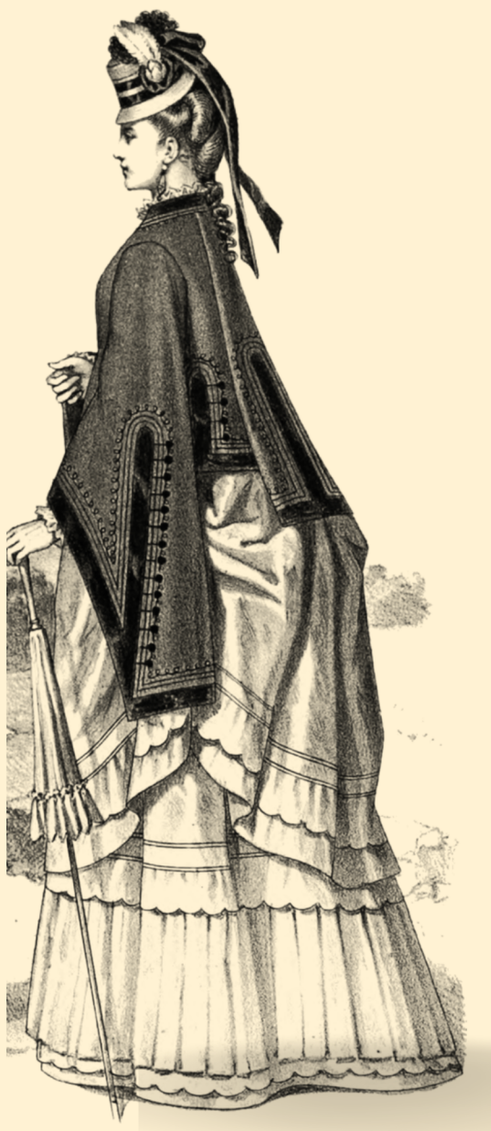
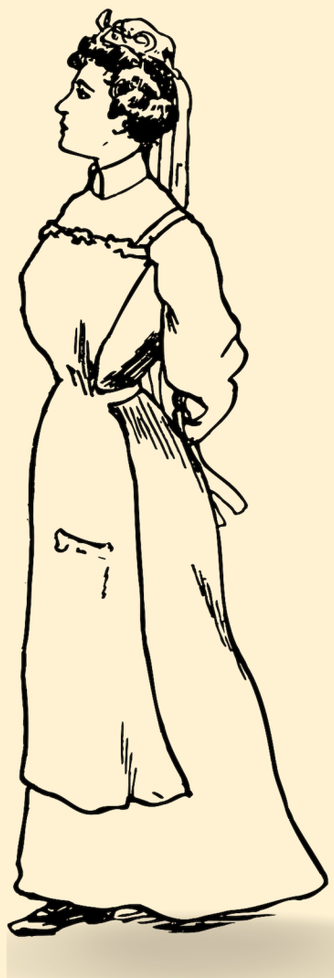
Masqueerade:

Victorian and Neo-Victorian Cross-temporal Tropes and Queer Cultural Imaginaries





JOSEFINE MAI ESKILDSEN
STUDYNR.20194317

THEA GRAVEN JENSEN
STUDYNR.20164794

AALBORG UNIVERSITET

Summary

This master's thesis, titled "Masqueerade: Victorian and Neo-Victorian Cross-temporal Tropes and Queer Cultural Imaginaries" examines the use of masquerade as a queering device, as well as the explicit neo-Victorian and implicit Victorian encodings of sexuality, gender, and class; as well as exploring the cross-textual use of 'queer' and the queer possibilities in the open endings of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002).

The theoretical and contextual chapter provides this thesis' framework within the fields of Victorian, neo-Victorian, feminist, and queer studies. It outlines the genres of the thesis' analysis material, primary elements of neo-Victorian historiography, queer theory in relation to identity, subjectivity, performativity and temporality, as well as the relationship and influence between queer theory and the Victorian era.

In the first analytical chapter, this thesis analyses Amy Dillwyn's 1884 novel *Jill* as a subtextual queer Bildungsroman. The novel utilises cross-class masquerade to encode same-sex desire and affinity in the protagonist's relationships to other women as well as depicting the unconventional gendered behaviour in its protagonist and the complexities of cross-class relationships between women.

The second analytical chapter focuses on analysing Sarah Waters' neo-Victorian debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), and its exploration and representation of gender performativity, sexuality, and cross-class identity masquerade. The novel uses the genre of the Victorian Bildungsroman to frame its protagonist's self-discovery and emotional development with the

intention of reinscribing female same-sex subjectivities into the historiographical narrative of the nineteenth-century.

In the third analysis chapter, this thesis undertakes Sarah Waters' third neo-Victorian novel *Fingersmith* (2002) as another example of writing female queer subjectivities into the narrative space of neo-Victorian historiography. The novel employs masquerade into the Victorian sensation plot by means of double deception, cross-class pretence and performance, homoerotic and homoromantic discovery, and further contrasting notions of being and performing identity.

The first comparative analysis considers the cross-temporal use of the word 'queer' in Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*. Despite a difference in frequency, the use of 'queer' in the three novels primarily reflect the nineteenth-century meanings of the word, denoting oddness and peculiarity. However the two neo-Victorian novels also use it metonymically in regards to the word's modern meaning, while the few times it is used in *Jill* all relate to significant homosocial relationships and thus fits a possible reading of interpretive sexual and gendered queerness.

Focused on the queer possibilities and imaginaries in the novel's three respective open endings, the second comparative analysis demonstrates the suggestive nature of the deliberate happy and open endings in regards to queer futurity. Having all their protagonists reach an emotional maturity, the ambiguity of the novels' textual conclusions allow for the envisioning of an affirmative future for all the novels' protagonists, whether or not the texts explicitly state or allude to queerness beyond their textual conclusions.

This thesis final chapter concludes its exploration of the use of masquerade in Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002), proving the success of the literary device in queering identitarian and performative notions, as well as affirming the multiplicity of possible queer relational imaginaries across past, present, and future boundaries. This thesis also suggests how interpretive readings of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* can reveal the likelihood of same-sex subjectivities, relations, love and desire existing in the nineteenth-century. It further concludes how Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* reappropriates the Victorian genres to narratively reclaim a queer past, in addition to also position and affirm agency, authenticity, and the existence of queer subjectivities and communities across time.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> "And my heart beat a little fast then, to think she might have noticed something queer there." (Waters *Fingersmith* 68)

It is generally acknowledged that, for the majority of literary history, women have not occupied any or much space. Feminist scholarship has done an insurmountable amount of work to change this. Similarly, same-sex desire and love between women has not existed in the literary canon. Those places where such desire and love is now agreed to exist in older texts have been dug out, read into, and interpreted through textual "possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" (Sedgwick *Tendencies* 8).

As culture shifts and changes in regards to what is accepted, so does cultural productions' inclusion and exclusion of specific narratives and subjectivities. Over the course of the twentieth century, literature started to include, and make, explicit female same-sex desire and love in a myriad of different ways. From the tragic, to the pulpy and camp, to the happy and affirmative. Entwined with this, literature not only wrote women loving women into its present-day texts, it also began to write them into fictive historical narratives, reclaiming a space in the past that had so far seemed nigh on devoid of them, apart from the occasional deviation from the heterosexual and cisgender norm. This thesis bridges the gap between Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) from the nineteenth-century and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002) from the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century. It connects these three texts across a temporal divide, suggesting a literary affiliation between female queer texts.

Throughout this thesis, we will employ different terms and descriptions, most notably ‘queer’ both as an adjective and as a verb. When used as an adjective we understand ‘queer’ to designate non-normative sexual or gender identity, whereas when used as a verb, such as ‘queering’, we understand it as a practice that questions and challenges traditional and established assumptions about sexual and gendered behaviours, identities, and beliefs. While this thesis is focused on women in particular, it simultaneously acknowledges that queer sexualities and identities expand and challenge conventional, Victorian and contemporary, understandings of both femininity and masculinity. As such, ‘queer’ captures both the specificity and indeterminacy that we wish to investigate in *Jill*, *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*.

Another set of terms we will use in this thesis is two genre references, those being the Bildungsroman and the sensation novel, as all three of our chosen texts engage and participate in the styles, themes, and modes from these two genres. Furthermore, as our title states, the term ‘masquerade’ is of importance to this thesis. According to *Oxford Reference*, the term ‘masquerade’, while frequently used in academia, “has not really been developed into a fully fledged concept” (*Oxford Reference*). Notably, it is also called “a precursor to the much more sophisticated concept of performativity” (ibid.). In addition to this, we understand and use the term to signal an active disguise and pretence. This coincides with thinking of masquerade as a literary plotting device. We also see the masquerade as a vessel for suggesting a place of intimacy where anything could take place, as we will further explore in our analyses of *Jill*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith*. In earlier texts, masquerade instigated social change and challenged the stability of social structure. Used as a literary device, masquerade brings a new level of explicating social disruption, and allows the “destabilization of the ordinary, a disequilibrium at the heart of things” (Castle 120).

This thesis is aware of the complex intersections between concepts of sexuality and ideas of gender, as well as the terminology used in regards to these concepts. The politics of gender are, after all, a significant factor in looking at representations of female same-sex relations, positions, and desire. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, gender and sexuality are inextricable from one another and, at the same time, distinctive (*Epistemology* 30). Consequently, this thesis' theoretical framework emerges from a convergence between feminism and queer theory. Our analyses and standpoint is in conversation with, and building on, the work of theorists within multiple interdisciplinary fields of feminist studies, gay and lesbian studies, queer studies, to just name a few, many of who have argued in different ways that both feminism and queer theory are useful, but incomplete when or if adopted separately. They are, as Linda Garber writes, "two terms that are mutually implicated" (L. Garber 1).

Advocates for the inclusion of gender when considering the history of sexuality situate female homoeroticism within feminist discourse. Within the academy, there are multiple existing and potential frictions between 'queer' and 'lesbian'. Clara Bradbury-Rance has observed how "the lesbian's delayed and uneasy path towards visibility has coincided with queer theory's dominance in the academic study of sexuality" (Bradbury-Rance 1). Lesbian feminist criticism usually views heterosexuality as a privileged position in a patriarchal society. Heterosexuality in conjunction with the constructed notion of ideal femininity can be, and used to be, used to control and regulate women. Female same-sex interest leads to relationships and communities between and among women with no dependence on men. Therefore, the existence of such interests stands as a threat to a male-dominated society and would result in cultural anxiety and turmoil.

Both Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) and Sarah Waters' two neo-Victorian novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002), are situated at a time in the late nineteenth-century where the advent of sexology and the proliferation of discourse, through which

homosexuality would be named, had yet to fully occur. All three novels are therefore situated prior to, or on the cusp of, what Sedgwick describes as the "shift in European thought, from viewing same-sex sexuality as a matter of prohibited and isolated genital *acts*... to viewing it as a function of stable definitions of *identity*" (*Epistemology* 83 emphasis in original). The various relationships and community constellations in the novels are indicative of the way in which gender ideology of the period constructs sexually segregated spaces and cultivates, albeit inadvertently, female homosocial bonds. All three novels present hierarchical female communities of mistresses and maids, nurses and patients, or mothers and daughters. Within these spaces certain kinds of intimacies between women are mobilised and encouraged. The desires enacted within these spaces, most often relegated to the domestic sphere, remain invisible to the public world. All same-sex practices between men, both in public and in private, were prohibited under Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 (Dryden "A Short History"). Compared to this harsh anti-gay legislation, sexual practices between women remained untouched and hence rendered invisible in legal terms (ibid.). The experience of queer men and queer women, not to forgo queer trans and non-binary people, differed enormously, since queerness and non-heteronormative behaviour endangered the ability to act in accordance to the expectations and norms assigned to the gender binary.

As noted previously, the word 'queer' is fitting and suitable for use in this thesis, as it reveals sexualities and gender-expressions and identities as fractured and fluid. The *Oxford English Dictionary* recognises 'queer' as describing "a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to, or that challenges, traditional … ideas of sexuality and gender" (*OED*). While late-nineteenth century usage of the word ranged from denoting the quaint to the devilish, Susan Lanser notes that, with its "uncertain origin" and "shifting syntax" (Lanser 923). 'Queer' has been used for over half a millennium to express "the strange and the suspect, the criminally counterfeit, the ill and the inebriate, the disconcerting, the interfering, the merely

puzzling, or ridiculous - and all this even before sexual messages seized the term" (Lanser 923). Historically, it is said that "The first account of the word 'queer' being used as a slur is by Lord Douglas, Ninth Marquess of Queensbury, where he denounced his son's supposed lover, [the then-Prime Minister,] Lord Rosebery, with the phrase 'snob queers like Rosebery' in the late 1800s" (Mandal 1). Though it was not until further into the twentieth century, as by the 1950s, the word had undergone and was undergoing a process of pejoration that changed the general understanding of it to that of a homophobic slur. Afterwards, it was not until "the late eighties that a movement started to re-appropriate the word" (Mandal 1).

In recent years, 'queer' has been, more often than not, used as "an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" (Jagose 1). With the increased use of 'queer' for individuals to identify and express themselves, the LGBTQ+ acronym has also had to change to accommodate this. Abhilasha Mandal notes that,

> [t]he youth that I interact with find a lot of freedom in the word 'queer' [...] Unlike words like 'gay' or 'nonbinary' or 'transgender,' which only encompass one facet of someone's life —gay including someone's sexuality, transgender including someone's gender —the term 'queer' encompasses both someone's sexuality and gender. (1)

This thesis considers 'queer' as a word that reaches for openness and refuses to settle for one singular meaning. It is why we have chosen to primarily use that instead of other identity- and sexuality markers under the LGBTQ+ acronym.

Properly emerging in the 1990s, queer theory sprang out of the fields of lesbian, gay, and gender studies. There are many interpretations, applications, and uses of queer theory, but broadly, it can be taken as the study of gender practices, identities, and sexualities that exist outside the cisgender and heterosexual norms. Queer theorists and thinkers are critical of essentialist views on sexuality and gender, and view these concepts as constructed social

and cultural phenomena. For queer theory, sexuality and gender is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional power, which interact to shape the ideas of what is normative and what is deemed ‘deviant’ at any particular moment, and which then operate under the rubric of what is otherwise deemed ‘other’.

Using the notion of queer cultural imaginaries, both explicit and implicit, those that actively engage and those that passively imply, this thesis engages with the same temporal approach to seeing queerness in literature that Emily Datskou argues for in her 2023 dissertation “Queer(ly) Lingering in Nineteenth-Century British Literature”, which is “one that resists the notion that because queer identities as we know them today became more visible in the twentieth century than in previous centuries, those periods before the twentieth century are not as queer” (Datskou 14). It is also partially in response to this temporal notion of queerness that Datskou criticises, that we have chosen both a Victorian novel, as well as two neo-Victorian novels. Therefore, we cannot wholly place this thesis within either Victorian studies or neo-Victorian studies, as we operate within both. As Jerome de Groot notes, “[f]iction undermines the totalizing effects of historical representation and points out that what is known is always partial, always a representation” (de Groot 57). Historical novels exist in a complicated position in relation to the present and the past “defined as much by the period it evokes as by the period it is written in” (Hadley 6). This is important to bear in mind when considering the texts in this thesis. Dillwyn’s *Jill* is a text of its time, while Waters’ two neo-Victorian novels implement the Victorian past, in a contemporary cultural context, while simultaneously accepting and working within the Victorian past’s original frame of reference. For theoretical and contextual purposes we will forthwith give a brief run-through of neo-Victorian historiography, queer subjectivity and performativity, as well as queer theory, queer temporality, and their relation in regards to the nineteenth-century, all relevant to the analytical, interpretive, comparative, and discursive focus of this thesis.

Thesis statement

Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002) suggest and illustrate identitarian and performative themes of sexuality, gender, and class. Whereas *Jill* is a Victorian novel, and thus operates within a culturally heteronormative context and could not make queerness explicit, *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* are neo-Victorian novels, and can therefore reimagine and reinscribe overt queer subjectivities into their narratives. All three novels, however, use masquerade as a literary device in queering their narrators and narratives, whereto they also engage with queer relationality and temporality. Furthermore, the novels all adhere to, challenge, and interrogate Victorian notions of gendered behaviour and sexual identity.

A note on the texts and their authors

The first text in this thesis is by Welsh author Amy Dillwyn (1845-1935). Born into "one of the most prominent families in the industrial development of Swansea and Wales" (Hopkins-Williams "Celebrating International Women's Day"), Dillwyn was a pioneering female industrialist, turning her father's bankrupt spelter works into a profitable concern. As well, as renowned for her work for social justice, supporting workers' rights, and campaigning for the vote as a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies ("The Life and Fiction of Amy Dillwyn"). According to an article on Dillwyn by Bethan Hopkins-Williams, Dillwyn's letters and diaries show an internal conflict about belonging to the landed gentry, her family being one of affluence and enterprise, while she also felt the

plight of the industrial working class and actively worked to support and give aid to them. Her literary work also reflects this 'social' conscience in her blunt and realistic prose and plots. During her life, Dillwyn published six novels between the years 1880 and 1892. Also inflecting her writings to "argue for the independence of woman and to rebel against the conformity women of all classes were expected to follow", Dillwyn's work is now regarded as important in "the development of lesbian literature" (Hopkins-Williams, "Celebrating International Women's Day") as they partly reflect, in a quasi-autobiographical sense, Dillwyn's own experiences as a queer woman living in the Victorian, and later the Edwardian and interwar, period.

Leading, and primary, scholar on Dillwyn, Professor Kirsti Bohata, points out, that we cannot know how Amy Dillwyn herself understood her own sexuality and gender identity "though she clearly relished being 'different' (a word she uses often in her life writing)" (Bohata "A Queer-Looking Lot" 122). Dillwyn's personal letters and diaries help shed light on a person who was clearly thinking about their sexuality and gender, but within the now-debunked framework of nineteenth century sexology, which understood same-sex desire or 'inversion' as an element of gender 'inversion'. Bohata quotes Dillwyn's own diary, wherein Dillwyn imagined a genderqueer or transgender identity in response to her attraction to another woman: "My own belief is that I'm half a man & the male half of my nature fell in love with her years ago & can't fall out of it again. I care for her romantically, passionately, foolishly, & try as I may, I cannot get over it" (qtd. in Bohata " A Queer-Looking Lolt" 122). Despite this, Bohata also notes that Dillwyn did not completely equate same-sex desire to either a gendered inversion or a transgender identity. To show this, Bohata provides another quote from Dillwyn's diaries, written a few months before the previous journal entry. In this second entry, Dillwyn writes about the way a woman falls in love with another woman:

> [P]erhaps the strangest feature in a woman's character is the way she can fall in love with another woman & be true to that love. I have made a fool of myself that way & I can see other women do it – & there's an inconsistency in that falling in love – it is weak & foolish but the steadfastness of the affection is strong. (qtd. in Bohata "A Queer-Looking Lot" 122)

Dillwyn fell in love with Olive Talbot, whom she would often refer to as her 'wife', adopting the language of marriage as many other women-loving women at the time did (Marcus 20). Bohata reasons this was to "signify Olive's central emotional, social, and erotic significance to her, though she left no record of what term she might have used for herself in this relationship" ("A Queer-Looking Lot" 122).

Couple this with contemporary newspaper reports about Dillwyn that were as much about her success as a businesswoman as they were about her unorthodox clothing choices and the fact that she publicly smoked cigars, all attributed to a more masculine behaviour and expression. While Dillwyn did not wear trousers, "her practical skirt and mannish jacket, stout boots and a Trilby hat, not to mention the cigar, underlined her rejection of the role of [a] passive Victorian lady" (Bohata "An original thinker"). Dillwyn's iconoclastic combination of public gender-mixed clothing and private notions of a homosocial and homoerotic nature, supports our inclusion of her work in this queer-oriented thesis. We will not assign a more specific sexual or gender identity to Dillwyn than the malleable 'queer' as doing so, in our minds, would be ahistoric and disingenuous.

It is Amy Dillwyn's fourth novel *Jill* (1884) that this thesis will analyse, as well as compare and discuss in relation to Sarah Waters' two neo-Victorian novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002). First published by MacMillan in two volumes in July 1884, *Jill* was a great commercial success as it quickly sold out and received multiple reprints, the

first being in September and then December of that same year. The second reprint was a one-volume edition. Once again, as a one-volume edition, the novel was reprinted in December 1887 as a part of MacMillan's Colonial Library series (Bohata *Jill* viii). The multiple contemporary reprintings of the novel makes a case for its Victorian relevance and proves the novel's initial popularity. In 2013, *Jill* was republished by Honno, with an introduction by noted Dillwyn scholar, Kirsti Bohata, as "part of an attempt to recover the author as an important figure in women's literature and history, as well as a welcome contribution to the maturing field of the study of Welsh literature in English" (Taylor 144). In her introduction to the republished edition, Bohata stated "[c]ontemporary reviewers identified Jill as 'a woman of the period' and Dillwyn is an early example of a New Woman writer" (Bohata *Jill* viii), further cementing Dillwyn's status as a Victorian proto-feminist preoccupied by the frustrations surrounding the social, professional, and educational boundaries imposed on women. Despite *Jill*'s contemporary commercial success, the novel has still fallen to the wayside in lieu of other literary works from the period, like the Brontës, Collins, Dickens, or Gaskell, to name a few. However, given its relatively recent publication and its inclusion, alongside its contemporarily anticipated sequel *Jill and Jack* (1887) and other of Dillwyn's novels, in The Gutenberg Project, *Jill* seems to have gained some ground in returning to both popular literary and academic interest and relevance.

Her fourth novel, Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* follows the eponymous protagonist Jill as she grows up to become a most unconventional heroine. The only child of the cold and indifferent Sir Anthony Trecastle and his wife, Jill grows up, largely left to her own devices save for a steady turn-over of nurses and maids that she does not care for. After her mother's death, Jill's father decides to bring her along on his travels to the continent, where Jill's education turns unconventional as she learns multiple languages, how to cook foreign meals and the ability to find her way around any train station. However, during their travels, Jill's

father enters into an ill-advised marriage to a self-serving widow, whereupon they return to the family estate in England. Here, Jill quickly discovers her dislike for her new stepmother, and soon thereafter, she runs away from her childhood home to make her own way in London, her sense for adventure fuelling her along. In London, Jill decides to don the masquerade of a maid to make a living. Learning the bare necessities to pose in her new role, Jill forges herself a character and enters service. She finds a position as a maid at the home of a young girl of her own age Kitty Mervyn, whom she had already met during her and her father's travels, and whom she had already taken an unusual interest in. She then goes on a European tour with Kitty and Kitty's aunt, but her forged character is soon discovered and Jill is subsequently fired. Not one to feel down on her luck for too long, Jill repeats her success at forging a character and gaining another position, this time as the maid, but primarily dog-walker, for an eccentric miss. However, Jill's deception is once again discovered, and she finds herself without a job. In a quick turn of events, Jill is run down by a carriage in the street, only to wake up in the hospital with a broken leg and no real identity or physical possessions to call her own. While recovering in the hospital she befriends the nurse Sister Helena, and through this relationship Jill begins to mature on a more intellectual basis. Just as Jill is about to leave the hospital, Sister Helena is unexpectedly killed by another patient, and the potential for Jill's newfound friendship to grow is cut short. Exiting the hospital, Jill discovers that her father has died in the meantime, and has left everything to her as his heir. Deciding she has had enough of making her own living, she returns to her social position as a 'lady's squire' and the novel ends with Jill musing on her new independent and affluent position in society, her ideas for her immediate future, and a recollection of the person from her past adventures whom she still holds an unusual interest in.

Alongside Dillwyn's *Jill*, we have chosen to analyse and examine two historical fiction novels set in the Victorian era, written by Sarah Waters. Born in 1966, Waters is a Welsh novelist with an oeuvre heavy with accolades and acclaim. Most noticeably, Waters was appointed an OBE, Officer of the Order of the British Empire, in 2019 for services to literature ("About the Author"). Caroline Koegler and Marlene Tronicke notes how the response from queer readers to Waters' neo-Victorian trilogy; *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002), indicate the extent to which queer readers had previously "been denied historical visibility and life-affirming, affective-sensual self-recognition in a 1990s culture still heavily invested in understandings of queerness as failure, pathology, and disease" (Koegler and Tronicke 1-2). With inspiration from her own academic career, including a PhD in gay and lesbian historical fiction, and her own personal experiences as a lesbian, Waters wanted to write a novel "with a clear lesbian agenda", noting that said agenda is "right there at the heart of the books" (Akbar). As Kaye Mitchell notes, Waters' "self-consciousness about the construction of history and the 'meanings' of the past has led to Waters' early novels being characterized as 'neo-Victorian'" (Kaye Mitchell 7). All three novels have "popularised a literary approach of queer writing-back to heteronormative historiography", wherein they imaginatively (re-)inscribe "into accounts of 'the Victorians' queer subjectivities, affects, attachments, crises, and ambitions" (Koegler and Tronicke 1). As Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble also note "in texts such as these, history is not just revisited but revised, and the form of the nineteenth century novel not reproduced, but reworked and the reworking is informed by a (contemporary) political impulse" (Armitt and Gamble 141).

