

Expressing Homosexuality: A Study of Sarah Waters *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*

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Abstract

This Paper is trying to estimate Sarah Waters' narratives' lost voices of those women who were on the fringes of society, be it because of their social class or sexuality, or simply because they are women in a predominantly patriarchal society. She brings these voices not only to history, but also to the present. The idea of women's submission to men expressed in the late 20th century is often considered a feature of the Victorian era, when women had no right to vote and were mythologized as house angels or prostitutes. Waters' Victorian heroines are regularly portrayed trying to resist personal, physical, and financial commitments to men. Sarah Waters's stories are told from the point of view of sexually minorities such as prisoners, women in the mental asylums or in the 19th century pornography industry. The invisibility of lesbian women lives, their unheard voices are the focus of Sarah Waters. She tries to blur the boundaries of class and foregrounds the performativity of gender. This paper focuses on the two novels of Sarah Waters: *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*.

Keywords: Predominant patriarchal society, submission, invisibility, performativity.

Sarah Waters a provocative Neo Victorian Writer, was influenced by Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Brontes for her classics of Victorian narrative and contemporary novelists in the combination of Victorian and post-modernist approach like A.S Byatt and John Fowles influenced her writings. Waters is known among scholars as part of a group of writers who took the step of mainstreaming the historical novel, moving away from the crowd, marginalization and tired, towards a genre that is widely revised and adapted to the screen.

Tipping the Velvet can pay interest to the manner public areas can function a way of covertly signaling choice this is simplest allowed complete expression in non-public areas. As Judith Butler's theory, which gives gender as a social assemble and as continually a part of a performance, Nancy attempts to dismantle the bounds among the sexes posing as each convincingly. Nancy clothes up with very female attributes further to her male costumes along with her lady waist in her jacket and barely greater colored lip than is used for Kitty's costume. The landlady seems suspicious about Nancy's outfit and undecided about her gender. As Nancy says, "Sometimes I was not sure myself."(p.195) The house in which Nan and her lover Florence live with Florence's brother and have adopted the baby represents an alternative form of kinship, a relationship that paves the way for the establishment of their lesbian identity. In this way, Waters' work invites careful reading of the details of each place: the theaters and streets of London somehow reflect the expression of the freedom of queer characters. The theater gives Nan a chance to acknowledge her weirdness and imagine her future with Kitty rather than staying with her family in Kant. Waters draws attention to the ubiquity of lesbians in Victorian times, while Nan Astley looks for ways to get in touch with different lesbian communities and how to express her lesbian identity.

Waters' bildungsroman story describes Nan's process of debunking to the patriarchal imposition of heteronormative femininity. Resistance is staged through cross-dressing. Waters' narrative agrees with Butler's argument about the construction of all genres. Nan's theatrical personality questions the idea that Victorian society validated two gender identities - heterosexual men and heterosexual women, and clothing became a tool through which those

identities were staged. However, their performance also serves to limit the space in which their lesbian relationship can be shown openly or covertly, as Kitty insists that they must hide their homosexuality from the public, their room and (by darkening) the stage the only places for their lesbian desire. Nan's search, whose ultimate goal is to achieve an "authentic" self-image as a lesbian subject, first explores a large number of theatrical spaces, which is counterproductive to her search. Ultimately, Nan discovers that performativity is put into practice when she and women from the same district wear pants to the home. The area they live in occasionally sees women in men's clothing, although that doesn't mean that people are indulging in the transgressive nature of cross-dressing. The novel, which ends with the union of Nan and Florence, emphasizes an alternative model of kinship. This form of relationship differs from biological kinship, which is based on heterosexual family relationships and therefore celebrates their lesbian identity.

