
Sarah Waters

The Discourse of Genre and Intertextuality in *Tipping
the Velvet, Fingersmith, and The Little Stranger*

by Merel Meuwese

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to write this thesis without the help of my supervisor, Usha Wilbers, who has helped me immensely with every doubt and hurdle that stood in my way, during the process of writing this thesis. I want to take this opportunity to thank her for all the advice and positivity over the last few months. It was a pleasure to work together during not one, but two theses. I also would like to thank Chris Louttit in advance, as the second reader of this thesis. Lastly, my thanks go to Dewi Beulen, who was a wonderful writing companion and a great support during the entire process.

I hope anyone who reads this thesis will enjoy it and be inspired to read Sarah Waters novels for him or herself!

Abstract

The aim of this master's thesis is to contribute to research on Sarah Waters' novels, by examining how Sarah Waters engages with traditional genres through the reinvention and reinterpretation of elements that are characteristic of the genre, as well as through referencing to classic texts that are part of the same genre. For this research, a close reading and analysis of three novels by Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Fingersmith* (2002), and *The Little Stranger* (2009), will be conducted in terms of what genre, or genres, each is part of. By analysing the use of literary references and traditional genres, it will become clear to what extent Waters reinvents, as well as maintains their traditional forms. An intersectional model of analysis will be used for the research, which will consist of K.S. Whetter's and Amy Devitt's approach to genre as 'maker of meaning', the theories on (meta)historical fiction by Jerome de Groot, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn and the notion of intentionality by Michael Baxandall. This thesis will argue that Waters' novels are each interplays between genres that aim at creating counter-histories from new perspectives, by placing the texts among classic works of fiction within a genre tradition.

Keywords: Sarah Waters, genre studies, intertextuality, queer fiction, metahistory, historical fiction, Neo-Victorian fiction, the picaresque novel, Gothic fiction, the country house novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith*, *The Little Stranger*

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Chapter 1	11
Chapter 2	21
Chapter 3	32
Chapter 4	43
Conclusion	54
Bibliography	58

Introduction

Since publishing her debut *Tipping the Velvet* in 1998, Sarah Waters has been an author who is studied extensively by many different scholars, both in the field of gender studies as well as in literary studies, with a special focus on the neo-Victorian and lesbian elements in her writing.¹ Waters is known among scholars as part of a group of authors that “kick-started the move to the mainstreaming of the historical novel ... [moving away from the] pulpy, marginal and tired” (De Groot, “Something New” 56-57) to a genre that is reviewed extensively and adapted to the screen. Due to her use of traditional genres in the majority of her works, Waters has been compared to well-known authors of British classics of similar genres, such as Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Daphne Du Maurier. She, in turn, has often conceded to these comparisons in interviews, stating that she has been influenced by various authors in writing her works and often takes inspiration from British novels written in the periods in which her novels are set. In an interview with Claire Armitstead from *the Guardian*, she for example explained that *Fingersmith* (2002) is “very much a homage to the novels of sensation: to Wilkie Collins or Mary Elizabeth Braddon” (Armitstead). When being compared to Charles Dickens, she disagrees however, stating; “People say ‘you’re like Dickens’, but I’m not like Dickens. Zadie Smith is a Dickensian writer because she’s writing about society now, just as Dickens was writing about his society. To write these faux Victorian novels is quite different” (“Hot Waters”). Waters’ clarity about the clear fictional, or “faux”, elements in her works of historical fiction and the definite purpose of them has been studied by Jerome de Groot and Mandy Koolen, among others. In his article “‘Something New and a Bit Startling’ – Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel” (2013), De Groot argues that historical fiction is a complex genre in which authors try to combine authenticity and historical facts with fiction (59). In doing so, they clearly distance themselves from Realism, while also maintaining elements of truth conforming to the time period (“Something New” 57). This is also true for Waters’ works in how she uses characteristics recognizable from the Nineteenth-century novels in her Neo-Victorian works, for example, while also reconstructing the time period to fit with her needs as a lesbian author writing queer fiction. De Groot describes this mode of writing, recognizable in Waters’ works, as a crucial part of what historical fiction aims to do; repurposing and reinventing traditional forms of writing, while also consciously reimagining history (“Something New” 60).

¹ For examples, see Louisa Hadley; Adele Jones and Claire O’Callaghan; Beth Palmer; and Diana Wallace.

When looking at Waters' work as reinventions of past traditions and forms, the parallels readers and scholars see between Waters and Dickens are not surprising, as her works are actively imitating and reimagining the traditional writing of the past, including those by Dickens. However, in stating she is not Dickensian, Waters of course means to point to the fact that, while Dickens has been of influence in her writing, his perspective as a contemporary writer in the Victorian era is crucially different from her imitations of the same period. Koolen notes that, though Waters is keeping truthful to the time period in which her works are set, she also clearly deals with contemporary issues in her novels, which set them apart from a period novel. Her debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), for example, "calls upon readers to consider similarities and differences between past and present meanings of "queer" and, in turn, to attend to continuities and discontinuities between experiences of same-sex desire then and now" (Koolen 374). In her article "Historical Fiction and the Revaluating of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*", Koolen argues how Waters uses historical fiction as a way of revealing both differences and similarities in the past and present, and in doing so shows that this opposition encourages more "nuanced readings of the past" (375). In her book *Female Gothic Histories*, Diana Wallace discusses the same topic by writing about Waters' use of the word 'queer', as she points out that by using the word, both in historically correct ways as well as by hinting at its present-day meaning, Waters makes readers aware of "the complexities of historical process" (163). In that sense, Waters' writing can be called 'metahistorical', which Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn explain as a process of creating "a fiction and [making] a statement about the creation of that fiction" (1), in which the author thus shows her own techniques of both creating an atmosphere of truth, using historical facts and well-known elements, as well as reinventing that past slightly into something new and fictional. The first chapter will expand on the topic of metahistorical narratives.

Similarly to how Sarah Waters plays with language and history in her works, she also seems to very consciously experiment with different genres. As stated earlier, Waters is quite open about the inspiration she gets from classic works of fiction in writing her own novels and multiple scholars have picked up on this aspect of her works. In an interview for *Feminist Review*, she even explained that "the books often have references, either semi-submerged or more overt, to other novels, or perhaps to other traditions of writing", because she is writing for readers who, like her, are "big reader[s]" and will understand the references (Armitt, "Interview" 117). Llewellyn states that "Waters' novels are at every level engagements with

other literary works”, as the intertextual references in her novels form clear “responses to and results of acts of reading” (196). Wallace discusses the intertextuality in Waters’ works to other Gothic novels. She addresses the inspiration Waters got from Sheridan Le Fanu’s *The Rose and the Key* (1871), Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1860), as well as some other Victorian novels in writing *Fingersmith*. Furthermore, Wallace states that “*The Little Stranger* blends together and ‘queers’, the genres of historical novel, ghost story, detective story and country house novel” (185), again remarking on the inspiration Waters took from novels of the same genres, such as classic haunted house stories like *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne Du Maurier. In the article “The ‘I’ inside ‘her’”: Queer Narration in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace’s *Misfortune*”, Emily Jeremiah also discusses intertextuality in one of Waters’ works by arguing that *Tipping the Velvet* is part of the literary tradition of the picaresque novel, as well as the Bildungsroman and takes inspiration from nineteenth-century novels, especially those by Charles Dickens. Jeremiah states that since “the picaresque novel and the Bildungsroman [are] by definition masculinist forms, [Sarah Waters] is already overturning conventional cultural scripts in featuring a female protagonist” (135), but she continues the reinvention of the genre by making the ‘coming-out’ the most important part of the story, instead of leaving the Bildungsroman’s usual focus on the ‘coming-of-age’.

The reinvention of traditional genres is a recurring technique used by Waters in her novels. The importance of treating this as an essential part of her works, relies on an understanding of how a genre works in a novel and how it is of influence in telling a story. There are multiple ways in which to approach genre, as K.S. Whetter explains in his book *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance*, some of which are that of linguists, who explain genre as “a type of communicative event”, rhetoricians, who see “genre as a social indicator, a means of analysing types of discourse and their socio-historical implications” and literary theorists, some of whom argue “that genre is a way of grouping literary works” (9-10). The first chapter of this research will further expand on the different types of approaches to genre. The overarching consideration among each of the approaches, however, is that genre is a crucial part of a novel, or any medium in fact, through which the recipient understands the medium’s message. Throughout our lives, we come to learn that certain elements fit within a specific genre, which we in turn can then approach with a set of presuppositions of what a work is trying to achieve or what message it wants to relay (Whetter 14). This knowledge then forms an important part of the meaning behind a work, as “no work makes its meaning without to some extent depending upon the audience’s recognition ... that it belongs to a

specific genre” (Whetter 14). Whetter later argues that “a text may sometimes fail to present certain features or fulfil its generic expectations, but we should see this not as cause for consternation, as has been known to happen, but rather as a source of information about that particular text” (22). The importance of studying Waters’ use of genres thus lies in how she purposefully uses them to bring across a message, both through which genre she chooses, as well as how she decides to stick to its traditions or in contrast decides to reinvent them (175). Northrop Frye states the purpose of this type of genre research “is not so much to *classify* as to *clarify* [a work’s literary] traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed so long as there were no context established for them” (Whetter 33). It is precisely because of this that an in-depth analysis of Waters’ way of working with, or sometimes even against, traditional genres will give a better understanding of the purpose of her novels.

While there is a field of research specifically aimed at the study of genres and researchers such as Fowler and Frye have extensively studied the ways in which genre can be approached, there are no theories available as of yet that aim at analysing the use of a genre in works of fiction. To be able to research Waters’ use of genres in her historical novels, this research will thus analyse three of Waters’ novels within an intersectional framework that combines the genre theory available with a study of the intertextuality and metahistory present in the source texts. The first chapter of this research will further elaborate on this intersectional model of analysis, as well as expand on intertextual and metahistorical writing. The aim of this approach is to show how Sarah Waters is in dialogue with traditional genres, by referencing to classic literature recognisable for the readers and creating expectations that come with the genres. In addition, it will analyse how Waters reinvents well-known genres to fit her purpose for the novels, specifically in creating a space for queer, female characters, while combining historical fiction with a clear contemporary voice. This research will thus be an intersectional study of genre and gender studies with a focus on intertextuality to be able to draw a conclusion about how Sarah Waters uses contemporary gender theories and issues to recompose the traditional form of the genres, and thus might also be pointing out the fictionality of the historical elements and the relationships she creates. By analysing Sarah Waters’ works through this lens, this research will offer a new perspective on the author’s works that will add to research that has been done previously on her works as well as takes a step towards a way of using genre theory to analyse the purpose of genres in fictional works.

The research will consist of four chapters, as well as a concluding chapter. The first chapter of this research will, as stated previously, give a brief overview of genre theory, metahistorical narration and intertextuality within the broader field of literary studies. In addition, it will present the intersectional model used for the analyses of three novels by Waters, which will consist of K.S. Whetter's and Amy Devitt's approach to genre as 'maker of meaning', the theories on (meta)historical fiction by Jerome de Groot, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn and the notion of intentionality by Michael Baxandall. Chapter two to four will consist of an individual close reading and analysis of the novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Fingersmith* (2002), and *The Little Stranger* (2009) in terms of what genre, or in some cases more than one genre, each is part of and how they are both part of a genre tradition, as well as a reinvention of a classic form. By analysing both the use of literary references as well as traditional genres, it will become clear to what extent Waters reinvents, as well as maintains traditional forms of genres. The chapters each will aim at describing which intentions Waters seems to have had in engaging with the specific genres and how this helps bring out the main theme and focus of her novels. The concluding chapter will bring these separate analyses together to provide a conclusion on how Sarah Waters uses genres to give meaning and depth to her works, by using classic literature as a source of inspiration as well as reinventing traditions within the genres.

Chapter 1

Sarah Waters' works of historical fiction are each dynamic interplays between reimagining history, playing with genres and referencing classic British literature. It is for this reason that her novels call for an intersectional model of analysis that enables a way to consider what these three recurring elements do for the aim of the novels. The purpose of this first chapter is to expand on the topic of 'genre' in multiple ways. First of all, the term must be defined and explained to enable an understanding of its meaning and use in the following research, which will be followed by a few different approaches to the notion of 'genre', specifically focussing on the articles by K.S. Whetter and Amy Devitt. A second term that will be defined is 'historical fiction', as it is the foremost genre present in each of the novels by Sarah Waters, and is a genre that calls for a specific approach, due to its opposing nature of both presenting 'truth' as well as fiction. Along the same lines, this chapter will elaborate on the notion of metahistorical narratives, as well as on the term 'intertextuality', which theory will be based on Michael Baxandall's notion of intentionality. The last part of this chapter will elaborate on the intersectional model that will be used for the analysis of the novels.

Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'genre' as "a particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose" ("genre, n."), which is both a very broad explanation of its meaning, while, at the same time, creates a very narrowing understanding of how a genre has influence on the aim of a novel. In the introduction of the anthology *Modern Genre Theory* (1999), David Duff indeed states that "in modern literary theory, few concepts have proved more problematic and unstable than that of genre" (1), giving the following definition of the term at the start of the book:

A recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and/or functional criteria. A term increasingly used in the classification of non-literary (and non-written) as well as literary texts; notably films and media programmes . . . In a second sense, the term is often used, sometimes pejoratively, to denote types of popular fiction in which a high degree of standardisation is apparent: for instance, detective stories, historical romances, spy thrillers and science fiction. (Duff xiii)

'Genre' will be approached according to Duff's definition, with the important distinction that, this research will always imply 'a genre within a novel' when using the term. This is an important distinction to make, since the novel itself is also approached as a genre by some, within the broader context of (literary) texts or even forms of expression. This is a difficult

approach in itself, however, as “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” (Duff 69), since it is made up out of (sub)genres that are also continuously evolving and distinctly different among themselves. The misconception in literary studies has long been that genres are a restrictive set of rules that “deny the uniqueness of the text, deny spontaneity, originality and self-expression” (Duff 1). Duff continues his introduction by stating that this notion has begun to change since the beginning of the twenty-first century, most probably as a result of the expansive growth of popular culture. Due to this change, “the anti-generic tendencies of Romanticism and Modernism have given way to an aesthetic stance which is more hospitable to notions of genre, and which no longer sees as incompatible the pursuit of individuality and the espousal of ‘generic’ identities, of whatever sort (Duff 1). In other words, the negative charge of the term has, instead, evolved into seeing ‘genre’ as an ‘enabling device, the vehicle for the acquisition of competence’ (Duff 2), which can be combined and mixed up into new forms as much as the author wishes. Since most books are categorised by genre before being published, or even before having been offered to a publisher, labelling books through genres as part of marketing plays an important role within the publishing industry of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and has even become a crucial way of discussing all types of novels outside of the field of literary criticism. Even though the notion of ‘genre’ seems to be generally accepted as part of the discussion of the novel, Duff states that “the apparent consensus may be misleading [, since] it is likely that genre theories will always, at some level compete with author theories, and that authors (or directors) will continue to insist on the uniqueness and autonomy of their work, while also wanting ... to exploit the resources - the *power* - of genre” (16). What will become apparent through the analyses of Waters’ novels is that she is an author who does not shy away from borrowing and engaging with sources and writing traditions from the past.