While this thesis does only focus on two of the three novels in Waters' trilogy, we still want to acknowledge *Affinity* (1999), even if it is not further discussed or included in the subsequent pages of this thesis. Both of the novels we do consider, *Tipping the Velvet* and

Fingersmith, are set in the mid to late nineteenth century, with all the perceived impossibilities of the Victorian queer woman's condition, while written and published at a time where said queer woman's possibilities seemed, and in many ways was and is, far more open and free. Self-describing her writing process as filled with "glee [and] diabolical delight" (Waters *Fingersmith* "Afterword" 551) and wanting to make it "fun and sexy and fairly intelligent about the way it was making us think about the past" (WalesOnline "Author Sarah Waters on being that 'lesbian writer'"), Waters picks and chooses, reproduces and revamps narrative and aesthetic devices and imaginaries from the past. All of these devices and imaginaries are deliberately selected to represent or reinsert specific things - in Waters' case, the representation and obvious encoding of love and desire between women.

Tipping the Velvet was Sarah Waters' debut, published by Virago Press in 1998 to much commercial and critical acclaim, winning multiple literary awards and "hailed as ground-breaking by readers and critics alike" (Koegler and Tronicke 1). Mirroring the form of the Victorian novel, *Tipping the Velvet* tells the story of Nancy King, from her humble beginnings and queer awakening as an oyster girl in the seaside town of Whitstable to the music-halls of London, its sordid renting streets, the licentious spaces of the Sapphic echelons of society, and, finally, to the socialist communities of the working class. Nancy's story is split into three parts, each giving her vastly different experiences of queer life, both closeted in the wings of the music-halls and in the shadows of London's streets, asd well as out in the secretive upper-class Sapphic circles and the queer underground scene of the capital. Through the seven years covered by the novel, Nancy must mature and decide who she wants to be, as she discovers she cannot just passively allow external circumstances and happenstances to dictate her life. The novel follows her through burgeoning love and heartbreak, with the repressed Kitty Butler, to recovery and sexual development at the home

of Diana Lethaby, to then eventually finding community and true love with Florence Banner in the working-classes of Bethnal Green.

Waters' last neo-Victorian novel *Fingersmith* was published in 2002. *Fingersmith* cemented Sarah Waters' authorial success, winning her several awards and accolades, continuously garnering critical attention from its debut on the literary stage to this day. A return to the three-part structured plot, recognisably Victorian, the novel is alternately told from the first-person perspective of the London-born and raised orphan Sue Trinder and the oppressed and obscure lady Maud Lilly. Orphaned shortly after birth, Sue grows up in the home of a baby-farmer, Mrs. Sucksby, among forgers and thieves, called fingersmiths, where she is recruited by a mutual acquaintance 'Gentleman' to con the wealthy heiress, Maud Lilly out of her inheritance. Arriving at Maud and her uncle's secluded home in the country, Sue and Maud unexpectedly forge an affiliation that turns to mutual attraction and romance. At the seemingly conclusive point of their con, Sue is taken for Maud, and is unwillingly committed to a mental asylum in Maud's place. At this point, Sue realises that Gentleman and Maud were actually the ones conning her. The second part of the novel turns the narrative over to Maud, where we discover her history and reasonings for entering the con with Gentleman. After leaving Sue at the asylum, Maud travels to London with Gentleman, believing that they will shortly split her inheritance and go their separate ways. However, once in London, the question of identity is once again posed. This time, the connection between Sue and Maud is revealed to date back to their infancy. In the third part, the narrative returns to Sue as she enters the asylum, where she suffers horrendous mistreatment from the matrons to the point of questioning her own identity as everyone keeps insisting she *is* Maud Lilly. She immediately begins plotting her escape and, quite by luck and ingenuity, she manages to break out of the asylum and make her way back to London, where she imagines she will be welcomed into the disbelieving but open arms of Mrs. Sucksby and the

rest of the people she left behind. She is intent on getting some form of revenge on Gentleman and Maud, especially smarting from the latter's deception and her still burning desire and growing love for her. Upon her return to her childhood home, Sue and Maud are swept up in a finale of bloody and fatal proportions, resulting in Gentleman's death and the public trial and hanging of Mrs. Sucksby, and then finally the last reveal that clocks both Sue and Maud into their true parentage. Despite all they have been through and done, or initially planned to do, to one another, the two young women find each other at the end. With everything now out in the open, they confess their mutual love. The novel ends with them seemingly entering onto a life path together. In addition to its many Dickensian twists and turns, form the seedy slums of London to the gloomy gothic mansion, Briar, to the captive cells of the mental asylum, and the underbelly of polite society, *Fingersmith* also engages with themes of eroticism, pornography, and gendered exploitation of the Victorian period.

Both novels have been adapted for screen and stage, the first being Andrew Davies' BBC adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* in 2002. Aisling Walsh adapted *Fingersmith* as a miniseries for the BBC in 2005, turning it into an arguably conventionally aesthetic period drama. In contrast, *Fingersmith* was "more radically transported to 1930s Korea under Japanese occupation in Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016)" (Koegler and Tronick 3). Both *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* have gotten stage adaptations, the first was Amanda Whittington's adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* in 2009, which was showcased by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Both novels also then saw their stage adaptations in 2015, with Alexa Junge's *Fingersmith* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Laura Wade's music-hall style *Tipping the Velvet* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith and the Edinburgh Lyceum.

State of the Art

There is not a lot of existing scholarship on either the life or the work of Amy Dillwyn, however this does appear to be changing. The College of Arts and Humanities Recent Research Project at Swansea University has an ongoing research project, aptly-titled "The Life and Fiction of Amy Dillwyn" led by the previously mentioned Professor Kirsti Bohata. The project is expected to result in a monograph on Dillwyn, presenting

> an in-depth study of an important lesbian figure and uses personal papers to revise the suppressed biography of Amy Dillwyn. These papers, alongside contemporary literary theories, will inform a reading of her fiction as an example of 'lesbian' literature. In addition to a focus on sexuality, the book will discuss Dillwyn's 'feminism' and her 'nationalism' It will reflect on her sometimes troubled sense of belonging to a minority ethnic group and, at the same time, to an oppressive exploitative class of landowners and politicians. ("The Life and Fiction of Amy Dillwyn")

Apart from one 1987 biography of Dillwyn by David Painting, and a few reviews of his book, as well as one review of *Jill* (Taylor), an academic search for criticism on Dillwyn only results in one thesis "Welsh Literature in English and the New Woman: Amy Dillwyn's Early Novels" by Eunai Sung published in Korean in the *Journal of English Studies* in Korea, and otherwise only a handful of critical or popular articles by Kirsti Bohata. Bearing this in mind, we have elected to include Dillwyn's *Jill* in this thesis to both support her relevance to the fields of feminist, Victorian, queer, and literary criticism, as well as illustrate the cross-temporal elements of queerness between the fiction of the Victorians and the historical fiction of twentieth- and twenty-first century neo-Victorianism.

Unlike Dillwyn's body of work, Sarah Waters' oeuvre has seen consistent scholarly interest. In addition to numerous articles and dissertations, academic research to this day includes two edited collections, the first being *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (2013) by Kaye Mitchell, the second being *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms* (2016) by Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan is also the author of a monograph on Waters: *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics* (2017). Amongst a plethora of themes, scholars and critics have investigated the ways Waters' neo-Victorian trilogy engages with their own agenda of questioning and queering normative notions of history and the power structures of historical discourse (Armitt and Gamble; Boehm; de Groot; Murphy; Wallace), as well as the novels' relationship to feminism (Kaplan; Muller; Schaff). Other academic investigations have gone into how the novels re-appropriate heteronormative understandings of family and domesticity from a queer perspective (Yates); or how the novels appropriates traditionally male-produced pornography from and for the female queer gaze (Armitt; K. Miller; O'Callaghan "The Grossest Rakes of Fiction"; Onega). Lastly, Waters' novels "frequently exceed existing literary categories and the tension of the politics of lesbian feminism and queer theory more generally" (O'Callaghan *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics*). As indicated by the continuing cross-field critical conversations sparked by Waters' works and the cross-genre and cross-cultural proliferation of adaptations, these novels remain and continue to be relevant in the fields of queer neo-Victorian studies.

Theory and Context

Notes on genre

According to John R. Maynard, "whenever we identify some qualities that make [...] works of art resemble each other and give works possessing these qualities a name, we have produced a genre" (Maynard 279). Maynard's definition is sufficiently broad enough to cover the two main genres we will look at, as well as also include other minor generic themes. The two primary genres relevant to our considerations of *Jill*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith* are those of the Bildungsroman and the sensation novel. The latter, some may argue, does not constitute a defined literary genre at all. However, in the framework of this thesis, we find traces of both the Bildungsroman and sensational fiction. Given that "once in play, genre becomes history; it becomes part of culture" (Maynard 279), genre is worth noting when it comes to inquiries into historical and historiographical texts.

The Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman "applies more broadly to fiction detailing personal development or educational maturation" (Childs and Fowler 18). Kathleen Kuiper notes that the maturation process relates to the "how and why the protagonist develops, both morally and psychologically" (Kuiper 29). However, both definitions put forward by Childs and Fowler, and Kathleen Kuiper leave something to be desired. We therefore consider M.H. Abrams' definition superior in terms of specificity and usefulness as he states: "[t]he subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis— into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (Abrams 193).

Despite our above attempt at a brief definition overview, the Bildungsroman is a debated term in secondary academic literature, precisely because there is not one sufficient and exhaustive definition of the genre. The term is infamously difficult to translate while keeping its full meaning intact. As Daniel Doughtery notes, the many contradictions around determining the definition of the Bildungsroman is only problematic if "we think of the, in this case, Victorian, Bildungsroman as a dominant and cohesive narrative form rather than a narrative form that became dominant over many decades'" (Doughtery 3). Doughtery argues that the genre should more aptly be considered the "ultimate aggregate of myriad forms and plots organised and presented as a linear narrative, focalised through the protagonist" (3). According to Michael Ormsbee, the portrayal of the development of an individual whose 'protagonicity' is never in question is key to the Bildungsroman (Ormsbee 1959). This 'protagonicity' "refers to the right to occupy a dominant position within a hierarchical network of character" (Ormsbee 1959). Doughtery's argument continues this as it hinges on how the protagonist is the "keystone for the entire text" without whom the Bildungsroman would be formless and "its manifold threads would collapse into futility and meaninglessness" (3). When it comes to the Victorian Bildungsroman, the plotting reaffirms the primacy of the heroine, and the genres and modes that the plotting is based on are authorial contrivances meant to keep the protagonist's centrality safeguarded against the possibility of usurpation.

Considering that the Bildungsroman is a genre emphatically associated with Victorian literature, the specificity of Abrams' definition is integral. The Victorian novel is famous for stories following characters through their lives, depicting and bearing witness to their experiences of life's challenges, often concluding in either marriage or death. Calling the Bildungsroman a 'portmanteau term' (Maynard 281), the Bildungsroman's flexibility and diversity is the reason for its popularity and frequent use by nineteenth-century authors, as

the genre offered a space wherein they could “try out devices for meaning” (300). Leading them to explore individual interaction with their changing socio-cultural world, emblematic of the changing world of the Victorians themselves.

Sensation fiction

While the Bildungsroman steadily grew in popularity and frequency through the late eighteenth-century and into the nineteenth-century, sensational fiction was a Victorian “literary and cultural phenomenon that took the newly expanded novel-reading public by storm” (Hughes 260). Encapsulating the essence of sensation fiction, Winifred Hughes explains it as “a pervasive mode of confronting and processing hidden fears, anxieties, and obsessions behind the dominant Victorian cultural institutions” (260). Sensationalist fiction as a genre exists by the authorial knowledge of the generic restrictions and characteristics they want to write in, and then subverting said restrictions and characteristics. Thus, one can say that ‘the sensational’ is not a genre in and of itself, but rather a form of meta categorisation of works that exists to upset and challenge normative notions. According to Hughes, the premise of the sensational genre was that life “in the Victorian middle-class society, was less tame, less ordinary, less predictable than its readers may have liked to suppose” (264). Frequently taking place in interior domestic spaces, inhabited by character types recognisable from other domestic fictions, sensation fiction’s shock effect depended on and succeeded by “the plight of such average, respectable citizens caught up in sensational circumstances beyond their ability to control” (Hughes 265).

One can argue that the sensation novel and the Bildungsroman are comparable in their multistrand of qualities, grouping similarities, and meanings of significance. However, in such a comparison, the sensation novel does not have “the narrative coherence and the

social cohesion that appeared so effortless - and so thoroughly naturalized - in the mainstream novel" (Hughes 263).

Neo-Victorian historiography

There are blurred temporal boundaries and a non-sequential narrative of history found in writings about the Victorian past. The Victorian period is ideal for practising queer history because of the era's complicated relationship with modernity and postmodernism. The relationship between the long nineteenth century and subsequent periods is not as simple as a succession from one to another. It does not lie in the distant past and refuses an absolute break with the present. For Cora Kaplan, the Victorian period is complicated as it could be "the origin of late twentieth-century modernity, its antithesis, or both at once" (Kaplan *Victoriana* 3).

In her essay "(Re)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts", Andrea Kirchknopf questions the naming of the type of fictional rewrites of the Victorians "[i]s it *Victoriana*, *Victoriographies*, *retro-*, *neo-* or *post-Victorian*?" (59). In agreement with Louise Hadley, this thesis uses the term 'neo-Victorian' as it "suggests that while the Victorian era is brought into contact with a new context, it is not subsumed within that new context" (Hadley 3). As we will subsequently show, neo-Victorianism mirrors queer theory's fluidity and self-reflexivity. The proliferation of terms for definition "reflects the variation within neo-Victorianism itself, both as a critical approach and a creative practice" (3). Noting something similar, Marie Luise Kohlke writes of neo-Victorianism as "in the process of crystallisation [...]; as yet its temporal and generic boundaries remain fluid and relatively open to experimentation by artists, writers and theorists alike" (Kohlke 1). Understanding neo-Victorian fictions in the broadest terms, these texts engage and "[share] a

concern with the Victorian past" (Hadley 4), however "the way that concern enters the fictional world can vary dramatically" (4). Some texts explicitly engage with the Victorian past via mediations through Victorian literature, while others draw on specific Victorian genre conventions, and some position themselves in relation to a certain Victorian intertext. Furthermore, there are texts that engage with nineteenth-century historical figures, as well as those that create fictional characters and events and use those to mediate an exploration of issues that were central to Victorian culture.

As Judith Johnston and Catherine Waters notes in their introduction to *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns* (2008), every period in history "adapts, rewrites, transforms earlier works" (2), and any such return to a past age "necessarily 'turn' it in new directions - whether in imaginative updatings [...] or in scholarship, as contemporary critics recontextualise a novel [...] in new ways in an effort to better understand Victorian culture" (2). To this we could add that, as the Victorian period has been so formative and influential for subsequent generations in both the twentieth and twenty-first century, that returning to it also helps us understand our present, as many of the imaginaries, stories, and reasonings we use today has roots going back to the Victorians. According to Johnston and Waters, fiction as a form of expression was used by the Victorians as a response to their changing society and worldview, and these responses engaged "with the various ideologies of the day - gender, race, class, to name but a few" (4). In the same edited collection of essays, Barbara Garlick also notes that "[t]he nineteenth century is no longer within living memory, but its artefacts and cultural treasures are still eminently accessible and will continue to provide us with material for critical and artistic exploitation well into this twenty-first century" (Garlick 194).

Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's seminal reference point for defining the field of neo-Victorianism is one that "self-consciously engage[s] with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4). Most

neo-Victorian scholars agree that large parts of neo-Victorian cultural production and criticism "share an awareness of their double ontological and epistemological status vis-á-vis the nineteenth and twentieth-/twenty-first centuries, and of what is at stake in involving dominant, i.e. normative, imaginings of 'the Victorians' whilst simultaneously interrogating them" (Koegler and Tronicke 8). Along the same lines, Andrea Kirchknopf also points out that "by creating a dialogue between narratives of the present day and the nineteenth century, strongly based on the concept of intertextuality, contemporary rewrites manage to supply different perspectives from the canonised Victorian ones" (Kirchknopf 54). According to Jerome de Groot neo-Victorian novels "work at an interface of cultural representation, social nostalgia, postmodernism and collective memory, engaging with the historical imaginary in complex and challenging fashion" (de Groot 60). Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble also note "in text such as these, history is not just revisited but revised, and the form of the nineteenth century novel not reproduced, but reworked and the reworking is informed by a (contemporary) political impulse" (Armitt and Gamble 141).

Once again, a question of definition and understanding of what the neo-Victorian phenomenon is, theories abound, from regressive theories based on Margaret Thatcher's ahistorical nostalgia for a supposed ideal Victorian past (Hadley 10) to more progressive ideas supported by the ways neo-Victorian novels often "challenges or critiques official historiographies (of the Victorian era)" (Kate Mitchell 6). Ann Heilmann and Mark Llwewllyn note that these progressive critiques presents alternate versions of the Victorians and their world by "represent(ing) marginalized voices, new histories of sexuality, (and) post-colonial viewpoints" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 165). Mark Llewellyn calls this the neo-Victorian novel's "democratizing impulse" (Llewellyn 167), agreeing with Kate Mitchell's notion that the neo-Victorian novel "moved away from high culture and included features previously invisible or excluded: women, the working and criminal classes and

non-Europeans" (Mitchell 165). Some neo-Victorian cultural production, in literature, in fiction, in film, in biography, in pastiche, portrays socially repressed, non-normative, and therefore transgressive desires and sexual practices. In representing these heteronormative meta-narrative challenging stories, neo-Victorianism adapts a historical period to a diversity of both old and new media. In so doing, neo-Victorianism naturally takes liberties that might seem "metaphorically, methodologically, or affectively queer" (Koegler and Tronicke 6). However, it is necessary to remember that neo-Victorianism has not always been consistently engaged in queerness, and so queer theory's intervention into neo-Victorian studies can stretch the field "beyond its current state of politics and concerns." (Koegler and Tronicke 9).

According to Kathleen Renk, neo-Victorian engagement with the Victorian "as an act of re-vision often takes the form of addressing the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed in the Victorian era" (Renk 3). By its nature, neo-Victorianism can deepen queer theory's own grappling with terminology as it regularly confronts the debates surrounding labelling or contrasting modern representation with historical conventions. Concerned as this thesis is, with notions of Victorian same-sex practices and their adaptations in neo-Victorian novel formats, it remains sensitive to the belief that sexuality, gender, and gender presentations is fluid, even though it is at odds with the general Victorian notions of binarisms, cis-genderism, or hegemonic masculinity. In our analyses, we consider the literary device of masquerade as a queer imaginary as well as the trope of the mistress and maid relationship as potentially subversive, deliberate, or fraught codings of 'queer', and how they tie in with historical and current understandings of gender and sexuality.

Queer identity, subjectivity, and performativity

Identity, subjectivity and gender are all terms that can be performed but the performativity of these terms can be controversial. In a 2011 interview with Big Think, Judith Butler argued that "it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start. I know it's controversial, but that's my claim" (1:22-1:36). Beyond what we individually can perform, there is sexuality. This has something to do with the authentic realm of the unconscious from which it emerges. In many ways, sexuality is something that belongs to a dimension that exceeds and is less accessible than those more coded concepts that we think of as gender or as identity in general. Theories of gender and sexuality have redefined the ways to think about culture and society, raising new questions about the construction of the gendered and sexualised subject (Butler *Gender Trouble* 6). It is especially noticeable with the ideas about performance and performativity as a means by which the body becomes a signifying system within social formations (ibid. 165). At the foundation of most gender and sexuality theories is a thoroughgoing critique of the subject and subjectivity.

The concept of the subject is closely linked to the concept of identity. Most gender and sexuality theorists understand identity as an ongoing process of construction, performance, appropriation, or mimicry (Mambrol). This is the idea that subjectivity and identity are not natural categories or essential features of human existence, unique and indivisible aspects of one's being; they are rather the material effects of the discourses and images that surround us. The crucial questions raised by gender and sexuality theorists have to do with agency and determination: Who or what determines the construction of gender and sexuality? How is social agency acquired and maintained by these constructions? Is one

constructed solely by social ideologies and institutions? In his later work, Foucault recognised the individual possessed a necessary freedom from power, which is "exercised only over free subjects […] and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised" (Foucault 790).

In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", Judith Butler says that gender is a thing we do through repeated stylised acts. Not a property, but an embodied event. Those acts get their meaning from a social world:

> Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler ibid. 519)

If not the, then one of the, most influential theorists to explore the idea of sexual and gender identity as a social performance, a site of power and discourse is Judith Butler, asking "[to] what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person?" (*Gender Trouble* 16). Alternatively to such naturalised regulatory practices, Butler developed a model of performativity, which they distinguished from a normative model of performance:

> [performance] presumes a subject, but [performativity] contests the very notion of the subject […] think about performativity as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names. Then I take a further step […] and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and

> recitation. So if you want the ontology of this, I guess performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. Performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed. (qtd. in Osborne "Gender as Performance" 111-112)

Butler argues that one's "internal core or substance" is a result of "acts, gestures and desire[s]" produced "*on the surface of* the body" (*Gender Trouble* 173 emphasis in original). Performaitivity is upsetting to any normative notions of identity as it highlights the constructedness of said notions, given that "the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporal signs and other discursive means" (ibid. 173). Arguably, performativity can be seen as the "ultimate expression of personal agency in a context of late modernity" (Mambrol), as any essentialist notions and understandings of the subject has been deconstructed or debunked.

Performativity is the consequences of both a construction process and the material sign of an authentic self. According to *Oxford Reference*, authenticity denotes the "condition of significant, emotionally appropriate living" (Oxford Reference). Living authentically often means living in accordance to one's own values and beliefs, which, taken to its full extent, affirms the autonomy and agency of the individual. Such agency and choice can also circle back to performativity again, considering one might choose to perform a certain way adhering to the rules or expectations of others for a multiplicity of subjective reasons. These could be, but are not limited to, personal safety, personal ease, or personal enjoyment.

Notions of authenticity can also be raised when considering the term 'masquerade'. Here, one can ask what is masked by the masquerade? What is the masquerade a consequence of? What does it try to do? Is it a construction or a transgression, or both? Is it a means through which one can succeed at gaining something? Using drag as an example,

Butler suggests that there are three "contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical gender, gender identity, and gender performance" (*Gender Trouble* 175). Thus, one can act and perform in a certain way without this performance being an enactment of their identity. Similarly, a gender performance does not equate to one's anatomical gender, nor does one's anatomical gender influence one's gender identity. This thesis use of masquerade in its analyses of *Jill*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith* echoes some of these questions around masquerade, performativity, and the significance of divergent corporeal contingents.

Queer theory and queer temporality

Since its initial academic establishment in the 1990s, queer theory has been characterised by its resistance to clear definition. There is no established singular referent when it comes to queer theory's definition, history, subject matter(s), or discussions. In their 1995 essay, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?", Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner refuse to pin down queer theory, to explain what queer theory is, what it does, and what exactly it is queer theorists do. They maintain that "queer theory is not the theory of anything in particular" (344), as well as critiquing the way one scholar's work can often be "made a metonym for queer theory or queer culture" (345). David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz claim that this openness is one of queer theory's most appealing and potentially productive promises due to it remaining "open to a continuing critique of its [own] exclusionary operations." (3). In his 2014 essay, "The Afterlives of Queer Theory", Michael O'Rourke posits that the potential attraction of queer theory lies in its "very indefinability, its provisionality, its openness, and it's not-yet-here-ness" as well as occupying a "strange temporality" in its relationship to the past, present, and future.

