of anything! ... She could call [Reggie] up and tell

him – what? That she was through him, for ever!’ (NW 140). The ring, which was used to fake Viv’s identity as a married woman to get an abortion, functions as an object which creates an illusion of Viv’s utopian space, which once offered her consolatory, but only temporary, room for escape. Therefore, returning the ring to Kay and ending her affair with Reggie, Viv liberates herself from her guilt-ridden past.

Yet, although the characters wish to reaffirm their queer place in society nevertheless, they are still in an ambivalent place. Viv’s decision to break up with Reggie, whilst it gives her a sense of freedom, does not promise anything about her future. While giving the ring back to Kay serves as a liberating gesture on Viv’s part, the ring signifies a lost love for Kay. Although she puts the ring ‘amongst the cigarette stubs’, it remains ‘gleaming, undimmed by ash’, which suggests Kay’s inability to give up the past (NW 171). Kay’s action of ‘put[ting] [the ring] back on her slender finger; and clos[ing] her fist, to keep it from slipping’ again stresses the fact that she cannot move on (NW 171). While Kay’s gesture of closing her fist also implies that she might be in control of her past as the ring no longer fits on her finger, at the same time by holding the ring in her finger, Kay still clings to the past. Viv’s and Kay’s renewed, if ambivalent, attitude towards their past respectively can anticipate some action of reconstructing their utopian space, or of imagining a new one. Waters’s backward narrative in *The Night Watch* functions to stress the transience of love and the power of trauma and guilt during and after the Second World War. Like the ending of *The Paying Guests*, when there is no certainty of Frances’s and Lilian’s queer future together in spite of their

reunion, the force of the 'perpetual present' in wartime leaves no room for the characters' desire for utopian space, even when they decide to relinquish their painful past and to move on.

In comparison to the novel, in which the self-affirming moments in 1947 are quickly replaced by the dark atmosphere of 1944 and 1941, the adaptation returns to its 1947 setting. In the final sequence, it shows the characters' actions fuelled by their new attitude – Viv hanging up Reggie's call, Duncan leaving Mr Mundy's house, and Kay sorting out objects from wartime. When the voiceover by Kay concludes the narrative, what it represents is the suspension of 'queer temporalities' of wartime<sup>197</sup>:

Someone once said a happy ending depends on where you decide to stop your story. Then again, it could be when you realise your story is not yet over, but you're only at the end of the beginning.<sup>198</sup>

Released now from the backward-moving narrative, the queer characters are moving to a new chapter of their story. On a train, for example, Duncan meets another young man, with whom Duncan feels something close to a beginning of a homosexual relationship. This rather convenient encounter with another homosexual character is reminiscent of Waters's neo-Victorian fiction, in which Victorian Britain is re-imagined as filled with homosexual desire. The ending of the adaptation implies a conscious attempt on the part of the author to return to the earlier historical period where imagining queer utopian space was still possible. The TV adaptation shifts the focus from non-normative

---

<sup>197</sup> Mitchell, "'What does it feel like to be an anachronism?'"', p. 86.

<sup>198</sup> *The Night Watch* (BBC, Dir. Richard Laxton, Screenwriter Paula Milne, 2011).

temporalities to the narrative's return to normative ones. Whereas at the end the TV narrative starts to move forward once again, it also implicitly gestures backwards to Waters's neo-Victorian period where queer utopian longing could become possible.

What Waters depicts in the novel, however, is a world where all the utopian longing is held in suspension. During the war, the characters cannot help but look at their present and past due to lack of a safe future. Although darkness occasionally provides them with heterotopic spaces in which to explore their queer sexuality, this is only a temporary respite. After the war, even when their 'safety' is guaranteed, darkness becomes an all-consuming force which engulfs the characters and their emotions, blocking any attempt to imagine utopian space on their own. In a similar way, material objects serve to anchor the characters in their past memories. By emphasising the existence of queer temporality and the disruption of utopian imagination during and after the wartime, *The Night Watch* interrogates heteronormative codes which occludes the presence of queer characters.

#### **4.3. Conclusion**

In *The Night Watch*, by an assemblage of homosexual and/or non-normative characters, Waters rewrites the heterosexist history of war. Rather than showing how the characters subvert the structure of heteronormative society, however, what Waters displays is how their desire is compromised through darkness which shuts out their hope, and material objects which confine them

in their traumatic past. In *The Paying Guests*, Frances's lesbian desire towards Lilian materialises through the medium of her household tasks, queering the genre conventions of middlebrow fiction which focuses on the relationship between (heterosexual) women and the house. Detective fiction's role as a tool to reiterate heteronormativity is also subverted when Frances becomes a queer detective who collects clues so as to decode Lilian's ambiguous sexuality. Through using the popular literary genres of the period, Waters explores potential of overturning heteronormativity. Although the characters attempt to move forward in both novels — Frances and Lilian doing their best to rekindle their romantic relationship in *The Paying Guests*, and Kay and Viv finding new ways to deal with their past in *The Night Watch* — they are not free of constraints, and their incapability is expressed by darkness. Darkness in both novels operates as a motif of both hopefulness and hopelessness — providing the characters with heterotopic space at one time, but representing their melancholy future ahead in later scenes. The darkening sky in *The Paying Guests*, and the tranquil darkness in *The Night Watch* function to control and confine the characters' longing for queer utopian space in the boundary of heteronormative society.

## Chapter Five

### Trapped in Liminality: Class, Gothic and the Failure to Build Queer Heterotopic Space in *The Little Stranger*

While in *The Paying Guests* and *The Night Watch* it is the working and middle-class characters who are unable to adjust themselves to life after the World Wars, the narrative of *The Little Stranger*, set in 1947–48, centres around an upper-class family, the Ayres, who is also at a loss as to how to contend with the post-war changes to British society. Due to the erosion of the traditional British class system, Hundreds Hall, the family's country house, is in decline, and the family's situation is made worse by a series of preternatural events. In the course of describing the 'accidents' that, one after the other, destroy each member of the upper-class family, Waters shows her text's clear indebtedness to Gothic fiction. According to Julian Wolfreys, the haunted house 'is the place where the blurring of boundaries is given its most literal depiction, in the motion of ghosts through walls'.<sup>199</sup> By setting up Hundreds Hall as a haunted country house, Waters emphasises the breaking down of social boundaries after the two world wars. As George Letissier writes, '[t]o address the still traumatic repercussions of the transitory post-war years, Waters borrows the ghost story's plotline and symbolically foregrounds its favourite

---

<sup>199</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 7.

locus: the haunted house'.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, in *The Little Stranger*, Waters draws on this trope to hint at a variety of intertexts to set the tone for the narrative. The country house setting reminds the reader of Victorian Gothic texts such as Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Writing on the close relationship between the Gothic genre and queerness, Paulina Palmer notes that '[t]he emphasis that the haunted-house narrative places on familial secrets, especially ones of an illicit kind, makes it admirably suited, of course, to treating themes relating to queer sexuality and experience'.<sup>201</sup> As the Ayres family experience one supernatural event after the other, each member's secrets, which exposes their queerness, come out of the closet. Furthermore, by placing Faraday at the centre of the story, his queerness (because of his problematic class identity and failed masculinity) is also brought to the fore, enabling a more productive investigation on the destructive function of heteronormativity.

While *The Little Stranger* benefits from 'borrowing' the conventional country house narrative structure, its resonance with these texts also evokes the escapist view of the pre-war period, which entails nostalgically remembering the past to assuage the damages done by the Second World War. At the same time, *The Little Stranger* alludes to 1940s literature such as Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Josephine Tey's *The Franchise*

---

<sup>200</sup> George Letissier, 'Hauntology as Compromise between Traumatic Realism and Spooky Romance in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*', in Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, eds., *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 34-50 (p. 35).

<sup>201</sup> Paulina Palmer, *Queering Contemporary Gothic Narrative 1970-2012* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 41.

*Affair* (1948), which also deals with the decline of the British upper class in 1940s Britain. Through the amalgamation of literature from different periods, *The Little Stranger* creates an atmosphere characterised by both timeliness and timelessness. As Ann Heilmann points out, 'Waters engages with the twenty-first century nostalgia for the Victorians as well as with 1940s explorations of Gothic doom and class upheaval as symbols of the postwar condition'.<sup>202</sup> It is in the midst of this combination of nostalgia for the past clashing with the social turmoil of the 1940s that Waters presents two conflicting utopian visions: Caroline Ayres's plan of leaving Hundreds and the narrator Dr Faraday's plan of appropriating the house – and obsolete position of country esquire – by marrying Caroline. The issue of social class relations after the Second World War is inseparable from Caroline's and Faraday's utopian visions, since it is the disintegration of the class system that allows them to imagine alternative futures for themselves.

This chapter demonstrates how Waters transforms tropes of Gothic fiction in order to interrogate the class system and the true potential of utopian escape. In the first section, I will show the link between *The Little Stranger* and literary texts that influenced Waters's writing, in particular Josephine Tey's *The Franchise Affair*. While *The Little Stranger* is greatly influenced by the class narrative of Tey's text, Waters updates some of the contents to make room to incorporate queer desire. The second section looks at the way in which Waters revises genre traditions in this novel in order to

---

<sup>202</sup> Ann Heilmann, 'Specters of the Victorian in the Neo-Forties Novel: Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* (2009) and Its Intertexts', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2012), pp. 38-55 (p. 54).



create a space in which the vocabulary for Gothic is employed strategically to give voice to class anxiety in the 1940s, just as she modifies the genre conventions of middlebrow and detective fiction in *The Paying Guests*.

Waters's use of Gothic tropes also sheds light on Faraday's queerness, which arises from his precarious class position. In the third section, I will argue that Waters sets up Hundreds as a liminal site where two utopian visions come into conflict. Both of Caroline's and Faraday's contradictory utopian visions are intricately linked to their different class backgrounds. On the one hand, Caroline's desire to escape her stately home comes from her sense of being burdened by her identity as an impoverished upper-class member of society — she is keen to make a new life for herself beyond the traditions that tie her to a lost heirloom. On the other hand, Faraday's intention to marry Caroline and take over the management of the estate from the biological heir, Roderick, indicates his desire for elevation from his precarious lower-middle-class status. Their conflicting sense of class and identity is complicated further because of the fact that they do not fit traditional gender norms regulating masculinity and femininity. Often described as a rather masculine character, Caroline is contrasted with the emasculated Faraday. I will show that his unstable class and gender identity leads him to be overly preoccupied with the idea of taking possession of Hundreds. Faraday's display of fetishistic behaviours confirms that the country house becomes in his mind an erotic object. His plan to marry Caroline, as the only way for him to appropriate the estate, is at odds with Caroline's longing to escape the heteronormative codes which construct her as an example of failed femininity. Thus Hundreds Hall

becomes a site where Faraday's and Caroline's conflicting plans intercross. The last section shows that with her ambivalent ending, which presents Faraday as a haunting and haunted figure trapped in liminality, Waters underlines the continuing influence of the old class system after the two world wars, and it is this influence which interferes with and obliterates the characters' queer utopian longing. As the spectral figure in *The Little Stranger* that is never properly explained or eliminated, the looming presence of the class conflict is present throughout Waters's text. Just like the presence of the traditional class system is always in the background, there are indications that Waters's narrative is influenced by various literary texts that precede *The Little Stranger*.

### **5.1. The Palimpsestuous Affair: *The Franchise Affair* and *The Little Stranger***

The way in which Waters's text exhibits layers of various narratives is related to the idea of the palimpsest, which Sarah Dillon argues is 'an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other'.<sup>203</sup> In her article in *The Guardian*, Waters lists Tey's *The Franchise Affair* (1948) as such text, a source for *The Little Stranger*. *The Franchise Affair* follows Robert Blair's attempt to clear an impoverished middle-class family's name from the allegation that they kidnapped a working-class girl. When Waters talks about Tey's *The Franchise Affair* as one of the major inspirations for *The Little*

---

<sup>203</sup> Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 4.

*Stranger*, she indicates the palimpsestuous relationship of Waters's text to Tey's: 'to my eye, at least – *The Franchise Affair* will always be there, the faintest of shadows, just below the surface of mine'.<sup>204</sup> Just as Waters uses *The Franchise Affair* as a starting point to develop her narrative, Tey's narrative is inspired by an eighteenth-century trial which began with maidservant Elizabeth Canning's claim that she had been kidnapped by two upper-class women who tried to force her into prostitution.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, Waters's palimpsestuous text writes over a palimpsest. In *The Franchise Affair*, Canning is turned into Betty Kane, a working-class girl who accuses the impoverished upper-middle-class Sharpes of kidnapping her and forcing her to be their maid. Betty crystallises the social unrest of post-war Britain about class and gender. For Alison Light, Tey's characterization of Betty displays 'the fear which runs through the text and which is never finally quelled – the fear precisely that female desire, the demands of female sexuality, can never be fully regulated through the definitions and limitations of class'.<sup>206</sup> Whereas Betty's allegation which threatens to destroy the reputation of the Sharpes is quickly established as a fabrication, the question of Betty's female agency is left unanswered: Betty is accused of falsifying facts in the lawsuit to which she is subject, not of voluntarily having an affair with a married man above her social class. Because Betty is not given a voice to explain her actions, Blair

---

<sup>204</sup> Sarah Waters, 'The Lost Girl', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/30/sarah-waters-books> (accessed 30 October 2016, para. 20 of 20).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., paras. 3-5 of 20.

<sup>206</sup> Alison Light, 'Writing Fictions: Femininity and the 1950s' in Jean Radford, ed., *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 139-156 (p. 149).

needs to guess what is behind 'the mask, as childlike and calm as when he had first seen it above her school coat in the drawing-room at *The Franchise*; although behind it its owner must be seething with unnameable emotions'.<sup>207</sup> The fact that Betty's motivation behind her actions is only guessed at by upper-middle-class Blair points to the conservative mind-frame of the author who attempts to maintain the old class structure. As Cora Kaplan writes, '[i]n the postwar conservative imaginary conjured up by Tey and others, women may be both the agent and the victims of [social] anxieties, but never the real authors of the period's enormous social changes'.<sup>208</sup> While Waters shows the influence of *The Franchise Affair* in *The Little Stranger*, she updates and revises the message in Tey's text by questioning the rigidity of the class system and the motivations of class actors.

Waters's novel shifts away from the conservative standpoint of *The Franchise Affair* by deploying a narrator, Faraday (his first name is not revealed), with a precarious class position. Unlike Faraday, Robert belongs to the same class as the Sharpes — when Marion Sharpe telephones Robert, she says she needs 'the advice of someone of [*her*] *own sort*', and she rejects the specialist lawyer who might better serve her needs because he comes from the 'wrong' (lower) class.<sup>209</sup> This reinforces the conservatism of Tey's narrative, as Robert, working with the Sharpes, is instantly determined to discredit Betty's story and proves her to be an unscrupulous and morally corrupt working-

---

<sup>207</sup> Josephine Tey, *The Franchise Affair* (London: Arrow Books), p. 182.

<sup>208</sup> Cora Kaplan, 'Josephine Tey and her Descendants: Conservative Modernity and the Female Crime Novel' in Rachel Gilmour and Bill Schwarz, eds., *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011) pp. 53-73 (p. 65).

<sup>209</sup> Tey, *The Franchise Affair*, p. 7, italics added.

class girl capable not only of promiscuously exerting her sexuality, but also of concealing her true nature to the detriment of her benefactors like the family who took her in. In Waters's text Betty's two-facedness is transferred to the characterisation of Faraday. While he appears to be a respectable middle-class doctor, his class antagonism, which comes from his ambivalent class position, is always just under the surface.

In Tey's novel, Robert, although he is comfortable with his class position, realises he wishes to escape the routine of his everyday life. This is shown at the beginning of the novel:

He had never wanted any other life but this: this quiet friendly life in the place where he had grown up. He still did not want any other. But once or twice lately an odd, alien thought had crossed his mind; irrelevant and unbidden. As nearly as it could be put into words it was: 'This is all you are going to have.' And with the thought would come that moment's constriction in his chest.<sup>210</sup>

Having inherited his family's legal business, Robert is comfortably ensconced in his class. Nevertheless, his boredom with the tranquil life, his 'doubt as to the pleasures and possibilities of being a middle class citizen after the war', is what leads him to defend the Sharpes.<sup>211</sup> By contrast, Faraday's queer class position, and his desire for the country house rather than for Caroline because of it, complicates and blurs the boundary between the working class and the upper middle class. Emma Parker relates this to Waters's 'desire to contest the attitudes to class and gender that characterize *The Franchise Affair*'.<sup>212</sup> At first

---

<sup>210</sup> Tey, *The Franchise Affair*, p. 3-4.

<sup>211</sup> Light, 'Writing Fictions: Femininity and the 1950s', p. 152.

<sup>212</sup> Emma Parker, 'The Country House Revisited: Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*' in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 99-113 (p. 100).

Waters presents her version of a disgruntled working-class figure, using the same name Tey gives to her working-class character, Betty. She is an 'unmemorable' housemaid at Hundreds, and exhibits her duplicitous nature by pretending to be ill so as to escape her duties (*LS* 10). Waters's Betty has a voice and is able to express her discomfort with serving as a maid at Hundreds. Furthermore, some of the characteristics of Betty Kane – above all, her duplicity and class hatred – are transferred to Faraday. Waters shifts the focus of the narrative from the power of female sexuality towards queer class conflict. Because of this shift, similarities and differences between Faraday and Betty are highlighted. Faraday sees through Betty's lies on first meeting her because he has the working-class background like her. At first Faraday is sympathetic towards Betty, for she reminds him of his mother: 'I thought of my mother. She was probably younger than Betty when she first went out to Hundreds Hall' (*LS* 14). At the same time, he envies Betty's treatment at Hundreds since she is the only servant who lives with the Ayres family. When Betty gets to live in Roderick's room after he is sent to a mental institution, Faraday registers his discomfort: 'I found myself faintly unsettled by it, and when I looked into the room shortly after she had moved in, I felt more unnerved than ever' (*LS* 233). For Faraday, Betty represents both what he has repressed (his working-class background) and what he desires (being part of Hundreds). In this way, Betty serves as a mirror image of Faraday, and his emotional response to Betty underscores his obsession with his class. However, Faraday is not the only character who is concerned about the class system. In order to describe the preternatural events which take place at

Hundreds Hall, the characters employ the vocabulary of the Gothic genre, which in turn reveals their anxiety about class.

## 5.2. 'This was mean and spiteful and wrong': Gothicised Class Conflict

Although Betty is the first character who tells Faraday (and the reader) about the possible existence of a supernatural being at Hundreds ('it in't like a proper house at all!' [LS 13]), it is Roderick, the young master of the estate striving to retain the reputation of the Ayres, who describes his queer experience in detail. As he explains to Faraday what happened to him in his bedroom the night of the Ayres' dinner party, when the shaving glass charged him, Roderick says that '[i]t was all the more sickening, for the glass being an ordinary sort of object' (LS 161-162). He aptly calls this event 'the most grotesque thing of all', for the term 'grotesque' describes a situation where the ordinary becomes the extraordinary (LS 161). According to Wolfgang Kayser, '[the grotesque] presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable'.<sup>213</sup> This definition of the grotesque can also be applied to British society in the 1940s, since for the upper-class Ayres family, their grand social life — what they regarded as ordinary — has turned extraordinary, leading the family to their economic decline. It is also important that the first ghostly event falls on the night of the cocktail party Mrs Ayres holds for the Baker-Hydes, the nouveau riche family who recently moved to a neighbouring country estate, since the catastrophic

---

<sup>213</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 185.

result of this social event determines the Ayres's fate and their collapse. The contrast between the Baker-Hydes and the others is highlighted from the start of the party by how they are dressed: while the Ayres, those who have long known Hundreds, and Faraday wear 'old-style evening clothes' and 'floor-length gowns', the Baker-Hydes are dressed casually in 'lounge suits' and 'a vivid cocktail gown' (*LS* 86-87). The fact that everyone at the party except for the Baker-Hydes wears formal and old-fashioned clothes (also literally 'old' in the sense of the wearers not being in a financial position to buy 'new' clothes) illustrates the 'old' regime's difficulty in keeping up with the time, as they are the ones 'who ended up feeling badly dressed', not the Baker-Hydes (*LS* 87). Also, how one should be dressed is relevant to the trouble that Roderick experiences, as it begins when he cannot find his collar and cufflinks for the formal occasion. As Roderick explains his situation, he stresses that his irritation comes from his incapability of being dressed in the appropriately grand manner in light of his obligation of presenting himself as 'the master of Hundreds' (*LS* 158). Therefore it is possible to argue that the spirit which disturbs Roderick can be read as a manifestation of his own hesitation and unwillingness to be the master of the country house.