As was stated in the introduction of this research, there are multiple different approaches to ‘genre’ as a result of its complexity.² In her article “Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept”, Amy Devitt argues how she thinks the notion should be approached by stating that the move towards a better understanding of genre requires recognition of its role as “maker of meaning” (580). To explain this, Devitt describes how readers will fill in unknown information about any given text, simply by making assumptions on the basis of the elements they see in the text (575). A classic example of this would be that

² K.S. Whetter gives a quick overview of each different school of research and its way of researching the notion of ‘genre’ in his book (p. 9-10).

when reading a text that begins with the words ‘once upon a time’, readers immediately know they are most likely reading a fairy tale and can thus expect a certain type and form of text with certain types of characters and scenarios. In addition to that, Devitt states, categorizing the text readers have been given will also evoke a certain response that goes further than “a set formal features or textual conventions” (575), as they will give additional meaning to the text that makes it possible to place it among other similar texts. In the case of the fairy tale, for example, readers have come to understand that it is suitable to read to children to entertain, but also to educate them, since one of the elements of the genre is that the text usually contains moral lessons. K.S. Whetter argues that while “genres are recognized and defined by the presence of a number of features . . . some features are merely commonplace and some are essential: it is the essential features which define a genre or, for that matter, create and validate (or quash) one’s expectations” (32-33). Genres thus are complex constructions of elements that can interchange and overlap with other genres, while at the same time having a number of quantities that are essential to the purpose of the genre. Through these different quantities, readers come to understand the aim of the text, as a result of previous experiences of a similar kind. The set of elements assigned to a particular genre are not set into stone, however, as “like other aspects of literature, [they] are in a constant state of flux” (Whetter 19) and thus the ever-changing quality of genres makes it impossible to equate “genre with form” (Devitt 575). This does make it possible, however, to study changes in the approach of a genre within certain novels, as is the purpose of this research. Since there is no consensus on the study of ‘genre’ within literature, this research will focus on genres as ‘makers of meaning’, as described by Devitt and Whetter, and approach them as ways of supporting, or even achieving to encompass, the message (or messages) of a novel. In this research, the approach of genre will be directly related to the intertextuality in Sarah Waters’ works of historical fiction, which means that both concepts are essential in the analyses of the novels.

Since Sarah Waters’ novels are all works of historical fiction, it is important for the purpose of this research to discuss what a historical novel is and what the genre’s main characteristics and intentions are. As well as being works of historical fiction, Waters’ novels are each also part of additional subgenres, sometimes even multiple for one novel, so these subgenres will be discussed in the subsequent chapters where the works will be analysed individually. First and foremost, however, the novels are considered part of the historical fiction genre, as they are all set in a historical time period which the author has tried to portray

in her narrative. While the genre is now studied extensively by scholars, it has only been taken seriously as a genre at all since the last three decades or so. Previously, it was marginalised as a ‘female’ form of writing, which was not to be taken seriously, as it was the genre for “pulpy” romance and generally tired as a genre (De Groot, “Something New” 56-57). Since the 1990s, however, novelists have embraced it as a genre with a function and have proven it to be a suitable format for complex narratives and themes (De Groot, “Something New” 57). Since then, the genre gained academic interest too, and Sarah Waters herself took part in this wave of interest, as she started her career with critical work on the genre in the form of a PhD thesis in 1995. Her critical work is part of the shift towards an approach of historical fiction as a genre with potential and complexity, looking further than the form of the historical novel and more at its content and purpose (De Groot, “Something New” 59). As Jerome de Groot puts it in his article from 2013, Sarah Waters’ novels, which appeared after her academic work, “[seek] to reflect this critical development and complication, as [they] address complex issues rather than simply debating the logic of representing the past” (“Something New” 59). De Groot has also written a book on the genre, called *The Historical Novel* (2009), in which he gives the following explanation of what historical novelists do:

History is other, and the present familiar. The historian’s job is often to explain the transition between these states. The historical novelist similarly explores the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar. To use Alessandro Manzoni’s metaphor, the historical novelist is required to give ‘not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history’. (3)

Historical novels thus need to go further than simply state the facts of history. They need to fill in the gaps between the facts and be imaginations of what could have been. De Groot explains that “historical writing can take place within numerous fictional locales: romance, detective, thriller, counterfactual, horror, literary, gothic, postmodern, epic, fantasy, mystery, western, children’s books” (*The Historical Novel* 2). The genre’s ability to fit within each type of genre and plot is one of its defining characteristics, as Sarah Waters shows through the differing approach in each of her works. About the genre’s function, De Groot writes that it “might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention” (*The Historical*

Novel 2). Some of these elements are explicitly present in Waters' historical fiction, as her focus often lies in making the reader aware of how history is also fictionalised to a certain extent, as it is formed through subjective and singular accounts, that are often written in favour and from the perspective of one group of people over others. In what ways she does this will become more apparent through the analyses of the novels, but what is crucial about her works, as well as other works of historical fiction, is that they undermine "the totalizing effects of historical representation and [point] out that what is known is always partial, always a representation" (De Groot, "Something New" 57). It is because of this that historical novelist will simultaneously aim at staying authentic to a certain time period, while also negating the supposed truthfulness of what is written down by taking a slightly different route. Waters does this most distinctly through her focus on narratives of lesbian romance in time periods during which this was not written about. The presence of lesbian romance in a historical setting makes the reader aware that although it is not described in canonical works from the period or factual history, lesbianism was certainly also present during those periods and thus is a part of history that can still be explored through narratives.

An important element in contemporary historical novels is metahistorical narration and, as mentioned in the introduction, Sarah Waters can be seen as a metahistorical writer, because of certain characteristics that appear in her novels. Before analysing those elements in the upcoming chapters, however, it is necessary to elaborate on the meaning of metahistory and what it entails. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn are co-editors of the book *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2007), in which they define metafiction with a quote by Patricia Waugh:

Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion . . . to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'. (1)

The aim of the author in writing a metafictional novel thus often is to broaden the reader's awareness of the fabrication of the fictional world and its plot. In metahistorical writing, this is done by authors to not only point to the fictional story they created themselves, but also make the reader aware of "the process of historical narrative itself" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2). For women especially, Heilmann and Llewellyn state, this is an important drive for writing

metahistorical novels, as it is a format that enables authors to reclaim parts of historical narratives that have not given a voice to specific groups in societies and to imagine the events from the perspective that the author offers. In doing so, the subjectivity of historical accounts is brought to light and authors can, in essence, rewrite them into a fuller, more complete version of history, by creating “their ‘own’ (counter-)histories” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 3). Since the late 1960s, there has been a growth in these ‘new histories’ written by minority groups that have wanted to reassess and address their position in canonical history. Diana Wallace writes that these type of novels, especially those of the 1990s, “contest the idea of a single unitary and linear history” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 3), offering new perspectives alongside the traditional, well-known notions of history. It is useful to analyse Sarah Waters’ novels with the notion of metahistory as a backdrop, since she is interested in writing about, mostly gay, women’s lives in a historical setting and in doing so challenges canonical views of history. This notion, in the context of Waters’ works, can be immediately linked to her active remaking of genres, as she engages with traditional forms and views in both cases. As Wallace argues, “[Women’s historical novels of the 1990s] emphasise the subjective, fragmentary nature of historical knowledge through rewritings of canonical texts, through multiple or divided narrators, fragmentary or contradictory narratives, and disruptions of linear chronology” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 3), and Waters is especially doing this in her works by taking on traditional genres and making them fit her needs. In addition, Llewellyn states in “Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre” that Sarah Waters is looking to challenge history “through rewriting or at least engaging textually with the written histories of previous generations . . . because Waters’ novels are at every level engagements with other literary works” (Llewellyn 195-196). This statement, of course, relates to Waters’ use of intertextuality, as well as metahistory, as a way of taking on genres and historical settings in each of her works.

Sarah Waters’ first three works, *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, are part of what can be called a subcategory, or subgenre, of historical fiction; the Neo-Victorian writing tradition. They are each contemporary novels that look back on the Victorian past and reimagine its atmosphere and societal structure. Jerome de Groot describes the genre as a literary movement in contemporary culture that engages with the time period through “cultural representation, social nostalgia, postmodernism and collective memory” (“Something New” 60). In her book *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), Louisa Hadley states that most critics mark the 1960s as the starting point for the genre, as

some noteworthy novels were published during this decade that were set in the Victorian era.³ As with historical fiction in general, Hadley argues, “the neo-Victorian fiction produced since the 1980s is marked by a concern with history and historical narratives; it is not only concerned with reinserting the Victorians into historical narrative, but also with exploring the ways in which historical narratives affect responses to the past” (6). Furthermore, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn argue that, more than simply being a work of historical fiction that is set in the nineteenth century, a crucial element of the Neo-Victorian novel is its engagement with “the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians” (Davies 1). Waters’ aim with her first three novels then, as will become apparent from the analyses, appears to have been to write a narrative for lesbian and female Victorians, so contemporary readers can envision a space for them in Victorian history as well. Characteristic of these novels is their awareness of the cultural representation and historicity of the narrative, allowing the texts to work and come across to its readers. De Groot argues that awareness of the contrasting position of the Neo-Victorian novel, being authentic and provisional at the same time, is crucial to Sarah Waters’ novels, which will become clear throughout the chapters on the novels (“Something New” 60). Neo-Victorian novels are often times described as works of fiction that are nostalgic towards the past, offering romanticised versions of it. In opposition to that, Silvana Colella describes that Neo-Victorian novels can also be “haunted by the ghosts of other texts and forms of writing, by authoritative voices from the past, by the spectral traces of Victorian characters whose actions still resonate within contemporary narratives, and by the shadows of histories and plots that resist closure.” (85) The haunting might also take on different shapes, Colella states, as can be seen in Waters’ *Fingersmith* and *Tipping the Velvet*, which are each formed by “the promise of a haunting to come” (85) through an omniscient narrator who occasionally steps in with indistinct information about the protagonist’s future. In the introduction of *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, Rosaria Arias and Patricia Pulham describe that a peculiar feature of the Neo-Victorian novel is its uncanny nature, which lies in a set of features used for the genre;

[I]t often represents a ‘double’ of the Victorian text mimicking its language, style and plot; it plays with the conscious repetition of tropes, characters, and historical events; it reanimates Victorian genres, for example, the realist text, sensation fiction, the

³ Hadley notes *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) as important publications for the Neo-Victorian genre (2).

Victorian ghost story and, in doing so, seemingly calls the contemporary novel's 'life' into question; it defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society; and it functions as a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present. (xv)

Arias and Pulham describe the characteristics of uncanniness according to Sigmund Freud's "list of psychological triggers for uncanny sensations[, which] include the double; repetition; the animation of the seemingly dead or, conversely, the deathlike nature of the seemingly animate; ghosts or spirits; and the familiar made strange." (xv) The chapters on *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* will explore what elements makes them part of the Neo-Victorian writing tradition, alongside their obvious Victorian setting.

The crucial role intertextuality plays in Waters' novels is quite visible, as becomes clear simply through her own statements about her novels. It is not only the case that Waters is borrowing from previous British works of fiction; rather, she is consciously placing her own works among classic British novels in written in the same traditions and critically engaging with them (Armitt, "Interview" 117). This conscious placing of the novels among and in comparison to well-known and classic titles gives, Beth Palmer states, "readers a framework for how to read these texts" (91). The term intertextuality is defined by David Duff as:

The relationship between a given text and other texts which it cites, assimilates or transforms; or the branch of literary studies which examines such relationships. In its broadest and most radical definition (that of Julia Kristeva, who coined the term, having derived the concept from her reading of Mikhail Bakhtin), the term denotes any relationship, implicit or explicit, between two or more texts or 'signifying systems', including relationships constituted by genre. (Duff xiv)

The term can thus be used in reference to a relationship between multiple texts, as either an engagement with or unconscious presence of one text within the other. As Duff also describes in his definition, however, intertextuality according to Julia Kristeva's theory from 1966 is used to reference to the relationship that occurs among each and every text, since the use of language is in itself not original and all texts are written as a result of themes and forms that already exist and have educated and influenced the writer consciously or subconsciously (Montgomery et al. 164). The approach of intertextuality that will be used for this research is different from Kristeva's approach, and, instead, in line with Michael Baxandall's idea of intentionality. In this approach of intertextuality, the author of the studied text is seen as an

actor who purposefully accepts earlier influences as material to remake into new forms, instead of being “a passive recipient of the predecessor’s ideas or techniques” (Landwehr 4-5). Baxandall thus poses that a writer actively engages with previous texts and influences and is aware of the intertextuality in her work. Margarete Landwehr addresses the danger in fully committing to the idea of intentionality, however, since it might as well be that for a reader the intertextuality is so obvious and on the foreground that it cannot be coincidental, while for the author the influence could be much more subconscious and an influence of something read years ago (5). In the case of Sarah Waters, this approach seems less inclined for those type of mistakes however, due to her explicit mentioning of multiple sources that were of influence for her works and her own intentions of engaging with earlier texts in her works. The analyses of the three novels by Waters will thus use the approach of intentionality by Baxandall in analysing the relationships between Waters’ texts and classic British literature, especially within the scope of the genres of the three works. In studying the use of genre in a specific novel, it can also be argued that it is unavoidable that intertextuality becomes automatically included, since “the very idea of genre . . . necessarily involves a degree of interconnection between texts” (Montgomery et al. 161). Each of the following chapters will thus include an analysis of the main genre or genres of the text, followed by the intertextual references made through the use of these genres, as each has mutual influence over the other.