Initially focused on literature and cultural studies, queer theory has come to define and provide strategies for a multitude of disciplines, fields of study, and praxis-based movements engaged in the workings of power, norms, and knowledge transfers. Queer theory has a broad stipulation of queer as an epistemological mode of "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner xxvi), a "deviation from normalcy" (Butler *Bodies That Matter* 176), as "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin 62), or an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" (Sedgwick *Tendencies* 8). It is queer theory's "welcomeness to its own revisability" (O'Rourke 26) and its "varied shapes, risks, ambitions, and ambivalences in various contexts" (Berlant and Warner 344) that makes it notably attractive to scholars as it welcomes them into queer theory as a vast field of possibilities. As Annamarie Jagose also notes, "as queer is unaligned with any specific identity category, it has the potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions" (Jagose "Queer Theory" 2). In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), Judith Butler argues that queer must be conceived as a category in constant formation to avoid simply replicating the normative claims of earlier lesbian and gay formations. They also note that what makes queer so efficacious is the way in which it understands the effects of its interventions as not singular and therefore not anticipatory in advance.

Often used in conjunction with psychoanalytic, materialist, feminist, and post-colonial readings of literary texts and narratives in contemporary contexts, queer readings, or 'queering', is at home in academia. Queer theory is an interdisciplinary field that encourages one to look at the world through new avenues. It is a way of thinking that dismantles traditional assumptions about gender and sexual identities, challenges traditional academic approaches, and fights against social inequality. For many academics, queer theory provides a lens through which they can 'queer' ideas and work within their own disciplines.

In this way, ‘queering’ is not always about imposing queerness on an area but about utilising the lenses of queer theory to imagine new, previously unidentified possibilities. Theorists, such as Jack Halberstam, have argued that ‘queer’ does not necessarily mean homosexuality or same-sex desire and interaction, and that it can also be used to indicate difference from dominant norms and structures, such as the creation of kinship communities, difference in the organisation of time and space, and difference in sexual and gender behaviours. Therefore, it is important to note and remember, that queer elements exist outside of non-normative sexualities, such as “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time,” (Halberstam 6).

Queer temporalities have a significant role in the realm of history, where traditional historicism usually views history as something that progresses in a single linear and sequential narrative. Caroline Dinshaw argues that queer history is not sequential, that “the absolute opposition cannot hold, the past cannot be used simply to ground the present” (Dinshaw 43). Despite Berlant and Warner’s claim that queer theory “has no precise bibliographic shape” (344), and because of its continual (re-)construction as both a discipline and a theoretical canon, queer theory as a field of study *does* have somewhat of a generally accepted temporal timeline and trajectory. There is, and has been, a general consensus that the cultural construction of hetero- and homosexuality can be traced to nineteenth-century theories and ideologies of gender and sexuality. However, Michael O’Rourke claims that queer theory has, since its beginnings, “been turned toward the future” (29) and Kadji Amin’s argument that queer studies is “driven by a set of temporal values that orient it [...] toward futurity” (*Disturbing Attachments* 38).

In his 2009 book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz plays around with concepts such as ‘queering one’s horizon’ in the hopes of achieving a glimpse of a queer utopia by understanding multiple temporalities such as the

one of futurity. In the introduction to the book he explains that: “My investment in utopia and hope is my response to queer thinking that embraces a politics of the here and now that is underlined by what I consider to be today's hamstrung pragmatic gay agenda. Some critics would call this cryptopragmatic approach tarrying with the negative. I would not” (10). Here, Muñoz comments on the well-established tradition of critical idealism, and the want for a more temporal timeline that breaks with the heteronormative society in the present. He goes on to state that queerness is always ‘in’ the horizon, but if queerness is to ever have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon (11). Muñoz makes the comment in regards to Lee Edelman’s thoughts of the future belonging to the children and so in Lee’s understanding, the future can not be genetically queer. Therefore, to Muñoz, it must always be in the horizon as “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (11). To further cement his claim, Muñoz comments in regards to his understanding of utopia being attuned to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s critique of reading practices, the major difference in focal points being, that Muñoz sees ‘queer’ as a glint of hope in the horizon. Muñoz is critical of the way that reading practices within the field of queer studies have become automatically paranoid and hypercritical. He describes the situation as having “led many scholars to an impasse wherein they cannot see futurity for the life of them” (12), and in this he blames anti-utopianism and, more often than not, also anti-relationality.

Muñoz sees beyond loss and self-destruction, proposing a politics of hope and queer utopia. For him, queerness “exists as an ideality” and “is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present” (1). Encouraging collectivity and idealism, he moves away from realism and negativity. Muñoz describes his approach as “I begin this study of the future in the present by turning to the past” (49). The idea of a queer futurity is based on being “as attentive to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present. This mode of queer critique depends on critical practices that stave off the failures of

imagination […]" (18), and these imaginations, and the ability to imagine create the opportunity for more complex temporal images of a modern society to exist.

By taking up space in the present, even when considered an 'other', this spatial claim also engages with the temporal imaginary, and creates glimpses and moments of a contact that Muñoz describes as "having a 'decidedly utopian function'" (55). These moments of contact help shift the narrative and make way for the imagining of a queer world and future. As an imaginary, this queer world and future is not yet in existence, but with its 'utopian function', it may be on the horizon, still just out of reach. There is no getting around the fact that the perfect utopian society does not and will never exist, as there will always be minorities less privileged than the majority. Throughout history, minorities have steadily gained more rights, exemplified in the LGBTQ+ movement and the increasing everyday acceptance queerness. Imagining a future is greatly helped along by the ability to imagine a past. By subscribing to a visionary politics of resurrecting forgotten queer lives for the sake of the living, people are reminded that queers have always existed. Illuminating possible queer interstices in history also validates a queer sense of futurity. This connected queer temporality between past, present, and future is necessary for the creation of queer imaginaries that feel both grounded in the past, giving queers a sense of temporal belonging and roots, as well as exhilarating in anticipating a future filled with hope and possibility.

Queer theory and the nineteenth century

According to Richard A. Kaye, much of the critical writing on queer theory in relation to Victorian studies has been influenced by Michel Foucault's theoretical writings on erotic relations and identity (Kaye 755). While Foucault argues that the history of sexuality is inevitably bound up in evolving discourses of power in the nineteenth century, he makes it

less clear the relationship between sexuality, literary discourse and the functions of power. In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault rarely mentions literary discourse, although it features significantly in other texts, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). However, according to Kadji Amin, the objects of study in Sedgwick's *Epistemology* are also "a negative reminder of the white and cisgender gay male, as well as canonical and literary origins of queer theory" (Amin "Genealogies of Queer Theory" 20), yet it has still been carried forward as a partially imaginary practice by those interested in "the generativity of literature, performance and art practices as sites of queer […] world-making, reparation, and alternatives" (20).

Arguably, the work of Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick form the cornerstones of early queer theory, and they both articulate the connection between the nineteenth century and queer theory. The nineteenth century was a period wherein identity formations and the institutional structures that have subsequently come to make up the foundations of queer theory, were negotiated and developed. With an increasing body of academic literature within the field, queer theory now boasts a plethora of specific studies of the many diverse forms of Victorian sexuality, concerned with working out the nuances of sexualised and gendered control and liberation in both public and private spheres. The nineteenth century was far more of an open and nuanced queer space than it is often given credit for. As Sharon Marcus argues: "our contemporary opposition between hetero- and homosexuality did not exist for the Victorians" (Marcus 19). Similarly, Jeffery Weeks also claims that,

> Victorian sexuality, like today's, was a patchwork of many different sexual cultures, some of which had long pre-histories, others of which were shaped within the rapidly shifting realities of Victorian society. There were radically disjunctive, and unequal, moral codes for women and men. The regulation of sexuality by church and state was

> often haphazard and patchy, with a variety of often different strategies rather than a single direction, though always taking for granted the male-dominated power structures which shaped sexual life. There was no final triumph of censorship or purity during the nineteenth century, whatever the efforts of the social morality crusaders. The continuing concern of moral conservatives over the flood of unexpurgated literature, street ballads, music-hall songs, dubious pamphlets and advertisements attests to their continuing presence as much as to the concern of the moralists. Far from being simply denied in the nineteenth century, sexuality acquired a peculiar significance in structuring ideology and social and political practices, and in shaping individual responses. (Weeks *Sex, Politics and Society* 26)

Throughout the nineteenth century we see the negotiation and construction of many of the concepts and themes that contemporary queer theory focuses on, such as identity and gender formation, sexology and sexuality, the establishment of standardised time and its role in organising the subject, and the elevation of the family and reproduction as institutions and structuring logics. While this has led to the narrative that the nineteenth century was a conservative, normative, and generally non-queer period, at the same time as these norms were being established, there was also a very significant and extensive resistance to such conventions. Queer theory seeks, among other things, to describe or map out the ways homosexual and homoerotic desire manifests itself in literary and cultural texts. One aspect of queer theory has been to actively read queerness into texts, while another aspect has been to reinscribe queerness into modern cultural representations of historical periods. One such project of reinscription is neo-Victorianism. As noted earlier, this thesis will analyse, compare, and discuss novels that cross this temporal chasm. Therefore, it is relevant to explore the specifics of female queerness in the Victorian era, as the novels analysed in this thesis all engage with the Victorian woman's position through female affiliation, whether it

be as a consequence of contemporaneity as in the case of *Jill* or a cross-temporal engagement as in the case of Sarah Waters' neo-Victorian novels.

While many restrictions and expectations of the Victorian period focalise gender, and thus, produce a focus on sexuality and varying treatments of male and female homosexuality. This stems from the developments of separate male and female homosocial spheres, it is important to note that gender commentary, and queer-coding tactics, are heavily related but do not always signal or constitute one another. It is important to recognise a difference between gender non-conformity and queer sexuality. Women's homosocial spheres consisted of heartfelt alliances that afforded them support amidst mutual oppression in an ostensibly patriarchal society. Homosocial structures frequently elicit homophobia as an institutionalised check on repressed homosexual desire, but they more often lead to changes in experiences "of living within the shifting terms of compulsory heterosexuality" (Sedgwick *Between Men* 134).

Jeffery Weeks and Catherine Gallagher both note how women were associated, connected, and in many ways bound to private domestic life. The Victorian "ideology of separate spheres for men and women […] inevitably constrained women in their social, economic, cultural and sexual lives", while also sharply delineating "what women could do without breaching the norms of decency" (Weeks *Sex, Politics and Society* 31). As well as restricting women, women's association with the private sphere allowed them to be "the agents of social reform by influencing the men around them to be ethical and benevolent in their economic and social activities. The family, in this view, is the moral center of society [...] what goes on inside the family necessarily affects the social world because men live and act in both" (Gallagher 86). Therefore, as Sedgwick points out "in a society where men and women differ in their access to power, there will be important gender differences, as well in the structure and constitution of sexuality" (*Between Men* 2). Men's access to public life, and

the inherent power herein, made it so that men's homosexuality was deemed more of a threat to society. In *Between Women* (2007), Sharon Marcus disassembles the trope of morality and sexuality in the Victorian era. Here, she explains the way in which women were able to exercise queer sexual agency and subvert marriage traditions in their bonds with other women. Society manifested homophobia as "less powerful between women than between men because all forms of love between women were essentially interchangeable" (Marcus 31). Women in the private sphere faced different variations of homophobia and their queerness would express itself differently. In relation to such a notion of differently expressed queerness, we will now turn to, firstly, an individual analysis and, secondly, a comparative analysis of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002). We will explore how the three novels use masquerade to queer their narrators and narratives, in relation to queer relationality and temporality. Additionally, we will also expound on how the novels adhere to, challenge, and interrogate Victorian notions of gendered behaviour and sexual identity.

Individual analysis

Jill

The Victorian queer Bildungsroman

As noted earlier, Amy Dillwyn's 1884 novel *Jill* has garnered some, but not a lot of academic interest since it was republished in 2013. It is therefore of interest for this thesis to analyse the novel in terms of female queer imaginaries, or the implicit indication of such imaginary, whether singular or plural, in relation to queer imaginaries' continuation in later literary works. *Jill* is in many ways a classic Victorian Bildungsroman, with its episodic structure and focus on the emotional and spiritual development of an adventurous heroine. It also participates in some traditions of the Gothic and picaresque, but it is ostensibly more a piece of Victorian realist fiction. Styled as an autobiography, the novel is narrated by the eponymous Gilberta 'Jill' Trecastle. She is both the focaliser and the focalised, the lens through which all plot elements and characters are filtered. We follow her on multiple unconventional adventures, most notably through two intense and meaningful relationships to two other women.

As we noted earlier in our chapter on the Bildungsroman, the primacy of the heroine is reaffirmed by the plotting. The heroine's 'protagonicity', her centrality, is kept safe from other characters usurping her narrative position thanks to the authorial choices made in regards to the genres and modes that they have based their plot on. Amy Dillwyn engages with the tradition of the Bildungsroman in *Jill*. The novel is named after our protagonist, Jill herself narrates the text, not to mention the reader follows Jill's thoughts, words, actions, and experiences. Within the story world, Jill does the same: in her perceived authorship, her directions to the reader as well as her interiority. Jill continually casts and recasts herself in

various roles that draw upon the reader's familiarity with and suspension of disbelief in favour of the conventions of various genre elements.

With a certain nod to fairy tale, the picaresque, and sensation fiction, the novel opens with the chapter heading "Jill Introduces Herself" (Dillwyn 1). What then follows is Jill's self aware description of her childhood and a reflection of her own character and 'nature'. Jill eschews sentimentality as a barrier to her passion for adventure and claims to be destitute of fond feelings for anyone, turning this into an asset as it allows her to escape "the fetters formed from strong domestic attachments or other affection" (Dillwyn 9). She is by her own admission decidedly unfeminine, revelling "in being a mess" (Dillwyn 6), seeing conventional dress primarily as an impediment to physical adventure. Following her mother's death, Jill's absent-minded and emotionally distant father, in lieu of not knowing what else to do with his tomboyish teenage daughter, brings Jill along on a European tour. Here, they meet an Englishwoman, who manages to snare the Trecastle patriarch into marriage, which lands Jill back in England. Now under the thumb of a tyrannical stepmother, Jill's agency is actively undermined (Dillwyn 28-29). Since she is devoid of any sense of filial love or loyalty, Jill finds no trouble in running away from her homelife, determined to see something of the world and make an independent living. This she believes she can realise by disguising herself as a lady's maid. What will later follow is an in-depth look at how this cross-class masquerade can be read and what it comes to mean in Jill's relationships. Arriving in London after her escape from the stasis of the Trecastle ancestral home, Jill acknowledges a need to learn some elemental skills as a lady's maid, such as hair dressing, while baulking at the more hyper-feminised dressmaking. Jill forges a character to secure a place as firstly a governess, then latterly a lady's maid and courier. Already an experienced traveller and accomplished linguist, Jill finds herself in the employment of a former acquaintance from her teenage years, Kitty Mervyn. However, now in her servant's disguise, she is not recognised

by Kitty as her ‘true’ self. Kitty is the first person, most notably also the first woman, who the otherwise cynical and people-abhorring Jill takes an interest in. An interest that continues beyond the span of their in-story relation.

Jill’s first proper adventure comes when she accompanies Kitty on a European tour, one populated by a secret love-revelation, a dangerous threat from escaped convicts and an overnight-imprisonment and subsequent escape from a Corsican mausoleum. However, upon their return from Europe, Jill’s deception in her forged character has been discovered and she is dismissed from Kitty’s employ. Hereafter she gains employment at an eccentric dog-lover’s home, where dog-walking becomes one of her most essential duties in this role as a lady’s maid. As her unfortunate luck would have it, Jill is seen on one of her dog-walks by the valet of the Mervyn household, who still harbours resentment towards her for having rejected his advances when she first entered service at the Mervyn’s. He informs Jill’s new employer of her previous deceit and the likelihood of her having repeated her forgery to gain her current place. Once again dismissed from her position and wandering the streets of London, Jill is then run over by a hansom and knocked unconscious, only to wake up confused and in shambled possession of her own recollections. Finding herself an unknown convalescent with a broken leg in a charity hospital, Jill meets the second woman to make a significant mark on her story. Befriending Sister Helena at the hospital, as Jill’s health slowly improves, we see the second instance in the novel where an affinity and deep connection between women is presented as legitimate and spiritually enriching. However, due to an unforeseen circumstance, what Jill herself refers to as a ‘catastrophe’ (306), Sister Helena is tragically killed by another patient before their relationship can ever truly blossom into more. When finally discharged from the hospital, Jill discovers the recent death of her father, and thus ends the novel by coming into her inheritance and becomes a lady squire.

There are two notable tropes at play in *Jill*, where a queer imaginary is apparent. One is the recurring theme of disguise and masquerade throughout the novel, while the other is the distinctive relationship between mistress and maid. Both tropes juxtapose gender, class, and sexuality in relation to Jill as a character and her life-story as it plays out in the novel. As Kirsti Bohata highlights in her article "Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism and cross-class desire in nineteenth century literature", Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* is an "openly celebratory of the ennobling power of love between women" (347), while it also utilises cross-class masquerade to represent unrequited same-sex desire. This analysis will consider both tropes as belonging to a queer imaginary, as they undeniably reinforce the women-oriented nature of love and affection in this novel, while unable to explicitly state it as either queer or lesbian.

Cross-class masquerade and aversion to conventional femininity

As Kirsti Bohata notes about mistress-maid stories, they often involve "masquerade in some form, including cross-class and cross-gender disguises" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 341). In *Jill*, cross-class disguise or masquerading disrupts not only categories of class but also categories of gender and sexuality. The element of cross-class disguise in *Jill* foregrounds class affinity and difference as a central trope of the novel (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 333), wherein the perceived class difference "translates into an imbalance of power (and sometimes a suggestive gendering of roles – servants tend to be gendered masculine) thus eroticising the relationship between two women, even as desire is sometimes frustrated or deferred" (344). Jill sustains her love through a chivalric loyalty, in part necessitated by the perceived different class positions of herself and the object of her desire.

Jill showcases a queer mixture of general emotional indifference, noted by herself, as well as excessive desire to protect Kitty and to bond with Sister Helena, both of which lends

a homoerotic dimension to her respective relation to the two women. As noted by Robert Dingley, class difference can render visible a 'lesbian menace' in relationships between women. His argument being that these relationships cannot be subsumed or 'derealised' within the language of 'romantic friendship', which "simultaneously speak of lesbianism and camouflage(s) it" (Dingley 104). Dingly further points out that the "erotic, and homoerotic, resonances […] are embedded within, and are enabled and mediated through, a more familiar discourse of social difference" (Dingley 105).

Jill's rejection of conventional gender roles and the emphasis on this being "peculiarities of [her] natural disposition" (Dillwyn 32) leads her to wonder if she is an "abnormal variety of the human species" (Dillwyn 10), which is echoed by the scorned manservant Perkins who describes her as 'ill-made'. This suggests a more specific encoding of Jill as mannish or as an 'odd' woman. Women who stood out from the conventional modes of femininity were subjected to increased scrutiny in the late nineteenth century. Here, the emerging field of sexology would try to define women who showed conventionally masculine gender traits as 'odd', 'queer' and sexual inverts. Jill displays many of the cultural and medicalised traits which came to be associated with lesbianism later in the new century. It is therefore clear that Jill's characterisation is an active choice on Dillwyn's part, and a Victorian reader would have recognised Jill as unconventional. She is a heroine that one can arguably identify as queer in some way.

According to Bohata, the 'discourse of social difference', that Robert Dingley mentions, is central to "representing same-sex desire, while disguise, surveillance and criminality on the one hand, and a chivalric code of service on the other, all contribute to this story of unrequited love between women" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 350). Disguised as a maid, Jill enters a social position where she is lower in class than the one she grew up in, yet it brings her closer to Kitty in circumstances which offer her a physical proximity and

intimacy that she might not otherwise have. Thus, the class difference and power imbalance inherent in the dynamics between maid and mistress, gives Dillwyn a space in which the erotic attraction between women can unfold or grow, depending on said attraction being requited or not. There are multiple scenes in Jill where the relative class positions seem to be temporarily undone. Yet, despite these momentary levellings of class roles, both Kitty and Sister Helena, until the latter's untimely death, never learn of Jill's 'true' class station, as it is not until the end, when both her relations to the two women are severed, that Jill comes into her inheritance and reclaims her position in society.

Dillwyn makes an effort to signal and imply Jill's feelings for Kitty and Sister Helena as exceeding conventional sentimental friendship. Jill repeatedly notes how unfeminine she is, especially her aversion to sentimentality and being devoid of feelings for anyone is used as proof of this. Even in her initial brief teenage friendship with Kitty, Jill dismisses the possibility of there ever being a "romantic friendship" (Dillwyn 19) between the two, despite the "strange fascination" (167) she ends up feeling for Kitty. In her dismissal, Jill notes how such a friendship with its "sentimental confidences" (Dillwyn 19) would be something *some* girls might do, but not her. It is heavily implied that Jill is *far* too unconventional to do anything of the sort that other girls might do. Such a conventional mode of sentimental attachment might even be too ordinary and not sufficiently erotically charged to accommodate her feelings for Kitty. However, Jill is nonetheless possessed by a secret infatuation and passion for Kitty. However, it is not until she is in the employ of Kitty that this fully surfaces to the reader. By then, Jill is held back by the new class boundary between her as the maid and Kitty as mistress, a barrier which her own cross-class disguise is the cause of.

In a study of literary cross-dressing, Diana Wallace identifies a transposition of gender disadvantage and class disadvantage: "Class rather than gender is foregrounded […]

as the mark of the 'other'" and so gender markers are "ventriloquized" through class markers (Wallace 325). Bohata notes how "Dillwyn's interest in genderqueer identities is accompanied by a fascination with cross-class ventriloquism and masquerade" (Bohata "A Queer-Looking Lot of Women" 119). Masquerading as a lady's maid, Jill is offered a comparative freedom that she could not attain in her position as a lady herself, especially not one under the subjugation of her stepmother. As Bohata remarks, class is gendered "as a hierarchical social concept" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 354), and Dillwyn associates the lower classes with masculinity. By adopting the disguise of a servant and becoming dependent on her own ability to make a living, and thus also making her own way in the world, Jill is already laying claim to more agency. Herein, she is performing a more masculine role than her identity, as Miss Trecastle, would ever allow. This is another instance where the novel arguably queers Jill's character and the plotline.

Despite the intensity of feeling Jill has for both Kitty, and in their brief acquaintance, also Sister Helena, Jill displays a complete disregard for the wishes of some of her other employers. As Kirsti Bohata remarks in her introduction to the republished edition of *Jill*, there is not "a glimmer of the devoted retainer" present where "a maid may pick up and abandon employers as it suits her" (Bohata xvi). Underpinning the novel's use of cross-class disguise and dissolution of class barriers, is the erotic charge and interest Jill feels for Kitty and Sister Helena. However, it is not only in this that class is used as a means of representing Jill's feelings.

In one of the few glimpses of life below stairs in the novel, as Jill has just become a domestic servant in the Mervyn household, she finds herself the unwilling recipient of the amorous attentions of Lord Mervyn's valet, Perkins. On paper, it is their difference in social rank that appals Jill. However, given it is the only male attention that Jill receives in the entirety of the novel, her repulsion at his attentions can be seen as an indication as to where

Jill's interest lies in terms of sexuality. Shortly after arriving at the Mervyn household, Jill is accosted by Perkins after the servants have retreated to their beds. Here, she repels his sexual advances by smashing her candle in his face and burning half of his whiskers, a symbol of his masculine virility which Jill has already noted with scorn upon her first description of him. Her repugnance at his attention to her is served as a reaction to his transgression of class boundaries, as she describes herself "scandalised at the notion of a man-servant taking liberty to raise his eyes to a lady" (Dillwyn 107). As she remembers her new social role, and how she is not a lady in his eyes, she;

> shuddered to think that I must endure being made love to by a valet: it was an odious and degrading idea. […] Disgusted and angry at the admiration which I deemed an insult, and was yet powerless to resent, I endeavoured to nip it in the bud by energetic snubbing. (Dillwyn 108)

As previously noted, Perkins is the only man in the novel to show any interest in Jill beyond mere formal friendliness. Jill's reaction to Perkins is in stark contrast to her otherwise calm, cool, and somewhat detached demeanour throughout most of the novel. Here, Jill's disgust turns nigh hysterical as Perkins forewarns her of his intention to kiss her. She comments how it:

> made me frantic merely to think of such a humiliation, what should I do supposing the monster actually did manage to profane my face with his lips? Should I kill him on the spot, or should I expire from sheer disgust? […] This, verily, was a degradation for which I had not bargained […] (Dillwyn 110)

Jill invokes class as the reason for her utter disgust at this unwanted attention, but she appears to direct her anger at men in general by saying "it's a great pity that there are any men at all in the world" (Dillwyn 109). She attempts to change the power of this first

statement by adding a half-hearted class qualification “or, anyhow, except gentlemen” (109), however, this comes across as more of an afterthought. This episode suggests that it is in fact man as romantic interest that she objects to. Using class differences like this, it reads as a way for Jill to articulate a deep-felt and vividly expressed sense of repugnance that is more to do with an aversion to the sexual advances of men. Her general disinterest in men from any class fuels the novel’s recurring hints at her sexual oddity or queerness.

