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In recent years, Sarah Waters has received much critical attention for her construction of historical narrative. In the recreated worlds of Victorian Britain, her characters struggle to establish their position as lesbians in a society that is organised by heterosexist codes. Her first three novels, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002) are often classified as neo-Victorian fiction in which, according to Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, 'the present is negotiated through a range of (re)interpretations of the nineteenth century'.[1] In Waters' neo-Victorian narrative readers are encouraged to see the past through a contemporary lens, which then gives them a new perspective of the present. Although Waters moves away from the Victorian period for her settings in subsequent novels (*The Night Watch* [2006] and *The Little Stranger* [2009] are set in the 1940s, and *The Paying Guest* [2014] is set in the 1920s), she constantly employs neo-historical narrative, which, as Elodie Rousselot notes, is 'characterised by its […] creative and critical engagement with the cultural mores of the period it revisits'.[2] In all of Waters' novels, her project has a consistent theme in that her characters imagine utopian space which would enable lesbian partnership. For this purpose, as Adele Jones argues, Waters employs 'dysfunctional [spaces which are] unable to contain the transgressions of lesbian and queer desire, and ultimately their foundations begin to crumble

[1] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.
[2] Elodie Rousselot, 'Introduction: Exoticising the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction' in Elodie Rousselot ed., *Exoticizing the Past in Contemporary Neo-Historical Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2.

under the weight of the characters' challenges to normativity'.[3] Female characters' search for places to disclose their lesbian sexuality in Waters' fiction serves to interrogate society's heterosexist norms.

In her overview of the critical reception of Waters' fiction, Kaye Mitchell writes that 'each of [Waters'] novels engages with issues of gender politics in some manner and each evinces a feminist interest in women's lives, bodies, histories and relationships'.[4] In *Fingersmith*, Waters focuses on how the patriarchal manor house serves to confine female characters, demonstrating that domestic and institutional spatial settings act to confine women. The plot-driven narrative of *Fingersmith*, which is heavily influenced by Victorian writers such as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, begins with the account of Susan Trinder, a girl living in the London Borough. She becomes part of a plot to trick Maud Lilly, who works as a secretary of her uncle Mr Lilly at the Briar estate. Sue starts working for Maud as her maid, while her mission is to help her partner Richard 'Gentleman' Rivers marry Maud and then incarcerate her in a mental asylum. Later Sue finds out that both she and Maud are pawns for a bigger scheme concocted by Mrs Sucksby, Sue's pseudo-mother. Maud is forced to stay in her uncle's ancestral house to fulfil her duty as his secretary. Her need to conform to what her uncle demands from her confines her to the house and her role in it. The oppressive conditions Maud faces are at variance with Gaston Bachelard's claim that 'the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace'.[5] Bachelard's focus is on the protective nature of inside spaces in a psychological sense as well as a physical one; when it comes to women, however, the inside of the house has been regarded as a space that restricts their physical and psychological freedom. This is the case for both of

[3] Adele Jones, 'Disrupting the Continuum: Collapsing Space and Time in Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014), p. 34.
[4] Kaye Mitchell, 'Introduction: The Popular and Critical Reception of Sarah Waters' in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 10.
[5] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 6.

Waters' heroines. Although Sue feels content with her London home in contradiction to Maud, she has been psychologically manipulated by Mrs Sucksby. As Marjorie Garber notes, the house 'reflect[s] and produc[es] sexual law and morality, and guard[s] (or enshrin[es]) female virtue'.[6] This notion of a house underwrites patriarchal authority which categorises women as vulnerable and in need of male protection. Mark Wigley agrees with this idea when he writes that a house is 'an effect of suppression'.[7] Women's ability to re-imagine the house to which they are confined plays an indispensable role for their construction of utopian space, but it is constantly suppressed by patriarchal influence, which underpins the foundation and power structures of the house. This solid presence of patriarchal authority, then, calls into question Bachelard's value of the house for women.