As will have become more clear through this chapter, the way in which this research will approach *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger* cannot be defined by one theory or field. Instead, the novels will be analysed following an intersectional model of all the previously mentioned terms and theories combined for the close reading of the texts. In the analyses of the novels, Amy Devitt’s notion of the genre as ‘maker of meaning’, as well as Whetter’s idea on how genres are in ‘constant state of flux’, will be used to show how Waters gives meaning to the novels through the use and reshaping of traditional genres. The focus of these genre analyses is not on the historical fiction genre; rather, it will be on the subgenres Waters uses alongside the historical. While the historical elements of the novels are of great importance to the texts and will be discussed, it is through the use of the additional genres that she conveys her message in the novels the most, as they each have a new set of characteristics which she engages with and adapts. In addition, Waters also seems to be purposefully using metahistorical narration to create a contrast between the past of the narrative and the present of her own time. In doing so, she ultimately is in dialogue with the genres, especially through the intentional use of intertextuality as a way of engaging with notions of historiography as

well as genre traditions. The way in which Sarah Waters combines historical fiction with other genres and places her own novels among classic British fiction makes an intersectional approach suitable for the analyses of the three novels.

Chapter 2

Have you ever tasted a Whitstable oyster? If you have, you will remember it. . . . Did you ever go to Whitstable, and see the oyster-parlours there? My father kept one; I was born in it. (Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* 3)

Tipping the Velvet, Sarah Waters's debut novel from 1998, opens with an introduction to the protagonist Nancy that is reminiscent of Dickens; allowing the reader to imagine the living situation of the main character just before the character is introduced and the story has fully started. The opening sets the tone of the novel, by introducing the voice of the narrator as well as giving an idea of the class and time period of the protagonist. *Tipping the Velvet* is a Neo-Victorian novel that is set in the 1890s. Waters engages with the era's perception of gender and class, while also rewriting history by offering an insight into a lesbian Victorian narrative, opposed to a traditional heteronormative perspective of Victorian life. In addition, the story of Nancy Astley is presented in an episodic form, making it a 'picaresque' novel. This chapter aims at showing how Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* engages with the tradition of the picaresque, by using its episodic form to focus on the performativity of gender and the identity of the protagonist, and by referencing to classic works of fiction from Virginia Woolf and Charles Dickens. In addition, it illuminates how Waters makes her work a true contemporary historical fiction novel that contrasts the past and present, through her dual use of the term 'queer' and her engagement with the contemporary theory of 'the performativity of gender' by Judith Butler.

Before presenting the analysis, the novel will be introduced in some detail. The purpose of a full recital of the events of the novel is to illuminate the episodic form of Waters' novel and to support the analysis following it. The narrator of the story is the novel's protagonist Nancy herself, who recounts the events of her life just before and in the year after leaving her parents' house in Whitstable. After having lived with her parents in an oyster parlour for eighteen years, Nancy meets the male impersonator Kitty Butler, by whom she is instantly swept of her feet; "Piercing the shadows of the naked stage was a single shaft of rosy limelight, and in the centre of this there was a girl: the most marvellous girl – I knew it at once! – that I had ever seen" (*Tipping the Velvet* 12). The two girls soon have an intimate friendship that leads to Kitty asking Nancy to accompany her as her dressing maid to London, where she has been offered a contract at a music hall. Kitty is quite successful during her first months in London with the help of her manager, the young man Walter Bliss, who himself is a former performer. On the same day that the two share their first romantic night together,

Nancy's own career as a male impersonator starts as she joins Kitty on the stage, and the duo of male impersonators, Kitty Butler and Nan King, quickly becomes famous in the city. The girls enjoy multiple successes and become increasingly wealthier, during a time period in which Nancy and Kitty are both each other's partners on the stage, as well as lovers behind closed doors. After a little over a year, Nancy's dream life falls apart when she unexpectedly finds Walter and Kitty together in the bedroom. Kitty announces that they will be getting married, and, in addition to that, will resume their music hall career together as a married duo. Heartbroken Nancy runs from her home, leaving everything behind, only to visit their dressing rooms at the music hall to quickly pick up some of the money she stored there and her costumes. After a few weeks of neglecting herself in a decrepit room in a shady neighbourhood she does not know, she decides to take to the streets dressed in her costumes, finding that dressed as a man she feels safe. Through a misunderstanding, she soon rolls into a career as a renter and passes her time on the streets of London, learning about the ways of renting from a man who poses as a 'mary-anne' by the name of Sweet Alice. During her days as a renter, Nancy meets Florence, who is a social activist and a young woman Nancy immediately wants to get to know better. On the way to meet Florence, however, Nancy gets picked up from the street by the 38-year-old wealthy widowed lady Diana Lethaby, who convinces her to spend the night at her house. This leads to Diana hiring Nancy for sexual entertainment. Diana wants Nancy to dress up as a man and go out with her as 'Neville', treating her as an object to show off to impressed friends. Nancy spends her days as Diana's trophy for a year, feeling both joy and pride for being there, as well as boredom and emptiness for being alone all the time and used as a prize. It all comes to an end abruptly when she is bluntly thrown out of the house as the result of defending the maid of the house, Zena, against the tyranny of a drunk Diana and her friends. Having completely relinquished any hope of conciliation, Nancy again starts wandering the streets of London, ending up with Florence, who she remembers and thus turns to for help. Florence somewhat reluctantly offers Nancy a night at her home, which she shares with her brother and a baby. Since Nancy is certain she wants to stay with Florence, she starts working on convincing her of her good intentions by cleaning the house and caring for the baby. Some time passes of Nancy working for the small family, while she slowly gets closer to them. Finally, the two women begin a romantic relationship, after having found out about each other's past. The novel ends with Nancy becoming convinced about the causes of the socialist rally and performing a speech alongside Ralph, Florence's brother. She bumps into Kitty who begs her to come back to her and restart

their love affair, but Nancy turns her away, realising she has found her happiness and place with Florence and her family.

The adventures of Nancy the oyster girl can primarily be described as a ‘picaresque’, because of the novel’s episodic form, first-person narration, and young lower-class protagonist. In the article “The Picaresque Novel: A Protean Form”, Howard Mancing states some of the characteristics usually present in picaresque works; “(1) first-person narration, (2) strict realism, (3) social satire, (4) a protagonist of low station (e.g., a beggar, a delinquent, a servant to many masters, or an orphan), and (5) a struggle for existence in a hostile and chaotic world” (182). Mancing continues his article, however, by stating that these elements are not necessarily always present in every picaresque novel, as some classic novels associated with the genre do not fit this precise description, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain (182). The picaresque genre thus is, like all genres, an everchanging form of narrative that has evolved into new forms since its origin. At its starting point in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Spain, the picaresque novel was first and foremost a novel about a *picaro*, which was then “used to refer to inmates holding the lowest offices in the prison in Seville, galley slaves, beggars, kitchen scullions, students, *esportilleros* (carriers), and others” (Mancing 184). Since then, the protagonist of the picaresque has evolved into someone from the lower class, who is poor and often struggling to survive or make enough money to live from. The novels that are generally considered to be the first picaresque novels are *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities*), which appeared anonymously in 1554, and *Primera parte de Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599) by Mateo Alemán. Much like *Tipping the Velvet*, the novels are written from the protagonist’s perspective, who is reflecting on his or her life and past adventures and hints at events that will happen in the near future as a result of good or bad decisions, thus creating an omniscient narrator. In *Tipping*, this happens often through Nancy the narrator who states something about Nancy the young heroine’s future or decisions that lead to something bad. A moment where this occurs is when Nancy is with Diana for the first night. The widow has just lured Nancy in, when she tells the story of a beggar who sets a djinn free from a bottle and is offered a choice; either the man can live simply yet in comfort for seventy years or he receives five hundred days of unlimited pleasure, with a princess, servants and gold. In being asked which she would chose, Nancy replies; “I suppose then, the pleasure” (*Tipping the Velvet* 248), which turns out to be the reply Diana is hoping for and leads to her asking Nancy

to stay with her for pleasure. Having made this life changing decision, Nancy the narrator ominously states; “The djinn was out of the bottle at last; and I had settled on pleasure. I never thought to ask what happened to the beggar in the tale, once the five hundred days came to an end” (*Tipping the Velvet* 250). This statement makes the reader more aware of the unstable position young Nancy has allowed herself to be in, and in the following chapters thus is aware of the fact that it will most likely end tragically. This form of narration illuminates the episodic form of the story, focussing on the adventurous side of the story, which is an element characteristic of the picaresque. Waters thus manages to bring out the episodic of the picaresque, by building the tension in the novel through the omniscient narrator. These moments that create an episodic experience of the novel are mostly present at the beginning and end of a chapter, drawing out the change that has happened, or will be happening, for the heroine. Waters often illuminates these moments, making them very apparent to the reader, by seemingly stepping out of the narrative to exaggerate the act of storytelling done by the older Nancy who knows what is to come. When Nancy recalls announcing to her parents that she wanted to leave Whitstable to go to London with Kitty, Waters writes;

I wish, for sensation’s sake, I could say that my parents heard one word of Kitty’s proposal and forbade me, absolutely, to refer to it again; that when I pressed the matter, they cursed and shouted; that my mother wept, my father struck me; that I was obliged, in the end, to climb from a window at dawn, with my clothes in a rag at the end of a stick, and a streaming face, and a note pinned to my pillow saying, *Do not try to follow me...* But if I said these things, I would be lying. (*Tipping the Velvet* 58)

This moment very clearly is an act of storytelling, as the narrator would have liked to make it better but shares the choice to keep her story close to the truth. Not only does this moment create a new episode in the characters life, fitting with the picaresque, but it is also metahistorical in how it raises awareness on what comes into play when recounting a story. As addressed in the first chapter, metahistorical narratives point to the illusion of truth created in fiction and in doing so thus break that illusion somewhat to lay bare the construction of the story. Additionally, these narratives focus on how history is also a construction, as that too involves the process of narration and is an act of storytelling. Waters points to the construction of not only her plot, but also to processes of storytelling from the past by bringing attention to the allure of sensation and exaggeration in recounting events. While some sources might seem very close to the truth, the sensation seeking in storytelling might not be as on the foreground in every text as she presents it here, thus making the reader more

aware of the semi-fictionality of historiography. Waters uses the characteristics of the picaresque genre to strengthen this element of the novel, as the episodic omniscient narration blends in incredibly with her metahistorical intentions in this scenario.

While the tradition of the picaresque is to narrate the story of a *picaro*, *Tipping* shows the reader a different protagonist by describing a girl, albeit working class, who decides to step out for adventure on her own, making it a 'Bildungsroman' as well. As stated earlier, this work by Waters is reminiscent of Charles Dickens' tone and techniques in describing living situations and class differences. It is also similar, however, in the way in which the picaresque genre is used in both *Tipping* and *Oliver Twist*. In the article "Oliver Twist and the Spanish Picaresque Novel", Sherman Eoff presents Dickens' classic work as only part of the picaresque tradition in its starting point, before turning into something that is of an entirely different genre form, though he does not describe what genre this could be (441). The picaresque story often is about the *picaro* moving from one master to the next and experiencing multiple layers within society. Oliver is a character who, much like the traditional picaresque calls for, comes across different masters from a very young age and later in life takes up the art of thievery. Eoff links these experiences of Oliver to the stories of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Guzman de Alfarache* respectively (444). In *Tipping*, Waters does not describe a child in as poor circumstances as Oliver or the original *picaros* Lazarillo and Guzman, but a child who has been safely cared for all her life by loving parents with a stable income. This is where Waters' work is crucially different from the traditional genre and its well-known texts, as she portrays a young woman who comes to find herself in certain circumstances as a result of her own choices without this being directly linked to her survival. The moment in *Tipping* that does fit with the *picaro* lifestyle is when Nancy decides to start earning money on the streets and live rogue – more than ever before in her life at any rate – as a renter. While Nancy followed Kitty because of love, it is here that money starts to be of importance and becomes a drive. The instance when she runs away from Kitty and the life they have made for themselves as performers in music halls then feels similar to when Oliver runs away from his employer and needs to find himself a way to live. This is what Nancy does too; she roams the streets, finding a new place to live and, accidentally, taking on a new job as a renter. Much like Oliver does with thievery, Nancy too learns the skill from someone in the field, though Sweet Alice is very different from Dickens' Fagin, and Nancy is under no threat from him. *Tipping* does, additionally, fit in among the three novels and within the picaresque tradition, as she unintentionally moves from job to job in trying to find a place where she fits

in. While her story does not begin much the same as the picaresque novel might call for, she ends up roaming the streets, looking for a place to live and a way to earn money at multiple occasions. As a result, she also experiences different masters, working for Kitty, Diana and Florence respectively, as is the tradition for the *picaro*. Waters does remake the genre in its master-servant format, however, as the purpose of the master-servant relationships in *Tipping* of course differs greatly from the tradition. While she does experience the different layers of society and finds out about different ways of living, the novel ultimately is Nancy's journey of discovery in finding her own, lesbian, identity and trying to find out what makes her happy. The different masters then have the purpose of bringing her closer to the truth about her own identity. It is in this element of the plot that the novel is also a classic "Bildungsroman", or a coming-of-age narrative, which can be defined as "a novel in which the chief character, after a number of false starts or wrong choices, is led to follow the right path and to develop into a mature and well-balanced man [or woman]" (Jeremiah 135). Waters' aim for the novel seems to be for her character to find out who she is and find people to love, but all the while setting her story against the backdrop of the Victorian times. The result is a novel that shows Nancy during her development from a young girl who is reckless and selfish into a self-aware woman who wants to care for the people and the world around her. In this aim, Waters stays quite close to the tradition of the picaresque in her storytelling, using the episodic format and the omniscient first-person narration, but reshapes the genre into an adventure tale of self-exploration for a young lesbian woman.

