

**Space and Sexuality in the Post-Victorian Fiction of
Sarah Waters**

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts

School of English, Journalism and European Languages
The University of Tasmania

July 2006

Abstract

This thesis analyses the work of British writer Sarah Waters, focussing on the inseparability of spatiality and the expression of sexuality in her novels. Since 1998, Waters has published three books set in the mid-to-late Victorian era, featuring lesbian protagonists: *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*. All three novels are examples of lesbian fiction, but they are also arguably works of historiographic metafiction and “post-Victorian” novels. They have been critically and popularly acclaimed, added to university reading lists and adapted for television. There has thus far been a small amount of scholarship in response to Waters’s novels, primarily concerned with generic classification and lesbian identity.

The entwined discourses of space and sexuality form the theoretical basis of this discussion. There is a large body of academic work on this subject, by cultural theorists such as Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Mark Wigley as well as geographers such as Tim Creswell. Previous studies of Waters’s work have made little use of theories of space and sexuality, despite their relevance to her novels. I draw upon these theories in my analyses of *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, exploring the way in which the historically transgressive sexualities of Waters’s heroines are constructed spatially, via the characters’ movement (or lack thereof) through confining interiors.

Chapter One looks at the ways in which theatrical and performative transgressions affect sexual expression in Waters’s first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*. Sites of performance, or stages, are not only located in theatres in this text, but are present everywhere: on the streets and in the homes of both the rich and poor. Upon these numerous and diverse stages Nancy Astley, the protagonist of the novel, reveals the inherent performativity of gender and sexuality through cross-dressing and impersonation. The second chapter shows the way sexual identities are confined within both the private sphere and the prison in *Affinity*. The desires of the protagonists can be articulated only through spiritual or ghostly transgressions, which are simultaneously arousing and frightening. The third chapter focuses on domestic spaces and madness in *Fingersmith*. Waters draws on

Victorian notions of hysteria and female sexuality in this novel, re-appropriating them for her own purposes. This thesis concludes that Waters re-presents Victorian sexuality through the spaces in which it was enclosed.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my primary supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Leane for all of her constructive criticism. I feel I have learnt a great deal over the last four years, much of which is thanks to you. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Lisa Fletcher for the fresh approach she brought to the final stages of the writing of this thesis. Further, I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Lucy Frost and Professor Ian Buchanan for all of their encouragement when I decided to embark on this project. As well as the School of English, Journalism and European Languages for funding my trip to the UK in 2002, which allowed me to attend a conference, and meet with Sarah Waters, whose novels I explore in this thesis.

Perhaps most of all I would like to thank my beautiful boyfriend Johnny for motivating me and being my best friend, and my family: John, Alex, Selby, Sarah and Mark. Thank you for everything guys, I really could not have done this with out your rallying assistance and love.

Numerous people have provided me with spaces in which to compose this thesis. I would like to thank: Mary, David and Ella McCann for all of the help, love and space they gave me in their beautiful home on the water at Tranmere; Simon de Little, Tim and Duncan for letting me stay with them in both their new and old houses on Duke Street in Sandy Bay; Angela Forrest for not only inviting me into her mother's home in Howrah, but always picking me up, giving me a shoulder to cry on and a few laughs when I need them most. The same goes for Alex Links, Philippa Morgan (Grace) and Belinda Harper who have all cooked and looked after me when I have not been at my best.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge my amazing friends who have supported me during the writing of this thesis: Belinda Abey, Matthew Brown, Jessica Connor, Martin Cowling, Saul Darby, James Gearman, Jason Linton, David Nixon, Jane Thomson and Michael Upton. Thank you for tolerating both my poverty and complaining during the last four years. I promise it will all stop now.

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Introduction

The “Other Spaces” of Waters’s “Other Victorians”

Gaston Bachelard claims that “both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy” (38). Bachelard’s observation aptly describes Sarah Waters’s first three novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002). Waters’s representations of female sexuality in these texts are intimately linked with the rooms, houses and institutions her characters inhabit. Each novel looks at one prominent Victorian space: the theatre or music hall in *Tipping the Velvet*, the women’s prison in *Affinity* and the private madhouse in *Fingersmith*. Each text shows that the characteristics of these spaces are not confined to their precincts but are instead far-reaching, and affect sites such as the Victorian home. Waters’s characters move between these spaces and eventually beyond them, in their attempts to find ways to express their lesbian sexuality.

Tipping the Velvet, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* are all tales of “other Victorians” in “other spaces.”¹ The prostitute and brothel, and the hysteric and madhouse, have traditionally been presented as the only bodies and spaces in which non-procreative models of sexuality were “tolerated” during the nineteenth century (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1: 4). What Waters, like Foucault, explores through her novels is the idea that “other Victorians” and “other spaces” were in fact all around. Waters centres her narratives around/in/through what Foucault calls “other spaces.” Foucault labels institutions such as prisons or psychiatric hospitals—established to contain society’s nonconformists—“heterotopias of deviation” (“Of Other Spaces” 25). In contrast to utopias, these heterotopias are real as well as unreal in that they have become the place of those deemed placeless (“Of Other Spaces” 24). The inhabitants of these heterotopias are those who are somehow “other.” Heterotopic institutions of deviance are spaces that

¹ The term “other Victorians” was first coined by Steven Marcus in his exploration of Victorian sexuality *The Other Victorians*. In this text Marcus suggests that “underneath the world of Victorian England as we know it—and as it tended to represent itself to itself—a real, secret social life was being conducted, the secret life of sexuality” (100). Foucault borrows the term “other Victorians” from Marcus to describe prostitutes, pimps, hysterics and psychiatrists when outlining his “repressive hypothesis” (*History of Sexuality* 1: 4).

supposedly contain and isolate people with abnormal desires in an attempt to spare society from “their infernal mischief” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1: 4).

Waters’s depiction of nineteenth-century space and sexuality in *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* focuses on three heterotopias: the theatre, the women’s prison and the private madhouse. Waters emphasises structural failure in her representation of these spaces, by permitting her “illegitimate” characters to occupy other sites, including the home. The permeability of these spaces affects sexual expression in all three of Waters’s novels (not only in *Affinity*, in which it is most obvious). This permeability is accompanied by a post-Foucauldian realisation that heterotopic spaces are in fact potentially everywhere. Foucault claims to be interested in heterotopias because they “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations they happen to designate” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). By exploring the “elsewhere” spaces to which illegitimate sexualities were exiled during the Victorian period, Waters suggests that “other Victorians,” like “other spaces,” could exist anywhere, not just in hidden interstices.

Most studies of Waters’s work are chiefly concerned with the sexuality of her protagonists. Space is not usually central to these analyses; however, a number of critics have noted its impact. Susan Alice Fischer and Stefania Ciocia discuss the lesbian identity of Nancy Astley, the heroine of *Tipping the Velvet*, as it is depicted against the backdrop of nineteenth-century London. Paulina Palmer, in her discussion of *Affinity*, notes the way in which “entrapment in the domestic sphere” is a prominent feature of lesbian representations in gothic literature (“Lesbian Gothic” 119). Mark Llewellyn, Heidi Macpherson and Jenni Millbank, in their studies of *Affinity*, all relate the lesbian desires of the novel’s protagonists to their ability to transgress the imprisoning boundaries that confine them. There has yet to be any published critical analysis of Waters’s third novel *Fingersmith*. In review, however, the confining spaces the doubled heroines transgress are not without mention. Patricia Dunker states that the “damp slow world” of Briar, for example, places the reader “inside the mental world of the heroine” (2).

In the following section of this Introduction I will “place” Waters herself. Her first three novels have been given a number of different labels such as: “lesbian Gothic

fiction” (Palmer, “Lesbian Gothic” 19; Macpherson 215), “faux-Victorian” (Waters, qtd. in “Hot Waters”) “pseudo-Victorian” (Plunkett) and “historiographic metafiction” (Palmer, “Lesbian Gothic” 142; Heilmann and Llewellyn 141; Kohlke 155). Debates over generic classification have been central to criticism of Waters so far. I want to establish my own perspective on the generic category of Waters’s fiction before offering analyses of the individual novels. Consequently, the following section looks at the label most often applied to her work, that of historiographic metafiction, and recommends an additional one: “post-Victorian” fiction. The term “post-Victorian” suggests an emphasis on issues both temporal and historical. However, one of the most interesting things about the works of this kind is that they also reflect postmodernism’s preoccupation with space. One technique often used by writers of post-Victorian fiction is an ex-centric perspective. Ex-centric perspectives explore identity determinants, such as sexuality, from the de-centred spaces nonconformists traditionally occupy. The second part of this Introduction establishes the interconnectedness of spatial and sexual discourses in relation to Waters’s fiction.

i) Placing Waters

In an interview with Debbie Taylor, Waters claims: “Having gone through academia, I do think that a good book should have an agenda ... something that gives it a point” (4). Waters completed a PhD thesis on gay and lesbian writing from the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* prior to the writing of her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, like Waters’s PhD thesis, is concerned with homosexual identities at the end of the nineteenth century. Waters’s “agenda” is undoubtedly one that is concerned with literary representations of lesbian histories. In the same interview with Taylor she states: “Lesbianism is at the top of the agenda for my books because it’s at the top of the agenda for my life” (1).

To represent the past from the lesbian periphery, however, is not Waters’s only aim. She also wants to write a satisfying story in the tradition of great Victorian novels. Sarah Broughton reports Waters’s opinion that “if she wanted to write a story about a lesbian who was an axe murderer, it would be because of her interest in exploring that one particular incident and its ramifications rather than from any deep-seated need to create a

representational character” (8). Waters’s agenda, it seems, is multi-faceted. She wants to explore and represent lesbianism at the same time as providing her reader with a “good” story. Due to Waters’s various agendas, issues of genre are pertinent to analyses of her novels. In this section I will discuss briefly the generic categories of lesbian historical fiction and historiographic metafiction in which Waters’s novels have been predominantly situated. Following this analysis, I will look at what I consider a more inclusive and useful category in this context, that of post-Victorian fiction.

Writers of lesbian fiction have an intimate relationship with the genre of the historical novel. In 1996, the same year she completed her PhD thesis, Waters wrote an article for *Women: A Cultural Review* entitled “Wolfskins and Togas: Maud Meagher’s *The Green Scamander* and the Lesbian Historical Novel.” In this analysis Waters recognises a “special affinity” between women or, more specifically, lesbian writers and historical fiction (176). The historical novel allows women to rewrite past fictions and representations that have traditionally been male-dominated from different female perspectives. The way in which postmodern writers of lesbian historical fiction actually manipulate the past, however, varies. In a later article, Waters and co-author Laura Doan ask: “Should the popular novel be a site to recuperate the names and lives of ‘suitable’ or famous lesbians of the past, or is it better approached as a starting-point to invent a history haunted by the present and understood to take its authority from the imperatives of contemporary lesbian identities?” (13). The first type of lesbian historical fiction referred to by Doan and Waters attempts to reconstruct famous lesbian genealogies, such as the life of Sappho, in an effort to imagine “an unbroken tradition of same-sex love” (13). This type of lesbian historical fiction has often been criticised for failing to explore the diversity of female same-sex desire and “simply insert[ing] a mirror image of the contemporary lesbian” into historical narratives (Doan and Waters 20). In recent lesbian fiction, therefore, the lesbian past has begun to be more fantastically re-imagined.

The novels of Jeanette Winterson are primary examples of the second, less realist technique that Doan and Waters outline (20). Winterson sums up her position at the start of *Sexing the Cherry*: “Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record ... the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time“ (2). Merja Makinen asserts

that in *Sexing the Cherry* the female protagonist Dog Woman represents “a space for the lesbian body that challenges the construction of femininity and refuses to be seen in relation to any masculine agenda” (98). By largely ignoring modern sexual labels, the characters in Winterson’s novels work to question normative assumptions of gender and sexuality. Waters’s novels are frequently compared to Winterson’s (Cornwell 8); however, as Waters herself notes, the only similarity between their work is that they are both lesbian authors (qtd. in Carey 2). *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* are not stories about famous lesbians from the past, despite Waters’s realist technique. Yet neither are her novels fantastic histories such as Winterson’s.

Waters’s fiction does not adhere to either of the two forms of lesbian historical fiction she and Doan outline in their article. Given the generic ambiguity of her work, it is not surprising that most of the criticism on Waters centres around issues of history and the way in which she represents the lesbian past. In 2004 *Women: A Cultural Review* produced a volume of papers which originated from a conference held at Swansea University entitled “Hystorical Fictions: Women, History, Authorship.” A number of papers presented at this conference dealt with Waters’s novels, including Heilmann and Llewellyn’s “Hystorical Fictions: Women (Re)writing and (Re)reading History” and M. L. Kohlke’s “Into History Through the Back Door: The ‘Past Historic’ in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity*.” These discussions, like Waters’s own, focus on the way in which the genre of the historical novel enables women writers to re-present the past and the present via lost female genealogies. As Heilmann and Llewellyn point out in their analysis, “contemporary women writers of historical fiction and their various agendas resist neat categorization” (137). Nevertheless, Palmer (“Lesbian Gothic” 124), Anne Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (141), and Kohlke (155) all suggest that Waters’s novels (particularly *Affinity*) contribute to the mode of historiographic metafiction.

Linda Hutcheon coined the term “historiographic metafiction,” describing it as writing in which “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs ... is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (*Poetics* 5). The particular aspects of the past that works of this kind usually depict are those that have been overlooked by conventional historical representations. Historiographic metafiction privileges “decentred perspectives,” preferring the “ex-

centric” or “marginal” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 12). This genre is particularly useful for writers of historical lesbian fiction because it decentres dominant (heterosexual) categories. Ex-centric re-presentations of the past, however, are acutely aware of the fact that all history can ever be is a representation. One of the main traits of historiographic metafictional narratives is that they are “intensely self-conscious” about their “metafictional status” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 113). In their effacement of the boundaries governing historical fact and fiction, all works of historiographic metafiction “dualistically point towards the events which are being represented in the narrative and towards the act of narration itself” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 76).

The nineteenth century is the period that historiographic metafictional novelists seem most keen to develop a dialogue with. Since the 1960s—the era Fredric Jameson posits as the dawn of postmodernism (*The Cultural Turn* 19)—the nineteenth century has become central to depicting current conditions. Even the most basic elucidations of postmodernism include some discussion of the nineteenth century. Peter Barry in his textbook *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* states that where the high modernists rejected Victorian excesses, finding the “overelaborate art forms of the nineteenth century deeply offensive and repulsive,” postmodern pastiche now embraces the excesses of the era (84). Postmodern authors, particularly contemporary British writers of historiographic metafiction, are major participants in this Victorian revival.² John Kucich and Dianne Sadoff propose that Victorian rewritings have “flourished” because “the postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence, and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence” (xv). Works of historiographic metafiction set in the Victorian era explore, and frequently de-bunk, homogenised perspectives on the nineteenth century whilst at the same time drawing parallels with the dominant ideologies of their own period.

Three much-quoted models of historiographic metafiction set in the Victorian era are John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), Peter Ackroyd’s *Chatterton* (1987) and A. S. Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* (1990). Tatiana Jukic uses these novels

² Patricia Waugh (49), Palmer (“Lesbian Gothic” 119), and Jukic (77) all acknowledge contemporary British novelists are the principal writers of historiographic metafiction. Consequently, the following analysis of the trends that have characterised the genre from the 1960s until today is mainly British in focus.

in her analysis of the shifts in British literature's depiction of the nineteenth century; Sabine Hotho Jackson discusses them in her exploration of the presence of literary tradition in contemporary British historical literature; and Frederick M. Holmes also analyses them in his study of postmodernism and the treatment of the past. Jukic's discussion of the novels is the most helpful to my own as she concentrates the developments of historiographic metafiction since the 1960s and thus provides a framework in which to examine late examples of the genre such as Waters's. Her discussion of the defining features of historiographic metafictional texts is particularly helpful in determining to what extent the generic label accurately describes Waters's fiction.

Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is credited by Jukic with initiating the literary dialogue between postmodernism and the nineteenth century (85). The self-consciousness which makes this text the primary example of historiographic metafiction stems from both the multi-period layering of the narrative as well as Fowles's polymorphous representation of Victorian sources. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the cultural concerns of the modern narrator in 1967 are echoed in the social unease of Charles Smithson in 1867. Through this reflection, Fowles demonstrates that all representations, literary and historical, are re-presentations governed by the cultural concerns of the day. At the start of Chapter 13 Fowles's narrator addresses the reader directly about the construction of his own fiction: "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story ..." (85). As Fowles demonstrates in this passage, we never actually know the past. All we ever get are depictions of the past that are inextricably governed by the concerns of the period in which they are produced.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, then, Fowles reveals both historical and literary discourses to be representations. By the 1980s, however, all that was left for historiographic novels to represent was "possible histories of representation itself" (Jukic 80). Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, with its multi-period meditations on the nature of literary and

artistic forgery, heralds the second stage of contemporary British writers' depiction of the nineteenth century (Jukic 80). As with Fowles, the self-consciousness of Ackroyd's writing stems, for the most part, from his multi-period layering of the narrative and concentrated intertextuality. By rewriting the life and works of the famous plagiarist Thomas Chatterton in three different stories from three different centuries, Ackroyd shows that what remains from the past "is not people or their deeds but representations of them" (Jukic 81). Belief in any sense of total knowledge is thwarted in *Chatterton* as histories are frequently mis-represented, confused and manipulated, frustrating the possibility of a neat ending. In his exploration of literary representations, Ackroyd is charged by Jukic with turning the Victorian era into a "mass of words," a style which by the end of the decade came to be seen as clichéd (82).

In the 1990s, depictions of the nineteenth century took on a third form with Byatt's *Possession* (Jukic 83). Like her predecessors, Byatt maintains metafictional self-consciousness via multi-period layering and intertextuality. The elaborate plot of *Possession* features two strands that eventually unite. The first involves two nineteenth-century poets, Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Henry Ash, and the second, two twentieth-century academics, Maud Bailey and Roland Mitchell. The present and the past are materially connected in Byatt's novel, when Maud realises that Christabel is in fact her great-great-great grandmother. What makes *Possession* different from *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Chatterton*, Hotho-Jackson suggests, is the "solidity" of Byatt's narrative (118). "Modern reality," according to Byatt, has robbed events of "solidity" ("People in Paper Houses" 31). Whereas Fowles and Ackroyd have been charged with turning representations of the Victorian era into a "heap of words, patterns and sterile quotations" (Jukic 83), Byatt has been credited with representing the nineteenth century like a Victorian writer. Byatt reanimates the Victorian period by "superimposing" the romance genre over the novel's metafictional aspects and firmly re-establishing historical links (Jukic 83).

