Chapter 8
London and the Spatialization of Queer Histories

The Historical Novel and Historiographic Metafiction

The relationship between realism and historical fiction has been discussed to a significant degree in literary theory. In his seminal book, *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács sees in the historical novel a means to narrate history with fidelity, but also as a means to yield the emotional reactions that we think individuals might have had in the past, having as a premise that, with a temporal distance from the past, it is possible to retrieve the exact feelings and experiences of that time by portraying fictional and real historical figures. He asserts Sir Walter Scott as the great example of historical fiction because Scott represents the past with "great historical objectivity"[1] in the sense that his characters act within the circumstances of real historical struggles and events, and they are constructed according to complex psychological features. For Lukács, what is at stake in the writing of historical novels is not simply the narration of historical events, but the use of characters to show the relationship that historical figures had with those events. He contends that it is crucial that the author faithfully construct historical reality in ways in which we, as readers, can, "re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality".[2]

He contends that the historical novel must inherently be written in the form of traditional realism in order to construe the 'real', which can render historical facts and historical characters with truthfulness, and yet add emotional and psychological elements to the characters to grant the novel dramatic effects. It is precisely because the historical novel produces historical fidelity and, at the same time, can trigger emotional identifications between reader and characters that Lukács suggests that historical fiction can function as a way to popularize historical narratives to the great public, making them available to those who do not have access to the studies of history.

1 Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 34.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Like Lukács, Fleishman provides a discussion about historical fiction by evincing the genre's national character and by defending the use of realism to grant verisimilitude to the historical reality that is represented. Drawing on Lukács' work, he asserts the emergence of the historical novel "as the outcome of the age of nationalism, industrialization, and revolution", in which "European peoples came to consciousness of and vigorously asserted their historical continuity and identity".[3] Fleishman does not believe in the mirroring effect of history, since he recognizes that the historical novelist's work depends on interpretations of history, historical documents, and archives. However, Fleishman asserts that, in spite of historical fiction's being based on imaginative and fictive elements, it still conveys historical truth in the sense that it is always based on real historical figures and events. In other words, Fleishman and Lukács share the belief that History, with a capital 'H', conveys truthful and faithful accounts of human endeavors and the development of nation-states. However, their arguments diverge in the deployment of history in literature: where Lukács sees an *authentic* account of history that evinces historical characters' emotions in historical fiction, Fleishman contends that the historical novel produces the author's imaginative *re-creation* of the past by using his own interpretations, which are not necessarily faithful to reality.

For Fleishman, the historian composes historical narratives by analyzing documents, whereas "the historical novelist has a claim to historical truth, on the strength of his habitual exercise of imaginative sympathy, his personalization of history so that it becomes not a mere movement of forces or sequence of events but the thoughts and feelings of men".[4] He contends that it is insufficient to write a historical novel that is only based on historical contexts; the historical novel, in Fleishman's view, as in Lukács', must present at least one historical figure: "[w]hen life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel".[5]

Both Lukács and Fleishman believe that characters in historical novels correspond to a universal subject that is formed by a distinct historical period, whose feelings, livelihood, and understanding of his environment can be represented for the reader in the present. Considering that the universal is largely associated with privileged gendered and racial positions,[6] Lukács' and Fleishman's discussions of the historical novel imply that historical experience is centered in the authorial and social position of white, middle- or upper-class men. From a postmodernist perspective, Ruth Hoberman notes that the relationship that Lukács and Fleishman defend between characters and their engagement with historical events can only be undertaken by "figures who

3 Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel*, p. 17.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

6 See Butler's discussion on universality in "Contingent Foundations" in Benhabib et al. *Feminist Contentions*. Here, Butler argues that universality has only recently "been exposed for its own highly ethnocentric biases", which is based on Western cultural and political hegemony (p. 40). For Butler, universality is always exclusionary and will hinder the participation of subjects who have been historically marginalized.

are free to roam, meet people and hold power".[7] As we know, women have historically been in disadvantage of accessing mobility, power, authorship, and leadership, having had to engage with political struggles in order to access these privileges. In arguing for a historical account that can represent a universal experience, Hoberman contends that Lukács and Fleishman efface "the particularities of female experiences", which results in "a reinscription of women's absence from history".[8] The same can be said about further marginalized subjects in terms of class, race, and sexuality.

Like Hoberman, Hutcheon perceives literature as a fruitful means to bring to light the past of "ex-centric" subjects, to use Hutcheon's term, to include women, queer, racial, and ethnic minorities in historiography. Hutcheon argues that feminist historical methodology, which consists in exposing women's exclusion in historical accounts as well as in producing narratives that emphasize the role played by women in history, has had a great impact on postmodernist historiography. Feminist historians have increasingly stressed the ways in which women were marginilized from historical accounts under the premise that they were not important actors in the course of history. It is under this perspective that Hutcheon devises the concept of 'historiographic metafiction', which "self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning".[9]

White and Hutcheon place great importance on the act of narration of history, which highly depends upon the selection of information, authorial interpretations of historical events, and the use of narrativity to represent history. For White, historical and literary discourses share a common ground regarding language and narration, since both need language in order to transform a series of events into a story.[10] While Lukács and Fleishman separate the roles of literary accounts and historical accounts, and assert the historical novel as an emotional account of history, White and Hutcheon are very much aware of the discursive aspects of historiography, for they argue that both historical and literary narratives can only produce *representations* of history, which ultimately rely on language. In challenging the clear-cut separation between history and literature, Hutcheon draws attention to narration in the construction of history, and to the potential of historical knowledge in fiction. In doing so, she points to the self-reflexivity that historiographic metafictions could potentially raise, as the term itself infers the "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs".[11]

Hutcheon disputes three main points in Lukács' debate about historical novels in her conceptualization of historiographic metafiction: the first consists in the difficulties in proving truthfulness and accuracy in each and every detail in historical novels; the second regards our access and understanding of texts about the historical past (both historical and fictional); and the third refers to Lukács' and Fleishman's

7 Hoberman, "Multiplying the Past: Gender and Narrative in Bryher's 'Gate to the Sea'", p. 356.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 357.

9 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 97.

10 White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, pp. 6–7.

11 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 5.

argument about the need to have at least one historical figure in a novel in order to characterize it as historical fiction. In her critique regarding the aspect of accuracy and truthfulness, Hutcheon contends that historiographic metafiction "plays upon the truth and lies of historical record"[12] by exposing the fact that official historical records can also contain errors and elide information about historical events.

This leads us to her second point, which considers how postmodernist fiction employs historical data and historical details. While Lukács claims that historical novels can mirror the historical past, Hutcheon defends that historiographic metafiction self-consciously recognizes "the paradox of the *reality* of the past [and] its *textualized accessibility* to us today"[13] by questioning the authority of official documents and data. In her third comment about Lukács' theory, Hutcheon disputes the arguments about the premise of having historical characters to validate the historical in fiction. Where Lukács sees the presentation of 'real' historical characters or 'types' as a primary feature of the historical novel, Hutcheon urges the inclusion of "peripheral figures" as protagonists of historiographic metafiction. For Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction does not require the presentation of a real historical figure because its emphasis lies on the process of writing history, rather than using one real historical persona as a character in order to give authenticity and truthfulness to a historical novel. In stressing the process of writing history, Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction seeks to highlight the overlapping elements between fiction and history, mainly concerning narrativity, authorship, documentation, and the selection of information, instead of illustrating authenticity through a real historical character and their relationship to historical events.

Hutcheon's concept must be regarded according to her notions of metafiction, elucidated in the last chapter, which she defines as "fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity".[14] In its historiographic form, metafiction functions as a strategy to openly indicate the fictional world "as a constructed one, but also as a world of public experience".[15] For Hutcheon, 'public experience' is narrated by discourses that are conveyed in the historical archives, documents, and testimonies that articulate historical events. In representing these events, historiographic metafiction denaturalizes the representation of history itself, critically engaging with the historical past in an attempt to understand the limitations of historical narratives.

From a similar perspective, Boccardi draws attention to the metafictional aspect of historical fiction. In contrast to Hutcheon, Boccardi does not see metafiction as a postmodernist phenomenon that gained force in the 1960s. Rather, she argues that "the historical novel [is] inherently metafictional and as such [it is] not only ideally receptive to postmodernism's positions on narrative, representation and knowledge but also supremely equipped to probe their validity".[16] In Boccardi's view, all historical

12 *Ibid.*, p. 114

13 *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

14 *Idem*, *Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox*, p. 1.

15 *Idem*, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 34.

16 Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Novel*, p. 6.

novels are self-referential, even the ones that were written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In exploring the lines between fiction and historiography, she explains, writers such as Walter Scott also relied on historical research, the selection of information, and self-reflexivity to compose their historical novels.[17] Boccardi disputes Hutcheon's argument by claiming self-reflexivity as a characteristic that has defined the historical novel from its early origins, suggesting that these strategies of narration, based on the interpretation and selection of historical data from the past to employ them in the writing of fiction, have been adapted to postmodernist paradigms in historiography.

I agree with Boccardi's argument insofar as to say that there are several similarities in terms of self-referentiality, in the sense that the historical novel has always existed according to the premise of revisiting the past as a means to understand the present. However, it is important to stress that the use of realism in early nineteenth century is quite different from its deployment in postmodernist historical novels, given that the latter is always self-conscious about its representational limits, whereas the former was written under the premise that what is represented actually mirrors historical reality. In this sense, Hutcheon's emphasis on the process of writing history (and not on the final object that represents history) is precisely the aspect that opens up possibilities for self-reflexivity and (oftentimes revisionist) approaches to the historical past as an attempt to include marginalized histories and their 'ex-centric' subjects. It is therefore relevant to remember that self-referentiality, in the sense of looking into the historical narratives of the past to re-present them, does not necessarily imply self-reflexivity, as Hutcheon claims.