Within the story of self-exploration, Waters responds to modern theories on gender fluidity and performativity, thus stepping away from the time period in her narrative to present readers with contemporary views. It is in this element of the novel that Waters also remakes the picaresque genre, as she does not aim at social satire – which the original picaresque novels do have as a clear undertone – but at contrasting 'the then and the now'. While presenting Nancy's play with gender roles as somewhat magically charged at times, she also very much shows the performative part of what Nancy does, as Waters describes Nancy studying and copying men on the street to perform her role more convincingly. Judith Butler presented her theory on the performance of gender in 1990 with her text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, so Waters' use of the theory in her novel published in 1998 was very much relevant for the time. Emily Jeremiah discusses Waters' reference to Butler's work in her article, stating that "there are numerous Butlerian echoes in *Tipping* (not least in Kitty's surname); recent theory is drawn on and alluded to, then"

(Jeremiah 133). As described in chapter one of this thesis, historical fiction draws upon both the past and the present in its narrative, making the reader aware of the fictional aspects of historical accounts as well as of specific situations relevant for the time period of the reader herself. By drawing on theories that were only just recently published, Waters reinforces her purpose for the text; making the reader aware of the hidden histories by creating “alternative temporalities” (Jeremiah 133). Nancy’s gender bending is described as being almost inscrutable. From the very start, Nancy is portrayed as a very convincing cross-dresser, and she is very taken by her appearances as a man herself;

I looked a little like my brother Davy – only, perhaps, rather handsomer. I shook my head. Four nights before I had stood in the same spot, marvelling to see myself dressed as a grown-up woman. Now there had been one quiet visit to a tailor’s shop and here I was, a boy – a boy with buttons and a belt. (Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* 118)

She seems to slide into the role of a man so easily that it becomes “too real” and too convincing, which the dressmaker, Mrs Dendy, exclaims “ain’t quite the idea now, is it?” (*Tipping the Velvet* 118) The problem here, Jeremiah explains, is that the vision of a woman posing as a very true looking man “challenges the boundaries between the sexes, echoing Butler’s dismantling of the idea of ‘sex’ as a stable category” (*Tipping the Velvet* 137). Waters’ text then seems to build on Butler’s theory, which presents gender as a social construct and as always part of a performance, by showing in her text that this is precisely what is possible; Nancy is dismantling the boundaries between the sexes, by convincingly posing as both. At her first fitting for male costumes, Nancy thus has to be dressed up with very feminine attributes in addition to her male costume, such as a smaller waist in her jacket and a slightly more coloured lip than is used for Kitty’s costume, so as to not look like a man too convincingly. Later on, when she takes on her role as a man much more seriously, she is able to safely roam the streets of London, changing clothes in rooms lend by the hour so as not to make her landlady suspicious. The woman lending the rooms where she changes her outfits seems to be undecided about her gender, as Nancy describes; “from a certain narrowing of her gaze when she dealt with me, I think she was never quite sure if I were a girl come to her house to pull on a pair of trousers, or a boy arrived to change out of his frock” (*Tipping the Velvet* 195). More importantly than this lady is Nancy’s stance herself, however, as she admits to agreeing with the lady by stating; “Sometimes, I was not sure myself” (*Tipping the Velvet* 195). It is in these instances that the novel seems reminiscent of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*. While in Woolf’s novel, the protagonist does actually change physically

from a man's body into a woman's body, Nancy does not change in such a drastic way. Mentally, however, she admits to being uncertain about her body. After having spent time posing as a man with Diane for a long time, she feels her body has physically changed;

The clothes I had bought, they were the kind I'd used to wear in Whitstable and with Kitty; and I seemed to remember that I had been known then as a handsome enough girl. But it was as if waring gentlemen's suits had magically unfitted me for girlishness, for ever – as if my jaw had grown firmer, my brows heavier, my hips slimmer and my hands extra large, to match the clothes Diana had put me in. (*Tipping the Velvet* 381)

Gender for Waters in *Tipping* is as fluid as for Woolf in *Orlando*, as both authors portray protagonists in their novels who play with their perceived gender, changing into a male or female role whenever that is more useful for them. While Woolf never addresses how her character feels about waking up one morning to suddenly have found his – or her - body changed into that of a woman, both novels address how each gender changes people's attitude towards them. Waters describes Nancy's constant changing of roles in more detail than Woolf, often focussing on Nancy's experience in portraying herself as a man. As the above stated quotes show, Nancy becomes unsure of her body, as she expects it to look traditionally feminine, while also having gotten used to present it in masculine clothing and feeling comfortable that way. The sense of having a body that magically adapts to fit the gender that is needed at that moment occurs at another point as well. After having spent weeks roaming the streets as a renter, Nancy describes Diana undressing her for the first time; "I felt like a man being transformed into a woman at the hand of a sorceress" (*Tipping the Velvet* 239-240). It is in these moments where Waters describes Nancy's cross-dressing as something quite mysterious and almost magical that the novel seems to reference to *Orlando* most. In the first two parts of the novel, Nancy's cross-dressing are taken out of her control, into the hands of Kitty or Diana, with the purpose of entertaining a crowd or out of lust. Her gender in these moments thus also seem to be in the hands of other people, so that her performance becomes something outside of her own doing and she loses sight of who she really is. Gender fluidity is present at multiple instances throughout the novel, not only in Nancy herself, but in various characters, like Kitty, and Diana and her friends. Sarah Waters' intention with the presence of gender fluidity in the novel seem to be to show her readers the contrasts between the past and the present, drawing them into the historical setting of the story, while at the same time

making them aware of their own contemporary time by showing that not that much has changed about our perception of gender roles.

The raising of awareness about temporal changes also happens through Waters' use of the word 'queer'. It is used a striking number of times – 43 times, according to De Groot - and is often employed in relation to both outer appearances, such as dress, as well as behaviour, for example in women towards other women (“Something New” 62). The term is never explained in the novel or never used to indicate homosexual activities, while the readers will undoubtedly see the connection there. In her article “Historical Fiction and the Revaluating of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters's “Tipping the Velvet”, Mandy Koolen argues that “Waters's use of this term playfully reminds readers that rather than being a period piece, this novel belongs to the realm of contemporary historical fiction” (374). Koolen agrees with Jeremiah in her text, when it comes to the purpose of the word in the text; making the readers consider the use of the word in the two different settings and its meaning behind it at each point, thus resulting in seeing the “continuities and discontinuities between experiences of same-sex desire then and now” (374). De Groot states that the presence of the word in a historical piece such as *Tipping* implies its authenticity, as the word was used often during that time (“Something New” 62). When looking at the etymological meaning of the term, it is obvious that the tension between the historical and the contemporary use of the word was precisely Waters' purpose in using the word in her novel. It has been noted that from around 1500, the term 'queer' was used to describe something as “strange, peculiar, eccentric”, while the term was first used in connection to 'homosexual' in 1914, which is how contemporary readers of *Tipping* will most likely also interpret the term (“queer, *adj.*”). The word will thus also relate “to sexual identity, dissidence, challenge, otherness”, which seems to have the purpose of entertaining Waters' contemporary readers (De Groot, “Something New” 62). More importantly, however, the contrasting use of the word, in both its awareness of contemporary relevance and its past neutrality, “traverses the boundaries of past/now that historical fiction itself happily shifts between, and, . . . both achieves historical effect (it is authentic) and contemporary resonance” (De Groot, “Something New” 62). Waters achieves this effect easily by changing the use of the word, and additionally, its meaning for the reader. When Nancy receives a letter from Alice in response to hers talking about her relationship with Kitty, it says; “I can never be happy while your friendship with that woman is so wrong and queer. I can never like what you have told me” (Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* 134). In this sentence, the use of 'queer' will most likely come across as indicating a homosexual

relationship to the contemporary reader, even though, were this an actual sentence written down by someone from the nineteenth century, it would never have been intended in that precise way. Waters stresses this crucial difference by using the word in its clear nineteenth-century form as well. When Nancy sees Kitty performing with her entire family present, after having talked about her for a full week, she says;

I could not but long for her to step upon the stage again; but I wished, too, that I might be alone when she did so . . . rather than seated in the midst of a crowd of people to whom she was nothing, and who thought my particular passion for her only queer, or quaint. (*Tipping the Velvet* 22)

Since the term is used in combination with the word ‘quaint’, the overall aim of Nancy’s wording seems to clearly imply ‘strange’, as is fitting for the time. As stated earlier, this contrasting use and meaning of the word thus makes the reader aware of the difference between the past and the present, affirming “a contemporary queer sensibility” (Jeremiah 133). The purpose of the term ‘queer’ thus seems to be to step away from the time period in which the novel is set, to remark on the time period of the author and the reader, while staying authentic to the narrative. Sarah Waters continued to use the term in her other novels as well, and thus is a technique that remained of importance in each of her texts. Among the three novels analysed, the term ‘queer’ is most strikingly and purposefully used in *Tipping the Velvet*, however, as it used in such close relation to gender fluidity in the text.

In conclusion, Sara Waters’ Neo-Victorian novel *Tipping the Velvet* focusses on the self-exploration of a young lesbian Victorian by combining primarily the picaresque with a Bildungsroman and referencing classic texts by Dickens and Woolf. Waters uses the episodic format of the picaresque tradition to write a metahistorical narrative that illuminates the act of storytelling, both in her works as well as in historical narratives. The tone of the picaresque is kept through the omniscient narrator in the form of an older version of the protagonist that recounts her life story. She reworks the tradition of the picaresque novel by narrating a story about a girl who travels between different masters by choice, and not, following tradition, because of circumstance. Waters reforms the picaresque novel too by not writing a social satire, but a novel that addresses both the past and the present, thus critically engaging the reader with both. She does this through the use of Butler’s gender theory on gender fluidity, making cross-dressing an essential part of her plot, as well as her meaning with the novel. Her novel thus plays with tradition, as well as contemporary elements, making it a combination of

both well-known tropes and forms, and a story that offers a new perspective on the Victorian era and gender roles.

Chapter 3

Fingersmith (2002) tells the story of a young orphan girl from London who gets involved in an elaborate heist to steal the heritage of a lady. At first hand, this seems to be it for the plot of Sarah Waters' third novel. Nothing is what it seems, however, as Waters switches the traditional Dickensian setting of the band of thieves, to an uncanny double narrative inspired by Wilkie Collins and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, which creates a novel full of deception for both the characters and the reader. The novel was shortlisted for both the *Orange Prize for Fiction* and the *Man Booker Prize* and was later adapted to the screen in a 2005 BBC production, possibly making it Waters' most popular novel to date. Much like Waters' first two novels, *Fingersmith* is a Neo-Victorian novel, as it is set during the Victorian era. In an interview with Lucie Armitt, Sarah Waters explains that her intention with *Fingersmith* was to write "in the tradition of the Victorian novel of sensation" ("Interview" 117). This chapter will explore how Waters engages with writers and writing traditions from the Victorian era to create a novel that uses the element of the 'uncanny double' to portray a lesbian relationship that is conflicted by deceptive plotting, and fluid and false identities.

Fingersmith consists of three parts, the first one starting off in London in the home of Mr. Ibbs and Mrs. Sucksby, the first of whom is of the cunning type that sells stolen goods on the black market and the latter being a woman who runs a questionable orphanage, or 'orphan farm'. Sue, short for Susan, Trinder, the protagonist of the story, is one such orphan, as her mother left her in the care of Mrs. Sucksby before being hanged on account of having murdered a man. The story takes off when a man named Gentleman arrives late at night and asks Sue to help him with an elaborate heist. His plan is to marry Lady Maud Lilly, a young woman of Sue's age who has a big fortune and land in her name, to then have her locked in an asylum, so as to become the sole owner of Maud's heritage. Sue will have to be the lady's maid, so Gentleman can woo Maud Lilly. Sue hesitantly agrees to the plan, not being able to say no to the promised three thousand pounds. A few days later, she leaves for Maud Lilly's house, Briar. Maud Lilly soon proves to be the shy, insecure and naïve girl Gentleman said she would be and the two girls form a bond quickly. Sue also learns about Maud's horrible uncle, who lives at Briar as its owner and spends his days in his library, compiling a dictionary. After Gentleman arrives to the scene at Briar, Sue feels conflicted, knowing that she is helping Gentleman hurt Maud. Sue realises that she will not do anything to save Maud from Gentleman, however, as she does not dare return to London without the money. Her inner struggle becomes bigger, as she finds herself in love with Maud. Soon after Sue realises

she loves Maud, the two girls share an intimate night, where she teaches Maud how to kiss. The night does not change anything about the situation, however, and the girls soon leave Briar in the night to meet with Gentleman. During a rushed ceremony, Gentleman and Maud are married and they spend the following weeks in a cottage, where Maud withers away from unhappiness. Gentleman reinforces Maud's unhappiness and unhealthy looks daily by pestering her, until he asks a doctor to come in and see her. Everyone, including Sue herself and the lady who owns the cottage, are questioned by the doctor and Sue is afraid of how Maud will be treated at the asylum. Soon, Sue realizes that those weeks spend at the cottage were not intended to get Maud into the asylum, but Sue. By now, having spent weeks eating the food Maud left untouched, Sue looks healthy and plum, wearing Maud's best dress at her request. She realises Maud and Gentlemen's intentions, as the doctor takes her to the asylum; to have her look like a lady, while Maud has the appearance of a maid. Immediately after Sue is taken to the asylum, part two of the novel switches to Maud's perspective, starting in her early childhood among violent nurses at the asylum where her mother died. At the age of eleven, Maud's uncle takes her away from the asylum to be his secretary. Through constant punishment and strict rules, Maud learns to copy, bind and read her uncle's books, whose work turns out not to be compiling a dictionary, but assemble a bibliography of literary pornography from all around the world. After some years, Maud comes to expect nothing more of her life then to live under the watchful eye of her uncle and work as his secretary. This suddenly changes as Gentleman, under the name of Richard Rivers, appears in her life, as her uncle's translator. He tells her of his plan to free her from her uncle by marrying her and all the while tricking a girl into thinking she is involved in stealing Maud's heritage, so they can use her as a replacement for Maud in an asylum, making her heritage available for their use. When the girl arrives, in the form of Sue, Maud soon begins to have doubts about Gentleman's plans, as she falls in love with her. Much like Sue, Maud does continue on with the plans, and deceives Sue into thinking she is helpless and afraid. After Sue has been locked up in the asylum, Maud is brought to Mrs. Sucksby, where she finds herself deceived too. The girls turn out to have been linked shortly after birth, in an elaborate construction where Mrs. Sucksby switched Sue and Maud, making Susan the actual Lady Lilly and Maud one of the orphans that was present at the house at the time that Sue was born. Marianne Lilly, Sue's mother, had the intention of keeping Sue safe from the terrors of the Lilly men and changed her will so that each of the girls would be entitled to half of the fortune. Mrs. Sucksby agreed to the plan, seeing the opportunity to keep all the money for herself by locking both girls up, one at her own house and the other in an asylum. After having stayed imprisoned for some