Byatt's technique has proved popular. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of fiction focussing on the Victorian period, such as Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Andrew Martin's *The Necropolis Railway* (2002), Lee Jackson's *London Dust* (2003), and Clare Clark's *The Great Stink* (2005). Just as Byatt does in

Possession, these narratives tend to favour “solid” representations of the nineteenth century. Novels such as Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*, however, are different from *Possession*, in that they are not overtly self-conscious. *The Crimson Petal and the White* is set entirely in the nineteenth century. The metafictional moments of self-consciousness in the text are minimal, involving only an occasional direct address to the reader:

Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them. This city I am bringing you to is vast and intricate, and you have not been here before. You may imagine, from other stories you’ve read, that you know it well, but those stories flattered you as if you belonged. The truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether. (3)

Faber gradually dispenses with these direct communications only to return to them on the last page of the novel. Recent examples of historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, such as Faber’s, are less self-conscious than Fowles, Ackroyd and Byatt in their manipulation of the past. Furthermore, texts such as Faber’s and Waters’s maintain, for the most part, an untarnished sense of historical verisimilitude. There are even fewer metafictional moments in Waters’s novels than there are in Faber’s. Moreover, the instances which can be read as self-conscious in *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* are so subtle they barely make a ripple in the narrative.

Waters, like Byatt and Faber, applies established generic structures to her narratives. *Tipping the Velvet* is both a *Bildungsroman* and picaresque tale whilst *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* draw on the traditions of Gothic and sensation novels. Like Faber, Waters is reluctant to make her postmodern seams apparent. *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* are set entirely in the nineteenth century; consequently there is no modern narrator or parallel story line to distract from the Victorian narrative. As Stephanie Brown states, Waters does not attempt to “rupture the narrative and highlight the fact that the text[s] wear [their] ‘realism’ as foregrounded artifice” (1). There is, admittedly, a degree of self-consciousness in Waters’s novels. In *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, Nancy Astley, the narrator, is always aware that she is being watched (or read). Another metafictional aspect of Waters’s novels, according to Llewellyn, is the characters’ frequent, and seemingly unself-conscious, use of the word “queer”

(Llewellyn, ““Queer”” 213). In all three texts, Waters’s heroines often use this term and, for the main part, the word follows moments of sexual expression. In *Tipping the Velvet* Nancy describes the sexual arousal she experiences from wearing trousers as “queer” (114); in *Affinity* middle-class women go to Selina Dawes and her spirit guide Peter Quick for “healings” when they are prone to “queer fits” (301); and in *Fingersmith* Sue describes the sound of arousal in her voice as “queer” (141). “Queer” began to be used as a term to describe sexual deviance from the late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (Ayto 26). Prior to this, however, it referred to anything which was considered “abnormal” or “odd” (97). While there is for the reader a postmodern knowingness in the characters’ use of the word, therefore, Waters is not obviously disrupting the historical verisimilitude of her novels by using it. Unlike Fowles, Ackroyd and Byatt, Waters dispenses with metafictional arrangements which draw attention to both the postmodern and fictional status of her novels. Anna Carey claims: “One of the most remarkable things about Waters’s novels is how well she captures a nineteenth-century voice... Her books feel as if they were written by a person from the nineteenth century who had somehow read a lot of twentieth-century fiction” (1). Any sense of multi-period layering in Water’s (and Faber’s) post-Victorian novels seems to come from the past into the future, as though the author is a Victorian who has travelled into the future and back again.

For the most part, the metafictional quality attributed to Waters’s novels stems from intertextuality. Waters’s explicitly refers to many well-known Victorian texts in *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*. A number of historiographic metafictional novels completely re-write past literary novels from ex-centric positions. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a primary example. Rewriting *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Bertha Mason, Rhys both subverts the original text and allows for a different reading of it. Christian Gutleben and Susana Onega call this process “refraction” (7). For Gutleben and Onega refraction is a “double process” that describes the way in which “a text both exploits and integrates both reflections of a previous text *and* the new light shed on the original work by the re-writing” (7; original emphasis). In the last decade many key Victorian texts have been refracted. Most popular by far are the works of Charles Dickens. Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Louis Bayard’s *Mr Timothy* (2004), for

example, refract Dickens's *Great Expectations* and *A Christmas Carol* respectively. Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the perspective from which these texts represent nineteenth-century worlds is one that gives voice to those largely denied it in the original. Waters's novels, however, are not "refractional" in that she is not specifically rewriting one novel but borrowing from many.

In *Fingersmith*, for instance, Waters makes use of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." There are also obvious references to Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and echoes of *Bleak House*. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Sheridan le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* and *Carmilla*, provide bleak Gothic undertones. Moreover, Waters's rewritings are not limited to Victorian texts. She also rewrites aspects of contemporary historical fiction. For example, her representation of the music hall in *Tipping the Velvet* mirrors the use Ackroyd made of the space in his novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. *Affinity* makes use of Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* in revealing the panopticon as a space of lesbian desire, as well as Byatt's *Possession* with its reworking of the Victorian Spiritualist movement. And *Fingersmith* recalls Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* by once again exploring the perspective of the mad woman.

Due to Waters's significant departures from the defining features of historiographic metafiction, the term may not be the most useful label to apply to her works. Kohlke, although suggesting that Waters's novels belong to the mode of historiographic metafiction, recognises that the genre itself "may have exhausted its transgressive possibilities and become problematic" (155). Kohlke suggests another term, "new(meta)realist fiction," which still ostensibly works within the category of historiographic metafiction but "reflects ironically on the unrestrained playfulness" of the genre (156). However, due to the unfaltering focus on the nineteenth century in novels such as Waters's, I believe they may benefit from a more specific categorisation encompassed by the term "post-Victorian."

Kucich and Sadoff suggest that "given the centrality of historical emergence that contemporary culture locates in the nineteenth century ... aspects of late century post-modernism could more appropriately be called 'post-Victorian'" (xiii). Georges Letissier uses the term "post-Victorian" to describe the prominence of the nineteenth century in

contemporary literature (111). Post-Victorian literature, he claims, is interested in “opening up the Victorian past by making it the locus of an intertextual, dialogic, historicized self-understanding, going far beyond mere nostalgia, voyeurism or epistemological popularisation” (112). Letissier’s description of post-Victorian literature makes no reference to the self-consciousness that is usually considered a key component of historiographic metafiction. Instead, he refers to “historicized self-understanding,” a term that perhaps more accurately describes Waters’s representation of the past, which is subtly self-conscious and intertextual but not explicitly metafictional.

Post-Victorian fiction, like historiographic metafiction, favours ex-centricity. The spaces and identities explored in post-Victorian works are, therefore, those previously silenced and ignored due to their peripheral placing. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, focuses on the outlying spaces Bertha inhabits: the lush Island of Dominica and the third-floor room in Rochester’s Thornfield Manor. Both of these spaces are shown by Rhys to work directly upon Bertha’s expressions of sexuality and sense of self. Since Rhys, the spaces and identities represented in post-Victorian literature have become increasingly ex-centric. In *The Crimson Petal and the White*, Faber tells the story of a prostitute named Sugar who makes her way up the Victorian ranks. The framework structuring Faber’s five-part book is overtly spatial: Part One is called “The Streets,” Part Two “The House of Ill Repute,” Part Three “The Private Rooms and the Public Haunts,” Part Four “The Bosom of the Family,” and Part Five “The World at Large.” Like Faber, Waters depicts the sexual identities of her heroines via the spaces they inhabit. In representing decentred spaces from ex-centric perspectives, post-Victorian novelists such as Waters not only reclaim the silenced voices of the past, they also undermine the presence of spatial and sexual boundaries informed by ideological norms.

ii) Spatiality, Sexuality and Transgression

When discussing the key factors which make the nineteenth century the preferred site for postmodern historical re-imaginings, Kucich and Sadoff suggest that economic, sexual, technological and political determinants have “joined in a matrix of forces that constitute late postmodernism’s obsession with the Victorian” (xv). Out of all these determinants, Kucich and Sadoff claim that it is particularly Victorian sexuality that

seems most made for postmodern “retellings” (xi). Mark Wigley claims that discourses of sexuality and space cannot be separated (357). Interior and exterior spaces are formed by human intervention. Subsequently, all human-made structures unavoidably encode assumptions about gender and sexuality. In turn these spaces also then form and influence human action and expression. Any discussion of sexuality, therefore, must be one of spatiality. There is also a widespread belief that temporal discourses are currently being replaced by spatial ones in light of a “weakening of historicity” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 6). With all this in mind, perhaps “space” should also join Kucich and Sadoff’s “matrix of forces that constitute late postmodernism’s obsession with the Victorian” (xv).

Since the 1970s, literary, feminist and cultural critics have been looking closely at representations of Victorian space. Margaret Higonnet suggests that there is a great interest in space because “as a wide-ranging metaphor, space invites ideologically inflected analysis ... because space does not just *record* gender-based assumptions and roles but also reinforces them” (16; original emphasis). Critics have noted that the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, for example, not only designated the way public and private spaces were organised but also delineated the way people behaved. Poems such as Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel of the House” and Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “The Princess,” for example, suggest that women are biologically suited to domesticity and that the home, therefore, is their natural place. In recent decades, the influence of such works has been questioned. The spatial dichotomy of public and private spheres is now understood as having been “articulated much more clearly at the level of ideology than it was on the ground” (Domosh and Seager 5). Similarly, Elizabeth Wilson claims: “We cannot automatically accept the ideological division between public and private spheres on its own terms” (“The Invisible Flâneur” 65). Wilson’s analysis of Victorian space undermines the public/private dichotomy by showing that for many women the private sphere was a workplace or an area of sexual danger, as opposed to a space of temperance and virtue (65). Similarly, novelists are now moving beyond dichotomised representations in their Victorian retellings, preferring instead to look at the under-read spaces of the era.

The rethinking of Victorian space is part of a general re-assessment of the Victorians themselves, particularly with regards to sexuality. In his analysis of Victorian sexuality, Foucault draws attention to the repressive conceptions that have influenced both historical and contemporary understandings of sex and sexuality (*The History of Sexuality* 1: 5). Foucault's work, according to Edward Soja, is "imbued with a subtle but persistently spatializing undercurrent" (16). Certainly Foucault's description of the "repressive hypothesis," which he believes governs all discussions of Victorian sexuality, is distinctly spatial in its terms:

Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law ... A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. (*The History of Sexuality* 1: 3)

Despite being unwelcome in the bourgeois home, "abnormalities" such as same-sex desire still proliferated during the Victorian period. But as far as the official (repressive) story goes, such desires were housed in designated sites, away from domestic spaces: "The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp together with the psychiatrist and his hysteric—seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 1: 4). In "mak[ing] room" for "illegitimate sexualities," the Victorians were attempting to displace the disorderly, removing it from the hearth (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 1: 4). However, the notion that there was only one type of space for Victorian sexuality to occupy is, for Foucault, as convincing as there being only one form of sexuality. Instead, he demonstrates that during the Victorian era there was a virtual plethora of sexualities and, subsequently, as many different overflowing spaces in which to house them.

The Victorian middle-class home, rather than being "a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved" (Houghton 343), is in fact conceived by critics such as Foucault as an open space subject to all kinds of transgressions. "Transgression" is defined as "passing beyond the bounds

of legality or right” (*OED*). An act of transgression is traditionally considered as something negative and sinful. “Trans” derives from the Latin for “cross” and refers to the action of “stepping over,” and “gress” from “gradi,” which means “to go” (*OED*). Therefore, the word “transgression,” as well as denoting a sin, also has a distinctly spatial element in that it implies moving or crossing from one space to another.

Transgression thus links the discourses of spatiality and sexuality. In recent years, the term/action has been used to question dominant spatial and sexual ideologies. Tim Creswell, in his book *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression*, uses examples of transgression in “normative geographies” to “delineate the construction of otherness” and challenge dominant belief systems (9). “Normative geographies” refers to the notion that space helps to “tell us who we are in society”: certain spaces expect certain behaviours (Creswell 8). When these spaces are unexpectedly transgressed, behaviour thought to be “natural” to a space is shown to be spatial/cultural construct. Creswell claims:

Transgressions appear to be ‘against nature’; they disrupt the patterns and processes of normality and offend the subtle myths of consensus. These deviations from the dominant ideological norms serve to confuse and disorientate. In doing so they temporarily reveal the historical and mutable nature of that which is usually considered ‘the way things are.’ (26)

Transgression is, unsurprisingly, a common motif in post-Victorian literature. Novelists such as Waters, keen to question overriding ideas about the nineteenth century, use transgression to undermine spatial and sexual expectations, particularly those pertaining to Victorian morality and the “repressive hypothesis.”

Waters questions the moralising and “normative” assumptions of Victorian domestic culture by focussing on heterotopic spaces that efface key boundaries. Heterotopias, as I explained earlier, are permeable spaces. Benjamin Genocchio suggests that the prison, brothel or asylum all function “to transgress, undermine and question the alleged coherence of totality” (37). By focussing on heterotopias, Waters not only disturbs spatial discourses, she also disrupts sexual ones. By showing heterotopic spaces, such as the theatre, prison and madhouse, to be potentially everywhere, Waters introduces the “illegitimate” sexualities they contain into normative spaces such as the

home and the streets. Waters's heroines are ex-centric "outsiders" and thereby familiar with the spaces into which those deemed illegitimate or abnormal are derailed. Through transgression, however, Waters allows her lesbian characters to cross over from the spaces in which they have been historically enclosed into regions where their presence was previously displaced or ignored.

By bringing their knowledge of "other spaces" into the Victorian home, Waters's characters expose the confining dynamics of this space. It is impossible to talk about confining dynamics in lesbian fiction without discussing a spatial metaphor central to queer theory, the closet. In Sedgwick's seminal text, *Epistemology of the Closet*, for example, nineteenth-century narratives are re-read via metaphors of the closet. The closet is "the den or lair of a wild beast" or "a private concealed trouble in one's house or circumstances, ever present, and ever liable to come into view" (Sedgwick 66). Studying Victorian texts through the in/out dynamics of the closet, Sedgwick spatially reassesses conceptions of Victorian sexuality. The closet functions as a metaphor of sexualised space that signifies the presence of transgressive desire. Although Sedgwick is interested in male homosexuality and not lesbianism (39), her epistemology has at its heart an inherently spatial metaphor that complements my readings of space and sexuality in post-Victorian literature.

Waters plays with the ideas of enclosure in her novels, as her characters are constantly positioning themselves in and out of the closet. In *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, her heroines make love in actual closets: "she led me into the pantry, and put a broom across the door, and we caressed amongst the packets of flour and tins of treacle while the kettle whistled and the kitchen grew woolly with steam and Annie called from the parlour. What were we doing?" (436). Alex Clunas claims that "enclosures specify boundaries, albeit permeable ones, between inside and outside" (173). Just like the binaries of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and public/private, the in/out binary of the closet is shown by Waters to be a "permeable" construct. Discussing the centrality of the symbol of the closet in narrative, Sedgwick warns: "There are risks in making salient the continuity and centrality of the closet, in a historical narrative that does not have as a fulcrum a saving vision – whether located in past or future – of its apocalyptic rupture" (68). Waters shows the closet to be a space which can be both transgressed and

celebrated. In *Fingersmith*, the characters' ability to live out their desires in one of the sites that previously closeted and confined them ruptures the negative connotations of the closet metaphor. According to Annamarie Jagose, "the transgressive potential" of lesbianism "proceeds logically from its alleged location beyond culture and discourse" (2). By focussing on the ex-centric spaces where lesbianism has traditionally been displaced, Waters resituates female same-sex desire within culture and discourse.

* * *

In her interview with Broughton, Waters describes her works as "like a Venn diagram ... sometimes the books can be put into different kinds of contexts and they can make sense in each of those contexts ... " (9). In this thesis analysis centres on issues concerning representations of spatiality and sexuality. However, there are of course numerous other areas of interest which can be explored in Waters's novels that both intersect with and depart from my own. Waters's treatment of class issues in the texts, for example, is an area for discussion in itself; in each of her novels sexual power is distinctly related to class. Diana in *Tipping the Velvet* can express her lesbianism without fear of censure because she is a member of the upper class. In *Affinity*, Margaret's position as a "lady" allows her to voyeuristically fulfil her desires by watching the more unfortunate women in Millbank prison. And in *Fingersmith*, Mr Lilly's obsession with pornographic literature is not censored because he is a gentleman. Additionally, the recent BBC productions of *Tipping the Velvet* (2001), written by Andrew Davies, and *Fingersmith* (2005), directed by Peter Ransley, have provided a further abundance of material for analysis. So too does the fact that Waters has just recently published her fourth book *The Night Watch* (2006). In *The Night Watch*, Waters leaves behind the Victorian period, setting the novel in London during the 1940s. However, as in her previous works, Waters is still interested in depicting sexuality via the spaces in which it is contained. In-depth exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis as they are large enough to deserve a project of their own.

In this thesis I focus on Waters's post-Victorian novels, in which decentred spaces play an important role in the production of ex-centric identities. The discussion of *Tipping the Velvet* in chapter one looks at the way the space of theatre affects the expression of sexuality. In this novel, theatricality pervades everyday spaces, such as the

home and the city streets, revealing the process of performativity underlying all expression of gender and sexuality. The second chapter explores how notions of imprisonment affect sexual expression in *Affinity*. The spaces of the home and the women's prison are paralleled in this novel; however, Waters has both spaces transgressed by disorderly Spiritualist forces. In this novel, apparitional metaphors work to both undermine and reinforce repressive conceptions of spatiality and sexuality. I explore the way Waters reworks the apparitional tradition of lesbianism in literature in *Affinity*, to show that the transgressive possibilities of the metaphor are limited compared to material transgressions. The third chapter's analysis of *Fingersmith* concentrates on the way that Waters reappropriates Victorian ideas about madness to show female insanity to be a response to social and physical limitations. By looking at the confining spaces of official and unofficial private madhouses in this novel I will show how the spaces themselves distinctly affect female sexuality.

Each of the three chapters examines the way the characteristics of public, or institutional spaces, such as the theatre, prison and madhouse can challenge conceptions of domestic space. It is through their oscillation between these sites that Waters's heroines find spaces in which their specific desires can be freely explored. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Florence's Quilter Street house at the end of the novel functions as a space where lesbianism is openly expressed. In *Affinity*, Italy figures as the site where the confines of the closet may be disregarded. And finally in *Fingersmith*, the reclaimed Gothic (mad)house provides a home in which the heroines can eventually live as they choose.