In contrast to the cross-class boundaries Jill feels Perkins oversteps, she feels very differently about the perceived class-boundary and supposed natural affinity between herself and both Kitty and Sister Helena, respectively. Both relationships articulate a female homosocial bond that is inferred and articulated through notions of the romance and erotics of servitude and care. Where Jill and Kitty’s relationship and bond explores the cross-class eroticism of maid and mistress, Jill’s relationship with Sister Helena serves to explore another version of a relational servitude trope, in the form of nurse and patient. The setting of the hospital functions as slight class-leveller as Sister Helena treats Jill as an equal due to their perceived working and genteel status, as she does not know Jill’s social position by birth. This class-transgressional environment, wherein Jill finds herself with Sister Helena, leaves a space for exploring another homosocial bond. A homosocial bond, not as hindered by obvious class boundaries in the way the bond Jill feels with Kitty is. However, both bonds have undertones of desire and eroticism, as well as yearning and connection, that are arguably more than platonic. This suggests that these two bonds are beyond normative, and therefore could be interpreted as queer.

Servitude and care as articulations for homoeroticism and homosocial romance

Historically, married mistresses were said to keep an extra eye on their maids, as the maids were "seen as sexually available and morally suspect and, towards the latter part of the century, prostitution, lesbianism, and domestic servants were directly linked" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 342). Bohata argues that while not all texts were 'secretly lesbian' "some texts undoubtedly use cross-class homoeroticism more purposefully to encode or directly represent exclusive love and desire between women" (341). Noting the possibilities of the trope of mistress and maid, Bohata mentions how,

> the relationship may also evoke models of loyalty, devotion, and the possibility, in fiction at least, of female alliance. On the comparatively rare occasions that servants and their relationship to their employers feature at all in Victorian fiction, these dynamics can lend a homoerotic dimension to the cross-class relationship between mistress and maid. (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 341)

The specific homosocial intimacy between the mistress and maid threatens the heteronormative relation the mistress might have with her husband or a potential husband. Therefore, the class boundary between the two must be strongly upheld to avoid this threat from becoming a reality. The relationship between mistress and maid requires the crossing of intimate boundaries, as the maid dresses and undresses her mistress, touching her and seeing her in her literally most naked state. Because of this potential threat to societally heteronormative relations, there is a need for a strong rule of conduct between the mistress and the maid; to establish and maintain the relationship of employer and employee. This was to avoid any cross-class transgressions that might otherwise occur, when physical boundaries are thusly blurred and crossed.

Aware of her own masquerade in pretending to be of the working-class, Jill also observes how Kitty dons a mask, depending on what space she is moving in. This is a knowledge Jill is privy to both as Kitty's maid and as someone who once was in the same social position as Kitty herself. She notes how this knowledge complicates her own interest in Kitty as well as the chances of their relationship beyond the boundaries of their professional relationship as it:

> made her all the more attractive to me. Curiosity as to what might lie beneath the surface she presented to the world, served to increase the drawing towards her that I had always felt; and had I been so placed as to have a chance of making friends with her, I should certainly have tried to do so. But it was, as I well knew, hopeless to attempt such a thing in my present position; for she was not the sort of girl to condescend to familiar intercourse with social inferiors, and in her eyes I was simply a maid. (Dillwyn 116)

Here, Jill acknowledges her own fascination with Kitty, a fascination that is fuelled by undertones of desire. However, as long as she inhabits the role of the maid, Kitty is above her in social ranks, thus barring their relationship from evolving into anything more. Believing herself above her servants, Kitty does not want any familiarity with those she finds her social inferiors. This textual support of class boundaries aligns with Bohata's comment that, "[c]lass distinctions and a proper distance must be maintained for the sake of social order and patriarchal domestic harmony" (342).

In addition to a 'female alliance' (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 341), there is also the notion of a suggestive gendering of the roles of servants that tend to lean more towards masculine than feminine (344), not unlike the mistress and maid relationship in Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Grey Woman* (1861). In the wake of this form of gendering, and combined with

Jill's tomboyish personality traits, the relationship between Jill and Kitty is interpretively eroticised as imitation ground for a heterosexual relationship.

From the first time Jill meets Kitty, she is fascinated by her, noting that "there was one of these stray acquaintances who made more impression on me than the rest, and whom I mention here because of the relations which she and I were destined to have together in the future - little as we then suspected it" (19). This fascination returns as she gets the position as Kitty's maid in the Mervyn household, exclaiming that she was "mightly pleased to having discovered that the Miss Mervyn whom I was to serve was just the one whom I wanted it to be" (98). Her new position gives Jill the chance to observe and fulfil her 'strange fascination' (115) with Kitty. In her review of *Jill*, Elinor Taylor describes the nature of the novel as "[e]xploiting the relatively under-policed space of intimacy between upper-class women and their maids," and goes on to say that Dillwyn explores the desire of one's own sex within the realms of naturalised boundaries (Taylor 145). These 'naturalised boundaries' lie in the seemingly naturally-occuring boundary between the serving class, that Jill occupies at this moment, and the upper-class that Kitty inhabits. It is the fear of losing both her employment, and therein her access to Kitty, and the assumed class difference between them that stops Jill from revealing her affection within, what she refers to as 'reasonable limits' (116).

Observing and chaperoning one's mistress was an ostensibly vital part of a maid's duties, done for propriety's sake as young unmarried women could easily lose their virtue if seen in the wrong company, wherefore the loyalty of one's maid was vital. While Jill takes the role of observing her young lady seriously, she still maintains an internal sense of being Kitty's equal, using this to justify her actions when she crosses another privacy boundary between the two, afforded to her in her primed position as maid. Thus impacting her perspective of privacy between them, she "thinks nothing of eavesdropping, reading private letters, and otherwise spying on her mistress" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 343). Perhaps,

Jill's prying tendencies are signs of her loyalty to Kitty, and all the knowledge she comes into possession of, such as Kitty's secret love for Captain Norroy, "binds her to her mistress" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 350).The surveillance aspect, inherent in the nature of the position of the maid, is due to the maid's access to her mistress' bedroom.

As Bohata notes, "Jill may watch and touch Kitty. She dresses and undresses her mistress, she brushes her hair; most importantly in the bedroom Kitty lets down her guard" ("Mistress and Maid" 350). It is Jill's class status as a maid that hinders any form of her pursuing and nurturing her relationship with Kitty. The class difference between the two grants Kitty the power to include or exclude Jill from the intimate space that is her bedroom. This is especially frustrating for Jill, as the power imbalance can be reiterated by the mere ringing of a simple bell. Kitty's exclusion of Jill from her bedroom can be read as a rejection of both the services that Jill provides, as well as a rejection of Jill herself and of her loyalty. Jill experiences such a rejection from Kitty, when Kitty herself finds out about her beloved's betrothal and Jill takes notice of it,

> [Kitty's] head was drooping, instead of being carried proudly thrown back as usual; her face was deadly pale, and wore an expression of misery. On seeing her like this, I felt sure that she must have just read the paragraph concerning him, and had rushed off to be alone, so that she might be relieved from the irksome restraint imposed by the presence of other people, and might let her features relax for a while into whatever expression of pain came natural to them (Dillwyn 220).

Jill, playing her role, offers her sympathy and service to Kitty, as she knew "that it would be an unheard-of solecism for such an official not to profess sympathy - whether she really felt it or not - with her mistress' ailments" (220). However, as in Bohata's reading of *Jill* "Kitty simply reads [Jill's] behaviour as that of a slightly overzealous maid" ("Mistress and Maid"

351). In her increasing affinity for Kitty, Jill must constantly reevaluate her own actions, the motivations, and how these may be perceived by others, as she navigates the class-boundary between herself and Kitty.

Accompanying Kitty on her European travels, there is a specific incident that breaks down some of the class walls between the two. Whilst on their travels, Jill, Kitty, Mrs. Rollin and Kitty's suitor, Lord Clement, goes to Corsica. On their way from one inn to another, Jill follows Kitty off the road and into the bushes as the horses need a break. It does not take long before Jill hears unfamiliar voices nearby. She immediately hides herself, but she is too far away from Kitty to reach her before Kitty is noticed by the strangers. It is then revealed that the voices belong to escaped prisoners who had seen them leave their carriage, and had followed them, hoping to rob them. However, as they realise neither Kitty nor Jill had anything of value on them, they capture the two instead. In the hopes of extorting Mrs. Rollin for money, Kitty and Jill are then brought to a cemetery where the prisoners lock them up in a mausoleum. Stuck in the dark and eerie monument for the dead, Jill must use her cunning and ingenuity to get the two of them out before the prisoners return.

Sharing the experience and trauma of being trapped in the mausoleum results in neutralisation of Jill and Kitty's relationship. The situation results in "a key moment when familiarity replaces formality" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 344), which transforms the terms of the relationship between Kitty and Jill. With the sudden change of scenery, the Gothic elements of the mausoleum, its complete darkness, and the possible danger if the convicts return, Jill's disguise is stripped away. Here, there is a slip between Kitty and Jill from the formality of mistress and maid to simply just two young women. The slip is apparent in the way Kitty apologises to Jill for getting her roped into trouble (Dillwyn 176) and a distinct lack of formality in their speech to one another during this scene. Kitty's

apology is a minor transaction of the power dynamics within their relationship. The situation also provides Jill with more agency in getting them out of the mausoleum.

In the mausoleum, with the class-boundaries slightly disintegrated, Jill acts more out of care for Kitty than her professional obligation demands. This is most notable when she keeps quiet as she makes contact with, "some small sized object, whose substance was cold and clammy, and whose identity I could not at all determine by touch" (179-180). Jill does this as she is sure that herself and Kitty in that moment have an unspoken agreement, and that they are to look out for each other in this situation. Acting the protector of Kitty, Jill believes she must "restrain any outward manifestation of emotion, and merely [push] the obstruction aside quietly, without letting Kitty know that [she] had found anything unpleasant" (180).

Jill's own reaction to her trying to spare Kitty's feelings in the dark of the mausoleum suggests a deeper layer in their cross-class relationship, underpinning the potential homoeroticism and homoemotionality between the two;

> As I made this effort to spare her feelings, I was struck by the quaint probability of her being at the same instant engaged in a similar endeavour to spare mine; and I realises that the common danger to which we were exposed was a link, which united us so firmly that our separate identities were, for the time being, well-nigh merged into one. Whatever affected the condition of one of us must necessarily affect that of the other also (180)

This realisation, that for someone as self-professed and uncaring about the feelings of others, her wanting to spare Kitty's feelings and the possibility of it being reciprocated, leads Jill to call it "a queer sort of selfish unselfishness!" (180). This aligns with what Bohata refers to as "the sensational climax of Jill and Kitty's relationship" (350), which serves to operate as

somewhat of a metaphor in its "temporary transcendence of class [as symbolising] a sublimated erotic union between mistress and maid" (350). However, nigh on immediately after escaping the mausoleum, and returning to Kitty's aunt and unwanted suitor, Lord Clement, one of Jill's masquerades is discovered. As Kitty discovers the forgery of Jill's character, Jill is given notice active upon their arrival back in England.

As her first masquerade has been removed, Jill considers enlightening Kitty as to who she is and how they are actually connected, but decides against it: "for a moment I felt very much inclined to tell her who I was I think I should inevitably have yielded to the inclination, and imparted my history to her there and then, if there had been anything in her manner to make me believe that I had won a footing, however low down, in her affection - that she cared about me just one little bit. But there was no such indication" (228). Jill's realisation that her feelings and desires are unreciprocated supports her in maintaining one of her masquerades as she leaves the Mervyn household. In addition, Jill further loses any chance at pursuing the possibilities suggested from their European tour as Kitty marries Lord Clement.

While care is inherent in the mistress and maid trope, it is also present in another relationship in *Jill*. After her employment at the Mervyn household comes to a halting end and Jill's subsequent employment at the home of the Torwood family, she is involved in a street accident and wakes up in a hospital. Here, she meets Sister Helena, the second woman in her story that stands out in comparison to all other social interactions and relations that Jill has had. Initially, Jill and Sister Helena come to one another's attention because Jill is mistreated by another nurse at the hospital. However, their first meeting and interaction is interesting. During one night, Jill finds herself thirsty beyond belief, and unable to attract the attention of the nurse on call as she has fallen asleep. At this moment Sister Helena is making her way around the wards and Jill manages to gather the Sister's attention. The first act of care between the two is described in almost sensual detail, as Sister Helena "took up the

coveted draught, and, putting the other arm under my pillow, raised me to drink comfortably, and then held the glass to my lips. Never was nectar more delicious and refreshing than that lemonade tasted to me!" (Dillwyn 277).

After this interaction, Jill is consistently aware of Sister Helena's presence during the time it takes for her to heal. As she slowly recovers, Jill's mind starts to grow bored and she fixates on Sister Helena to fill her time:

> My mind, then, having but few distractions, was all the more ready to occupy itself with whatever person or thing happened to come prominently before it. And thus I found myself continually engaged in studying and thinking about the Sister, who, for the time being, filled a position of conspicuous importance in my life […] (Dillwyn 295-296)

What follows after this is several pages of Jill's description and musings on Sister Helena, her background and her character. Importantly to note, the chapter that this occurs in is titled "Sister Helena", suggesting the Sister's obvious importance to Jill's story.

In her musings on Sister Helena, Jill notes that she is "evidently well born and bred" (Dillwyn 297), and this supposed class equality is what Jill uses to explain and support their increase in interactions and the length of said interactions. Jill further applies the significance of their "belonging to the same social order" as the natural reason for forming "an intimacy beyond that which is ordinarily produced by the relations of nurse and patient" (298). As her broken leg heals and she regains her mobility, Jill begins taking tea with Sister Helena. These near-daily visits to Helena's room facilitates their conversation, which quickly take on an existential and discursive sensibility. Their conversations on religion leads Jill to want to reform her previously misandrist ways, but she notes she still does not "want to be *too* good" (301 emphasis in original). She attributes this to the fact that she is "a deal too fond of

worldly comforts and joys to be happy without them" (301), but another reading is that were Jill to become too good, as she fears, she would lose all of her characteristics, including those that stand out from the normative, such as her potential queerness; her desire for those of her own sex, as well as her masculine behaviour.

Jill debates with Sister Helena how "goodness according the degree of [one's] mental predisposition […] and that some people could never be influenced by them at all" would make it "obviously absurd to expect much goodness form a person whose mind was so constituted as to be antagonistic to virtuous influences; and of course no one could be blamed for what was merely a natural defect" (Dillwyn 302). This can read like Jill trying to argue against her own internalised homophobia and society's heteronormative default being deemed the only right way to be. It might also be Jill's own attempt to come to terms with her internal sense of queer identity, while also wanting to have Sister Helena acknowledge and affirm her argument's point. The motivation behind this could be that Jill desires more than mere friendship from the Sister. Her steadily growing attachment further supports this. She wants not only Helena's agreement for argument's sake, but also for what it could mean for their relationship if they took it further. The blurring of social roles between them, and Jill's affinity towards Sister Helena awakens this potential for their relationship.

However, the potential evolution of Jill and Sister Helena's friendship sadly never comes to any kind of further development or fruition, as Sister Helena is tragically killed on the day Jill is set to leave the hospital. Thus any possibility of them taking their friendship beyond the spatial limits of the hospital wards is at an end. While their acquaintance was brief and there was never any confirmation of a reciprocated deeper affection between the two, Jill still notes how changed she is after having known Sister Helena: "my acquaintance with Sister Helena [...] sufficed to make an indelible impression on my life; and it is owing to her influence, and to the seed she sowed, that I am no longer the unprincipled, heathen,

scampish individual that I was before i knew her" (Dillwyn 316) . This reiterates the notions of homosocial affinity that has permeated the novel thus far.

In the closing chapter of the novel Jill learns of her father's passing through a newspaper advertisement from his solicitors, requesting his daughter to get in touch with them. Doing so, she discovers that her father did not change his will after his second marriage. Willingly returning and reclaiming her identity as Gilbertina Trecastle, Jill sheds her final masquerade. However, her new position as the head of the Trecastle estate still grants her the agency that she has discovered for herself the span of the novel. Having always shown unconventional characteristics as a young woman, her new position, free of both familial and marital subjugation to any man, allows her to "to the best of my ability [...] perform the duties of my new position as a lady squire" (Dillwyn 323). While Jill's story ends on this open note, with her both contemplating her new life as a part of the landed gentry and considering going on another "foreign trip before long" as her "natural spirit of restlessness and adventure is too vigorous to rest satisfied without an occasional indulgence" (323), this is not where the novel fully end. Dillwyn has Jill finish the final chapter by returning to her first unrequited love, Kitty. Jill's reasoning for this appears rather off-hand, citing Kitty's "somewhat prominent part" (323) in her story, yet she does subsequently account for Kitty's life from the time of her marriage to Lord Clement to the time of Jill's telling. It appears as though Jill still holds a torch for Kitty as she ends the novel wondering "if in those days she and i had been thrown together (as might very likely have happened, had it not been for my step-mother) as equals instead of as mistress and maid, should we have become friends, I wonder?" (326).

Analysis Conclusion

Inherently challenging the fixity of Victorian womanhood, Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884) queers nineteenth-century notions of female subjectivity, desire, and relationality. The novel uses intricate dynamics of cross-class masquerade and aversion to conventional femininity, to further the implicit queering of the traditional plotline of the Victorian female Bildungsroman. Jill's more masculine traits and her rejection of gendered behaviour, reflects broader societal anxieties about non-normative femininity, female sexuality, and same-sex desire in the late nineteenth century. Through Jill's disdain for male attention, and her deep emotional connection with women, the novel portrays a nuanced depiction of a potential queerness, and complicates Victorian norms of romantic and platonic relationships. Through Jill's relationship with Kitty, the novel demonstrates how female same-sex desire and affinity were constrained by class hierarchy, preventing the development of deeper connections beyond the roles of mistress and maid. However, the text also highlights the importance of intellectual connection, in addition to the focus on care as a form of intimacy, in Jill's interactions with Sister Helena. Jill's two primary homosocial relationships highlight her longing for a deeper connection, underscoring the complexities of affection within the confines of societal expectations. Ultimately, the novel reflects on the lingering impression of unrequited love and the novel's open ending can be read as the possibility of alternative outcomes if societal norms were different.

Tipping the Velvet

Queering the neo-Victorian Bildungsroman

Similar to what we noted in our analysis of *Jill* (1884), the literary genre of the Bildungsroman "follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (Baldick "Bildungsroman"). *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) begins as the protagonist Nancy "Nan" Astley/King, is around eighteen years old, and follows her throughout the subsequent seven years, as she grows into her own identity. Like the eponymous heroine in *Jill*, Nancy is similarly the focaliser and the focalised, the one whose view the reader experiences the plot of the novel through. Meredith Miller notes how the 1980s and 1990s saw an influx of novels wherein it posited the "queer self against the social world, and yet also posit[ed] a new relation between queer self and national culture, one defined by the subcultural movements in which they were embedded" (M. Miller 256). She goes on to further explain how in the "context of subcultural articulation, the queer Bildungsroman expresses a new formal reflexivity and a multiplicity of redeployments, challenging the relation between the individual and historical time and yet retaining its basic assumptions" (256).

Emily Jeremiah reads *Tipping the Velvet* as a female queer version of both the picaresque novel and the Bildungsroman, with her argument being that *Tipping the Velvet* challenges the masculinist conventions of the genres by having a protagonist that "progresses from oyster-girl to dresser, to music-hall artiste to rent boy, to sex slave to housewife/parent and socialist orator" (Jeremiah 135). Throughout the span of the novel's seven years duration, Nancy circulates through several social contexts and overcomes challenges to find the place where she can belong. Here, multiple identitarian elements are at interplay, most notably class, as it "plays a pivotal role in the materialization of Nancy's various identities,

since [class] dictates the 'gender scripts' that she must perform" (Neves 61). Nancy's character is quickly shown and reiterated throughout the novel in terms of her ability to adapt to and move through numerous social environments. As the novel progresses, Nancy's sexual identity and gender expression is established more and more firmly. Not in terms of what those around her expect but in terms of the life wherein she can live the life that feels the most authentic to her. This compliments Júlia Braga Neves' reading of the elements of the Bildungsroman in *Tipping the Velvet* as "the protagonist's maturing and psychological development" (Neves 63).

Nancy recounts her story retrospectively in an autodiegetic narration, a narrative mode often found in the Victorian Bildungsroman as exemplified in Charlotte Brontë's canonical female Bildungsroman *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884). However, *Tipping the Velvet* is undoubtedly a modern Bildungsroman as it places more emphasis on individual self-development, whereas the traditional Bildungsroman "offers the 'plot' of an apprenticeship of the concurrent mutual shaping of the protagonist's psyche and [their] integration into society at large" (Raynaud 108). Here, Nancy's maturation is not strictly related to "society at large" or society's institutions. It is more about finding one's place when one cannot live within the confines of the expected roles and institutions of society, such as marriage. *Tipping the Velvet*'s narrative mode reflects the twentieth and twenty-first century's reflexive gaze on the Victorian, as it focuses on the identitarian markers such as sexuality, gender, and class that much neo-Victorian fiction occupies itself with.

At the start of the novel, Nancy is working as an oyster girl at her family's oyster restaurant in the seaside town of Whitstable. Brought up in a working-class family with both of her parents and her siblings, Alice and Davy, Nancy is expected to adhere to the general life trajectory of the Victorian woman. That is, settle down with a young man, have a family of her own, stay in Whitstable or close by, continuing the family business or something of

equal import to society and the familial community. These expectations of Nancy's family are regularly hinted at throughout the novel, but most strongly in the first part, where Nancy is still either living at home or is still actively in communication with her family as she moves to London.

While Nancy hints at a fascination with the music hall from the get-go as, while she is working, she is "continually moving to the words of some street singer's or music-hall song" (Waters *Tipping* 4), it is not until she experiences the performance of the male impersonator Kitty Butler that something stronger is woken in her, commenting that Kitty is "the most marvelous girl – I knew it at once! – that I had ever seen" (12). Nancy returns to the music hall to see Kitty's performance time and time again, keeping the reasons for her recurring visits a secret to her family. The heteronormative expectations of her family are shown in their theorising some ulterior motive for her going to the music hall so often. Nancy's father speculates that it must be because of a boy: "Well, we are told it is Kitty Butler… If you ask me… I think there's a young chap in the orchestra pit what she's got her eye on" (19). Nancy remains mum about her real reason, letting "them all think just what they liked" (19), until she finally confesses her admiration and more-than-platonic interest in Kitty to her sister, Alice. However, Alice reacts with shock and disappointment to Nancy's confession: "gazing at me with an ambiguous expression that seemed half amused, half distaste" (20). Alice's distaste and rejection of Nancy is shown by her distancing herself from Nancy, despite them being each others' closest friend and confidante, as Alice stops speaking to her and "only rolled away from me and faced the wall" (21) when the two are alone in their shared bedroom.

As a result of losing Alice's intimate relationship, Nancy fears further disapproval and rejection from the rest of her family and begins distancing herself from them as her relationship with Kitty grows. When Kitty's act must move on from Whitstable, Nancy

decides to accompany her to London, leaving her family behind. She feels both conflicted at leaving what she has always known and the safe and traditional trajectory of her life for the unknown and exciting prospects of a life in London at Kitty's side. As she is leaving, Nancy's parents show a seemingly unconditional love and support for their daughter and her decision to leave, even as they had hoped she would "marry a Whitstable boy and settle close at hand" (Waters *Tipping* 59). As he is seeing her off, Nancy's father says that "children […] weren't made to please their parents; and no father should expect to have his daughter at his side forever" (59), concluding that "even was you going to the very devil himself, your mother and I would rather see you fly from us in joy, than stay with us in sorrow - and grow, maybe, to hate us, for keeping you from your fate" (59). While this loving farewell appears unconditional, Nancy keeps her new-found sexuality and true reasoning for going with Kitty from her parents after experiencing Alice's reaction. The physical distance between her and her family, brought about by her move to London, further alienates Nancy from them.