While going to the theater gives the audience a chance to put themselves in a dreamlike atmosphere and even make them queer, they can tell that they take on a demonic streak that would worry people in the real world. For Nan especially, this suggests her hidden homosexual nature that she cannot show off in her daily life. Nan's homosexuality is indicated here by her "strangely lit" face on hers. For Sarah Waters, the city of London is ambiguous, glamorous and ramshackle, but ultimately it offers its protagonists a chance to make their voices heard. Her characters find their voice in the illegitimate and bordering spaces of the city. Sometimes lifelong same-sex friendships and passionate declarations of love are revealed in lesbian texts, letters, and diaries. After this love was tolerated, it was later condemned. The condemnation of same-sex love sometimes has to do not only with sexual expression, but because of the emerging freedom of women, the abolition of heterosexuality, which not only meant sex between men and women, but also patriarchal, male and female domination and subordination. Waters' heroines are regularly depicted trying to challenge personal, physical, and financial commitments to men. Waters' narratives problematize rigid definitions of gender and present it as malleable and fluid. When Nan King poses as a retiree, she undermines the concept of a physiological basis for gender and sexuality.

The narrator of the story is the novel's protagonist Nancy herself, who recounts the events of her life just before and in the year after leaving her parents' house in Whitstable. After having lived with her parents in an oyster parlour for eighteen years, Nancy meets the male impersonator Kitty Butler, by whom she is instantly swept of her feet; "Piercing the shadows of the naked stage was a single shaft of rosy limelight, and in the centre of this there was a girl: the most marvellous girl – I knew it at once! – that I had ever seen" (p.12). The two girls soon have an intimate friendship that leads to Kitty asking Nancy to accompany her as her dressing maid to London, where she has been offered a contract at a music hall. The narrator of the story is the protagonist of the novel Nancy herself, who recounts the events of her life shortly before and in the year after leaving her parents' home in Whitstable. After living with her parents in an oyster parlor for eighteen years, her Nancy met male impersonator Kitty Butler, who immediately knocked her unconscious; "Piercing the shadows of the naked stage was a single shaft of rosy limelight, and in the centre of this there was a girl: the most marvellous girl – I knew it at once! – that I had ever seen" (p.12). The two girls soon develop an intimate friendship, prompting Kitty to ask Nancy to accompany her to London as her cleaning lady, where she is offered a contract at a music salon. Kitty is quite successful during her first months in London with the help of her manager, the young man Walter Bliss, who himself is a former performer. On the same day, the two spend their first romantic night together. Nancy's own career as a male impersonator begins when she takes the stage with Kitty, and the male impersonator duo, Kitty Butler and Nan King, are quickly becoming famous in the city. The girls enjoy multiple hits and keep getting rich, while Nancy and Kitty are partners on stage and lovers behind closed doors. After just over a year, Nancy's dream life falls apart when she unexpectedly finds Walter and Kitty together in her bedroom. Kitty announces that they will be getting married and that they will continue their Music Hall careers together as a married duo. Heartbroken, Nancy runs away from home, leaving everything behind only to visit her dressing room in the music room to quickly collect some of the money she keeps there and dress her up as her. After neglecting herself for a few weeks in a ramshackle room in a shady area that she does not know, she decides to go outside in her disguise to find herself as a man who feels safe. Due to a misunderstanding, she soon pursues a career as a tenant and spends her time on the streets of London learning more about the

possibilities of renting from a man she poses as "Maryanne" named Sweet Alice. During her tenant days, Nancy met Florence, who is a social activist and young woman who immediately wanted to get to know Nancy better. On the way to Florence, however, Nancy is picked up from the street by Lady Diana Lethaby, a wealthy 38-year-old widow, and persuaded to spend the night at her home. This leads Diana to hire Nancy for sexual entertainment. Diana wants Nancy to dress up as a man and date her as "Neville" to treat her as an object to show her impressed friends of her. Nancy spends her days as Diana's trophy for a year, feeling joy and pride in being there, as well as boredom and emptiness from being alone all the time and being used as a prize. It all ends abruptly when she is bluntly thrown out of the house as she defends the maid Zena from the tyranny of drunk Diana and her friends. After Nancy has completely lost hope of reconciliation, Nancy once again wanders the streets of London and ends up with Florence, whom she remembers and therefore asks for help. Florence, somewhat reluctantly, offers Nancy a night at her home, which she shares with her brother and a baby. Certain that she wants to stay with Florence, Nancy begins to convince her of her good intentions by cleaning the house and taking care of her baby. Spend some time while Nancy works for the little family as she slowly approaches them. Finally, the two women begin a romantic relationship after learning about each other's past.