Chapter One: *Tipping the Velvet*

The notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear is deep in our thoughts.
-Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* 42

In *Tipping the Velvet*, the dualistic binaries governing normative understandings of space (inside/outside and public/private), gender (masculine/feminine) and sexuality (heterosexuality/homosexuality), are represented as cultural constructs rather than natural divisions. These ideological norms are challenged by the novel's depiction of the theatre as a transgressive space, a space which disrupts dualisms. In the Introduction, I discussed Michel Foucault's analyses of "other spaces," spaces he calls "heterotopias." The theatre is a heterotopic space because it is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 25). Further, Waters's representation of the theatre and theatricality in *Tipping the Velvet* reveals the performative dimensions of public and private space. Everyday spaces such as homes and city streets are depicted as theatrical stages on which identities are rehearsed. The portrayal of cross-dressed characters on these diverse stages draws attention to the performativity of gender. In this way *Tipping the Velvet* refutes assumptions that gender and sexuality naturally follow heteronormative models of masculine/feminine. Waters's depiction of theatrical performances on various stages enacts a fascinating and complex reimagining of Victorian space, gender and sexuality.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the way theatrical performances, principally those in drag, point to the performative nature of cultural norms governing conceptions of space, gender and sexuality. Marjorie Garber puts forward the idea that "transvestite theatre" may in fact be "the norm, not the aberration" (39). This is indeed true of the Victorian stage, on which cross-dressing was common for both men and women. As Waters shows in *Tipping the Velvet*, acts involving cross-dressing are complex examples of gender performativity, in that they reveal some of the processes through which gender is constructed. At the same time, however, drag performances can be more straightforward expressions of identity. For *Tipping the Velvet*'s protagonist, Nancy Astley, costume allows the exploration of alternate ways of being; gender performance is the chief mode through which Nancy achieves an honest expression of self by the novel's end.

Tipping the Velvet charts the experiences of Nancy, an oyster girl from Kent who follows her lover to London where she takes on a number of different identities in search of her true self. As this summary implies, the novel works within the tradition of *Bildungsroman*. In many ways, *Tipping the Velvet* is a novel of progression. Nancy discovers her sexual orientation and slowly moves towards finding a place where she can express her desires. Stephania Ciocia, however, argues Nancy's tale is a "circular" one with "no real ethical or emotional growth" (par. 17). Instead of progressing, Ciocia contends Nancy moves only from one theatrical position to another, from spectator to actor to director (par. 2). For this reason, Ciocia believes Waters's first novel belongs more rightly to the picaresque tradition. Nancy embodies the "outsider status" of the picaresque protagonist because she is "a character that lives at the periphery of society and therefore can look onto its conventions and norms for what they are, unmasking their hidden ideological bias" (Ciocia par. 17). I argue, by contrast, that by the end of *Tipping the Velvet*, Nancy moves from her position on the periphery and finds a space that enables the sincere expression of her sexual desires. Although Nancy never quite leaves the theatre behind her, the novel's structure is more linear than circular in its portrayal of Nancy's progress towards finding a true self.

Nancy acts in a number of different roles, on a number of different stages, with different kinds of audiences. Susan Alice Fischer suggests, in her analysis of *Tipping the Velvet*, "Connection with specific parts of the city brings Nancy closer to recognising herself as a lesbian" (60). Space is crucial in this novel for it dictates the nature of Nancy's performances. As Fischer recognises, the various settings in the novel play key roles in Nancy's characterisation. This discussion is structured around the key spaces in the text. My argument is that the theatrical transgressions depicted in this novel make space, gender and sexuality contentious categories. Before beginning my textual analysis of *Tipping the Velvet* it is important to establish the impact theatre and the dynamics of performance have on these categories. Section one, "Theatricality and Performativity," therefore sets up the chapter's theoretical framework. Section two, "Whitstable: The Stage is Set," examines Nancy's primary space, her family home. Nancy's mode of inhabitation throughout *Tipping the Velvet* is in many ways influenced by the early years she spends living in her family home at Whitstable and attending the local music hall.

Nancy initially experiences the music hall as an extension of her own domestic space. That is, however, until the space reveals a new way of life to her that awakens her own innate desires, prompting her relocation to London. Nancy finds that London's theatricality both assists, and impedes, her sexual expression. The third section of this chapter, "London: New Horizons," focuses on Nancy's performance on the private stage, in her new home, and on the public stage in London's theatres. The fourth and fifth parts of my analysis, look at two of Nancy's most intense theatrical performances: the time she spends as a "renter" (male prostitute) on the streets of London and her experience as a "toy boy" whilst living with the rich Sapphist Diana Lethaby near Maida Vale. The final section, "Quilter Street: A Final Curtain Call," analyses the way that Nancy finds a space that works for her, a place where she feels that she can be herself.

i)Theatricality and Performativity

"Excess, that which overflows a boundary, is the space of the transvestite" (Garber 28). "Excess" in clothing, according to Garber, is a sign of transgression in that it "violates expected boundaries of gender identification" (128). Transvestitism, however, not only upsets expectations of gender, it also disrupts spaces such as public streets and the private home. In *Tipping the Velvet*, the Victorian private sphere is an "excessive" space. Bedrooms and parlours are the stages for transgressive performances that destabilise dominant binary distinctions such as public/private, masculine/feminine and heterosexuality/homosexuality, and support readings of historical diversity. The numerous spaces Nancy inhabits throughout *Tipping the Velvet* are acutely influenced, in one way or another, by theatricality. Many of her performances are attempts at coming out of the closet, of becoming visible. Audiences are crucial to any show; in fact it is the presence of an audience which makes a performance recognisably so. Norms of gender and sexuality are parodied on the music-hall stage in *Tipping the Velvet* through cross-dressing and *double entendres*, through performances that highlight the performativity of dualistic sexual binaries. The product of this kind of performance—the heightened recognition of the performativity of social identity—does not start and finish on the stage of the music hall. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Nancy's performances always spill over.

There is a proliferation of stages in *Tipping the Velvet*. Domestic spaces, for example, are treated as mini-theatres and city streets become outdoor auditoriums. Peter Brook asserts: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (9). Although Brook is distinctly referring to the Elizabethan stage, his understanding of what constitutes an act of theatre has broader resonance. Treating drawing rooms and alleyways as stages is not transgressive just because they are outside actual theatres. Rather, the specific performances on these stages render them transgressive. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Nancy Astley falls in love with, and then becomes, a male impersonator. The audience is not surprised or shocked by the acts that Nancy and her lover perform on stage because male impersonators were common in London’s music halls. The novel draws its drama from the extent to which these acts mimic a more private performance for Nancy and Kitty.

Drag performances have different effects in *Tipping the Velvet*. Through her performances on various stages, Nancy emphasises the closeted dynamics of homosexuality and the performativity of gender. According to Judith Butler: “Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalised, worn and done: it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation” (“Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 21). Butler’s use of the term performativity is, as Annamarie Jagose states, frequently misappropriated and used as a theatrical metaphor to show something the subject does or performs (*Queer Theory* 86). Butler describes performativity as process of reiterative acts “within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 33). Butler uses drag, therefore, as one example of performativity in that “what is ‘performed’ in drag is, of course, *the sign* of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body it figures, but cannot be read without it” (“Critically Queer” 157; original emphasis). A review for *The Independent on Sunday*, included on the back blurb of the 1999 edition of *Tipping the Velvet*, calls Waters’s first novel “A unique read, a sexy picaresque romp through the lesbian and queer demi-monde of the roaring Nineties. Imagine Jeanette Winterson on a good day collaborating with Judith Butler to pen a Sapphic *Moll Flanders*.” My analysis draws on Butler’s ideas about drag to show the way

Nancy's gender performances demonstrate some of the workings of gender. The conclusion of my discussion, however, departs from Butler's anti-voluntarist approach to show that Nancy actually succeeds in finding a space and identity where she can be herself.

ii) Whitstable: The Stage is Set

"Through the interpretation of fixed space early in life," Edward Hall claims, "each one of us develops a spatial envelope, which acts as a mold into which a great deal of behaviour is cast" (103). Nancy's attraction to the theatre is established in the novel's early chapters, which describe her formative years spent living in the coastal town of Whitstable in Kent. Up until turning eighteen, Nancy divides her time between working in her family's restaurant and attending shows at the Palace music hall in the neighbouring town of Canterbury. Her placement in the family home and avid attendance at the local music hall establish a complex "spatial envelope" that sets the stage for the novel's reflection on the performativity of gender and sexuality.

Nancy's family home in Whitstable is also her place of work, inherently governed by the demands of the family's restaurant *Astley's Oysters*. Any middle-class notion of separate spheres is irrelevant to this commercial space for, if anything, the house is more public than private. The area designated to the restaurant is, first of all, considerably bigger than the living space above. It can seat fifty customers at once whilst, in the family's cramped domestic quarters, Nancy and her sister are required to share a bedroom. Secondly, the restaurant's fishy smell infuses everything, upstairs and down, atmospherically negating any spatial polarity. Thirdly, the amount of time the Astley family spend working in the restaurant is proportionately greater than time they spend doing anything else.

Just as in family-run theatre companies, each member of the Astley family plays the role into which she/he is born. Nancy has been groomed for the oyster-house since her birth, her mother telling her "that they found me as a baby in an oyster-shell, and a greedy customer had almost eaten me for lunch" (4). By mythologising, and subsequently romanticising, her oyster heritage Nancy's mother attempts to cultivate a "natural affinity" in her daughter, reinforcing Whitstable and *Astley's Oysters* as her place in the

world. At the same time this passage shows that Nancy, like a pearl in an oyster, is prone to metamorphosis. However, what it suggests most of all is that Nancy's actual *identity* could easily have been superseded; she was almost eaten by a "greedy customer" (swallowed up by her prescribed role in the family business).

In the restaurant, Nancy's older sister Alice, being of "rosy cheek" and possessing a "saucy manner," works/performs with Mr Astley on the restaurant floor serving the customers, whilst Nancy and her mother attend to things behind the scenes in the kitchen (4). Nancy's account of her own role demonstrates her awareness of an audience and being on public show:

Did you see, as the kitchen door swung to and fro, a lady stand frowning into the clouds of steam that rose from a pan of bubbling oyster soup, or a sizzling gridiron? That was my mother. And was there at her side a slender, white-faced, unremarkable-looking girl, with the sleeves of her dress rolled up to her elbows, and a lock of lank and colourless hair forever falling into her eye, and her lips continually moving to the words of some street-singer's or music-hall song? That was me. (4)

This passage is one of the few moments in the novel where the reader is directly addressed, which not only highlights Nancy's interest in the theatre but also invites the reader to imagine themselves as a spectator of a visual drama. Nancy is both observed in a diegetic sense by the customers in the restaurant when the "door swung to and fro," and extradiegetically by the reader ("Did you see?"). Ciocia describes *Tipping the Velvet* as the story of Nancy's "theatrical apprenticeship" (par. 4). In her home/business, Nancy appreciates being on display, performing for an audience. Her apprenticeship, however, also involves being a spectator at the local music hall, a role which she identifies with more strongly than her role as an oyster girl.

Nancy's sense of place and identity is not singularly informed by her position in her family and its business. Even as a young girl she searches beyond the nurturing confines of her home for her identity at the local music hall. In the beginning, however, she conflates the space of the music hall with her domestic space. Nancy's "oysterish sympathies" are initially enhanced by her "passion" for the music hall: "there are more similarities between a fishmonger's trade and a music-hall manager's than you think" (9).

Nancy views both her home/restaurant and the music hall as stages upon which entertainment is provided for an audience. On Sundays, after attending the music hall the previous night, Nancy and Alice “serve a bit of music-hall glamour” in the restaurant with Alice whistling to the customers on the floor and Nancy singing to the oysters out the back (7). Yet the homely comparisons characterising Nancy’s first “spatial envelope” change when she sees Kitty Butler perform.

Prior to Kitty’s “masher” act, none of the performances Nancy has seen on the music-hall stage have attracted her in quite the same way: “the girls whose songs I loved to learn and sing, they weren’t like me” (7). Although she has viewed a number of male impersonators in the past, they were all different to Kitty:

Of course we had had male impersonator turns at the Palace before; but in 1888, in the provincial halls, the masher acts were not the thing they are today. When Nelly Power had sung ‘The Last Dance of the Dandies’ to us six months before she had worn tights and bullion fringe, just like a ballet-girl – only carried a cane and a billycock hat to make her look boyish. (12)

Unlike her predecessors, Kitty is a “perfect West-End Swell” with the suit, the swagger and the hair to match (12). As the novel suggests, although male impersonation was popular during the nineteenth century, performers typically maintained a degree of femininity because “the plausible representation of mannishness by women was not encouraged” (Halberstam 233). Kitty’s performance pushes the boundaries established by previous acts at the Palace music hall, for she dresses like a boy rather than employing a few well-placed accessories to make her only boyish. Yet although Kitty’s costume is more boyish than those of her predecessors’, she still maintains a degree of femininity. She looks only “like a very pretty boy ... her eyes were large and dark at the lashes, and her lips were rosy and full. Her figure, too, was boy-like and slender – yet rounded, vaguely but unmistakably at the bosom, the stomach and the hips, in a way no real boy ever was” (13). Kitty’s still-feminine costume ensures that the audience are not confused or, worse still, repelled by her.

Nancy becomes a nightly regular at the Palace and obtains a box close to the stage to privately view Kitty’s act. According to Beatrice Colomina, the theatre box “is a device which both provides protection and draws attention to itself” (82). The box

protects Nancy yet aptly suits her specific longings: “It was ... always marvellous to step again into my little scarlet box” (21). Within the confines of the box, Nancy finds a space of her own where she can think without the distraction of the crowd. However, her position close to the stage makes her both a spectator and performer. At first, Nancy finds herself “unnervingly exposed ... before the idle, curious or envious gaze of the whole restless hall” (17). Yet after only a couple of shows Nancy begins to see herself as an important part of Kitty’s act, gripping her seat and holding her breath “as if it were part of the overture to her routine and she could not work without it” (25). Kitty’s act, and the friendship that forms between the two girls, changes everything for Nancy: “the world seemed utterly transformed since Kitty Butler had stepped into it. It had seemed ordinary before she came; now it was full of queer electric spaces, that she left ringing with music or glowing with light” (38). From this point onwards Nancy begins to extricate herself from her family and starts to feel more at home in the theatre (where she comes to work behind the scenes as Kitty’s dresser), in the world where performances such as Kitty’s are made possible.

Once the Palace becomes Nancy’s second home the space of her childhood seems less interesting or relevant. Nancy starts to view familiar objects with jaded eyes: “I had grown up with these things, and for eighteen years had barely noticed them, but I saw them now, for what they really were” (44). Her primary domestic space now lacks the theatrical sparkle and shine of the music-hall drag acts. The decorative shawl her mother has “tacked to the mantel,” for example, appears “dusty and torn” (44); it does not have the glamour of the theatre. Her relationships with her family also change, especially her bond with her sister. Before Kitty’s arrival Nancy and Alice were inseparable. Once Alice begins to recognise Nancy’s attraction to Kitty, however, their relationship dramatically changes. She responds with fear, shame and embarrassment. Their nights in bed are now awkward, as Nancy’s longing for Kitty lies uncomfortably between them: “she saw me ... as I lay in my bed; and ... it is in bed that you do your dreaming – in bed, in the darkness, where you cannot see your own cheeks pink ... All this with Alice’s breath upon my cheek, or her hot limbs pressed against mine; or with her eyes shining cold and dull, with starlight and suspicion” (40-41). Nancy’s home used to be the space which enabled her to be herself: Nancy Astley, an oyster girl from Kent. But once she

meets Kitty and becomes a part of the theatre, her domestic environment starts to seem restrictive. Consequently, when Kitty invites her to go to London she immediately accepts. Nancy's "spatial envelope" has become a closet where her transgressive desires, for the stage and Kitty, cannot be expressed.

iii) London: New Horizons

At home with her family in Whitstable Nancy is unable to fully express herself. She sings music-hall songs in the kitchen away from the main gaze of the public and she dwells on her feelings for Kitty only in the dark whilst sleeping next to her sister. For the main part she is a spectator, whose performance is so closeted that it is barely recognisable. When Nancy moves to London her role begins to change. At first her performances are still confined to backstage where she works as Kitty's dresser. However, she lives with actors and music-hall performers, so when she sings at home she has a knowing audience. Furthermore, her closeted nightly performances must now be even more convincing because her bedfellow is Kitty, the object of her desire. Nancy is unaware that words and spaces exist to name and house her feelings. Therefore, although her "stage" has changed her performance remains largely the same. Just as in Whitstable, she works behind the scenes; just as in Whitstable she stifles her "queer" and "inconvenient lusts" (78). Yet this is just another phase in Nancy's theatrical apprenticeship. The space she is living in, Mrs Dendy's boarding house, is an overtly theatrical one. Living in a house full of actors and music-hall performers, Nancy becomes accustomed to theatricality being an integral part of her everyday life. Unlike her primary home, this space becomes an ideal stage for her to play with gender and sexuality as its heightened sense of theatricality complements her own transgressive desires. Living in London, Nancy does not remain long in the shadows and quickly moves into the spotlight.

Waters imagines late-Victorian London as a city of variety. Nancy's first impression is one of diversity: "I had not known that there was such a place as this, at all – this place that was so squalid and so splendid, so ugly and so grand, where every imaginable manner of person stood, or strolled, or lounged side by side" (66). The city is a theatrical heterotopia, sheltering many different spaces, and performances, within the

same site. During her first year in London Nancy finds that the city, with its numerous stages, facilitates her own performance. Through actively scrutinising the urban scene, as research for Kitty's act, Nancy becomes familiar with the urban malaise and begins to see herself as a part of it: "We learnt together the constable's amble, the coster's weary swagger, the smart clip of the off-duty soldier. And as we did so we seemed to learn the ways and manners of the whole unruly city; and I grew as easy, at last, with London as with Kitty herself" (86). As Nancy starts to perceive herself as an urban performer she learns to perfect her sisterly act with Kitty.