weeks, Maud finds out that she is not, after all, just an orphan, but Mrs. Sucksby's daughter. Part three of the novel returns to the perspective of Sue Trinder, who the reader now knows is Susan Lilly. She is locked up in the asylum, where the doctors believe she is the deranged Mrs. Rivers. For weeks, Sue is maltreated and beaten up by the nurses of the asylum, until at one point, she is lucky enough to find a familiar face from Briar at the asylum. Young Charles, a knife boy at the estate, helps her recollect her memories of Briar, proving that she is not mad herself, as she was starting to think. With his help, Sue manages to escape the asylum and returns back to her home in London. Through the bedroom window, Sue spots Maud standing in her room. After a few days, Sue gets into the house to confront Maud and explain everything to Mrs. Sucksby. The latter pretends to have been unaware, while keeping Sue from attacking Maud. It is only when Gentleman arrives that Sue too finds out, in part, about Mrs. Sucksby's elaborate plan. In an attempt to protect Sue from the hurt, Maud restrains Gentleman and in a fight between these two and Mrs. Sucksby, Gentleman is stabbed by the knife Sue brought. When the police arrive at the scene, Mrs. Sucksby takes the blame for the murder of Gentleman and she is hanged soon after. Sue only discovers the full story of her and Maud's lives, when she finds Marianne Lilly's document, declaring both girls equally entitled to her heritage. She reconnects with Maud, each having forgiven the other. Maud returns to Briar and starts writing her own erotic stories to earn money, sending the stories to a magazine in London. The novel ends with the girls being peacefully in love and together.

Fingersmith is part of the literary movement called Neo-Victorian, as the plot takes place during the Victorian era and the novel has a number of characteristics associated with the genre. First and foremost, Waters' work reimagines the Victorian era on multiple fronts. Examples of this are the living situations of the protagonists; the lower-class Sue comes from a 'family' of thieves, and upper-class Lady Maud lives in the estate that she is to inherit from the age of ten, living with the fulltime care of multiple servants. Another important element of Waters' reimagining lies in her descriptions of the Victorian madhouse, which will not be discussed in this analysis, but is extensively explored by Rosario Arias and Diana Wallace. In her article "Accompanied by Ghosts: The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction", Natasha Alden argues that significant in Waters' Neo-Victorian writing is her active discourse with classic Victorian literature. Waters uses plot points and scenarios in her novels that will be familiar to the reader, for example borrowed from Dickens and Collins, to then "[appropriate] their overwhelmingly heterosexual plots to use them as vehicles for exploring lesbian and queer experience, absent or elided in the original novels" (Alden).

Wilkie Collins' influence is most strongly present in the novel, as will become apparent in a later paragraph in this chapter. Dickens, however, is also present in this text, as he was in *Tipping the Velvet*, as there are some scenarios in *Fingersmith* that are reminiscent of Dickens' Victorian *Oliver Twist*. In this work, the reference mostly lies in the home where Sue grew up. Sue Trinder's childhood home brings to mind the den of thieves that Oliver ends up with. Mr. Ibbs appears to be a kinder hearted version of Fagin, who is the leader of the group of thieves and both of them fit the title of "receiver of stolen goods", as Dickens himself named Fagin in a preface written in 1841 (1). Among these groups of thieves, Oliver and Sue both learn to take out the embroidery in silk handkerchiefs and are taken along by older children to go out thieving. Waters gives Sue a more secure and safe home than Oliver has, as she is protected from harm by Mrs. Sucksby and receives extra care and attention compared to the other orphans. This at first seems to come from love, as Sue understands it, but later turns out to have been about money all along. In addition, the character Mrs. Sucksby embodies the Victorian time in how she takes in orphans, to sell on to couples who want children, all the while giving them questionable care. Waters' descriptions of "Mrs. Sucksby's infants" (*Fingersmith* 6) are reminiscent of Dickens' portrayal of "the farm" (6), though Waters is somewhat kinder in writing Mrs. Sucksby than Dickens is with Mrs. Mann. Dickens' caregiver of the children keeps most of the money she earns for herself and provides the children with the bare minimum, while Mrs. Sucksby ultimately gives her life for the survival of both girls, as she does turn out to love them both. Waters seems to intentionally use these elements to create certain expectations in the reader, as a result of works such as *Oliver Twist*, to then be able to take the story in a surprisingly different direction. Waters clearly sets her work among those of Dickens, by making a direct reference to *Oliver Twist* at the beginning of the novel. She alerts the reader of the fact that Dickens was a contemporary at the time that the novel takes place, as she describes how Sue sees it performed on stage as a very young child. Sue is especially shaken by one of the most violent scenes in the play; the moment that Bill Sikes beats up Nancy and leaves her for dead. By having Sue remember this one brutal scene from the play, Waters seems to use it as a subtle foreshadowing of her own plot, as she later introduces her own "Bill Sikes figure known as Gentleman" (Armitt, "Teasing"), who will later on in the novel leave Sue to wither away in a madhouse. Waters' intentional mentioning of Dickens' classic piece of literature seems to serve the purpose of making the reader more aware of her aim to reinterpret and rediscover the Victorian era in her work, as well as allow the reader to add meaning to the novel through certain tropes within the genre from past literary works.

An important element of the Neo-Victorian novel is its engagement and reimagining of Victorian genres, which in *Fingersmith* is done through the imitation of, and discourse with the Victorian sensation novel. This is a form of writing that was used by many classic Victorian authors, such as Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (Palmer 86-87). Not only is *Fingersmith* “a pastiche” to the sensation novel of the Victorian era, there are some clear references to some of these well-known authors within the genre, as Waters pointed out herself in an interview with *The Guardian* (“Hot Waters”). The writing tradition of the sensation novel originates from the 1860s, as a direct result of developments in the publishing and printing industry, as well as the abolition of the paper tax (Palmer 86). Literature could be printed and consumed more easily because of these developments, resulting in new ways of writing that could give the audience more new stories at a faster pace. Beth Palmer describes that the “new, modern, mass-produced sensation novels were particularly well-placed to capitalize on these conditions” (86). While most novels of the period were serialized, authors of sensation fiction made use of it by including plot twists, cliff-hangers and foreboding language (Palmer 86). With its lack of moral impetus like other popular novels, Palmer argues, sensation novels had the purpose of entertaining the reader and making them want more (87). In his 1986 article, Jonathan Loesberg states that during the 1860s, when the sensation novel was at its peak, the genre was debated upon intensely by critics and writers alike, as it was an immensely popular novel form (115). Although it would be expected that the sensation genre should be categorized under popular fiction, it was critiqued in the same magazines as the most serious literary pieces brought out at the time (115). In “Sensation Fiction: A Peep Behind the Veil” (2012), Laurence Talairach-Vielmas argues that “the Victorian sensation novel . . . is heavily indebted to earlier plots, finding its inspiration in late eighteenth-century Gothic narratives” (29). Elements characteristic for the sensation novels of the late nineteenth-century then are also found in Gothic fiction, such as “the search for the secret” (30). The Gothic is present in *Fingersmith* in the descriptions of Briar, as the house, with its dark corridors and locked rooms, is reminiscent of the Gothic haunted house element. Sue and Maud are both somewhat fearful of the dark house, and Sue describes that she sees something “moving against the wood” at night, suddenly thinking “that the thing was Maud’s dead mother, come back as a ghost to haunt [her]” (*Fingersmith* 87). The house is only haunted for a short instance, however, and Waters does not stick to the idea that the house is haunted, as it turns out Sue was only scared by an object moving in the wind. Other elements that Talairach-Vielmas describes as characteristic of the sensation novel are the construction and removal of identity, “fashioning

individuals according to the terms of artificial codes, and turning life and death into figures of speech” (30), which can be found in the novel in the identity switch of Maud and Sue. As Waters herself stated, there are a few distinct references to sensation novels of the period in *Fingersmith*, as she borrows elements and scenarios from classic texts. Diana Wallace argues that one of the intertextual references Waters makes, is to Le Fanu’s *The Rose and the Key* from 1871 (175). Another source Waters took inspiration from for her novel was Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1860). The similarities between Waters’ and Collins’ novels will be discussed in a later paragraph in this chapter, in relation to the element of the ‘uncanny double’. Between Waters’ and Le Fanu’s novels, there are some parallels in characters, as well as in plot. Waters borrows the protagonist’s name ‘Maud’ from the classic sensation novel for one of her own protagonists, and Le Fanu’s plot equally is about an heiress whose inheritance is claimed through an elaborate plot in which the heiress will be taken to an asylum (Wallace 175). In the plot by Le Fanu, the deception is primarily done by Maud’s mother, with the help of a servant, Mercy Cresswell. A key difference between the classic sensation novel by Le Fanu and Waters’ novel is that Waters’ focus lies not on making a villain out of the women in the situation, as is the case in *The Rose and the Key*, with Maud’s mother being adamant to steal Maud’s heritage for her illegitimate son. Waters’ intention seems to be to put the focus on the male villain of the story, Gentleman, who is the character that stands between the love Sue and Maud feel for each other. The relationship between the maid and the lady is given a happy ending in *Fingersmith*, whereas in Le Fanu’s novel this is not the case and the maid is only there to help Maud’s mother achieve her goal. It is not only in these scenarios that Waters is borrowing from and engaging with the traditional Victorian sensation novel. The structure of the novel, with its limiting first-person perspective, illuminates the sensation element in the novel. Waters’ book is, of course, published as a whole and no longer needs the sensation to make the reader come back to a second part, contrary to the traditional sensation novels that would first be published in parts in a magazine. She does, however, still make use out of the tradition sensation novel format, as she has written a three-part novel, of which two end on cliff-hangers that are essential to the story. The first part ends with Sue learning that she is tricked by Maud, instead of the other way around; “You thought her a pigeon. Pigeon, my arse. That bitch knew everything. She had been in on it from the start” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 175). After this final outburst from Sue, who seems equally mad at herself for trusting Maud as at Maud for tricking her, Waters lets the reader wait for a full other part before returning to Sue to find out how she is doing in the asylum. The perspective switches to Maud, who, to the reader, seems to know a whole lot

more than Sue and thus appears to be a more reliable narrator, but equally a deceiver like Sue. This proves not to be so, however, as Maud is also tricked into thinking she will leave with Gentleman, or Richard Rivers as she knows him as, and be finally free to form her own life. The trickery does not end with Gentleman locking her up at Mrs. Sucksby's house, as Waters leaves the reader to cope with another sensational twist at the end of part two. Having just found out Mrs. Sucksby is Maud's mother, the reader is teased with an open ending; "Dear girl,' she [Mrs. Sucksby] says. 'My own, my own dear girl –' She hesitates another moment; then speaks, at last." (*Fingersmith* 392). With these scenarios in *Fingersmith*, Waters builds worlds and settings with promises to the reader, who expects to know how the story will go, to then fully break them down and give another world entirely. The plot is full of deceptions for both the protagonists and the reader, often making the reader impatiently wait for the resolution, and thus in that sense stays faithful to the tradition of the sensation novel. Waters seems to intentionally engage with *The Rose and the Key* as inspiration for the novel, so she can illuminate her aim at writing a different story, namely between two gay women from clashing backgrounds, alongside writing in the tradition of the sensation novel.