Historiographic metafiction ultimately praises the ideals of plurality and multiple voices of narration, and the postmodernist questioning of authority and authenticity. Furthermore, it makes evident the tensions between history and fiction by reflecting on the silences that positivist History has yielded in its universalizing accounts. In her doctoral thesis, Waters elucidates the ways in which gay and lesbian novels have employed historical references to homosexuality in literature as a means to contest dominant discourses about same-sex desire among men and women: "[…] in history of homosexual representation certain historical narratives and icons recur again and again; but in each cultural moment, they are reconstructed rather differently".[18] These historical narratives, she argues, reclaim homosexual self-representation by revisiting the past to retrieve elements that have culturally and socially informed homosexual identity, at times reinforcing stereotypes but often providing self-reflexive images of homosexuality.

Waters finds Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction to be a useful critical instrument in reading gay and lesbian historical narratives, both those written in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as well as in contemporary literature. She contends that, though a postmodernist form, historiographic metafiction has long been deployed by some authors of gay and lesbian historical fiction whose works

17 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

18 Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas*, p. 8.

engage with "plundering and selective rewriting of historical narrative" and with exposing "the provisionality of (historical) representation, lay[ing] bare its implication in dominant – heterosexual – social structures which are in turn revealed to be far from stable".[19] She argues that gay and lesbian historical novels, both contemporary and those from the nineteenth century, appropriated official medical, criminal, and psychoanalytical discourses about homosexuality to narrate gays and lesbians' own self-images.[20] Literature is, therefore, presented as a textual means to gain a voice and to allow for the propagation of homosexual histories that do not necessarily converge with conventional accounts of the history of homosexuality.

Waters and Hollinghurst both contemplate historiographic metafiction in their novels and they point to the ways in which homosexuality has been overlooked in dominant accounts about London's history. However, it is relevant to stress that self-reflexivity in their works is carried out in different ways. In Waters' neo-Victorian fiction, for instance, there is a clear goal to provide a piece of a fictional lesbian historiography that addresses lesbian invisibility in the nineteenth century. In her 1940s fiction, historiographic metafiction is employed to re-work the myth of sexual freedom during the war and, in *The Night Watch*, to challenge 'the myth of the Blitz' by showing that, though women and sexual minorities did obtain more freedom during the war, they were still excluded from the national ideal of citizenship in many ways. In his turn, Hollinghurst is more interested in explicitly addressing homosexual promiscuity and experimentation as constitutive parts of elitist, traditional, and conservative parts of English society, present in well-established institutions such as the Oxbridge circles, the Parliament, and in the English literary canon. Moreover, in setting two of his novels during the Thatcherite period, Hollinghurst addresses the effects of neoliberalism in gay culture by shedding light on the ways in which privileged gay men reproduce forms of oppression based on race, class, and gender. While in Waters' works, especially in the neo-Victorian novels, historiographic metafiction is deployed as a means to re-vise traditional historical narratives, Hollinghurst's use of historiographic metafiction is devised to show an overt conservative and oppressive side of male homosexual culture that is often dismissed.

There have been some disputes about whether or not Waters' works pertain to the subgenre of historiographic metafiction, especially in regard to her neo-Victorian novels.[21] Yates, for instance, argues that Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* is a re-visionist historical novel, instead of a historiographic metafiction, because it "is playful rather than radically confrontational".[22] Yates' comment about the novel's 'playfulness' concerns the fact that *Tipping the Velvet*' is based on Chris Hunt's *Street Lavender*, published in 1986.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

20 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21 Cf. Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, pp. 61–65; Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, pp. 117–121; de Groot, "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" in Mitchell (ed.) *Sarah Waters*, pp. 60–61; Yates, ""But it's only a novel, Dorian": Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Process of Re-Vision", pp. 192–199.

22 Yates, ""But it's only a novel, Dorian": Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Process of Re-Vision", p. 191.

For Yates, Waters' intertextual reference to Hunt's novel is merely an adaptation that replaces the original's gay protagonist with a queer cross-dressing one.[23] Moreover, Yates does not see self-reflexive potential in Waters' representation of male impersonation, street prostitution, gender, and sexual relations in the novel, instead suggesting that *Tipping the Velvet*'s "delight in anachronism"[24] conveys contemporary Victorian revival and does not necessarily criticize or challenge historical representations of the late-Victorian period.

The re-visionary character of Waters' novel, in Yates' view, only relates to the author's concern in depicting lesbian history in fiction by revising traditional notions of the *flâneur* and by presenting lesbian spaces in London that "are not generally the subject of nineteenth century canonical novels".[25] Yates' discussion of 're-visionary fiction' draws from Peter Widdowson's definition of the concept, which characterizes it as novels that "'write back to' – indeed rewrite – canonic [sic] texts from the past".[26] Although she recognizes that Hunt's text is not canonical, Yates' debate about intertextuality in Waters' novel is only associated with *Street Lavender*, as she suggests that *Tipping the Velvet* is only based on the 1986 text, completely overlooking Waters' further intertextual references associated with the picaresque novels, with the male impersonation acts in music halls and with the Dickensian tradition of the contrasts between light and darkness and wealth and poverty in different areas in London.

Waters has openly recognized Hunt's novel as an influence in writing *Tipping the Velvet*.[27] In the same interview, though, she also mentions other writers who inspired the creation of the novel, such as Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney, who wrote at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Ellen Galford and Isabel Miller, who were engaged with contemporary lesbian fiction. In her discussion about intertextuality in the novel, Yates neither cites these texts, nor does she consider the literary tradition of the picaresque and the cultural phenomenon of the male impersonation acts, something which Waters appropriates in order to depict a fictional account of what lesbian culture could have been in the period.

As Hutcheon has explained, intertextuality is a central feature of historiographic metafictions that articulates a double effect "in its inscribing of both historical and literary intertexts".[28] In other words, Hutcheon maintains that the intertexts that comprise a work of historiographic metafiction not only stem from literature, but also from historical discourses. Yates' discussions of intertextuality and re-visionary fiction is limited because it does not take into consideration Hutcheon's definition of intertextuality, and it also overlooks the complexities of Waters' historical representation in *Tipping the Velvet* and the ways in which it deliberately addresses lesbian invisibility in traditional historical accounts. As I have shown in my reading of *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters' articulation of the picaresque novel and male impersonation works

23 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

26 Widdowson, "'Writing Back': Re-visionary Contemporary Fiction", p. 491.

27 Cf. Armitt, "Interview with Sarah Waters", p. 121.

28 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 128.

alongside Butlers' contemporary notions of gender performance, which is not merely used as a backdrop for the plot, but as a means to produce a fictional historical narrative about lesbian and cross-dressing cultures in London within the trope of the picaresque tradition.

In a reading of *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, Mitchell also challenges the argument that these novels can be considered historiographic metafiction, arguing that both texts lack the elements of irony and parody that are pivotal to Hutcheon's conceptualization of the form.[29] Like in Yates' article, the problem with Mitchell's argument is that it does not reflect on Hutcheon's very specific definitions of irony and parody in her theoretical discussions. As elucidated in chapter 5, Hutcheon contends that irony operates in "an economy of exchange", in which "there is always a power imbalance"[30] in the act of communication. Hutcheon points out that irony is not always infused with humor, but is rather a rhetorical trope that destabilizes meanings of enunciations, which can then go onto subvert already consolidated power relations.[31]

Parody and irony are often discussed in tandem with each other in Hutcheon's work about historiographic metafiction, thereby implying the ways in which parody can often carry an ironic comment. Hutcheon emphasizes that the notion of parody consists in the "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity", and "*not* the ridiculing imitation" of texts.[32] Additionally, Hutcheon contends that parody "offer[s] a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it".[33] It is precisely these notions of parody that Waters conveys in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity*, given that she goes back to literary traditions of the picaresque novel and the Victorian gothic, respectively, to create novels that, on the one hand, imitate these genres and, on the other hand, produce different meanings for them, since she writes these texts consciously showing that they are contemporary re-constructions of those literary genres. Waters' presentation of these genres is concerned with denaturalizing our understandings of gender and sexuality by stressing, as Alden points out, "the provisional nature of any enactment of gender [and sexuality], in any period".[34] Conversely, in re-working these literary traditions in a contemporary context, Waters reminds us that our present-day comprehension of gender and sexuality inevitably evokes Victorian conventions that were based on clear-cut gender divisions and homosexuality as a deviant form of sexuality.

Jerome de Groot contemplates this issue of present and past by focusing on Waters' usage of the word 'queer', as he argues that it "explicitly broker[s] a relationship

29 Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, pp. 117–118.

30 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 91.

31 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 2; 12.

32 *Idem*, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 26. Emphasis in original.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 35. Emphasis in original.

34 Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 66.

between the historically authentic and the contemporary".[35] Throughout *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity*, 'queer' is used both to mean oddness and sexual dissidence, bringing out the word's nineteenth century definition (the 'historically authentic') and its contemporary usage, which points to the different meaning of the exact same word. For instance, Nancy comments on the ways in which her life had changed after she met Kitty: "[i]t had been ordinary before she came; now it was full of *queer* electric spaces that she left ringing with music or glowing with light".[36] In this sentence, 'queer' means both odd and sexual, bringing to the fore the meanings that pertain to the nineteenth and to the late-twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first centuries.

In *Affinity*, however, the predominant meaning of the word is that of strangeness,[37] though there are also passages in which the employment of 'queer' suggests sexual connotations. The passage in which Margaret writes that "Priscilla said she did think it rather *queer* that, if Pa's ghost should walk anywhere, it should be in the tweeny's attic";[38] this usage of the word implies the meaning of 'queer' as oddness. One instance in which we find the word 'queer' in its sexual connotation is in a scene in which Selina places her hand on Margaret's breast, who, in her turn, moves "as if [Selina's] fingers had some charge to them. She had found [...] the *queerest* chance – she had found [...] my locket; and now she began to trace its outline with her fingertips".[39] Here, 'queer' is not used as a term that contemplates sexual deviancy, but it clearly suggests sexual desire between Selina and Margaret, which is figured within the framework of the supernatural and spiritualism in the novel.

The arguments raised by Yates and Mitchell about Waters' novels not bearing the characteristics that define Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction overlook Hutcheon's explanations of pivotal concepts such as intertextuality, parody, and irony. Waters works with all of these devices in her novels, for she engages with intertexts from literature and history, she uses parody as a means to critically articulate past and present in her narratives, and she employs irony as a device that subverts conventional relations of gender, sexuality and, in *Affinity*, of class.