Nancy's home at Mrs Dendy's in Brixton functions as the main stage where she practices her performance. Her theatrical talents are quickly recognised here: "it could not long be kept a secret, in that house, that I liked to sing and had a pretty voice" (85). The house also helps Nancy's sexual performances. In their small garret bedroom, Nancy and Kitty become sweethearts. The architecture of Mrs Dendy's, and the girls' physical placement in it, seems to support their lesbianism. In an earlier daydream Nancy imagines the space she and Kitty are to occupy as a house "with a chimney the colour of Kitty's carmined lips" (61). Nancy's vision proves to be partially correct. The girls come to share a bedroom at the very top of the house, beneath the chimney. Traditionally a phallic symbol, the chimney penetrates the surrounding outside space of the house, demonstrating the masculine power within. Nancy's private comparison, which envisions the appendage the same colour as Kitty's "carmined lips," subverts (or inverts) this penetrative symbol, rendering it feminine. Thus, the area beneath this imagined beacon, Nancy and Kitty's bedroom, is the space of "secret" feminine desires.

In this space Nancy starts rehearsing for her stage debut. Nancy and Kitty begin their sexual relationship in their bedroom at Mrs Dendy's. When they undress, Nancy observes: "we might have been at the side of the stage, making a lightning change between numbers" (104). Even this most private space is circumscribed by theatre. The following morning Nancy resumes her position as spectator, watching Kitty wash and dress: "I lay, quite at my leisure, and watched as she splashed water on her face and arms, and fastened on her underclothes and frock" (107). But Kitty does not allow Nancy to relish her "leisurely" position for long, warning her to "be careful" and asking her to not "let on" to anyone (108). Later that morning Kitty's manager Walter Bliss catches the

girls in the act. Nancy has dressed up in one of Kitty's costumes and, for the first time, joined in her performance: "I linked my arm with hers, and imitated her dance... We finished with a flourish, and I attempted a twirl – then froze. Kitty had left the door ajar, and Walter stood watching us, his eyes as if he had had some sort of fright" (110). Walter, however, does not recognise their dance as evidence of a love affair. Instead of seeing two sweethearts he sees two girls innocently singing a love song to one another whilst wearing jackets and swinging walking-canes: "'My God – that's it! Why, oh why, didn't I see it before! That this is what we have been looking for. *This*, Kitty' – he gestured to our jackets, our hat, our gentlemanly poses – '*this* will make us famous!'" (110-11; original emphasis).

"'Closetedness' itself," according to Sedgwick, "is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence" (3). In the Introduction I argued that Waters's characters frequently move in and out of the closet. Nancy, despite coming out of the closet to Kitty, is compelled, to all intents and purposes, to remain "in" by Kitty's insistence on secrecy. Relying on the hope that future audiences will share Walter's assumption, Nancy joins Kitty's masher act. "Ignorance," according to Sedgwick, is "as potent and as multiple a thing there is as knowledge" and it is typically what the dynamics of the closet depend upon (4). Nancy's desire for Kitty has always been entwined with her love of the theatre. It is her love for both that finally enables her to step on the stage and share the spotlight. Waters demonstrates, however, that two women performing together in drag is different to one. In addition to parodying conceptions of manliness, their act becomes pointedly concerned with questions of sexuality.

Only a very fine line comes to separate Nancy and Kitty's onstage routine from their private one. Dressed in feminised mannish attire Nancy is able to perform the love she and Kitty share in private to a public audience. However, it is only the audience's failure to recognise their romance is genuine that makes the performance acceptable:

It was as if we walked before the crimson curtain, lay down upon the boards, and kissed and fondled – and we were clapped, and cheered, and paid for it! As Kitty had said, when I had whispered that wearing trousers upon the stage would only make me want to kiss her, 'What a show *that* would be!' But, that *was* our show;

only the crowd never knew it. They looked on, and saw another turn entirely.
(128)

Ciocia suggests that Nancy only wears her costume as a mask, arguing: “she cross-dresses in order to perform, but her real sexual identity as a lesbian must be disguised” (par. 11). Ciocia’s assertion, however, seems more relevant to Kitty, who needs the costume and audience so that her act is thought to be theatrical and, therefore, not real. Nancy, on the other hand, discovers a new side of herself when in drag, one that she likes: “I admired my hair, so neat and so sleek. I adored my legs – my legs which, while they had skirts about them, I had scarcely had a thought for; but which were, I discovered, rather long and lean and shapely” (126). Public performance, for Nancy, is an important extension of her own private act as it validates and legitimises her desires, especially since the double nature of the act is not lost on everyone.

The private performance embedded in Nancy and Kitty’s act is recognised by some knowing members of the audience: “there were some who caught glimpses ... they were girls for the most part” (126). Nancy and Kitty’s “double act,” however, depends on the majority of the audience’s failure or inability to glimpse the truth. Their act cannot survive or exist once named. Following a public incident, during which a man calls them “toms,” Nancy and Kitty’s performances on both the public stage and the private alter dramatically: “At the sound of it, the audience gave a great collective flinch. There was a sudden hush; the shouts became mumbles, the shrieks all tailed away. Through the shaft of limelight I saw their faces – a thousand faces, self-conscious and appalled” (140-141). The audience’s mute response is not the silence of ignorance, it is the shaming silence of knowledge, a knowledge that Kitty cannot bear the public to have. Soon afterwards, Kitty decides they should leave Mrs Dendy’s because it had begun to “look queer” that they still shared a room (145). As I stated in the Introduction, Waters’s use of the word “queer” in her narratives is one of the few metafictional aspects of her works. Consequently, the reader, if not Kitty, knows that “queer” means more than just “odd.” In attempt to escape the homosexual label put upon her, Kitty begins a heterosexual relationship with Walter.

Paradoxically, Nancy’s dependence on the stage leaves her bereft of any sense of reality; she needs theatricality to express her desires. When she finds Walter and Kitty

together in bed, she is unable to believe that what she is seeing is real and expects Kitty to say “Oh, Nan! How funny this must look to you! It isn’t how it seems, at all!” (168). Even in her terrible grief Nancy is still aware that she is performing: “‘How could you?’ I said through my tears: I sounded like a stage husband in some penny gaff” (170). For her dramatic finale, Nancy, like a “character in a novel or play,” runs out into the streets without “so much as a glove or a bonnet” (172-73). This scene suggests Nancy’s awareness of the iterative discourses through which gender and identity are scripted and is one of the key moments in the novel that depicts the performativity of gender and sexuality. This realisation does not interfere with the priority of the narrative, however, which is Nancy’s search for self. In losing Kitty, Nancy loses both her lover and her audience, but this loss also inaugurates the next phase in her journey towards self-discovery.

iv) Street Theatre

Following Kitty’s betrayal, Nancy tries to block out the world by taking a room in a house in Clerkenwell next to the Smithfield Dead Meat Market. With a broken bed in the front yard, the house’s debilitated state renders it, according to Nancy, “invisible to any pursuing eye” (181). The immediate aftermath of Kitty’s betrayal has left Nancy empty of any real self-awareness: “I thought of how I must appear ... but I considered this image of myself rather listlessly, as if it did not much concern me” (182). The imperceptibility of the space, and Nancy’s uncharacteristic lack of self-consciousness, makes it the only site in the novel that cannot be read as a theatre. Without an audience Nancy too very nearly becomes invisible.

Nancy keeps to her room in Clerkenwell for eight weeks, rehearsing her grief with “a strange and horrible passion” (185). Her distress is intensified by the fact that no one, apart from her sister Alice and some anonymous theatregoers, ever knew the true nature of her and Kitty’s relationship. Without an audience Nancy does not know herself to exist: “When I gazed at the world from my dusty window, I might as well have been gazing at a colony of ants ... I could recognise nothing in it that had once been mine ... I might have faded into nothingness ... along with the carpet and the wallpaper” (186). Nancy is saved, however, by glimpsing a newspaper article that not only announces Kitty

and Walter's marriage but also fabricates Nancy's own situation by saying that she is starting "a new career of her own" (187). Nancy realises that she has been living all this time "as a worm, cast out from pleasure," whilst Kitty and Walter have "walked together, and the world smiled to see it!" (190). In Clerkenwell, Nancy learns how intrinsic the theatre and audience is to her sense of self. This realisation brings her back to life and "out into the world again" (190).

However, as soon as Nancy steps outside she finds that she cannot move freely, that her femininity is too visible and that she "might as well be stumbling through Clerkenwell with no clothes at all ... a girl in a city where girls walked only to be gazed at" (191). To find a place in this heterosexualised arena Nancy must modify her act and manipulate the gaze of her audience to her own advantage. Responding to the treatment she receives on London's streets as a woman, Nancy dons her music hall costumes (after re-altering them to maximise her mannishness) and returns to the streets as a young man. For a time, Nancy becomes the ultimate "invisible flâneur" finding a new freedom and power in passing as a man.³ At a Berwick Street "knocking-shop," where Nancy rents a room by the hour to stage her gendered metamorphosis, the madame on the door is "never quite sure if I were a girl come to her house to pull on a pair of trousers, or a boy arrived to change out of his frock" (195). She becomes a boundary creature happy to just walk the streets with freedom: "to walk as a boy ... in a well-sewn suit, whom people stared after only to envy, never to mock" (195). By dressing as a boy, Nancy believes that she "neutralises" the male gaze that was "threateningly" directed at her as a woman (Ciocia par. 12). But what she eventually finds is that she is still subject to the male gaze because it is only her sex which is invisible. Her error is to assume that men look with desire only at girls.

"I had first donned trousers," Nancy claims, "to avoid men's eyes" (201). However, after being propositioned by a gentleman Nancy realises that her performance as a man has its very own male audience whose secret gaze is just as predatory. By becoming a "renter" Nancy closes the gap between being a spectator and performer: "you walk and let yourself be looked at, you watch until you find a face or a figure that you

³ Elizabeth Wilson uses the term "invisible flâneur" to describe the position of women, particularly prostitutes, in the nineteenth-century city.

fancy” (201). Her performances take her from the city streets and back into London’s theatres and halls that were “famous in the renter world as posing-grounds and pick-up spots” (207). Here Nancy turns her back on the stage and performs with the rest of the renters in the audience with her “costume bright beneath the ungentle glare of the chandeliers ... bold and unmistakeable – but false” (208). Nancy’s renter performances rely on the audience’s knowingness, on a series of nods, winks and shakes of the head. At the same time though, they depend upon the audience’s failure to know, because they take her for a boy.

When she was performing in the theatre, Nancy’s male impersonation hinged upon suggestions of femininity. Her costumes all had to be altered when she performed with Kitty because she appeared too mannish, so that she was “clad not exactly as a boy but, rather confusingly, as the boy [she] would have been had [she] been more of a girl” (120). Nancy’s girlishness is also highlighted when she is performing as a renter, but in the sense that she is a boy who is slightly feminine as opposed to a girl who looks too much like a boy. Nancy knows herself to be a convincing renter yet this poses a problem for her. Nancy does not want to become a boy; rather, she wants recognition for how authentically she can play the role. What she needs therefore is an informed audience:

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. I would long for just one eye – just one! – to be fixed upon our couplings: a bold and knowing eye that saw how well I played my part... (206)

Nancy is primarily a performer. She relishes the spotlight and is unable to play the role of the abandoned or fallen woman to its fullest capacity because it involves no audience. Instead, she continues her transgressive journey taking on new roles all the time, refining her performances to suit her audience. Despite the “success” of her male impersonations, Nancy feels as though she is still in the closet, that her impersonation is too authentic for anyone to understand. However, her nocturnal trysts as a renter have not gone unnoticed. A rich Sapphic named Diana has been watching her perform from the dark privacy of her coach and wishes to take her act to another level.

v) A Private Performance

In Diana's house at Felicity Place, St John's Wood, Nancy becomes a sexual object, fetishised and controlled by the tastes of her mistress. Diana's house functions as a grand domestic stage upon which Nancy is "displayed" (280). Diana likes to "make real the word that other people said in metaphor or jest" (280). As a result, Nancy's performances in this space are overtly stylised and self-conscious. As Ciocia states, although Nancy's "sexual orientation" is clear at Diana's, she still wears a "different kind of mask" (par. 12). Diana wants Nancy to be seen, first and foremost, as an extension of her own transgressive desire. Nancy is masked, as Ciocia suggests, because her own longings have been absorbed and stylised by Diana's.

Diana is able to indulge her sexual tastes in the privacy of her own home because she has "no fear of sensation" (249). Nancy finds Diana's bedroom, on their first night of love making, "as unreal as a stage-set: a place of lamplight and shadows... in which we had been given a license to be not ourselves, or more than ourselves, as actors are" (246). Due to the success of her performance, Diana purchases Nancy as her live-in tart, paying her with extravagance and pleasure. She is given her own bedroom with golden floors, to which she is banished when her mistress tires of her, to fine-tune her act. Nancy's bedroom is essentially a dressing room as "crowded with goods" as Kitty's was at Canterbury Palace (260). In her bedroom she prepares for her performances: "It was quite like dressing for the halls again – except that then, of course, I had had to change at the side of the stage, while the band switched tempo; now, I had entire days to prink in. For Diana was my only audience; and my hours, when out of her company, were kind of blank" (264). Confined to the house, Nancy rehearses her act until it becomes pathetically posed like a "living picture" that can only be viewed by one pair of eyes for fear of tarnishing it (270). Nancy, however, relies on public scrutiny to know herself visible.

Diana enjoys directing and displaying Nancy. She chooses her clothes and when and how she should wear them, claiming "all performers dress to suit their stages" (272). Nancy's stage is a specific one upon which her performance is refined for the tastes of a select audience: "I might be Perseus, with a curved sword and a head of Medusa, and sandals with straps that were buckled at the knee. I might be Cupid, with wings and a bow... Then another night I was an Amazon. I carried the Cupid's bow, but this time had

one breast uncovered; Diana rouged the nipple” (281). Through these acts of *mise-en-scene*, Diana has Nancy evoke the lost, or silenced, historical lesbian. Nancy’s poses become increasingly risqué, finally culminating in a posture of Hermaphroditus with “a crown of laurel, a layer of silver greasepaint – and nothing else save ... Diana’s *Monsieur Dildo*” (281; original emphasis). The select audience watching these shows is a cruel and selfish one consisting of Diana’s minions. To them Nancy is an object at which they may gaze, Diana’s commodity. The show is Diana’s and Nancy is only a prop: “We were a perfect kind of double act. She was lewd, she was daring – but who made the daring visible? Who could testify to the passion of her ... to the rare, enchanted atmosphere of her house in Felicity Place, where ordinary ways and rules seemed all suspended, and wanton riot reigned. Who, but I?” (282). In essence Nancy is no longer living in the closet when she is with Diana as her performances make lesbianism clear. Her performances, however, are more about the display of Diana’s identity than her own.

Whilst living in Clerkenwell, near the meat markets, Nancy learned what it was like to be without an audience; her invisible performance very nearly turned her into a part of the house itself: “I might have faded into nothingness, I think, along with the carpet and the wallpaper” (186). When she is left alone at Diana’s, Nancy again imagines that she is becoming invisible: “I was like a spectre – the ghost, I sometimes imagined, of a handsome youth, who had died in that house and still walked its corridors and chambers, searching ... for reminders of the life that he had lost there (265). To combat her imperceptibility, Nancy’s staged performances become increasingly outlandish. One night at a party Nancy breaks out of a *mise-en-scene* and comes to life, stepping outside the objectifying position Diana has created for her: “I put my hand to the garland of wilting flowers at my throat, and tore it from me. Then I did the same with my sable wig, and flung it to the floor ... I felt filled with power and with light. I said, ‘You shall not talk to me in such a way. How dare you talk to me like that!’” (315). Nancy’s tantrum causes her to lose her place, like a servant, and be thrown back onto the streets. Thus far, Nancy has learnt how to be many things; she has not, however, yet found a space in which she can comfortably express herself. The following, and concluding, section of my analysis looks at the way Nancy learns to accommodate her transgressive desires by finding a home, stage and audience that neither censure nor exploit her.

vi) Quilter Street: A Final Curtain Call

Once Nancy is unceremoniously forced to take leave of Diana's home, her performances become less extravagant. Walking London's streets, in much the same way as she did after the demise of her relationship with Kitty, she takes on another role. When she was still working as a renter, Nancy met a philanthropist called Florence, with whom she had arranged to go on a date. However, due to Diana's arrival Nancy never kept their meeting. In her desperation to get off the city streets after Diana kicks her out, Nancy tracks down Florence and seeks her help.

Florence's Quilter Street residence in Bethnal Green initially appears to Nancy as a culmination of many of the spaces she has previously inhabited. Her first impression of Quilter Street is much like her first of Clerkenwell: "The glass in some of the street-lamps [is] cracked, or missing entirely, and the pavement [is] blocked here and there, by piles of broken furniture" (346). By leaving Diana's, Nancy relinquishes her space in the spotlight; she loses her knowing audience. Florence's brother Ralph, for example, views her short hair as a sign of criminality rather than lesbianism: "I do think she must've been in prison, though ... judging by the state of her poor hair ..." (349). Nancy similarly misreads the nature of the Quilter Street house and its residents. She initially assumes that Ralph is Florence's husband, rather than her brother, and that she has stumbled into a typically nuclear family. Nancy has yet to realise that she is not the only one whose appearance may be deceiving. Subsequently, she changes her performance so that it seems more ordinary, cooking and cleaning the way she did in her family home, in an attempt to fit into this space (375).

Nancy's performance in the role of housekeeper is a very deliberate one. Initially she finds as much satisfaction in this performance as she did in her earlier ones: "I think I felt like Marie Antoinette, the day I put on an apron and cleaned Florence's house for her" (374). Her enjoyment, however, is short lived because here, unlike at Diana's house, her act goes unnoticed: "there was no one's eye to charm or set smarting" (380-381). Nancy finds her new role unfulfilling "At Florence's house no one looked at me at all – and what was worse, they all supposed I might be as good and energetic as themselves" (378). Performing in ways that she perceives others want no longer makes Nancy happy, particularly when the performance is at odds with her emerging true self.

The last five years since she left Whitstable have irrevocably changed Nancy. The closeted act she once performed whilst living with her family in Whitstable is impossible now that she has fully recognised her lesbian desires. Furthermore, Nancy feels as though she has altered physically: “it was as if wearing gentleman’s suits had magically unfitted me for girlishness, for ever – as if my jaw had grown firmer, my brows heavier, my hips slimmer and my hands extra large” (381). This moment of self-realisation is followed by others as Nancy begins to feel ashamed of the way she behaved whilst living with Diana (388), and also grows conscious of the fact that she has misread the nature of the space at Quilter Street. The pretence of heterosexuality is not necessary here; Florence is also a lesbian, and rather than living in the closet, she has simply been grieving over the death of a woman named Lilian, for whom she had an unrequited love. After learning about Lilian, Nancy feels as if she has only been playing someone else’s role: “I was only clumsily rehearsing what the fascinating Lilian had done so well and cleverly before me!” (398). This particular realisation has a liberating affect on Nancy, encouraging her to begin to behave in a way that suits her self.