For a long time, Nancy only writes letters home apart from one visit close to the ending of the first part of the novel. Waters shows Nancy's alienation from her family and her past in a scene where Nancy gives each family member a gift, having expected it to be a joyful affair but instead it turns embarrassing. Her mother's reaction to her gift, a silver backed brush and hand-glass, makes Nancy immediately think "how queer they would look beside her cheap coloured perfume bottles, her jar of cold-cream, on her old chest of drawers with its chipped glass handles" (Waters *Tipping* 157). Nancy's choice of gifts and the word 'queer' show the disconnect that has come over her relationship to the rest of her family, marking her as the odd one out. The embarrassment and discomfort of the situation is further marked by Alice's reaction to her gift, a hat that she refuses to try on and instead bursting into tears. Afterwards, the entire family tries to ignore and forget what just occurred, treating Nancy with an air of formality, more a guest of the house than a family member as they

"shoo" her "away" when she "offers to join them" in preparing dinner (159). Despite her success in London and the sense of achievement it gives her, providing her with an initial confidence as she travelled home for her visit. The actual visit makes it evident that Nancy no longer belongs there, to the point of strong discomfort. She returns to London, seemingly more attached to her new life there, only to have it immediately ripped apart, as we will explain later in the analysis. However, first we will delve more into Nancy's developing queer subjectivity as it awakens in the music hall with Kitty Butler.

Cross-dressing, gender performance, and sexuality

In her re-creation of fin-de-siècle Victorian England, Waters centres the Victorian music hall as one of the main milieus of *Tipping the Velvet*. The music hall, with all its gendered associations, acts as the setting for Nancy's sexual awakening, and the development of the same-sex relationship between Nancy and Kitty Butler. The music hall is also the place where Nancy finds her gender expression, first enabled by the performance of female masculinity on stage, quickly followed by embodying it outside the music hall as well. It is culturally appropriate to use the music hall as the space for gender explorations as it was "a space for testing and contesting gender imagery to the cultural upheaval that surrounded the woman's suffrage agitation, and the hostilities and anxieties that upheaval generated" (Bratton 109). Cheryl A. Wilson notes that,

> Women music hall performers also engaged in performances designed to please their audiences. Often women of the working classes, they had to attract and seduce audiences to expand their billing and increase their salaries, and the music hall's dual role as cultural site and workplace further complicated the position of women performers. (Wilson 291)

In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters uses the setting of the music hall to expose the shared experiences of performing sexuality and gender for many Victorian women.

After multiple returns to the theatre, specifically to watch Kitty's performance, Nancy is finally noticed and invited backstage where she is introduced to Kitty who also takes an interest in her. Once the pair become acquainted, Nancy is offered a job as Kitty's dresser, and she explains the sense of thrill she gets from helping Kitty during her quick changes: "Now, instead of wearing one suit for the whole of her turn she wore three or four; and I was her dresser in real earnest, helping her tear at buttons and links while the orchestra played between the songs, and the audience waited" (Waters *Tipping* 84). Furthermore, from this intimate position Nancy derives immense pleasure from cleaning and looking after Kitty's room, costumes, and possessions, calling them "acts of love, these humble little ministrations, and of pleasure – even perhaps, of a kind of self-pleasure, for it made me feel strange and hot and almost shameful to perform them" (38). Nancy's acts of service are her way of showing her love for Kitty, and once Kitty realises this, the two become secret lovers.

After arriving in London and Kitty's act has seemingly run its course on the London stage as audiences' interest are waning, Kitty's manager, Walter Bliss, convinces the girls that their ticket to success and fame is a two-person act, where Nancy joins Kitty on stage, both dressed in men's clothes. As she steps into this new role, Nancy also takes on the stage name of Nan King (Waters *Tipping* 125). Nancy and Kitty's double act quickly becomes a success, showing their appeal to both the male and female theatregoers in the Gallery. When Nancy and Kitty are dressed up and impersonating dandies, it is primarily the working-class men who enjoy a good laugh at their social betters' expense, whereas their other stage-characters attract the female theatregoers by their titillating performances. It is especially Nancy in her masculine dress that appeals to women. In a reversal of roles, Nancy becomes the sexual awakening for others that Kitty was for her.

Cheryl A. Wilson notes how cultural anxieties around ‘the New Woman’, primarily identified as middle-class, and her masculine tendencies/associations were fuelled by male impersonators (Wilson 294). The New Woman challenged established gender hierarchies and positioned her as “an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule” (Showalter 38). Both the New Woman and male impersonators were subject to societal scrutiny and satire. Marjorie Garber also notes in *Vested Interests* (1992), that clothes were "an index of destabilization” (M. Garber 27), with this destabilisation reflected in the New Woman’s increased participation in the public masculine sphere, which positioned her as a real threat to the established gender hierarchies and women’s subordination relative to men. However, while the gender-crossing behaviours were applauded and popular on stage, they were unacceptable and scandalous off the stage.

At the start of their dual act, Nancy and Kitty perform in music halls in the East End and South London, where the audience is primarily of the working-class. As their act gains popularity, they move their performances to better-off theatres in the West End and East London, where they encounter a more middle- and upper-class audience. Having Nancy and Kitty earn their living – not to mention, derive joy and pleasure – from their male impersonation act, Sarah Waters utilises the sexual ambiguities and tensions implicit in this role. Not only that, but Waters also articulates it as a survival strategy of some Victorian women in the acquisition of perceived ‘masculine’ attributes, like independence and mobility. It is especially the cross-dressing element that enables Waters to interrogate both Victorian and modern notions of gender performativity and expression, as Garber comments that the appeal of cross-dressing was “clearly related to its status as a sign of the constructedness of gender categories” (M. Garber 9). Waters’ reconstruction of a version of Victorian male impersonators bridges the gap between said impersonators and the New

Woman by turning her, and our, attention to their shared participation in performing femininity, as well as incorporating a possible queer layer to it.

Nancy's sexual awakening is described in detail, and Waters maintains an explicit connection between this and Nancy's emerging sense of identity, with her leaning towards identifying as a lesbian, inextricable from her preferred gender expression as it becomes more and more cemented throughout the novel. In the novel's first part, dedicated to the time of her life spent with Kitty, Nancy notes how integral the stage, and their performance on it, is to their relationship: "the two things – the act, our love – were not so very different. They had been born together – or, as I liked to think, the one had been born of the other, and was merely its public shape" (Waters *Tipping* 127), also saying that "making love to Kitty, and posing at her side in a shaft of limelight, before a thousand pairs of eyes, to a script I knew by heart, in an attitude I had laboured for hours to perfect – these things were not so very different" (128). On stage, during their performance, Nancy and Kitty have their own language, only they are privy to its meaning and implication, as Nancy compares it to the nonverbal communication of the bedroom:

> There was a private language, in which we held an endless, delicate exchange of which the crowd knew nothing. This was a language not of the tongue but of the body, its vocabulary and the pressure of a finger or a palm, the nudging of a hip, the holding or breaking of a gaze, that said, *You are too slow – you go too fast – not there, but here – that's good – that's better*! It was as if we walked before the crimson curtain, lay down upon the boards, and kissed and fondled – and were clapped, and cheered, and paid for it! (128 emphasis in original)

While Nancy is thrilled by her burgeoning sexual identity and gender expression, Kitty wants their relationship hidden, happy to don a dress after their act is over and appear

the proper young Victorian lady upon leaving the music hall. Motivated by her love for Kitty, Nancy acquiesces to Kitty's wish for secrecy, yet describes the mask of heterosexuality in painful terms: "walking with her through the city streets, I felt as though I was bound and fettered with iron bands, chained and muzzled and blinkered. Kitty had given me leave to love her; the world, she said, would never let me be anything to her except her friend" (Waters *Tipping* 127). Nancy comes to learn how both gender and sexuality are social constructs that are performed, sometimes out of choice and other times out of necessity. Here, Nancy's experiences reflect Butler's notion of gender performativity as "regulatory norms materializ[ing] 'sex' and achiev[ing] this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (Butler *Bodies* 2). Having to constantly alter her outward appearance, changing from a 'costume' into her socially accepted dress, Nancy is caught in an internal conflict between the norms she can subvert and the ones she cannot. This "notion of theatricality is crucial for the discussion of authenticity in the character's performance" (Neves 69). As the novel continues, Waters depicts a large part of it as a period of internal struggle and reflection that ebbs and flows with the plot, ultimately leading Nancy to an awareness of exactly how much of her identity is anchored in her gender expression for her to feel comfortable and authentic to herself.

Throughout *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters uses costumes to articulate the connections between performance, identity, and sexuality. Patricia Marks notes how, in the nineteenth century, gender debates were channelled through clothing in saying that "traditional female clothing signaled that the wearer was in her proper place on the Victorian chain of being" (Marks 148). To then dissociate herself from the role of the traditional Victorian woman, Nancy uses clothing and costumes for this exact purpose, both on the stage and off it. The first time she dons a more masculine outfit, Nancy describes it as something revelatory,

thinking "I felt as though I had never known, quite, what it really felt like to have *two* legs, joined at the top" (Waters *Tipping* 114).

As noted earlier, clothing is also significant to Nancy's relationship with Kitty, first as her dresser and later as her co-impersonator. Nancy's dressing routine with Kitty serves as a prelude to their sexual relationship. However, the theatrical elements are also recalled in the scene where Nancy and Kitty make love for the first time: "For a moment – my fingers tugging at hooks and ribbons, her own tearing at the pins which kept her plait of hair in place – we might have been at the side of a stage, making a lightning change between numbers" (Waters *Tipping* 104). The connections between the music hall performances and the development of individual sexual identity and gender expression are established in the first part of the novel, and through these Nancy learns the power of appearance and disguise. Nancy brings the learning experiences from this part of her life with her away from the music hall scene and into all the other spaces she enters throughout the rest of the novel.

At one point Nancy and Kitty meet two fellow women performers, who Nancy realises are also lovers. Thrilled by this sense of connection, Nancy expects Kitty to join her in her joy at finding potential community, but Kitty immediately shuts her down: "They're not like us! They're not like us, at all. They're toms" (Waters *Tipping* 131). Kitty's internalised homophobia is fuelled by her fear of discovery and social ruin, not unreasonable in the context of the nineteenth-century setting of the novel. Another turning point in Nancy and Kitty's relationship happens after a drunken man approaches the stage during their act at Deacon's Music Hall, harassing and jeering at them, finally shouting: "You call them girls? Why, they're nothing but a couple of- a couple of *toms*!" (140 emphasis in original). Although conflations between gender expression and sexuality have long been debated and debunked, for Waters' in-text Victorian audience, women in masculine costume, performing drag, must signify a difference in sexuality. Upset by the harassment and the crowd's turning

on them, while notably not questioning their own enjoyment and consumption of drag performance, Nancy is mostly upset by the reaction this situation elicits in Kitty. The public naming of their queer sexuality, and the obvious public contempt for them, drives Kitty off the stage and into the awaiting arms of their manager, Walter. Having been accustomed to Kitty's aversion to displaying any public affection for her beyond acceptable friendship, Nancy does not immediately question Kitty's want for increased security around their relationship.

Upon her return from her one visit home to her family, Nancy discovers Kitty and Walter in bed together and in extension of this discovery, she also learns that the two plan to marry. Kitty claims to still love Nancy, and that she "could hardly bear" (Waters *Tipping* 170) to be with Walter, yet she still goes through with it, choosing the personal and professional protection of a man as a means of survival, as marriage to Walter grants her both respectability and eschews any rumours of her being a 'tom', repelling any suspicion that could otherwise have tainted her character as an actress and performer. Caught between her love for Nancy and her professional and economic self-interest, Kitty ultimately betrays Nancy, who loses all trust and belief she previously had in Kitty's love. This betrayal hardens Nancy, who describes it as "a darkness, a stillness at the very centre of me", going on to say, "I didn't writhe, or sweat, beneath the pain of it, rather, I crossed my arms over my ribs, and embraced my dark and thickened heart like a lover" (190). Here, Nancy internalises her former expectations of a pure connection between one's emotions and expressions of love as naive and foolish.

While Nancy does leave Kitty and life on the stage behind, she does continue using performance as a means of survival. Neves notes how "the depiction of class in the novel functions as a way to determine the mannerisms, language, and gestures that Nancy must imitate in order to perform a certain kind of male or female identity" (Neves 69). Nancy

begins exploring the world by embodying different gender identities, showing agency by choosing sexual pleasure and power over social and financial comfort, despite the potential risks of compromising her own safety. Having realised from Kitty's use of her body as a tool of exchange, Nancy spends a brief time as a 'renter' in Leicester Square, passing as a boy. Some of the last things she decided to bring with her when she left Kitty was an old sailor's bag full of her and Kitty's costumes. Nancy puts them to good use as she traverses and works the streets. The costumes and the attention they bring help Nancy explore the fluidity of her identity, and the ease with which she navigates a variety of roles as she shapes them to suit the customer at hand. Similarly to learning the ways of the stage and a life in theatre, Nancy quickly picks up on the culture and codes of conduct of the street: "you walk, and let yourself be looked at; you watch, until you find a face or a figure that you fancy; there is a nod, a wink, a shake of the head, a purposeful stepping into an alley or a roominghouse…" (Waters *Tipping* 201). Here, Nancy's performances are as scripted and choreographed as any of the performances she had on the stage.

While the previous setting of the music halls and theatres of London lends itself well to the idea of the masquerade, there is something far more literal in this new stage of Nancy's life. This is where she fully embodies both sexuality and performance. As Judith Butler writes, "[w]hen the constructedness of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 10 emphasis in original). Nancy's dual sexual and gender identity is articulated in reference to her upbringing as an oyster girl in Whitstable. Earlier in the novel, Nancy's father had explained to Kitty that an oyster is "what you might call a real queer fish – now a he, now a she, as quite takes its fancy" (Waters *Tipping* 49). Both this description of the oyster and the multiplicity of meanings in

the word ‘queer’, Waters foreshadow Nancy’s future identity, becoming a literal ‘oyster girl’. At this point in her life, Nancy’s sexual and gender identity is constantly in flux, young single woman by day, male renter by night. This is specifically shown to us in the scene where Nancy reads an advertisement “Respectable Lady Seeks Fe-Male Lodger”, thinking to herself, “there was something very appealing about that Fe-Male. I saw myself in it – in the hyphen” (211). This living situation proves ideal for Nancy, and her landlady Mrs Milne and her disabled daughter Grace show no concern at Nancy’s alternate masculine or feminine appearances. During her time lodging with the Milnes, Nancy begins to heal from her heartbreak. Not only that, but the sense of a home and a familial relation to Mrs Milne and Grace also gives Nancy the emotional support that she had lost. However, a chance meeting during a night out renting brings about a new change of scenery for Nancy, and she leaves her lodgings and renter profession into the role of a kept companion to the wealthy widow Diana Lethaby.

As Diana’s companion, Nancy is quickly swept up into Diana’s sapphic circle of upper-class women. Here, Nancy’s performances are more vivid and meticulously sexual in nature than they ever were on stage, and Diana and her circle of friends prove to be a particularly hard audience to please. Nancy has gone from having to hide her sexuality and gender expression, pretending to be nothing more than Kitty’s friend, to being able to embody her gender expression at the cost of selling her body, still needing to hide part of who she is. In contrast, being with Diana, Nancy has to hide and repress all other aspects of her identity than her sexuality, living in a state of constant performance at the whims of Diana’s pleasure. In the beginning, Nancy enjoys her new situation and indulges in all Diana’s wealth can provide. She tries to recapture her original performance excitement from her theatre days by staging elaborate and long-thought out scenes in which to welcome and entertain her mistress: “There was drama to be had in the choosing of the chamber, and the

pose, in which I would arrange myself for her. She might find me smoking in the library, or dozing, with unfastened buttons, in her parlour" (Waters *Tipping* 265). In comparison to Nancy's own realisation of this, it quickly becomes obvious to the reader that Diana is exploiting Nancy, showcasing Nancy's beauty and her body, encased in lavish costumes, to her friends. For example, Nancy notes how Diana "took to displaying me in masquerade – had me set up, behind a little velvet curtain in the drawing-room" (280). Posing in a variety of roles, such as Salome, Perseus, or Cupid, each one has to outdo the previous: "it became a kind of sport with her, to put me in a new costume and have me walk before her guests, or among them, filling glasses, lighting cigarettes. Once she dressed me as a footman, in breeches and a powdered wig. It was the costume I had worn for Cinderella, more or less" (280).

Ultimately, the theatricality of her life with Diana starts to grow stale for Nancy. Every act begins to feel like nothing more than spectacle, and even her previous excitement for all the costumes becomes difficult to muster. Though Nancy is sexually liberated and enjoys her and Diana's sexual escapades in the bedroom, she begins to realise that she has nothing besides this. Her life outside of sexuality is emptied of all meaning and interest. The listlessness of her life comes to a jerking end, when Nancy tries to prevent Diana and her drunken friends from abusing a servant. Having diverted attention from the servant to herself, she is crudely put in her place by Diana and dismissed from the room. Drunk herself, Nancy ends up having sex with the shaking but grateful servant girl, Zena, only to be discovered post-coital by a furious Diana and her friends. With no time to gather her things or even her hungover mind, Nancy is thrown out into the rain alongside Zena. Zena quickly turns on Nancy, leaving her before she wakes in the rooming-house they managed to find and spent the rest of the night in with nothing but the clothes on her back.

Emotionality, authenticity, and queer subjectivity

Once more alone on the streets of London, Nancy receives a chance to re-evaluate and change her situation. Just before she left Green Street, Mrs. Milne and Grace, Nancy had met and arranged a date with a socialist Florence Banner. However, as she left so spontaneously for Diana's home, she stood Florence up, even driving past her in Diana's carriage as Florence was waiting for Nancy to arrive. Remembering Florence's work as a charity-visitor and how she "found houses for the poor" (Waters *Tipping* 339), Nancy convinces herself that if she finds Florence again, Florence might help her out of her homeless and impoverished state. Trekking across London, Nancy initially learns that Florence has left the place of work she told Nancy she was about to start at back when they first met and arranged their meeting. The ladies at Florence's old place of work will not give Nancy her address. However, using her wits Nancy notices Florence's resignation letter whereupon her address is (343). Memorising it, Nancy spends the little money that she has on going to Florence's house. Fearing rejection and being thrown out again, Nancy keeps how and why she has turned up on Florence and her brother Ralph's doorstep. Using her knowledge of Florence's reformist work, Nancy pretends to have been misused by a 'gent' (354) rather than a woman, uncertain if her assumption of Florence being 'tommish' (354) is correct. Florence and Ralph allow Nancy to stay the night with them and their orphaned foster-son, Cyril. By part charm and part manipulation, Nancy manages to extend her stay for enough days that Florence agrees to let her stay and "have a share of the family salary [...] for the sake of watching Cyril and keeping house" (372).

In this part of the novel, where Nancy is with Florence and Ralph, Waters "brings the participation of women in London to light by exploring the 1880s as an important moment for the circulation of women in urban space" (Neves 63). Although class commentary

abounds in the novel, it is in this third part that Waters truly highlights the social change that was happening in the late Victorian period. She imagines feminine and queer areas of society that popular Victorian writers did not include in their work despite a contemporary interest in the counterparts to dominant culture and society. Júlia Braga Neves notes how women began to effectively take part in public life, accessing and frequenting "theaters, department stores, libraries, and parks, for instance, and to promote new models of femininity that did not necessarily converge with the familial and domestic spheres" (Neves 64).

Having wound up the unexpected housemate of Florence and Ralph, Nancy begins to reshape herself once again. However, this time she begins to act, dress, and live the way that feels most authentic to her, not influenced by anyone else. She begins wearing trousers for comfort or some hybrid masculine and feminine costumes if it suits the occasion. The more disguises she sheds and the more authentic she becomes, the closer she grows to Florence. Once the two of them become lovers, they are quietly accepted by their friends and family, something Nancy has not experienced before. Nancy is no longer made to hide her feelings for the one she loves, like she had to with Kitty, nor is she made to live in a state of constant performance, the way she had to do in living with Diana. While struggling to find who she is when not in relation to someone else or their expectations, Nancy starts to separate her identity from her past performances and the memories that still haunt her. She begins to find meaning again, helping out with Florence and Ralph's socialist reformist work, ultimately using her theatrical skills in coaching Ralph when he is to give a speech at the Workers' Rally at the culmination of the novel.

Florence and Nancy's visit to the underground lesbian bar brings about a revelation for Nancy. Realising that there are others like her living plain ordinary lives compared to the inauthentic secrecy of the life Nancy lived with Kitty or the abusive power-imbalanced life she led in Diana's house, Nancy is affirmed in both her sexual identity and gender

expression. Because this new community around her is so different to her prior living situations, Nancy is surprised to discover this sense of community and belonging, asking Florence "Would you think me very foolish […] if I said I had thought I was the only one?" (Waters *Tipping* 417).

Tipping the Velvet suggests, and ultimately affirms, an idea of a collective female queer identity, yet it does not represent this identity in unquestioned or simplistic terms. The scene in the pub with Florence and her friends imagines a space where a lesbian or female queer subculture exists. While performing with Kitty, both girls, especially Nancy, receive significant attention from female fans. Originally dissuaded from responding to this attention by Kitty, Nancy is affirmed in her gender expression and sexual identity, when she discovers an old postcard, with her and Kitty's photograph, affixed to the wall in the underground bar her and Florence go to (Waters *Tipping* 420). Their iconic status in this context is supported by the rousing response Nancy receives when the pub-goers and Florence's friends realise who she is (420). Experiencing solidarity and positive affirmation in her new-found community, gives Nancy the final push to full agency, reclaiming her theatrical past and identity: "I [...] had spent five years in hiding from that [...], denying I had ever been her, myself" (419). She sheds the last confining performative elements of her identity, as she publicly reclaims her identity. This final shedding of the last secrecy Nancy had around who she is, also results in her and Florence finally coming together. As a result, their relationship develops in tandem with Nancy now embracing her gender expression in a mix of both feminine and masculine attire. Furthermore, forming a household with Florence that includes Cyril and Florence's brother Ralph, *Tipping the Velvet* also offers a vision of an alternative queer kinship (Jeremiah 140).

Analysis Conclusion

In conclusion, *Tipping the Velvet* mediates between past and present concerns when it comes to queer identities. Nancy's journey showcases a queer reorientation at home in the neo-Victorian politics of flexibility, wherein she gives in to explorations of gender and sexuality via cross-dressing and masquerade, going beyond the Victorian heteronormative classification systems shaping the in-text world that Nancy inhabits. The fluidity of both gender expression and sexual identity that Nancy embodies in the novel echo Butler's words that "sex does not cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex" (*Gender Trouble* 152). By thusly not conforming to either expected Victorian notions of femininity or masculinity, Nancy truly queers the subjectivity and 'protagonicity' of the Bildungsroman.

In addition, Nancy uncovers the inherent artificiality of pretending to be someone she is not, thus highlighting the importance of authenticity. At the same time, Waters uses the inherent performativity in cross-dressing and masquerade as the recurring motif to illustrate the subjective queer agency that frees Nancy from the gendered constraints of heteronormative society. Beyond this, Nancy also discovers how communality and solidarity further offers the space in which she can express herself the way she wants alongside building a life with the woman she loves. Waters deliberately ends the novel with this unquestionably queer resolution as a way to connect a past narrative with notions of fluidity and change recognisable to her contemporary audience. In so doing, Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* reclaims the past as queer, interjecting joy and affirmation in the imagery of the queer past.

Fingersmith

Queering neo-Victorian sensationalism

Sarah Waters' 2002 novel *Fingersmith* participates in traditions of Victorian sensation fiction. Waters' participation comes about by her knowing the restrictions and characteristics of sensation fiction as a genre, and then subverting said restrictions and characteristics. As a piece of neo-Victorian literature, *Fingersmith* engages with some of the unseen and more would-be scandalous aspects of the Victorian era; the working-class criminal scene, pornography, as well as female sexuality and queerness. *Fingersmith* also bears a few particular characteristics of the Gothic, reflecting "epistemological uncertainty, the rupture of the narrative, and multiple points of view" (Myers 17).

Structured as a three-part novel, *Fingersmith* is told through a double first-person narration split between two protagonists, Sue Trinder and Maud Lilly. The first part of the novel is told by Sue, while the second part is told by Maud, and the third part returns to Sue. Sue is a young woman from the London Boroughs, who believes herself to be the daughter of a hanged murderess, and has grown up in "a Dickensian den of thieves presided over by the baby-farmer Mrs Sucksby, whom [Sue] regards as a mother-figure" (Gamble 43). At the beginning of the novel, Sue is persuaded to join the elaborate con-plot of one of Mrs. Sucksby's regular visitors, Richard Rivers, who goes by the moniker 'Gentleman'. Sue believes the con is to cheat Maud Lilly out of her inheritance. Isolated in a large country house called Briar outside of London, with her tyrannical uncle, Maud appears the perfect innocent girl to fall for Gentleman's ruse. As Maud will only come into her inheritance upon her marriage, Gentleman, in the guise of Maud's art instructor, intends to secretly court her, marry her, and then have her declared insane and committed to an asylum, whereupon he can take her fortune for his own. To succeed in his ploy, he enlists Sue in this scheme with the

promise of a cut of Maud's fortune, if she masquerades as Maud's maid and helps him convince Maud to accept his suit. Thinking their con about to succeed once the marriage has taken place, Sue realises she is the one who has been conned. Gentleman manipulated Sue into playing the part of a substitute for Maud, becoming the one admitted to the mental asylum in Maud's stead.