Roderick's conversation about his experience with Faraday also reveals Faraday's deep-rooted hatred toward the class system. For what Roderick sees as grotesque is not shared by Faraday, whose class status, unlike Roderick's, is unstable. Despite his middle-class educational and professional attainment, Faraday has a troubled class identity complicated by his working-class origins and his professional interaction with the Ayres family as their



doctor. Whilst his first encounter with the Ayres is accidental as their regular doctor is not available, he takes advantage of his newly found relationship with the family to raise his own class status by association. When he gives Caroline a lift to Hundreds Hall, he is thrilled to 'be driving up [the road he had taken when he was a child] in [his] own car with the squire's daughter at [his] side' (LS 47). He is proud of the fact that he is not a chauffeur for the Ayres, which gives him an illusion that he now belongs to the same class as Caroline. At the same time, however, he realises the instability of his class status, as he feels 'overcome suddenly with an absurd sense of gaucheness, and falseness' (LS 47). His drive to and from Hundreds Hall also reinforces his liminal status. Since most of his patients are working class, he literally moves back and forth between the upper class and the working class.

Moreover, when he is surrounded by members of the upper class at the party for the Baker-Hydes, he feels embarrassed about his inauthentic status. His sense of disappointment comes from the fact that his longing to be recognised as an upper-class gentleman is jeopardised by his lower-middle-class position, and also because he realises that the party was organised to match Caroline with the Baker-Hydes' brother. While the horrific incident at the party, where Gillian, the Baker-Hydes' little girl, is attacked by Gyp, Caroline's dog, and Faraday has to stitch her up, helps his name to be recognised in the area and gains him the Ayres's trust, he is frustrated when he is not allowed to call on Gillian the next day. His frustration is amplified by the fact that the task of looking after Gillian is taken over by his colleague Seeley, whose background and family identity are firmly located in the

middle class. Whereas Seeley, whose father was a doctor, naturally assumes his class position, Faraday cannot forget that his parents come from the working class – his father was a grocer, and his mother served the Ayres at Hundreds. At the cocktail party, when he looks at his reflected self in the mirror, he notices that he ‘looked more than ever a balding grocer’ (*LS* 89). His resemblance to his father who was actually a grocer is what fuels his self-hatred. He would have ended up in the same class position as his parents if they had not supported him to attend medical school, which in turn he blames for their early deaths. His unstable class status also keeps him from joining in conversations about the past, which prompts him to feel a mixture of desire and anger.

These mixed feelings come to the fore earlier in the novel when he has tea with the Ayres for the first time. He cannot contribute to the conversation while all topics are concerned with the family’s past and the people who had served them, and feels

the faintest stirring of a dark dislike ... Perhaps it was the peasant blood in [him], rising. But Hundreds Hall had been made and maintained, [he] thought, by the very people they were laughing at now. (*LS* 27)

Here his anger is fuelled by a sense of bitterness from the viewpoint of a working-class man aware of the exploitation of his forebears. While Roderick and Caroline make fun of some of the servants, Faraday is reminded that his own mother was a maid at Hundreds. As Parker writes, it is possible that ‘the poltergeist that disturbs the house ... is the product of Faraday’s psyche’, as

the spirit succeeds in destroying the class hierarchy.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, Claire O'Callaghan assesses Faraday as 'a complex figure, a man who aspires for power and authority, but who wrestles with class inequality and his working-class origins'.<sup>215</sup> While Faraday expresses his desire to assimilate himself to the upper class, the spirit which serves as his dark self is fed by his resentment and hatred of this very class, that, he believes, drove his parents to the grave. His sense of guilt for his parents' deaths, transformed into anger towards the class system, is projected onto the Ayres. For Faraday, whose identity wavers between the working class and the middle class, and who wishes to overcome this identity crisis by attempting to turn himself into a country squire, taking possession of Hundreds through marriage to Caroline turns into an obsession and appears the only solution to his class dysphoria.

### **5.3. 'Or is it the house you want?': Fetishism, Liminality, and Queer Utopia**

For Faraday's dark self, taking control of the country house means overcoming his frustration with the class system. Faraday's utopian desire to possess the country house dates back to his childhood days, when on his first visit in the company of his mother, he prised out a plaster acorn from the wall decoration. As Emily Apter notes on fetishism, 'objects are revealed to be provocations to desire and possession', and Faraday's possession of a minute part of the house is a significant early indication of his later desire to control

---

<sup>214</sup> Parker, 'The Country House Revisited: Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*', p. 106.

<sup>215</sup> O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 134.

Hundreds.<sup>216</sup> Faraday's behaviour is a clear sign of fetishism: according to William Pietz, '[t]he fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a significant event', and Faraday's childhood experience of entering the grand estate for the first time, as well as taking possession of an acorn that represents the house, is an important factor in his adult obsession with Hundreds.<sup>217</sup>

Therefore it is worth noting that when Faraday prolongs the Baker-Hydes' stay at the cocktail party, which leads to Gillian's terrible injury and to Faraday's increased influence at Hundreds, he is '*childishly* glad' and realises his 'pointless, almost spiteful urge to make life difficult' for the Baker-Hydes (LS 96, italics added). The use of the adverb '*childishly*' indicates that the 'dark' aspects of Faraday's psyche are shaped by his childhood experience which attracted him to Hundreds in the first place.<sup>218</sup> In recounting the childhood event, he likens his attachment to the house to a romantic affair:

It was simply that, in admiring the house, I wanted to possess a piece of it – or rather, as if the admiration itself, which I suspected a more ordinary child would not have felt, entitled me to it. I was like a man, I suppose, wanting a lock of hair from the head of a girl he had suddenly and blindingly become enamoured of. (LS 3)

Faraday's obsession with an acorn which represents Hundreds for him can be classified as an example of fetishistic behaviour. Instead of a woman's body being fetishised, it is the country house that becomes an object of Faraday's fetishism. Freudian psychoanalysis sees fetishism as a way of assuaging one's

---

<sup>216</sup> Emily Apter, 'Introduction' in Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds., *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

<sup>217</sup> William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish', Part 1, *Res*, No. 9 (1985), pp. 5-17 (p. 12).

<sup>218</sup> It is also worth noting here that Roderick refers the spirit as 'spiteful', further linking it to Faraday's psyche (LS 164).

fear of castration by the mother figure. Therefore, as Freud proposes, the fetish 'remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it'.<sup>219</sup> Faraday feels entitled to be a custodian of Hundreds through his appropriation of a part of it. As a result of this, Faraday's biological mother becomes less influential; this is reflected by the blurry figure in an old portrait Mrs Ayres shows him (*LS* 29). While the fact that he cannot be sure which servant is his mother further confirms his unstable identity, it also points to his over-identification of the country house as a maternal figure. At the same time, by likening his desire to possess a part of the estate to a man's longing for a girl's lock of hair, Faraday transforms Hundreds into an erotic object of desire. As his act of vandalism that puts him in possession of the acorn is referred to by his mother as 'the queer little thing', for Helen Davies Faraday's action is 'a sexual transgression, something to be silenced, hidden, repressed'.<sup>220</sup> The word 'queer' here also describes an action which can threaten the class system. He later takes home 'the ivory whistle [he] had drawn from the kitchen end of the speaking-tube', which is a bigger object than a plaster acorn (*LS* 467). This suggests his growing eagerness to physically seize possession of Hundreds. He successfully takes over Graham's place as the family doctor for the Ayres, and gradually eliminates the family members: through his treatments he is able to establish a

---

<sup>219</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis), pp. 147-157 (p. 154).

<sup>220</sup> Helen Davies, 'Written on the Body: Wounded Men and Ugly Women in *The Little Stranger*' in Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, eds., *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 155-172 (p. 164).

medical diagnosis of Roderick and Mrs Ayres as mentally unstable, as a result of which Roderick is sent to a mental institution and Mrs Ayres commits suicide. Lastly, his endeavour to keep her under his control culminates in his proposal to Caroline. As Wilhelm Stekel, observing the root of fetishistic behaviours, writes, '[t]he first sexual impression is permanently soldered to the individual's whole sex feeling; so that only the memory of this impression can provoke passion'.<sup>221</sup> The first entrance to Hundreds, accompanied by his act of vandalism, is in Faraday's mind his first sexual encounter which determines his later actions, and his unexpected return to the country house revives and increases his passion for it. In this way the country house, not Caroline, becomes Faraday's main erotic object.

Since his desire is only manifest in the material objects taken from Hundreds Hall, and operates like 'a lock of hair from the head of a girl', Faraday's emotional attachment to Caroline is rather a forced one. He desires Caroline only because through her he can have access to the country house he has always coveted. When Caroline eventually realises this, her question 'Do you [want me], really? ... Or is it the house you want?' reveals Faraday's true intention (*LS* 448). Because Faraday values Caroline only as a means to take possession of Hundreds, he feels embarrassed at the idea that people think he is romantically involved with her when he takes her to the dance. At the same time, however, he feels proud of himself for 'bring[ing] Caroline Ayres along to a party' (*LS* 265), given she is the squire's daughter. His relationship with Caroline, always underpinned by his desire to climb up the social ladder,

---

<sup>221</sup> Wilhelm Stekel, *Sexual Aberrations: The Phenomena of Fetishism in Relation to Sex*, trans. Sam Parker (London: Vision, 1930), p. 4.

situates him in a liminal position, for his masculine longing to possess Hundreds Hall is contrasted with his emasculated status in juxtaposition to Caroline's masculine features. Caroline, always praised for her intelligence, not for her physical beauty, does not fit the image of a conventional female figure. When she talks about her experience at the Women's Royal Naval Service, she contrasts her experience to the more feminine realm of nursing:

I thought of nursing, you know, during the war. [But s]o many people told me I was just cut out for it, it put me off. ... That's why I joined the Wrens. ... I liked there being only one way to do things, only one sort of stocking, one sort of shoe, one sort of way to wear one's hair. (LS 255-256)

In her wish to distance herself from the traditional femininity which is associated with nursing, Caroline shares characteristics with Waters' other heroines, such as Nan in *Tipping the Velvet* and Kay in *The Night Watch*. As Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan note, 'Waters frequently explores the way in which dominant notions of womanhood have, at different points in the past, placed narrow parameters upon the way in which women experienced their lives'.<sup>222</sup> Her repetitive use of 'only one' to describe her time at the naval service indicates an escape from femininity into uniformed office. The fact that there is always 'only one' way to be dressed prevents her from making 'wrong' decisions that could thwart what is expected of her as a woman. Gina Wisker points to the fact that 'Caroline [has no] real commitment to romance, sexual encounter [nor] the marriage narrative constructed for her by others [or] the sociocultural gender politics of the times

---

<sup>222</sup> Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, 'Sarah Waters's Feminisms' in Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, eds., *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-21 (p. 3).

in which she lives'.<sup>223</sup> Her reluctance to dress herself in a feminine manner is clear at the cocktail party when she evidently feels 'ill at ease' and 'not quite herself' in wearing a pointedly feminine gown (*LS* 82). The result is not a favourable one, for what she wears – 'a blue chiffon gown and silver shoes and gloves' – emphasises her rather masculine parts of her body, 'her prominent collarbones and the tendons of her throat' (*LS* 82). Also at the dance party to which Faraday takes her, she takes more pleasure in socialising with her friend than functioning as Faraday's female company. Her decision to break off her engagement with Faraday, after 'think[ing] about what I wanted, and didn't want', shows her determination not to be confined to the hetero-patriarchal environment (*LS* 446). Her longing to live away from the part she has to perform at Hundreds – nursing Roderick and Mrs Ayres, and being confined to the role of Faraday's wife which awaits her – is a clear indication of her desire to release herself from the constraints placed on her femininity. In this way, Hundreds Hall is set up as an intersectional site where conflicts between Faraday's and Caroline's utopian ideals are presented and contested.

At Hundreds, through their interactions with each other, Faraday's and Caroline's sense of self is blurred and questioned. As Victor Turner writes with reference to religious rituals, in a liminal space one's identity is made 'ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of

---

<sup>223</sup> Gina Wisker, 'The Feminist Gothic in *The Little Stranger*: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change' in Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, eds., *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 97-113 (p. 103).



classification'.<sup>224</sup> In this sense, Hundreds functions as a heterotopic site that signifies a 'break with ... traditional time', in that there is a sense of accumulated time — the present influenced by his childhood longing for the estate in Faraday's case, and by the past when the Ayres were prosperous in Caroline's.<sup>225</sup> While Faraday and Caroline play an indispensable role in completing each other's ideal vision, Faraday's vision to take possession of Hundreds as Caroline's husband is at odds with Caroline's hope that Faraday is the key to her departure from it. Faraday and Caroline, both of whom are depicted as queer in the sense that they do not conform to the traditional values of class and masculinity/femininity, long for a space that promises them a new, 'more bearable', life — Faraday attempts to achieve this by staying at Hundreds, whereas Caroline does so by moving out.

While Hundreds is where Faraday's queer desire clashes with Caroline's, 'a small clearing beside an overgrown pond' is a heterotopic place which could potentially accommodate Faraday's and Caroline's queer desire (LS 124). Initially this is where Faraday visits from time to time, and this site is located between the houses of his working-class patients and Hundreds, thus geographically and socially located in liminality. Faraday takes Caroline to this place on the night of the dance, after Caroline is unwilling to return home ('God, I don't want to go back to Hundreds! Take me somewhere else, can't you?' [LS 273]). The heterotopic space serves both Faraday's and Caroline's desire: Faraday's desire to court Caroline (only as a means of taking

---

<sup>224</sup> Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 232.

<sup>225</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 6.

possession of Hundreds) and Caroline's to escape (if only temporarily) her duties as a upper-middle-class lady. When Faraday makes advances at Caroline, however, he is overcome by 'some dark current of unease, almost of distaste' (*LS* 275). His mixed feelings of desire and repulsion clearly stem from his class discomfort, for he compares himself to Seeley:

None of this, I knew, would have made any sense to him. Seeley would have kissed her and to hell with it. ... The teasing open, in the darkness, of a seam of moisture, movement, taste. Seeley would have done it.

But I am not Seeley. It was a long time ago since I had kissed a woman; years, in fact, since I held a woman in my arms with anything other than a rather perfunctory passion. (*LS* 275)

Just like he felt awkward when driving to Hundreds with Caroline next to him, he is not able to shake off the idea that his actions are not what is expected from someone without confidence in his masculinity. His constant comparison of himself with Seeley is understandable, for Seeley represents a model of masculinity: 'a tall, well-built man', with 'his little ways with the ladies' (*LS* 36, 105). In addition to his failed masculinity, his lack of sexual inexperience partly stems from his past relationship, which did not work because of the class difference:

a girl with whom, as a medical student, I'd been very much in love: a girl from a good Birmingham family, whose parents hadn't considered me to be a suitable match, and who had finally thrown me over for another man. (*LS* 39)

Faraday's insecure class status, combined with his fragile sense of masculinity, leads to his inadequacy. Furthermore, his sense of uneasiness results from the fact that it is Hundreds, not Caroline, that is the object of his sexual desire. In a similar way, Caroline sees Faraday not as her romantic partner but as someone who can help her escape from the suffocating life at

Hundreds. The heterotopic space fails to allow Faraday and Caroline freedom here because their relationship is not based on mutual respect and desire for each other as in Waters's other novels. Although the darkness provided ideal space for queer characters to briefly evade heteronormative codes for Maud and Sue in *Fingersmith*, Frances and Lilian in *The Paying Guests*, and Helen and Julia in *The Night Watch*, it is not the case for Faraday's and Caroline's conflicting desires.

After Caroline's rejection of Faraday, he imagines himself transported to the estate in his dreams while he is in this liminal site. After attending to an emergency patient in the night, the precise night that would have been his wedding night, he drives to a spot near a pond and falls asleep:

And in the slumber I seemed to leave the car, and to press on to Hundreds: I saw myself doing it, with all the hectic, unnatural clarity ... I saw myself cross the silvered landscape and pass like smoke through the Hundreds gate. I saw myself start along the Hundreds drive. (LS 473)

This passage suggests that Faraday's mind could have escaped his body and travelled to Hundreds. Cases of thought transference like this one were compiled and analysed by Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore in *Phantasms of the Living* (1883). They examined various cases where 'the mind of one human being has affected the mind of another, without speech uttered or word written, or sign made'.<sup>226</sup> They then maintain that dreams allow 'the whole range of transition from *ideal and emotional* to distinctly *sensory* affections', supporting the idea that one's thought can be

---

<sup>226</sup> Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886), p. xxxv.

transferred in one's dreams.<sup>227</sup> The fact that Caroline's death takes place when Faraday imagines his mind travelling to Hundreds implies that through his dream Faraday's anger towards the class system and fetishistic desire to take possession of Hundreds result in his actual murder of Caroline. This is not the first time Faraday's desire is materialised through his dream. While asleep at home, his

... mind would go softly across the darkened miles between [Faraday and Caroline], to slip like a poacher through the Hundreds gate and along the overgrown drive; to nudge open the swollen front door, to inch across the chequered marble; and then to go creeping, creeping towards her, up the still and silent stairs. (*LS* 325)

On that earlier occasion, Caroline tells Faraday the next day that she received a phone call which did not seem to issue from anybody, and which also could be a manifestation of Faraday's desire. Later, in trying to make sense of the mysterious events at Hundreds, Caroline draws on several cases from *Phantasms of the Living*, attributing the source of the evil spirit to 'parts of a person ... [u]nconscious parts, so strong or so troubled they can take on a life of its own' (*LS* 363). Faraday's movements likened to the trope of a spectre imply that Faraday is the source which slowly destroys the Ayres family.

At the same time it is possible to entertain another theory, that Faraday's personality is split into two: the one an authoritative figure who rationally analyses the events that take place at Hundreds, and the other a self secretly driven by deep anger towards the class system; an anger that is directed at the Ayres. Henry Maudsley's double brain theory indicates that Faraday might actually have gone to Hundreds to kill Caroline but fails to

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 295, italics in original.

remember that. Arguing how the brain's two hemispheres operate in patients with mental disorder, Maudsley talks '[o]f a self bound to another self, which was hindering and opposing it – of a self divided against itself, a distracted or double self'.<sup>228</sup> In Faraday's case, he is divided into two selves in terms of his class status: that of his original working-class background and that of a doctor aspiring to the middle class. While presenting himself as an authoritative male heterosexual narrator in control, Faraday is, like Caroline, marked out as queer because of his ambivalent class status and sexuality. Faraday's ambiguous class position is articulated when he 'use[s a] Warwickshire word, almost unconsciously', revealing his inner, working-class self which he tries to conceal (LS 401). Also, he displays his sense of discomfort when he realises he went to school with one of the men building new flats on the land which used to be part of the Hundreds estate: the man's 'ripe Warwickshire accent' Faraday is now unable to 'believe had once also been [his]' (LS 248). The man's awkward greeting, along with his heavy local accent, is a reminder for Faraday about the working-class origins from which he tries so hard to separate himself and makes him realise the other man is aware of his own insecurity. The disjuncture between Faraday's two selves is explored further when he recalls the time he entered medical training. He learnt that '[his] accent was wrong, [his] clothes were wrong, [his] table manners – all of it, wrong' (LS 250), stressing the difference of class and his sense of discomfort. It is worth noting here that Roderick uses the same word, 'wrong', to describe the spirit which causes him distress, for this links Faraday with the spirit

---

<sup>228</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'The Double Brain', *Mind*, Vol. 14, No. 54 (April 1889), pp. 161-187 (p. 183).

which sets out to destroy Hundreds. They share a sense of misplacedness, and they are both filled with hatred towards the upper-class Ayres. Faraday's frustration with the class system, mixed with his desire to elevate his status in it, leads to his obsession with Hundreds. Maudsley's 'theory of a dual and inconsistent action of the hemispheres' establishes Faraday as the spirit that haunts Hundreds.<sup>229</sup> When Faraday and Seeley discuss what is behind the inexplicable event at Hundreds, Seeley proposes the possibility of '[a] sort of shadow-self, perhaps: a Caliban, a Mr Hyde' (*LS* 380, italics in original). Although they start their discussion by debating the validity of Myers's theory, Seeley's mention of Mr Hyde, a personality that allows Dr Jekyll to exert violence without remembering any of the actions, brings Maudsley's theory to the fore. Waters does not provide a clear answer as to what really happened at Hundreds. This is furthered by the ambivalent ending, when Faraday looks at his reflection in a window-pane. Rather, this ending subtly confirms Faraday's queer status that is linked to a spectral figure.