Whilst Nancy continues to work around the house at Quilter Street, her mode of self-display becomes bolder. She has her hair cut again and starts to dress in men’s clothing once more, first only at home and then beyond its confines. Although Nancy is aware that she is no longer invisible, in that she now has her knowing audience, she does not act as though she is on stage. Nancy’s act is now less overtly theatrical because she has finally found the role she is meant to play. Her partial rejection of overt theatricality is clearly depicted when she and Florence go out one evening to a lesbian bar called the “Boy in the Boat.” Nancy has kept her music-hall past a secret from Florence; however, at this bar she is recognised by some of the women who had viewed her double act with Kitty. When she is asked to sing a song for everyone Nancy “look[s] wildly at Florence” (421). Nervous and uncomfortable with this former part of herself, she is reluctant to take centre stage amongst her real peers. Once she eventually joins in and sings along with the other women, however, she realises the song no longer sounds the same: “ It sounded very different here, in this rough cellar – and yet, it had a certain trueness, too ...” (422). Throughout *Tipping the Velvet*, one of the main things Nancy has craved is recognition. The atmosphere at the “Boy in the Boat” is similar to the atmosphere at Florence’s home

because in both spaces Nancy is accepted as an oyster girl, a music hall star, a prostitute and a tom, and no longer has to pretend to be anything else.

* * *

The intense sexuality associated with the theatre, due to the gendered dynamics of performance, is also replicated on the streets and within the home. What we see specifically in *Tipping the Velvet* is a version (or inversion) of “transvestite theatre” as the novel shows Garber’s suggestion that “all of the figures onstage are impersonators” (40). By the conclusion of the novel’s narrative of progress, Nancy finally receives the recognition and visibility she has so craved, without recourse to blatant theatricality. At a Worker’s Rally at the conclusion of the novel Nancy performs once more, but this time the act is not intrinsically about herself. Nancy rescues Ralph when he forgets his lines during his speech on socialism by standing up and finishing it for him, using some of the tricks she learned in the music halls: “I found myself adding a few little rhetorical flourishes to the speech, as I went along” (457). After the speech, when Nancy is asked whether she will become a regular speaker, she says she will only take on the role if the speeches are written by somebody else (460). Nancy’s performances no longer need to be about self-expression because she has found her identity and a place where she can simply be herself. The perspective at the end of the novel mirrors this change in its protagonist, moving from a diegetic to an extradiegetic one, when Nancy finally kisses Florence without performing: “I turned back to her, took her hand in mine leaned in and kissed her ... From the speakers’ tent there came a muffled cheer, and a rising ripple of applause” (472). The applause, muffled in the text, is also the applause of the reader who has been Nancy’s audience throughout the novel and watched her move from only theatrically exploring alternative lifestyles to actually living one.

Chapter Two: *Affinity*

And what one Medium may do, my sweet,

Two may improve on endlessly.

-A.S. Byatt, "Mummy Possesst," *Possession* 408.

Affinity, like *Tipping the Velvet*, is a work of lesbian fiction set in the Victorian period. Its scope, however, is quite different from that of Waters's first novel. Nancy romps through a series of different spaces in *Tipping the Velvet*, cross-dressing, becoming a prostitute, a kept woman and a socialist. In *Affinity*, on the other hand, spaces are far more confining and expressions of sexuality much less obvious. And whereas *Tipping the Velvet* is a first-person narrative written from the perspective of one protagonist, *Affinity* is comprised of the diary entries of two chroniclers: a gaoler spirit medium named Selina Dawes, and Margaret Prior, a middle-class spinster who becomes a Lady Visitor at Millbank prison where Selina is incarcerated. Selina's diary entries dealing with her life prior to her imprisonment for fraud and assault are scattered unevenly throughout *Affinity*, and predate Margaret's narrative. The novel's primary perspective comes from Margaret's entries because she, unlike Selina, is free to write. Despite Margaret's relative freedom, Waters parallels the positions of her two chroniclers in the novel by showing the seemingly disparate spaces the two women occupy—the prison and the middle-class home—to be in fact very similar.

The comparisons Waters makes between the home and the gaol in *Affinity* extend beyond representation of restraint and surveillance. What is most obviously presented in this novel is that even the most imprisoning environments are subject to transgression. Ideas about transgression have been pivotal to critical analysis of *Affinity* (Palmer, "Lesbian Gothic"; Llewellyn, "'Queer?'"; Macpherson; Millbank). This is because transgressions work in this text not only to undermine imprisoning spatial dynamics but also to enable expressions of female same-sex desire. Terry Castle, in her book *The Apparitional Lesbian*, claims that lesbians have been compelled to inhabit a "recessive, indeterminate, misted over space" in literature (30). In *Affinity*, ghostly forces transgress the analogous spaces of the gaol and the home, disrupting spatial boundaries by seemingly "walking through walls." However, as I will show, the undercurrent of ghostly

possibility running throughout *Affinity* works both within and against the apparitional history of lesbianism, as Waters both affirms and undermines the use of ghostly metaphor.

The first section of this chapter, “Ghostly Metaphor and Lesbian Materialisation,” explores the way Waters uses spectral metaphors and aspects of the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement, as well as ideas about the gaze, to undermine repressive conceptions of Victorian space and sexuality. The second section, “Coming Out of the Dark Cabinet,” concentrates on the space Selina occupies prior to her arrest, the home of Mrs Brink. Mrs Brink’s house becomes susceptible to all kinds of transgressions once Selina arrives. Lesbian sexual desire unfolds in this space under the guise of Spiritualism. Eventually, however, the spiritual/sexual transgressions cause Selina to be charged with fraud and assault. In the third section, “The Prison,” I turn to the panoptic women’s prison Millbank where Selina resides and Margaret visits. The notions of complete visibility implied by the panopticon are undermined and subverted in *Affinity*. The space of the panopticon, with its potential for transgression, functions as a model for all forms of imprisonment throughout the text. The fourth section, “Margaret’s Domestic Confines,” deals with the domestic imprisonment Margaret experiences at home and the parallels that can be made between the two spaces. Like the prison, Margaret’s home at Chelsea is not a secure container. Instead, the house’s walls are made to seem permeable and its portals openings for uncanny forces.

i) Ghostly Metaphor and Lesbian Materialisation

Waters draws on the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement to undermine and transgress sexual and spatial boundaries in *Affinity*. Many Victorians became occupied with “morbid sensitivities” that were expressed and harnessed by the movement during the mid-nineteenth century (Finucane 190). One of the main reasons for the popularity of the Spiritualist movement was the sensational atmosphere of séances, which took place in private homes.⁴ The informal conditions of séances gave the Victorian middle classes a

⁴ R. C. Finucane, in his account of a pre-séance search, shows the way in which the house and the spirit medium were entwined. Just as the cabinet that was expected to issue forth spirit matter was checked before a sitting, the dark crevices of the medium were physically inspected “*per rectum et vaginum*” (187; original emphasis).

chance to act out inner fantasies and disregard some of the social moral restraints under which they normally lived. Despite the movement's popularity, however, spirit mediums were associated with all kinds of deviances. Mark Llewellyn states, "for the Victorians mediumship was simultaneously fascinating, monstrous and socially criminal, transgressing not only the life/death boundary but also strict societal codes" ("Queer?" 210). During séances, for example, mediums would go to great and fraudulent lengths to convincingly demonstrate otherworldly communication, from sneakily rapping the table themselves to performing "fake" ghostly materialisations (Finucane 182). Waters makes use of both the positive and negative aspects of the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement in *Affinity*, showing it to facilitate, as well as undermine, alternative ways of being.

Spiritualism, or more specifically séances, have been utilised for the expression of closeted female desire in previous post-Victorian fiction. A. S. Byatt, for example, makes use of the Victorian Spiritualist movement and the séance in her subtle suggestion of lesbianism in *Possession*. Christabel LaMotte's female companion Blanche Glover commits suicide by loading her pockets with stones and throwing herself in the river after she thinks herself forsaken. Glover's presence seemingly re-materialises at a séance attended by LaMotte, accompanied by voices saying, "Remember the stones," and the sounds of "flowing water and waves" (*Possession* 396).⁵ "Lesbianism," notes Jenni Millbank, "is a rupture that crosses" (159). In *Affinity* Waters, like Byatt, uses the Victorian spiritualist movement to signify the "crossing over" of lesbianism from the dark spaces in which it was confined.

Affinity's imprisoning spaces and spectral visitations clearly draw on the Gothic tradition. Paulina Palmer ("Lesbian Gothic" 119) and Heidi Macpherson (215) both claim *Affinity* as an example of "lesbian Gothic fiction." Works of this genre appropriate "Gothic motifs and imagery as a vehicle for lesbian representation" and explore from a lesbian perspective "erotic female relations and their transgressive dimensions" (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 4). Palmer lists a number of Gothic subsets that writers of the lesbian Gothic genre utilise, including "ghost stories, vampire narratives, Gothic thrillers and

⁵ LaMotte's lover, poet Randolph Henry Ash, also attends this séance, after which he writes the poem "Mummy Possesst" (*Possession* 405-12). Waters gestures towards aspects of "Mummy Possesst" in *Affinity*, as the poem, in many ways, can be read as the voice of Selina's maid/lover/master Ruth Vigers.

texts centring on the witch” (“Lesbian Gothic” 118). Of these possibilities, however, it is the first that has proved the most popular in lesbian Gothic fiction (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 59). Waters works within the tradition of the ghost story to represent female same-sex desire in *Affinity*.

The traditional metaphoric “ghosting” of lesbian desire in literature, according to Castle, is a process of “derealization” (6). “Derealization” refers to attempts to make the lesbian disappear, make her non-existent and drained of “any sensual or moral authority” (Castle 32). Castle argues that the literary history of lesbianism since the eighteenth century has been derealized in that “one woman or another must be a ghost, or on the way to becoming one” (34). The character of Miss Wade in Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*, for example, demonstrates an unnatural interest in a young and angry maid nicknamed Tattycoram. Mr Meagles, Tattycoram’s patriarchal employer, defines Miss Wade thus: “You were a mystery to all of us, and had nothing in common with any of us ... I don’t know what you are, but you don’t hide, can’t hide, what a dark spirit you have within you” (Dickens, *Little Dorrit* 312). Miss Wade’s passion for Tattycoram is ghosted. Rather than being named, her desires are depicted as a spiritual force. Waters recalls parts of *Little Dorrit* in *Affinity*. Selina’s surname “Dawes” is also the name of a character who torments Miss Wade when she works as a governess in *Little Dorrit*. Dickens’s Dawes character is described by Miss Wade as someone who uses “artful devices” (629). Unlike Margaret, who is blind to Selina’s artful ways, Miss Wade claims that she “saw through [Dawes’s devices] from the first” (630). Margaret, in *Affinity*, reads *Little Dorrit* to her mother but she never quite makes it to Book Two, chapter 22 in which Miss Wade discusses the manipulative behaviour of Dawes. Instead, Margaret actually falls for Dawes’s ghostly devices.

Ghostly depictions of sexually transgressive women such Dickens’s have been re-appropriated by twentieth-century lesbian writers. Castle notes that one of the features of modern lesbian literature is a “tendency to hark back, by way of intertextual references, to earlier works on the same subject” (63). Instead of making the lesbian disappear, however, these writers have “been able for the most part to ignore the negative backdrop against which [the apparitional lesbian] has been traditionally (de)materialised ... [and] have succeeded in transforming her from a negative to an affirming presence” (Castle

64). Llewellyn reads *Affinity* in this way, claiming that spiritualism allows for the expression of lesbian sexuality in the novel (“Queer?” 210). The “ghosting” of women in *Affinity* functions, on one level, as affirming in that it provides a positive metaphor for lesbianism.

The apparitional tradition enables Margaret, the novel’s main protagonist, to ambiguously express her lesbianism with limited risk of censure. Margaret, like a number of women in *Affinity*, is not comfortable with her sexuality. For example, when she learns that some of the women prisoners in Millbank make “pals” of each other (after a prisoner named Jarvis asks her to carry a note to her sweetheart), she finds that the reality of the situation makes her uneasy: “I have heard them talk of ‘pals’ before, and have used the word myself, but it disturbed me to find that the term had *that* particular meaning and I hadn’t known it. Nor, somehow, do I care to think that I had almost played medium, innocently, to Jarvis’ dark passion ...” (67; original emphasis and ellipsis). Margaret prefers ghostly expressions of desire which appear to transcend the mundane barriers of her domestic life whilst remaining imperceptible to those around her. However, the ghosting of lesbianism is not treated as inherently affirming in *Affinity*. Instead, Waters problematises modern apparitional representations by showing them, in the case of Margaret, to be ultimately ineffective and unsatisfying.

Although Waters’s deployment of Spiritualism works, on the one hand, to facilitate expressions of lesbianism in *Affinity*, on the other it implies that if lesbians are to achieve real expression of their desires, they must negotiate material, not ghostly, conditions. By cunningly manipulating the Spiritualist movement, Selina and her maid Ruth Vigers are able to express their lesbianism materially in *Affinity*. In small and private séances Selina and Ruth (who disguises herself as a spirit named Peter Quick) express their passions protected by the smokescreen of Spiritualism. By showing spectral manifestations to in fact be mundane materialisations, Waters adds another perspective to the use of spiritual metaphor as an expression of lesbianism. Selina and Ruth’s employment of Spiritualism demonstrates how the apparitional tradition is most useful when it is recognised as a metaphor masking literal, material lesbian relationships.

Selina and Ruth are able to use the Spiritualist movement for their own advantage by manipulating the gaze. Finucane, discussing the psychological involvement of the

audience at a séance, states: “If there was fraud, the percipients were very willing victims. It could be suggested that these people so earnestly wished to communicate with [or see] spirits, that any approximation to their expectations was accepted as reality” (189). Apparitional appearances are intrinsically linked to notions of observation and the gaze: “seeing is believing.” In *Affinity*, Waters presents Selina and Ruth’s manipulative skills as so effective that they are even able to undermine the all-seeing panoptic architecture of Millbank prison.

Waters is not the only post-Victorian author to utilise the space of the panopticon. For example, inside the Panoptic House of Correction in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* the Countess is unable to recognise the love between the guards and the inmates: “she could not, no matter how hard she looked, detect a visible change in the mechanical order she had laid down...” (217). The up-close and intimate reality of this space is vastly different from the mechanised world seen from one of the prison’s viewing platforms, because this is only one perspective. According to Paul Rodaway: “The possibility of illusion [when seeing] is always present. Seeing is a creative interpretation of appearances, a translation of what appears as patterns of illuminated surfaces into what is represented ...” (117). The Countess in *Nights at the Circus* is unable to see past the ordered structure she has inflicted upon her inmates and grasp that the seemingly passive behaviour they display is an illusion. In *Affinity*, when Margaret first watches the women take their daily exercise from Millbank’s high viewing tower she similarly cannot grasp the actuality of the situation, claiming the women “looked small—they might have been dolls upon a clock, or beads on trailing threads” (13-14). Like the Countess, Margaret is unable to comprehend the underlying reality of what she sees. The difference for Margaret, however, is that she does not want to fully understand, she prefers the women to remain derealised and to seem unreal. Margaret’s reaction to seeing the women at first hand reveals her distaste for this materiality: “then they were suddenly very real—not ghosts, not dolls or beads on a string, as they had seemed before, but coarse-faced, slouching women and girls” (20).

The idea of the ever-watchful eye, which guarantees order in panoptic structures in that the captive is seen but does not see and “never know[s] whether he is being looked at at any one moment” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201), is undermined in post-

Victorian literature through the ex-centric recognition that what is seen may not in fact be the whole story. In *Affinity*, Waters toys with notions of observation to demonstrate that there are numerous ways of seeing, all of which are inherently governed by personal interpretation.

ii) Coming Out of the Dark Cabinet

In *Affinity*, Waters first establishes the link between lesbianism and apparitional motifs in the house of Mrs Margery Brink, where Selina lives prior to her incarceration at Millbank. Selina's diary entries concerning the period in which she lives at Mrs Brink's Sydenham residence are unevenly interspersed with Margaret's throughout *Affinity*. As a result, it is not until the end of the novel that the reader recognises the "true" nature of the events leading up to Selina's imprisonment.

Selina becomes the object of Mrs Brink's desires by channelling the latter's dead mother.⁶ Mrs Brink sets Selina up in her mother's old bedroom, one of the many closeted spaces in the house, which Selina describes as a "queer sort of room" (119). The room is filled with a "vast closet" as well as many cabinets and draws (119). Small boxes, according to Bachelard, are "witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding places" (81; original emphasis). Mrs Brink's placement of Selina in this room spatially implies her secret desires. All her mother's things are "kept dusted and polished and smelling fresh, so that anyone seeing them ... would think what a neat lady her mother must be" (119). Probing the bedroom's secrets, Selina succumbs to a sense of the uncanny, thinking that if she turned she would see the dead woman at the door (119). When she does turn, however, she instead comes face to face with Ruth, Mrs Brink's maid and Selina's future lover, who walks "like a ghost" (119).

⁶In *Affinity*, lesbianism is only implied. Although the implication is clear, it is often made so by play on words, in which codes of kinship stand for sexual relationships. Mrs Brink believes that she sees her dead "mother" in Selina. However, the way she acts when her mother "appears" suggests that this relationship is not strictly maternal. Waters uses terms such as "uncle" in *Tipping the Velvet* as slang for lover or sweetheart (415). In *Affinity* sexual allusions are more cryptic and uncertain. For example, before living with Mrs Brink, Selina resides with her "aunty" in Bethnal Green. Waters never makes clear whether "aunty" is actually a relative or an older woman with whom Selina has a romantic relationship. Selina's knowingness, however, suggests the latter.