In contrast to *Tipping the Velvet*, the narration in *Fingersmith* is provided by the dual perspective of the protagonists, using the Victorian Sensation tradition of the 'uncanny double', with the result that both the characters and reader are taken unaware when it comes to the surprises in the plot. The first-person narration makes it possible for Waters' plot to work, as it needs the element of surprise and lack of knowledge in the reader. In his book *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (2013), Mark Currie states that "[the novel's] unexpectedness is organised by the perspectival structure of the novel and by the distribution of information that this structure entails" (127), as the reader only receives information from Sue and the information from other characters is kept from the narrative. While the omniscient narrator in *Tipping* adds an element of foreboding to the narrative, because the reader is made aware of what will go wrong in the near future, the reader of *Fingersmith* is constantly taken by surprise, with the result that she becomes 'haunted' by the knowledge that the plot can twist and turn at any given moment. Both techniques thus add an element of suspense to the narrative in contrasting ways. Gina Wisker argues that "Sarah Waters plays with readers' expectations as the characters play with the expectations of those around them", as all aspects of the narrative are "paralleled, twinned, hidden, deceitful" (241). The narrative structure uses the traditional Victorian Sensation fiction element of the 'uncanny double', which is a technique of deception present in

Fingersmith in the identity switch between Maud and Sue. The narrative technique of the double is also a characteristic in Neo-Victorian literature and has the result of asserting the objectivity of historical narratives and the fluidity of identity. Talairach-Vielmas states that “questioning the artificiality of identity as well as constructions of the self” are elements that were often used in sensation novels to explore “forbidden or inaccessible depths” (34). The scenario of the uncanny double was a way to achieve this aim, especially in relation to identity. In the article “The Maid, the Master, her Ghost and his Monster: *Alias Grace* and *Mary Reilly*”, Esther Saxey describes that in sensation fiction, unlike for example gothic fiction, “there is often a mundane explanation for the double, but this cannot entirely remedy the air of the uncanny” (67). An example of an uncanny double in a Victorian sensation novel would be Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*, from who Waters got her scenario of a lower-class woman being switched with an upper-class woman (Wallace 175). Collins’ uncanny plot involves an identity switch between two women; one of whom has been declared mad and dies in the place of the second, who is an upper-class woman with a husband who wants to claim her fortune. Waters’ plot seems to borrow closely from Collins’, as it involves a very similar uncanny situation, but it is complicated by the doubles falling in love and overthrowing the plot “through trusting one another” (Saxey 68). Waters’ intention with this plot change seems to be to offer her main female characters a better ending than those in *The Woman in White*, especially since her aim appears to be to create a positive space for queer characters in fiction and represent Victorian women individually, instead of on the background of a narrative. Sarah Waters uses the uncanny double to comment on identity, much like in *Tipping the Velvet*, albeit not by focussing on gender identity or performativity this time, but on class. Saxey argues that the uncanny double is “highly appealing to the modern author . . . wishing to investigate inequalities of sex and class” (67-68) when writing within the Neo-Victorian genre. Both the exploration of identity and performativity are present in *Fingersmith* but lie more in the conscious or unconscious presentation of persona, than the active cross-dressing of *Tipping*. A less essential ‘faux’ identity in the plot, though still an interesting one, is that of Gentleman. First of all, he continuously changes his name, as Sue explains when the character is introduced in the story; “His name was Richard Rivers, or Dick Rivers, or sometimes Richard Wells. We called him by another name, however; . . . ‘It’s Gentleman,’ I said” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 18-19). In addition to the name changes that happen with every role he takes on, Gentleman also pretends to be an upper-class man, in his attempt to marry a lady with a fortune to her name. At the end of the story, Sue finds out that he is not a gentleman at all, as she and the rest of the ‘family’ had always believed him to be;

[Y]ou'll never believe it, but it turned out that all his tales of being a gentleman's son were so much puff. His father and mother ran a small kind of draper's shop, in a street off the Holloway Road . . . His real name was not Richard Rivers or even Richard Wells; it was Frederick Bunt. (*Fingersmith* 517)

While Gentleman's performance of identity is with the purpose of being "a villain" (*Fingersmith* 498), as he is described as throughout the novel, the outcome is that Waters shows how fluid identity can be and how unfixed it is to an individual, much like she did with Nancy's genderbending. While Gentleman always consciously portrays himself to be different, Sue and Maud's performances of identity are both conscious and unconscious. Partly, they are kept in the dark about their identities by Mrs. Sucksby and Gentleman, while on the other hand they are each performing a version of themselves to the other and perceiving the other's identity differently. Both are pretending to be innocent and honest towards each other, thus resulting in the misperception of each other's identity. Not only do they have a hand in this themselves, however, as a big part of the misperception lies in how Sue and Maud are influenced to see the other through the planning of Gentleman. The misperception starts shortly after Sue hears of Gentleman's plan to marry Maud, when he describes the latter as "naturally shy", adding that "she'll pick up like anything, with Sue and [him] to teach her" (*Fingersmith* 37). The same happens when Maud learns about Gentleman's plans to marry her and trick another girl into taking her place. Gentleman promises her that Sue will not see through their plot;

She 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 . . . who wouldn't, in her place, believe you innocent? (*Fingersmith* 227)

The duality of the plot, both girls seeing different outcomes, leaves the girls blind to the perspective of the other and makes them uphold their identities as constructed by Gentleman, thus falling for the heist that Mrs. Sucksby and Gentleman have set them. The fact that both girls believe in the false identity of the other – Sue, for example, believes Maud to be an innocent, shy woman, incapable of standing up for herself, right until the moment where she is tricked herself – helps along the deception of the reader in the same way, as she also only sees the false identity through the first-person perspective. The construction and resulting removal of identity reaches a height for Sue, as she is locked up in the asylum. The novel starts to explore the psychological results of the constant taunting of the nurses at the asylum,

who completely negate any argument Sue offers on the topic of her sanity and identity, making her question, finally, whether she is not mistaken herself;

I began to answer to *Maud* and *Mrs Rivers*; sometimes it seemed to me I *must* be Maud, since so many people said I was. And sometimes I even seemed to dream, not my own dreams, but hers; and sometimes to remember, from Briar, that she had said and done, as if I had said and done them. (*Fingersmith* 445)

This moment of merging that Sue feels then reinforces the uncanny double for the entire plot, as Sue thinks she has switched mentally with Maud momentarily. Of course, the uncanny feeling described in Sue will later prove somewhat true for the story, as she is in fact an upper-class lady rather than a working-class woman whose mother was a murderer. Natasha Alden argues that Waters affirms the fluidity of both identity and history through the narrative mode of the novel, since the reader is presented with an unexpected twist in the plot that gives it a non-chronological structure, thus losing sense of time. The result of seeing the narrative suddenly through Maud's eyes completely disrupts the entire narrative, and "opens up textual spaces that are reflective of one another", as the reader is presented with different truths in an "overarching narrative structure" (Jones). The effect is, as Alden argues, that the novel "[emphasises] the idea that there is no single unitary historical truth, or rather, that history is strongly affected by point of view, and may be plural". Adele Jones supports this argument by stating that the structure of the novel "invites the reader to reflect on the very act of writing and the meanings produced by this act". Waters' writing in *Fingersmith* thus is metahistorical through the narrative structure of the uncanny double that distorts time and place for the reader temporally. Waters' use of this traditional Victorian element seems to serve the purpose of both entertaining the reader, as a traditional sensation novel should, as well as comment on the notions of identity and history, creating a metahistorical narrative.

Fingersmith is a Neo-Victorian novel that offers a plot full of deception and identity switches, by using traditional elements of the Victorian Sensation novel and referencing to classic texts by Dickens, Collins, and Le Fanu. Waters' use of first-person narration allows the traditional sensation element of the 'uncanny double' to work in the plot and mislead both the characters and the reader. The notion of the intentionality seems to be present in *Fingersmith* in how Waters sets up her novel. She first of all uses a direct reference to *Oliver Twist*, before introducing a seemingly similar band of thieves, thus creating the expectation that Sue will have experiences similar to Oliver. She continues her story with references to the sensation novels *The Woman in White* and *The Rose and the Key*, by imitating the elements of

the plots and creating an uncanny double in her narrative. She engages with the element of the double in a contemporary way by creating a romance story out of the traditional identity switch, thus both complicating the narrative, as well as allowing it to come to a happy end. The result is a metahistorical narrative that offers the contemporary version of the Victorian Sensation tradition and explores the fluidity of identity by portraying characters who move between classes, using classic texts to engage with and reform.

Chapter 4

Sarah Waters' fifth novel *The Little Stranger*, published in 2009, steps away from the Victorian setting of her previous novels and instead takes place in the 1940s, much like her fourth novel *The Night Watch* (2006). Waters does, however, stay true to the traditional themes of her novels, by keeping the focus on social inequality among gender and class. The novel engages with the tradition of the gothic by describing a haunted house that poses a threat to the characters, creating a task for the reader to find out the source of the haunting. Through the eyes of an unreliable first-person narrator, the novel is reminiscent of the country house novel, while its themes subvert the genre's romantic optimism. In writing this novel, Sarah Waters seems to have been inspired most by the classic Gothic novel *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne Du Maurier, while Evelyn Waugh's country house novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) can be seen as the sort of novel that Waters aims at critiquing. This fourth chapter will aim at describing how *The Little Stranger* brings together these two writing traditions by making the Gothic engage and reinvent the country house novel to critique its form and purpose in literature, while referencing to classic texts within the genres. In doing so, Waters critiques gender and class inequality in the past and the present and creates a metahistorical narrative by presenting new perspectives.

The Little Stranger tells the story of Dr Faraday, who in a post-war summer in the 1940s is called to visit Hundreds Hall to see to a servant, the 14-year-old Betty. The opening of the book recalls Faraday's first visit to the great mansion as a ten-year-old boy, as he was visiting with his mother, a former nursery maid of the family. Faraday is struck by how the mansion now, close to thirty years later, has lost all of its former glory, as the Ayres family who lives there no longer has the money to uphold it. After this first visit to the family, Faraday's interest in the family is peaked and he is adamant to stay in contact with the Ayreses. The three members of the family hesitantly let him into their lives, as he convinces them he can treat the son of the family, Roderick, who has suffered severe leg injuries during the war. The mother of the family, Mrs Ayres, is a proud woman, who desperately tries to maintain an appearance of high standards and prosperity among the decaying surroundings of Hundreds Hall. Roderick, on the other hand, is trying his best to enable life at the mansion, although he suffers, being the head of the house, sleeping in his office and selling land to pay the bills. Caroline is the daughter of the family and is described by the locals as a 'natural spinster', being single in her late twenties. Faraday soon sets his eyes on her, even though he also seems to dislike her "plain, over-tall" and masculine looks (Waters, *The Little Stranger*

9). The story of Faraday's time at Hundreds Hall really takes off when he is invited by the family to attend a party and the uncanny activities at the house begin. The young daughter of a visiting family is attacked by the friendly family Labrador, Gyp, who inexplicably has a moment of aggression. From this point on, the situation at Hundreds Hall begins to go downhill, and Betty is the first to create a character out of the atmosphere at the house, as she exclaims; "There's a bad thing in this house, that's what! There's a bad thing, and he makes wicked things happen!" (*The Little Stranger* 129) Faraday and the Ayreses do not take the servant girl seriously at first, putting it down to a need for attention. Roderick, however, soon starts spiralling into madness, as spots and burns start to appear in strange places and moving objects attack him. Faraday has him committed to a mental hospital, after he lies passed out drunk in his office while it is on fire. The women left at the house, Caroline, Mrs Ayres, Betty and the cook Mrs Bazeley, now start feeling anxious and scared, seeing marks on the walls in childish writing and hearing bells and phones ringing without someone ringing them. Mrs Ayres slowly starts losing her mind, convinced that the thing that haunts her is her young daughter, Susan, who died years ago when she was six. Finally, the woman hangs herself in her room at night, thinking her daughter is calling her to come join her. This leaves Caroline in sole charge of the house, who by now has let herself be convinced by Faraday to get married. Faraday is eager to make plans, looking forward to his future at Hundreds Hall, when suddenly Caroline says she has changed her mind. She no longer wants to marry him and intends to sell Hundreds Hall. On the night they should have been wed, Faraday gets a call to let him know that Caroline has killed herself by jumping from the landing on the second floor. Faraday, unable to believe it is suicide, hears from Betty that Caroline also appeared to be haunted by something in the house. Betty tells him that she went out of bed in the middle of the night and clearly called out "You" (*The Little Stranger* 482), as if recognising someone and being afraid, just before jumping, or falling, to her death. Three years later, Faraday still returns to Hundreds Hall often, somewhat trying to tend to it and keep people out. He is unable to leave the events at the hall in the past, as he still has not found the origin of the hauntings. In the end, Betty is the only one who truly escapes the house, as she leaves the house shortly after Caroline's death, finally going to the factories to work, as she had wanted all along. The entire narrative is told from the first-person perspective of the doctor himself, so that the reader can only guess at the experiences of the other characters and receives only the rational and sober reasoning of Dr Faraday on the topic of the hauntings at Hundreds Hall.

The Little Stranger's plot makes the novel part of the Gothic genre, a tradition that appeared during the second half of the eighteenth century. The genre is primarily used as a type of historical fiction, one that "is fascinated by the unknown and mysterious, with the terrifying and the haunting" of the past (De Groot, *The Historical Novel* 14). In describing the genre, De Groot states that Gothic literature concerns itself with European history, finding scenarios within that can horrify contemporary readers by presenting "the chaotic, scary, Catholic past" (*The Historical Novel* 16). Gothic fiction thus is historical in the sense that it uses the past to then disrupt it and present something horrifying and eerie. Additionally, the Gothic constantly revisits its own past by reusing similar themes and characters, to create a "mix of playful, performative and cutting critique and exposure of serious, ongoing concerns" (Wisker 6). Wallace states that while Historical fiction is often questioned on account of its historical accuracy and truthfulness, "the Gothic is even more at odds with our notion of history than the realist [historical] novel which at least appears to represent the 'real'" (4). Gothic fiction includes supernatural elements alongside realist and historical details and thus is even more problematic at presenting history. The genre combines two opposite ways of narrating history, the historiographical and the psychoanalytical way. The historiographical way assumes that history is fixed, and thus can only be truthfully presented in a realist mode, while psychoanalysis approaches the past as something that still has high influence over the present and haunts it (Wallace 4). These two elements are very much present in Waters' novel in the form of Hundreds Hall. The mansion marks a time in the past, right after the Second World War, when Britain had changed and the upper-class started to lose its purpose and wealth. These are changes that can be considered factual and realistic in the historiographical way. Waters adds a psychoanalytical element to this representation of the 1940s, by making the change marked by terror and haunting. The past thus is disrupted in *The Little Stranger* by presenting the mansion, Hundreds Hall, as a source of haunting and destruction, while it previously had a standing of grandeur and prosperity. Waters uses the Gothic trope of the haunted house to refer to the genre's own past. Hundreds Hall is much like other haunted houses, as "[l]ike Udolpho, St Salvat's, Manderley or Jamaica Inn, it is imbued with the secrets of its inhabitants, both dead and living" (Wallace 186). With the haunted house Manderley at its centre, *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier is one such novel that Waters makes references to in her work, as there are clear parallels between the plots. Both first names of the protagonists in the novels remain unknown to the reader, leaving a sense of mystique around the characters, as well as the sense that the story is never truly theirs. Much like Waters's Faraday, the narrator of Du Maurier's novel, Mrs de Winter, suddenly finds herself in a house