#### **5.4. Queer Self in a Window-Pane: Ambivalent Ending and the Haunting by Queer Desire**

The ending of *The Little Stranger* sees Faraday furtively visiting the now deserted Hundreds, as if he had become a spectre. He confesses that he visits Hundreds partly because he hopes to encounter 'the spirit' himself:

Every so often I'll sense a presence, or catch a movement at the corner of my eye, and my heart will give a jolt of fear and

---

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

expectation ... I'll turn, and am disappointed – realising that what I am looking at is only a cracked window-pane, and that the face gazing distortedly from it, baffled and longing, is my own. (LS 499)

Faraday's reflected self, distorted in a window-pane, draws attention to his queerness. Earlier on, when Mrs Ayres talked to Faraday about the incidents shortly before her suicide, she expresses her 'impression that this thing, whatever it was, was in some way *familiar*: as if its bashful advance towards us was more properly a *return*' (LS 393, italics in original). The narrative, which begins with Faraday's first visit to the estate in his adult life, is concerned with his return. This is a nod towards Freud's 'return of the repressed': 'the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns'.<sup>230</sup> In Faraday's case, however, it is not his fear of Hundreds but his desire to possess it that has been repressed and returns. Although technically he is not entitled to own Hundreds, he is allowed to walk around the house as he wishes for the time being. This illusion that he can be the master of Hundreds as long as he is the only one who sets foot in the estate is as close as it can be to his utopian vision. Faraday's facial expression reflected in a window-pane is 'baffled and longing', illustrating his in-between status – he is trapped in this 'heterotopia of illusion', which makes the space outside of Hundreds seem unreal to him. Only at Hundreds is he allowed to entertain an illusion that he can one day take possession of the house. As O'Callaghan argues,

Faraday's crisis in masculinity [is] that which comes to haunt its grounds. ... Waters posits Faraday as a spectre of the

---

<sup>230</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 123-162 (p. 147).

heteropatriarchal male subject, a stranger (as the novel's title suggests) who brings *into* the Hall's parameters the ideology of heteropatriarchy, and who is aggrieved by his own inability to be the master of the house.<sup>231</sup>

In her study of gender and sexual politics in Waters's novels, O'Callaghan demonstrates that *The Little Stranger* delineates the process of heteropatriarchal oppression against queer characters who do not fit into the conventional class and gender categories. Although Faraday is a representation of heteropatriarchal values that sees the Ayres family members as unfit and suppresses them, at the same time he is a queer character himself. Therefore, his desire to resolve his insecure sense of self in regard to his class and gender identity cannot be achieved, and he is bound to haunt Hundreds. This state of Faraday's psychological stagnation corresponds with the idea of queer spectrality that Carla Freccero discusses. She argues that '[t]he past is in the present in the form of a haunting', and this spectrality is 'related to ... survivals and pleasures that have little to do with normative understandings of biological reproduction'.<sup>232</sup> Faraday's obsession with Hundreds which started in his childhood continues to occupy his mind, as he roams about Hundreds just like he did in his childhood. Faraday's queer desire haunts him, not allowing him to escape the liminal space where his class identity remains uncertain.

In contrast to Faraday's temporary and failed utopian ideal, the housing blocks that are built on the Hundreds estate, on the other hand, succeed in

---

<sup>231</sup> O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 137, italics in original.

<sup>232</sup> Carla Freccero, 'Queer Spectrality Haunting the Past' in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, eds., *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 194-213 (p. 194).



providing those who live there with what Letissier calls 'a utopian picture, with ... pastoral Morrissian echoes'.<sup>233</sup> Thanks to the newly built council housing, those in the middle class are better off than they used to be. A family related to Betty is one of them, and her life has similarly improved. Although she is not living in a council house herself, she is working at a bicycle factory, a job which she long wanted to do, and is in a happy relationship. Betty's situation makes for quite a contrast with Faraday's in that he failed to be the recognised owner of Hundreds and he lost Caroline. However, those who live in the council houses have Hundreds always in the corner of their eye, which complicates their seemingly idyllic life. The introduction of a wood fence, so that they will not need to see the ostensibly haunted house, paradoxically reinforces Hundreds' presence. As '[s]tories about the Hundreds ghost continue to circulate' (LS 495), the old notion about the class system haunts people's minds. Although she is content with her life, the memories of Hundreds live on in Betty's mind too. She tells Faraday that she 'dream[s Mrs Ayres] tries to give me things, jewels and brooches and things like that' (LS 496). The items that Mrs Ayres wants to give Betty in her dream symbolise the upper middle class, and the fact that she 'never want[s] to take them' indicates her content with her class position (LS 496). Whilst the gloomy memories of Hundreds remain with Betty, her clearly stable working-class mind allows her to move on to pursue the satisfaction that her class offers.

---

<sup>233</sup> Letissier, 'Hauntology as Compromise between Traumatic Realism and Spooky Romance in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*', p. 38.

## 5.5. Conclusion

Waters maps out queer desire in a tapestry of texts. In drawing on a variety of texts both from the Victorian period and from the post-war period, *The Little Stranger* revises and updates them so that Waters can reveal Faraday's queer desire that arises from his insecure class position. Failing to build his heterotopic space with Caroline due to their lack of mutual respect and desire, Faraday transforms Hundreds into the liminal site where his queer past functions to haunt the present and cuts off his futurity. In describing Faraday's fractured utopian and heterotopic space, Waters stresses the continued influence of the class system: its impact remains in place, and this is what makes every utopian longing illusory and distorted. Given the series of tragedies that befall the Ayreses and the sharp contrast between Faraday and Betty, Waters suggests that class and gender expectations in society place queer characters in the margins, and do not allow them to transgress any boundaries. Along with *The Paying Guests* and *The Night Watch*, *The Little Stranger* explores where queerness could be situated in heteropatriarchal society, underscoring the hopelessness of establishing queer heterotopic space in the post-war period.

## Chapter Six

### Taking Possession of the City: Queer Streetwalking and London

As I discussed in Chapter 5, in *The Little Stranger* Hundreds Hall is regarded as a feminine entity that the male, heterosexual narrator Faraday attempts to possess and penetrate. Similarly, in Waters's novels London's urban landscape is also associated with femininity. This is because by their act of walking and thus taking possession of the streets, Waters's lesbian women seek to infuse London with their queer desire. Waters's representation of London has been discussed before, yet the way Waters utilises her characters' act of walking to articulate their gender and sexual identity could be investigated further.<sup>234</sup> Queer streetwalking allows Waters's characters to explore their non-normative identity, and thus its ability to interrogate heteronormativity resonates with the subversive potential of queer heterotopic space. By bringing all of Waters's novels together, this chapter demonstrates how female characters' acts of walking can collectively call into question patriarchal hegemonies that are premised on walking the streets. As

---

<sup>234</sup> See, for example, Stefania Ciocia, "'Queer and Verdant': The Textual Politics of Sarah Waters' Neo-Victorian Novels", *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007), <http://literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2007/ciocia.html> (accessed 10 February 2017) and Rachel Wood, "'Walking and Watching" in Queer London: Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Night Watch*", *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4 (2013), pp. 305-316.

Susan Leigh Foster asserts, an act of walking symbolises a critical response towards the normative structure of society:

Moving down the street, the walker's swerve is a trope. It embodies both an analysis of and response to the normative. ... Such a response ... opens up the possibility for resistance through its affirmation of individual human agency.<sup>235</sup>

In *Tipping the Velvet*, when Nan walks through London in male costumes, her walking reveals and plays with the performative nature of heteronormativity. Nan utilises her act of walking as a way of critiquing the assumption that the outside spaces function to maintain heteronormative societal codes. Also, in a number of Waters's lesbian characters the desire to walk around London is associated with queerness in its lack of linearity. Kay Langrish in *The Night Watch*, for instance, walks the streets of London for no apparent purpose:

She stepped like a person who knew exactly where they were going, and why they were going there – though the fact was, she had nothing to do, and no one to visit, no one to see. Her day was a blank, like all of her days. She might have been inventing the ground she walked on, laboriously, with every step. (NW 6)

The aimless nature of Kay's walk serves a queer purpose. The ostensible purposefulness of her walk is compromised by its purposelessness, which transforms the meaning of women's streetwalking. Her random choice of the route, which is contrasted to the straight, linear progression of (other) straight women, involves her queer status. Like Kay, the female characters in Waters's novels often walk the streets, not only to get from one place to another, but also for the sole purpose of walking.

---

<sup>235</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, 'Walking and Other Choreographic Tactics: Danced Inventions of Theatricality and Performativity', *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3 (2002), pp. 125-146 (pp. 129-130).

This act of aimless walking calls into question the idea that outside spaces are often considered men's domain, just as inside spaces are dominated by men. As Helen Jarvis, Paula Kantor, and Jonathan Cloke write, outside spaces such as cities 'have always been regarded "risqué and exciting" to reflect male pleasures'.<sup>236</sup> Cities as playgrounds for wandering men are associated with the concept of the *flâneur* in nineteenth-century Paris – according to Walter Benjamin, '[t]he street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls'.<sup>237</sup> The *flâneur* is a male, bourgeois figure who leisurely walks the streets while 'translating the chaotic and fragmentary city into an understandable and familiar space'.<sup>238</sup> Thus, the act of making sense of the modern cityscape is seen as a prerogative for men. In addition to Benjamin's comparison between the streets and the inside of the house, Charles Baudelaire states that '[f]or the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it has been an immense source of enjoyment to establish the dwelling in ... the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite'.<sup>239</sup> The figure of strolling men has been pertinent to the portrayal of cities, for, according to Michel de Certeau, '[the act of walking] is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the

---

<sup>236</sup> Helen Jarvis, Paula Kantor, and Jonathan Cloke, *Cities and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 15-16.

<sup>237</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 37.

<sup>238</sup> Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>239</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painters of Modern Life*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 14.

part of the pedestrian'.<sup>240</sup> De Certeau maintains that through the act of walking strollers actualise the space of the city.

Waters attempts to diversify the process of individuals actualising space by letting her lesbian characters walk the streets and thus 'possess' the cityscape. In *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation*, Charlotte Mathieson writes about the complex significations of the female act of walking, as '[w]alking was a site of an array of classed meanings and codes, and for women these codes were complicated through the intersection of class with gender ideologies'.<sup>241</sup> She goes on to point to the fact that '[t]he solidification of the association between women's walking and sexual promiscuity is evident in the use of "streetwalking" to signify prostitution'.<sup>242</sup> Waters's characters' act of appropriating and penetrating space by walking can contribute to invalidating the masculine implication attached to outside space and challenge the sexually subordinate position of women. In an interview with Kaye Mitchell, Waters states that

[her characters] enjoy walking ... because of its mixture of life and anonymity – the fact that there's room for you to be in a crowd but for you to be untouched by the crowd at the same time.<sup>243</sup>

Waters emphasises the sense of freedom that female characters can get from the act of streetwalking, by which they can, if only temporarily, escape and/or subvert men's control and call into question gendered and sexualised

---

<sup>240</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Reddall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 98, italics in original.

<sup>241</sup> Charlotte Methieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 28.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>243</sup> Mitchell, "'I'd love to write an anti-Downton!'", p. 137.

meanings of 'streetwalking'. De Certeau writes that the streetwalkers 'offers a series of turns (*tours*) and detours', which makes the act of walking 'an equivalent in an art of composing a path'.<sup>244</sup> In that it grants them an independent position that is usually taken up by men, streetwalking gives women the potential to discredit male authority that confines women. In her recent book on the *flâneuse*, Lauren Elkin argues that '[t]he flâneuse does exist, whenever we have deviated from the paths laid out for us, lighting out for our own territories'.<sup>245</sup> Elkin's statement serves as a counter-argument to critics such as Janet Wolff, who writes that '[t]here is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century'.<sup>246</sup> This idea is challenged by Waters's novels, in which female characters are given active agency to walk the streets and their act of walking complicates the male-female power dynamics.

By depicting various types of female characters in different historical periods who attempt to counter heteronormative codes through their act of

---

<sup>244</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 100, italics in original.

<sup>245</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 23.

<sup>246</sup> Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1985), pp. 37-46 (p. 45). Elizabeth Wilson contests Wolff's argument from a different standpoint from Elkin's. She contends that 'there could never be a female *flâneur* ... the *flâneur* himself never really existed, being but an embodiment of the special blend of excitement, tedium and horror aroused by many in the metropolis, and the disintegrative effect of this on the masculine identity. ... He is a figure to be deconstructed, a shifting projection of angst rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power' (Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Inivible Flâneur', *New Left Review*, No. 191 [1992], pp. 90-110 [p. 109]).

walking, Waters works to re-demarcate London as a female space. As Sally Munt notes,

Lesbian identity is constructed in the temporal and linguistic mobilisation of space ... Our bodies are vital signs of this temporality and intersubjective location. In an instant, freeze-frame, a lesbian is occupying a space as it occupies her.<sup>247</sup>

The cityscape, then, is an extension of the women characters' female and queer bodies through which they reinvent and explore their identities. In this process of discrediting a phallocentric doctrine of walking, Waters transforms the concept of a female streetwalker which is traditionally and problematically connected with that of a prostitute. The first section of this chapter deals with female characters whose act of walking cannot be necessarily considered to be that of the *flâneuse*. Rather than idly strolling the streets and absorbing the environment, the characters have clear goals in mind. Nevertheless, their walk is also characterised by their random walking which leads to accidental encounters along the way: they stumble upon new aspects of the cityscape, an experience which highlights the ultimate unknowability of the city. Each character's walking of the street works to create an urban palimpsest, which introduces a set of experiences where new meanings are engraved upon the old ones. This can be placed in the context of Gérard Genette's concept of the palimpsest. Genette refers to a palimpsest as a network of texts where 'a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two

---

<sup>247</sup> Sally Munt, 'The Lesbian Flâneur', in David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 114-125 (p. 125).



concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole'.<sup>248</sup> In a similar vein, Doreen Massey argues that space is 'the sphere of coexistence of a multiplicity of trajectories'.<sup>249</sup> Genette suggests that a literary heterotopic space can be created which is characterised by

a perpetual state of transfusion, a transtextual perfusion, constantly present itself in its totality and as a Totality all of whose authors are but one and all its books one vast, one infinite Book.<sup>250</sup>

Here by 'one infinite Book' Genette refers to a metatextual space which encompasses all layers of palimpsests. The third section of this chapter conceptualises Waters's novels as constituents of what Genette calls 'one vast, one infinite Book' where there is potential for queer heterotopic space.

Through surveying the way each of Waters's characters maps out their desire in London in different time periods, it becomes possible for the contemporary reader to perceive London as a heterotopic space full of queer potential. Their walking encapsulates a questioning of patriarchal values, for through their urban exploration, the city is seen as a text to be reshaped and reinterpreted, which shifts the dominant gendered and sexualised social boundaries. This chapter takes the question further by focusing on the problems of queer *flânerie*. The characters who transform the city so that it will accommodate their queer desire tend to reveal the fragile nature of their act of walking.

Waters's queer characters need to constantly negotiate their place in the city which is set up to maintain heteronormative values.

---

<sup>248</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln, NB: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 398.

<sup>249</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>250</sup> Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 400.

There is an increasing concern about the relationship between women and their act of streetwalking in contemporary women's writing. Michèle Roberts's *The Walworth Beauty* (2017), for example, addresses heteronormative codes that function to erase the *flâneuse*, which Waters challenges in her novels. Madeline, the contemporary of the two narrators of Roberts's novel, says, 'I think women can be *flâneurs*, but no one notices. They think we're just shopping'.<sup>251</sup> She goes on to call the societal codes '[a] complete double standard!', since they only register men as the *flâneurs* and women as prostitutes.<sup>252</sup> Waters is one of the contemporary female authors who demonstrate that women's (and in Waters's case, also queer) act of walking can challenge heteronormativity that abounds in the streets.

### **6.1. The City as 'fundamentally uncertain and ambiguous': Accidental Walking and the Negotiation of Queer Identity**

Waters's female characters who walk the streets of London are not always strictly defined as the female version of the *flâneur*. These women's walking is navigated by their instincts, and characterised by its accidental nature. Although they have clear destinations in mind, they lose their way, take random routes, and encounter the unexpected. Hence their walking is an ambiguous mixture of purposefulness and purposelessness. This unrestrained nature of walking unsettles the patriarchal system which disciplines and

---

<sup>251</sup> Michèle Roberts, *The Walworth Beauty* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 196.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

confines women's movement under its rule, allowing the female characters to reshape their identity. As Mark W. Turner points out,

The city's passers-by, its loafers, its shoppers, its workers, its prostitutes, its cruisers – they all had their own way of moving and walking, of loitering with interest. All exist in a visual and spatial economy that is fundamentally uncertain and ambiguous[.]<sup>253</sup>

Through their walking, Waters's female characters serve to diversify the process of actualising space, indicating that the *flâneur* is not the only figure that 'register[s] the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten, and reread'.<sup>254</sup> The cityscape that is 'fundamentally uncertain and ambiguous' is an apt field for lesbian characters to examine and negotiate their own transgressive sexuality. Waters's women claim the city as their own domain where they search for their queer identity.

For example, in *Affinity*, Margaret faces her own queer desire as a result of her accidental walking. She comes across the building of the British National Association of Spiritualists by chance while she 'gazed at the names upon the door-plates and the windows', consuming window displays (A 126). As Margaret's unexpected encounter with the building which reminds her of Selina is associated with her memory of her previous queer attachment to Helen, Waters draws our attention to the palimpsestuous nature of the act of walking the city: 'I remembered waiting at that corner once for Helen, in the days when I first knew her. Perhaps Selina passed me then' (A 127). Here Margaret's sequential visits to a particular section of the city make it possible

---

<sup>253</sup> Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 35.

<sup>254</sup> Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 3.

for a new meaning to be inscribed on her already established lesbian identity. This is sharply contrasted with the institutionalised act of walking at Millbank. From Miss Haxby's office, Margaret sees female prisoners in the yard as they are forced to walk in circles. The fact that Margaret 'could not have said which was the first prisoner to have entered the ground, and which the last, for the loops were seamless' illustrates the loss of prisoners' individual identities through the meaningless act of walking in circles (A 14). As part of the daily routines for prisoners, having to walk in circles functions to deprive them of their own identity. Accidentality in the act of walking, therefore, is necessary for the process of a constant rewriting of one's identity. This is also exemplified in *The Little Stranger*. Although *The Little Stranger* is not set in London, Caroline is also engaged in an act of walking that is not defined by linearity. On her errand for her mother, she walks to the nearby village, but then she willingly strays from the set course to pick blackberries: 'I got tempted from the path' (LS 42). As Faraday observes her, she moves in and out of the bushes to get what she desires:

A few seconds later I see Caroline. She was right at the edge of the lane, on the shadowy side. Hatless and bare-legged, she was reaching into one of the hedges – had managed to work her way into the brambles so completely that without Gyp to alert me I would have driven past without spotting her. (LS 42)

Here her disregard for any obstacles (the brambles), as well as her carefree style (hatless and bare-legged) registers her as a deviant figure. For, as Sara Ahmed notes,

direction takes us somewhere by the very requirement that we follow a line that is drawn in advance. ... To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without meditation. Within the concept of direction is a concept of 'straightness.' To follow a

line might be a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point.<sup>255</sup>

Caroline is not depicted as a lesbian character, but with her rather masculine features, she is a queer character. Her detour while she is supposed to follow the 'straight' line from Hundreds to the village reinforces her queerness. Her straying from the path serves to establish her as an independent female character.

Likewise, in *The Paying Guests*, rather than striding out in search for her queer identity, Frances utilises her act of walking as a way of claiming her social and sexual independence. As a single woman living in the 1920s, Frances is given more freedom to explore the city than Margaret was. She not only 'tak[es] any street that caught her eye', but also uses public transport to travel more easily than any of the female characters in the Victorian period (PG 38). Temporarily free of her household duties, she seems 'like a battery, to become charged' and feels 'a tingle, something electric, something produced as if by the friction of her shoes against the streets' (PG 38). Through this electric charge, created by her very act of walking the streets, Frances is roused into an independent lesbian self able to possess the cityscape. The importance of the streets in allowing her to explore her identity is highlighted as she contemplates her curious excitement about taking in everyday objects in the streets:

If I were to die today, she thought, and someone were to think over my life, they'd never know that moments like this, here on the Horseferry Road, between a Baptist chapel and a tobacconist's, were the truest things in it. (PG 38-39)

---

<sup>255</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 16.

The privateness of Frances's walking highlighted here challenges the clear distinction between the public and the private sphere by associating her 'true' self with generic urban outside space. This close connection between her unconfined, private self and the public space is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), which is set in 1923 (*The Paying Guests* is set in 1922). *Mrs Dalloway* is one of the texts Waters read for her research on the 1920s, and while she wanted her novel's protagonist to be an 'ordinary' middle-class woman in opposition to an upper-class lady in Woolf's novel, the affinity between Frances and Clarissa Dalloway in terms of their attitude towards their act of walking is unmistakable.<sup>256</sup> Woolf's Clarissa expresses her enthusiastic attitude towards walking early on in the novel when she says, 'I love walking in London ... Really it's better than walking in the country'.<sup>257</sup> Rachel Bowlby points to the leisurely way of walking that Clarissa's name indicates, noting '[w]hat else, after all, would Clarissa's surname have led us to expect than, the woman who likes to dally along the way, the *flâneuse* herself?'<sup>258</sup> Furthermore, the quotation above echoes a scene in which Clarissa remembers her passionate friendship with Sally Seaton (a friendship potentially charged with lesbian desire). She quotes Shakespeare when she feels that "'if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy'" ... all because

---

<sup>256</sup> Waters talked about *The Paying Guests* at Manchester Exchange Theatre on 12 October 2014. This event was part of Manchester Literature Festival.