Both Ruth and Mrs Brink express their sexual desire for Selina by demonstrating interest in her powers as a spirit medium. Ruth helps Selina “develop” her special powers so that she may satisfy the cravings implied by Mrs Brink’s furtive touches. Mrs Brink claims to want Selina to “give up her own flesh, for the spirit world to use it for itself” (164). The intensity of Mrs Brink’s phantasmic cravings, however, suggest that what she really wants is for Selina to “give up her own flesh” so that *she* can use it for herself. Mrs Brink wants to see the unseeable: “Miss Dawes, Margery is growing greedy. If she thought that, as well as words, she might see a shape or feel a hand. Well!” (171-172). The hesitant materialisations Selina manifests are in response to Mrs Brink’s urgent and frantic desires: “I have said to Mrs Brink that she must not expect her mother to come every night ... She says she knows this and yet, each night, she grows fiercer, she draws me nearer to her, saying ... ‘Won’t you come a little nearer? Do you know me? Will you kiss me?’” (171). Greedy Margery eventually receives her long-desired kiss, but finds the effect too real and, subsequently, too frightening: “when she finally was kissed, she screamed, putting her hand against her breast, & frightening me so hard I thought I should die” (173). Like Margaret, Margery Brink prefers metaphorical rather than physical embodiments of her sexual desires. The theatrics with which Mrs Brink responds to her mother’s “appearance” are similar to the “waving off” gestures Castle identifies as common in texts which use traditional apparitional motifs to express lesbianism. “Passion is excited,” Castle writes, “only to be obscured, disembodied, decarnalized. The vision is inevitably waved off” (34). Even though Mrs Brink wants to be kissed by the spirit of her mother/Selina, she cannot bring herself to be kissed on the lips, “only her eyes and cheeks,” always remaining on the “brink” of satisfaction (174).

The appearance of a ghostly hand or obscured figure partially reveals Mrs Brink’s transgressive desires. However, because the materialisations are not full ones, in that they are inherently ghostly and not real, her sexual identity remains obscured. When Selina’s own spirit guide arrives in the shape of the deceased gentleman Peter Quick things rapidly begin to seem too real for Mrs Brink. Convincing her benefactor that the arrival of Peter Quick will only enhance the maternal manifestations she performs privately for her, Selina persuades Mrs Brink to move her cabinet to a position which has better magnetism, a curtained alcove in front of a door (192). Peter Quick, as I mentioned

previously, is actually Ruth dressed as a man. Ruth manages, by using the concealed door behind the cabinet which has remained unopened since “the housemaid lost the key to it” (192), to “come out” of the closet and satisfy her transgressive desires.

Waters toys with notions of (de)materialisation by having Ruth pretend to be a materialised spirit. Ruth’s performance as Peter Quick is convincing. When she first enters the cabinet Selina fearfully asks the loaded question: “O God, are you real?” (193). Although she is an accomplished medium and seemingly experienced young woman, Selina is initially frightened of Peter Quick as he is an embodiment of Ruth’s desires. By materialising Peter Quick, Ruth and Selina change the nature of the dark circles by playing more than ever with the hidden desires of the séance participants. Selina tells a young woman named Miss Ishwood, for example, that Peter Quick believes her to have potential medium powers. In the private sitting that follows, Peter Quick/Ruth and Selina take advantage of the young woman: “He put his arms about her & I felt his hands upon me, now we had her hard between us & she began to shake” (263). However, one evening Ruth and Selina take their games too far. *Affinity* opens with Selina’s account of the night her life changes forever, when a young séance participant (fifteen-year-old Madeleine Silvester) and Mrs Brink are forced to see too much. Although accustomed to manipulating the gaze, Selina and Ruth are unable to alter the appearance of the scene Mrs Brink is confronted with when she bursts into the room in response to Madeleine’s screams. Selina writes:

She looked at Madeleine lying stiff upon the parlour floor ... & then at me in my torn petticoat, & then at the blood upon my hands ... Then she looked at Peter. He had his hands before his face & was crying ‘Take the light away!’ But his gown was open & his white legs showed, & Mrs Brink would not take the lamp away until at last it had began to shake. (2)

Mrs Brink has unlocked the closet and been confronted with the reality of her unconscious desires. The realisation proves too much for her and she quickly dies. Selina’s confinement in her bedroom following this incident pre-empted the imprisonment she is shortly to experience at Millbank: “They have put me in my own room, they have locked the door on me” (1).

Mrs Brink's house is, in many ways, a metaphorical prison for Selina. She is often restrained, always subjected to surveillance and frequently left alone in the dark. Importantly, however, the home-imprisonment Selina experiences at Mrs Brink's teaches her to manipulate her wardens once her metaphorical prison becomes an actual one.

iii) The Prison

At the gates of Millbank, Margaret Prior takes up the tale two years later when she starts to visit the prison as a Lady Visitor. Waters depiction of Millbank in *Affinity* is not entirely fictional. Millbank was an actual prison opened in 1816 with the intention of "reformatory preparation for the subsequent banishment of convicts" and was known for its panoptic structure (Priestly 5).⁷ The architecture and geometry of the panopticon, which centres upon the notion of the gaze, is supposed to act directly upon the individual and encourage reform (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* 206). However, as Waters shows in her depiction of Millbank, when forced to live in cells under constant scrutiny prisoners learn how to manipulate the gaze of their gaolers.

In *Affinity*, Waters shows that using a surveillance mechanism to control and monitor the behaviour of a subject comes at a price. Within the panoptic system, those who wield the power are simultaneously subjected to observation, and the act of watching in a place such as Millbank can be dangerous. Margaret is not only warned against becoming emotionally close to the women she is observing, she is also informed that there is a physical danger. The door of each cell is fitted with a vertical iron flap, called "the eye" by the inmates and "the inspection" by the wardens. Mrs Pretty, one of the gaolers, tells Margaret to be mindful using the flap to observe prisoners because the women are "that cunning" that "they had had matrons blinded in the past" (23). Margaret quickly learns that whilst she is looking at the women she is also being watched: "At last I realised that just as I looked for details of their hair and frocks and bonnets, so they looked for the particulars of mine" (24).

Although Margaret is viewing the reality of prison life, even fondling the coarse garments worn by the prisoners (22), she continually derealises the inmates. For example,

⁷ Millbank prison is now the site of the Tate Gallery in London and is still, therefore, primarily concerned with the act of looking.

she describes one prisoner, Jane Samson who like Margaret has attempted to commit the crime of suicide, as like a “character in a fairly-tale—a princess, humbled, set to work at some impossible labour at the bottom of a pond” (24). Llewellyn claims: “For Margaret, being a ‘lady visitor’ is an outlet for her lesbian desire” (“Queer” 201). Like Mrs Brink, however, Margaret is only able to express her longings through derealisation, and this becomes most obvious when she meets Selina.

When left alone on the “third and highest floor” of Millbank where the “Star Class” prisoners are kept (24), Margaret feels herself drawn towards an inspection slit after a “sigh” emanates from the cell within: “it seemed to me a perfect sigh, like a sigh in a story; and the sigh being such a complement to my own mood I found it worked upon me, in that setting, rather strangely” (26). For Margaret, Selina instantly stands out from the other prisoners. Sitting with her face to the sun, seemingly unaware of being watched, she seems angelic in comparison to the rest of the women. Margaret observes:

There seemed something rather devotional about her pose ... But then she stirred. Her hands opened, she raised them to her cheek, and I caught a flash of colour against the pink of her work-roughened palms. She had a flower there, between her fingers—a violet, with a drooping stem. As I watched, she put the flower to her lips, and breathed upon it, and the purple of the petals gave a quiver and seemed to glow ... (27)

Selina is dissimilar to the other prisoners, whom Margaret has to derealise by fantastical reimaginings. Instead, she seems like a magical embodiment of Margaret’s innate longings. Furthermore, Selina’s past crime is not a commonplace one, as the “harming had been of a peculiar sort” (43). This ambiguity suits Margaret’s own desires.

Similarly, unlike the spaces she occupies on the outside, Millbank is almost a derealised space for Margaret in that she sees “a curious kind of charm to it” (8). Before too long, however, Margaret finds that there are in fact many parallels between her own spaces and Millbank, a realisation which both frightens and arouses her.

iv) Margaret’s Domestic Confines

Initially, Margaret’s visits to Millbank cause her to relish her comparative freedom. When she returns home she remembers the women prisoners whilst she

performs small domestic actions: “I have found myself remembering them, in the midst of some plain act—taking tea, because I’m thirsty; taking up a book or a shawl, because I am idle or cold ... I have done these things a thousand times; and I have remembered the prisoners, who may do none of them” (32). In becoming a Lady Visitor, Margaret believes that she has found herself an interesting occupation away from the family home and her mother’s ever-present gaze. However, Waters parallels the conditions of Millbank with Margaret’s domestic situation. Both spaces, according to Palmer, are patriarchal and “exert control through surveillance” and “spectral connotations” in that they are “haunted by their inmates’ memories and frustrated desires” (Palmer, “Lesbian Gothic” 126). The patriarchal structure of Margaret’s home once allowed her to pursue her interests beyond its precincts. Margaret’s father nurtured and encouraged her intelligence, giving her many of the liberties retained only for men. Once her father dies, Margaret becomes subjected to intense familial surveillance and the house becomes open to spectral transgression.

Margaret’s early journal entries convey the masculinized expectations she has established for herself. Trying to write as her father would have, Margaret begins her account outside the prison gate:

He would start it, I think, at the gate of Millbank, the point that every visitor must pass when they arrive to make their tour of the gaols. Let me begin my record there, then ... Before I can do that, however, I am obliged to pause a little to fuss with my skirts, which are plain, but wide, and have caught upon some piece of jutting iron or brick. (7-8)

In spite of her intentions, Margaret is physically constricted by the architecture of her body. The distinctly distanced, almost scientific style of writing that she attempts to mimic is hindered by her gender because she has skirts that interfere with her narrative. Subsequently, even though Margaret first constructs her visits to the prison as a way of escaping her spatial confines, her gender still gets in the way.

The trappings of Margaret’s feminine apparel are not her only hindrance. Margaret’s narrative is also curtailed by her home and lack of private space. “The first truly private space,” states Mark Wigley, “was the man’s study, a small locked room off his bedroom which no one else ever enters, an intellectual space beyond that of sexuality”

(347). Margaret, however, is physically denied privacy—“a room of one’s own”—to separate her self or her sexuality from her narrative and achieve the masculine detachment she is trying to emulate. Unlike her father, who would have worked from his study at home, Margaret is compelled to record her experiences from the uncertain privacy of her bedroom, which is haunted by the kisses of her former “companion” (204). She has, therefore, no space in which to write a detached narrative.

Unlike the rest of her family, Margaret has a bedroom on the second uppermost level of the house, just below the attics that sleep the maids. The house, for Bachelard, “is imagined as a vertical being ... ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic” (17). By choosing her bedroom in the upper echelon of the house, which is presumably a four-story structure, Margaret is attempting to align herself intellectually with what Bachelard calls the “rationality of the roof” (18). Despite her vertical positioning, however, Margaret’s bedroom is open, like a prison cell, to surveillance. Shortly after the death of her beloved father and the marriage of her closest female “companion” to her brother, Margaret attempted suicide by overdosing on morphine. Suicide was a criminal offence during the nineteenth century but because Margaret is a “lady,” she does not experience public scrutiny and official conviction for her actions. Instead, what she does experience is private imprisonment and relentless familial surveillance; her bedroom is a sickroom and open to constant scrutiny.

A sickroom is typically “separated and secluded” from the rest of the house, to ensure the tranquillity required for recuperation as well as preventing greater contamination (Bailin 17-18). Separation and seclusion, however, do not mean that the patient has privacy. Due to the need for constant monitoring and nursing, the sickroom, like the prison cell, is a space that is always open to the gaze. Like the panopticon, which according to Foucault, was also a laboratory, for it could be used to “experiment with medicines and monitor their effects” (*Discipline and Punishment* 203), Margaret’s bedroom is a medicinal space. For example, two years after her illness, Margaret’s mother still visits her room on a nightly basis, to check on her condition and personally administer her medicine:

Mother came, half an hour ago, to bring me my dose. I told her I should like to sit a little longer ... but no, she wouldn’t do that ... And so I sat and let her pour the

grains into the glass, and swallowed the mixture ... Now I am too tired to write— but too restless, I think, to sleep just yet ... When I close my eyes I see only the chill white corridors of Millbank, the mouths of the cells. (30)

Her mother's nightly intrusion reminds Margaret of Millbank. Her previous suicide attempt after the death of her father has meant that she is treated like a criminal and a hysteric. Llewellyn suggests that like Selina's spiritualism "Margaret's hysteria is used as a cover for her internal 'other' life" ("Queer?" 209). Unlike Selina's spiritualism, however, Margaret's hysteria does not help her cause; instead it hinders it by giving her less freedom and subjecting her to more surveillance.

Margaret's Chelsea home acts as a viewing tower where even her actions beyond its immediate confines are observed. For example, after one prison visit, Margaret decides to walk home, believing her mother to be out: "I walked, because I guessed that Mother would still be busy with Pris. When I went home, however, I found that she was not out as I had supposed, but had been back for an hour, and had been watching me" (51). Margaret's mother closely watches her because she views her daughter as different and "too susceptible" (263). Margaret's discordant position in her family causes her to associate more strongly with the women in Millbank, where she may also have been if she were not a "lady." She keeps a plan of the prison on the wall next to her bed and next to it, after her first proper visit with Selina, the Crivelli picture that reminds her of the imprisoned spirit medium (52).

Although Waters parallels Margaret's home space with that of Millbank, the main difference between the two sites is that the boundaries are not as strictly guarded in the home as they are in the prison. The failure of Margaret's home to fulfil its most basic requirement, which is to provide shelter from outside elements, reveals the space's susceptibility to transgression. Bachelard claims that "faced with the bestial hostility of the storm and the hurricane, the house's virtues of protection and resistance are transposed into human virtues" (46). The same relationship applies when the house ceases to provide protection and resistance. Margaret begins to notice changes within her home shortly after becoming a Lady Visitor and agreeing to think of the women prisoners when she is "wakeful" (50). Through her interest in Selina, Margaret unconsciously invites transgressive forces into her home. After three days of rain she writes:

The rain has made the kitchen flood, and there are leaks in the attics; worst of all, our girl, Boyd, has given us her week's warning ... We all supposed Boyd content enough, she has been with us for three years ... She said the truth was, the house when she was alone in it has begun to frighten her. She said it has 'turned peculiar' since Pa died, and his empty study, that she must clean, gives her the horrors. She said she cannot sleep at night, for hearing creaks and ... once she said, she heard a whispering voice, saying her name! (56)

Margaret's home fails to provide its most primary service by allowing the rain to transgress its threshold. This structural failure activates feelings of fear and uncertainty within the household—particularly, it seems, with those who inhabit the attics, the servants. Palmer states that Waters “portrays the servant-girl ... as signifying the hole in the social cell, the chink in the closely protected carapace, of the bourgeois family where forces of disorder can creep in and unravel family ties” (“Lesbian Gothic” 128). A woman called Vigers quickly replaces the timid Boyd. Vigers's instalment, however, drastically changes the dynamics of the residency, and heralds the arrival of disorder, because she is actually Ruth Vigers, Mrs Brink's former maid and Selina's lover. Ruth orchestrates Boyd's resignation by playing on the assumption that servants are more susceptible to ghostly disturbances.

As Margaret's domestic space becomes increasingly permeable, and the boundaries she imagined protected her begin to dissolve, her behaviour, like Boyd's, becomes erratic. Returning from a disturbing visit at the prison, Margaret struggles to separate herself from the vaporous forces that threaten the very structure of her private life:

Outside, the day was dark, the street made vague by a thickening fog. The Porter's man was slow to find a cab for me; when I climbed in one at last I seemed to take a skein of mist in with me, that settled upon the surface of my skirts and made them heavy. Now the fog still rises. It rises so high, it has begun to seep beneath the curtains. When Ellis came this evening ... she found me upon the floor, beside the glass, making the sashes tight with wads of paper. She said, what was I doing there?. ... I said I was afraid the fog would creep into my room, in the darkness, and stifle me. (189-90)

Margaret's attempt to stop the fog entering her bedroom is futile because the transgressive forces are emanating from within the house, not beyond it. Ruth cunningly satisfies Margaret's derealised longing for Selina through a series of material interventions into her private space. Unseasonable flowers appear in her bedroom (220); Selina's severed blonde plait upon her pillow (258); and, as Margaret's desire grows, a velvet collar turns up in the pages of her diary "with a lock of brass" (294). Margaret attributes these transgressions to spectral forces controlled by Selina, and welcomes them as expressions of desire. The only thing that begins to bother her about them is that she does not witness and have some control over their arrival: "They never come when I am here and watching. I wish they would. They would not frighten me. I should be frightened, now, if they ceased! For while they come, I know they come to make the space between us thick" (286).

By abandoning herself to her desire Margaret begins to make moves towards fully realising it, rather than remaining in a "misted over" space. For Margaret, Selina's seeming reciprocation of her longing makes the "space between [them] thick" (285), and subsequently more real. Even Margaret's self-observations show her to be moving away from her formerly derealised position, "I ... am growing subtle, insubstantial. I am evolving... When I am alone, as I am now... I gaze at my own flesh and see the bones show pale beneath it. They grow paler each day. My flesh is streaming from me. I am becoming my own ghost! I think I will haunt this room, when I start my new life" (389). By making plans to run away with Selina and start a new life in Italy, Margaret is evolving and moving towards material, rather than metaphoric, expressions of her lesbianism.

By the end of the novel, however, Margaret is made to realise that she, along with many readers, has been duped; what she saw was not the whole story. Margaret finds that she has no place: "I am filled with horror, and with envy and with grief, because I know myself untouched, unlooked-for and alone" (349). Ruth has stolen Margaret's identity and emigrated with Selina in her place because she, unlike Margaret, is able to materially realise her desires. Margaret, on the other hand, has invested all her longing and future happiness in an empty metaphor which, once negated, leaves her with nothing.

* * *

Heidi Macpherson claims, “in explicitly or implicitly seeking ‘improper’ relationships, [Waters’s] fictional prisoners step outside their prisons and wrest control from those who seek to contain them” (205). In the end, however, this saving vision is only partial. Margaret is never actually able to escape her confines. Selina and Ruth’s duplicity has left her in an impossible situation. On the brink of coming out, Margaret has gone to criminal lengths to secure a future for herself. When Selina does not miraculously appear at her bedroom window, Margaret is forced to understand that all along her “affinity” has in fact belonged to someone else and that there have been no “spirit friends,” only Ruth. By turning the spirits into flesh Waters gives life to Selina and Ruth’s desires. Conversely, their fleshing out renders Margaret’s love invisible. What she believed to be true never really existed at all: “*Selina has taken my life, that she might have a life with Vigers in it*” (340; original emphasis). Rather than face a future of domestic imprisonment and familial recrimination, Margaret imagines ending her own life by jumping into the Thames: “How deep, how black, how thick the water seems tonight. How soft its surface seems to lie. How chill its depths must be” (350-51). Waters gives Margaret a traditional Victorian ending. She is now a fallen woman and, as Nina Auerbach states, “generally the fallen woman must die at the end of her story” (161). Margaret, like her desire, is derealised in the end of the novel.