The novel ends with Nancy convinced of the causes of the socialist rally and giving a speech with Ralph, Florence's brother. He meets Kitty, who asks him to go back with her and start their love story again, but Nancy rejects her, realizing that she has found happiness and her place with Florence and her family. Waters describes Nancy's constant role reversals in more detail than Woolf, and often focuses on Nancy's experience of portraying herself as a man. Nancy alters her body because she expects her to look traditionally feminine, but she has also gotten used to presenting him in masculine clothing and feeling so comfortable. The feeling of having a body that magically adapts to the gender she needs at the time appears in other places as well. After wandering the streets as a tenant for weeks, Nancy describes how Diana takes her out for the first time; "I felt like a man being transformed into a woman at the hand of a sorceress" (pp.239- 240).

Nan's relationship with Florence gives her a new perception of the world and leads her to accept herself as a lesbian in public. Nan's recognition of the possibility of displaying her sexuality in public leads to a change in the meaning of her cross-dressing, as well as her acting. When they go to the pub together, Nan is surprised to find 4,444 women dressed as men, just as she did in the theater, prompting her to ask Florence if she thinks they are "very foolish" ... if (she) said that (she) thought that (she) was the only one disguised as a man. (P. 417) Nan and Florence's queer space remains a point of reference for all representations of queer space that appear in Waters' other novels and thus serves to explore the characters' potential for sexual liberation.

The radical otherness of queer desires leads the characters to challenge the heteronormative code. While Sarah Waters maintains the goal of addressing issues such as sexuality, gender and class, Waters' transition to other historical eras has allowed her to portray characters who try to balance their desires with the social demands of each era. The social instability in these transition phases led to new ideas about the queer space. Waters shows characters who live under the pressure of social instability and hers queer rooms are used or created for queer-lesbian characters or those who do not fit into the "normal" category due to their non-normative attitude.

It is in those moments when Waters describes Nancy's cross-dressing as something quite mysterious and almost magical that the novel seems to relate more to *Orlando*. Nancy's cross-dressing is beyond her control, in the hands of Kitty or Diana, for a crowd or for lust. Her gender seems to be in someone else's hands right now, so her acting becomes alien to her own actions and she loses sight of who she really is. Sexual relationships are present in various places throughout the novel, not only in Nancy herself, but also in various characters such as Kitty and Diana and her girlfriends. The intention of Sarah Waters with the presence of gender fluidity in the novel seems to be to show her readers the contrasts between the past and the present, to bring them to the historical context of the story and at the same time show them their own contemporary time showing that not much has changed in our perception of gender roles. Describing Nan Astley's search for ways in which her lesbian identity can be expressed in her

encounters with various lesbian communities, Waters draws attention to the ubiquity of lesbians in Victorian times. What Waters reveals with *Tipping the Velvet* is, as Sonja Tiernan asserts, "to regain the potential of fiction, lesbian culture and history, and at the same time address the issues of heteropatriarchal injustice." (P.54) *Tipping the Velvet* is much more than the story of a young woman who can declare herself a lesbian when she takes the stage at London Music Hall; It is a text that undermines and destabilizes traditional notions of gender stereotypes when she dresses as a child on the streets of London. Her voices are those that remained hidden from history.

In *Fingersmith*, on the other hand, protagonist Sue's apparent physical, largely spiritual relationship with Maud marks the novel as a distinguishing feature of mainstream Victorian fictions, in which lesbian relationships are almost always disguised as intimate friendships of one another. With its strong narrative structure and precise setting in Victorian England, it is classified as a historical detective novel; With its same-sex love story between two heroines, it is also considered a lesbian novel. Such categorization is outlined by Waters' well-known exploration of historical, social, and sexual politics in her novels. Sarah Waters paints a picture of this middle class, which in many ways restricts women more than the working class and locks them into rigid gender roles. Waters focuses on small details like women's clothing to illustrate how gender is a construction.