<sup>257</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>258</sup> Rachel Bowlby, 'Walking, Women and Writing: Virginia Woolf as *Flâneuse*' in Isobel Armstrong, ed., *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 26-47 (p. 35).

she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seaton!’<sup>259</sup>

Through her emotional connection of this experience to ordinary activities and objects such as ‘doing her hair’, ‘the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light’, ‘dressing, and going downstairs’, Clarissa seeks her private self which is in line with ordinariness.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, Clarissa, on her way to a florist, considers ‘what she loved; life; London; this moment in June’.<sup>261</sup> Although Frances and Clarissa do not belong to the same class, they share their appreciation of outside spaces as a medium through which they are released from their domestic entrapment, as well as impressionist moments of pleasure.

In *The Paying Guests*, Frances’ walking also allows her to imagine a utopian space with Lilian. Looking at the window displays enables her to imagine different lives:

She strolled a little way along Regent Street simply for the sake of its curve, pausing to goggle at the prices on the cards in the smart shop windows. Three-guinea shoes, four-guinea hats... A place on a corner was selling Persian antiques. A decorated jar was so tall and so round that a thief might hide in it. She thought, with a smile: Mrs Barber would like that. (PG 40)

While Frances cannot afford to buy new clothes due to the Wrays’ financial difficulties, in her imagination she transfers herself to an alternative world. This echoes aspects of Woolf’s essay that explores women’s experience of the London streets. In ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’ (1927), Woolf explores the imaginative component of window-shopping. As she writes,

---

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

Standing out in the street, one may build up all the chambers of a vast imaginary house and furnish them at one's will with sofa, table, carpet. ... But, having built and furnished the house, one is happily under no obligation to possess it; one can dismantle it in the twinkling of an eye, build and furnish another house with other chairs and other glasses.<sup>262</sup>

When imagining alternative houses in which she could live, Woolf considers the possibility for women's streetwalking to allow space for their exploration of queer identities, which challenges the heteropatriarchal imposition of femininity on women. As Woolf asks,

what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave the *straight* lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men?<sup>263</sup>

Her use of the word 'straight' is particularly striking here, since by allowing women on the street to stray from the path that is set out for them and to move across the city as randomly as they please, Woolf attempts to grant female streetwalkers a similar status to the male *flâneur*. This is emphasised by her description of women's walking as entry 'into the forest where live those wild beasts'. Woolf allows female streetwalkers to explore the urban jungle traditionally reserved for men, where unexpected encounters could challenge their identity. Bowlby states that Woolf 'is advocating a form of female street-walking or street-writing which is clearly going to deviate from any expected routes'.<sup>264</sup> At one point during her walking, Clarissa imagines herself as if 'in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things' she

---

<sup>262</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, David Bradshaw, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 177-187 (pp. 181-182).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 187, italics added.

<sup>264</sup> Bowlby, 'Walking, Women and Writing', p. 37.



becomes part 'of the trees at home', and 'of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist'.<sup>265</sup> Naturalistic metaphors used here – both the trees and a mist – emphasise Clarissa's ubiquitous sense of identity. By likening herself to the trees with extending branches in curved lines and a mist which spreads across the city, Clarissa creates an image of herself as one who is resistant to the oppressive heteronormative societal codes. Thus she redefines the streets as a space where women escape and contest heteropatriarchal confinement. Similarly, in *The Paying Guests*, Frances shares Clarissa's desire to mark herself as queer when she 'seemed, as she made them, to become porous' (PG 38). Through this reciprocal process, Frances appropriates London as a city with queer potential, as well as taking possession of herself as a queer subject. Also, by constructing an imaginary space and an imaginary self in it, Frances fantasises about a utopian space where she may explore her queer sexuality. Although she does not realise her lesbian desire for Lilian at this point, Frances's inclusion of Lilian in her imagination indicates that her utopian space accommodates her own and Lilian's queer longings for each other as the narrative progresses.

The accidental, unintentional nature of walking and a consistent process of reinterpreting one's identity is most prominent in *Tipping the Velvet*. For Nan, walking plays an indispensable role in determining her life. When after the collapse of her relationship with Kitty she decides to go out into the London streets to reinvent herself, she draws attention to the close relationship between her body and the city:

---

<sup>265</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 9.

I gave a cry, I paced the floor ... it was as if to try out new limbs, to feel my whole self shift and snap and tingle with life. ... I thought, I will go out into the world again; I will go back into the city – they have kept me from it long enough! (TV 190)

Here Nan's search for her queer identity is conceptualised as an impulsive, bodily experience of recovery. Since *Tipping the Velvet* is about her journey through various queer theatrical spaces in search of her lesbian identity, whenever her attempt to settle in one community fails, she needs to walk around London to find a new space where she might re-establish herself (from secret lesbian to crossdressing performer, from boy prostitute to libertine lesbian, from sex toy to socialist lesbian). It is in this way that she accidentally comes across clues which determine her course of action, such as Mrs Milne's advertisement for a lodger. It is by chance that she finds an advertisement for a room at Mrs Milne's house which says '*Respectable [sic] Lady Seeks Fe-Male Lodger*' (TV 211). It is the use of hyphen that attracts Nan's attention, as it explains her situation where her identity wavers between masculinity and femininity. Streets, thus, serve as a performative space for her search for her identity as a lesbian subject.

Although each time her streetwalking is an attempt to discover a new self, Nan also draws on her previous experiences for her act of walking. In this way streets serve as an extension of the theatrical space for her masquerade. This accumulative nature of walking functions to shed light on the constructedness of heteronormative streets. When Nan starts out on her career as a rent boy, she realises that '[w]alking and watching' are her new 'world's keynotes' (TV 201). However, even before she embarks upon this new venture, walking and watching are a significant part of her theatrical life.

Walter asks Nan and Kitty to 'go about the city and *study the men*' to improve their theatrical act, learning various ways of men's walking (TV 83, italics in original). Out in the streets, as Gill Valentine argues, 'the identity of those present in a space, and thus the identity of the space being produced, can sometimes be constructed by the gaze of others present rather than the performers'.<sup>266</sup> Therefore, the identity of the men whom Nan and Kitty observe is partly established by their gaze. Similarly, Nan's new identity as a male renter is a creation of those who see and interact with her. As she walks in male guise,

At St Luke's Church, on the corner, a man brushed by me with a barrow, calling, 'All right, squire!' Then a woman with a frizzed fringe put her hand upon my arm, and tilted her head and said: 'Well now, pretty boy, you look like a lively one. Fancy payin' a visit, to a nice little place I know...?' (TV 194)

These people's attitude towards Nan is contrasted with the time Nan walks in feminine attire, in which situation she is taken for a prostitute (her dress, as well as her 'fitful' way of walking, is 'a kind of invitation to sport and dalliance' [TV 191]). This relationship between the performer and those who see that performance points to the performative nature of heterosexual and homosexual code. Although public spaces are considered heterosexual, Valentine suggests that 'the production of the heterosexual street is always under threat from sexual dissidents (re)negotiating the way everyday space is produced'.<sup>267</sup> Nan's identity as a lesbian dressed in male garb threatens to

---

<sup>266</sup> Gill Valentine, '(Re)Negotiating the "Heterosexual Street": Lesbian Production of Space' in Nancy Duncan, ed., *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 146-155 (p. 149).

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

reveal the fragile nature of the construction of heterosexual space. Lesbian characters in Waters's novels are engaged in the constant questioning of the dominant heteronormative values attached to the city, with the aim to (re)invent their queer identity. Waters's queer characters' act of walking is an attempt to challenge heteronormativity which marks the city as a men's domain. At the same time, however, Waters also draws attention to the possible dangers with which they are faced. The next section will consider the difficulties of lesbian flânerie.

## 6.2. Problematic Flânerie: Fragmentation of the Queer Self

As Paulina Palmer argues, 'London, Waters reminds us, in addition to offering opportunities for pleasure and self-fulfilment, provides a context for loneliness, acts of violence and the concealing of secrets, both social and sexual'.<sup>268</sup> In the course of exploring their queer identity and London's potential to accommodate homosexuality, the characters often find themselves involved in a paradigm which reinforces heteronormativity, thus complicating the issue of the relationship between flânerie and the queer self.

For example, in *Fingersmith*, Maud realizes a gap between the London she imagined and the London she actually experiences when she compares her previous expectation of London as 'a city of opportunities fulfilled' with

---

<sup>268</sup> Paulina Palmer, 'Representations of Queer London in the Fiction of Sarah Waters', in Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham, eds., *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c. 1850 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 81-96 (p. 83).

'[t]his place, of jostling and clamour, [that] I do not know' (*FS* 308). While escaping from Lant Street, she unintentionally finds herself near the Thames:

I stand and gaze at [the Thames], in a sort of horror, a sort of awe. I remember walking beside the Thames, at Briar. I remember seeing it seem to fret and worry at its banks: I thought it longed – as I did – to quicken, to spread. I did not know it would spread to this. (*FS* 370)

The small river at Briar, which Maud saw as a representation of her desire to escape her uncle's patriarchal rule, transforms itself into the Thames. Her sense of horror comes from her realization that London is much bigger than she expected, which makes her search for Holywell Street, the place where she thinks she can get help, almost impossible. At the same time, her horrified reaction is suggestive of her need to explore her fluid queer desire. At Briar she is only allowed to walk in the park, where she follows her daily routines as she does inside her uncle's manor house. Therefore her frantic walking in London, as she escapes from Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman, is contrasted with the pre-determined routines she must observe at Briar. Released from the patriarchal oppression at Briar, as well as from a new form of confinement at Lant Street, Maud (if only momentarily) allows herself to be guided by her instincts, which expresses her queerness. Through her new experience in the metropolis, which is navigated by her instinctive walking, Maud is encouraged to adjust the way she sees the world outside of Briar, and her position in it accordingly.

However, the nature of her random walking is problematised by her status as a fugitive, which deprives her of the privilege of waking for leisure. Also, Maud's potential to realise her queer desire is complicated by the gaze

to which Maud is subjected. She realises that '[e]verybody stares – men, women, children – even here, where the road is busy again, they stare' (FS 371). During her search for Holywell Street, she is constantly observed by the passers-by because of the stark difference of her clothes and theirs: 'their clothes are worn and faded, and your gown bright' (FS 369). As Rob Shields remarks, the gaze is one of the main components which constructs the act of *flânerie*, and '[t]he *flâneur* is out to see and be seen, and requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take in the bustle of the city in the security of his anonymous status as part of the metropolitan throng'.<sup>269</sup> Due to her unfamiliarity with the city, and the way she is dressed differently, Maud stands out from the anonymous crowd and is therefore not able to explore her queer desire by her act of impulsive walking. As Paulina Palmer points out, in Maud's escape from Lant Street '[t]he topic of the gaze ... with reference to the figure of the *flâneur* is ... foregrounded, though here emphasis is placed on its threatening aspect' (90).<sup>270</sup> This threatening side of women's streetwalking is further emphasised when Maud is taken for a prostitute by a gentleman in a carriage. Although she manages to escape from her uncle's patriarchal rule at Briar, and then temporarily from her confinement at Lant Street by Mrs Sucksby and Gentleman, this renewed experience of escape from a patriarchal figure further drives home to her vulnerable position. This is emphasised again later when she arrives at Holywell Street, only to find that Mr Hawtrey is horrified and refuses to assist her. This corresponds to

---

<sup>269</sup> Rob Shields, 'Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *Flânerie*' in Keith Tester, ed., *The Flâneur* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 61-80 (p. 65).

<sup>270</sup> Palmer, 'Representations of Queer London in the Fiction of Sarah Waters', p. 90.

Judith Walkowitz's assessment of the position of women in the Victorian period that 'they lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning'.<sup>271</sup> Maud's experience in London encapsulates the problem of female agency in queer characters' act of randomly walking in the city.

In contrast to Maud, Sue finds the way from the asylum to London without much difficulty. Whenever she and Charlie 'met the crossing of two of three roads, [she] would stand for a minute and think hard of London ... [and] the idea would come to [her] which road [they] ought to take' (FS 462). This hints at Sue's psychological connection to London, which is alluded to later when she arrives at London: 'That part of London was strange to me, but I found I knew my way all right – just as I had known, in the country, which road to take at a fork' (FS 469). The contrast between Maud's helpless exploration of London and Sue's success in navigating her way to London stresses the point that sufficient and instinctual knowledge of the metropolis is necessary for Waters's characters' random walking to subvert the oppression of patriarchal authority.

The problematisation of lesbian *flânerie* is further explored in *The Night Watch*, where the novel's setting has immense impact on the way queer streetwalkers fit into society. Parsons points out that '[i]n women's representation of wartime London, the city frequently becomes the province of the *flâneuse* rather than the *flâneur*'.<sup>272</sup> Women not only took over men's

---

<sup>271</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 21.

<sup>272</sup> Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 188.

occupations but also were given freedom to roam the city onto which they inscribed their new identity. In the 1944 section of *The Night Watch*, Kay notes the otherworldly atmosphere of London during the Second World War:

the view down the Thames, to Westminster, was all of humped, irregular masses – as if the war had stripped London back, made a series of villages of it, each of them defending itself against unknown forces, darkly and alone. (NW 193)

The fragmentation of London, which now seems as if it consists of ‘a series of villages’, makes it possible for the queer characters to negotiate their sexuality against the once totalising heteronormative codes of society. The ambiguous, unstable condition of the city is marked by ‘the sensation of unsafeness, even of dislike’ which is paradoxically ‘almost exciting’ for Helen (NW 228). As the darkness in bombed-out London creates a space for Helen and Julia to infiltrate the heteronormative space of the streets, Waters’s lesbian characters utilise the city during the Second World War for the materialisation of their queer desire. This point is made prominent when Kay and Helen go to Hampstead Heath, where they walk with their arms linked as a couple:

They walked arm in arm – Helen not minding the fact that they were two women, now, for one expected to see women, she said, on a Saturday afternoon on Hampstead Heath; it was a place for plain, brisk women, spinsters, and dogs. (NW 317)

Although this does not mean the full acceptance of lesbian characters in society – the time and place for the presence of lesbian women is here limited to Hampstead Heath on Saturdays – the queer state of society in wartime makes way for the public expression of lesbian longings.

What we witness in the 1947 section, however, is the way the space for queer desire diminishes after heteronormativity is reestablished in the post-



war period. Some characters, most notably Kay, continue to display their queer identity in the public sphere by their walking, but others experience difficulty in their acts of flânerie. Thus, as she walks the streets with Fraser, Viv realises the danger of women's streetwalking:

the streets they were entering were rather sleazy ones ... Yesterday she'd come this way on her own and a man plucked at her arm ... But tonight men looked but called nothing, because they assumed she was Fraser's girl. It was half amusing, half annoying. (NW 132)

The difference of Viv's experience of walking the streets is solely due to Fraser's presence. It is also significant that Viv and Fraser are seen as a properly heterosexual couple – since her relationship with Reggie is a 'queer' (adulterous) one, '[t]hey never went to nightclubs or restaurants. They only ever went from one lonely place to another; or they sat in his car with the radio on' (NW 132). A post-war social order that reinstated heteronormative values does not allow them to publicly display their queer desire. The city is reclaimed as a men's space after the war, and because of that, Waters's characters are unable to inject new meanings to the cityscape or to reinvent their queer identity.

One of the ways to tamper with heteronormative codes after the war is to be dressed as a man, as Kay is. While her act of walking does permit her to transgress gendered boundaries, it also reduces her status to a spectral one. As she says to herself, she has '*become a person whose clocks and wrist-watches have stopped*', illuminating the fact that she is seen as someone who cannot keep up with the time (NW 3, italics in original). Because of her precarious status, she is heavily reliant on materials she owns for her identity: 'She had,

as it were, her brushed hair to live up to; her polished shoes, her cuff-links' (NW 6). The narrator's constant reference to the polishedness of Kay's shoes, as well as to her act of polishing them, demonstrates the insecurity of her fractured social position. According to Claire O'Callaghan, 'Waters points to how Kay's flânerie may appropriate male privilege but also expresses lesbian abjection'.<sup>273</sup> This is shown in the opening sequence of the BBC adaptation when Kay walks the streets. She is walking in one direction while all others are headed in the other, emphasising her queerly estranged status from others. Whereas Kay desperately tries to validate her queer identity by walking disguised as a man, she is confronted with the fact that her attempt is doomed to fail.

The theatrical production of *The Night Watch* also showcases Kay's fragile self. At the beginning, the audience sees Kay sitting at the centre of the stage, while the other

*[m]embers of the cast help her dress. One of them helps her on with her jacket.*  
**[Kay]** And I would have put my jacket on.  
*She is helped on with her coat. Her jacket is dusted down, [and] Kay is helped on with her trousers. ...*  
 Combed my hair. ...  
 And. I can go out.  
 I can do this.  
 This day I could go and see Mickey.  
*Pause.*  
 And I can open the door  
 And close the door.<sup>274</sup>

The direction that other cast members assist Kay with her male costume points to the presence of a community of characters who share a queer sense

---

<sup>273</sup> O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 120.

<sup>274</sup> Naylor, *The Night Watch*, I. 1., pp. 3-4.

of belonging. Here what Kay wears and what she looks like constitute an important part of her act of walking in the streets of London. The repetition of 'can' and 'could', while it indicates her strong will, suggests that Kay needs to convince herself, which in turn reveals her insecurity about her identity. In this way, the beginning of the play signals the presence of a queer community and the potential and yet problems of lesbian *flânerie*.

In a similar way, Duncan experiences a sense of rejection from society. On his way to Fraser's house after he decides to escape his domestic imprisonment by Mr Mundy, he realises that he is the only person in the street, while imagining the families inside the houses he passes:

The street was one he walked down often, but it seemed transformed to him now, in the darkness. ... Nobody challenged him. He moved through the streets as a ghost might. (NW 164)

His solitary walk, which promises him freedom as '[n]obody challenged him' on the one hand, transforms him into a spectral figure on the other. As he sees a man through a bathroom window, Duncan 'caught the ring of the glass as it was set down on the basin', and 'heard the water rushing through a waste-pipe, spluttering as it struck the drain below' (NW 164-165). In his mind he is able to move freely between the outside and the inside, which reinforces his status as apparitional. Whilst walking the streets enables Waters's queer characters to assert their independence in a heteronormative world, it also functions to make their identity fragile. In a world where heteronormativity is reinstated after the war, queer streetwalking is turned into a spectral act. The theatrical adaptation of *The Night Watch* attempts to recreate the queer sense of disjuncture by its stage set, and to emphasise Kay's walking as

spectral. This evokes Terry Castle's argument that 'the lesbian ... has been "ghosted" – or made to seem invisible', and this is manifest in Waters's novels (most evidently in *Affinity*).<sup>275</sup> In the play, the stage is made up of the outer circle which moves clockwise and the inner circle which moves anti-clockwise. In addition to this, often two different scenes are enacted at the same time, which contributes to a sense of fragmentation. In the 1947 section, for example, after Kay meets Mickey, Kay stays on stage and walks around; the direction reads '**Kay** stays in the space. Walking round the outer rim or standing still'.<sup>276</sup> Kay remains on the stage during Viv's conversation with Fraser, and does not leave until halfway through Helen's and Julia's heated argument. This works to confuse the characters' sense of direction, as a character on the outer circle who moves forward is seen as walking backward from the other circle, and contributes to creating a queer community that is cut off from the outside world.

The same is the case with Nan in *Tipping the Velvet*: though her career as a rent boy is defined by its accidental nature, and is navigated by her impulse to constantly remap the cityscape, the fact that Nan allows her body to be treated as a commodity by her homosexual 'customers' complicates the meaning associated with Nan's walking. As Nan walks to Leicester Square, she remembers her first visit with Kitty and Walter:

This was one place which, in all my careless West End wanderings, I had tended to avoid or pass through swiftly: I was always mindful of the first trip I made there, with Kitty and Walter, and it was not a memory I cared, very often, to revisit. Tonight, however, I walked there rather purposefully. (TV 200)

---

<sup>275</sup> Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 4.

<sup>276</sup> Naylor, *The Night Watch*, I.3.p. 31.