As Sue observes, inside Mr Lilly's house everyone performs their domestic duties in such a mechanical manner that she imagines them as if they were dolls to slide in grooves on the floor.[8] By comparing characters to lifeless dolls, Waters indicates that the home serves to confine female characters who live in it to their domestic roles which are imposed by their master. Maud is forced to fulfil the role of a secretary to her uncle, who is a collector of pornographic literature, while Sue too needs to comply with the rules of Mr Lilly's manor house as a maid. In order to escape the oppressive situation, Susan and Maud imagine London as their utopian space in which they can live together, possibly as a lesbian couple. Maud fantasises what they can do after they escape her uncle's house with Sue: 'We can make our own secret way to London, find money for ourselves…'.[9] What she wishes for here is an independent life free from patriarchal authority. However, Sue's and Maud's utopian vision of forming a romantic relationship is suspended for the fraudulent plot to work out. In contrast to

[6] Marjorie Garber, *Sex and the Read Estate: Why We Love Houses* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), p. 76.
[7] Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 137.
[8] Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith* (London: Virago, 2002), p. 108.
[9] Ibid., pp. 283-284.

their initial utopian vision, which is an escape from patriarchal heteronormativity, female characters in Waters' fiction find themselves in an ambivalent place. At the end of the novel, Maud and Susan are reunited at Mr Lilly's manor house, which used to be a place of confinement, and even though they can now express their feelings openly, Maud has to produce pornographic work as this is the only way in which she can make money. As I will go on to demonstrate, however, the ambivalence of a utopian space created at the end is the very factor which gives the women protagonists the strength to contest patriarchal power. The ambivalent nature of Sue and Maud's newly established utopian space is, I argue, what constitutes 'paradoxical space'. In *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993), Gillian Rose suggests that '[p]aradoxical space is […] a space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism'.[10] This space is characterised by its duality: it is 'both the centre and the margin, […] at once inside and outside'.[11] It is a space that positions itself within the boundary of patriarchy, and at the same time refuses to be consumed completely in the system. Thus this paradox can question the demarcation of inside and outside that is governed by masculinist norms. The library where Sue and Maud meet at the end of *Fingersmith* is a typical example of this paradoxical space. While it still reminds them of Mr Lilly (inside the patriarchal system), Waters suggests that Sue and Maud will be able to transform it for their own lesbian imagination (outside the societal system).

The House as a 'Secret Theatre' and Doubling of Performance

In the domestic sphere, everyday performance of domestic roles functions to entrap characters. This way of portraying the house as a place for confinement resonates with

[10] Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 159.
[11] Ibid. p. 153.

narratives of sensation fiction writers such as Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon and others. In *The Woman in White* (1859), Collins presents an extreme example of how the household can be presented as a space for forced performance when the patriarchal figure Frederick Fairlie talks of his servant: 'At present he is simply a portfolio stand'.[12] Here, by forcing a servant to perform a role at his command (thus dehumanizing him), Frederick assumes dominance over those who live under the same roof. Performance is, therefore, seen as a tool for entrapment, and sensation novels often set up the home as a theatrical space within which characters are forced to perform their domestic roles. Through narratives frequently organized around plots of deception and crimes, sensation novels invited the reader to catch a glimpse of the secrets of middle-class households. In this way they expressed, as Lyn Pykett argues, the 'anxieties concern[ing] the nature and status of the family, [which was] generally considered to be the cornerstone of Victorian society'.[13] For this reason, sensation fiction tends to depict how characters suffer from, and rebel against, domestic confinement. For example, the protagonist in Collins's *Basil* (1852) observes some difficulties in keeping up a performance in domestic life:

> I could see one of those ghastly heart-tragedies laid upon before me, which are acted and re-acted, scene by scene, and year by year, in the secret theatre of home; tragedies which are ever shadowed by the slow falling of the black curtain that drops lower and lower every day[.][14]

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

[12] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (London: Everyman's Library, 1974), p. 138.
[13] Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel from* The Woman in White *to* The Moonstone (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p. 10.
[14] Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 75-76.

This uncanny repetition of movements over time in the domestic setting is illustrative of Judith Butler's argument that gender 'is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*'.[15] Domesticity is seen as a performative act, just as gender is considered in the same light. Appearances, then, can be misleading, as in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), where Braddon draws the reader's attention to the disconnectedness between what is presented and what is real in the first chapter, using 'as if' a number of times. In *Fingersmith*, which mimics Victorian sensation fiction, most characters need to pretend to be what they are not in order for the scheme of switching identities to work out. Sue, brought up amongst thieves in the London Borough, plays a lady's maid, whereas Maud, exposed to her uncle's pornographic literature, assumes the role of a naïve lady.