In the second part, the narrative perspective changes to Maud. The events already related by Sue are replayed from Maud's point of view. Here, the reader discovers that Maud is far from the naive and inexperienced girl Sue presented her as. It appears that Maud and Gentleman schemed together to use Sue as a pawn for financial gain, with Maud also motivated by gaining her freedom from her uncle, a collector of pornographic texts, his work as both a collector and cataloguer something he involves Maud in from childhood. As Maud and Gentleman supposedly succeed in their scheme involving Sue, they go to London where Maud believes they will go their separate way, once the money from her inheritance comes in. However, in another revelatory turn of events, Gentleman brings Maud to Mrs. Sucksby, who turns out to be the original architect behind his scheme. It turns out that Mrs. Sucksby is, in fact, Maud's biological mother. It is Sue, who is the actual heir to the Lilly fortune, as she and Maud were swapped as babies by their mothers. Sue is actually the daughter of Mr. Lilly's sister, who died shortly after giving birth to her.

Fingersmith subjects its inherited Victorian sensationalist narrative form to a disorienting series of narrative reversals, knowledge reveals, doublings, deception and masquerades. In so doing, Hatice Yurttas notes that the novel ends up "displacing all identity categories, and, in a nod to Judith Butler, exposes them as indeterminate and the effect of performative acts" (Yurttas 110). Yurttas further points out that Waters builds on a Butlerian understanding of gender and "the construction of identity as the imitation of an imitation, in

other words, as discursive constructions that do not rely on an originary, natural, or in any sense imperative form of identity and sexuality" (110).

Fingersmith's plot is unravelled and revealed through its complex narrative structure, filled with surprise elements, reversals, deception, and masquerade, ultimately revealing Mrs. Sucksby's plan to retrieve her own daughter, Maud, and her promised share of Marianne Lilly's fortune. Her plot centres on a double deception of Sue and Maud, and the novel's entire plot hinges on the implication of knowledge and authenticity. The complicated plot situates both Sue and Maud in a mirroring relationship. Each thinks herself the one in the know, the one in control, fooling the other, however both clogs in Mrs. Sucksby's machinations of her own scheme. Waters deprives both the protagonists and the reader of the security of a reliable narrator, using first-person narration as a way to ensure "that we are forced to rely on the perspectives of characters who often know far less than they suppose" (Gamble 45).

Both Sue and Maud begin their respective parts of the narrative in a way that makes it seem as though they assert their own identity and origins. They both construct their narratives in the form of an autobiography, by starting to relate the story they have been told about their birth and origin. Yet, by retelling other's stories, it is clear they cannot give a fully truthful account of themselves this way. Sue begins her narrative thus:

> My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. I was Mrs Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's. (Waters *Fingersmith* 3)

Sue's account for herself vacillates between speculation and fact, which validates her life story while, at the same time, also places it in doubt. Maud's opening is more dramatic and graphic, yet it is in many ways similar to Sue's.

> The start, I think I know too well. It is the first of my mistakes.
>
> I imagine a table, slick with blood. The blood is my mother's. There is too much of it. There is so much of it, I think it runs, like ink. I think, to save the boards beneath, the women have set down china bowls; and so the silences between my mother's cries are filled up - *drip drop! drip drop*! - with what might be the staggered beating of clocks. [...] this is a madhouse. My mother is mad. [...] the house falls silent about me. There is only, still, that falling blood - *drip drop! drip drop*! - the beat telling off the first few minutes of my life, the last of hers. (179-180 emphasis in original)

They both believe themselves to be orphans, but their narratives also appear founded on supposition.

Both Sue and Maud as narrators can be, as Susan Lanser notes, "characterised according to qualities gleaned from their articulated perspectives, frames of knowledge, or focus of attention" (Lanser 929). As the novel progresses, each of the girls' partially fictitious, partially factual, presentation of themselves gradually comes to show this sense of both Sue and Maud being in very fluid subject positions. Their subject position appears able to be occupied by either one of them. Maud dresses Sue in her clothes, so Sue can be mistaken for "quite a lady" (Waters *Fingersmith* 155), while Maud herself plays the part of the lady's maid. The truth of this identity swap is, at this point in the text, unbeknownst to both girls. That is, Maud is really Mrs. Sucksby's child and Sue is, in fact, the Lilly heiress. In retrospect, this element of the plot infused the story with a warped sense of authenticity. What is at stake for both Sue and Maud is actually their sense of an authentic identity, as

their origin stories are revealed to be imaginary, they have to learn the truth to fully know where they came from and who they 'really' are. This is especially seen in how they both perceive and embody masquerading as someone they are not *to* each other, as well as when they are masquerading *as* the other.

Cross-class and identity masquerade

Whereas Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* uses masquerade in terms of class, and *Tipping the Velvet* uses masquerade to highlight sexuality and gender, *Fingersmith* uses identity as masquerade. Hatice Yurttas notes how with this use of masquerade and in Fingersmith's plot structure "imitators become impossible to distinguish from originals and originals turn out to have been copies all along" (Yurttas 119). This masquerade is slowly unmasked throughout the novel, utilised in *Fingersmith*'s double narration, split between Sue and Maud. The effect of Waters utilising masquerade like this affects both the reader and the characters within their respective narratives. Particularly in the cross-class and identity transgressions in the novel, as Maud and Sue's individual plotlines are intertwined. To succeed in their respective childhood and young adulthood, both of the girls have very specific socially constructed identity roles to perform. Sue grew up in a thieves' den in the Boroughs, so she is expected to become a fingersmith and with her part in Gentleman's inheritance ploy, she plays into the social role and the skills afforded her from her upbringing. Similarly, Maud also performs an identitarian role, imparted to her by Mr. Lilly when he brought her to Briar, as a lady and later his secretary. Yet, as it is slowly revealed to the reader, and even slower to Maud and Sue, these social roles and identities, which they have grown to think of as their own, is yet another masquerade.

This identity masquerade was originally plotted by the girls' biological mothers, Marianne Lilly and Mrs. Sucksby. Having run away from her father and brother, Marianne hides in Mrs. Sucksby's home in the Boroughs, where she gives birth to a daughter. Not wanting her to have any notable connection to the Lilly family and their position in society, Marianne names her daughter a more common name, Susan. Mrs. Sucksby on the other hand, having also just had a child of her own, was already working as a baby farmer on the edge of the law. When offered the chance to swap their children's identities, so the newborn Susan would not fall into the hands of the Lilly patriarch and his son, once they found Marianne. Mrs. Sucksby agrees, motivated by the thought that this secures her own daughter an upbringing as a lady, and the promise of half of Marianne's inheritance upon the girls' eighteenth birthday. Both Marianne and Mrs. Sucksby think their end of the bargain is the better deal. Therefore, when the Lilly men find Marianne, they take her and Mrs. Sucksby's infant daughter, Maud, with them, leaving Susan Lilly to be raised in the Boroughs as Mrs. Sucksby's 'favourite' adoptive child (12). Confined in a mental asylum, Maud spends the first eleven years of her life in the asylum until Marianne's brother, her supposed uncle, now the patriarch of the Lilly household, comes to collect her and brings her back to Briar, as she is the heir to the Lilly fortune.

Hatice Yurttas refers to the novel as a 'double masquerade', in that Sue and Maud embodies identity and their performances thereof, further explaining that;

> Maud and Mr. Rivers scheme to make Sue look like a lady for the doctors. Maud, in turn, loses weight and neglects her appearance to turn herself into a maid. Well-fed Sue, once attired in Maud's gifts of dresses, resembles her so closely that even Mr. Rivers cannot tell them apart. Of course, what each takes to be her original identity is, in fact, the fake one: by birth, Sue was destined to be a lady and Maud, the daughter of a baby farmer, a thief, at best a maid. (Yurttas 119)

This identitarian struggle suggests the complexity of any notions of the nature versus nurture debate. This debate centres around whether individual differences in behavioural traits and personality are caused primarily by nature or nurture. Both Sue and Maud embody and perform the role they believe to be their natural one, even when the reader learns it is a role given to them by the nurturing environment they grow up in. An example of this is Sue's comfort with stealing, as she does when she has escaped the mental asylum and is making her way back to London (Waters *Fingersmith* 466). This is before she learns of her 'true' identity and so at this point in time she both acts as and believes herself to be a fingersmith.

The sudden reversal of imagined identities puts a different set of assumed characteristics onto both Sue and Maud. This enhances the fact that Sue assumed Maud innocent and naive due to her ladylikeness, when it was herself that got scammed and revealed to be 'the naive victim'. Maud's newly revealed origin supports her cunning and cruel character traits as ones fittingly belonging to someone living at the edge of the law like the residents of Mrs. Sucksby's house. *Fingersmith* appears to further fulfil this essentialist notion by having Maud be the one killing Gentleman (Waters *Fingersmith* 502-508), even though it is Mrs. Sucksby that offers herself up for trial. Similarly, while she is confined in the asylum, isolated and abused, Sue begins to experience her identity dissolving, considering that "it seemed to me I must be Maud, since so many people said I was" (445). By this point in the novel, the reader knows of Sue's maternal origin and can therefore read Sue's time at the asylum as Waters commenting on Victorian notions of biological determinism. However, Waters never commits to this biological imperative, instead letting both Maud and Sue embody some character traits that echo those of their biological origin, while also characterising their identity based on nurture, not on their class origin.

Masquerade can come in multiple forms, both physical and psychological. Between Sue and Maud, there is both. Waters subverts the trope of the mistress and maid by

combining it with this identitarian cross-class masquerade between Sue and Maud. For Sue, her masquerade begins as she takes on the disguise of Maud's new maid, going by the name Susan Smith, changing the cadence of her speech, and dressing herself in simple brown clothing to hide her actual identity (Waters *Fingersmith* 49). While entering domestic service was very common for Victorian working-class girls, Sue is used to making ends meet through petty street theft and odd-jobs for either Mr. Ibbs or Mrs. Sucksby. Therefore, prior to her arrival at Briar, Sue has no knowledge or experience to draw on in terms of knowing how a maid should act or talk. Once she has agreed to help Gentleman in his plan, she must learn the basics of dressing and hair styling to properly be able to perform the role she is about to play. In addition to this, Sue's own dress and hair must undergo a change to reflect this new position she is about to enter, one that she must pass off as one she has been in for a long time. Knowing how to perform a maid's duties satisfactorily and looking the part of the maid, Sue must also know how to act like a maid. This is the last step for her to fully embody her role as maid in all but spirit. Sue spends several days learning and training for her upcoming performance, finally getting somewhat of a hang of it, trying to memorise all Gentleman has told her:

> I must wake her in the mornings […] and pour out her tea. I must wash her, and dress her, and brush her hair. I must keep her jewellery neat, and not steal it. I must walk with her when she has a fancy to walk, and sit when she fancies sitting. I must carry her fan for when she grows too hot, her wrap for when she feels nippy, her eau-de-Cologne for if she gets the head-ache, and her salts for when she comes over queer. I must be her chaperon for her drawing lessons, and not see when she blushes. (42)

Once at Briar, becoming immersed in her disguise and performance, she quickly finds herself naturally drawn towards Maud. She even occasionally forgets that being a lady's maid is not her actual occupation and reason for being at Briar.

Similarly, while pretending to be an innocent gentlewoman when Sue comes to Briar, Maud forgets the reason for them being together in the first place. Acknowledging her own attraction to Sue, Maud catches herself thinking,

> May a lady taste the fingers of her maid? She may, in my uncle's books. […] as I am standing, feeling the blood rush awkwardly into my cheek, that a girl comes to my door with a letter, from Richard. I have forgotten to expect it. I have forgotten to think of our plan, our flight, our marriage, the looming asylum gate. (Waters *Fingersmith* 256)

There is a certain symmetry between Maud and Sue when it comes to forgetting the role they are playing. Maud comments that in addition to forgetting her and Gentleman's plan, she also feels like Sue forgets her mission for a while, "I quite forget that she is only keeping me safe for Richard's sake. I think that she forgets it too" (253). This forgetful slip in both of their masquerades highlights the artificiality of their identity performances. It also enhances an imbalance of knowledge in terms of class behaviour. Maud, as a lady, knows the proper behaviour that a young gentlewoman should exhibit and acts in accordance, while also noticing all the ways Sue, despite her maid's disguise, does not act as a maid should. This is especially noticeable in the scenes where it is just the two of them. Here, any class boundary is further blurred by the unknown impropriety that Sue displays. Charmed and fascinated by this version of her, Maud finds herself more at ease with Sue than she has felt with any other person, even Gentleman who she is supposed to be in league with.

In *Fingersmith*, clothes are used as masquerade, which Maud and Sue use to support their respective cross-identity performance. According to Danielle Dove clothes in both Victorian and contemporary historical narrative "play an active role" insofar as they "signal and sometimes conceal the specifics of a [person's] identity, such as the wearer's gender, sexuality, race, and class, as well as reflecting or obscuring their economic, social, and political status" (Dove 116). It is most noticeable in the two scenes where Maud gives Sue one of her dresses; the first time because Sue's dress is 'rather plain' (Waters *Fingersmith* 101), and the second in the concluding scene of the first part where Sue is mistaken for Maud and locked up in the mental asylum. The first dress-exchange happens whilst Sue is in the midst of her maidly duties of getting Maud ready for the day. As they are going through the ritualistic performance, fixing Maud's hair, pinching her cheeks to give them some colour, Sue notes:

> Then she looked at me. She looked at my brown stuff dress. She said, 'Your dress is rather plain, Sue–isn't it? I think you ought to change it.' I said, 'Change it? This is all I have.' [Maud replies] 'All you have? Good gracious. I am weary of it already. What were you used to wearing for Lady Alice, who was so nice? Did she never pass any of her own dresses on to you?' […] 'You must and shall have another gown, to spend your mornings in. And perhaps another besides that, for you to change into … Now, I believe we are of a similar size. Here are two or three dresses, look, that I never wear and shan't miss. You like your skirts long, I see. (101)

Here, Sue does not question Maud's offer as she has no other mistress relationship to draw experience from. Maud knows Sue is not really a maid and has no previous maid experience, yet she plays into the narrative that Sue believes herself to be convincing Maud of. Furthermore, Maud, in a blatant display of crossing the class boundary between mistress and maid, offers to help Sue dress: "'Oh, try it, Susan, do! Look, I shall help you.' She came

close, and began to undress me. ‘See, I can do it quite as well as you. Now I am your maid, and you are my mistress!’” (102). By convincing Sue that this behaviour is not in any way irregular, Maud primes her to not suspect any foul play later on, after her marriage to Gentleman has taken place, when Maud again offers Sue a dress to wear.

The change in dress further helps Maud and Gentleman’s plan to convince Gentleman’s doctor friends, most noticeably Dr. Christie, that Sue must be the mistress and Maud obviously the maid. Sue’s protestations are seen as confirmation that she is mentally unwell, a lunatic mistress, convinced that she is the maid. The physicality of the masquerade is not only dependent on costume. It is also marked by the physical body, as Maud has lost noticeable weight after her and Gentleman’s wedding, securing her a frail and scrawny appearance, so no one would believe her to be a lady well-fed with meat everyday since the age of eleven. While this is purposefully done on Maud’s side, Sue is unaware of the implications in Maud’s weight loss, associating it more with Maud’s hesitancy around the marriage and the result of her wedding night.

Arguably, Sue is not wholly wrong. By this point in the text, Maud has realised her own feelings towards Sue, and wishes she could back out of the scheme with Gentleman, were it not for the fact that marriage to him is her only chance to leave Briar and go to London. However, her feelings for Sue propels her pre-existing dislike for Gentleman into full-blown hatred. However, he is still her ticket to freedom, and so, even though she feels remorse for tricking and using Sue, she goes through with it. When Sue and Maud finally meet each other again, in the third part of the novel, this time in Sue’s childhood home on Lant Street in the Boroughs, Sue notices that Maud is still very thin. As the reader now knows Maud’s side of the story, they can infer that Maud’s continued weight loss is likely due to stress and depression.

As noted earlier, Sue's dress is a convincing factor in the doctors' belief that she is a delusional gentlewoman. When forcefully manhandling her through the gates to the asylum, they note: "Now don't twist so, Mrs Rivers! You are spoiling your handsome dress'" (Waters *Fingersmith* 174). At this point, Sue realises the trick that has been played on her, noting that it is not only the dress that acts against her, it is also her own body: "At his words, I grew slack. I gazed at my sleeve of silk, and at my own arm, that had got plumb and smooth with careful feeding" (174). In contrast to Maud's weight loss, Sue's weight gain gives her appearance further thwarts her attempts at truthfully identifying herself. In a final, albeit unwilling, performance, Maud seals Sue's fate by crying out with tears in her eyes and a voice that was not her own, "My own poor mistress. Oh! My heart is breaking!" (175). The excessive emotionality of this statement is perceived as a lie by Sue, as she notes, "beyond the tears, her gaze was hard" (174). Realising she has been duped, and that Maud "had been in on it from the start" (175), Sue believes Maud to only have used her, that the intimacy, desire, and burgeoning love that they shared, was in fact just a part of Maud's deception. In spite of her own anger and want for revenge, her desire and love for Maud remains throughout her sojourn at the asylum, and upon her return to Lant Street. Still believing her own feelings unreciprocated, Sue still yearns for Maud. She looks for her at Mrs. Sucksby's trial, and subsequent hanging for the murder of Gentleman. Yet, it is not until she learns of her own true identity, and this additional connection between herself and Maud, that she decides to go back to Briar to reconnect with Maud.

Undressing the masquerade and same-sex desire

While the plot of *Fingersmith* hinges on deceptive doubles and the two protagonists purposefully setting out to cheat and use one another, Sue and Maud's mutual desire and

ultimate romance further complicates the plot. Waters subverts the mistress and maid trope to allow an on-page physical intimacy that easily turns homoerotic and homoromantic. Her subversion is in stark contrast to the one-sided articulation of same-sex desire within a cross-class relationship found in Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884). The difference in Waters' use of the trope, compared to Dillwyn's use, lies in how Waters makes the homoerotic and homoromantic possibility of the relationship into a reality in *Fingersmith*.

The relationship between a mistress and her maid provides a fictional framework to explore the intimacy, the restraint, and the feelings that might come to life, either one-sided or mutual, when being obligated to share a liminal space with a woman one is both close and intimately far from. Waters infuses the relationship with tropes that Kirsti Bohata notes as homoerotic when articulating same-sex desire between women, such as "surveillance, voyeurism, passionate loyalty and chivalric service" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 341). Sue and Maud observe each other in secret. Both girls' observations are charged with the knowledge that they are respectively trying to con the other. From the outset they have been pitted against one another, yet it seems that this underlying awareness breaks down some of the class barriers between the girls that would otherwise have kept them apart. Knowing that Sue is masquerading as a maid, Maud notes how Sue's performance fails as "her notion of intimacy is not like Agnes's—not like Barbara's—not like any lady's maid's. She is too frank, too loose, too free" (Waters *Fingersmith* 252). For the both of them, knowing they are - in Sue's case only knowing of herself, and in Maud's case knowing the both of them to be - pretending to be someone they are not supports their ability to consider the other in a different light, one where they can acknowledge their interest as something more.

Hands and fingers play an important role in *Fingersmith*, as the physical body part that bridges the distance between Maud and Sue's bodies in their role as mistress and maid, but also as the recurring motif articulating sexual knowledge, as well as the embodiment and

enactment of said knowledge between Maud and Sue. Waters illuminates the "homoerotic undertones to mistress and maid sharing the intimate space of the dark dressing room" (Bohata "Mistress and Maid" 346), whenever Sue dresses or undresses Maud, really whenever they are alone in Maud's chambers. Their intimacy is strengthened by their proximity, as maud notes, "[i]t is only that we are put so long together, in such seclusion. We are obliged to be intimate" (Waters *Fingersmith* 252).

The imagery of the fingersmith referring to the dexterous hands of one who may steal something without being noticed, also, in the context of Sue and Maud's relationship, allude to a different sexual activity that requires dexterity. There is a shift between Sue and Maud, from formality to familiarity, which foregrounds their eventual sexual union, when Sue helps Maud file down her 'serpent tooth' that's bothering her. Using a thimble, Sue puts her hand to Maud's face, calmly putting her fingers into Maud's mouth. The sensuality of Sue's description of the scene sounds:

> Maud stood very still, her pink lips parted, her face put back, her eyes at first closed, then open and gazing at me. Her cheek with a flush upon it. Her throat lifted and sank, as she swallowed. My hand grew wet, from the damp of her breaths. I rubbed, then felt with my thumb. She swallowed again. Her eyelids fluttered, and she caught my eye. (Waters *Fingersmith* 97)

This scene is one of the few instances where mutual desire flares between them. It is worth noting, because it is also one of the scenes in the novel with a clear erotic same-sex intimacy, that we get from both Sue and Maud's perspective, as it is included in both the first and second part of the novel. In comparison to Sue's description, Maud's version of the scene goes like this:

> It does not hurt. I do not scream. But it makes for a queer mix of sensations: The grinding of the metal, pressure of her hand holding my jaw, the softness of her breath. As she studies the tooth she files, I can look nowhere but at her face; and so I look at her eyes: one is marked, I see now, with a fleck of darker brown, almost black. I look at the line of her cheek [...] Her fingers, and my lips, are becoming wet. I swallow, then swallow again. My tongue rises and moves against her hand. Her hand seems, all at once, too big, too strange; [...] She tests again with her thumb, keeps her hand another second at my jaw, and then draws back. I emerge from her grip a little unsteadily. (255-256)

While this is not the first time that Sue has touched Maud, it is the first time her touch is on the inside of Maud's body. All prior touches have had an air of professionalism, sticking to the class barrier between them. In this scene, they are no longer mistress and maid, but simply two young women. They go from observing each other, to *seeing* the other. The eroticism, intimacy, and tenderness of the act highlights the care Sue's puts into the action. It also indicates a moment, in which Maud lets go of her long-held control, for fear of her mask slipping.

Maud has been trained from childhood to aid her uncle in compiling a catalogue of pornographic texts and illustrations, and is thus far from the unworldly ingénue that Sue believes her to be. Maud cannot help but relate sexuality to the pornographic literary depictions she has grown accustomed to, and so she believes that the sexual encounter between her and Sue will conform to the crude dualism and heterosexist depictions portrayed in her uncle's books. However, the actual encounter transpires quite differently, and leaves Maud feeling very different about the emotions and sensations now surging through her body and mind, as she notes: "*Everything*, I say to myself, *is changed*. I think I was dead, before. Now she has touched the life of me, the quick of me; she has put back my flesh and opened

me up. *Everything is changed*" (Waters *Fingersmith* 283, emphasis in original). The emphasis on '*everything is changed*', is meant to the point of Maud thinking of confiding in Sue, that she knows everything, and that she has done so from the start. Realising that if she were to speak of her desire and love out loud, she would not go through with the original plan to escape Briar. She imagines an alternate future with Sue by her side, in which the two of them could turn on Gentleman and escape Briar together instead:

> I think, 'I will tell her, then. I will say, 'I meant to cheat you. I cannot cheat you now. This was Richard's plot. We can make it ours.' – We can make it ours, I think; or else, we can give it up entirely. I need only escape from Briar; she can help me do that—she's a thief, and clever. We can make our own secret way to London, find money for ourselves […] (283-284)

For her part, Sue believes herself the experienced one, and considers herself the instigator of their sexual encounter. Led on by Maud's feigned ignorance, and her own belief that it would not be out of the ordinary, for her as the maid to show her mistress part of what to expect on her wedding night, she convinces herself that she is allowed to, "show [Maud] how to do it" (Waters *Fingersmith* 142). But come morning, Sue puts on yet another mask to hide just how affected she is by their sexual encounter. By erecting this mask as a barrier between her and Maud, Sue tries to convince both Maud and herself that Maud's feelings for Gentleman was the true cause for the sexual pleasure of the previous night. Parallel to Maud, Sue also thinks to herself that she would drop the scheme to cheat Maud, for the sake of running away from Briar together:

> I think, that if I had drawn her to me then, she'd have kissed me. If I had said, I love you, she would have said it back; and everything would have changed. I might have

> saved her. I might have found a way—I don't know what—to keep her from her fate. We might have cheated Gentleman. I might have run with her to Lant Street—. (144).