As Nan walks around Leicester Square, the palimpsestuous nature of her walking is highlighted: through overwriting her sentimental memory with her newly found queer identity, she attempts to read the city in a new light and update her sexual identity accordingly. However, by combining the rebelliousness of her *flânerie* with the submissive nature of her prostitution, Nan's queer identity is fractured. The fragmentation of her identity is depicted in the BBC adaptation, when Nan, clad in a suit, looks at her reflection in a number of mirrors (Fig. 13). Each part of her body is augmented in small mirrors and highlights her boyishness, but the absence of a mirror which shows her figure in full suggests her incapability to construct a complete self. This fractured nature of Nan's crossdressing is accentuated when she is almost raped by a homosexual gentleman in the street.<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, the BBC adaptation depicts what Nan sees when she walks the streets in a succession of random and distorted images. As Iris Kleinecke-Bates points out, '[t]he scene is not integrated through dialogue but instead is a delirious ramble through the dark corners of the city, without clear purpose or destination'.<sup>278</sup> While this unexpected movement of the camera is indicative of Nan's accidental act of walking, it at the same time emphasises the dangers of the streets, revealing the insecure status of female streetwalkers. By pointing out the potential dangers of female streetwalking, Waters presents London as a fragmented city, which accommodates both opportunities and crises for queer streetwalkers. Each of Waters's novels

---

<sup>277</sup> This attempted rape does not appear in the novel.

<sup>278</sup> Iris Kleinecke-Bates, *Victorians on Screen: The Nineteenth Century on British Television, 1994-2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 51.

contributes to adding an interesting layer to the reader's reassessment of London as a queer city, which is indicative of its palimpsestuousness.



Fig. 13 Nan looking at mirrors.

### 6.3. 'It's all freighted with layers and layers of meaning': Waters's fiction and London as Urban Palimpsest

One of the reasons London fascinates Waters is, as she explains in an interview, that it embodies the co-existence of the past with the present:

I love the fact that London's history is still very visible on its streets, that you can 'read' a street as a piece of social history. ... It's all freighted with layers and layers of meaning.<sup>279</sup>

The visibility of the past in the present Waters describes here points to the palimpsestuous nature of London. According to Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, 'the palimpsestic trope posits the past city's supersession through incorporation and accretion rather than displacement and eradication', and all of Waters's fictions contribute to reimagining London as

---

<sup>279</sup> Mitchell, "'I'd love to write an anti-*Downton*!'", p. 137.

a space filled with queer potential.<sup>280</sup> As each of Waters's characters moves across London with the aim to explore their queer sexuality and identity, the routes they take tend to intersect and overlap. It becomes possible for the reader, then, to imagine Kay walking a street in the 1940s which Nan walked in the 1890s. Just like Waters can observe London's history on the streets, so the readers are able to recreate Waters's queer London on the actual streets, which helps them redefine the space.

The construction of Waters's literary London is reminiscent of the way Dickens utilised London for his novels. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues, 'it was Dickens who discovered how to blend his intimate walking knowledge of the city with fictional techniques that would create London on the page from a variety of perspectives'.<sup>281</sup> Bodenheimer goes on to write that 'Dickens sewed different parts of London together simply by describing the walking routes his characters take', making London into a space of conflicting desires.<sup>282</sup> In the case of Waters's novels, it is up to the reader to put different parts of London together so as to make sense of London's queer potential. As readers attempt to retrace the steps of Waters's queer characters in London, whether actual or imaginary, their act of walking in contemporary London

---

<sup>280</sup> Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, 'Troping the Neo-Victorian City: Strategies of Reconsidering the Metropolis', in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds., *Neo-Victorian Cities: Reassessing Urban Politics and Poetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 1-40 (p. 11).

<sup>281</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'London in the Victorian Novel' in Lawrence Manley, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 142-159 (p. 142).

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

serves to reinforce the palimpsestuous relationship between different time periods. As Jane Rendell states,

Through the act of walking new connections are made and re-made, physically and conceptually over time and through space. Public concerns and private fantasies, past events and future imaginings, are brought into the here and now, into a relationship that is both sequential and simultaneous. Walking is a way of at once discovering and transforming the city.<sup>283</sup>

Whilst in each of Waters's novels queer utopian space thus exists beyond the end of the narrative (*Tipping the Velvet* presents the most optimistic vision of future for Nan and Florence, but their quest for further equality and visibility remains unexplored), the contemporary reader can unite the fragmented potential for queer utopian space, so as to continue to call into question heteronormative and heteropatriarchal codes. As Kohlke and Gutleben suggest, '[p]alimpsestically, we read the past city through the overlaid present, but conversely, we also read the present city backwards through the underlying and resurfacing past'.<sup>284</sup> Through experiencing Waters's queerly reimagined London in her novels, the contemporary reader sees the way the past co-exists with the present, and at the same time reflects on the present through experiencing the pasts Waters imaginatively recreated in her novels.

As Sebastian Groes argues, '[o]ne particularly insightful way of understanding London is to study the lives the city is given by writers who make and remake it in their imagination', which is 'implicated in shaping our

---

<sup>283</sup> Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2006), p. 153.

<sup>284</sup> Kohlke and Gutleben, 'Troping the Neo-Victorian City', p. 11.



understanding of the city'.<sup>285</sup> As each of Waters's novels contributes to revealing different experiences her queer streetwalkers go through, Waters's palimpsestuous London constitutes queer utopian space which is otherwise only partially hinted at in her novels. Waters not only describes the pleasures and perils of lesbian streetwalking, though which they challenge heteronormative and heteropatriarchal values, but also encourages the contemporary reader to see 'a sense of the plurality of queer spaces in London and the variety of ways in which they have been deployed'.<sup>286</sup> Through the fragmentation of queer London, Waters refuses to straightjacket queer streetwalking as the norm. Rather, she allows London to be seen as 'a site of open-ended difference', where her lesbian characters constantly challenge, destabilise and subvert heteronormativity.<sup>287</sup> The order Waters's novels were published in is also characterised as queer (the Victorian period through the forties to the twenties) and adds to a sense of a queer cityscape. The way Waters takes us through London is queer, which resists a 'straight' reading of history.

---

<sup>285</sup> Sebastian Groes, *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>286</sup> Simon Avery, 'Structuring and Interpreting Queer Spaces of London' in Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham, eds., *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c. 1850 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 3-22 (p. 13).

<sup>287</sup> Affirica Taylor, 'A Queer Geography' in Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt, eds., *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 3-19 (p. 13).

## 6.4. Conclusion

Through acts of random, impulsive walking performed by a variety of queer characters, Waters rebrands London as ‘a little less straight, a little less homogenous, a little more bent’.<sup>288</sup> Waters’s gay and lesbian characters explore the streets of London in ways that are characterised by their lack of purpose, through which they deviate from the straight path heteropatriarchal society seeks to force them to take. But while she describes an act of walking as a liberatory exercise, Waters also points to possible dangers for queer streetwalkers. Her queer streetwalker can be returned to the heteropatriarchal system like Maud and Kay, or the fleetingly liberating nature of walking can lead to a fractured sense of identity, as is experienced by Nan. Waters’s London – a city of conflicting desires, where the potential and danger of streetwalking co-exist – functions as an exploratory space for the reader. By piecing the multifaceted meanings attached to an act of queer walking together across Waters’s novels, the reader can understand the palimpsestuous nature of the city and the potential for queer heterotopic space.

---

<sup>288</sup> Mark W. Turner, ‘Zigzagging’ in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds., *Restless Cities* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 299-315 (p. 300).

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Coda

### The Ambivalent Potentiality of 'staying in the mess'

Waters's neo-historical novels actively engage in queering spatiality and temporality. Her fiction's past settings both utilise and challenge our historical knowledge, which in turn urges us to reflect on the present and envisage what queer futurity might entail. At the same time, Waters's employment of utopian and heterotopic space serves to reveal the structure of heteronormativity's exertion of its authority on her characters and to examine how that structure can be subverted. Although it remains to be the characters' (often naïve) fantasy, their utopian imagination is the foundation from which they strive to establish their ultimate heterotopic space.

Nan's dream of forming a relationship with Kitty predicated on their mutual respect and desire in *Tipping the Velvet* is, through her journeying through theatrical spaces, transformed into a heterotopic space with Florence, with the hope of adjusting her biological home. It is even possible to see Nan's and Florence's home as more than heterotopic, because this is where utopian desire is fulfilled, albeit with the presence of Ralph and Cyril. Nan's attempts to establish her queer self highlights the blurring of the distinction between the public and the private, as she looks for an outlet for her queer desire outside the bedroom. While Margaret's utopian imagination that stems from *Aurora Leigh* is taken up by Ruth and Selina, her other fantasy of taking working-class Selina to her newlywed sister's upper-middle-class estate is

filled with heterotopic potential. This imagination threatens to break down the boundaries of class and sexuality, and even though it cannot be achieved within *Affinity's* narrative timeframe, it stresses the continuum between the past and the present. *Fingersmith's* ending is also indicative of the continuity of then and now in that Maud's act of writing lesbian pornography has potential to expand the network of queer literature and looks forward to our own time when (lesbian/homosexual) Victorian pornography is the subject of critical books. Both novels reveals the oppressive system of domestic and institutional confinement, and despite their sombre or ambivalent endings, they nevertheless points to the presence of paradoxical space, which can potentially challenge the dominant force of heteronormativity from within.

Waters's move from the Victorian period to the 1920s and 1940s means a change not only in tone but also in the underlying question of whether the utopian imagination was possible at a time of war and the way heterotopic space was then constructed. The accidental death of Leonard and the constant presence of the police that follows it deprive Frances and Lilian of their private, hence heterotopic, space. *The Night Watch* further highlights the fleetingness and fragility of heterotopic space leading to an impasse, which makes the characters' utopian imagination impossible. *The Little Stranger* problematises the creation of heterotopic space even further, by focusing on Faraday's unstable class identity and failed masculinity which prevents him from constructing a heterotopia with Caroline. Although gender and sexuality is continually placed in relation to characters' class throughout Waters's works — her queer characters' romantic relationships involve class

differences, as in Margaret and Selina in *Affinity*, Sue and Maud in *Fingersmith*, and Frances and Lilian in *The Paying Guests* — *The Little Stranger* moves this point centre stage, and focuses on the clash between Faraday and Caroline, as well as Faraday's internal struggle to attain a secure class position, ironically by aspiring to the role of squire, a position already defunct. Faraday becomes a quasi-ghostly figure in the end, reflecting Hundreds Hall, the remnant of the once flourishing upper middle class. Waters's neo-twenties and -forties novels stress the helplessness of the post-war period for the characters who hope for their heterotopia.

While their attempt to establish heterotopic space is sometimes unsuccessful, Waters's characters search for ways to secure their sense of queerness and independence through their act of walking. By appropriating the streets as their domain, their decision to willingly deviate from the path underscores their defiance against heteronormativity which views straight lines as the pre-set, therefore correct, course. Each novel deals with the characters' experiment to circumvent heteronormative pressures through creation of heterotopic space in which they can bypass its all-encompassing surveillance.

As I have shown in previous chapters, each of Waters's narratives is indebted to the network of literary texts. As Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn rightly point out, neo-Victorianism is itself a form of adaptation, for 'all engagements with the Victorian in contemporary culture ... are necessarily adaptations or appropriations'.<sup>289</sup> Just as each of Waters's novels

---

<sup>289</sup> Heilmann and Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism*, p. 244.

serves as a palimpsest that enables us to see the past and the present in a new light, adaptations of her works create another layer of palimpsestuous imagery. Due to recent releases of adaptations of Waters's novels on multiple platforms, we are invited to immerse ourselves in her queer characters' lives in numerous and interesting ways. *Affinity* was adapted for a television programme (2008), and *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Night Watch* were adapted for TV and the stage (2002, 2011, 2015, 2016). *Fingersmith* is the most popular work so far, as it was turned into a TV drama (2005), a film (2016) and a play (2016-2017). Furthermore, *The Little Stranger* will be released in August 2018<sup>290</sup> and *The Paying Guests* is optioned for film,<sup>291</sup> which is a testament to the popularity of Waters's works. As Imelda Whelehan notes, there is a tendency in the field of neo-Victorian studies to focus on the literary and see screen adaptations as secondary. Instead, Whelehan suggests paying more attention to 'adaptation's intertextual potentialities [which] roam across eras and genres'.<sup>292</sup> Similarly, Antonija Primorac refers to the palimpsestuous nature of adaptations:

the dynamic, complex nature of screen adaptation [means that] they are in dialogue not just with one (or more) adapted text(s),

---

<sup>290</sup> 'The Little Stranger feature film coming soon', <https://www.sarahwaters.com/2017/11/06/the-little-stranger-feature-film-coming-soon/> (accessed 8 December 2017)

<sup>291</sup> In her article on *The Handmaiden*, Claire Armistead writes that *The Paying Guests* will be adapted for screen by Emma Donoghue. Claire Armistead, 'Sarah Waters: "The Handmaiden turns pornography into a spectacle – but it's true to my novel"', *The Guardian*, 8 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/apr/08/sarah-waters-the-handmaiden-turns-pornography-into-a-spectacle-but-its-true-to-my-novel> (accessed 1 September 2017)

<sup>292</sup> Imelda Whelehan, 'Neo-Victorian Adaptations' in Deborah Cartmell, ed., *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 272-291 (p. 289).

but also with previous adaptations of the said text(s), the related images and adaptations that depict the era, extending into the future towards new adaptations ... creating a mutating palimpsest of related adaptations.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, it is necessary to recognise adaptations' growing contribution to a wide palimpsestuous network of texts. Linda Hutcheon calls adaptation 'a kind of extended palimpsest', since an adaptation is 'a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works'.<sup>294</sup> Hutcheon goes on to argue that in an adaptation the audience experiences 'the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced – and knowingly so'.<sup>295</sup> For example, in the BBC adaptation of *Fingersmith* (2005), in the opening shot the camera slowly descends to show those who walk on Lant Street; their clothing instantly allows the audience to recall other televisual or filmic adaptations set in Victorian London. Regardless of their familiarity with Waters's source text, the audience is exposed to a multi-layered web of literary and cultural intertexts. Adaptations function to widen the palimpsestuous network of Waters's queer imagination.

It is worthwhile here to mention Waters's own theatrical work. *The Frozen Scream* (2014-2015), co-written with Christopher Green, is advertised as an adaptation of CC Gilbert's forgotten novel with the same title. However, *The Frozen Scream* is what Madelon Hoedt calls 'a faux adaptation', for it is based 'upon a supposed, but non-existent source' and therefore 'a focus on

---

<sup>293</sup> Antonija Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptation of Victorian Women* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 11.

<sup>294</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 33.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

fidelity becomes largely invalid'.<sup>296</sup> Although the play starts in a conventional style, opening on a group of people stranded in a cabin because of snow, it quickly turns into 'an interactive piece, borrowing from the conventions of immersive theatre and in doing do, the production constructs a particular staged narrative for its audience'.<sup>297</sup> The performance is put to an abrupt end in the middle of the play due to a 'power cut', and the audience is guided to various parts of the theatre. This encourages the viewers to talk to the cast about a gothic figure which is supposed to appear in the play. As the audience go through various spaces in the theatre, their sense of reality and fiction becomes blurred. Because the conventional narrative of the play is suspended and the audience are moved out of their seats, both the play's spatiality and temporality are queered. Although it is not based on any particular piece of literary work, *The Frozen Scream* contributes to adding an interesting layer to Waters's experimentation with queer time and space and also is indebted to the palimpsestuous network of Gothic fiction.

As Waters benefits from adapting and updating literary texts before her, adaptations of her novels use the same strategy. Waters takes a very relaxed attitude towards them, because, as she says in an interview, 'the adaptations are never going to replace the book. The book is always there; the adaptation just becomes this other thing'.<sup>298</sup> Just as Waters utilises and transforms the narratives of the novels of Dickens, Collins, Tey and others, so she implies

---

<sup>296</sup> Madelon Hoedt, "'There is a curse...': Performance, Adaptation and Fidelity in Christopher Green and Sarah Waters' *The Frozen Scream*", *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, Vol. 9, No.3 (2016), pp. 223-238 (p. 235).

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>298</sup> Mitchell, "'I'd love to write an anti-Downton!'", p. 140.



that the same pattern emerges when her novels are adapted for other media. As Claire O'Callaghan writes, 'Waters acknowledges how the screen and stage adaptations which translate her work imbue her characters and plots with new lives of their own'.<sup>299</sup> This view is supported by Waters's cameo appearances in the BBC's adaptations of *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, in which she plays an audience member in a music hall and a servant respectively. Although ostensibly these roles imply that she takes a step back from the role of writer/creator, and assumes that of participant, in actual fact her appearances in adaptations represent something more complex. Waters's roles point to intertextuality – her presence suggests multiplied reflections of her figure as an author, challenging the audience's expectations of what performative authorial acts entail. Waters's appearance as an audience member in the opening sequence of *Tipping the Velvet* adds a further layer to the semantic reversals of the relationship between seen and being seen in the narrative. While Nan feels that Kitty's and her male impersonating act exhibits the twofold nature of their performance – because the audience believe that they are seeing two heterosexual women disguised as men when they secretly display their homosexual desire towards one another – Waters in this sequence assumes the two roles of performer (writer) and audience member, playing to and yet at the same time returning the gaze of viewers.

The role Waters's presence plays in adaptations can also be illustrated when she takes the role of a maid in *Fingersmith*. Waters's presence reveals the foundation of the narrative that seeks to subvert the class structure by

---

<sup>299</sup> O'Callaghan, *Sarah Waters*, p. 184.

pointing to the deceptive nature of servants. Waters, along with two other maids, is standing at the Briar entrance to welcome young Maud, who throws her gloves at Waters. Since gloves play a crucial role in the narrative as a metaphor of Maud's physical and psychological confinement, Maud's act of disposing of them indicates her desire to defy her uncle's authority. At the same time, however, she is unaware of the fact that Waters is the one who constructs the whole narrative. Just as Sue performs her role as a maid so as to trick Maud, Waters pretends to be a meek and obedient maid for the sake of deceiving while alerting the viewer. Her cameo appearances work to expand the textual network that already existed in Waters's novels.

In the network of adaptations of Waters's texts, *The Handmaiden*, a film 'inspired' by *Fingersmith*, is an odd one out. In this film set in 1930s Korea under Japanese military rule, South Korean director Park Chan-wook and his co-writer Seo-kyeong Jeong deals with a variety of spaces so as to depict lesbian characters' sense of entrapment and their desire for freedom. The ambiguous endings of Waters's novels allow those who adapt them to explore their queer potential in their own way — whether or not the particular denouement is diminished/problematised further by the heterosexualising gaze. In the final section of the thesis I will consider the process of transnational adaptation to investigate how the spatial politics of Waters's novels are utilised and developed in the film. First I will look at the cultural context of this film, and argue that the film adapts the class conflict which is at the core of *Fingersmith* for the conflict between Japan and Korea. Although *The Handmaiden* moves beyond the temporal and spatial frame of the

Victorian period, in that Victorian Britain functions as a backdrop to the conflict between Japan and Korea, the film can be classified as neo-Victorian. This encourages us to link the colonial influence of Japan (and of Britain in the background) on Korea with questions of space. Secondly I argue that the film extends the representation of performance as a way of confining women under patriarchal rule. In a final part the section demonstrates that the ending of the film depicts a queer heterotopic space for lesbian characters in the context of their escape on a ship. In this heterotopic in-between space, they are allowed, if only temporarily, to indulge in their sexual fantasies. The setting of the ship not only links the argument back to Foucault's view of a ship as 'the heterotopia *par excellence*', but is also conducive to contributing to the discussion of postcolonialism and the Empire.<sup>300</sup>

### **7.1. What Makes It Neo-Victorian?: *The Handmaiden* and the Double Internalisation of Cultural Colonisation**

*The Handmaiden* takes its main narrative from Waters's *Fingersmith*, and is centred around four main characters: Sook-Hee/Tamako (Sue Trinder), Hideko (Maud Lilly), Fujiwara (Gentleman) and Kouzuki (Uncle Lilly). The film does not portray Bok-soon (adapted from Mrs Sucksby) as the puppet master figure who controls the whole plot, instead focusing on the conflict between the female characters and patriarchal violence. In addition to the male/female relationships, the cultural conflict between Japan and Korea is

---

<sup>300</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 336.

the driving force of the plot. As Sook-Hee (Tae-ri Kim) first visits the grand residence of Kouzuki (Jin-woong Jo), the house is described by one of its servants as a curious mixture of English and Japanese architectural styles: 'This property has three buildings. A Western-style wing by an English architect and a Japanese wing form the main house. Not even in Japan is there a building combining two styles. It reflects Master's admiration for Japan and England' (the third building is an annexe used as a library/theatre which appears to be a combination of Western and Japanese aesthetics). Similarly, the film itself combines Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian novel *Fingersmith* with Korea's cultural relationship with Japan in the period of Japanese colonial rule in the early twentieth century. As Joseph Dwyer writes, 'Park borrows much of the novel along roughly the same story lines, but transforms it through the context of Korean and Japanese history'.<sup>301</sup> Also, Waters rightly observes that the film is 'more about colonialism: that very fraught relationship between Korea and Japan'.<sup>302</sup> According to Han Woo-keun, 'Japanese policy in Korea after the Russo-Japanese war was clearly directed toward eventual annexation of the country to the Japanese Empire'.<sup>303</sup> This was complete in 1910, and in the 1930s,

the 'assimilation' policy was born and applied to Korea with increasing severity. The Koreans, the Japanese decided, were now to become Japanese. The Korean language and culture

---

<sup>301</sup> Joseph Dwyer, 'If these gloves could talk' Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden*, *DiSSOLVE*, Issue. 3 (2017), <http://www.dissolvesf.org/issue-3/if-these-gloves-could-talk> (accessed 1 September 2017, para. 5 of 14).