There is a thin line between theatre and reality in *Fingersmith* from early on. As a child, when she sees a theatrical performance of *Oliver Twist*, Sue shows that she is incapable of telling performance apart from reality. During the performance she is so frightened by Sykes that she thinks the audience 'should all be killed', and when one woman 'put her arms to [her] and smiled, [she] screamed out louder'.[16] The difference between theatre and ordinary life, according to Richard Schechner, 'depend[s] on the degree spectators and performers attend to […] pleasure […] or routine'.[17] Whilst what happens on stage is supposed to be purely for entertainment, Sue construes it as connected to her daily life, because crime is a key part of her experience. As she grows up, she sees performance as one of the routines amongst those who live at Lant Street. For example, she observes Mr Ibbs' act when people bring in stolen goods for him. He plays a kind-hearted person after being stern with them in order to make them believe that he is doing the best he can.[18] Here is where *Fingersmith*'s link to *Oliver Twist* is

[15] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988), p. 519, italics in original.
[16] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 4.
[17] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 152.
[18] Waters, *Fingersmith,* pp. 8-9.

explored further: as Linden Peach writes, '[l]ike Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, [*Fingersmith*] stress[es] the "othering" of fraud, deception, and petty crime but [also] the masquerade and performance necessary to carry them out'.[19] Sue's perception of the world clearly consists of different performers: 'it had had Bill Sykeses in it, and good Mr Ibbses'.[20] For Sue, the world is one big stage where performance is necessary for survival. This sense of masquerade is also present when Sue explains the hidden passages at the back of the house:

> What there was, was a little covered passage and a small dark court. You might stand in that and think yourself baffled; there was a path, however, if you knew how to look.[21]

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

At Briar, performance is incorporated into daily routine, though to a different extent. Sue feels as if those who live there are manipulated into acting according to a particular set of routines:

> the days at Briar were run so very regular, you could not change it. The house bell woke us up in the mornings, and after that we all went moving on our ways from room to room, on our set courses, until the bell rang us back into our beds at night. There might as well have been grooves laid for us in the floorboards; we might have glided on sticks. There might have been a great handle set into the side of the house, and a great hand winding it.[22]

Sue's life at Briar is made mechanical by the sound of the bell. What makes her life more machine-like is her imagination of grooves in the floorboards and of sticks attached to her. This imagination points to puppet theatre imagery: at Briar Mr Lilly as a puppet master who controls everything. As Helen Davies points out, for example, Maud's task of reading the pornographic

[19] Linden Peach, *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 52.
[20] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 7.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

texts to him and his guests 'places her in the role of a "dummy" in relation to the ventriloquist'.[23] However, even he turns out to be a mere puppet in the plot in which Sue, Maud and Gentleman are intertwined. In the wider context, Mr Lilly loses his status as the man behind the curtain, and as all the narrative twists are presented, Mrs Sucksby is revealed to be the one who operates the puppet theatre.

This choreographed life at Briar threatens to deprive Sue of her feelings and passions. Maud experiences the same sentiments, as when Sue likens her to 'a little clockwork doll'.[24] By setting guidelines for everyday behaviour, Briar is rendered a 'secret theatre of home', confining everyone to their positions. In this house controlled by Mr Lilly's patriarchal power, he 'ma[d]e a secretary of' Maud.[25] As Butler explains, 'gender performances in non-theatrical context are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions'.[26] Hence, when Maud refuses to conform to the rules Mr Lilly sets out for her, she is punished by him. Even when her uncle is absent, Maud is under constant surveillance and subject to abuse by the housekeeper, Mrs Stiles. Since Maud's mother is already dead, Mrs Stiles functions as a patriarchal mother figure who forces Mr Lilly's sadistic version of the male ideal on Maud. Mrs Stiles' 'carr[ying] keys about her, on a chain at her waist' makes her look like a prison matron.[27] While the matrons at the asylum where Maud was raised were kind and motherly figures, Mrs Stiles represents the opposite. Also, the gloves Maud has to wear function as a prop to confine her to the role that Mr Lilly dictates. As Sarah Gamble points out, gloves 'showcase rather than disguise the corrupting substances with which they come into contact, such as ink, blood and food', signalling Maud's status as a blank sheet of paper whose fate is