Internally confirming their feelings for the other, but not saying it aloud, creates a different gap of knowledge in the narrative. When Maud hints to Sue that she had an 'interesting dream' where Sue had a part in it, she heavily implies the sexual identity of said dream. Here, Maud gives Sue an opening to correct her that it was not just a dream. However, Sue argues that the sweetness of the dream must be because of Maud's love for Gentleman. Maud knows this to not be the case, but feeling shut down by Sue, she turns away from her own thoughts of a future with Sue and continues to go along with Gentleman's con. Yurttas notes how "[i]n the plots of Victorian male writers, any articulation of lesbian desire is bound to lead to hostility, distrust between women, and the ultimate punishment, incarceration in a madhouse or prison" (Yurttas 123). Waters subverts this literary inheritance, by having both Sue and Maud remain desirous and emotionally connected to each other, even as the plot around them forces them apart. Gentleman and Mrs. Sucksby's plan creates a hostile environment around the girls, wherein they are pressured, used, and blackmailed into continuing on with the plan to deceive the other.

According to Brenda Ayres gloves are "used metonymically throughout most neo-Victorian fiction", noting they were "germane to literature's index to gender, class, and rank; and they were agents for numerous fungible symbols" (Ayres 257). A woman wearing gloves signified propriety, as skin was often equated with sexuality and so for a woman's fingers to be covered she was behaving properly in accordance with Victorian material morality. Danielle Dove identifies *Fingersmith*'s use of gloves as a symbol thus:

> Worn habitually, gloves were central items of clothing in the nineteenth century and often bore a significant and intimate relationship to the wearer. Worn close to the

> skin, gloves not only acted as an intermediary between the body and the outside world, but they also reflected both the economic status and social standing of an individual, as well as their personal, aesthetic tastes. (Dove 226)

When she reaches puberty, Maud is made to constantly wear white kid gloves by her uncle with "an almost fetishistic persistence" (Gamble 48). The gloves are euphemistically meant to "keep her from […] mischief" (Waters *Fingersmith* 201), yet Maud is only ever allowed to remove her gloves when she is handling her uncle's pornographic texts, meaning that she is physically in contact with the texts in a way she is not in contact with anything else. Before Sue, Maud, and Gentleman leave Briar, Sue steals one of Maud's gloves "to remind me of her" (148). If she cannot have Maud, she can at least have this token of her. This shows gloves have become identifiable with Maud in Sue's mind, as well as how reluctant Sue is to continue on without anything tangible to remind her of her love. Once she is confined in the asylum, with all her physical possessions taken from her except for that "crumpled white hand" (401), which the asylum nurses allow her to keep for what harm could one glove do (406). The glove is also the one thing she keeps with her from the asylum as she runs back to London.

Maud's innocence is one of the greater masquerades throughout the first part of the novel, as it is not until the second part that the reader gets to see the full picture. As long as the narrative is told from Sue's perspective, Maud is presented as an innocent victim. When Maud's duplicity is revealed, Sue still thinks her innocent in sexual terms. An assumption that is only debunked at the end of the novel. Gentleman tells Maud that Sue will, "be distracted by the plot into which I shall draw her. She will be like everyone, putting on the things she sees the constructions she expects to find there. She will look at you […] who wouldn't, in her place, believe you innocent?" (Waters *Fingersmith* 227), suggesting that he is the only one who sees through Maud's innocent mask and knows her to "be a villain"

(226). The fact that Gentleman also notices Maud's feelings for Sue (276) and Sue's 'soft heart' for Maud (133), echoes this notion of his perceptiveness in seeing beyond both girls' pretences. He is also the only one to realise in the commotion of Sue's confrontation scene upon her return to Lant Street, that Maud is in fact Mrs. Sucksby's daughter (501).

At the closing of the novel, when Sue and Maud have found each other again, it is the final identity reveal, and the fact that now Sue knows almost all, which allows Maud to shed her final mask, showing and inviting Sue into her professional pornographic work. Here, at Briar where they once lived together as mistress and maid, kept apart by masquerades, deceptions, and omissions of truth, they now know and see each other for who they truly are. Thus, the novel comes full circle, with an open ending, heavily implying that Sue and Maud will remain at Briar together, this time as lovers and partners.

Analysis Conclusion

Fingersmith (2002) intricately weaves themes of deception, identity, and same-sex desire through the complex relationship between Sue and Maud. Sarah Waters subverts traditional mistress-maid dynamics by exploring the genuine homoerotic and homoromantic possibilities within their cross-class bond, contrasting sharply with the restrained same-sex desires depicted in earlier literature like that of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884). Waters uses physical intimacy, particularly the motif of hands and fingers, to illustrate the deepening connection and eventual sexual union between the protagonists. The evolving relationship from deception to mutual recognition is poignantly highlighted through shared intimate moments, reflecting the characters' inner transformations and shedding of social masks and pretences. Ultimately, Waters reclaims and transforms the Victorian sensationalist plotting style and heteronormative narrative outcome, by allowing Sue and Maud to emerge not only

as lovers but as partners who fully understand and accept each other at the conclusion of the novel. The novel's open-ended conclusion suggests a future where they can rebuild their lives together, free from the constraints and deceptions that once kept them apart.

To conclude this analysis of *Fingersmith*, we have shown how the novel employs the theme of masquerade to explore the complexities of class and personal identity. Through the intricacies of multiple layered masquerades that cross both class and identitarian boundaries, Waters emphasises how Sue and Maud’s characters are more complex and multifaceted than they appear, and perhaps even more than they understand themselves to be. This insight challenges and encourages understandings of the social shaping forces on individual identity, as well as the continuous interplay between inherent traits and environmental influences.

Comparative analysis

The cross-temporal and cross-textual use of 'queer'

The word 'queer' is used in all of the novels analysed in this thesis, but the word is notably used more frequently in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002) than in Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* (1884), as it is used only three times throughout the novel. Waters uses the word both in the nineteenth-century usage of the word as well as anachronistically evoked its twentieth- and twenty-first century appropriation. Mandy Koolen notes how Waters' use "playfully reminds readers that rather than being a period piece, this novel belongs to the realm of contemporary historical fiction", yet she also points out the historical and present use of the word sets up "continuities and discontinuities between experiences of same-sex desire then and now" (Koolen 374). Jerome de Groot also notes how Waters' use of 'queer' "explicitly [brokers] a relationship between the historically authentic and the contemporary" (de Groot 62). Considering how many times an *actual* Victorian novel uses 'queer', such as the three times in *Jill*, Waters substantial use of the word reflects a very meta-awareness of the duality of the word, "being both diegetically accurate and also contemporaneously significant" in addition to "attempting to persuade the reader of its authenticity" (de Groot 63).

The two underlying meanings of 'queer' in Waters' novels, is the Victorian usage as denoting the odd, the peculiar, "the strange and the suspect" (Lanser 923), as well as the modern understanding of 'queer' as representing "a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to, or that challenges, traditional […] ideas of sexuality and gender" (*OED*). De Groot notices that the word 'queer' is repeated 43 times in *Tipping the Velvet* (62) and 68 times in *Fingersmith* (63). As Waters has come to be known as a 'lesbian' writer

(WalesOnline, "Author Sarah Waters on being that 'lesbian writer'"), the reader will, from the outset, expect and anticipate queer themes in her work. Whenever Waters does use ‘queer’, especially in scenes with the main romantic leads, it signals this tongue-in-cheek meta-connection between the production of the text and the consumers of the text.

In *Fingersmith*, Waters uses ‘queer’ to mark an othering of sorts, to reflect how unusual Maud’s upbringing and life is. Before the reader knows the entirety of the truth from the second part of the novel, Sue notes how strange Maud is and how odd Maud’s ideas of London is: “Her world was so queer, so quiet and shut-up, it made the proper world—the ordinary, double-dealing world, [...] it made the world seem harder than ever, but so far off, the hardness meant nothing.” (Waters *Fingersmith* 96). While Sue is right that Maud’s world is isolated from the world around her, she does not know what is the cause of Maud’s oddity. In the second part of the novel, Maud acknowledges that the way she has been brought up has left her strange and different to those around her: “So my life passes. You might suppose I would not know enough of ordinary things, to know it queer” (Waters *Fingersmith* 203).

Waters primarily uses ‘queer’ in *Fingersmith* to describe things around and about Sue and Maud, from odd sensations to the smell of the air, the feel of the house to one of Maud’s dresses. Linking ‘queer’ to dresses is thematically in tune with *Fingersmith*’s use of masquerade and identity performance, as we showed in our earlier analysis. As Maud gives Sue one of her dresses, it is described as “a queer thing of orange velvet” (Waters *Fingersmith* 102). Mrs. Sucksby gifts Maud new dresses to replace the one Maud was wearing upon her arrival at Lant Street, which is in fact Sue’s old maid’s dress. This dress is also described as “a dull old thing, ain’t it? And queer and old-fashioned? How about we try something nicer” (352). Queerness is associated not only with the dresses as costume and masquerade, when it comes to Sue and Maud being mistaken for and pretending to be one another, but also associated with the identitarian element of the novel’s masquerade.

In comparison, Waters' earlier novel, *Tipping the Velvet* overtly uses costuming and dressing to denote queerness. The first time Nancy tries on masculine attire, she borrows a pair of Kitty's trousers and it makes her wonder aloud: "How can you dress like this, before a hall of strangers, every night, and not feel queer?" (Waters *Tipping* 114). Going along with Walter's idea of having both Nancy and Kitty perform on stage together, he has a masculine costume made for Nancy, and when Kitty sees her wearing it, for the first time, she voices her reaction: "There is something queer about it; but I can't say what…'" (118). The main themes of the novel are undoubtedly gender and sexuality. Waters explicitly connects the word 'queer' with gender and sexuality, clearly using the word in a way that is authentic to the time *in* the text, but its meaning is still anchored in the late twentieth-century meaning.

As mentioned, Waters also uses 'queer' as a cross-temporal double entendre. There is a scene in *Fingersmith*, where Waters combines the two mentioned meanings; the scene in question is when Gentleman is trying to convince Sue to join his scheme and become Maud's maid, as he begs, "'I aim to marry this girl and take her fortune. I aim to steal her' [...] 'from under her uncle's nose. I am in a fair way to doing it already, as you have heard; but she's a queer sort of girl, and can't be trusted to herself— and should she take some clever, hard woman for her new servant, why then I'm ruined" (Waters *Fingersmith* 26). This use of 'queer' is applied as a way for Gentleman to belittle Maud to Sue, so she seems easier to trick, and in that way also calling her odd.

There is a certain parallel in the romantic usage of queer desire, and the realisation of said desire, in Water's two novels. It also comes into play in another scene in *Fingersmith*, where Sue is teaching Maud how to kiss and they both become speechless, with Sue noting that, as due to "The words sounded queer; as if the kiss had done something to my tongue. She did not answer. She did not move. She breathed, but lay so still I thought suddenly, 'What if I've put her in a trance? Say she never comes out? What ever will I tell her

uncle—?'" (Waters *Fingersmith* 141), in this quote Waters also applies a sense of othering to the act of speaking, describing it as queer. When in fact, it is also the more contemporary meaning that is at large for the queer othering of speech, the kiss leaving them speechless and in almost a trance. This quote borders on the line to also being applied as of the more contemporary meaning, that is the purely same-sex romantic desire use of 'queer'. In *Fingersmith* it is during the second part from Maud's narrative, in which she exclaims to herself, "Is this desire? How queer that I, of all people. Should not know! But I thought desire smaller, neater;" (277). Maud's queer epiphany parallels that of Nancy, when she realises her own feelings for Kitty: "I thought, How queer it is! And yet, how very ordinary. *I am in love with you*" (Waters *Tipping* 33 emphasis in original). Additionally, when Nancy is about to leave for her visit home to Whitstable and Kitty mentions how she will miss her, Nancy notices "that old queer tightness in my breast" (*Tipping* 152). Where *Fingersmith*'s use of 'queer' is all about layering cross-temporal definitions, and creating a linguistic masquerade between the reader and the writer, *Tipping the Velvet* is more deliberately using 'queer' in relation to gendered expressions and performances, as well as same-sex desire and love.

Whereas Waters uses the multiplicity of meanings behind 'queer' available to her, both Victorian and current, Amy Dillwyn uses the word all but three times in *Jill*, and all with the late nineteenth-century connotation. However, when Dillwyn uses it, it is always in relation to Jill's musings on relationality and especially same-sex relationships. Denoting the peculiar and the strange in Dillwyn's use of 'queer' throughout the novel, it also reflects Jill's growing emotional maturity. At the start of the novel, Jill, unsentimental and verging on misanthropist, grows quite perplexed at the idea of her maid, Mrs. Smith's willingness to drop everything and go to her sister when receiving a distressed letter. At this, Jill comments that, "[i]t must be a queer sensation, thought I, to care for anyone to such a pitch as she does.

Fancy being in such a state of mind as she is at the mere idea of some other person's being ill, or in trouble of some kind or other!" (Dillwyn 52). Here, Jill's notion of queerness is in how one could ever feel so strongly for another to drop everything for the sake of ensuring another's welfare. At this point, Jill is embarking on her adventure, running away from her family, and cannot see value in such strong inter-relational emotions.

The second time Dillwyn uses 'queer' is when Jill has discovered the identity of the man in Kitty's photograph. Still spurning the idea of caring for other people, yet noting the "singular attractiveness" (Dillwyn 69) she feels for Kitty, Jill reflects "how queer it was to take so much interest in the affairs of a person with I had absolutely nothing to do, and wondering whether it did not show a tendency to reprehensible weak-mindedness…" (69). At this point, Jill has not become reacquainted with Kitty yet, however, already having noted her unusual affinity for the other girl in her teenage years, this is the first time 'queer' is used about one of Jill's own relationships.

The third and last use of 'queer' is once again in relation to Jill and Kitty. Compared to the protagonists in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, Jill also experiences a version of 'queer epiphany'. While she and Kitty are stuck in the Corsican mausoleum, Jill thinks to herself:

> Whatever affected the condition of one of us must necessarily affect that of the other also; whence it followed that the bodily and mental welfare of both was a matter of mutually vital consequence, and that each was as anxious to shield the other as herself from any annoyance or shock that could possibly be avoided. Truly a queer sort of selfish unselfishness! (Dillwyn 180)

Here, Jill believes the two of them to be in an unspoken agreement, to look out for one another and do whatever they are able to do, to limit the other's discomfort. The mutuality of

this sensibility reads a potential reciprocated same-sex affinity, even though it is not further acknowledged between the two of them. In contrast to Waters' two novels, *Jill* cannot make any non-normative sexuality or same-sex interest more explicit.

The word 'queer' is not mentioned in the novel in regards to Jill's relationship with Sister Helena, even though it is evident that their relationship, all though cut short, also meant a lot to Jill. One interpretation of the omission of the word 'queer' can be as another reflection on Jill's emotional maturity. She no longer has to deflect to 'a queer sensation' when she recognises herself caring for someone else, she can simply acknowledge it as affection (Dillwyn 311).

Open endings and queer possibilities

In order to interpret a story, readers and critics alike rely on both subjective and collective assumptions about what constitutes a satisfying ending, as well as what we know and feel about narrative resolution and closure. Generally agreed upon, narrative closure relates to the feeling that a text is complete when it ends. According to Frank Kermode, all endings are the literal death of a textual world, and it is through these endings that the reader can confront some of their own feelings of mortality (Kermode). Narrative closure helps to balance out the feelings evoked by a textual world's 'death'. The sense of completeness, upon a text's ending, hinges on a novel's resolution of its conflicts, that is whether it resolves or answers the questions raised regarding the narrative's characters, setting, plot, or events. There is a tendency to equate happy endings with a strong sense of closure, whereas some readers oppose the ambiguity and uncertainty of a more open ending. This gives the impression that closed endings, whether happy, or sometimes, tragic, can more successfully answer and resolve the questions posed by and in the text.

Jill, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith* all have open endings, which, we would argue, add another element to the queer interpretation of the texts' conclusions, suggesting more possibilities for the queer continuation beyond the respective texts' end. This is significant for the sense of queer futurity, and the general notion of queer temporality in relation to the connections between the past, present, and future for queer stories. As we noted in our theoretical and contextual chapter, by imagining a queer past it becomes easier to imagine a queer future. The open ending gives space to all manners of possible queer imaginaries.

At the end of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill*, we see Jill return to Castle Manor and become the new head of the Trecastle household, coming into her own as "a lady squire" (Dillwyn 323). Jill wraps up her own story quite neatly with noting her still young age, and the likelihood that while she will continue to "perform her duties of [her] new position" while also occasionally indulging in a foreign trip so as to satisfy her "natural spirit of restlessness and adventure" (323). However, this is not where the novel actually ends. Jill turns her focus once again, to Kitty as she goes on to explain what has happened to Kitty in the time since they parted ways. At the point of Jill's telling, Kitty is married to a man and has provided him with an heir, all successes for a young wealthy woman in the late nineteenth century. Yet, Jill contemplates whether Kitty is truly happy, despite only running into her once or twice through the years since they parted ways. Jill reminisces about Kitty by questioning the notion that marriage equals happiness. She further comments that: "I cannot help doubting whether she is really and in her secret soul happy. Does ambition fill and satisfy her life entirely? Or is there room for any lurking regret for the dream of love that came to her once - the romance that might have been, which is now buried far out of sight, and can never come to life again?" (325). While both Jill and the reader know of Kitty's former secret affection for Captain Norroy, this musing on Jill's part could be interpreted as a question she poses to

herself. Is her ambition as a lady's squire enough to satisfy her? Her own admittance of a "natural" need for "adventure" counters this (323). And is her reference to the dream of a "romance that might have been" (325), while on the surface the one between Kitty and Norroy, really about the secret desire and affection she herself held for Kitty? By ending Jill's narration with her wondering "should we have become friends" (326) if they had met one another as class equals, rather than as mistress and maid, Dillwyn retains the imagery of the homosocial friendship. The novel's allusion to Jill's future, also suggests the possibility of her meeting someone else who might usurp the place Kitty has had in Jill's emotions. This future possibility is further supported by the interpretation that Jill ends her story with a return to Kitty, as though by doing so she can conclude this chapter of her life. It enables Jill to move on to the next part of her story - one that lies beyond the text. In this way, we would argue that Jill's ending indicates a subtextual and interpretive queerness.

In *Tipping the Velvet*, there is no need for a subtextual and interpretive queerness, as everything is explicitly shown and stated on the page. During the socialist rally in the novel's final chapter, we are given a wrap-up of almost all of Nancy's major relationships, that have shaped her thus far. Running into Zena, Nancy experiences a closure in regards to what happened between them as they were thrown out of Diana's house. They even end up agreeing to stay in touch and remain friends. At this point, Zena tells Nancy that Diana is also at the rally. Out of Diana's direct sight, Nancy observes her with her new lover, another version of herself, a young woman dressed in masculine attire, being treated as Diana's pet. Whilst looking at them, Diana and Nancy's eyes meet, and Nancy's heart reacts by twitching in what she believes to be fright. When Diana does not recognise Nancy's presence any further, Nancy realises she has no need for further interaction. Seeing Diana and remembering the subjugation she had to live under while with Diana, Nancy turns away, returning to the tent where Ralph is about to give the speech they have been rehearsing for

weeks. As Nancy joins Ralph on stage to counter the jeers from the audience at his obvious nervousness, she realises her talents at performing can be used for social activism. This is how she can become a part of something, where what she has to offer is deemed of worth.

Having exited the stage, Nancy is told that there is a lady wishing to speak with her. She is shocked to find herself facing her first love, Kitty, again. As the two speak for the first time in years, Nancy realises that she has moved on from both the love she had for Kitty and the person she was back when she was with Kitty. When Kitty asks Nancy to come back to her, Nancy also rejects Kitty's advances as she realises that returning to Kitty would force her back into secrecy, both in terms of keeping their relationship hidden but also stunting Nancy's ability to live her life authentically. Angered by her rejection, Kitty retorts, "'You don't belong with her and her sort, talking all this foolish political stuff. Look at your clothes, how plain and cheap they are! Look at these people all about us; you left Whitstable to get away from people such as this!'" (Waters *Tipping* 466).

Doing as Kitty urges her to, Nancy looks around her, seeing her new-found family and community, where she does not have to hide from the people she cares about, who accept all the facets of her identity. Letting the last shreds of emotion for Kitty go, she turns to leave. As a last resort to have Nancy stay with her, Kitty calls out to her, telling her that she still has all of Nancy's old things, including the letters from her family. She even tells Nancy that her father came looking for her, and that they still hold out hope for news of Nancy (467). Deciding to ask Kitty to forward the letters to her, she thinks "I'll write, and tell them of Florence. And if they don't care for it — well, at least they'll know I'm safe, and happy" (468). From this it is clear that Nancy still cares for her family, but unlike her earlier visit home, where Alice's reaction to her relationship with Kitty made her fear the rest of the family's reaction, she is now at ease enough in herself and her new life that she knows she will still be loved and happy if her family rejects her.

Saying her final farewell to Kitty, and to her past, she returns to her friends, seeking out Florence, flush with her realisation that she loves her and must tell her. However, Florence has already left the rally, and Nancy immediately takes of to find her, as "it seemed to me suddenly that if I didn't find Florence at once, I would lose her for ever" (Waters *Tipping* 469). Finding both Florence and Cyril at the other end of the park, Nancy professes her love for Florence, saying that the heart Kitty broke has been "mended already, by [Florence]" (471). As Florence reciprocates Nancy's feelings in kind, the two share a kiss in public surrounded by a "crush of gay people" to the sound of "a muffled cheer, and a rising ripple of applause" (472).

While *Tipping the Velvet* ultimately affirms 'choice' as far as gender expression and sexuality is concerned, it also suggests that choice, agency, and internalised homophobia, exemplified in Kitty's character, are all complicated by cultural factors, and thus queer performance is both contextual and heavily subjective. The undoubtedly happy ending can be considered a closed one, however, by not directly stating what follows from Nancy and Florence's kiss but heavily implying that they end up together; Waters, lets their future be up to the reader. So, by imagining a queer story set in the past, but ending it on an open note, Waters suggests that a happy authentic queer future is possible, even in the past.

Lastly, there is Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*. Sue and Maud's happy ending comes about because of the last act of motherly love from Mrs. Sucksby, when she takes the blame for Gentleman's murder (Waters *Fingersmith* 508), and is subsequently hanged for it (524). After Mrs. Sucksby's hanging Sue, as her supposed next of kin, receives her belongings from the prison. In a secret pocket in the bodice of Mrs. Sucksby's blood-soaked dress, Sue finds the crumpled letter her biological mother, Marianne Lilly, wrote before she was taken from Lant Street, revealing her and Mrs. Sucksby's baby switch, and thus the true identities of Sue and Maud. With the final unknown mask shed, Sue is left finally knowing who she is and

where she comes from. Following this, Sue spirals into a depressive state, spending all her time holed up alone in Mrs. Sucksby's house in Lant Street, except regular visits from Dainty. Knowing her time at Lant Street is running out, and coming to know that Maud is aware of their birth identities, Sue leaves the Boroughs to find Maud, believing the only place Maud could be is back at Briar. Arriving at Briar, Sue finds it "quite shut up" and ravaged by neglect (537), but she still ventures inside. Here, she finds Maud sitting and writing at her uncle's old desk (541).

United at last, only possible due to the act of Mrs. Sucksby's sacrifice, Maud and Sue reconcile over the fact that, in the end, they were both deceived (Waters *Fingersmith* 543). Maud reveals to Sue that she has become what her uncle unwittingly made her to be: "his heir, and more" (Kaplan 52). The 'more' is the fact that Maud is not only a copyist of pornographic texts now, she is a writer of such texts herself. Even though Sue is shocked, they still reach a moment of mutually expressing their yearning with words, confessing that they want each other.

Significantly, Waters ends *Fingersmith* with a poignant reunion; a consummation and mutual recognition, between Maud and Sue, of their longing and love for one another. Lucie Armitt reads the ending of *Fingersmith* as ambiguous, that Waters does not claim Maud and Sue's futures "for good - neither saving them nor solving their problems" (Armitt 28). The possibilities that come with such a relatively open ending suggest, similarly to what Waters does with the ending of *Tipping the Velvet*, that the characters' queer future beyond the text is whatever the reader can imagine it to be. While her focus is on Maud reclaiming women-on-women pornography by becoming a pornographic writer, Claire O'Callaghan similarly notes on *Fingersmith*'s ending that even though "Waters leaves the page blank, is significance is more ambiguity; it reinforces [...] possibility, authenticity, and legitimacy" (O'Callaghan "The Grossest Rake" 573).