<sup>302</sup> Armistead, 'Sarah Waters', para. 21 of 27.

<sup>303</sup> Han Woo-keun, *The History of Korea*, trans. by Lee Kyung-shik (Seoul: The Eul-yoo Publishing Company, 1970), p. 464.

were to be eradicated and the rising generation was to be taught to think, act and speak just as native Japanese did.<sup>304</sup>

As Chan-wook moves the narrative setting from Victorian Britain to 1930s Korea, the class structure which is at the core of *Fingersmith* is replaced with the cultural tension between Japan and Korea.

In an interview, Chan-wook mentions a reversal of the power relation between Korea and Japan during the Japanese colonisation period:

the thing with Korea — there comes this idea of modernity, it's actually something that made its way into Korea via Japan. It so happens that in the past, Korea is the one that would pass culture on to Japan and because of that, Koreans instantly look down on Japanese and because of their pride, they shut the doors to anything foreign or outside. [Japan was] able to receive and make scientific discoveries, and they were able to accept all this technology and advancements from our side on their borders, and with such technology and weapons, they were able to overtake Korea, overpower Korea. So once Korea was occupied by Japan, Korea had no choice but to receive outside culture through Japan.<sup>305</sup>

Interestingly, the process of cultural colonisation is doubled in that Japan modernised the country through absorbing Western culture after the Meiji Restoration in the late-nineteenth century. After the period of national isolation that ended in 1854, Japan was eager to receive technologies from the West in an attempt to catch up with the rest of the world. As Regenia Gagnier notes,

Victorian Studies in its most liberal sense played a major role in Japan's transformation in the later nineteenth century from a feudal to a modern state... While European continental

---

<sup>304</sup> Han, *The History of Korea*, p. 492.

<sup>305</sup> Britt Hayes, 'Interview: Park Chan-wook on *The Handmaiden*', *Screen Crush*, October 21 2016, <http://screencrush.com/park-chan-wook-handmaiden-interview/?trackback=tsmclip> (accessed 28 Feb 2017, para. 4 of 13).

examples were influential, British and American models tended to dominate.<sup>306</sup>

One example of Japan's modernisation projects was the Iwakura mission: a group of noblemen, led by Tomomi Iwakura, travelled to the States and European countries. Whereas one of the purposes of this journey was to fix unequal treaties Japan was forced to sign with the Western countries, Sukehiro Hirakawa contends that '[t]he Iwakura mission's ... members' real intention was to discover conditions in the West and adapt these to Japan in order to create a new Meiji state'.<sup>307</sup> As a result, as Richard Storry notes, 'the entire apparatus of Western material civilization seemed to find some reproduction, some kind of echo, in Japan'.<sup>308</sup> This doubled form of colonisation is apparent in the curious mixture of the Kouzuki mansion. Korean society in the 1930s is depicted in the film as doubly indebted to Victorian British and Japanese culture, and this is perhaps what gives *The Handmaiden* a neo-Victorian atmosphere.

In this way this film's engagement with Victorian British influence demonstrates Priya Joshi's statement that

A term with a specific origin in nineteenth-century England, 'Victorian' refers today not only to historical boundaries but more cogently to a set of interrelated cultural, intellectual, and social preoccupations that far outlive the originary moment.<sup>309</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *Literatures of Globalization: Global Circulation and the Long Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 20.

<sup>307</sup> Sukehiro Hirakawa, 'Japan's Turn to the West' in Marius B. Jansen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 432-498 (p. 463).

<sup>308</sup> Richard Storry, *A History of Modern Japan* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 107.

<sup>309</sup> Priya Joshi, 'Globalizing Victorian Studies', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2011), pp. 20-40 (p. 38).

Arguing for 'a different kind of transnational study ... where the cultural and economic hegemony of the metropolis is no longer dominant [and] other circuits and relations, long-observed in the centre-dominated model, become evident', Joshi suggests that Victorian studies can include more varied types of cultural practices.<sup>310</sup> The influence of Victorian Britain that has a looming presence in the background of *The Handmaiden* is a case in point, for the film reveals the way Victorian British culture resonates in a country distant from Britain in a different time period. Dwyer points to this triangular relationship that is reflected in a scene where Hideko reads out passages from erotic literature in front of gentlemen (the book she reads is introduced as 'Sade-esque'): 'Koreans experience an erotic book by a Japanese author, albeit based on a European classic, and make the story their own'.<sup>311</sup> In this relationship, along with the conflation of 'European' with 'Victorian', the viewer is invited to see intricate layers of colonisation. Kouzuki, who hosts the reading sessions, encapsulates Korea's complicated relationship with Japanese culture which 'invaded' Korea and the country's yearning for modernity by becoming Japanese. He even divorced his first Korean wife and married a Japanese lady to elevate his status as a Japanese nobleman, which emphasises the intensity of his yearning. Kouzuki's action resonates with Faraday's desire to marry Caroline so that he can become the master of Hundreds. In *The Handmaiden* the class-ridden struggle in *The Little Stranger* is transposed to represent a transnational conflict between Japanese and Korean culture. When he is asked the reason for his actions, he says that 'Korea is ugly and

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>311</sup> Dwyer, "'If these gloves could talk'", para. 3 of 14.

Japan is beautiful. ... Korea is soft, slow, dull, and therefore hopeless’.

Similarly, Count Fujiwara (Jung-hoo Ha) and Sook-Hee express their desire to move outside of Korea and reinvent themselves. Fujiwara is revealed to be the son of a farmhand, making his way up in society. During his lunch with Hideko at a restaurant in a luxurious hotel, he tells a story of when he worked as ‘a tout at a brothel’. His title of ‘Count’ and mannerisms come from British customers at the brothel who were interested in his desire for cultural sophistication (he’d spent a month’s pay ‘on one dignified meal’). When he tells this story, the camera shows what Fujiwara sees: a group of well-dressed Japanese gentlemen and ladies at a table behind him and Hideko. They represent what Fujiwara desires, for they encapsulate the result of the Westernisation of Japan followed in its cultural development. Sook-hee, too, earlier on in the film expresses her desire to go abroad with the money she will get. This outward-looking attitude, as well as the setting which allows characters to climb up the social ladder a little more easily in comparison to Victorian England, is perhaps one of the factors which encourages Hideko (Min-hee Kim) and Sook-Hee to break up Fujiwara’s plot and devise their own instead so that they can free themselves from physical and psychological confinement. Another aspect which allows the shift in the narrative is a gendered one — since Mrs Sucksby’s role as a character who controls the whole plot is taken over by Fujiwara, Sook-hee does not have the emotional intimacy with her mother figure like Sue. By asking Bok-soon to be on her and Hideko’s side, Sook-hee shifts the focus of the narrative to the power relation between men and women.



Male characters employ theatricality and performance to confine female characters in *Fingersmith*, and these themes are explored in *The Handmaiden* in a hyperbolic way. In *Fingersmith*, as I explored earlier in this thesis, routine behaviours are considered to be a performance which functions to entrap characters in the domestic sphere. At Briar, performance is incorporated into the daily routine. Sue feels as if those who live there are manipulated into acting according to a particular set of routines. In *The Handmaiden*, theatricality's connection to the male gaze is particularly emphasised. In another interview, Chan-wook describes the male audience's violent gaze in Hideko's reading scenes:

The reading sessions, that Hideko is part of, are designed to literally show what 'male gaze' is, and, in a very palpable manner. It shows you what the violence of gaze can do. Even if Hideko was wearing layers of kimono, it doesn't matter; she might as well have been exposed in the nude in front of those men.<sup>312</sup>

In this confining and oppressive environment, Hideko's performance serves as a tool for survival. She changes the tone and pitch of her voice, strangles herself, and uses a puppet to recreate a lost illustration. While her theatrical performance sustains the guests' male gaze, she sees her performance as part of her daily routines to enable her to protect her true feelings from her observers. At the same time, however, Hideko uses her own gaze to control male characters to some extent. In a scene where Hideko reads out to the gentleman guests, the camera slowly moves towards her, focusing on her

---

<sup>312</sup> Nick Newman, 'Park Chan-wook Talks *The Handmaiden*, Male Gaze, Queer Influence, and Remaking a Spike Lee Film', *The Film Stage*, 19 October 2016, <https://thefilmstage.com/features/park-chan-wook-talks-the-handmaiden-male-gaze-queer-influence-and-remaking-a-spike-lee-film/> (accessed 28 Feb 2017, para. 12 of 14).

eyes. This is followed by shots of the facial expressions of the guests who are entranced by Hideko's theatrical reading. While she is subjected to the male gaze, Hideko uses her performance to manipulate her male audience. In this scene, we are made complicit with the guests, as we follow what they would see. Hideko's performance in the reading scene anticipates her later manipulation of Fujiwara, when she pretends to obey him in order to escape.

This manipulative use of performance is contrasted with the spontaneous expression of natural feelings, which only happens between Hideko and Sook-hee. It is Sook-hee who becomes angry at the way Hideko is treated and starts destroying Kouzuki's pornographic books. Her anger is related to an earlier scene of their first sex, where she is pleasantly surprised with Hideko's sexual voraciousness and says 'you must be a natural!', which is later revealed as untrue. Their sexual union is seen by Sook-hee as a result of their spontaneous expression of natural feelings for one another, and Sook-hee's anger is possibly directed at the pornographic books which have 'tainted' Hideko. First Hideko simply watches Sook-hee destroy the books, saying that Sook-Hee is her 'saviour who came to tear my life apart'. Although Hideko and Sook-hee's sexual union is their first collaborative act, their action of destroying Kouzuki's books together is more significant. While in *Fingersmith*, Sue is unaware of the larger plot which involves her prospective incarceration in an asylum in the place of Maud, Hideko and Sook-hee reveal their past in the scheme to each other, and thereby subvert Fujiwara's plot. In this way, when they destroy the uncle's pornographic books, they have more actual agency in charting their own course of action.

The viewers, however, do not realise this at first, for it is not until Part 2 that they see Hideko's and Sook-hee's actions in the library. Just as Sue and Maud deceive each other, we are being played with.

In a setting where every character needs to perform more than one role, the meaning of material objects in the film changes so as to represent the shifting relationship between characters. As Jonathan Romney notes, 'the viewer is required to follow symbolically laden objects, their roles no less important than those of the characters'.<sup>313</sup> Chan-wook's use of objects is closely linked to the deception of the viewer as well as the characters, since objects that we see in part 1 are often transformed into the ones which serve different purposes in part 2. For example, a rope is at first a traumatising object for Hideko, since her aunt hung herself from a tree. In a scene when she tries to kill herself in the same manner and Sook-hee stops her, however, a rope functions differently, which reflects the new nature of Hideko's and Sook-hee's relationship. Hideko's suicide attempt leads Sook-hee to confess that she is part of Fujiwara's fraudulent scheme to trick Hideko, who in turn reveals her place in the plot. This is the critical moment in the film when two female characters are united to turn the plot to their benefit, and the tone of the film becomes comedic, albeit for a short time, when Sook-hee, shocked by what she hears, accidentally lets go of Hideko's body. The shift of meaning

---

<sup>313</sup> Jonathan Romney, 'The Handmaiden, Park Chan-wook's Intricate Erotic Intrigue', <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/handmaiden-park-chan-wook-intricate-erotic-intrigue-sarah-waters-fingersmith-adaptation> (accessed 8 December 2017, para. 9 of 10).

attached to a rope indicates Hideko's readiness to overcome her past and explore her queer future with Sook-hee.

Another example is the sliding doors in the Japanese section of the mansion, which work to both reveal and to conceal characters' identity and desire. A sense of liminality created by the sliding doors contributes to creating a heterotopia. As De Cauter and Dehaene notes, those who are situated in this in-between space are 'ambiguously hosted as representatives of otherness', with their identities destabilised.<sup>314</sup> When Sook-hee first arrives at the estate, and is given her Japanese name, the sliding doors partly hide her figure (fig. 14). This represents Sook-hee's transformation into Hideko's maid 'Tamako', and the co-existence of two identities. Similarly, when Fujiwara invites Sook-hee to his room, another maid's shadow is visible through the door, making it impossible for them to discuss their plan to trick Hideko. Paper sliding doors create an ambivalent atmosphere by placing characters in a liminal space, where the distinction between the public and the private is blurred.



Fig. 14 Sook-hee behind sliding doors.

---

<sup>314</sup> De Cauter and Dehaene, 'The Space of Play', p. 96.

Furthermore, the liminality created by sliding doors serves to trick the viewers, since they are only given a part of the truth. On Hideko's and Fujiwara's first night as a couple, Sook-hee hears Hideko's moaning from the room next to hers. While she imagines Hideko's and Fujiwara's sexual union because of the sliding doors which separate Sook-hee's room from Hideko's, it is revealed later in the film that the moaning was only Hideko's performance. Similarly, the silver balls Hideko and Sook-hee use for sexual pleasure at the end of the film serve a similar purpose. Originally used to punish Hideko for her defiant behaviour, the balls symbolise both violence and pleasure. The co-existence of opposing significations contributes to the ambivalence of the ending. Having tricked the men, not each other, Hideko and Sook-hee escape Kouzuki and Fujiwara, and are shown on their way to Shanghai on a ship. A ship is one of the spaces Foucault categorises as a heterotopia, as

it is a floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean, and yet, from port to port, tack by tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies, looking for the most precious things in their gardens.<sup>315</sup>

While it clearly situates itself within society, it is at the same time outside of it. Charlotte Mathieson supports this idea, stating 'Out at sea, the ship has featured as a powerful site where new social codes coalesce'.<sup>316</sup> While on board, Hideko and Sook-hee are partly and temporarily liberated from

---

<sup>315</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 336.

<sup>316</sup> Charlotte Mathieson, 'Introduction: The Literature, History and Culture of the Sea, 1600-Present' in Charlotte Mathieson, ed., *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600-Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-21 (p. 8).

heteronormative codes which dictated how they perform their roles. It is shown in the film the ship which Hideko and Sook-hee boarded is bound for Shanghai, but this does not necessarily mean that this is the ship's, and the couple's, final destination. Just as Waters's queer characters stay in heterotopic space to continue to challenge heteronormativity, the ship's presence indicates their long search for a place in which they can settle. A number of queer theorists have recently drawn on this idea to see queer potential in heterotopic spaces — as Angela Jones writes, '[q]ueer heterotopias are material spaces where radical practices go unregulated', and they 'exist in opposition to heteronormative spaces and are spaces where individuals seek to disrupt heterosexist discourses'.<sup>317</sup> This ambivalent state of heterotopic space can call into question the clear demarcation of sexuality governed by heteronormative codes. In their luxurious room on board the ship that is carrying them to freedom, Hideko and Sook-hee use silver balls for their pleasure. Although this does not necessarily liberate them from the patriarchal entrapment to which they were previously subjected, for the idea derives directly from Kouzuki's book which Hideko reads out, their action holds potential to 'disrupt heterosexist discourses'. Just like the Iwakura mission sailed to Europe to search for ways to Westernise Japan, Hideko's and Sook-hee's sea journey is filled with outward-looking optimism. This is because the political situation implies the looming influence of 1930s Britain in Northeast Asia. Following the First Opium War and the First Sino-Japanese War, both Britain and Japan partly colonised China in the late nineteenth

---

<sup>317</sup> Jones, 'Queer Heterotopia', p. 2.

century, and furthermore in the 1930s, Japan invaded Manchuria so as to further the cause of colonisation. As Tricia Cusack states, the sea is where 'Western and non-Western cultures remain imbricated' and thus 'the ocean itself may be viewed as a space that connects and transposes places and cultures'.<sup>318</sup> Thus Northeast Asia in the 1930s can be seen as a curious mixture of various cultures, which allows Hideko and Sook-hee a sense of freedom. Furthermore, pointing to the traces of colonial influence in focusing solely on neo-Victorian fiction that is set in the British Isles, Elizabeth Ho contends that 'the further neo-Victorianism moves from Britain, the more capable it becomes in addressing new sites of production'.<sup>319</sup> *The Handmaiden* moves away from Victorian Britain both in a geographical and temporal sense, yet (or because of it) it sheds light on the way the British Empire's haunting presence in modern Asia. In addition, unlike Maud, who needs to keep producing pornographic literature for money, Hideko and Sook-hee have already secured financial stability by taking Fujiwara's money. For this reason they do not need to depend on the male-dominated literary market for their life together as a couple, which suggests that they have more opportunities to explore their queer sexuality.

In contrast to the space Hideko and Sook-hee inhabit, Kouzuki and Fujiwara end the film and their existence in the basement of Kouzuki's house,

---

<sup>318</sup> Tricia Cusack, 'Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space' in Tricia Cusack, ed., *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 1-22 (p. 3).

<sup>319</sup> Elizabeth Ho, 'The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea: Towards a Global Memory of the Victorian' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds., *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 164-178 (p. 166).

a space that has been established to serve Kouzuki's sadistic violence. The basement is where Kouzuki's pornographic fantasy is made possible — for example, there is an octopus in the large fish tank, which reminds us of an illustration of an octopus assaulting a woman which we see Fujiwara colouring in earlier in the film. Along with a number of severed genitals preserved in jars, the basement is a museum which showcases Kouzuki's perverted sexual imagination. In this very different heterotopic space, Kouzuki asks Fujiwara about his first night as a married couple with Hideko and indulges in his erotic imagination. As Kouzuki says, 'Even listening to the same story, people imagine different things. Peering into each of those fantasies was this old man's humble recreation', his attitude to storytelling and possibility of different interpretations hints at the film's deceptive play with the viewers, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter. When Fujiwara starts his story, it is shown that Kouzuki's imagination is at odds with what actually happened, which we see as a flashback. Thus his erotic imagination is not only made ineffective but also short-lived, as Fujiwara kills Kouzuki and himself by mercury hidden in his cigarettes. In his last moment, Fujiwara remembers the time when he, Hideko, and Sook-hee were on a boat heading to Japan. Since the scene when Hideko and Sook-hee pleasure each other with the silver balls comes right after a series of images that could be in Fujiwara's mind, it is possible to argue that the ending, which promises the heterotopic future for a lesbian couple, could be Fujiwara's fantasy. There is a sense of continuation from the memory of their escape from Kouzuki's house to a ship to Shanghai: in both situations they are on water, surrounded by fog,



which highlights uncertainty about what lies ahead as well as a fantastical atmosphere. Nevertheless, the ambivalence about whether the establishment of Hideko's and Sook-hee's queer heterotopic space is for real or another piece of male fantasy still allows for the possibility of queering male characters' heterosexist discourses. While being in a queer heterotopia does not guarantee one's liberation from heteropatriarchal oppression, Chan-wook draws our attention to the possibilities of the future for lesbian characters that lie beyond the ending of the film. The ship in *The Handmaiden*, as well as the library in *Fingersmith*, exists as a starting point for further calling into question heteronormative codes.

*The Handmaiden's* engagement with Victorian Britain's looming presence in the background of Japan's and Korea's cultural conflict opens up a new possibility for the discussion of neo-Victorianism and Waters's historical fiction. It serves to widen and globalise the definition of the term '(neo-)Victorian' by shedding light on the influence of Victorian Britain on the periphery of the film. Its emphasis on heterotopic space in temporarily suspending heteronormative codes resonates with the spatial politics of Waters's novels. By moving away from neo-Victorianism's conventional setting and narrative timeframe, Chan-wook expands the extent to which the spatial shift and temporal shift in Waters's novels can be optimised.