[23] Helen Davies, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 156.
[24] Waters, *Fingersmith,* p. 137.
[25] Ibid., p. 187.
[26] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 527.
[27] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 57.

determined by her uncle.[28] As Maud recalls, moreover, any rewards she receives from Mr Lilly are what she wears, such as 'new gloves, soft-soled slippers, a gown', thus further stressing her femininity and entrapping her in it.[29] This situation changes when Gentleman is in the house, albeit only for a short while. His arrival at Briar causes some ripples on the surface, but soon the whole system 'went on, smooth as before, but with the scenes in a different order'.[30] Any attempt to get out of these set courses only has the effect of creating 'new grooves … to slide in'.[31] Once one of these grooves is derailed, destruction ensues: Mr Lilly, after Maud damages all his books, suffers a heart attack and eventually dies.

This stifling environment is what encourages double role-playing. To get the most out of their positions in which they are stuck for the foreseeable future, the servants at Briar rely on what Sue calls 'two-facedness'.[32] They try to obtain what they can while pretending to believe what they do is for the benefit for the house. Sue notices them, for instance, 'holding off the fat from Mr Lilly's gravy to sell on the quiet to the butcher's boy' or 'pulling the pearl buttons from Maud's chemises, and keeping them, and saying they were lost'.[33] In this way they are sustaining two sets of performance: one as a faithful servant and the other as a skillful insurgent. Although she tells the reader that she hates their attitude, Sue cannot be exempt from blame. She also plays the role of a maid when she is scheming to trick Maud into an asylum so she can get part of her inheritance. Maud, however, as it turns out, is the same as Sue in pretending to be a naïve girl, when she is key to Gentleman's scheme from the start. When Sue is incarcerated in the asylum that she thought was intended for Maud, it is as if she experiences the discipline and punishment Maud suffered at Briar. Sue is shocked to find out that the asylum

[28] Sarah Gamble, '"I know everything. I know nothing": (Re)Reading *Fingersmith*'s Deceptive Doubles' in Kaye Mitchell, ed., *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 48.
[29] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 196.
[30] Ibid., p. 108.
[31] Ibid., p. 115.
[32] Ibid., p. 91.
[33] Ibid., p. 91.

'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'.[34] Not only does Sue feel 'just like at Briar', but also she finds one of the rooms resembling a room at Briar: 'It might have once been a pantry – it was very like Mrs Stile's pantry, at Briar – for there were cupboards, with locks upon them, and an arm-chair and a sink'.[35] Here, even an asylum is revealed to have two faces, indicating that Briar and the psychiatric hospital are two sides of the same coin. As Kate Mitchell argues, '*Fingersmith* performs the sensation novel's inscription of the domestic sphere as a site of danger characterised by threatened and actual incarceration'.[36] Drawing on the generic conventions of sensation fiction, Waters presents the world of *Fingersmith* as if all the domestic spaces are potentially suggestive of confinement. Regardless of whether incarceration really happens or not, whether confinement is domestic or institutional, inside spaces are presented as inescapable. Sue's eventual escape from the madhouse, however, indicates that she *is* able to move out of the grooves, though only with external help and only thanks to her thief's training. Her opportunity for escape comes from her knowledge of the routine at the asylum. Since she knows that the doctors are away on Wednesdays, she can ask one of the former employees at Briar to get her a blank key and a file to escape on that Wednesday.[37] Knowing how those who work there perform their roles as doctors and nurses, she manages to use the information to her advantage. Maud notices this special ability of Sue's, though she is not conscious of what this means for her, when Sue walks 'over the carpet – heedless of the design, the lines and diamonds and squares, beneath her feet'.[38] The lines and shapes of the carpet are evocative of the grooves, and Sue's movement shows her potential for becoming the driving force that gives reality to the utopian space she shares with Maud.

[34] Ibid., p. 408.
[35] Ibid., p. 173, 405.
[36] Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 134.
[37] Waters, *Fingersmith*, pp. 447-455.
[38] Ibid., p. 147.