Selina and Ruth’s fate appears, on the one hand, to be the second traditional option given to fallen Victorian women in literature, in that they are exiled. By removing the characters outside of England, and the narrative, Waters recalls the Victorian literary tradition of sending disorderly women away (usually to the colonies). But, on the other hand, Selina and Ruth’s ending can be read as distinctly post-Victorian because they do not leave individually as fallen women. Instead, they go away to Italy together, as though they are eloping.

This vision of a place in the sun, however, is not entirely utopian. Selina, as the last page of the novel implies, is still essentially trapped and commanded by others, for it is Ruth who has the final word: “Remember ... whose girl you are” (352). In this sense, *Affinity* shows itself to be the most ambiguous of Waters’s three novels. Although the

characters seem to find a space where they can be free, this vision does not necessarily extend to their personal relationships.

Chapter Three: *Fingersmith*

It is not the one thing nor the other that leads to madness, but the space in between them.

-Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* 251

Waters pre-empts the narrative of her third novel *Fingersmith* in *Affinity* when Margaret Prior, jokingly voicing her fears that she too will be imprisoned in Millbank, asks her friend whether “she remembered Mr Le Fanu’s novel, about the heiress who is made to seem mad?” (29). After exploring the spaces of the Victorian theatre and the women’s prison in her first two novels, Waters takes on another heterotopia in her third: the madhouse. Waters shows the permeability between the madhouse and domestic spaces in *Fingersmith* through the characters’ oscillation between actual madhouses and unofficial ones. The spatial analysis I made during the previous chapter, based upon the parallel between the home and the prison in *Affinity*, led me to conclude that transgressive desires, like spirits, cannot be contained by confining structures. In *Fingersmith* Waters couples the home with the space of the madhouse rather than the prison to demonstrate the restrictions placed upon female self-expression during the nineteenth century. Madness, like Spiritualism, acts as a transgressive force; however, the madwoman, unlike the spirit medium, is usually powerless. In *Fingersmith* madness occurs in women, for the most part, as a response to confining conditions. But, at the same time, it also symbolises a stage in sexual knowledge.

In taking on the space of the madhouse and the identity of the madwoman, Waters moves into territory that is much explored in Victorian and post-Victorian literature. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, for example, Rochester describes his mad wife Bertha as “intemperate and unchaste” (306). Bertha’s sexual behaviour is treated by Rochester in *Jane Eyre* as a repugnant manifestation of her madness. In post-Victorian fiction madness is still linked with sexuality; however, it is written from the ex-centric perspective of the madwoman herself. In Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* Bertha (or Antoinette) re-presents Rochester’s accusation from *Jane Eyre* as a question: “I took the red dress down and put it against myself. ‘Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?’ I said. That man told me so” (152). By questioning masculine assumptions about women who do not fit the norm, Rhys opens up possibilities for alternative stories. Waters similarly inverts

traditional perspectives on Victorian madwomen in *Fingersmith*, showing female insanity to be a response to the limited position women were forced to occupy during the Victorian period. But in *Fingersmith*, unlike *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Waters's mad heroines are not required to come to grisly ends. Instead, her characters find a space where they can be themselves within the very walls that once contained them.

Fingersmith is a deliberately extravagant and complicated tale that draws on the tradition of sensation and Gothic fiction. The novel's doubled protagonists, Sue Trinder and Maud Lilly, give their own perspectives on the tangled events that link them. As Patricia Dunker notes in her review of the novel, "all of the characters have several identities" and the two heroines "change places with dizzying frequency" (1). The narrative centres on a plot to defraud a young heiress, Maud, of her inheritance and imprison her in a private madhouse. Unbeknownst to Sue, who leaves the comforts of her home at Mrs Sucksby's to work as Maud's maid and help the job along, it is not Maud who is to be double-crossed, swindled and certified as insane, but Sue herself. Complicating this plot is the fact that Sue and Maud were swapped as babies. Therefore, it is actually Sue who is the rightful heir to the Lilly fortune. Maud, on the other hand, is the daughter of Mrs Sucksby, the "baby farmer" who brought Sue up as her own. *Fingersmith*'s detailed and involved plot unfolds in a number of different spaces, all of which are, in one way or another, imprisoning. More specifically, however, these prisons can be read as madhouses in light of the behaviour the confining spaces evoke in the protagonists.

Due to *Fingersmith*'s complexity there are numerous aspects which are pertinent to discussions of madness. For example, issues concerning the doubling of Sue and Maud and notions of split personality are obviously relevant to analysis of this text, as is the way that madness is traced matrilineally, and the manner in which monstrous, or more specifically vampiric, metaphors are used in the expression of lesbianism. In this chapter, however, I am interested the way mad spaces affect female sexuality. The spaces that are most clearly deranged in *Fingersmith* are the private madhouse, where Maud enjoys her childhood and Sue is wrongly certified, and the Lillys' Gothic manor Briar, where Maud comes to work as her depraved uncle's secretary and Sue as a maid. Mrs Sucksby's and Mr Ibbs's Lant Street residence in London's Borough, however, may also be read as a

madhouse in that it subverts the notions of domesticity it outwardly projects and, for Maud at least, encourages hysteria. In the following analysis I will be looking at the maddening dynamics of these three spaces from the alternating perspectives of both Sue and Maud, to reveal the way one person's madhouse is another person's home.

The first section of this chapter "Madhouses, Madwomen and the Gothic Tradition," looks at the way madness was treated during the nineteenth century in both psychiatric institutions and the home. In this section I am also interested in exploring the way that Waters uses Gothic tropes to represent female insanity as a response to domestic captivity and the awakening of desire. The second section, "Lant Street: Sue's Den of Thieves," briefly looks the ways Lant Street functions as the primary space for the protagonists in *Fingersmith*; it is where both girls were born and where all of knowledge about their past is housed. However, whilst Sue views the space as a home, Maud finds it an imprisoning madhouse where her life is revealed to her as a fiction. Maud's entrapment at Lant Street mirrors Sue's in an actual psychiatric institution. The third section, "A House 'Made Crazy,'" focuses on privately run madhouses and the varying effects these (un)homely spaces have on their inhabitants. For Maud the madhouse is a familiar space where she spends her early childhood as a daughter to the nurses. In contrast, when Sue is objectified and confined in a similar asylum, after wrongly being certified as insane, the space makes her behave as though she is mad. The fourth and final section, "Briar: 'Made Over for Madwomen,'" concentrates on the Gothic space of the Lilly family home, Briar. In many ways Briar is as deranged as the madhouse. Despite this, it is the only site in the text where Sue and Maud are able express their sexual desires. By the end of *Fingersmith*, Briar functions as a space where Sue and Maud can live as they wish by reinscribing their desires on its formerly confining walls.

i) Madhouses, Madwomen and the Gothic Tradition

In *Fingersmith* the private madhouse is one of the key spaces Waters uses to represent the confinement women experienced during the nineteenth century. The 1860s, the period in which *Fingersmith* is set, was the heyday of the private madhouse and the female hysteric. In response to growing number of feminine ailments during the nineteenth century, a great need arose for adequate and respectable places to house

middle-class madwomen. Elaine Showalter, in her exploration of Victorian ideas about women and insanity, states “sexual desire, anger, and aggression,” were viewed as “morbid deviations from the normal female personality” during the nineteenth century (322). A normative environment, it was reasoned, would restore normative behaviour, particularly in female patients. By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, madhouses were characterised by orderly patients behaving in ways similar to those beyond asylum confines (Showalter 314). The stifling conditions of the Victorian middle-class home which madhouses tried to emulate were, however, potentially responsible for exacerbating female mental maladies. In *Fingersmith*, Waters explores the domestication of madness in the nineteenth century by showing similarities between the conditions in psychiatric institutions and the home, and the effect entrapment in these spaces has on female identities.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman most famously explores the madness which can result from domestic interment in her late-nineteenth-century short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.” In this tale, a young woman with a nervous condition is confined to the upper floors of a large and unfamiliar “ancestral hall” to “rest” for the summer (3). Being shut away in an upstairs room under the orders of her doctor/husband to rest, the female protagonist finds that the monotony of her confines begins to work upon her mind, slowly turning her mad. The main symptom of her madness is that she begins to see other women creeping behind the suffocating pattern of the yellow wallpaper in her room: “Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer everyday. It is always the same shape, only very numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind the pattern” (11). Compared to these sorts of conditions, it is little wonder that the space of the madhouse, despite its warped domesticity, was seen to be more restorative for some women. Showalter claims “one of the most striking ironies of women’s experience in the Victorian asylum was that despite its limitations, the asylum probably offered a more tolerant and more interesting life than some women could expect outside” (321). Waters evokes images very similar to Gilman’s in *Fingersmith* when her heroines find themselves trapped in domestic confines. She also, however, explores female entrapment in actual psychiatric institutions and the way the strange domesticity of these spaces can have a similarly maddening effect on the female psyche.

Fingersmith's narrative also recalls the tradition of sensational Victorian classics, such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which madhouse abuses are illuminated. In *The Woman in White*, for example, Anne Catherick is confined to a private asylum so that she is unable to pass on a secret. In *Lady Audley's Secret* the wicked Lady Audley is "buried alive" in a private madhouse despite the fact that a doctor initially says that "there is no evidence of madness in anything that she has done" (377). In *Fingersmith*, Waters uses sensation motifs, such as female madness and imprisonment, to disrupt normative conceptions of sexuality and space. These motifs, however, are not only familiar to sensation fiction; they are also common in Gothic narratives.

The Gothic features I discussed in the previous chapter, which have led critics such as Paulina Palmer to categorise *Affinity* as a work of "lesbian Gothic fiction," may also be applied to *Fingersmith*. In *Fingersmith*, as in *Affinity*, Waters utilises the Gothic's "stylistic eccentricities to portray ... eccentric [lesbian] subject[s]" (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 1). According to Palmer, in classic Gothic texts women are frequently "incarcerated" in "locked rooms or mental asylums" and "writers of lesbian Gothic develop these scenes of ... entrapment, manipulating them to suit lesbian/queer circumstances" (Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic* 12). All of the spaces in *Fingersmith* are, in one way or another, imprisoning, for the characters are literally locked in. At Lant Street, for example, Sue is kept "close" (339), and Maud is actually restrained. In the private madhouse, Maud is allowed to move freely within the structure's precincts but not to go beyond them. Sue, on the other hand, is as trapped in the madhouse as a person who is locked in prison. At Briar, both Maud's and Sue's movements are restricted by the isolating position of the house and Maud's controlling uncle. The characters' movement, or lack thereof, through and within imprisoning environments affects their mental state. The spaces, however, also structurally reflect the mental condition of the characters housed within, revealing they are, like the inhabitants, "made crazy" (*Fingersmith* 408).

Waters's depiction of madness in *Fingersmith* links spatial and social limitations. Doreen Massey, exploring the interconnectedness of space and gender, suggests that "the attempted consignment/confinement [of women] to particular places" is "crucially related" to "limitation on identity" (179). Similarly, the madness and confinement of

female characters in Gothic fiction, as Karen Stein suggests, may be seen to function as a “critique of the society which has prevented [them] from developing [their] full human potential.” Both Sue and Maud are what Stein would call “locked into the devalued female role” (126). Their spatial imprisonment within the house, and resulting madness, is reinforced by the fact that they are socially denied any meaningful outlet to adequately explore their emerging identities.

The house, in Gothic literature, acts directly upon the inhabitant and can often be read as representative of the character’s body (Armitt 121). In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for example, the room in which the female protagonist is confined by her husband/doctor makes her mad. At the same time, however, this space, or more specifically the patterns in the wallpaper, also represents and makes manifest her madness. Nowhere is this more obvious in *Fingersmith* than in Briar. Briar functions as a Gothic house/castle in Waters’s novel and most clearly symbolises women’s entrapment in the domestic sphere. The Gothic castle, according to Tanya Gardiner-Scott is a space that shows both masculine and feminine genders (49). The masculine aspects of the Briar are representative of Maud’s uncle Lilly. The house itself belongs to Mr Lilly and, initially, he controls the way it is presented and inhabited. Subsequently, the space is dark, foreboding, imprisoning and, like Maud’s uncle himself, silent. These conditions instigate Maud’s madness. The Gothic house, however, is not only a space characterised by masculinity. The entrapment of women within Gothic spaces has meant that houses are permeated, according to Judith Fetterly, by women “buried alive in them” (253). Briar, like the house in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” is disordered by the women who have been trapped within the space. And, as I will show, the house can in many ways be read as a space that structurally represents the female body, particularly the mother’s.

Juliann Fleenor, in her Introduction to *The Female Gothic*, suggests that in a number of Gothic narratives “the mother literally becomes the house, a house-mother” (19). Palmer notes that “images of maternal nurture” are often used in lesbian Gothic literature in the depiction of lesbian sexual encounters (*Lesbian Gothic* 104). The house-mother, in *Fingersmith* works as a space that allows for the expression of lesbian desire. Just as the space is imprisoning, it is also the site where Sue and Maud act on their lesbianism and eventually liberate all of the women, or madwomen, metaphorically

entrapped in the space. Patricia White uses the term “lesbianises” in regards to narratives of female same-sex desire in which the house structurally plays a part in the expression of lesbianism (148). Sue and Maud’s relationship “lesbianises” Briar. And furthermore, they eventually manage to make the space of Briar entirely their own when Mr Lilly dies and the girls collect their inheritance. “Once the ‘skeleton’ has been removed,” states Lucie Armitt, “the house is permitted to return to ‘normality’” (123). In *Fingersmith* the skeleton is the patriarchal figure of Maud’s uncle Mr Lilly and his library of pornography. The house is allowed “to return to normality” once Mr Lilly dies and the women who have been intimately entwined with the house symbolically assume their places in it on their own terms.

Fingersmith is not a traditional Gothic narrative. Instead it is post-Victorian and, therefore, concerned with effacing key boundaries. Armitt discusses the process by which lesbian theorists explore the “cracks” in the space to find “freedom by enlarging *spaces-in-between*” (144; original emphasis). In *Fingersmith* Waters evokes the “cracks” in the space of Briar to reveal the space not only as one of patriarchal control but also a space where women can live as they wish.

ii) Lant Street: Sue’s Den of Thieves

Spaces in *Fingersmith* are never what they seem. The madhouse can be a home, for example, whilst the respectable gentleman’s manor can be the site of perversity. Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs’s Lant Street residence in London’s Borough is no exception. Not only is this house difficult to find, located deep within a maze of twisted alleyways, it is also hard to define. A number of occupations occur beneath its roof, rendering this space, like the theatre, heterotopic. The house is a den of thieves, a counterfeiter’s, a baby farm, a brothel and a madhouse with a lunatic occupying one of the upper rooms. For Maud, who is taken there after she flees her uncle’s home with Gentleman, Lant Street is as imprisoning as a madhouse and works as a frightening return to origins. For Sue, however, Lant Street seems to function as a place of asylum and a home, where she was left as an orphan but raised and protected by Mrs Sucksby, who was “paid to keep [her] a month” but instead looked after her for seventeen years (12). Yet although Sue does not

consciously realise it, her home at Lant Street is in some ways a madhouse where she is kept “blunt” like a troublesome lunatic (339).

Unlike the numerous children passing through the house who are put to work by Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs as thieves, Sue is protected and cherished: “She [Mrs Sucksby] might have passed me on to the poorhouse. She might have left me crying in my draughty crib. Instead she prized me so, she would not let me out on the prig for fear a policeman should have got me. She let me sleep beside her, in her own bed. She shined my hair with vinegar. You treat jewels like that” (12). Sue is aware that her position in this house is peculiar but she does not think long about it. Further, as she knows nothing else, in that this space is her “spatial envelope,” she believes that this is the way she will continue to live: “If you had asked me how I supposed I should go on, I dare say I would have said that I should like to farm infants” (13). Sue is “kept so close” (339) in this space, however, in preparation for her fate: confinement as insane in a private madhouse.

Maud takes Sue’s place, and (it is revealed) her own rightful one, at Lant Street once Sue is double-crossed and certified. Unlike Sue, Maud does not find Lant Street homely. Instead, she experiences the space as maddening. The wild insanity Maud initially exhibits at Lant Street is established by the disorientation she experiences on her way there. London’s disorderly vastness baffles and confuses Maud, who had supposed it to be “a place, like a house in a park, with walls” (307). By the time she arrives at Lant Street, via its labyrinthine entrance, Maud is completely bewildered and unable to understand where she has been brought: “What is this? Where have you brought me?” (324). Having just left Sue at the gates of the madhouse, she believes that the same fate has been arranged for her: “*he has married me, and has brought me here, as a place to be rid of me*” (315; original emphasis). Like Sue, Maud has been kept in the dark about the true nature of the plan. Her assumption that she has been brought to a kind of madhouse is in many ways correct.

Maud’s display of insanity in the Lant Street house is directly related to the effect the space has on her identity. When she is taken upstairs to the room she is to share with Mrs Sucksby she feels that “her brain, like the room, is hedged in darkness” (331). It is only once she is told the real story of her birth, however, that she starts to behave as a madwoman: “I shudder, and Richard sighs. Mrs Sucksby shakes her head and tuts. But

then when I show my face they both start back. I am not weeping, as they suppose. I am laughing—I am gripped with a terrible laughter—and my look must be ghastly” (336). Like Brontë’s Bertha Rochester, Maud becomes hideous in her moment of insanity and begins to “jerk, as a fish might jerk on the end of a line,” seeming more monstrous than human (336). But, as with Rhys’s depiction of Bertha, Waters shows Maud’s madness to be largely a response to the confining conditions in which she is forced to live.