Waters's neo-historical narrative is capable of interrogating the perception of gender and sexuality in a unique conjunction of queer time and space, and ambivalent heterotopic space created in it lends itself to the continuous questioning of heteronormative values. Along with its utilisation

of temporality, spatiality can be a more useful factor in considering neo-Victorian/historical fiction's engagement with the past. Although it is still in progress, Waters's next novel is likely to be centred around a heterosexual family that lives in a council house in the 1950s.<sup>320</sup> At the end of *The Little Stranger*, council houses that are built on what used to be the Ayres's estate are described by Faraday in an idealistic way: "[t]he houses are cozy enough, with neat flower and vegetable gardens, and swings and slides set up for the children' (LS 495). Through portraying the social and cultural transition from the 1940s to the 1950s, Waters's new novel could interrogate this utopian vision. Waters's novels can inform, develop, or adjust each other's vision of queer futurity that the characters' heterotopic space implies. Investigations into heterotopias in neo-historical novels prove to be an interdisciplinary process, which involves gender, sexuality, and queer studies, urban literary studies, geography, and much more. Further research would be necessary to see whether there are more diverse configurations of queer heterotopias within and beyond neo-historical fiction. The ambivalent potentiality of creating queer heterotopic space, or 'staying in the mess', in Waters's neo-historical narratives invites us to imagine beyond the ending of each novel so that we can examine the influence of queer heterotopia on our present moment.

---

<sup>320</sup> 'Meet the Author' event, Cardiff University, 9 March 2018.

## **Appendix**

### **An Interview with Sarah Waters**

**'Meet the Author' event, organised by Assuming Gender, School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University**

**9 March 2018**

**Akira Suwa:**

I'd like to start by asking you about novels, films or people that influenced you and your take on gender. The reason I'm starting with this question is that yesterday was International Women's Day and people shared images of who or what inspired them to think about gender equality. So what or who inspired you?

**Sarah Waters:**

Well, I was born in 1966 so I went to university in 1984. I thought of myself as a feminist then already. I thought of myself as a feminist when I was at a Catholic junior school and I really wanted to be an altar boy and only boys could serve at the altar. I was really cross about it. And so I definitely identified myself with feminists from quite early on, but the eighties was a fantastic time for feminism in the UK in lots of ways because there was lots of activism going on and there was lots of publishing, I mean feminist publishers including Virago who publishes my novels now, I'm very happy to say, but there were also

lots of publishers who disappeared, like the Women's Press, Only Women Press, Sheba, Pandora as well as gay presses like Gay Men's Press, so I read voraciously. That was because I was coming out as lesbian and so I really wanted to just read anything that was written about queer stuff but also a lot of it was about women, so the writers like Adrienne Rich, you know, talking about the lesbian continuum, for example, or writers like, though she is one of the writers in the nineties, Sarah Schulman, an American writer who was writing very upbeat political kind of queer fiction. I just liked Ellen Galford, an American writer working in the UK, and she was very interested in history. She wrote a book called *Moll Cutpurse, Her True History* which is fantastic and it had a really big impact on me. It's just a great appropriation of the past for Moll Cutpurse — as you might know it was a real figure, Mary Frith, I think she was called — she was a cross-dressing figure. It was in the air I was breathing at the time really — Angela Carter was a great, great influence on me and remains a great heroine of mine because she was extremely feminist in her own way. I think she was kind of ahead of her time in a way. Her feminism didn't necessarily sit easily alongside some of the feminisms of the time — she was very pro sex and quite bold in lots of her writing. But she was also a very literary writer. She was fantastically good at, sort of, plundering the canon. So she was a great influence on me definitely.

**Akira Suwa:**

And you think Carter's influence is reflected in your novels?

**Sarah Waters:**

Yeah I mean I can see that now, looking at my novels. A few years ago I re-read *Nights at the Circus*. *The Bloody Chamber* had always been the book I'd love the most, which is Angela Carter retelling of fairy tales, which now is a very familiar idea. You think films like *Shrek*, and there's this idea of retelling fairy tales in a more subversive way. But Angela Carter was doing this back in the late seventies, I think, or early eighties. It was a really exciting thing to do, to take these stories that we were very familiar with it in a rather sanitised, Disney kinds of ways and to expose to sexual dynamics of them, the sexual politics of them, the darkness of them, the misogyny of them and maybe retell them from that a feminist perspective. So *The Bloody Chamber* had a big influence on me certainly, but when I re-read *Nights at the Circus* I realised that it had a big influence on *Tipping the Velvet*, which is fantasy history set at the end of the nineteenth century. *Nights at the Circus* is all about theatricality and the women kind of using theatrical space for their own ends. If you know *Tipping the Velvet*, that all is very much part of *Tipping the Velvet*, so I think I definitely owe Angela Carter a bigger debt than I realised when I was writing *Tipping the Velvet*.

**Akira Suwa:**

How about films and TV shows that influenced you?

**Sarah Waters:**

I watched tons of telly when I was growing up. It was my main occupation really. We had the telly on the moment I got home from school - the telly went on and it stayed on. All evening long and, you know, we're very much in the living room with the telly on and engaging with it in a kind of royal family kind of way. You might sit in front of the telly for hours on end, it doesn't necessarily mean you're a passive consumer of TV — we might laugh at it, or do all sort of things. The telly I was watching in the 70s was not at all feminist, it was quite the opposite. It was full of dreadful kind of anti-female clichés and misogyny and casual racism — classic British TV. But even so instead of remembering the racist stuff, I remember lots of the telly from the era very fondly and I think it did have a big influence on me. And *Doctor Who* — I was a ridiculous *Doctor Who* fan and I like its storytelling- the cliff hangers in *Doctor Who* and I like cliff hangers, so there is a sort of overlap I think for me with television narratives definitely. I think television does storytelling very well in a way that literary fiction is sometimes a bit embarrassed to do. I think literary fiction doesn't like to be seen as a page turner — which is an amazing thing to me because I would think, as an author, the one thing you want the readers to do is turn the pages. So if anybody calls me a page

turner, I'm absolutely thrilled. But I think telly is very good at doing that and not being embarrassed about it. Going back to feminism and TV — for me it's partly about feminism, and partly about being a young queer person, so I was looking for heroines, I suppose, and for a kind of queer figures. There were more gay men on telly when I was young so Kenneth Williams, I remember really liking Kenneth Williams — that campness and the archness that Kenneth Williams has that I now realise of course is very gay. It's part of the gay male tradition. Larry Grayson, I liked him very much as a young viewer, but it was much harder to find lesbian role models on telly.

**Akira Suwa:**

How about television shows now?

**Sarah Waters:**

Now it's much easier to find lesbians on telly — finally in *Doctor Who*, which is so extraordinary to me, I would have never believed that. Nobody in the UK would ever have believed that. It would have seemed crazy. It just seems outlandish even twenty years ago, that the doctor has a gay sidekick. There's a lot to celebrate and of course it's much easier to see lesbians in sitcoms and dramas, and *Orange is the New Black* is a good example because there are lots of different kinds of lesbians in that show. If there is any problem now, it's that you get a lesbian in a minor role in television series, which means they're kind of

liable to be bumped off. The main story isn't a queer story, so lesbian characters are kind of dispensable. That's not ideal. The funny thing is, now that I write lesbian fiction, I'm less interested in reading lesbian fiction because I live a lesbian life so I haven't got the hunger to read lesbian fiction or go out of my way to look for queer storylines that I would have had when I was a bit younger.

**Akira Suwa:**

Do you think the way lesbian fiction is received has changed?

**Sarah Waters:**

It must be a generational thing, because I can look around it, the lesbian writers that I know, people like Ali Smith, Stella Duffy, Charlotte Mendelson, Jackie Kay and I know that those authors have had very similar experiences to me growing up. They read the same kind of fiction as me and they fastened on the same sort of icons as I did. And I'm not sure I'm seeing that in younger writers. Maybe somebody here is reading lesbian fiction now or writing it, and can tell me what's happening in the lesbian scene now because I'm not quite sure if that's happening in the same way. I don't know if that's because of, like I say, that kind of hunger. I know it is very different in different parts of the world and I know that the UK is quite extraordinary at the moment for the presence that LGBT people have in mainstream culture. It is kind of extraordinary really especially when you compare



it with other parts of the world where that is so not happening, where the opposite is happening. Perhaps for that reason there isn't a need to get those lesbian stories out there like I felt when I was a hungry young lesbian reader. And even when I was starting off as a lesbian writer with *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity*, I felt like there were stories that are half-found in the past, or the writers had imagined for the past. I thought it was important to tell their stories. Maybe younger lesbian writers aren't feeling that so much, I don't know. Or maybe there are lots of lesbian fiction that I'm not aware of. I think one thing that has happened with lesbian fiction is that there's a lot that's published online, or self-published and doing really well with big audiences so maybe it's just about publishing that has changed. Maybe it's just a different way in which the story is getting out.

**Akira Suwa:**

Following up on your experience as a queer person, but I was thinking of an interview with Kaye Mitchell in which you said you like to walk in London. And some of your characters do that too. How much of your experience of walking in London is reflected in your novels?

**Sarah Waters:**

Well I do like walking London streets - I say London because that's where I live. I think there is something about walking the city streets that is exciting and I'm sure that's true in Cardiff too. Cities have a long history and when you walk down city streets you see bits of those

histories all jumbled up together and I really enjoy that. When I've been working on different periods it's made me newly aware of the streets. For example, when I was working on *The Night Watch* which is set in the forties, suddenly what I could see was bomb damage or what's been done since the bomb damage, and a row of terraced houses with one missing in the middle where a V-1 rocket or something probably landed and it gave me a new way of looking at the streets, whereas previously with one of my first three novels which have a nineteenth century setting all I could see was Victorian London when I was walking around. That sort of attention when it comes to reading city streets is something that my characters often have too, especially the ones I feel closest to. But then again I think there is something about the way they roam around and I suppose there are two characters in particular: one is Kay in *The Night Watch* which is the one that's set during the war. Kay is a Butch lesbian who's being very heroic in the war. She's been an ambulance driver, and then after the war when it's been this kind of return to conservative normality, she's a bit of an oddity, as she wanders around restlessly, because she is searching, because she has lost her lover during the war. So she doesn't quite fit in to the available models that are around her. She doesn't fit in to heteronormativity so that makes her a restless solitary figure. And I suppose the other character I'm thinking about is Frances in *The Paying Guests*, my last book, who is a spinster in 1922. A young spinster, which was a terrible thing to be in the twenties, but a lot of

women were, especially middle-class women, because they had lost their fiancées and whatnot. So she is also a bit of an oddity I suppose, wandering around. But really it's just I like walking in London so my characters do too. Also, in the UK, as well as in lots of other Western cities, I can walk around London streets and feel very at home, very unharrassed, and unpoliced and unregulated. That's not the case for women in lots of parts of the world and it wasn't so easy as you go back in time. It was certainly difficult when you get to the nineteenth century. Working-class women walked the streets, of course, and they were involved in various kinds of trades. But for middle- and upper-class women, it was harder to wander around alone. You would get harassed, or they think you are a prostitute. So that's something I'm mindful of when I'm writing fiction — of how I can use public space in a certain kind of way but how a woman in 1947, 1922, or 1892 would do. How they would be able to use space – so walking is a very gendered process.

**Akira Suwa:**

What I noticed when I was reading your novels is that your characters remember the name of the place or the streets. Is it something the characters remember vividly because it's what they can hold on to, when they are surrounded by uncertainties?

**Sarah Waters:**

I haven't thought of it quite like that. I might be true for somebody like Kay in *The Night Watch* who has had a loss, so all she's got is city streets. I do like to really locate my characters on the London streets. With *The Night Watch* it was interesting because I literally had to look at a map of London and think 'I can't have this character living close to that one for various reasons, so if they live over here, they could live here'. It was interesting to plot it like that. I tended to put them in bits of London that I knew well because obviously that's helpful if you're trying to evoke the atmosphere. But also I have a kind of fondness for Pimlico that I know a bit, and I knew that I needed Kay as an ambulance driver, so I looked at where ambulance stations were and there was one that was underneath Dolphin Square, which is this big mansion block of flats. So research becomes very focused with things like that, like looking at images of Dolphin Square ambulance station during the war. I could go to Dolphin Square and it was really hard not to think 'Oh, Kay was here'. It was really hard not to blur the lines between fact and fiction. So I think it's partly for me as a writer that my characters are attached to streets so that I can plot their journeys as I walk their journeys myself. So it must be something about rootedness.

**Akira Suwa:**

I'd like to move on to the way you write: the way you usually start when you work on a new book.

**Sarah Waters:**

It's been different with each book. Normally I've known a bit or quite a lot about the period before I started it. Normally I've known enough to give me a story. So with *The Night Watch* — that was my fourth book and my first three were all set in the late nineteenth century or mid to late nineteenth century. I just wanted to leave the nineteenth century and move to the twentieth somewhere. I knew a bit about the Second World War and how women, especially young women, had paradoxically, given that it was wartime, they had a quite exciting time. You know, there were new opportunities available to the new jobs, and they moved around, meeting new kinds of people. I think some women literally had the time of their life during the war. And I knew that the return to peace meant men coming back and wanting their jobs back and that sort of thing. And lots of people wanting to retreat into family life after the upsets and traumas of war. There was the closing down of transgression and license with the return to peace. That was all I knew really, but that was enough for me to begin to think about women characters who have had an exciting war and what was happening to them afterwards — were they a bit lost, or wrecked, like London itself? And then I began my research and that fleshed them out. So, for example, I realised I wanted all my characters to live in London but when I began to research, quite quickly I realised that lots of people left London they got out for the safety's sake. So if you stayed in London there was probably a reason for it so you either have

a job there, a certain kind of job, civil defence job or something like that, or it meant you were particularly brave, maybe you wanted to stay. I can be so attached to them on a certain level, so if they were threatened in some way, I wouldn't want them to run away from it. I would want them to stay and be part of the experience. I'm sure I'd be on the first train out, actually, when it comes to it. But I thought somebody like Kay who is this rather heroic figure, there's no way Kay would leave. She would want to be there, doing a bit and that began to give me personalities. One young man is in prison because there were people in prison during the war — it's kind of a crazy thought, really. So I started with an idea and then as I did my research it would flesh that idea out a bit. So the only time when I didn't have a sense at all of a story to tell was with the last book, *The Paying Guests*, which is set in the twenties. I'd written about the Victorians and I'd written about the forties, and the twenties was this sort of unknown bit in between. I just began to think what was going on in the twenties and began to do my research and it was purely the research that produced the novel for me. I began to look at a couple of famous murder cases involving women, the Edith Thompson case, and the Rattenbury and Stoner case, both in the twenties, quite similar in that women didn't technically commit the murder but were put on trial and both women were destroyed by the case in a very gendered kind of way. They were punished because they were actively sexual women. And they got me interested in domestic crimes where women might be involved in a love triangle and

transgression. Then I began to think 'who's here? It's a home. Who might be here, what's their involvement with each other?' and that produced the novel. Usually I like to have quite a lot mapped out before I start writing anything at all. I'd like to want to know where I'm going. Often I have a kind of final scene, even. But the bits in between can be quite rough and I have to figure this out as I go along.

**Akira Suwa:**

You were just saying how you'd like to plan a lot before you start writing. At what point of your writing do you think about the ending? Do you usually have a clear idea about what's going to happen to your characters at the beginning of your writing, or do you change your mind in the middle?

**Sarah Waters:**

I don't think I've ever changed my mind about the ending. I always have a destination in mind when I set off because it's part of the intellectual agenda for want of a better word, because all the books I've seen as addressing kind of issues that belong to the period I'm writing about and it's the issues that come first. So I find characters and stories that will allow me to explore those issues, or enact those tensions. So I have to know what's going to happen, where it's going. But what I don't know is how my characters feel about the things that I'm going to make them do and that can change quite a lot, because it is about motivation. You're thinking about acting, and you can play a role in a

very different way depending on what you think motivation of your character is, and I have to figure out what motivations are best suited to enact the issues. So, for example, *The Paying Guests* is about a love triangle of a married woman, her husband and her female lover that goes horribly wrong with hilarious consequences. I also rotated the love between the two women. When I first wrote it, I liked the idea that it was a sort of an illusion as lots of affairs are. You're terribly excited when you're having an affair, so people tell me. Because it's often something slightly illusory, you know, it's sort of fulfilling your role for you — it's a fantasy thing. But six months later you'd look back and think 'what was I thinking? I was ready to give up everything for that person?' It's kind of crazy because it wasn't really about this person and it was about something you needed to work through at that point. So for Frances and Lilian in *The Paying Guests*, I thought maybe they were something like that. They saw each other as a bit of an escape from their own unhappy situations and then this terrible thing happens. It was going to put dreadful pressure on their relationship and it would all come to crumble away, and they'd be like 'Oh my god, you know what, it is all gone'. I wrote half of the story or more, and they just weren't very likable. I didn't feel the reader would care about them and I realised I wanted it to be a proper love story, by which I mean the portrait of a relationship which wasn't about fantasy. It was about genuine mutual attraction and respect that was put under terrible pressure by this dreadful incident, but they just about scraped



through in the end. So in terms of the plot, nothing had to change but what really had to change was how they felt about each other, things they were saying to each other and the tone they were taking with each other. And certainly it was transformed into a different book, so it was very interesting for an author when you realise that things go in a very different direction with very small adjustments.

**Akira Suwa:**

What I like about the ending of your novels is a sense of ambivalence. Take *The Paying Guests*, for instance, it's not a happy ending. *Tipping the Velvet* presents a sort of happy ending, but then your subsequent books the ending is a bleak one.

**Sarah Waters:**

I don't know why, because I'm usually a cheery person. Every single time I think 'I'm going to write a romantic comedy this time' and it just gets darker and darker. I cannot resist it. But *Affinity* is pretty bleak and it can't get bleaker than *Affinity*, which ends with betrayal and suicide. And *The Night Watch* is very melancholy, and has a very poignant tone to it. With *The Paying Guests*, I really wanted them to stay together. But basically there's a murder — it's not really a murder, it's accidental, but it becomes a murder case then somebody else gets involved, a boy who is not guilty. This is a very dreadful, moral, mess that Frances and Lilian find themselves in. To me it seems to match some of what I was finding in books from the early twenties and

newspapers from the period. It was in the wake of the First World War and so many lives had been lost and for not very much. There was a burdened and exhausted feel to people. They were in a new moral landscape and they didn't really know how to negotiate it. So that got into Frances's and Lilian's story too. The world today seems to have already changed again because *The Paying Guests* came out four years ago, so I thought I was writing it in the post 9/11 period, a slightly new world then. How do we cope with these tensions and rifts and antagonisms? It was about mess. And Frances is a spinster trying to take care of this house that is clearly too big for her to maintain. She just has lots of tidying up to do, so I realised that this is about mess. *The Paying Guest* is all about muddle, mess and grubbiness, how you remain a decent person when you're trying to cope with all the stuff. So that's fed into the narrative trajectory of the novel.

**Akira Suwa:**

Do you think it's important for the characters to stay in the mess so that that can continue to subvert heteronormativity?

**Sarah Waters:**

That's a very good point because I hadn't thought about gender and sexuality like that. I think the novel ended up being slightly more conservative than I planned it to be, because I think what I wanted to say was we have to live with mess. We have to live with muddle. I

mean the problem with things like social media is that people can't bear ambiguity or nuance. Everybody has to have an opinion on one side or the other and then they have to shout about it to other people. There's no time to pause and reflect and just say, 'Hang on a minute. This is a complicated situation. Everybody's got strong feelings about this for very good reasons so let's just take our time'. There's none of things like that on social media and I wanted the novel to say, 'Yes, the world is messy and we do have to live with mess, and if we can't bear mess, that's at our own peril'. It didn't really work Frances and Lilian, and they don't cope with it at all as it just gets messier and messier, and they just about scrape through. It has always been important to me not to escape. When I began writing, I wrote *Tipping the Velvet* in the mid-nineties and I read an awful lot of lesbian and feminist fiction. And there were some really great stuff, and although there was lots of stuff that wasn't really well written, it was just exciting that it was there at all. There was a real vein in lesbian fiction that was about escaping. It was all about how the world is so polluted by men, polluted by patriarchy and sexism, which is going to go away and we make our own space. So there is some great lesbian science fiction, for example. But in terms of historical fiction, it often manifests itself as women going off in the woods and becoming witches and wise women and things like that. I was living at that time in London, where there was this thriving lesbian and gay subculture and it was very urban. There were lots of different kinds of ways of being gay as well, and

that's what I wanted to explore, not like escaping to a fantasy rural world where everybody was the same, except they were all women. I wanted to try to recover or invent lesbian history that was urban and was about difference rather than everybody being the same. So I'm attached to mess, and not escaping but staying here to deal with it or to make the best of it if you can.

**Akira Suwa:**

What can you tell us about your next novel? Can you share with us any information?