Not a Maid, but a Companion: Sue's and Maud's Utopian Imagination

Although Sue and Maud have to deceive each other to obtain what they wish for – money in Sue's case and freedom away from Briar in Maud's – their sexual desire toward one another fractures their performance. As they come to verbalise feelings other than the lines provided by Gentleman, their lesbian identities supersede their faked ones. This process begins when they start to improvise their lines in which their willingness to move the plot forward is interwoven with their reluctance to trick each other. Gradually, then, their improvised lines give voice to their more honest, spontaneous expression of sentiments. When Maud tells Sue her plan once she gets to London, she includes Sue in it: as Sue recalls, 'she said she wouldn't call me her maid then, but her companion. She said she would get me a maid of my own'.[39] Although this is indicative of Maud's desire to fool Sue further into her later incarceration, Maud at the same time expresses her affection toward Sue in the form of imagining a prospect for their future companionship. Friendship between women in Victorian Britain, as Sharon Marcus writes, 'was defined in terms of affection and pleasure, not instrumental utility'.[40] Although female friendship was often seen as an effective way for women to learn how to form a similar relationship with their husbands, Marcus emphasises that friendship between women also promoted their emotional refinement for their own benefit.[41] Inclusion of Sue in Maud's (if only fictitious) future vision, then, indicates the fact that she has grown used to the life she shares with Sue and begins to develop nurturing feeling for her. Maud's affection is answered by Sue when she feels that they are '[q]uite like sisters' after they start sharing the bed.[42] Also, when she rubs at Maud's pointed tooth with a silver thimble, she uses the trick she learned at

[39] Ibid., p. 127.
[40] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 26.
[41] Marcus, *Between Women*, pp. 25-32.
[42] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 89.

Lant Street from seeing 'Mrs Sucksby do it many times, with infants'.[43] Here, Sue tries to assume Mrs Sucksby's motherly position, placing Maud in that of an infant. Having difficulty explaining her affection for Maud, which can stem from either her naïvety or her reluctance to spoil the plot, Sue mixes up various aspects of her life at Lant Street to make sense of her feeling: Dainty's quasi-sisterly presence and Mrs Sucksby as a mother figure. As Georges Letissier observes, 'Waters calls up situations in which characters improvise kinship relationships to make up for their inability to conform to the traditional model offered by socially stable heterosexual couples'.[44] Maud and Sue's improvised lines, in spite of the fact that they use them to keep the plot afloat, also reveal their affectionate feelings toward one another.

Their emotional attachment to each other, in the form of companionship on Maud's side and kinship on Sue's, soon leads to their lesbian desire, which is constantly overshadowed by the impossibility to openly express this desire. The scene with Maud's sharp tooth and Sue's thimble, while illustrating Sue's familial attachment to Maud, can be seen as the starting point of Maud's lesbian desire. She is reminded of her knowledge gleaned from her uncle's books when she thinks: 'May a lady taste the fingers of her maid? She may, in [her] uncle's books'.[45] By having Maud compare her own experience with what happens in pornographic literature, Waters challenges the view that 'love between women has been primarily a sexual phenomenon only in male fantasy literature'.[46] Although she does not realise her own lesbian passion until much later, Sue also implies that she experiences a similar desire to Maud's when she explains the character of Lady Alice, her former employer, whose fictitious identity is made up by

[43] Ibid., p. 97.
[44] Georges Letissier, 'More Than Kith and Less Than Kin: Queering the Family in Sarah Waters' Neo-Victorian Fictions' in Marie-Louise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, eds., *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), p. 379.
[45] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 256.
[46] Lillan Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p. 17.

Gentleman. She tells Maud that Lady Alice knew 'grand clothes meant nothing, since it was the person inside the clothes that ought to be judged'.[47] While this anticipates later events, when Sue is mistaken for Maud because of her clothes, it also suggests Sue's hope that her sexuality will be understood by what she expresses, not by what she wears. The link between clothes and sexuality is a continuous theme in Waters' fiction: in *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, male clothes serve as a foil for the protagonist Nancy Astley's innate homosexuality. In *Fingersmith*, by letting Lady Alice speak of an ideal society in which each person is judged for who they really are, Sue expresses her inner desire. As Barbara Schaff points out, '[t]he shift from the consolidating model of sisterly love to the potent and potentially socially destructive dynamics of female homosexual desire is a major aspect of Waters' revisionist approach to Victorian femininity'.[48] By depicting the transition of Maud and Sue's feelings from friendship to lesbian desire, Waters contests the idea held by the Victorians that relationships between women were asexual.[49] Whilst Sue and Maud are forced to act by the rules given to them, their hidden desires slip through their performance in the form of spontaneous expressions of feeling.