In *The Night Watch*, Waters' deployment of these devices is more concerned with debunking the myth of sexual freedom during the war and the myth of national unity during the Blitz by devising a narrator that focalizes on individual experiences in the Second World War. Alden notes that, in this novel specifically, Waters uses historiographic metafiction "to signal the incompleteness of what we know", since "she turns to the literary and historical archives to rewrite lesbian fiction of the time in a way that testifies to the reality she finds in the historical record, but which would

35 de Groot, "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" in Mitchell (ed.) *Sarah Waters*, p. 62. He points out that the word 'queer' is used 43 times in *Tipping the Velvet*, while it is repeated 40 times in *Affinity* (p. 63).

36 Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*, p. 38. My emphasis.

37 Cf. Carroll, "Rethinking generational history: Queer histories of sexuality in neo-Victorian Feminist Fiction", p. 143.

38 Waters, *Affinity*, p. 57. My emphasis.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 88. My emphasis.

not have been publishable at the time".[40] In doing so, Alden explains, Waters narrates the often suppressed experience of women, most of them lesbians and some gay men, which she re-constructs by researching historical archive and testimonies, instead of formulating an imagined story that recounts lesbian experience, as she had done in the neo-Victorian novels.

Although Hollinghurst's novels have not yet been regarded as historiographic metafictions, I also designate them as belonging to this subgenre in my study because of his use of intertextuality, parody, and irony as a means to write historical novels. However, as I will elucidate in the following section, the ways in which Hollinghurst's works devise these literary devices distinguish themselves from Waters'. In *The Swimming-Pool Library*, for instance, intertextuality is used in tandem with the autobiographical genre and with neoliberalism; irony is the novel's main trope, which guarantees Will's detachment from his surroundings and gives the account about gay culture in London an exaggerated and overtly sexualizing aesthetic. The novel's parodic stance can be regarded in Hutcheon's term, in which it operates as a means to convey ironic difference and to articulate past and present, in the sense that Will's autobiographical narrative is composed alongside excerpts of Charles' diaries. As I have pointed out in chapter 5, Will's and Charles' texts about their lives in London both indicate the similarities and differences in the distinct historical periods which they experienced in the city, Charles having lived in London in the beginning of the twentieth century and Will enjoying the apex of his youth in the 1980s.

In *The Line of Beauty*, I have shown that intertextuality is closely related to Henry James' works and to the Jamesian center of consciousness, which are constructed according to Thatcherite politics and ideology. In featuring aestheticism within the 1980s neoliberal framework, as Hannah contends,[41] it is possible to argue that Hollinghurst parodies the figure of the aesthete, found in Nick's character, by contextualizing the love for beauty with the 1980s culture of excess, individualism, and avarice. As I have elucidated in my reading of the novel in chapter 6, Hollinghurst's portrayal of the aesthete is constituted through irony, associating art with Thatcherite politics and, to some extent, endorsing Nick's detachment to his surroundings.[42]

In *The Stranger's Child*, irony, intertextuality, and parody are employed in the construction of the country house as an imaginary, historical, and cultural signifier and they are, as my reading of the novel has shown, articulated thoroughly through Hollinghurst's use of metafiction. In emphasizing how much of history is elided and how historical narratives change over time, *The Stranger's Child* displays an ironic and parodic use of the omniscient narrator. As I have argued in my reading of the novel in chapter 7, the space of authorship and of literary tradition are depicted in parallel with the spatial trope of the country house, narrating gay history in fragmented temporal frameworks that show how gay identity and culture have been assimilated

40 Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 72.

41 Cf. Hannah, "The Public Life, The Private Stage: Henry James in Recent Fiction", p. 89

42 Cf. Eastham, "Inoperative Ironies: Jamesian Aestheticism and Post-Modern Culture in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*", pp. 509–510.

by English literature and culture. However, Hollinghurst's novel suggests that these spaces, of authorship and of the country house, are only available for the male characters, while the female characters, namely the protagonist Daphne Sawle, remain powerless and insignificant in the social hierarchies determined by these spaces. In this sense, historiographic metafiction in *The Stranger's Child* operates as a means to evince the ways in which historical accounts always produce exclusion, even when narration is purported to be both objective and neutral.

In this section, I have attempted to elucidate key concepts about the historical novel to discuss the complexities of Hutcheon's theories on historiographic metafiction and to explain how this form is devised in the novels that I have analyzed in the previous chapters. In the following section, I examine how the aspect of gender marks the differences in Waters' and Hollinghurst's deployment of historiographic metafiction by considering their usage of intertextuality particularly in relation to literary history.

Historiography, Intertextuality, and Literary History

As historiographic metafictions, Waters' and Hollinghurst's works put forward similar literary strategies, such as the use of intertextuality that associate literature and history, parody, irony, and also the construction of characters that are intimately related to their novels' spatial configuration. However, the Londons and histories of homosexuality that they convey are very different, specifically because of gender: Hollinghurst's London is inhabited almost exclusively by gay men, whereas Waters' is a London dominated largely by lesbians. Both authors rely on distinct literary and historical frameworks and sources when writing historical fictions that narrate gay and lesbian histories in England. Hollinghurst looks back into established male literary canons and at a gay history that is marked by juridical prohibition and persecution. As women have had their position widely relegated throughout history, literature, and culture in general, Waters seeks to write a history of lesbians in the nineteenth century that has been overlooked, as well as to reinforce a female literary tradition that has only recently been established by feminist literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century.

There are also dissonances in the ways in which they perform historical research for their novels, since Hollinghurst seems to draw the historical aspects in his texts from his own memories and experience in the 1980s, in tandem with "vast accretions of influences from the literary and artistic past".[43] Waters, however, engages with intense historical research from archival sources in the writing of her 1940s novels, *The Night Watch* and *The Little Stranger*, and also from fictional texts, particularly in her neo-Victorian novels, showing that "her novels are not only acts of writing but also the responses to and results of acts of reading".[44]

43 Johnson, *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence*, p. 3.

44 Llewellyn, "Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre" in Heilmann and Llewellyn (eds.) *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*, pp. 195–210; p. 195.

At first glance, Waters' and Hollinghurst's turn to literature to write historical fiction may seem to be an identical strategy that defines their writing of historiographic metafictions. However, it is important to stress that their approaches to intertextuality are strongly embedded in the historical differences between literature produced by women and by men, since the cultural and historical acknowledgement of works written by male authors in a canonical tradition have been more evident than the works by female writers. Waters' and Hollinghurst's uses of intertextuality evoke both literary texts and history, as well as historical discourses about events such as the Victorian Era, the Second World War, and Thatcherism. Thus, we can argue that their intertextual employment of history and literature can be analyzed in light of Hutcheon's understanding of intertextuality which, in her words, "offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces – be they literary or historical".[45] She argues that historiographic metafiction contemplates the notion of history as a narration of events that is only available to us in textual forms. The ways in which Waters and Hollinghurst use literature and history as intertexts hinge on the differences ascribed to the production of female and male literary traditions and, as I will elucidate later in this section, on their representations of different historical periods.

Feminist literary criticism has pursued significant research and publishing that have cemented a tradition of women's writing that remained either secluded or was considered secondary in the eyes of a predominant masculine criticism for centuries. Works produced by scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Kate Millet, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,[46] as well as the foundation of publishers that focused exclusively on women (i.e., Virago, the Women's Press, and Pandora in the UK) paved the way for the promotion of women writers in the second half of the twentieth century. As Gilbert and Gubar have prominently elucidated, women authors in the nineteenth century have suffered from the 'anxiety of authorship', instead of the Bloomian patriarchal premise of male 'anxiety of influence'. Where Bloom postulates that male authors fear that their body of work could not exceed that of their predecessors or successors in literary history, Gilbert and Gubar claim that, for women authors, the real issue is "a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her".[47]

Although it is true that women have overcome their 'anxiety of authorship' and have established themselves as significant actors in literary history and writing, the ways in which women have been depicted in nineteenth century literature is still a prominent theme in contemporary literary texts. Waters' re-workings of the late-Victorian period, for instance, challenge the images of 'angel' and 'monster' that Gilbert and Gubar have frequently found in their analyses of nineteenth century literature. In giving her characters agency and autonomy, Waters portrays women who struggle against domesticity and passivity. Even Margaret in *Affinity*, who commits suicide

45 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 125.

46 Cf. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*; Millet, *Sexual Politics* and Gilbert and Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*.

47 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, p. 49.

in the end, attempts to fight against her condition of domestic imprisonment by engaging with intellectual activities in research and writing.

Remembering her father, Margaret reminisces about his idea of historiography, which evokes Hutcheon's and White's ideas about history and narrativity: "Pa used to say that any piece of history might be made into a tale: it was only a question of deciding where the tale began, and where it ended".[48] She is aware that the histories that her father conjured were not the same as the ones she wished to write about the women at Millbank Prison. For her late father, these tales "were rather easy to sift like that, to divide up and classify – the great lives, the great works, each one of them neat and gleaming and complete, like metal letters in a box of type".[49] While the histories her father wrote are described in terms of great achievements and classification, which recall male endeavors in history that have been recognized as such, Margaret begins her story about Millbank prison by recounting her own experience of visiting it. In replacing the omniscient form of historical narration with a diary form, Waters suggests that history can also be conveyed by memory and historical experience, evoking the frequently quoted feminist premise that 'the personal is also political'. The first pages of Margaret's diary show her own anxiety about being unable to reproduce her father's objective writing, and yet she engages with her own style of historiography which prioritizes subjective experience at Millbank over and against the necessity to access textual archives about the prison.

In contrast to Waters' assertion of women as authors who can fully contribute to historiography and literature in their own terms, Hollinghurst's construction of Daphne in *The Stranger's Child* infers Gilbert and Gubar's 'anxiety of authorship' as the protagonist struggles to become part of the realm of authorship and can never attain the success of the male protagonists in the novel. While all of the male authors in the novel work to surpass the success of their predecessors, and leave their contribution about Cecil's works and biography, Daphne attempts to find a place to fit as someone who *can* contribute to history, but who remains in a position of disadvantage in relation to her male counterparts. At the end of the novel, in the 1980s, Daphne is seen as a forgotten object inside a house that is full of junk, representing the scraps of women's history that could have been written, and which remained hidden and discarded until the biographer Paul Bryant finds her.[50] It could be that Hollinghurst's development of Daphne's character evinces the privileges that male writers and intellectuals still maintain until today. However, as I have argued in my reading of the novel, this view provides an anachronistic take on women's authorship, since we know that women's writing became an important issue in literary criticism from the 1970s onwards.