that is haunted by its inhabitants' past, both of which involve the dead as much as the living. The opening of *The Little Stranger* reflects on *Rebecca*, as both protagonists return to the mansion in the story at the introduction of the narratives, though Mrs de Winter returns in a dream, while Dr Faraday returns in real life. Both protagonists are surprised to find the mansions less grand and stunning than they recalled however. Mrs de Winter remarks that "[t]he drive was a ribbon now, a thread of its former self" (Du Maurier 2), seeing that nature has taken over the land surrounding Manderley. Dr Faraday arrives at a similar scene as he describes that "the park was now so overgrown and untended, my small car had to fight its way down the drive" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 5). The narratives both immediately create a character out of the houses, as the narrators describe them as alive. Faraday describes Hundreds Hall as having a 'belly' (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 5), while Mrs de Winter remarks that "[she] could swear that the house was not an empty shell but lived and breathed" (Du Maurier 3). The mansions are both presented as central to the story in the titles of the novels, as Manderley's poltergeist is in the title name, as much as Hundreds Hall's is. Du Maurier, however, is very direct in her title and source of haunting, as the title refers to the first Mrs de Winter, Rebecca, who does receive a first name, in contrast to the second Mrs de Winter, and haunts Manderley as the new wife arrives. Hundreds Hall's poltergeist only receives the name of 'the little stranger' without further resolution. The resolutions for the protagonists' lives are similar, however, as both leave the mansions, but can never fully say goodbye to it and return to it often, either in thought, as Mrs de Winter does, or physically, like Dr Faraday. As with *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, the references to a classic literary text of the same genre seems to have the intention to make readers more aware of *The Little Stranger*'s narrative structure and main elements. The expectation then is that it will be a haunted house story which, much like *Rebecca* and other Gothic narratives, will be somewhat resolved in the end. Sarah Waters breaks this expectation with her ending, by leaving the narrative open with Dr Faraday still visiting the house to look for the source of the hauntings. The unresolved ending thus leaves it up to the reader to decide what was haunting the inhabitants of Hundreds Hall. The reader has to make her own psychoanalysis of the characters in the book, to be able to decide who is most haunted and is the source of the 'poltergeist'. Multiple analyses of the novel are possible, as becomes clear through the texts written by Diana Wallace, Gina Wisker, Emma Parker, and Monica Germanà, who each point towards different causes for the poltergeist. Wallace leaves the ending open, much like Waters herself, by stating that "the source of the 'little stranger' . . . could be any one of the characters", as they all have problems and traumas that haunt or frustrate them (189). Wisker

argues for a “ghost of [the] past [that] reacts against change”, stating that it is created by Faraday’s eagerness to possess some of the glory of the past as a middle-class man, who gets ever closer to the Ayres family and thus makes the house strike back (221). Parker also accepts the ghost to be Faraday’s poltergeist, which is created as a result of cultural and societal inequality, since Faraday’s position as a middle-class man clashes constantly with the social structure of the past and he does not have a real place yet in the world among the upper-class, nor the working class (105). Germanà makes a case for a “ghost of the future, a future made of significant social changes to the class structure of Britain and foreshadowed by the rise of a new fashion”, where the poltergeist, or ‘the little stranger’, is Betty, who is the image of the future in this novel and thus the destructive force that sweeps away the glory of the past and of the house (127). While multiple readings of the novel are possible through its open ending, the main element among these three analyses seems to be that the poltergeist is a result of the inequality among gender and class. These elements of the novel will be explained in the following paragraphs. By intentionally referencing to *Rebecca*, Waters places her novel among similar Gothic novels and makes the reader more aware of the aim of her narrative.

The characteristic of the Gothic to reference to its own past and European history makes the genre somewhat metahistorical, as is Waters’s *The Little Stranger*, through its engagement with texts from the past and its awareness of societal issues of the time. The novel offers a different presentation of the past, as Wallace argues is often the case with gothic fiction, as female writers reinsert female narratives into history and critique the way in which women were ignored or portrayed badly in the past and present (1). By doing so, Gothic historical fiction questions what is meant with ‘History’ and how it is shaped into accounts that form our ideas of that past, as it reimagines and twists what the reader knows as true (Wallace 2). Ultimately, the Gothic and historical novel are inseparable, according to Wallace, even with its somewhat clashing combination of the historical and the psychoanalytical (5). She quotes David Punter in stating that “the reason why it is so difficult to draw a line between Gothic fiction and historical fiction is that Gothic itself seems to have *been* a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it” (*Female Gothic* 5). Especially for women, the Gothic offers a form of narration that enables authors to describe what is outside of the ordinary, mainstream perspective that has been accepted as truth. In her fifth novel, Sarah Waters engages with this past, by writing a classic gothic ghost story that makes the reader aware of the fictionality of the plot, while also presenting realist historical elements that portray an underrepresented perspective of the time. Her novel thus

very much creates the ‘counter-history’ that Heilmann and Llewellyn described as being characteristic of the metahistorical narrative (3). In her book *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction*, Gina Wisker states the differences between traditional gothic ghost stories and the contemporary ones, such as *The Little Stranger*;

Traditional Gothic ghost stories by women often focused on entrapment, being walled in, hidden in castles, or physical danger, such as being threatened by ghost dogs, by revengeful predecessors and demon lovers. Contemporary women’s ghost stories recover the past and offer the opportunity to speak to those silenced by history, some of whom are representative of the ways in which societies outcast people who do not or cannot conform. (211)

The statement by Wisker is apparent in Waters’ fiction in multiple ways. First and foremost, the first person to note the haunting in Hundreds Hall is Betty, the servant of the family, who is part of a class that has been silenced throughout history. Her role as the servant of the house would previously have been of no importance in classic gothic fiction, as it was part of the societal structure of the time to have servants in the house and expect them to work. As twenty-first century author, however, Waters puts great importance to her role in the house, which will become clear in the following paragraph in discussing the novel in relation to the country house novel. Another important woman that Waters gives a voice to is Caroline, as she is an outcast in the upper-class society, being an unmarried young woman, who is often described as not abiding to the female gender roles. She is critiqued by Faraday in his narration of the story and he constantly describes her outward appearances; “her leg, I saw now, were bare, and tanned, and quite unshaven” (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 24). Faraday’s harsh descriptions of Caroline make Waters’ aim with the novel clearer, as she thus gives the perspective of a man who is clearly frustrated that he cannot get the woman he wants, while also showing a woman who does not care if she fits in and is quite aware of it. By not narrating the story from the perspective of any of the women in the house, Waters also portrays more clearly the limits for women of the time, as by disallowing Caroline to share her own views, she illuminates the fact that Caroline is actually not able to create her own life at all. As an upper-class woman of the time, she does not have the ability to work and earn wages, thus has to rely fully on her family or marriage. Freedom to shape her life only comes after she is the sole owner of Hundreds Hall, and still her only solution is to sell and move away from England, as she states; “England’s no good any more for someone like me. It doesn’t want me” (*The Little Stranger* 448). Of course, she is not given the chance to do any

of these things, as the poltergeist apparently gets to Caroline before she can change anything. Waters' focus on gender, as well as class inequality, thus clearly shows her contemporary perspective, which then does not differ greatly from what other contemporary Gothic works aim at doing. Alongside being contemporary in its focus on minorities and underrepresented voices, Waters' engagement with an earlier time period and its concerns make her work sit within both the earlier tradition, as well as the contemporary one. In the introduction of her book, Gina Wisker describes that originally the gothic novel would focus on "anxieties about inheritance and purity", as well as female sexuality from the eyes of a man, while in contemporary Gothic literature, female authors tend to focus on "gender-based terrors" (9). The Gothic genre then is very adaptable to the time in which it is used, as it is at its core an engagement with contemporary issues that result in fears and questions. *The Little Stranger* indeed shows the Gothic concerns of inheritance and purity that were present in the 1940s as a result of immense changes in society after the Second World War. The Ayres family is highly aware of the decrease of their position in society as an upper-class family and is clinging to every element of their former life in the hope of maintaining it as long as possible. While Waters seems empathetic towards the family, her contemporary gaze shows through her descriptions of the lower-classes and their poor circumstances. She emphasizes her focus on social inequality by describing the pride and extravagance of the Ayreses, who do not see the suffering of other people, but only their own loss, which in contrast is insubstantial. In response to Dr Faraday's concern for the fourteen-year-old Betty, Caroline responds with; "Well, we don't treat her badly, if that's what you're thinking! We pay her more than we can afford. She eats the same food as us. Really, in lots of ways she's better off than we are" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 16). Waters' descriptions of the Ayreses and their expectations to have a more luxurious life, in the form of better quality food and daily comforts, thus make her novel more of a contemporary tone than a traditional gothic one. The characteristics of the gothic, primarily in the haunted house and the anxieties, are written into the story through its focus on social inequality and change, and support Waters' aim to create a metahistorical portrayal of these parts of history.

The second genre that is present in *The Little Stranger* is that of the country house novel, as it describes a mansion belonging to the upper-class Ayres family and thus portrays parts of the class-based society that is so essential to British history. Hundreds Hall, in Gina Wisker's words, "at its best is an English country house in the tradition established prior to Jane Austen's Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and undermined latterly by Kazuo

Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* (1989) and by Julian Fellowes' *Gosford Park* (2001)" (221). The house is remembered by Faraday as being full of splendour and beauty, as it was when he was introduced to it as a young boy. Arriving as an older man, he still sees this past beauty, but it is overshadowed by bleakness, decay and the feeling of a time that has come and gone. In the article "The Country House Revisited: Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*" (2013), Emma Parker argues that Waters' novel "responds to the conservative class and gender politics that characterize both the tradition of country house literature and the English heritage industry" (99), by presenting her country house novel in a different way. In these traditional works of literature that portray the English class system, "the country house not only represents a nostalgic desire to preserve the past but also actively reinforces and legitimizes the values of the aristocracy in the present" (Parker 100). A good example of such a novel is *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh, which, Parker states, has multiple similarities to *The Little Stranger*. "[Both] are narrated (unreliably) by a middle-aged, middle-class man" (100-101) with a connection to an upper-class family and both narrators are enamoured by the country house of the family and intend to marry the daughter of the family. In each of these narratives, "the wedding is called off by the wife-to-be, and the protagonist ultimately remains shut out from the world of privilege he covets" (Parker 101). Parker also underscores how crucially different the intentions of both authors are, however, as she addresses that Waugh describes the novel as "a loving farewell to 'the splendours of the recent past' and laments the decline of the country house, which he feared would be 'doomed to decay and spoilation'" (101). In contrast, Waters does not seem to approve of the way the genre of the country house novel romanticises and perpetuates the class differences and inequality in society, even in late twentieth and twenty-first century fiction, and thus completely ignores the layers of society that were most punished and ignored due to its structure. Whereas *Brideshead Revisited*, and often the traditional country house novel in general, shows only the life of the upper-class, enjoying the comforts of a big and stately home, Waters describes the work that went into upholding such an estate and by who this was done. The tone of the novel is set immediately, as Dr Faraday's sole reason for visiting the estate is to tend to the servant in the house. Waters gives the servant of the house a major role and a strong voice with opinions in her narrative, and as Parker states, thus "subverts the myth" of the servants who all happily do the work they are required to do (103). Betty expresses her unhappiness at the family's house and her wish to join her friends in the factories, in addition describing her uniform as "the awful old dress and cap" that she believes will be her "dead of shame" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 13). The result of this meeting is that the reader is aware of the servant of the house and knows

how she feels about attending to an upper-class family in a grand mansion. Betty is not at all as enamoured by the place as Faraday is, which reinforces that times have changed and the focus of society lies elsewhere. Later on, Waters describes Betty's work in much detail, to again reinforce her role in the house, through Faraday's eyes;

They both sat comfortably in their chairs, enjoying the tea and the cake that Betty had prepared for them, then awkwardly carried for them, then cut and served for them, from plates and cups which at the ring of a bell, she would soon remove and wash . . . I said nothing this time however. (*The Little Stranger* 73)

Faraday sees how hard Betty is working for the family, but that the Ayreses are unaware of this. They see the fourteen-year-old girl as essential to their lives, though also bemoan her attitude, stating that "the house is like an oyster" that will make Betty a better, more civilized version of herself (*The Little Stranger* 73). While Faraday is surprised by the fact that they seem to have forgotten completely that his mother was one of these girls as well, he does not say anything. At a later point in the novel, he even feels slightly ashamed and awkward when Mrs Ayres serves the tea herself. In describing these scenarios, Waters completely dismisses the feelings of nostalgia towards the period of country houses, and indirectly critiques the class differences still present in society. She shows that class differences are so ingrained in the people's expectations of life, that even a middle-class man from a working-class background such as Faraday feels awkward about a woman from a higher status serving him and herself tea in her own home. She pointedly criticizes the Ayres family, as well as traditional country novels, for their bad treatment of and ignorance about the servants in the house. When Dr Faraday is with the family for the first time, the three Ayreses openly make fun of their previous servants and other lower-class citizens they see themselves separated from;

Dr Gill was a bit of a character, wasn't he? . . . Do you remember that giantess of a girl who used to work in the kitchen when we were young? . . . Mrs Ayres had recalled another servant. 'Oh, she was a moron,' Roderick said. (*The Little Stranger* 26-27)

They become aware of their behaviour as Faraday poignantly mentions his mother's occupation as a nursemaid at the Hundreds Hall, creating an awkward moment that extends into a scenario where both parties try to restore the good atmosphere;

And in the silence that followed, Mrs Ayres said, 'Of course. Your mother was a nursery maid here once, wasn't she? . . . She went across to a table, on which a number

of framed family pictures were set out . . . ‘I can’t be sure. But I *think*, Dr Faraday, that your mother might be here.’ . . . [Caroline] said quietly, ‘Is that your mother, Dr Faraday?’ I said, ‘I think it might be. Then again – ‘ Just behind the awkward-looking girl, I noticed now, was another servant, also fair haired, and in an identical gown and cap. I laughed, embarrassed. ‘It might be this one. I’m not sure. (*The Little Stranger* 28-29)

In describing this moment, Waters reinforces the invisibility of the servants, with a picture of the whole household, both during the period itself as well as in fiction. The purposeful anonymity of the lower-class comes across especially strong, as Dr Faraday cannot even tell which figure in the picture is his mother, due to the identical outfits. As was the case with the Gothic genre, Waters uses the genre of the country house novel as a format in which to critique and reflect on inequality. She seems to engage with fiction that is part of the tradition by intentionally taking on a similar plot to *Brideshead Revisited* and changing its purpose, changing the nostalgic romanticism of the genre into a more inclusive and realist perspective fitting with the time.