Maud’s descent into madness involves her making parallels between Lant Street and the mad home of her childhood. On her first night she wakes, thinking she that she must be sleeping next to one of the nurses from the madhouse rather than Mrs Sucksby (347). There are constant muffled shrieks emanating from both downstairs and the bedroom of Mr Ibbs’s mad sister. Like a deranged patient, Maud is kept in her room where she paces and grinds her teeth, unable to cope with the “sheer perversity” of her situation (351). What Maud finds most difficult, or perverse, during her first few days at Lant Street is the way her gaolers act as though everything is normal, asking her questions such as “Dear girl, all right?” (351). Maud’s experience at Lant Street mimics Sue’s in the private madhouse. Both women find themselves inexplicably confined and treated in ways they do not fully understand. Like a patient in an asylum, Maud’s temper eventually dulls over time once she realises that she is completely trapped and has nowhere to go.

iii) “A House Made Crazy”

Waters demonstrates the way domestic ideologies were essentially parodied and undermined by the structure of the private madhouse in her depiction of Sue’s traumatic period of certification. Sue’s description of arriving at the madhouse juxtaposes images of rural domesticity with prison-like confines. “Iron gates” enclose the “green lane” and the “small,” “neat” house has barred windows decorating it (173). The dismal exterior features of the madhouse make Sue even more fearful of its interior, causing her to struggle violently: “They were trying to pull me closer to the house. I wouldn’t let them” (395). Sue is right to struggle, because once she is overpowered and taken inside her disorientation and objectification really begin: “She lifted me up the two or three steps that led to the house’s front door, as I might have been so many feathers in a bag” (395).

The purging of Sue's identity initially parallels her spatial disorientation: "I could make out only so many drab-coloured ceilings and walls. After about a minute I knew they had got me deep in the house, and that I was lost" (397). Not only is the space of the madhouse disorientating; it is also, due to the twisted domesticity of the structure, completely baffling.

Old-fashioned public institutes for the insane, such as the famous Bedlam, left a particular type of residual terror in the collective imagination. The private madhouse Waters depicts in *Fingersmith*, however, is more sinister than Bedlam because it pretends to be something other than it is. Sue sensationally expects the madhouse to be a dungeon: "I had an idea in my head—I think I had got from a picture, or a play—of how a madhouse should be ... I think I supposed it would be like a dungeon or a gaol" (407). She experiences "more of a creep," however, when she makes the uncanny realisation that the madhouse to which she has been taken is in fact a strange country manor:

... and finally it broke upon me that this was the madhouse after all; that it 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; but that now it had all been made over to the madwomen—that it was, in its way, like a smart and handsome person gone mad itself. (408)

Sue's personified description of the madhouse's gross parody of domesticity in this passage mirrors her own transformation. In a short time, Sue becomes a part of the madhouse structure, succumbing, like Gilman's character in "The Yellow Wallpaper," to a "*creeping* misery, that crept so slow, and was so much a part of the habits of the house—like the colour of the walls, the smell of the dinners, the sound of weeping and shrieks" (432; emphasis added). As the madhouse infects Sue through abuse and isolation, she begins to lose her memories and thus finds herself, like the house, "made crazy" (408).

Waters inverts the function of the madhouse in *Fingersmith*. Rather than helping to cure insanity, the space instead promotes it. For Sue, the pointless empty routine of daily life in the madhouse creates a profound sense of lethargy. Furthermore, the madness of her fellow inmates, rather than reinforcing her own sanity, makes Sue see herself as mad also. Sue has an awakening in the madhouse, but it is an awakening into insanity. After

professing her sanity to one of the inmates, Sue is told, “I’m afraid you must be mad, since you are here. There is something queer about us all. You only need look about you. You only need look at yourself” (432). After this conversation Sue is forced to recognise her own madness when she uncannily mis-recognises her own reflection: “The nurse who had been set to watch us was sitting with her eyes closed ... but a little to the left of her was the window that looked into the drawing room. It was dark, and showed the line of circling ladies, clear as a mirror. One of them had stopped, and had her hand at her face.—I blinked. She blinked. She was me” (432). The image Sue sees in the window is of a madwoman. This moment of self-realisation allows her to finally see herself the way others do. It also prompts her to become aware that her transgressive desires may be more obvious than she first thought. When surveying her reflection Sue notices that Maud’s glove, on which she has been compulsively chewing since her arrival, is poking out of the collar of her dress: “From beneath its collar there showed the dirty white tips of the fingers of Maud’s old glove, that I still wore next to my heart. You could just make out, on the kid skin, the marks of my teeth” (433). In this moment of self-realisation, Sue finds that her lesbianism may have been more obvious than she first thought. In light of this awakening, Sue is forced to recognise herself as both a madwoman and a lesbian.

Sue’s transgressive sexual desires are treated as a symptomatic of her mental malady. When convincing the madhouse doctors of Sue’s insanity prior to her certification, Gentleman informs the doctors that she had taken an “unnatural fancy” to Maud (301). This clinches the diagnosis of Sue’s insanity for the madhouse doctors: “we shall keep her, and cure her of all her ills” (302). In *Fingersmith*, Sue becomes what the space expects of her. Her exclamations of sanity and accusations of fraud and the compulsive chewing on Maud’s glove only reinforce the doctors’ diagnosis. Similarly, Maud becomes mad when locked away in her uncle’s gothic manor Briar, and at Lant Street. Waters treats madness as one of the outcomes women experience when they are powerless and objectified. Like Maud at Briar and Lant Street, the conditions under which Sue is placed in the madhouse render her mad.

Maud’s childhood experiences in a similar psychiatric institution, however, are vastly different from Sue’s. The main reason for this is that unlike Sue, Maud is in a position of power whilst inhabiting this space and therefore able to remain sane even

though she is surrounded by lunatics. Spending her first ten years as a daughter to the nurses in the private madhouse, Maud naturally deduces that it must also be here that she was born. She imagines her delivery into the world as a gruesome primal scene which ends with her birth and her mother's death: "When I am born ... They put me on her bosom and my mouth finds out her breast ... My mother's bosom rises, falls, rises again; then sinks for ever. I feel it, and suck harder" (179-80). Maud takes morbid pleasure in this gruesome scene and vicariously punishes her mother for dying and leaving her by tormenting the lunatics in the madhouse. Living on the wards, Maud is surrounded by hysterical women, who pet her because she reminds them of their own daughters (180). Maud's power is accentuated in this environment. She is the only child in a house full of baby-less mothers. The other nurses dress her in a uniform like their own and even have a little wooden wand "cut to fit" her hand so that she can strike the madwomen when they misbehave (180). The madhouse is a domestic, although somewhat sadistic, space for Maud, where she believes that she will happily live out her days as a nurse "contentedly teasing lunatics" until she dies (180). As with Sue's image of Lant Street, however, Maud misunderstands her position in this space. Her uncle, who pays the nurses to mother her until he is ready to claim her for himself, in fact keeps her here.

iv) Briar: "Made Over for Madwomen"

Once Maud is taken to her uncle's decaying Gothic manor Briar, the powerful position she holds in her early childhood changes dramatically. Having known only the space of the madhouse, she first believes that Briar must be the same: "I think the shadowy passages must hold rooms, with quiet lunatics" (184). Maud's naïve assumption is not all that far from reality. Briar echoes the madhouse confines in a number of ways. Structurally it is debilitated: "dark and dim and shabby" (74). Like the madhouse, Briar has a strict routine run by the ringing of bells, a signal Maud understands from the madhouse: "I have been raised by the sound of similar bells, that told the lunatics to rise, to dress, to take their dinners" (185). Maud quickly realises that she is as trapped in this residence as the female lunatics were in her former one. Placed under the control of her uncle Mr Lilly and his housekeeper Mrs Stiles, she begins to behave like the powerless madwomen she used to taunt, yielding to "fits and foaming tempers" (192). Maud

manages to remain sane living in a house full of lunatics for ten years. Yet after barely a week at her uncle's house she begins to behave hysterically. By the time Sue comes to Briar, seven years later, Maud is relying heavily on laudanum and is plagued by nightly terrors. Waters clearly parallels Briar with the private madhouse. Yet when comparing the two spaces, Briar appears infinitely more terrifying due to its dark Gothic overtones. The space is understandably more fearful for Maud than the madhouse which was her first home. Yet even Sue, during her first frightening night at Briar, makes the comment that a prison would be livelier (61).

Mr Lilly, the master of the house, keeps Briar as silent as a tomb. Like Frederick Fairlie in *The Woman in White*, Maud's uncle cannot bear any coarse or loud sounds interrupting his work. Mr Lilly is the sinister masculine force in the house that makes it Gothic and the space, in some ways, represents him. Like Mr Lilly, Briar is decaying. The only real life in the house comes from the Briar clock which fastidiously ensures the house is run to his stifling routine. Maud has been buried alive here. She is "inside the cabinet, and long[s] to get out" (204). The tomb or cave, however, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim, is also a space of feminine power (95). Briar is the Lilly family home. The house must also be read, therefore, as the space of *Fingersmith's* absent mother: Mr Lilly's sister Marianne.

The narrative only provides scanty and fragmented pieces of information about Marianne Lilly. What may be gathered is that she fell pregnant and ran away from Briar and gave birth to Sue in London at Mrs Sucksby's. Attempting to save her daughter from a life of domestic imprisonment, such as she experienced at Briar, Marianne swapped her with Maud before her brother caught her. Upon re-capture she and her baby were put in a private madhouse. Marianne promptly died (presumably weakened by childbirth), leaving the nurses to bring up Maud. Whether Marianne actually died in the madhouse or under more sinister circumstances back at Briar is not made clear. Her body, however, is buried at Briar, and Marianne's presence pervades the space. Her bedroom, which becomes Maud's bedroom, is at the "heart" of the house (229).

In the tradition of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Briar is filled with trapped women, particularly in the house's most confining room, Mr Lilly's library. When Maud is first taken to this room as a girl she thinks she will now see the female lunatics the

house contains: “*Now I shall see them!*” (186; original emphasis). Although Maud does not actually see any women, she is correct to perceive the space as one of female confinement and objectification. Mr Lilly is a collector of pornographic literature and the walls of his study are lined with hundreds of books. He has brought Maud to Briar to work with him, under some initial duress, as his secretary. On the floor in the library is a hand that marks the boundary between knowledge and ignorance.⁸ Maud is not allowed past the hand until she has been fully trained to handle the books; her uncle warns: “Let me see you step once past that pointing finger, and I shall ... whip your eyes until they bleed. That hands marks the bound of innocence here” (188). Her tasks as her uncle’s secretary are initially as monotonous and mindless as those given to female lunatics. She is as confined and objectified as the women in both the madhouse and the books lining the shelves. The windows in the room are painted yellow so that the light does not affect the books. The yellow window, like Gilman’s yellow wallpaper, “grows bright, then dim, then bright again, as the wind sends clouds across the sun” (187). Maud has night terrors that involve hearing “the smothered sounds of movement, close by” and imagining “a thousand skulking figures with their faces at the curtain” (190). Lying still in her bed so that “the lurking women shall not guess” she is there (190), Maud is made crazy, like the women haunting her, by her domestic entrapment. The house, however, also facilitates escape.

Structurally, Briar may be read as a female space. The front door, the main portal of the house, for example, is unabashedly vaginal, “split down the middle into two high, bulging leaves” (184). The entrance room, not unlike Bronte’s “red room” in *Jane Eyre*, is womb-like. It is a completely dark space with an amniotic atmosphere, which causes Maud’s ears to feel “full, as if with water or wax” (184). Furthermore, just as the perpetual ticking of the clock outside reinforces Mr Lilly’s strict routine, it may conversely be read as an echo of a maternal heartbeat. For Maud, any presence of her mother is unwelcome. She hates Marianne for dying and abandoning her to a life of madness. Maud kisses her portrait goodnight before bed, only to whisper “I hate you” (197). Marianne, however, is not Maud’s mother. Unbeknownst to her, Briar is actually

⁸ The pointing finger in Mr Lilly’s study recalls the pointing Roman that the very “knowing” Mr Tulkington has in his office in Dickens’s *Bleak House* (642).

Sue's family home. The closer Sue gets to Briar, on the night she first arrives, the "thicker" the air becomes: "So thick it grew, I felt it, damp, upon my face, upon my lashes and lips; and closed my eyes" (56-57). Approaching the house she experiences a kind of re-birth. Once she reaches the front of the vast structure "the dampness pass[es] away": Sue has arrived, she has been reborn (57). Sue's rebirth enables her sexual awakening. It is whilst living as Maud's maid and "companion" at Briar that she realises the specific nature of her desires.

The night that Sue and Maud sexually realise their feelings for each other, the dark house seems "filled with echoes" of their "whispers and cries" (283). The ticking of the Briar clock takes on a third meaning in Maud's description of Sue's movements during their love-making: "she moves her hips and her hand as if to a rhythm, a time, a quickening beat" (283). White, recalling Freud's comments in *Totem and Taboo* on female delusion, states that ticking or "knocking" (seen by Freud to represent a throbbing in the clitoris) have become recurring themes in lesbian discourses (153). Maud and Sue's sexual arousal is echoed and affirmed by the ticking of the clock outside their bedroom, making their desire real and tangible.

Maud and Sue escape Briar only to find themselves placed in different asylums. Yet on the night of their departure, Maud penetrates her uncle's closeted bedroom for the first time. Her transgression is his downfall: "I look about me; and at last see the two things I have come to take. On his dressing stand, beside his jug of water; his watch-chain with, upon it, the key to his library, bound in faded velvet; and his razor" (289). Maud performs both a metaphoric castration upon her uncle by cutting up his books and an act of liberation for the women confined in its pages: "I am almost afraid the book will shriek, and so discover me. But it does not shriek. Rather, it sighs, as if longing for its own laceration; and when I hear that, my cuts become swifter and more true" (290). Like the compulsive tearing of the wallpaper in Gilman's novel, Maud's cutting up of the books sets all the objectified women contained within free, along with herself. The skeleton lurking in the closet at Briar is not Sue and Maud's lesbianism but Mr Lilly and his pornography. By destroying the books, Maud is erasing the objectified position of women's bodies and making a space for women to inhabit this patriarchal space on their own terms.

* * *

Sue and Maud leave Briar only for a short time. Maud returns to nurse her uncle through the final stages of the illness her disgraceful departure brought upon him, whilst Sue comes back to find Maud once she realises that she has loved her all along. The second time Sue approaches the dark house, at the end of the novel, she finds it “quieter inside the walls, than it had been before—quieter, and queer” and the great door that was always “swollen” now “bulged” (538-539). Sue finds Maud sitting at a desk in her uncle’s library where the yellow paint has been “scraped from the window, the finger of brass prised from the floor” (541). Rather than discarding her past, Maud has made a space for herself within her former confines. She is now writing pornographic literature and, in doing so, literally inscribing her own lesbian desires into a genre traditionally designed for the consumption of men.

Gilbert and Gubar claim: “The cave is not just a place where the past is retrieved but a place where the future is conceived” (102). Briar functions as the cave in this text, where Waters not only rewrites the past but also reimagines a future. As in *Tipping the Velvet* and, to some extent, *Affinity*, in *Fingersmith* the heroines eventually find a space where they can live as they want. Sue and Maud establish their sexual identities and re-inscribe lesbianism on previously confining walls of the patriarchal space that once rendered them mad.

Conclusion

In *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* Waters represents her characters' expressions of lesbian sexuality and female identity as intimately linked to the spaces they inhabit. In my analysis of *Tipping the Velvet*, I demonstrated that by working through a series of theatrical spaces, Nancy Astley moves beyond merely exploring alternative lifestyles through role-play and performance to actually living one. Whilst Nancy's performances in this novel, particularly those in drag, show an awareness of the performativity of gender and sexuality, she still manages to find a role/identity, as well as a space, that eventually works for her, on her own terms.

In *Affinity*, depictions of seemingly spectral transgressions undermine the containability of women within sites such as the prison and the home. Both the prison and the home in this text are ruled by the ever-present gaze, which gives the illusion of total knowledge. However, through materially manipulating the gaze (by creating the impression of a ghostly presence), Selina and Ruth are able to undermine the notion that "seeing is believing." Waters moves towards making a space for female same-sex desire in this novel as Selina and Ruth's deliberate management of Spiritualism allows them to find a place, albeit in exile, where they can be together.

In my last chapter, concerning Waters's third novel *Fingersmith*, I looked at the way the spaces of official and unofficial madhouses produce mad behaviour due to the confining and objectifying conditions they place on inhabitants. Sue and Maud experience madness when they are imprisoned against their will. Both girls come to recognise their previous madness as a product of enforced occupation of limiting social roles and spaces; this confinement prevents them from knowing and asserting their true identities and desires. And, by the end of the novel, Sue and Maud make a home for themselves in one of the spaces where they were once entrapped.

In each chapter, as the above summary demonstrates, I have coupled a specific space with a particular idea: the theatre and theatricality, the prison and Spiritualism, and the madhouse and madness. Each of these ideas (theatricality, Spiritualism and madness), however, could be individually applied to the spaces and the heroines' expressions of sexuality in any one of Waters's post-Victorian novels. The theatricality Waters shows to be inherent to discourses of space and sexuality in *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, is

also an intrinsic element in both *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*. Margaret's home in *Affinity* is a stage on which middle-class values are self-consciously performed and she is frequently reminded of her role: "your place is here, at your mother's side" (253). Furthermore, Selina and Ruth's material manipulation of Spiritualism in this novel is also overtly theatrical and staged. *Fingersmith* begins with Sue describing a stage production of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Like actors in a play, many of the characters in this novel, at one time or another, very deliberately perform a part. Sue takes on the role of a servant girl after spending many hours practising to dress, curtsy and lower her gaze (39), whilst Maud plays the part of a naïve heiress (242). Similarly, Waters makes use of the apparitional tradition of lesbianism in all three of her novels, not only *Affinity*. Nancy frequently compares herself to a ghost whilst living a half-life with Diana in St John's Wood: "I was like a spectre" (265). In *Fingersmith* Sue and Maud move like ghosts when at Briar, and Maud, much like Margaret in *Affinity*, claims that she will "haunt" this space as "a neat, monotonous ghost" (287). Likewise, madness features in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity* as well as *Fingersmith*. Margaret's home in *Affinity* becomes a madhouse when she is diagnosed with hysteria and forced to suffer the "rest cure." In *Tipping the Velvet*, Nancy, like Sue in *Fingersmith*, goes mad when confined in a house after her lover betrays her, stating "perhaps I was mad" (183). The approaches to reading Waters's novels I have developed in this project could thus be extended in a variety of different directions, and open up interesting possibilities for future analysis of her work.

One of the benefits of my focus is that it reveals the structural similarities of *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*. All three novels chart Waters's "agenda" to explore the lesbian past through satisfying narrative frameworks. Each novel maps the progress of one or two female protagonists in their search for a space and a means to express their lesbianism. Waters's post-Victorian heroines oscillate between the institutions of the theatre, prison and the madhouse, and more domestic spaces, in an attempt to find somewhere they can be themselves. By performing, haunting and going mad, these characters navigate their way out of the spaces that restrict their sexual expression, to find and create ones that accept their lesbianism.

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