It was in this period that the role of women in history gains importance in historiography. As Eagleton notes, "[w]omen's literary history is seen as 'subterranean' or an 'undercurrent'. In both the titles and introductions to numerous texts [in the

48 Waters, *Affinity*, p. 1.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Cf. Hollinghurst, *The Stranger's Child*, pp. 470–471.

1970s], a vocabulary of 'silence', 'absence' and 'hiding' vies with one of 'revelation', 'uncovering', 'discovery'".[51] If Daphne's character somehow portrays the deficit in prestige and power for women writers, then Hollinghurst certainly constructs her as a woman who did not partake in the feminist struggles of the 1970s and neither has she been favored by it. In Hollinghurst's work, what is at stake is unravelling the notion of a gay tradition *within* a heteronormative tradition of canonical literature and art. This, of course, can be found in the very criticisms of his work, such as Johnson's *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence.* Hollinghurst's intertextual dialogues speak to an already established male tradition of influence, in the Bloomian sense, in which he tries to assert male homosexuality as a pillar of this tradition that for so long tried to coin it as a deviant practice that took place in its margins.

Although Waters also uses intertextual references from male authors, such as Wilkie Collins in *Affinity* and Charles Dickens in both *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, she largely provides re-workings of popular and middle-brow literary genres, as is the case with her intertextual references of Elizabeth Bowen in *The Night Watch* and her use of the Victorian Gothic in *Affinity*. Unlike Waters' interest in popular fiction, Hollinghurst refers to already established authors, such as Henry James, E.M. Forster, Rupert Brooke, Ronald Firbank, Oscar Wilde, and Christopher Isherwood. He revisits commonly depicted relationships in these writers' literary works that range from the Wildean narcissistic Dorian Gray to Jamesian aestheticism and devotion to beauty, going through interracial and (post)colonial relationships in Forster's novels and pederastic ones in Firbank's, to inter-class relationships between upper- and working-class men prominently figured in Isherwood's *Berlin Novels.* By providing intertextual dialogues exclusively with canonical literature, Hollinghurst places these literary traditions within specific contexts, locations, and historical periods, which mainly focus on the 1980s and the 2000s. In doing so, he claims "a tradition in which one homosexual generation precisely *schools* the next",[52] as Waters elucidates in her reading of *fin de siècle* gay authors, such as John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde.

Johnson, however, perceives it differently. He defines 'literary influence' as a way to "speak of the flowing material from the past into ('influ'-) the present, not of the present struggling with or reorganizing the past".[53] For Johnson, what is imperative in Hollinghurst's work is to look into the 'vitality' of images and texts from the past in the present, not asking them how they have influenced subsequent generations or how these generations have responded to them, but eliminating a "normative timeline of progression" and the "biological timeline" that implicates that "a writerly son was begat by a writerly father".[54] The problem with Johnson's argument, however, is that he does not question the conditions and norms that warrant a specific work to *influence* those that are still being made. This is indeed a question of influence: what are the works that live throughout history and that influence the present? Who are the artists or

51 Eagleton, "Literary Representations of Women" in Plain and Sellers (eds.) *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, pp. 106–107.

52 Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas*, p. 41. Emphasis in original.

53 Johnson, *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence*, p. 5.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

authors who create them? Johnson's readings of Hollinghurst's novels suggest that only white men can afford this privilege, as his readings of the author's novels relate Derek Jarman and Philip Glass's influence on *The Swimming-Pool Library*; Thomas Mann's and Benjamin Britten's on *The Folding Star*; the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright in *The Spell* and Henry James' and Aubrey Beardsley's impact on *The Line of Beauty*.

It is impossible to dissociate Hollinghurst's novels from the canonical presence of his predecessors, as his intertextual references predominantly allude to the works of male artists who are greatly consecrated in various artistic realms, such as architecture, visual arts, music and, primarily, literature. The dialogue with 'homophile' canons is also a means to write gay history by emphasizing how earlier models of male friendship and homosexuality are still present in contemporary gay culture and identity, thereby creating what Sedgwick calls 'minority canons'. Sedgwick is very critical about the formation of a minority canon that bases itself on the author's sexuality, since "it seems to falter in important ways in the implicit analysis it offers of the mechanisms of homophobia and of same-sex desire".[55] For Sedgwick, the problem with creating minor gay canons is that it isolates them as authors whose sexuality defines their work and, moreover, that it separates them into a label of 'gay literature' as if they had no relationship whatsoever with the 'great literary canon'. In this sense, she proposes that it makes more sense to look into the ways in which homophobia, homosocial desire, and homosexuality are represented in the master canon, under the premise that these topics have indeed been present in Western literature throughout its history. Hollinghurst's use of canonical intertextual references does not aim to create a 'minority canon', but rather insists on asserting gay writers as constitutive parts of the 'master canon'. Moreover, I believe that Hollinghurst's engagement with literary canonical tradition implicates the relevance that is still attributed to 'The Master Canon' and, therefore, asserts that his own work can be a part of this tradition.

Adapted to the historical and cultural frameworks of the late twentieth century, Hollinghurst's deployment of literary and cultural traditions subverts, to some extent, the dichotomous assumption that places straight culture as conservative and gay culture as progressive, given that he evinces the fractures and highly conventional behavior of gay men. It asserts the fact that has been historically and culturally denied: that the repression of male homosexuality, in its juridical, medical, and social forms, did not prevent it from greatly informing the most traditional (and conservative) sectors of English society. As Mitchell notes, Hollinghurst's works go back to Foucault's notions about the classification of sexuality that eventually leads to the intelligibility of homosexuality as the deviant form of sexual practice in many ways. In openly exposing gay sex, cruising, and promiscuity as key elements of a 'gay life-style', Hollinghurst enacts "a positive and defiant appropriation of the homosexual narrative and identity" by depicting a gay subculture that "sits in an uneasy relation with the (heterosexual) culture at large: *sub*culture can signify both *sub*version and *sub*ordination".[56] In fact, I would go further in her argument by stating that Hollinghurst's portrayal of gay subcultures

55 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 51.

56 Mitchell, "Alan Hollinghurst and Homosexual Identity" in Tew and Mengham (eds.) *British Fiction Today*, pp. 42–43. Emphasis in original.

speaks more to a subordination to heteronormative imposing norms regarding class, race, and gender than to an actual subversion of it.

While it is true that *The Swimming-Pool Library* and *The Line of Beauty* caused outrage in the conservative media, because of their overtly sexual and promiscuous content, more than thirty years after Hollinghurst's first novel, it is possible to look into his highly sexual, hedonistic, and individualist gay protagonists as products of neoliberal impact on sexual politics. If *The Swimming-Pool Library*'s Soho gay scene was seen as a focus of resistance throughout the twentieth century, as a *sub*culture that *sub*verts, then reading the novel in the third decade of the twenty-first century allows us to already detect homonormative features in Will Beckwith's relationship to both the gay spaces in which he circulates and in the relationships he maintains with other men, especially men of color and working-class men.

For Mitchell, the conflation of nineteenth century gay identity, largely informed by Oscar Wilde's persona[57] and late twentieth-century gay male sexuality, is articulated through the link between "capitalism and sex [which] is, arguably, commodified through the practice of cruising".[58] Mitchell argues that Hollinghurst creates a sexualized version of the nineteenth century aesthete, who had previously been only effeminate, to represent "the apotheosis of masculinity, and to [indicate] the progressive 'masculinization' of homosexual culture since the 1970s".[59] Although she specifically talks about Will Beckwith in this passage, I believe that this can be said about all of Hollinghurst's protagonists, whose masculinity depends on a hyper-sexualized gay self-image and also on the objectification of the women around them.

White masculinity in Hollinghurst's novels, however, must also be regarded alongside the privileged world that these gay men create for themselves, especially in their interclass and interracial relationships, as well as in their relations with women. Where cross-class relationships have been considered to be a means of comradeship between men and a manifestation of social change,[60] there is a constant mark of social hierarchy that is maintained by white privilege, upper-class sexual exploitation, and lower-class apparent subservience in Hollinghurst's protagonists' relationships. In *The Swimming-Pool Library*, it is sex and cruising that modestly subvert these norms, at least briefly. One instance includes Will's sexual encounter with an Argentinian man named Gabriel. As he shows Will a gigantic dildo that he plans to get inside of him, Will panics and wishes to leave. Gabriel gets angry and acts like he has been hurt: "I could whip you […] for what you did to my country in the war". Will then leaves, arguing that Gabriel has been taking "the sex and politics metaphor a bit too seriously".[61]

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57 Cf. Chapter 1 in Sinfield's *The Wildean Century*, in which he elucidates the influence of the Oscar Wilde trials on the cultural and social perception of male homosexuality in Britain. He writes: "it is hard to regard Wilde as other than the apogee of gay experience and expression, because that is the position we have accorded him in our cultures" (p. 2).

58 Mitchell, "Alan Hollinghurst and Homosexual Identity", p. 47.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Cf. Cook, "Queer Conflicts: Love, Sex and War, 1914–1967" in Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain*, p. 161.

61 Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library*, p. 275.

In this scene, he uses sex to criticize British military and imperialist supremacy by trying to make Will feel the consequences of the Falklands war.