Despite their reluctance to spoil Gentleman's plot for their own sake, Sue and Maud's romantic feeling toward each other materialises the night before the wedding. To have intercourse at Briar, the site of Mr Lilly's patriarchal power, signifies their defiance against the gender norms that have been imposed on them. This imposition of patriarchal authority is often identified with permeating darkness, which is a compelling characteristic associated with the estate. Sue describes the hall of Briar as 'all dark and dim and shabby, as it was everywhere in that house'.[50] Furthermore, 'the walls in that house were all of dark oak panelling, very gloomy

[47] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 68.
[48] Barbara Schaff, 'On Not Being Mrs Browning: The Revisionist Feminism of Sarah Waters' Neo-Victorian Trilogy', *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2013), p. 68.
[49] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 154.
[50] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 74.

on the eye and very baffling, for the doors were set so pat in their frames, you could not spot them'.[51] Briar is a house filled with darkness, and the fact that you cannot find a door because it is black and perfectly shut stresses a sense of entrapment. During their sexual union, however, darkness becomes a liminal space in which Sue and Maud's lesbian desire takes shape. When Sue kisses Maud, she says that 'it was like kissing darkness. As if the darkness had life, had a shape, had taste, was warm and glib'.[52] Then she tells the reader that touching Maud's body 'was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness – as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand'.[53] These expressions mark the reversal of Terry Castle's argument that lesbian desire in literature tends to be de-materialised.[54] Here, Sue materialises her desire towards Maud out of the darkness. When we reach Maud's account of the same event, we can see that she is feeling the same way: she feels '[Sue's] fingers … gather me, out of the darkness, out of my natural shape'.[55] Until this moment she has associated herself with inky darkness, for her identity is based on what Mr Lilly thinks of her. Thus, Sue's fingers gathering Maud out of the darkness are indicative of Sue releasing Maud from her entrapment, if only psychologically.

Sue and Maud's sexual union before the night of the wedding makes a great impact on Maud, leading her to imagine a utopian space where she can stay with Sue in a lesbian relationship, without being disturbed by Mr Lilly or Gentleman. Although she imagined the freedom she would have in London before, this time London appears in her mind as a clear destination in which their lesbian love is made possible. As she expresses her feeling as if she is 'filled, as with colour or light, with a sense of the life [they] will have, together', she is not

[51] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[52] Ibid., p. 141.
[53] Ibid., p. 142.
[54] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 34.
[55] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 282.

thinking of them merely as companions.[56] However, when Maud pretends to dismiss their sexual experience as a dream, Sue denies it altogether by saying it must have been Gentleman who appeared in her dream. Therefore, in spite of the fact that they actually arrived at a space where they could exhibit their homosexual desire, which is therefore the closest they can possibly be to their utopian space, they turn away from it for the sake of Gentleman's plot. Maud's desperation on her wedding night, then, is fuelled by her desire to stay with Sue, even if that means going back to Briar. As Sue recalls the event, Maud says to her: 'You said I dreamed you. I'm not dreaming now. I wish I were! […] I wish I were dreaming, and might wake up and be at Briar again!'[57] After they abandon their utopian space, London loses its attractions for Maud. She tells the reader, '*London*, I think. The word means nothing to me now'.[58] And when she finally arrives at Paddington station, she is startled to realise that the London she had imagined is vastly different from what she sees: 'I know London. London is a city of opportunities fulfilled. This place, of jostling and clamour, I do not know'.[59] This suggests that the London she had imagined back at Briar is not complete unless she is accompanied by Sue.

Briar Revisited: Paradoxical Library Space

At the end of the novel, Sue and Maud are reunited at Briar. It is notable that this reunion takes place in the library. As Sue describes the room, it is 'a dark one, like all the other rooms there. Its walls were panelled all over in an old black wood, and its floor […] was also black.[60] Also curtained to protect books from fading, the library is most likely to be the darkest room

[56] Ibid., p. 284.
[57] Ibid., p. 161.
[58] Ibid., p. 296.
[59] Ibid., p. 308.
[60] Ibid., p. 65.