In conclusion, *The Little Stranger* proves that the Gothic and the country house novel make an effective combination in storytelling, as Waters engages with the genres to support her intention with the novel; critiquing class and gender inequality, while subverting the romantic and nostalgic portrayal of the upper-class of the past. Gina Wisker argues that;

The Gothic, its settings, creatures, atmosphere, tropes and narratives are put to work by contemporary women Gothic writers, to expose the horror in the domestic, oppression in the everyday, as well as the cultural and imaginative constraints perpetuated in forms as broad as romantic fictions, folk and fairytales, popular fictions and grand meta-narratives. (6)

By reimagining the tradition of the country house novel, Sarah Waters shows the horrors of the class-based society and the idealisation of the country house. Parker states that she “subverts the tradition of country house literature . . . [by] presenting Hundreds Hall as a house haunted by a spirit fuelled by envy and anger” (112). Hundreds Hall is not a grand mansion that presents the prosperity and wealth of the most fortunate, as the traditional country house novel does, but a haunted house that is slowly falling apart and is no longer useful in a modernising world. Waters is thus able to point to faults and issues she sees in her country, both in the past and the present, by moving away from the nostalgic descriptions.

The hunkering and nostalgia in books such as *Bridesmaid Revisited* is satirised by making the house a character that expresses the same sentiments as the traditional novels, and in trying to prevent change, harms everyone around it. Waters' intention in combining the two genres thus seems to be to create a story that shows the horrors of a society divided by class that is terrified to leave the past behind and to change.

Conclusion

This research examined Sarah Waters' use of traditional genres in her novels *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith*, and *The Little Stranger*, focussing on how she engages with them as a 'maker of meaning', through both reinventing and remaining true to its traditions, as well as by referencing to classic works belonging to the same genre. The novels have been analysed following an intersectional model that was based on the following theories; K.S. Whetter's and Amy Devitt's approach to genre as 'maker of meaning', the theories on (meta)historical fiction by Jerome de Groot, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, and the notion of intentionality by Michael Baxandall. The importance of this type of research lies in how Sarah Waters seems to purposefully use genres and their past to build on and bring across a message in her works. In addition, this research has aimed at adding to the study of the genre's function in literary fiction.

Sarah Waters' novels are each works of historical fiction and thus this genre is the most distinct feature to her authorship. She uses it in her novels to address complex issues that are relevant for both the past and the present, while also engaging with other genres in each. As described in the first chapter of this master's thesis, historical fiction was previously seen as a less worthy form of writing that could not be taken seriously by critics, as they were simply seen as romance novels with a historical setting that did not participate in critical debates present in the literary field or outside of it. Sarah Waters' novels, however, prove Jerome de Groot's statement that the genre is a form suitable for complex narrative structures and "can take place within numerous fictional locales" to be true (*The Historical Novel 2*). In her texts, she comments on the fluidity of gender and identity, the presentation of women and the lower-class in both contemporary and classic works of fiction and the issues with historiography, as a result proving that historical fiction is not simply a genre for "pulpy" romance (De Groot, "Something New" 56-57). Waters creates counter-histories by presenting characters and situations that have been invisible in classic literature, such as the cross-dressing and gender fluidity in *Tipping the Velvet* or the experiences of the servant Betty in *The Little Stranger*, who would have been ignored in the traditional country house novel.

Looking at the diversity of the genres in all three novels, the analyses have showed that Waters' active engagement with the notion of 'genre' and its past is essential to the intention of her work. Without this discourse and engagement, her works of historical fiction would not be as effective in bringing across her message about historiography and narrating

the past. Her engagement with the writing tradition of the picaresque in *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, supports the metahistorical narrative in the text, as the omniscient narrator of the novel makes the reader aware of the act of storytelling. This then illuminates the construction of history as an act of storytelling as well. Similarly, *Fingersmith* is metahistorical in its non-chronological narrative structure that distorts time and place for the reader through a plural and overarching perspective that switches throughout the book. This is supported by the genre of the sensation novel, which Waters engages with by using the characteristic sensation element of the 'uncanny double' in her plot and writing a story full of plot twists, allowing for the complexity of the narrative structure and its metahistorical message. Lastly, the presentation of a 'counter-history' that is in opposition with the traditional country house novel makes *The Little Stranger* a metahistorical narrative, by reinventing the genre and steering its perspective and focus in a different direction. The novel comments on both the past and the present by critiquing the class-based society that was, and still is, essential to British society and the way it is often still presented in a nostalgic romanticised way in contemporary fiction. Sarah Waters thus uses the characteristics of traditional genres to create metahistorical narratives, both by reinventing and maintain them, making the reader aware of the fictionality of her novels and the objectivity of history.

In deciding to write in a certain style and tone, Waters seems to accept that each of her novels will be part of a bigger collection of works and the overall discourse within a genre. As stated in the first chapter of this research, Duff argues that most authors do not want to view their books as part of a collection of books that makes use of the same genre, since this would potentially take away from their own originality. Sarah Waters, however, seems to embrace the fact that every text that fits within a specific genre will ultimately be part of its discourse and its process of change and development. This analysis has been made as a result of Waters' use of intertextuality throughout all three of the novels, as she seems to intentionally engage with texts from the past, by using its tropes, scenarios, and plots, additionally giving them a contemporary twist. Her intertextual references then also serve the purpose of supporting her use and reinvention of genres. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters makes references to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* most distinctly and uses these classic texts to illuminate her exploration of gender fluidity and identity in the narrative. Woolf's classic text is present in Waters' somewhat magical descriptions of the cross-dressing Nancy, who loses sight of her own identity through fluidly presenting herself as both female and male. This theme also builds on Judith Butler's theory on the performativity of gender, thus

bringing the novel into a contemporary discussion alongside presenting the reader with a secret world of cross-dressing in the Victorian era. Waters thus reinvents the picaresque genre by not writing a social satire, but a novel that addresses both the past and the present, through her engagement with Butler's gender theory and her dual use of the term 'queer'. Dickens' novel is present in *Tipping* in its connection with the picaresque novel, as well as in direct references in the narrative. Oliver and Nancy both experience a number of different masters during their youth, but Waters changes Nancy's masters into her lovers, thus presenting a journey of coming-out and experiencing love, rather than hardship in finding a way to survive. For the novel as a whole, the genre of the picaresque is used by Waters to illuminate the exploration of identity for Nancy, making it a traditional adventure story, but reinventing the genre by focussing on the coming-out part of the story. The intertextuality in the novel then supports this theme in the novel through its contrasts and similarities, making it possible for Waters to set her novel among the Victorian writing tradition, while also writing a contemporary novel.

In *Fingersmith*, the intertextuality is mostly present in the novel's parallels to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Rose and the Key* and *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, to support the novel as a contemporary sensation text, but she also refers to Dickens' *Oliver Twist* in the first part of the novel. The notion of the intentionality seems to be present in how Waters sets up her novel. In the beginning of the novel, she refers to *Oliver Twist* directly, and then creates a similar family and living situation for Sue, which seems to have the intention of setting the reader on a different path to then be able to surprise them with her plot. She continues her story with references to the sensation novels by Collins and Le Fanu, by imitating elements from their plots, such as the deception of the wealthy heir, and creating an uncanny double in her narrative. She engages with the element of the double in a contemporary way by creating a romance story out of the traditional identity switch, thus both complicating the narrative, as well as, allowing it to come to a happy end. The intertextuality, again, supports the aim of the narrative – to tell a contemporary heist story that is ultimately a love story – and clearly sets her novel within the tradition of the sensation novel.

In the last novel that was analysed for this research, *The Little Stranger*, the intertextuality seems to serve the purpose of critiquing social classes by bringing together two contrasting genres; the haunting house of the Gothic, with the romanticised image of the stately mansion of the country house novel. Sarah Waters seems to intentionally use references to Daphne Dur Maurier's *Rebecca* in writing her haunted house narrative and

engaging with the Gothic genre, as there are clear parallels between both novels in their plots and narration. The references to the classic text of the same genre make the reader aware of the novel's traditional narrative structure and main elements, thus expecting a similar kind of story. Similarly to *Fingersmith*, however, Sarah Waters uses the expectations to create an unexpected twist in her story, which in *The Little Stranger* comes in the form of an unresolved ending, as the source of the poltergeist is never explained. Waters seems to reject this traditional element of the Gothic with the purpose of making the reader aware that the poltergeist is a result of social inequality and thus stays unresolved. This element then is reflected in how Waters makes references to the classic texts *Brideshead Revisited*, which she seems to use to disrupt the genre of the country house novel. By reimagining the tradition of the country house novel, she displays the horrors of the class-based society and the idealisation of the country house, thus subverting its traditional romanticised and nostalgic approach to the upper-class. As a result, Waters is able to point to faults and issues she sees in her country, both in the past and the present. The intention of the intertextuality in the novel thus seems to be to support a story that critiques and shows the horrors of social classes, by focussing on the inequality in gender and class.

In conclusion, the analyses of *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith*, and *The Little Stranger* have aimed at showing that Sarah Waters is an author who constantly engages with history, in the form of her historical setting, her discourse with traditional genres, and her references to classic works of fiction. By using intertextuality to support her novels, Waters seems to intentionally place her novels among other works of the same genre. This helps her to engage with the traditional genres in her novels, as she borrows plots, scenarios and tropes from these classic sources. Waters shows that she does not simply borrow and rewrite classic texts, however, as her works constantly subvert the expectations created by both the traditional genres and the classic works and, as a result, offer new perspectives on history.

Bibliography

- Alden, Natasha. "Accompanied by Ghosts: The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction." Jones and O'Callaghan.
- Alemán, Mateo. *Guzman de Alfarache*. Penguin Clasicos, 2015.
- Anónimo. *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*. Createspace, 2015.
- Arias, Rosario. "Epilogue: Female Confinement in Sarah Waters's Neo-Victorian Fiction." *Stones of Law, Bricks of Shaming: Narrating Imprisonment in the Victorian Age*, edited by Frank Lauterback and Jan Alber, University of Toronto Press, 2009, pp. 256–77.
- Arias, Rosario and Patricia Pulham, editors. *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Armitstead, Claire. "Sarah Waters: 'The Handmaiden turns pornography into a spectacle – but it's true to my novel!'" *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 8 Apr 2017, www.theguardian.com/film/2017/apr/08/sarah-waters-the-handmaiden-turns-pornography-into-a-spectacle-but-its-true-to-my-novel-. Accessed 6 March 2018.
- Armitt, Lucie. "Interview with Sarah Waters." *Feminist Review*, no. 85, 2007, pp. 116-127.
- Armitt, Lucie. "Teasing (Out) a New Generation: The Writing of Sarah Waters." Jones and O'Callaghan.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999.
- Colella, Silvana. "Olfactory Ghosts: Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*." Arias and Pulham, pp. 85-110.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. Penguin Books, 2012.
- Currie, Mark. *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.
- Davies, Helen. *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction*. E-book ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Devitt, Amy J. "Generalizing about Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1993, pp. 573-586.
- Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. E-book ed., Dover Publications, Inc, 2002.
- Duff, David, editor. *Modern Genre Theory*. Pearson Education Limited, 2000.
- Eoff, Sherman. "Oliver Twist and the Spanish Picaresque Novel." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1957, pp. 440-447.
- "genre, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/77629. Accessed 30 May 2018.

- Germanà, Monica. "The Death of the Lady: Haunted Garments and (Re-) Possession in *The Little Stranger*." Mitchell, pp. 114-128.
- Groot, Jerome de. *The Historical Novel*. Routledge, 2010.
- Groot, Jerome de. "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" Mitchell, pp. 56-69.
- Hadley, Louisa. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Heilmann, Ann, and Mark Llewellyn, editors. *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- "Hot Waters." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 26 Sep 2002, www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/26/artsfeatures.bookerprize2002. Accessed 6 March 2018.
- Jeremiah, Emily. "'The 'I' inside 'her'': Queer Narration in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune*." *Women: a cultural review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2007, pp.131-144.
- Jones, Adele, and Claire O'Callaghan, editors. *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*. E-book ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Jones, Adele. "The Feminist Politics of Textuality: Reading the Feminism of Julia Kristeva in *Fingersmith*." Jones and O'Callaghan.
- Koolen, Mandy. "Historical Fiction and the Revaluing of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2010, pp. 371-397.
- Landwehr, Margarete. "Introduction: Literature and the Visual Arts: Questions of Influence and Intertextuality." *College Literature*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2002, pp. 1-16.
- Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. *The Rose and the Key*. Valancourt Books, 2007.
- Llewellyn, Mark. "Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre." Heilmann and Llewellyn, pp. 195-210.
- Loesberg, Jonathan. "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction." *Representations*, no. 13, 1986, pp. 115-138.
- Mancing, Howard. "The Picaresque Novel: A Protean Form." *College Literature*, vol.6, no. 3, 1979, pp. 182-204.
- Maurier, Daphne du. *Rebecca*. Virago, 2015.
- Mitchell, Kaye, editor. *Sarah Waters: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Montgomery, Martin, et al. *Ways of Reading*. Routledge, 1992.

- Palmer, Beth. "Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2009, pp. 86-94.
- Parker, Emma. "The Country House Revisited: Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*." Mitchell, pp. 99-113.
- "queer, *adj.*" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2007, www.oed.com.ru.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/156236?rskey=FTm9Ug&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid. Accessed 15 June 2018.
- Saxey, Esther. "The Maid, the Master, her Ghost and his Monster: *Alias Grace* and *Mary Reilly*." Arias and Pulham, pp. 58-82.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. "Sensation Fiction: A Peep Behind the Veil." *The Victorian Gothic*, edited by Andrews Smith and William Hughes, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 29-42.
- Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Penguin Books, 2013.
- Wallace, Diana. *Female Gothic Histories*. University of Wales Press, 2013.
- Waters, Sarah. *Fingersmith*. Virago, 2010.
- Waters, Sarah. *The Little Stranger*. Virago, 2010.
- Waters, Sarah. *Tipping the Velvet*. Virago, 2018.
- Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*. Penguin Books, 1962.
- Whetter, K.S. *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance*. Ashgate, 2008.
- Wisker, Gina. *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*. Wordsworth, 2003.