While Hollinghurst's novels convey ambivalence regarding stances in sexual politics, in which it becomes difficult to detect whether or not there is criticism in the conservative milieus which he represents, in Waters' novels there are explicit strategies to critically engage with history and to assert the participation of lesbian women in history. These two literary approaches differentiate themselves because Hollinghurst upholds a willful re-working of a canonical 'homophile' literary tradition, whereas Waters aims to *create* a tradition of lesbian historiography and literature that has never really been considered historical by normative accounts. In fact, this has been an important point that Doan and Waters have made in their article about lesbian historical fiction, in which they write that, where "one [male] generation passes its masculine privileges on to the next […] [t]he suppression or absence of lesbian activity from the historical record […] has limited the constituency across which a lesbian genealogy might be traced".[62] They argue that the unequal amount of information available, both in historical documents and archives as well as in literary texts, has hindered "women to imagine themselves as participants in an unbroken tradition of same-sex love".[63]

It is precisely these absences that inspired Waters' early works, particularly the neo-Victorian novels, which not only fill "in the gaps, refocusing attention to the previously marginalized", but that also "work backwards and forwards, commenting upon contemporary lesbian identity and the workings of sexuality in modernity".[64] As Jones and O'Callaghan contend, Waters is very much aware of the marginalized status that women have had in both history and historiography, since she is well-read on feminist literary history, having herself been strongly influenced by the Women Liberation Movement in Britain in the 1970s.[65] Jones and O'Callaghan's collection of essays confirm the trajectory that Waters' public persona and her writing suggest: that her engagement with literature cannot be dissociated from her political stances within feminist politics and practices.

Alden sees a development in Waters' fiction that indicates "a shift from a queer, radical and playful mode in the early work [the neo-Victorian novels], through to a more traditionally feminist approach to testifying to lost lesbian experience in *The Night Watch*".[66] Alden detects a difference in Waters' use of historiographic metafiction, which is linked to discussions about lesbian historiography and to Waters' methodology in the early work that involves "playfully reinventing and appropriating history".[67]

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62 Doan and Waters, "Making up lost time: Contemporary lesbian writing and the invention of history" in Alderson and Anderson (eds.) *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring the Contemporary Boundaries*, pp. 12–13.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

64 de Groot, "'Something New and a Bit Starling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" in Mitchell (ed.) *Sarah Waters*, p. 62.

65 Cf. chapter 1 in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*.

66 Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 61.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

She perceives Waters' deployment of historiographic metafiction in the neo-Victorian novels as "a way of resolving the conflicts between the two schools of thought on lesbian history, continuism, and alterity".[68] For Alden, Waters' works confirm the historical research advanced by Freccero and Fradenberg that attests to the existence of same-sex desire among women in the past, although they do not necessarily correspond to the same models of female homosexuality that exist today.[69]

For Alden, Waters' neo-Victorian novels do not aim to provide *truth* about the historical past of lesbian women. Rather, they are self-reflexive texts that articulate reflections about contemporary lesbian identity by making "explicit the provisional nature of any enactment of gender, in any period, and simultaneously [...] the performative, provisional nature of historical fiction more generally".[70] Victorian culture is imaginatively performed to challenge the assumption of women's sexual passivity and acceptance of domesticity in the neo-Victorian novels. In accruing contemporary notions of lesbian sexuality to the nineteenth century, Waters re-creates versions of the Victorian past that include lesbians and that assert female agency to make the argument that gender and sexuality are, in many ways, constituted by historical conditions. Her novels thus re-enact Victorian London and its culture by including reflections about our contemporary understandings of gender and sexual identity, trying to imagine what a lesbian past might have looked like during the nineteenth century.

For instance, Waters employs notions of Butlerian performance and performativity, which are parts of contemporary discussions of gender, sexuality, identity, and subjectivity, as a means to evince that what we understand about gender and sexual identities is always provisional and depend upon the historical periods that are at stake. This is particularly the case with Waters' neo-Victorian novels, in which representations of history and historiography largely hinge on notions of performance and performativity, as I have shown in my analysis of *Tipping the Velvet* in chapter 2. In *Affinity* and in *Fingersmith* performance is also crucial for the development of the plots, specifically regarding the twists and artifices that demand the reader's full engagement with the text. If in *Affinity* it is the performance of spiritualism in séance circles that grants Selina and Ruth their respective freedom, in *Fingersmith* Maud Lilly is the character who seduces the reader with her performance of naivety and innocence, which grants her an escape from her uncle's exploitation and from domestic incarceration. In both novels, the characters' performance is crucial for the readers' engagement with the text, as we are often misled by the narrators' accounts and missing pieces of the plot, which sometimes direct our sympathies towards the villains, as it happens with Ruth Viger's involvement in Selina's plot and Maud Lilly's plans with Gentleman and Mrs. Sucksby.

Waters' early work appropriates well-established Victorian literary genres, such as the sensation novel, the *Bildungsroman*, the picaresque novel, social realism, and the

68 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

69 Cf. Fradenburg and Freccero, *Premodern Sexualities*, pp. xvii-xx.

70 Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction", in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 66.

ghost story, in order to include lesbian protagonists. In a move to create a lesbian-feminist literary tradition, Waters sees the necessity to introduce protagonists who convey different possibilities of being a lesbian in specific social and historical contexts. This is, in fact, the point made by O'Callaghan in her article about female masculinity in Waters' novels. She argues that "Waters rejects the denigration of butch women by celebrating erotic variants of female masculinity and its connectivity to forms of lesbian desire and lesbian subjectivity", thereby valuing female masculinity instead of turning to "dominant views by mainstream feminists and (some) lesbian-feminists alike, who view masculine women as traitors for capitulating to masculine stereotypes and rejecting their own femininity".[71] In this sense, Waters also uses metafiction to review the histories that have already been written about lesbian women and to address the contentions that have emerged throughout the process of writing these histories in both the neo-Victorian novels and in the 1940s works.

In the neo-Victorian novels, metafiction works as a strategy to point out the absences in historiography and to raise questions about cultural and historical visibility, given that Waters self-consciously employs literature to yield reflections about lesbian invisiblity in public discourse. In these works, the present and the past co-exist precisely because contemporary gender, queer, and feminist theories are used as tools to reflect upon and to re-write history, drawing attention to the ways in which historiography depends on language and narration to convey an account of the past. As de Groot maintains, historical novels are a "re-enactment, a recreation, a performance of pastness",[72] whose goal lies mainly in undermining dominant discourses about history and historiography.

Once Waters moves her historical research to the 1940s, the performance of the past cannot be exclusively imagined, but it must be depicted in dialogue with historical archive and the testimonials of those who survived the Second World War. Alden contends that Waters' use of metafiction in *The Night Watch* functions as a means "to deepen the reader's emotional connection with the characters and situations depicted",[73] as opposed to her earlier construction of the past as a way to recover possible histories of lesbian women. Waters' directing her research to documents, memories, and testimonies about the Second World War implies the use of official historical records to create a novel that presents interpretations of that same archival material, thereby providing a self-reflexive account of the myth of the Blitz. Thus, I will delve further into Alden's argument about the creation of emotional responses between reader and text to add that Waters' accounts of the Second World War and its aftermath – both in *The Night Watch* and in *The Little Stranger*, where the plot begins in the post-war period – inflect criticism about the ideal of national unity and progress.

71 O'Callaghan, "'Grisley "L" business': Re-valuing Female Masculinity and Butch Subjectivity in *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Night Watch*" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 196.

72 de Groot, "'Something New and a Bit Startling': Sarah Waters and the Historical Novel" in Mitchell (ed.) *Sarah Waters*, p. 57.

73 Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 62.

What these novels show is that, in spite of women's engagement with the war and of the apparent sexual freedom during the period, women and sexual minorities were not granted the freedom of choice that had been promised to them.

This is particularly evident in both Kay Langrish's and Caroline Ayres' characters. As I have discussed in my reading of *The Night Watch*, Kay is a 'ghostly' presence in the novel because her female masculinity does not fit into the post-war project for women. A similar belief is depicted in *The Little Stranger*, which is set in a country house during the post-war period and in which the spinster Caroline Ayres struggles with the social environment around her, which expects her to get married and to be more feminine. Waters' portrayal of the Second World War and the post-war period cannot simply be regarded as a nostalgic representation of the past, as Cavalié has argued in her reading of *The Night Watch*. She claims that the novel turns "history into an object of consumption, and paradoxically enough, comfort for the contemporary reader",[74] and she affirms that Waters chooses to efface the traumatic consequences of the war to recount a nostalgic past of normality during the Blitz.

As I have shown in my reading, the novel neither creates a nostalgic past, nor does it diminish the critical consequences of traumatic events such as the Second World War. Rather, *The Night Watch* works as an intertextual narrative that speaks to other seminal texts, such as Elizabeth Bowen's and Graham Greene's works, by critically appropriating the myth of the Blitz and its literary representations to bring out aspects about gender and the period's sexual politics. It is true that Waters feeds into the Blitz as a literary and historical narrative; however, in producing a narrative that is composed by several focalizers, Waters undermines the pervasive idea of national unity by showing that, though all characters were somehow involved with the war (even Duncan, who refuses to take part in it), they definitely had very different experiences during that period. In starting the novel in 1947, after the war, we encounter a melancholic world of loss, in which the denial of public participation of women, who were now expected to go back to their domestic activities or to take up underpaid jobs, proves that national unity during the war had, in fact, been a narrative deployed as a means of control and governance.

As Rose has compellingly elucidated throughout her work, Churchill's government and its use of propaganda were crucial to the development of discourses about national identity, which served populist ends and were effective to the extent that they "either subsum[ed] or deni[ed] the significance of other identities".[75] In *The Night Watch*, Waters has produced a historiography of the period that explores the fractions in national unity and that exposes the points in which they are dissonant. Where the women in the novel perceive urban destruction as an opportunity for emancipation and for political agency, Duncan, as a conscientious objector, experiences the war as a period of physical and mental incarceration, since his individual freedom is severely restricted. While Julia's post-war life is successful, given that she becomes an established writer of detective novels, Helen's is marked by loneliness and by the

74 Cavalié, "'It's like gold leaf, and now it's rising, peeling away': Britishness and Exoticism in Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*", p. 85.

75 Rose, *Which People's War?*, p. 9.

everyday life in a job at a dating agency, a job for which she does not care. In their stories, it is class that grants Julia privileges of greater opportunities in the post-war period, whereas Helen's less advantageous education leaves her with less rewarding jobs. Waters appropriates the myth of the Blitz to dismantle its formative assumption of equality and sense of belonging. In shedding light on the gender, sexual, and class differences that mark the characters' trajectories in the narrative, Waters recounts historical events that have been obscured by the overwhelming presence of the myth about the war serving as a revolutionary breakthrough for marginalized subjects.