at Briar. When Sue enters the library, however, she 'saw [Maud] clearly, because of the light'.[61] Given that, as Mitchell argues, 'lesbian desire […] [has] exist[ed] only as *shadows* at the margins of Victorian literature and history', this ending with light coming into the library is suggestive of the bright future awaiting Sue and Maud.[62] However, the future suggested here, ironically, posits several problems. The fact that Maud earns her living by producing pornography which is circulated to the male-centred literary market and readership does not necessarily mean that she has managed to free herself from her uncle's patriarchal influence. Although Maud manages to mock the literary market of pornography by writing pornography to satisfy Sue (which is intended by Maud when she says to Sue, 'it is filled with all the words for how I want you') while appearing to satisfy a male readership, it hardly distinguishes itself from the doubling of the servants' performance at Briar.[63] Also, there is the possibility that Maud and Sue will not be freed from their past: as Sue explores Briar, she 'made no sound, and might have glided', reminding the reader of how as a maid she used to glide in grooves mechanically.[64] And as Maud admits, '[she is] still what [Mr Lilly] made [her]. I shall always be that'.[65] Rather than offering an easy way out, Waters draws the reader's attention to the possibilities of the future that lie beyond the ending of the novel. As Letissier notes, 'the queer family reconfigures the traditional family by positing that domesticity is not a "given", but instead produced through discourse or repetitive performance'.[66] It can be argued that the novel suggests that they are going to form a queer family. It is, then, significant that Maud begins to teach Sue how to read using what she has written. In this way Maud encourages Sue to be engaged in 'discourse or repetitive performance' as we all are in the course of learning. Thus, the library at Briar exists as a starting point for further calling into question of heteronormative

[61] Ibid., p. 541.
[62] Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, p. 117, italics added.
[63] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 547.
[64] Ibid., p. 540.
[65] Ibid., p. 546.
[66] Letissier, 'More Than Kith and Less Than Kin', p. 366.

codes. The library becomes what Rose calls a 'paradoxical space', the place which constitutes both the inside and the outside of patriarchy and makes it possible to critique the male-dominated literary market.[67] Furthermore, as Llewellyn suggests, it is possible to speculate that 'the secret women pornographers of the 1860s and 1870s (in which *Fingersmith* is set) made it possible for women's lesbian relationships to be positive acts', which is depicted in *Tipping the Velvet*.[68] In this light, the combined accounts of Sue and Maud, which constitute the narrative of *Fingersmith,* can be seen as their first collaborative literary production. The future that Sue and Maud will encounter is not without difficulty: at the end of the novel '[t]he room got darker, the rain still beat the glass', which implies further hardships.[69] However, Waters suggests a possibility that they will transform Maud's uncle's patriarchal library into their ideal utopian space. Therefore, the ending is indicative of their future attempt to create their own values by intentionally subverting the patriarchal force of performance in the domestic sphere.

Conclusion

Using conventional tropes from sensation fiction, Waters blurs the boundary between theatre and the domestic sphere. Brought up in the Borough where crime is a part of everyday life, Sue mixes the domestic with the theatrical quite naturally. Since in this case, performance is inseparable from criminality, Sue is naturally immersed in the idea that performance is part of reality. Maud, on the other hand, is trained to perform the role of Mr Lilly's secretary. In the world constructed as if everyone is a mechanical doll moving in grooves, thus unable to escape its multi-layered structure of power relations, Sue and Maud first conform to the movement provided by Gentleman (but ultimately by Mrs Sucksby) in order to execute the plot. As the

[67] Rose, *Feminism & Geography*, p. 159.
[68] Mark Llewellyn, 'Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre' in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, eds., *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.205-206.
[69] Waters, *Fingersmith*, p. 548.

narrative goes on, however, their scripted lines change to improvised ones, finally leading to their impromptu expression which reveals their homosexual desire. Their sexual union in Maud's room at Briar holds significant meaning since it represents a rebellious act under the roof of Mr Lilly's patriarchal authority. As they feel each other's bodies in the darkness, Waters attempts to shed light on lesbian desire without spectralisation, subverting the view that constructs lesbians as peripheral. The ending with their reunion in the library at Briar, too, suggests that the library has the potential to become the place where Sue and Maud's utopian imagination may be realised. Waters' depiction of female characters who remain trapped in heteronormative society serves to raise the issue of where lesbians should be located in society both in day-to-day life and in literature. The presence of lesbians within heterosexist society, not their escape from it, can destabilise the rigidity of gender and sexuality.

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