Fingersmith Sue Trinder can't believe how many layers a lady has to wear and sees the fact that it is tied to her dress at the back as a sign of incarceration. Waters creates a hybrid. She has a literary flirtation with the conventions of Victorian hardcore porn, but ultimately the clarity is softened by romance. In *Fingersmith*, Waters acknowledges the influence of Victorian erotic and pornographic fiction. Some Victorian women wrote erotic novels, and Maud and Sue appear to be their literary descendants. Maud is a new woman, an emancipated Victorian woman, for she is a literary, professional secretary and sexually adventurous. Maud and Sue (who are physically, if not intellectually, innocent) evolve from Victorian "sexual innocent women" and gain sexual agency. At the end of the novel, the new career of the heroines is to write pornography.

In this story, Maud Sue says that when she offered her own pornographic material to a friend of her uncle, he sent her to a "home for desperate gentlemen." She then she added: "They say women don't write that. But I am not a lady '(546). By rejecting the qualifications of 'girl', 'lady' and 'distraught lady', Maud places herself beyond social and cultural boundaries that limit her sexual actions and behavior in a gender-specific way, thus opening the possibility of imagining new ones. forms of social and sexual relationships. Only by considering this possibility can we explain Maud's seemingly contradictory decision to deface or sell (456) Mr. Lilly's books and prints while she earns her living as a pornography writer. This is the crucial aspect in which Maud's pornographic texts differ from those of her uncle: the fact that her writings are made up of words of desire that express her own homosexual experience, rather than metaphors, that represent patriarchal stereotypes. of male domination and female submission. The existence of these texts puts an end to the assumption that sex roles conform to an immutable and universal pattern. While patriarchal pornography is based on the objectification of women and the justification of male violence, Maud's lesbian texts open the possibility of imagining women as active agents of their own enjoyment living in a more empathetic, egalitarian society. and free. In that sense, the role assumed by Maud as a lesbian pornographer, far from providing evidence of the continuation of Lilly's teachings, or expressing the ironic admission of Sarah Waters's defeat, as Kaplan argues, is in fact a moral value and educational. She offers both Victorian and contemporary readers a liberating alternative to the binary opposites between male / female, self / other, master / slave, subject / object of desire that are prevalent in sexual and social relationships in Western culture.

So Sarah Waters debunks closure and bring in front the missing voices of ignored identities. Sarah tries to destabilize the established norms regarding of conformity of heterosexuality. She creates a new space for queer representation in the officially sanctioned society. The blurred boundaries of outer and inner space problematize the rigidity of gender. She tries to destabilize the traditional notions of gender stereotyping. Sarah Waters tries to show a lesbian text as a performative text rather than a descriptive text.

The two heroines, Sue and Maud, switch places of mistress and servant with "dizzying frequency" as they knowingly or unknowingly play roles other than themselves in a treacherous double game (5). As a mistress and servant, her appearances include an imitation of bodily gestures and an intimacy of female robes. In 19th century society, dressing was a practice of deep significance due to its association with social status. The way she dresses denotes "the person and the class", as the dress not only "expresses the true nature of a lady" but also "defines the lady" (6). While clothing indicates a woman's feminine characteristics, like a dramatic disguise, it serves as a means of playing a role or assuming the role of another person. Karla Jay writes:

"*Fingersmith*... is relatively chaste ... Waters appears to be reflecting the social constructionist view that women prior to the late 1850's lacked a language for same-sex love. Sue and Maud have no words for their attraction. 'Like it, do you?' one might say, but there are no terms to define the 'it' in question" (39).

Sarah Waters develops and complicates a diverse range of spaces. It was about the limitations or dominance over the lives of women in the 19th century and the ways they struggled to break out of outdated life patterns and find new ones. The restrictions regarding sexuality, gender and class are subverted in her novels. Sarah Waters in her narrative tries to subvert the concept of normality regarding heterosexuality only and tries to bring the queer sexual minority in the hegemony of normalization of power of heteronormative codes. Both *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* have their heroines who break the sanctioned boundary and show their same sex love.

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