Waters and Hollinghurst both employ similar literary strategies in writing historiographic metafiction. However, as I have elucidated in this section, the differences that are inherent to men's and women's participation in literary, social, and cultural history play a great role in the ways in which they re-work and represent history. While Hollinghurst's works reclaim gay men's participation as part of the 'center' of culture, rather than as something marginal to it, Waters' novels specifically address lesbian and female invisibility in these realms. These differences also influence the ways in which they depict London, its history and sexual geography. In the following section, I want to postulate that Hollinghurst's and Waters' historical narratives about homosexuality must be examined in tandem with London's sexual and gender geographies in specific historical periods. If, as Hodgkins argues, the successful reception of historical fiction relies on "the recreation of imagined otherness, measured especially through the detail of everyday life (food, clothes, pastimes, preoccupations), and also through [...] accuracy and verifiability of the content",[76] then I would argue that the construction of London plays a very central role in the case of these historical novelists, in their acclaimed critical reception, and in their discussions about gay and lesbian history.

Urban Mobility

In her discussion about gay and lesbian historical novels, Waters asserts that the historical novel "tells us less about the past than about the circumstances of its own production – [it] reveals, if nothing else, the historiographical priorities of its author, or its author's culture."[77] In the context of contemporary debates about gender and sexuality, Waters' and Hollinghurst's novels contemplate an affirmative presence of gays and lesbians in England's history, featuring London as a place that has both informed gay and lesbian culture and as a place that has been greatly influenced by queer practices. However, as I have shown, male and female same-sex desire played distinct roles in history and in London's sexual geographies, which also contributes to the differences encountered in gay and lesbian historiographies.

76 Hodgkin, "The Witch, the Puritan and the Prophet: Historical Novels and Seventeenth-Century History" in Heilman and Llewellyn (eds.) *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*, p. 15.

77 Waters, *Wolfskins and Togas*, p. 8.

While Hollinghurst's novels have turned to canonical literature and art to highlight the intersections between an increasingly gentrified gay subculture and conservative (heteronormative) tradition time and again, Waters has worked to make lesbian urban culture visible, since "[m]uch of lesbian subcultural life took place in spaces and spheres that have been largely invisible to historians".[78] Houlbrook also addresses the invisibility of lesbian spaces in London in his work, arguing that one of the reasons for lesbian invisibility is the fact that women's circulation in public spaces was restricted. Another reason that he attributes to the lack of documentation of lesbian spaces is the fact that women have always had smaller wages in comparison to men, which "lessen[ed] their ability to access commercial venues or private residential space".[79] Access to these spaces facilitated the encounter of gay men in many ways, as we know from spaces such as molly houses in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and queer subcultures in the West End in the late Victorian period and in the early twentieth century.[80]

The invisibility of lesbian culture in London is also linked to their invisibility within the law, given that female sexual deviance was commonly dealt with in terms of prostitution.[81] Studies about lesbian history and the discussions about lesbian historiography have enabled research about spaces that were frequented by lesbian women in the second half of the twentieth century.[82] Gardiner's research about the Gateways club, which collected oral histories from lesbians who attended the venue, is an important source of lesbian sociability in the post-war period.[83] Munt has also pursued significant work about lesbians and space by conceptualizing a lesbian *flaneur* who appropriates the gaze of urban space, which had been historically entitled to white men, in order to assert images of urban mobility as a central characteristic that affirms "lesbians *as women* inhabiting the urban environment".[84]

Waters and Hollinghurst articulate notions of urban mobility and the *flâneur* that are strongly shaped by historical frameworks regarding men and women in the city

78 Gowning, "History" in Medhurst and Munt (eds.) *Lesbian and Gay Studies: a Critical Introduction*, p. 61.

79 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 10.

80 Cf. Chapters 2 and 3 in Houlbrook's *Queer London*; Cook's *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914*; Cocks' "Secrets, Crimes and Diseases, 1800–1914" in Cook (ed.) *A Gay History of Britain*, pp. 103–144.

81 Cf. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 10 and Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, pp. 7; 111.

82 Cf. Gardiner, *From the Closet to the Screen: Women at the Gateways Club, 1945–1985*; Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*; Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*; Nestle, "Restriction and Reclamation: Lesbian Bars and Beaches of the 1950s", in Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter *Queers in Space*, pp. 61–68; Rothenberg, "'And She Told Two Friends': Lesbians Creating Urban Social Space" in Bell and Valentine (eds.) *Mapping Desire*, pp. 165–181; Valentine, "(Re)negotiating the 'Heterosexual Street': Lesbians Production of Space" in Duncan (ed.) *BodySpace*, pp. 145–153; Wolfe, "Invisible Women in Invisible Places: The production of Social Space in Lesbian Bars" in Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter *Queers in Space*, pp. 301–324.

83 Cf. Gardiner, *From the Closet to the Screen: Women at the Gateways Club, 1945–1985* and chapter 4 in Jennings' *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*.

84 Munt, "The Lesbian *Flâneur*" in Bell and Valentine (eds.) *Mapping Desire*, p. 120. Emphasis in original.

and, subsequently, how they relate to the specificities of male and female homosexuality. In this sense, the same geographical location in London acquires distinct signifiers that depend upon the characters' subject position in a specific moment of London's history of sexuality and their shaping of the city's sexual geography. West London, Soho, and the West End, for instance, feature in many of their novels, displaying their importance for gay and lesbian histories of London and the areas' ongoing shifts. While the nineteenth century West End portrayed in *Tipping the Velvet* is Nancy Astley's stage for exploring an underground gay scene, Will Beckwith's 1980s experience of the same area is very sexualized, but as a consolidated 'gay village' that is in the process of becoming gentrified.

For Nancy, walking the streets of the West End as a boy provides a means to enter the world of cruising and renting, something which she could not partake in as a girl. Being approached by a man in the Burlington Arcade,[85] for instance, shows Waters' specificity in depicting London's sexual geographies. The Burlington Arcade is located in the West End, near Jermyn Street and Regent Street, places that were popular as both commercial and cruising sites. In the late Victorian period, Jermyn Street was well known for its Turkish baths and as "a particularly male area of London, that caters for men's pleasures".[86] Commenting on the intersections between this street's commercial and sexual aspects, Turner explains that "those moments of reflection that appear in a shop window" are moments that characterize Jermyn Street as a "particularly significant street in the queer map of the West End" that "has been continually reimagined and appropriated queerly".[87]

Though Nancy is not looking at a window display in Jermyn Street, she is very close by, partaking in the same idle and quotidian activity of window-shopping when a gentleman, who is interested in sex, approaches her. From exploring the West End's theatrical scene in the first part of the novel, Waters depicts the underground scene in the West End by appropriating images that are present in historical archives of male homosexuality. In doing so, she reflects on this scene, alongside cross-dressing culture in the area, as a means to imagine how a lesbian subject might have experienced these places in that context. As a place known for the conflation of sexual deviance and the theatrical and artistic scenes in the nineteenth century, Waters represents the West End as a cruising ground, as a queer space for cross-dressing culture, and as a potential site for a lesbian encounter.

If Nancy falls into the underground cruising scene in the West End by chance, Will Beckwith is very conscious of the sexual dynamics in the same area in the 1980s and makes the most of it, as long as he is the one who occupies a dominating position. Whether it is in Hyde Park, in the West End, or in Soho, Will's accounts of moving through the city are always extremely sexualized, making a simple journey in the tube "sexy and strange, like a gigantic game of chance".[88] Comparing Hollinghurst's first novel with Waters' debut novel, the first was published in 1988 and the latter in 1998, it

85 Cf. Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*, pp. 196–197.

86 Turner, *Backward Glances*, p. 78.

87 *Ibid.*

88 Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library*, p. 47.

is possible to argue that the protagonists' strategies of walking, cruising, and sexually exploring the city rely on gendered practices of homosexuality and their histories.

The different uses of the West End and its sexual culture in Waters' and Hollinghurst's works also relates to the historical periods that they represent. Where Waters' nineteenth century depiction of the West End is deeply rooted in the sexual subculture of the area, which was linked to male homosexuality, cross-dressing, and prostitution,[89] Hollinghurst's portrayal of the same area in the 1980s is largely informed by the consumer culture that, according to Mort, began in the post-war period. Mort explains that in the 1950s, "the West End shops announced the advent of material abundance, sex, food and leisure [which] were promoted as the capital's major attractions".[90] By the 1980s, Soho, for instance, had become known for "a specific type of urban experience",[91] which was attuned to its sex industry, growing commercial infrastructure, and bohemian lifestyle. As I have discussed in my reading of *The Swimming-Pool Library*, this is the image of Soho and its neighboring areas that Will construes in his autobiographical account of the city, given that he promotes his circulation in the West End as a cruising ground from which he must always profit. Will's walking in the 1980s West End, seeking casual sex and enjoying the area's sex industry is, as I have shown, deeply linked to Thatcherite neoliberal culture and ideology. If it is true, as Edwards argues, that the "sexual pick-up system is deeply set in a series of modern developments, including capitalism", then Will's highly commodified narration of his sexual encounters suggests "a reflection of the internalisation of industrial, capitalist values of efficiency and productivity […] defined in terms of primarily male sexual activity".[92] Will's gay identity and the relations that he maintains with other men indicate, as Mitchell puts it, "the apotheosis of masculinity"[93] that is strengthened by his privileges of whiteness, class, and education.

While Waters represents the West End in *Tipping the Velvet* as a space that allows the protagonist to engage with an ambiguous gender identity and with her homosexuality, both on the streets and in the theater, Hollinghurst depicts the West End as a place that sustains Will's consumerist and overtly masculine sex drive, which is addressed mainly to working-class men and men of color. In Eeckhout's words, Hollinghurst presents his male protagonists "unapologetically as gay men who [are] not inclined to reflect upon […] their sexual identities, and who [show] little interest in extending their sexual activities into a politically radical, norm-breaking social project".[94] Published in a time in which the AIDS crisis was still at its peak, *The Swimming-Pool Library* was considered outrageous because it proudly touched upon

89 Cf. Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, pp. 94–105; Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914*, pp. 17–41.