**Sarah Waters:**

Well, I can't say too much about it, partly because I'm a bit superstitious about airing it and it is still very much in progress. It's another rather gloomy one, I'm afraid. It starts glum and gets grim. It's set in the fifties. It's a bit gothic. It's not gay at all, not a hint of it. It's about a normal family. When I finished my last book, I realised that there are lots of houses in my book, often dirty houses or houses that get dirty, get polluted or blood spilled. And I thought I mustn't write about houses anymore, but here I am. It's set in a house, sort of a fifties council house. It's going to be the end of the cycle, because when I look across my books, the houses got smaller and smaller. Millbank Prison, this horrible gothic prison in *Affinity*, and a couple of big country houses in *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*. And in the last one it's a suburban villa. And I think all of those stories had an element from my

childhood. I was born in a fifties council house and spent a very happy childhood. And now I'm writing about a council house, finally I'm getting to the heart of something. I think it's going to be the last book with a house in it in this kind of way.

**Akira Suwa:**

I think it will be a nice continuation from *The Little Stranger*, where we see council houses at the end of the story.

**Sarah Waters:**

Exactly. This is a book that feels a bit like a cousin to *The Little Stranger* because I thought that's a book about a big country house that's well haunted and falling apart. It's partly enacting the end of the landed gentry era. It finishes with council houses getting built and it's a very rosy picture of meritocratic fifties Britain. But actually with this book I started thinking that I don't really know much about fifties life or ordinary people. Things under the surface maybe weren't quite so ideal, so that's where the book originated.

## Bibliography

*Affinity*. Box TV, Cité-Amérique, Castel Film Romania. Dir. Tim Fywell.

Screenwriter Andrew Davies. 2008.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006.

Akbar, Arifa. 'The Paying Guests by Sarah Waters, Book Review: Novel Tackles Big Themes but Lacks Bite'. *Independent*, 21 August 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-paying-guests-by-sarah-waters-book-review-novel-tackles-big-themes-but-lacks-bite-9683573.html> (accessed 16 February 2019), 10 paragraphs.

Apter, Emily. 'Introduction' in Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 1-9.

Armistead, Claire. 'Sarah Waters: "The Handmaiden turns pornography into a spectacle — but it's true to my novel"'. *The Guardian*, 8 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/apr/08/sarah-waters-the-handmaiden-turns-pornography-into-a-spectacle-but-its-true-to-my-novel> (accessed 1 September 2017), 27 paragraphs.

Armitt, Lucie and Sarah Gamble. 'The Haunted Geometries of Sarah Waters' *Affinity*'. *Textual Practice*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2006), pp. 141 - 159.

---. 'Interview with Sarah Waters (CWWN Conference, University of Wales, Bangor, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2006)'. *Feminist Review*, No. 85 (2007), pp. 116-127.

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1993.

- Avery, Simon. 'Structuring and Interpreting Queer Spaces of London' in Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham, eds. *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c. 1850 to the Present*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 3-22.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Bailey, Peter. 'Introduction: Making Sense of Music Hall' in Peter Bailey, ed. *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986, pp. viii-xxiii.
- Baldick, Chris. *Literature of the 1920s: Writers among the Ruins*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Bartkowski, Frances. *Feminist Utopias*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painters of Modern Life*. Trans. P. E. Charvet. London: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Bell, David M. *Rethinking Utopia: Place, Power, Affect*. New York and London: Routledge, 2017.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: New Left Books, 1973.
- Best, Sue. 'Sexualizing Space' in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, eds. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 191-205.
- Bland, Lucy. *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. 'London in the Victorian Novel' in Lawrence Manley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 142-159.
- Boehm-Schnitker, Nadine and Susanne Gruss. 'Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian — Neo-Victorian Fashions' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds. *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-17.
- Bowlby, Rachel. 'Walking, Women and Writing: Virginia Woolf as *Flâneuse*' in Isobel Armstrong, ed. *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 26-47.
- Bracco, Rosa Maria. *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939*. Oxford: Berg, 1993.
- Bravmann, Scott. *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Brindle, Kym. 'Diary as Queer Malady: Deflecting the Gaze in Sarah Waters's *Affinity*'. *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 2009/2010), pp. 65 - 85.
- . *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Diaries and Letters*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Butler, Judith. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory'. *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 40, No. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.



- Carrol, Rachel. *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Castle, Terry. *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Ciocia, Stefania. "'Queer and Verdant': The Textual Politics of Sarah Waters' Neo-Victorian Novels'. *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007), <http://literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2007/ciocia.html> (accessed 10 February 2017), 25 paragraphs.
- Clapp, Susannah. 'The Night Watch review – the swish of the blackout curtain'. *The Guardian*, 29 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/29/night-watch-review-royal-exchange-manchester-sarah-waters> (accessed 15 December 2017).
- Cohen, Annabel J. 'Film Music from the Perspective of Cognitive Science' in David Neumeyer, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 96-130.
- Cusack, Tricia. 'Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space' in Tricia Cusack, ed. *Framing the Ocean, 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, pp. 1-22.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. London: Everyman's Library, 1859. ---. *Basil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Dau, Duc and Shale Preston, 'Queer Victorian Families: An Introduction' in Duc Dau and Shale Preston, eds. *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 1-15.

- Davidoff, Leonore. *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955.
- Davies, Helen. 'Written on the Body: Wounded Men and Ugly Women in *The Little Stranger*' in Claire O'Callaghan and Adele Jones, eds. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 155-172.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage, 1973.
- De Cauter, Lieven and Michiel Dehaene. 'The Space of Play: Towards a General Theory of Heterotopia' in Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, eds. *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 88-102.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Reddall. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.
- de Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010.
- . "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel' in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 56-69.
- Delap, Lucy. *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Dillon, Sarah. *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Doan, Laura and Sarah Waters. 'Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History' in David Alderson and

- Linda Anderson, eds. *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring the Contemporary Boundaries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 12-28.
- . *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Dwyer, Joseph. 'If these gloves could talk' Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden*. *DiSSOLVE*, Issue. 3 (2017), <http://www.dissolvesf.org/issue-3/if-these-gloves-could-talk> (accessed 1 September 2017), 14 paragraphs.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2016.
- Emmens, Heather. 'Taming the Velvet: Lesbian Identity in Cultural Adaptations of *Tipping the Velvet*' in Rachel Carroll, ed. *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*. London: Continuum, 2009, pp. 134-146.
- English, Elizabeth. *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. London: The Women's Press, 1981.
- Fingersmith*. Sally Head Production. Dir. Aisling Walsh. Screenwriter Peter Ransley. 2005.

- Fortier, Anne-Marie. 'Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment' in Sarah Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, eds. *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Oxford: Berg, 2003, pp. 115-135.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. 'Walking and Other Choreographic Tactics: Danced Inventions of Theatricality and Performativity'. *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3 (2002), pp.125-146.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.
- . 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias'. Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October 1984), pp. 1-9.
- Freccero, Carla. 'Queer Spectrality Haunting the Past' in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, eds. *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 194-213.
- Freud, Sigmund. 'Fetishism' in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 2001, pp. 147-157.
- . 'The Uncanny' in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 123-162.
- Gagnier, Regenia. *Literatures of Globalization: Global Circulation and the Long Nineteenth Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Gamble, Sarah. "'You cannot impersonate what you are": Questions of Authenticity in the Neo-Victorian Novel'. *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*. Vol. 20 (2009), pp. 126-140.

- . "I know everything. I know nothing"; (Re)Reading *Fingersmith's* Deceptive Doubles' in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. pp. 42-55.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- . "The Body as House" in Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, eds. *The Domestic Space Reader*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, pp. 123 - 127.
- Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Trans., Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky. Lincoln, NB: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- Groes, Sebastian. *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Gurney, Edmund, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore. *Phantasms of the Living*, Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886.
- Hadley, Louisa. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Hall, Demelza Morgana. 'Space and Sexuality in the Post-Victorian Fiction of Sarah Waters' (unpublished master's thesis, The University of Tasmania, 2006).

- Hayes, Britt. 'Interview: Park Chan-wook on *The Handmaiden*'. *Screen Crush*, 21 October 2016, <http://screencrush.com/park-chan-wook-handmaiden-interview/?trackback=tsmclip> (accessed 28 Feb 2017), 13 paragraphs.
- Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- . 'Specters of the Victorian in the Neo-Forties Novel: Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* (2009) and Its Intertexts'. *Contemporary Women's Writing*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2012), pp. 38-55.
- Heynen, Hilde. 'Heterotopia Unfolded?' in Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, eds. *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 311-323.
- Hickling, Alfred. 'The Night Watch review — captures the heart of Sarah Waters's love story'. *The Guardian*, 25 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/25/the-night-watch-review-adaptation-sarah-waters> (accessed 15 December 2017), 5 paragraphs.
- Hirakawa, Sukehiro. 'Japan's Turn to the West' in Marius B. Jansen, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 432-498.
- Ho, Elizabeth. 'The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea: Towards a Global Memory of the Victorian' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds. *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 164-178.

- Hoedt, Madelon. "'There is a curse...': Performance, Adaptation and Fidelity in Christopher Green and Sarah Waters' *The Frozen Scream*'. *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, Vol. 9, No.3 (2016), pp. 223-238.
- Humble, Nicola. *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- . 'Little Swans with Luxette and Loved Boy Pudding: Changing Fashions in Cookery Books'. *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2002), pp. 322-338.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.
- . *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Lesbian Utopics*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- . *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Jarvis, Helen, Helen Kantor, and Jonathan Cloke. *Cities and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Jeremiah, Emily. 'The "I" inside "her": Queer narration in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune*'. *Women: A Cultural Review*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (2007), pp. 131-144.
- Johnson, Peter. 'Unravelling Foucault's "Different Spaces"'. *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2006), pp. 75-90.

- . 'The Geographies of Heterotopia'. *Geography Compass*, Vol. 7, No. 11 (2013), pp. 790-803.
- Jones, Adele. 'Disrupting the Continuum: Collapsing Space and Time in Sarah Waters's *The Night Watch*'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014), pp. 32-44.
- and Claire O'Callaghan. 'Sarah Waters's Feminisms' in Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, eds. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 1-21.
- Jones, Angela. 'Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness'. *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, Vol. 4 (2009), pp. 1-20.
- . 'Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice' in Angela Jones, ed. *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 1-17.
- Joshi, Priya. 'Globalizing Victorian Studies', *The Yearbook of English Studies*. Vol. 41, No. 2 (2011), pp. 20-40.
- Kaplan, Cora. 'Josephine Tey and her Descendants: Conservative Modernity and the Female Crime Novel' in Rachel Gilmour and Bill Schwarz, eds. *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011, pp. 53-73.
- Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957.
- King, Jeannette. *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.



- Kleinecke-Bates, Iris. *Victorians on Screen: The Nineteenth Century on British Television, 1994-2005*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Kontou, Tatiana. *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise. 'Into History Through the Back Door: The "Past Historic" in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity*'. *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), pp. 153-166.
- . 'Sexation and the Neo-Victorian Novel: Orientalising the Nineteenth Century in Contemporary Fiction' in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Luisa Orza, eds. *Negotiating Sexual Idioms: Image, Text, Performance*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008, pp. 53-77.
- and Christian Gutleben, 'Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters: Cultural Capital and Reproduction' in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds. *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, pp. 1-42.
- . 'Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein: Prospecting for Gold, Buried Treasure and Uncertain Metal' in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss, eds. *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 21-37.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise and Christian Gutleben. 'Troping the Neo-Victorian City: Strategies of Reconsidering the Metropolis', in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds. *Neo-Victorian Cities: Reassessing Urban Politics and Poetics*. Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 1-40.
- Kumar, Krishan. *Utopianism*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991.

- . 'The Ends of Utopia'. *New Literary Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Summer 2010), pp. 549-569.
- Letissier, Georges. 'More Than Kith and Less Than Kin: Queering the Family in Sarah Waters's Neo-Victorian Fictions' in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds. *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, pp. 365-394.
- . 'Hauntology as Compromise between Traumatic Realism and Spooky Romance in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*', in Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, eds. *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 34-50.
- Light, Alison. 'Writing Fictions: Femininity and the 1950s' in Jean Radford, ed. *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, pp. 139-156.
- Llewellyn, Mark. "'Queer? I should say it is criminal!': Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999)". *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2004), pp. 203 - 214.
- . 'Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre' in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, eds. *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 195-210.
- Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1962.
- Malinowitz, Harriet. 'Taking the Road to Ruin'. *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2000), p. 11.

- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- . *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005.
- Mathieson, Charlotte. *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- . 'Introduction: The Literature, History and Culture of the Sea, 1600-Present' in Charlotte Mathieson, ed. *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600-Present*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 1-21.
- Maudsley, Henry. 'The Double Brain'. *Mind*, Vol. 14, No. 54 (April 1889), pp 161-187.
- McCauley, Gay. *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Medd, Jodie. 'Encountering the Past in Lesbian and Gay Fiction' in Hugh Stevens, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 167-184.
- 'Meet the Author' event, organised by Akira Suwa under the auspices of Assuming Gender, School of English, Communication and Philosophy, Cardiff University, 9 March 2018.
- Mitchell, Kate. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

- Mitchell, Kaye. "'What does it feel like to be an anachronism?': Time in *The Night Watch*" in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 84-98.
- . "'I'd love to write an anti-Downton!': An Interview with Sarah Waters" in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 129-141.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.
- Munt, Sally. 'The Lesbian Flâneur', in David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 114-125.
- Naylor, Hattie. *The Night Watch*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016
- Neal, Allison. '(Neo-)Victorian Impersonations: Vesta Tilley and *Tipping the Velvet*'. *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011), pp. 55-76.
- Newman, Nick. 'Park Chan-wook Talks *The Handmaiden*, Male Gaze, Queer Influence, and Remaking a Spike Lee Film'. *The Film Stage*, 19 October 2016, <https://thefilmstage.com/features/park-chan-wook-talks-the-handmaiden-male-gaze-queer-influence-and-remaking-a-spike-lee-film/> (accessed 28 Feb 2017), 14 paragraphs.
- O'Callaghan, Claire. "'Lesbo Victorian Romp': Women, Sex, and Pleasure in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*" in Joel Gwynne and Angelia Poon, eds. *Sexuality and Contemporary Literature*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012, pp. 61-80.

- . 'Sarah Waters's Victorian Domestic Spaces; Or, the Lesbians in the Attic'.  
*Peer English: The Journal of New Critical Thinking*, Vol. 9 (2014), pp. 123-138.
- . *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Owen, Alex. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Palmer, Paulina. *Queering Contemporary Gothic Narrative 1970-2012*.  
 Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- . 'Representations of Queer London in the Fiction of Sarah Waters', in  
 Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham, eds. *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c. 1850 to the Present*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 81-96.
- Parker, Emma. 'The Country House Revisited: Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*' in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 99-113.
- . 'Contemporary Lesbian Fiction: Into the Twentieth Century' in Jodie Medd, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 204-218.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Peach, Linden. *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Pietz, William. 'The Problem of the Fetish'. Part 1, *Res*, No. 9 (1985), pp. 5-17.
- Plain, Gill. *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

- Pohl, Rebecca. 'Sexing the Labyrinth: Space and Sexuality in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*' in Kaye Mitchell, ed. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 29-41.
- Primorac, Antonija. *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptation of Victorian Women*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Pykett, Lyn. *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994.
- Rau, Petra. 'The War in Contemporary Fiction', in Marina Mackay, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 207-219.
- Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. London: I. B. Taurus, 2006.
- Roberts, Michèle. *The Walworth Beauty*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Romney, Jonathan. 'The Handmaiden, Park Chan-wook's Intricate Erotic Intrigue'. *Sight and Sound*, 13 April 2017, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/handmaiden-park-chan-wook-intricate-erotic-intrigue-sarah-waters-fingersmith-adaptation> (accessed 8 December 2017), 10 paragraphs.
- Roof, Judith. *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Rose, Gillian. *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Rousselot, Elodie. 'Introduction: Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction', in Elodie Rousselot, ed. *Exoticizing the Past in*

- Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1-16.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Schaff, Barbara 'On Not Being Mrs Browning: The Revisionist Feminism of Sarah Waters's Neo-Victorian Trilogy'. *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2013, pp. 63-75.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Scaggs, John. *Crime Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Schaub, Melissa. *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Tendencies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Shields, Rob. 'Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *Flânerie*' in Keith Tester, ed. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 61-80.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Cultures at the Fin de Siècle*. London: Virago, 1990.
- Steinbach, Susie L. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Stekel, Wilhelm. *Sexual Aberrations: The Phenomena of Fetishism in Relation to Sex*. Trans. Sam Parker. London: Vision, 1930.

- Stewart, Faye. 'Of Herrings Red and Lavender: Reading Crime and Identity in Queer Detective Fiction'. *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2009), pp. 33-44.
- Stewart, Victoria. *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Storry, Richard. *A History of Modern Japan*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Studlar, Gaylyn. "'Out-Salomeing Salome": Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism' in Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds. *Vision of the East: Orientalism in Film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997, pp. 99-129.
- Taylor, Affrica. 'A Queer Geography' in Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt, eds. *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*. London: Cassell, 1997, pp. 3-19.
- Tey, Josephine. *The Franchise Affair*. London: Arrow Books, 1948.
- Tiernan, Sonja. 'Tipping the Balance with Historical Fiction: *Tipping the Velvet* as a Lesbian Feminist Device'. *Irish Feminist Review*, Vol. 1 (2005), pp. 161-184.
- Tinkler, Penny. 'Sapphic Smokers and English Modernities' in Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, eds. *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 75-90.
- Tipping the Velvet*. BBC, Sally Head Productions. Dir. Geoffrey Sax. Screenwriter Andrew Davies. 2002.
- The Frozen Scream*. Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff. Dir. Christopher Green. Writer Christopher Green and Sarah Waters. 2014.



- The Handmaiden*. Yong Film. Dir. Park Chan-wook. Screenwriters Park Chan-wook and Seo-kyeong Jeong. 2016
- '*The Little Stranger* feature film coming soon',  
<https://www.sarahwaters.com/2017/11/06/the-little-stranger-feature-film-coming-soon/> (accessed 8 December 2017), 1 paragraph.
- The Night Watch*. BBC. Dir. Richard Laxton. Screenwriter Paula Milne. 2011.
- Tomaiuolo, Severio. *Deviance in Neo-Victorian Culture: Canon, Transgression, Innovation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Turner, Mark W. *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London*. London: Reaktion Books, 2003.
- . 'Zigzagging' in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds. *Restless Cities*. London: Verso, 2010, pp. 299-315.
- Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Valentine, Gill. '(Re)Negotiating the "Heterosexual Street": Lesbian Production of Space' in Nancy Duncan, ed. *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 146-155.
- . '(Hetero)Sexing Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces', in Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp, eds. *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: Arnold, 1997, pp. 284 - 300.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. London: Virago, 1992.
- Waters, Sarah. *Tipping the Velvet*. London: Virago, 1998.

- . *Affinity*. London: Virago, 1999.
- . *Fingersmith*. London: Virago, 2002.
- . *The Night Watch*. London: Virago, 2006.
- . *The Little Stranger*. London: Virago, 2009.
- . 'The Lost Girl'. *The Guardian*, 30 May 2009,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/30/sarah-waters-books>  
 (accessed 30 October 2016), 20 paragraphs.
- . *The Paying Guests*. London: Virago, 2014.
- . "'I wanted *The Paying Guests* to be sexy without being a romp". *The Guardian*, 6 June 2015,  
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/06/sarah-waters-writing-the-paying-guests> (accessed 23 Sep 2015), 6 paragraphs.
- Weston, Kath. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Whelehan, Imelda. 'Neo-Victorian Adaptations' in Deborah Cartmell, ed. *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 272-291.
- Wigley, Mark. 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender' in Beatriz Colomina ed. *Sexuality & Space*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, pp. 327-389.
- . *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993.

- Wilson, Cheryl A. 'From the Drawing Room to the Stage: Performing Sexuality in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*'. *Women's Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2006), p. 285-305.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. 'The Inivible *Flâneur*', *New Left Review*, No. 191 [1992], pp. 90-110.
- Wisker, Gina. 'The Feminist Gothic in *The Little Stranger*: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change' in Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan, eds. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 97-113.
- Witting, Monique. *Les Guérillères*. Trans. David Le Vay. New York: Avon, 1973.
- Wolff, Janet. 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1985), p. 37-46.
- Wolfreys, Julian. *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Wood, Rachel. "'Walking and Watching'" in *Queer London: Sarah Waters' Tipping the Velvet and The Night Watch*'. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4 (2013), pp. 305-316.
- Woo-keun, Han. *The History of Korea*. Trans. by Lee Kyung-shik. Seoul: The Eul-yoo Publishing Company, 1970.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- . 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*. David Bradshaw, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 177-187.

Yates, Louisa. 'The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Queer Families' in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds. *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, pp. 93-117.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. 'Exiting from Patriarchy: The Lesbian Novel of Development' in Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover, NH and London, 1983, pp. 244-257.