However, there is a difference to the sense of ambiguity of *Fingersmith*'s ending in comparison to *Tipping the Velvet*. Whereas *Tipping the Velvet* is more unmistakably positive, in the potential trajectory of its characters' story after the closing of the narrative, *Fingersmith* has more of a bittersweet quality to its open ending. Sue and Maud *does* end up together but their remaining at Briar can be interpreted as a return to their place of confinement, and being happy there seems out of place, as Sue noted earlier in the novel, "She will laugh. The sound is as strange, at Briar, as I imagine it must be in a prison or a church" (Waters *Fingersmith* 254). One could argue that, given the house now belongs to Sue, and with both Mr. Lilly and Gentleman dead, there is no one at Briar controlling or abusing either Sue or Maud. They are in that way free to do whatever they please. However, they are still two young women, albeit independently wealthy and landed, in the nineteenth-century and their position is undoubtedly still at the fringes of society. Their isolation at Briar attests to this. The return to the spatial beginning, at least, where Maud's narrative began - this resolution bears similarities to that of Amy Dillwyn's *Jill*. As our earlier analysis has shown, there are possible suggestions of queer futurity in *Jill* through the novel's protagonist, and therein also the narrative, defying Victorian societal norms, which establishes both a queer subjectivity and a queer narrative. Again, *Fingersmith*'s queerness is deliberate on Waters' part, yet the interpretation of what *Fingersmith*'s ending means for its queerness is potentially as complex and deeply subjective as any reaction to such an ambiguous open ending, just as we noted at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the multiplicity of queer implications and interpretations in the three novels' use of masquerade as an imaginary, as well as compared them in their textual use of the word 'queer' and their suggestions of cross-temporal queer possibilities. As suggested from the considerations presented in our introduction, the reason for choosing Amy Dillwyn's novel *Jill* (1884) in this thesis was due to its relative obscurity in academic criticism despite its somewhat recent republication. Ultimately analysing and comparing *Jill* with Sarah Waters' two neo-Victorian novels, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002), this thesis has explored multiple cross-temporal queer themes at home in both queer studies, literature and cultural studies, as well as Victorian studies and neo-Victorian studies.

Concluding our first theoretical and contextual chapter, neo-Victorian historiography offers a nuanced understanding of the Victorian era's influence on contemporary times, particularly in the realm of queer history. We especially considered Sarah Waters' queer "literary approach of [...] writing-back [...] to heteronormative historiography (Koegler and Tronicke 1) as evidence for this thesis' relevance in combination with a close reading of the understudied recently republished work of a queer Victorian author, Amy Dillwyn. Through diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches, scholars have unpacked the complex relationship between Victorian culture and modernity, highlighting the fluidity of identity and the performative nature of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler's theories of performativity challenge fixed notions of identity, emphasising the ongoing construction of subjectivity within social discourses. This framework not only challenges normative binaries but also underscores the agency of individuals in shaping their identities within social contexts.

Furthermore, queer theory resists singular definitions and encourages interdisciplinary engagement, disrupting linear historicism and envisioning alternative futures. By centering marginalised voices and experiences, queer theory encourages a more inclusive and intersectional approach to scholarship, one that acknowledges the complexities of lived experience. In relation to the nineteenth-century, queer theory interrogates the complexities of gender and sexuality of the period, revealing a diverse landscape of sexual expression and resistance to normative ideals. Through these critical lenses, the Victorian era emerges as a dynamic space where identities were negotiated, challenging traditional narratives and paving the way for contemporary understandings of queerness. By rejecting simplistic narratives of linear progression, researchers continually uncover the layers of complexity inherent in Victorian culture, highlighting its ongoing influence on modern understandings of gender and sexuality. Through the exploration of literature, art, and historical records, scholars engage in a dynamic dialogue with the past, revealing how Victorian norms continue to shape contemporary discourses and cultural imaginaries.

Moving on from the above-mentioned chapter, which offered the needed theoretical and contextual framework for this thesis, we then analysed our three respective novels, *Jill* (1884), *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), and *Fingersmith* (2002). Through these analyses we can conclude that each novel contributes to the queering of Victorian and neo-Victorian narratives and the exploration of female subjectivity, identity, sexuality, and relationality within the constraints of nineteenth-century society. With a specific interest in the novels' use of masquerade, we have argued and proven that masquerade can sufficiently constitute as a literary device in influencing queer cultural imaginaries.

Firstly, we can conclude that in *Jill,* Amy Dillwyn challenges conventional Victorian gender norms and depicts a nuanced portrayal of female same-sex desire and affinity, highlighting the complexities of homosocial, homoerotic, and homoromantic relationships

within a cross-class Victorian context. Masquerade operates on both a literal and metaphorical level, one as a cross-class disguise and the other as an identitarian pretence respectively. This masquerade allows Jill to challenge societal assumptions around gendered behaviour, while exploring her own identity beyond the constraints of class roles. The openness of *Jill*'s narrative conclusion is suggestive of queer possibilities.

Tipping the Velvet by Sarah Waters considers the fluidity of gender expression and sexual identity, echoing Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Through Nancy's journey of self-discovery, exploration of gender expression and sexuality, as well as emotional maturity, the novel queers the subjectivity of the neo-Victorian Bildungsroman. Thus it reclaims the past as queer and interjects joy and affirmation into the imagery of the queer past, notably in its cross-temporal use of the word 'queer'. Furthermore, the novel also utilises masquerade as a central imaginary, as Nancy's journey involves literal cross-dressing and performances, allowing her to navigate the restrictive gender norms of Victorian society. However, masquerade also extends beyond physical disguise to encompass the performance of different social roles and identities. Through Nancy's experiences, *Tipping the Velvet* explores the fluidity of gender expression and the complexities of self-discovery in a society rigidly enforcing binary gender roles, while opening up a narrative imaginary that posits queer authenticity at its centre.

Similarly, Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* rewrites the Victorian sensationalist narrative and plot, by both queering the epistemological trajectory of the neo-Victorian sensation novel and subverting the dynamics of the Victorian trope of mistress-maid in the complex relationship between its protagonists, Sue and Maud. In addition, *Fingersmith* intricately weaves a masquerade imaginary of identity and desire into the plot, serving as a means of deception, manipulation, and finally revelation. Sue and Maud's relationship initially

revolves around a scheme of deceit, however, as the novel progresses, masquerade becomes a means of exploring the characters' inner selves and desires.

In conclusion, masquerade functions as a complex literary imaginary in each of these texts, beyond that of a literal disguise. This imaginary allows for the queer exploration of identity, relationality, same-sex desire, and power dynamics within a Victorian and neo-Victorian literary and cultural context. Through the use of masquerade, these novels challenge normative narratives and offer nuanced portrayals of queer subjectivity, sexuality, knowledge, and temporality.

Following our three part analysis, we reoriented our notions of queer imaginaries to consider the word ‘queer’ and the implications and possible readings of the three texts’ usage of the word across the century-long interim between the original publication of Dillwyn’s *Jill* and Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*. In Waters's works, ‘queer’ is utilised both in its nineteenth-century meaning, denoting oddness and peculiarity, as well as its modern usage and understanding as something that challenges traditional binary notions of sexuality and gender. The repeated use of ‘queer’ in Waters's novels serves to establish a meta-awareness of the word's duality. The term is used to mark otherness, reflecting the unusual aspects of characters' lives and experiences, as well as their non-conformity to societal norms.

In *Fingersmith*, Waters associates queerness to the theme of masquerade, symbolising the characters' performance of different identities. Furthermore, the word is also linked to aspects of Maud's life and surroundings, such as her isolated upbringing and unconventional behaviour. In *Tipping the Velvet*, queerness is explicitly connected with gender performativity in conjunction with sexuality, in particular Nancy's exploration of her authentic sexual identity and gender expression. Contrastingly, Dillwyn's *Jill* uses ‘queer’ sparingly, primarily

in relation to Jill's musings on relationality. The term signifies Jill's growing emotional maturity and her evolving understanding of interpersonal connections. Despite the limited usage, 'queer' in *Jill* still implies a sense of peculiarity, however this is more Jill's own sense of relational queerness and less Victorian notions on sexual or gendered oddness in homosocial relationships.

Lastly, we compared the three novels' endings and textual implications for queer imaginaries in relation to queer possibilities and time, past, present, and future. While leaving some questions unanswered, open endings also provide space for imagining diverse possibilities, especially in queer narratives. We have argued that all three novels, *Jill*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Fingersmith* all have open endings. Firstly, we noted what the open ending suggested for *Jill* as a novel with a subtextual and interpretive queerness, rather than overtly queer texts like *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*. In *Jill*, Jill reaches an emotional maturity by the end of her narrative, that leads her to reflect on her relationship with Kitty. Our interpretation has been that this functions as a way for Jill to conclude her narrative, similarly as one would finish a chapter, in order to move onto whatever is coming next. Whatever happens to Jill beyond the text is unclear, but full of possibilities. For such an unconventional Victorian heroine, her future is easily imagined as something equally unconventional or queer, if you will.

In contrast to Amy Dillwyn's *Jill*, we acknowledged the deliberately happy endings of Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, while also noting that the possibility of a queer future for the main characters could be subjected to individual interpretation in a way that might question or challenge the intentional happiness of the endings, primarily in the case of *Fingersmith*. The ambiguity of such open endings reinforces the notions of authenticity permeating Waters' two narratives, while still demonstrating Waters' eye to the scope of queer temporality, as Waters herself puts it, "it is really [...] about the ways in

which, by imagining alternative histories, we can, with courage and mischief, begin to rethink the present and the future" (Waters *Fingersmith* "Afterword" 552). Our critical comparison argues that open endings in these novels allow for the envisioning of queer futures through the illumination of possible queer interstices in the past, which provides a richer, more complex interpretation and affirmation of queer identities and experiences.

As our conclusion has shown, this thesis has examined how Amy Dillwyn's *Jill* challenges Victorian gender norms and presents a layered portrayal of female same-sex desire and social dynamics through literal and metaphorical masquerades, while its narrative conclusion suggests a further subtextual and interpretive queerness. In Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*, masquerade functions as a central theme, highlighting the fluidity of gender expression and sexual identity. Through our analysis we have also shown how the novel's narrative reclaims a queer past, in addition to also position and affirm agency and authenticity for queer subjectivities and communities. Finally, *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters weaves masquerade into its narrative and plot, using it to reflect themes of deception, identity, and same-sex desire. As our final comparative analysis also showed, all three novels have open endings, which further suggests possibilities for queer imaginaries that connect across time.

Works Cited

"About the Author". *Sarahwaters.com* www.sarahwaters.com/landing-page/sarah-waters/sarah-waters-about/ Accessed 28,04 2024.

"Masquerade." *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press, 2024 Date of access 26 May. 2024, www-oxfordreference-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100138600

"The Life and Fiction of Amy Dillwyn". *Swansea University*, www.swansea.ac.uk/arts-and-humanities/arts-and-humanities-research/our-recent-research-projects/the-life-and-fiction-of-amy-dillwyn/ Accessed 25.02 2024

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Earl McPeek, 1999.

Akbar, Arifa. "Sarah Waters: 'Is there a poltergeist within me?'". *The Independent*. 29 May 2009. www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/sarah-waters-is-there-a-poltergeist-within-me-1692335.html. Accessed 04.05 2024.

Amin, Kadji. *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History*. Duke University Press, 2017.

- - -. "Genealogies of Queer Theory." *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*. Ed. Siobhan B. Somerville. Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 17–29.

Arias, Rosario. “Female Confinement in Sarah Waters Neo-Victorian Fiction”, in Alber, Jan and Frank Lauterbach (eds.), *Stones of Law, Bricks of Shame: Narrating Imprisonment in the Victorian Age*. University of Toronto Press, 2009, pp. 256-277.

Armitt, Lucie, and Sarah Gamble. “The Haunted Geometries of Sarah Waters’s Affinity”, *Textual Practice*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2006, pp. 141–59. doi.org/10.1080/09502360600559837.

Armitt, Lucie. “Dark Departures: Contemporary Women’s Writing after the Gothic.” *Postfeminist Gothic*. Ed. Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz. Palgrave, 2007, pp. 16–29.

Ayres, Brenda. “Fits Like a Glove: Neo-Victorian Metonyms of Fingers, Hands, and Gloves.” *The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism*, Springer International Publishing AG, 2024, pp. 255–71. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32160-3_14.

Baldick, Chris. "Bildungsroman." *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford University Press, 2015. www-oxfordreference-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-129

Schaff, Barbara. “On Not Being Mrs Browning: The Revisionist Feminism of Sarah Waters’s Neo-Victorian Trilogy.” *Anglistik*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2013, pp. 63-75.

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?” *PMLA : Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 110, no. 3, 1995, pp. 343-49. www.jstor.org/stable/462930.

Big Think. (2011, June 6). *Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender | Big Think* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc

Boehm, Katharina. "Historiography and the Material Imagination in the Novels of Sarah Waters." *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2011, pp. 237-257. www.jstor.com/stable/41228679

Bohata, Kirsti. Introduction. *Jill*, by Amy Dillwyn, edited by Kirsti Bohata. Honno, 2013.

- - -. "'A Queer-Looking Lot of Women': Cross-Dressing, Transgender Ventriloquism, and Same-Sex Desire in the Fiction of Amy Dillwyn." *Victorian Review*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, pp. 113–30. doi.org/10.1353/vcr.2018.0013.

- - -. "Mistress and Maid: Homoeroticism, Cross-Class Desire, and Disguise in Nineteenth-Century Fiction." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017, pp. 341–59. doi.org/10.1017/S1060150316000644.

- - -. "An original thinker and economist who liked to smoke a 'man's cigar'." *WalesOnline*, 01 Mar 2017, www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/original-thinker-economist-who-liked-12628475 Accessed 03.05 2024

Bradbury-Rance, Clara. *Lesbian Cinema After Queer Theory*. Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Bratton, J. S. “Beating the Bounds: Gender Play and Role Reversal in the Edwardian Music Hall.” In Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (eds.), *The Edwardian Theatre*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 86–110.

Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal (Washington, D.C.)*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–31
doi.org/10.2307/3207893

- - -. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* Routledge, 2006.
doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979

- - -. *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge, 2011.
doi.org/10.4324/9780203828274

Castle, Terry. *Masquerade and Civilization: the Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. Stanford University Press, 1986.

Childs, Peter and Fowler, Roger. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Routledge, 2006.

Datskou, Emily. *Queer(ly) Lingering in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. 2023. Loyola University Chicago, PhD dissertation.

de Groot, Jerome. “‘Something New and a Bit Startling’: Sarah Waters and the historical Novel.” *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Kaye Mitchell, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp.56-69.

Degórska, Malwina. “Crossing the ‘Gender Frontier’: Cross-Dressing and Male Impersonation in Sarah Waters’ Tipping the Velvet (1998).” *Crossroads in Literature*

and Culture, vol. 6, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2013, pp. 147–55. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-21994-8_14

Dillwyn, Amy. *Jill*, 1884, edited by Kirsti Bohata. Honno, 2013.

Dingley, Robert. "'It was now mistress and maid no longer; woman and woman only": The lesbian menace in Victorian fiction." *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns: Essays on Fiction and Culture*, edited by Penny Gay and Catherine Waters. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. 1999. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre and Postmodern*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Dougherty, Daniel. "'I Thought Unaccountably of Fairy Tales': Jane Eyre, Form, and the Fairy Tale Bildungsroman." *Brontë Studies : Journal of the Brontë Society*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2024, pp. 38–51. doi.org/10.1080/14748932.2023.2268177.

Dove, Danielle. "Ghostly Gloves, Haunted Hands: The Material Trace in Sarah Waters's *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*." *Victoriographies*, 9, no. 3, 2019, pp. 222–41. doi.org/10.3366/vic.2019.0351.

Dryden, Steven. "A Short History of LGBT Rights in the UK." *The Good Men Project*, Oct. 26 2019. goodmenproject.com/social-justice-2/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk/

Eng, David L. et al. "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text*, vol. 23, no. 3–4, 2005, pp. 1–17. doi.org/10.1215/01642472-23-3-4_84-85-1

Foucault, Michel. “The Subject and Power.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 777–795, doi.org/10.1086/448181

Gallagher, Catherine. “*Hard Times* and *North and South*: The Family and Society in Two Industrial Novels.” *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 36, 1980, pp. 70-96.

Gamble, Sarah. “‘I know everything. I know nothing’: (Re)Reading *Fingersmith*’s Deceptive Doubles.” *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Kaye Mitchell, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 42-55.

Garber, Linda. *Identity Poetics*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Routledge, 1992.

Hadley, Louisa. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press, 2005.

Harra, Melanie M. *Everything but Named: Queer-Coded Characters in 19th-Century Literature*. 2023. San Francisco State University, Masters Thesis. Scholar works Calstate.

Hernández, Elsa Adán. “Nan King’s Orientation in Sarah Waters’s Tipping the Velvet: A Journey of Gender and Sexual Self-Discovery Following ‘The Slantwise Direction of Queer Desire.’” *Gender Studies (Timişoara)*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2021, pp. 59–74. doi.org/10.2478/genst-2022-0005

Hughes, Winifred. “The Sensational Novel.” *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, edited by P. Brantlinger & W.B. Thesing, John Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 260-278. doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1002/9780470996324.ch16

Hopkins-Williams, Bethan. “Celebrating International Women’s Day: Amy Dillwyn (1845-1935)”. *Royal Commision on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales*, 08 May 2024, rcahmw.gov.uk/celebrating-international-womens-day-amy-dillwyn-1845-1935/ Accessed 03.05 2024

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory*. Melbourne University Press, 1996. Accessed via Google Scholar: books.google.dk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=nes8DAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=IzIAoYZ8rD&sig=pSiFKFajN5ZgqwoKSmlzTMogQnM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false 21.04.2024

Jeremiah, Emily. “‘The “I” inside “Her”’: Queer Narration in Sarah Waters’s Tipping the Velvet and Wesley Stace’s Misfortune.” *Women (Oxford, England)*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2007, pp. 131–44. doi.org/10.1080/09574040701400171.

Jones, Adele, and Claire O’Callaghan. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50608-5

Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: histories, fictions, criticisms*. Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

- - -. “Fingersmith’s Coda: Feminism and Victorian Studies”. *Journal of Victorian Culture: JVC*., vol. 13, no. 1, 2008, pp. 42-55

doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.3366/E1355550208000064

Kaye, Richard A. “THE NEW OTHER VICTORIANS: THE SUCCESS (AND FAILURE) OF QUEER THEORY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH STUDIES.” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2014, pp. 755–71. doi.org/10.1017/S1060150314000291.

Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New Edition, Oxford University Press, 2000. doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195136128.001.0001

Kirchknopf, Andrea. “(Re-)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts.” *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008, pp. 53-80. neovictorianstudies.com/article/view/311/298

Koegler, Caroline, and Marlena Tronicke. “Neo-Victorianism’s Queer Potentiality: Livability and Intersectional Imaginaries.” *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2020, pp. 1-43. neovictorianstudies.com/article/view/323/308

Kohlke, Marie Luise. “Sexsation and the Neo-Victorian Novel: Orientalising the Nineteenth Century in Contemporary Fiction.” *At the Interface: Probing the Boundaries*, Vol. 53, Rodopi, 2008, pp. 53-77. doi.org/10.1163/9789401206525_005

Koolen, Mandy. “Historical Fiction and the Revaluing of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters’ “Tipping the Velvet”.” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2010, pp. 371-387. www.jstor.org/stable/40983499

Kuiper, Kathleen. *Prose: Literary Terms and Concepts*. Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012.

Lambert, Karen. "'Capturing' queer lives and poetics of social change." *Continuum*, Vol. 30, Issue 5, pp. 576-586. doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1210800

Lanser, Susan S. "Queering Narrative Voice." *Textual Practice*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2018, pp. 923-37. doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1486540.

Llewellyn, Mark, and Ann Heilmann. "The Victorians Now: Global Reflections on Neo-Victorianism." *The Critical Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2013, pp. 24–42, doi.org/10.1111/criq.12035.

Llewellyn, Mark. "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?" Neo-Victorian Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008, pp. 164-185. neovictorianstudies.com/article/view/315/302

Mambrol, Nasrullah. "Queer Theory." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, March 4 2019. literariness.org/2019/03/04/queer-theory/

Mandal, Abhilasha. "The Conversation Surrounding the Word 'queer' Is Evolving." *University Wire*, Uloop, 2020.

Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton University Press, 2007.

Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers : The New Woman in the Popular Press*. University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

Maynard, John R. “The Bildungsroman”. *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Eds. P. Brantlinger and W.B. Thesing. John Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 279-301. doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1002/9780470996324.ch17

Miller, Kathleen A. “Sarah Waters’s Fingersmith: Leaving Women’s Fingerprints on Victorian Pornography.” *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies.*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2008, www.ncgsjournal.com/issue41/miller.html

Miller, Meredith. “Lesbian, Gay and Trans Bildungsromane.” *A History of the Bildungsroman*. Ed. Sarah Graham. Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 239–266.

Mitchell, Kate. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages*. Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2010 doi.org/10.1057/9780230283121

Mitchell, Kaye. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia - The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. 10th anniversary edition ed., New York University Press, 2019.

Murphy, Naoise. “Queering history with Sarah Waters: Tipping the Velvet, lesbian erotic reading and the queer historical novel.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2021, pp. 7-18.

www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/queering-history-with-sarah-waters-tipping-velvet/docview/2519900110/se-2?accountid=8144

Neves, Júlia Braga. *London, Queer Spaces and Historiography in the Works of Sarah Waters and Alan Hollinghurst*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022, doi.org/10.1515/9783839457344.

O'Callaghan, Claire. "'The Grossest Rakes of Fiction': Reassessing Gender, Sex, and Pornography in Sarah Waters's Fingersmith." *Critique : Studies in Contemporary Fiction.*, vol. 56, no. 5, 2015, pp. 560–575 doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/00111619.2015.1019399

- - -. *Sarah Waters: Gender and Sexual Politics.* Bloomsbury, 2017.

O'Rourke, Michael. "The Afterlives of Queer Theory." *International Social Science Journal*, English edition, vol. 63, no. 207–208, 2012, pp. 25–37. doi.org/10.1111/issj.12015

Onega, Susana. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries in Sarah Waters' Fingersmith." *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, vol. 48, no. 48, 2015, doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2053

Ormsbee, Michael. "Battle for the Bildungsroman: 'protagonicity' and National Allegory." *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 12, 2020, pp. 1955–68. doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2020.1834704.

Osborne, Peter, and Lynne Segal. "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler." *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 67, no. 67, 1994, pp. 32–39.

Raynaud, Claudine. "Coming of Age in the African American Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, ed. Maryemma Graham. Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 106-121.

Renk, Kathleen. *Women Writing the Neo-Victorian Novel*. Springer International Publishing, 2020. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48287-9

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia University Press, 1985.

- - -. *Epistemology of the Closet: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. University of California Press, 1990.

- - -. *Tendencies*. Duke University Press, 1993.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. Bloomsbury, 1991.

Taylor, Elinor. *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, no. 13, 2015, pp. 144–46. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26920390.

WalesOnline. "Author Sarah Waters on Being That 'Lesbian Writer.'" *Wales Online*, 21 Mar. 2013, www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/showbiz/author-sarah-waters-being-lesbian-1803050

Wallace, Diana. *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic.* University of Wales Press, 2013.

Warner, Michael. "Introduction." *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Ed. Michael Warner. University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Waters, Sarah. *Fingersmith*. Virago Press, 2002.

- - -. *Tipping the Velvet*. Virago Press, 1998.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century." *History Workshop*, No. 1, 1976, pp. 211-219. www.jstor.org/stable/4288046

- - -. *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*. Routledge, 2017. doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.4324/9781315161525

Wexler, J. M. *Queering Happily Ever After: Narrative Closure in Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Novels*, Brandeis University, United States -- Massachusetts, 2017. *ProQuest*, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/queering-happily-ever-after-narrative-closure/docview/1873870990/se-2.

Wilson, Cheryl A. 'From the Drawing Room to the Stage: Performing Sexuality in Sarah Waters's Tipping the Velvet.' *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* Vol. 35, No. 3, 2006. doi-org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/10.1080/00497870600571919

Yurttas, Hatice. "Masquerade in Fingersmith." *Journal of Narrative Theory : JNT.*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2018, pp. 109–34 www.jstor.org/stable/45095540