90 Mort, *Capital Affairs*, p. 6.

91 *Idem*, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 158.

92 Edwards, *Erotics and Politics*, p. 92

93 Mitchell, "Alan Hollinghurst and Homosexual Identity" in Tew and Mengham (eds.) *British Fiction Today*, p. 47.

94 Eeckhout, "Alan Hollinghurst's Fictional Ways of Queering London" in Avery and Graham (eds.) *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London c. 1850 to the Present*, p. 203.

promiscuity and casual sex, which are certainly elements that pertain to gay culture and which the mainstream media and conservative sectors of society condemn very vehemently. Hollinghurst defied hysterical, homophobic and moralist viewpoints that had been so commonly disseminated by the media and public discourse in general by exposing promiscuity among gay men as a lifestyle of which many gay men are proud, and in describing the spaces that have been lost with the epidemic. Nevertheless, Hollinghurst's depiction of sexual hedonism does not portray promiscuity as the ultimate resistance to heteronormative puritanism. Rather, it points to the contradictions of gay liberation, in which sexual norms are ruptured, and yet other related forms of domination and oppression, especially those concerning class and race, are maintained.

In *The Swimming-Pool Library* cruising as a form of flânerie, in which gazes express sexual attraction, only works in West and Central London where Will flaunts his social privileges and where the gay scene has already consolidated many sexual meeting points for gay men. In the East End, as I have pointed out, the tables turn as Will attempts to cruise the streets, just as he did in Hyde Park or in Soho. Depicted as a site of poverty and social exclusion, Hollinghurst's construction of East London epitomizes the lives of those who had long been forgotten by social welfare. By contrast, Waters' depiction of East London in the nineteenth century recreates working-class communities that are charged with the potential for political transformation. O'Callaghan associates Waters' East London with the figure of the New Woman, arguing that Florence's social group of lesbians "represent various incarnations of the New Woman as butch and femme subjects; they are a mixed class-based community of lesbians who embrace an assortment of gendered and sexual aesthetics, employment, and economic circumstances".[95] It is interesting to note that Waters attempts to depict an East End that, in spite of its poverty, is politically active and displays a large sense of community life. However, in not articulating social conflicts between the East End and Central and West London, Waters falls into stereotypical images of working-class life and of marginalized neighborhoods as sites of tolerance and progress, overlooking the complexities involving urban inequalities, in which the relationships between affluent and poor neighborhoods are always uneasy. As I have discussed in my reading of *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters uncritically uses class as an identity category that marks the characters' poverty as a lifestyle, instead of reflecting on class as a social relation, as she does in the later novels *Affinity* and *The Night Watch*.

For Hollinghurst, East London is presented as a place in which Will's privileges do not guarantee a higher hierarchical position; therefore, this serves as a contrast to Soho and the cruising spots in West and Central London. It is the protagonist's social class that hinders his appropriation of the East End for queering purposes and this, in turn, puts him in a position of danger and vulnerability. In Waters' depiction of East London, however, we notice a part of the city that functions as a queer space that enhances the potential of lesbian and feminist encounters and, moreover, that

95 O'Callaghan, "'Grisley "L" business': Re-valuing Female Masculinity and Butch Subjectivity in *Tipping the Velvet* and *The Night Watch*" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 202.

grants the protagonist a feeling of belonging and of freedom to perform her non-binary gender identity. My main criticism of Waters' first novel is that her vision of a lesbian queer space in the late nineteenth century can only work by effacing class conflicts. If the scene in Victoria Park is supposed to depict the great variety of women and men fighting for equality, in which women and feminism are given great political, historical, and cultural visibility, then this is only possible precisely because conflictive issues involving class and race, which permeate the histories of workers' and feminist movements in Britain, are elided.[96]

Queer Domesticities

While Waters' novels portray a series of traditional spaces in London and in literature to re-write them as feminist spaces which enable lesbian desire, political agency, and historical and cultural visibility, Hollinghurst's novels take up the "greater awareness of male homosexual transgression"[97] in the city in order to draw attention to its inextricable connections to the most traditional tenets of British history and culture. Hollinghurst's characters do not need to appropriate space, having in mind that the circulation and participation of men in the public sphere is a historical given. Rather, what is at stake is precisely the negotiation between private and public spaces and how they articulate their sexual identities in each of these spheres. In novels such as *The Swimming-Pool Library* and *The Spell*, which is set in the 2000s, privileged white gay men enjoy their freedoms in private and public spheres, as if the former were a continuation of the latter. In other novels, such as *The Line of Beauty* and *The Stranger's Child*, notions of private and public spheres become more complex, especially because Hollinghurst's articulation of the domestic and urban spheres often overlap and become confounded, providing spatial frameworks in which characters must know how to draw the line between homosocial and homosexual relations as a means to safeguard their public images.

The domestic sphere figures as a significant trope in both Hollinghurst's and Waters' novels. In *Tipping the Velvet* and in *Affinity*, traditional notions of female domesticity are undermined by the protagonists' urges to escape and live beyond the boundaries of private reclusion, while the domestic sphere is mostly depicted as a space that enables lesbian desire in *The Night Watch*. In Hollinghurst's works, the domestic appears as a homonormative space that metaphorically stands for the domestication of gay culture in neoliberal times, and also as a public and political space in which white male privilege and bonding prevail as determining factors in maintaining the protagonists'

96 Gilroy discusses racism and race at length in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, insightfully analyzing racial and national discourses both in Conservative, Labour, and left-wing movements. In *Beyond the Pale*, Ware elucidates how race has been the most visible fracture in British feminist movements by presenting a series of essays that address the invisibility of race throughout feminist history in Britain.

97 Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London*, p. 7.

dominating positions in the realms of politics and literature. As Matt Cook has elucidated, "home has become a key symbol and material indicator of queer alienation, belonging, difference and 'normalization'".[98] As I have shown, most of the homes that Hollinghurst represents indicate affluent status and social prestige, as is the case with the Feddens' mansion in Kensington Gardens in *The Line of Beauty* or Corley Court and Two Acres in *The Stranger's Child*. Nevertheless, Hollinghurst also counters these representations of wealth with working-class homes, such as Leo Charles' flat in *The Line of Beauty*, and with extreme marginalization and poverty, as shown in the council estates in the East End in *The Swimming-Pool Library*.

The descriptions of different domestic spheres in *The Line of Beauty*, for instance, give the reader information about the characters' social class and their access to culture and beauty, evinced by Hollinghurst's accounts of aesthetic taste in each household and the ways in which the characters utilize different spaces in the house. The emphasis placed on the domestic sphere indicates London's increasing privatization and segregation, especially concerning more vulnerable communities, such as the working-class and gay communities. The differences described in these homes – from Lord Kessler's Victorian country house in Middlesex to Leo's small council-flat, where he lives with his mother and sister – convey the Thatcherite maximum of individualism, in which "there's no such thing as society",[99] but only individuals and their families.

Alongside Thatcherite government, AIDS plays a crucial role in the domestic geography of *The Line of Beauty*. Cook notes that "AIDS and HIV meant changes to the ways many men lived out their home lives, as well as adjustments in welfare and housing policy".[100] His study about domestic life during the epidemic relays that many gay men became homeless or were evicted from their homes because they either had AIDS or were HIV positive. As the epidemic spread across the UK, in London in particular, which was the city with most cases according to Cook,[101] there were significant shifts in the capital's sexual geographies:

> The lines between gay and straight and the ways these divisions mapped onto the urban landscape were thus reappraised in the context of the early years of the epidemic. The homophobic insistence on separation and exclusion by some paradoxically redoubled an insistence by many gay and lesbian Londoners on a visible presence.[102]

Where homophobic reactions to gay spaces were violent and oppressive, there was also, as Cook points out, much resistance by gay and lesbian movements. An important resistance took place in the 1970s and early 1980s, as members of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) squatted in houses in Brixton and actively protested against the privatization of housing, private property, the nuclear family, and monogamy.[103]

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98 *Idem*, "Queer Domesticities" in Briganti and Mezei (eds.) *The Domestic Space Reader*, p. 174.

99 Qtd. in "Margaret Thatcher: a life in quotes" in *The Guardian*, 8 April 2013, accessed in July, 2017 in https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes

100 Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London*, p. 191.

101 *Idem*, "London, AIDS and the 1980s" in Avery and Graham (eds.) *Sex, Time and Place*, pp. 50–51.

102 *Ibid*., p. 58.

103 *Idem*, *Queer Domesticities*, pp. 193–197.

These sites of resistance, however, are not Hollinghurst's focus in *The Line of Beauty*, as he portrays the lives of men whose class, whiteness, education, and political position keep them aloof from any kind of political resistance. Although Wani and his family are non-white characters, their wealth and financial involvement with the Tories elide their immigration background and allow them to take part in a privileged circle that does not demand engagement with movements of resistance. What we note in Hollinghurst's protagonists, such as Nick Guest and Will Beckwith, is that they epitomize the depoliticization of gay politics in neoliberal times. Although both are targets of homophobic violence, as Nick is thrown out of the Feddens' home and as Will is beaten up by the skinheads, neither of them reflect on these incidents as consequences of homophobic hysteria and conservative sexual politics.

Hollinghurst does not show gay resistance in London in the 1980s; however, it is interesting to note how some elements in *The Swimming-Pool Library*'s and in *The Line of Beauty*'s sexual geographies resemble the mapping of AIDS in the 1980s. Cook explains that more than 70 percent of the AIDS victims in the UK were located in the four health authority areas in London, namely in the North-West Thames region. This locality includes three of the neighborhoods featured in *The Swimming-Pool Library* and in *The Line of Beauty*: Earls Court is where the Coleherne is located and where James is arrested in *The Swimming-Pool Library*; Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove are two of the neighborhoods that feature in *The Line of Beauty*. Located in the North-West of the Thames, all of these neighborhoods, Cook writes, were "areas which had been associated subculturally and more broadly with queer life in the city [throughout the 1980s]".[104] As Cook explains, the AIDS epidemic transformed London's geography of gay culture, given that queer spaces often came to be dangerous for gay men because of the overwhelming homophobic discourses that were propagated by the media and government.[105] This is precisely the case in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, as the Coleherne in Earls Court, which is supposedly a safe space for James to cruise, becomes a space of danger that is depicted by James being arrested by Colin, the gay policeman who also frequents the leather bar and the Corinthian Club.

Although Hollinghurst does not explicitly mention the AIDS epidemic in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, the location of James' arrest can be read as a spatial indicator of the urban transformations that had been triggered by hysterical homophobia during the AIDS crisis. In *The Line of Beauty*, in which AIDS is addressed openly, Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove are represented in terms of domesticity, suggesting that the epidemic directly hindered gay men's circulation and participation in the public sphere. Nick walks between Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill twice throughout the novel, and there are allusions to AIDS in neither of them. Instead, these trajectories describe the unequal material conditions between the two neighboring areas: on his first walk, Nick comes back from Leo's house in Brent and walks down through Ladbroke Grove, "longing for the other end, his own end, the safety and aloofness of white stucco and private gardens"[106]; on the second walk, he finds himself in Ladbroke Grove and he

104 *Idem*, "London, AIDS and the 1980s", p. 51.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

106 Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, p. 165.

goes there to use the public phone to call his dealer to buy more cocaine for him and Wani.[107] The contrast between Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill is also shown by Hollinghurst's depiction of the Notting Hill Carnival, as Nick, the maid Elena, and the Feddens drive through the festival completely aloof from its status as a public event that represents the Caribbean community in the area. While Ladbroke Grove is depicted as a space of material disadvantage, to which Nick clearly does not belong, Notting Hill is described in terms of privileges and of private property. Nick's circulation in Ladbroke Grove is only transitional in the sense that he walks through the area to see Leo or to meet his cocaine dealer. In the novel, Notting Hill is mainly represented through the Feddens' residence in Kensington Park Gardens, in which Nick aims to create bonds that might bestow him a social status into which he had not been born.

Whether it is in Notting Hill, in Soho or in the outskirts of London, we can read Hollinghurst's deployment of gay culture and domesticity as corollary effects of both the AIDS epidemic and Thatcherite neoliberal politics. As Duncan explains, the increasing privatization and commercialization of public spaces have compromised "the vitality of public sphere as a political site and [have] diminishe[d] the ability of marginalized groups to claim a share in power".[108] In *The Line of Beauty,* Hollinghurst depicts the consolidation of a hysterical homophobic culture and of an individualist and entrepreneurial culture throughout the 1980s by portraying depoliticized gay men who have no connections to the forms of resistance that were taking place in other areas of the city, such as in Brixton. In his novel, it is the private sphere that is politicized, but only in terms of the conservative and neoliberal ideologies that informed Thatcherite governance. The politics that prevails in *The Line of Beauty*'s wealthy homes is that of individual privilege, meritocracy, and social *arrivisme*, which refuse to either embrace or welcome marginalized groups.

In depicting political and historical activities within wealthy homes, such as in the Feddens' or the Sawles', Hollinghurst shows how the private is also used as public; that the domestic can also be deployed as political and, finally, that secluding non-normative sexualities to the private sphere does not mean that they will not also actively partake in the public sphere. Like Paul 'Polly' Tompkins in *The Line of Beauty* or the Great War hero Cecil in *The Stranger's Child*, all other gay male characters must negotiate their homosexuality in the domestic sphere according to norms that regulate the public. At the same time, their privileged social and subject positions alienate them from their urban surroundings, turning the public sphere, which is supposedly political, into a depoliticized and apathetic space.

While Hollinghurst's representations of domesticity relates to neoliberalism, Thatcherism, and the AIDS epidemic, especially in *The Line of Beauty* and in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, Waters' portrayal of the domestic sphere is a response to the ideal of Victorian domesticity and to recurrent images of women's confinement in nineteenth century literary tradition. In the neo-Victorian novels, Hughes-Edwards

107 *Ibid*., p. 230.

108 Duncan, "Renegotiating and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces" in Duncan (ed.) *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, p. 128.

contends that "all [...] women are in prison, either physically or psychologically",[109] since they must somehow break free from the traditional norms that surround them in order to obtain agency within the city. While Nancy seeks a breakthrough by pursuing her career as an actress, Selina and Ruth both use spiritualism to get Selina to escape prison and to enable their escape from middle- and upper-class femininity.

While Hollinghurst's domestic tropes are deeply rooted in neoliberal frameworks, in the domestication of gay culture and in the effects of AIDS on queer spaces in *The Line of Beauty* and in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, the shift to the representation of domestic spheres in the realm of country houses, as it happens in *The Stranger's Child*, is attuned to the "ubiquity of the country house in English history, culture and literature".[110] As I have elucidated in my reading of this novel in chapter 7, the deployment of the country house in *The Stranger's Child* displays Hollinghurst's interest in homosexuality's influence on the English literary tradition and canon. The trope of the country house also appears in one of Waters' novel, *The Little Stranger*, published in 2009. However, in Waters' novel, she is less interested in stating that her protagonist, Caroline Ayres, is part of a tradition, but is instead concerned, as Terentowicz-Fotyga points out, with showing "the last moments of manorial glory [that] are juxtaposed with radical, social and political transformation", since it was in the 1950s that England inaugurated "an era of demolitions of stately homes and the most dramatic decline of the country houses".[111]

In the novel, Waters locates the ghost story in the decaying eighteenth-century country house, named Hundreds Hall. The Ayres family symbolizes the disintegration of the landowning class, which according to Terentowicz-Fotyga takes place between the 1830s and the 1930s and which is strengthened in the post-war period with rationing and the short supply in building material, which made it difficult to maintain the estates.[112] Like the decline of the Ayres' social and political status in the novel, the decaying Hundreds Hall symbolizes "a material sign of the ending of a particular social, economic and political system that supported [the country house's] existence".[113] Set in the period after the Second World War, the Ayres' family is shown to be respected by the inhabitants of their village in Warwickshire, but they have no material condition by which to maintain the estate. This is because the family's main breadwinner, the elder brother Roderick, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder because of his service in the Second World War.

Instead of using the country house as a means to endorse the significance of women in literary tradition, Waters' decaying estate suggests that the assertion and perpetuation of tradition, represented by Hundreds Hall, does not fit the new models of femininity of the 1940s which seek autonomy and independency. Caroline, who

109 Hugues-Edwards, "'Better a prison… than a mad house!': Incarceration and the Neo-Victorian Fictions of Sarah Waters" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 133.

110 Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, p. 9.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

112 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.

113 *Ibid.*

is overworked with her job of maintaining the house, wishes to sell the estate and does not wish to get married, something that her mother desires for her. As Wisker has noted, *The Little Stranger* can be read as a Gothic narrative that deals with the difficulties that women encountered when attempting to free themselves from the limiting perspectives of both marriage and motherhood. For Wisker, the connection between the uncanny and women writing in the novel revolves around the necessity to write the histories of these women and to address their marginalized status in society:

> Women write ghost stories perhaps because of the histories of hidden and silenced lives, the denials and the guilt, the repressions and the marginalisation, the domestic incarceration and the lack and loss of identity and power, which have traditionally accompanied the roles of women, differently played out in different times and places.[114]

Although the novel is also based on the country-house plot, Wisker argues that Waters uses the "strategies of the literary Gothic to critique the constraining narratives placed around three women":[115] this is conveyed through the spinster Caroline Ayres; her mother, Mrs. Ayres; and the servant, Betty. The ghost that haunts the house is Caroline's sister, Susan, who died at age seven, a death from which Mrs. Ayres has never recovered. *The Little Stranger* is the only novel in which Waters deploys a male narrator, Dr. Faraday, a neighbor who is interested in Hundreds Hall and who tries to marry Caroline in order to inherit it. Not only does Faraday represent the narrative's manipulative male dominating voice, as he also epitomizes the possibilities of class (upward) mobility in the post-war period, since he stems from a working-class family (his mother worked at Hundreds Hall in its golden age) and managed to go to medical school. Interestingly, Dr. Faraday is the only character who shows an interest in Hundreds Hall and, as Terentowicz-Fotyga contends, the decaying state of the country house is depicted in parallel with his social ascent.[116] The narrator's interest in being part of the Hundreds Hall tradition, even if it is in its deteriorating condition, and Caroline's refusal to be part of it, point to the gender differences in their relationship with traditional norms. Dr. Faraday's upward social mobility suggests his desire to partake in an upper-class tradition of landowning and marriage, whereas Caroline's rejection of marriage and of continuing to live in the estate suggests that her desire for autonomy does not fit into this tradition of property ownership and marriage.

In reading *The Little Stranger* through the strategies employed in the feminist Gothic, Wisker hints at some pivotal purposes in Waters' works: "to upset expected norms, undercut, destabilise, explore and problematise convention, complacency and established narratives".[117] These are precisely Waters' main goals in her literary project and she uses historical fiction to question the roles played by women, and

114 Wisker, "The Feminist Gothic in *The Little Stranger*: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change" in Jones and O'Callaghan (eds.) *Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms*, p. 103.

115 *Ibid*., p. 97.

116 Cf. Terentowicz-Fotyga, *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, pp. 115–116.

117 Wisker, "The Feminist Gothic in *The Little Stranger*: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change", p. 101.

more importantly, lesbian women, throughout history. Characters such as Caroline in *The Little Stranger* and Kay Langrish in *The Night Watch* depict the restricted roles for women who had actively engaged with the war effort and who, after the war, wished to take up social positions that went beyond "the security of women's 'place' – the home – and the narratives in which women find themselves constructed and constrained".[118]

Both characters are described as having masculine features: Kay has short brown hair, which she combs neatly with grease, and wears "a shirt with a soft white collar" and "men's shoes".[119] Caroline, in her turn, is described by Dr. Faraday as "plain […] wearing boyish flat sandals and a badly fitting pale summer dress […] her face was long with an angular jaw, her profile flattish".[120] Caroline and Kay are both portrayed as figures who are anachronistic to their time, as women who remained back in their war activities – Caroline was a nurse during the war and Kay was an ambulance driver – and who never managed to return to the roles that they intended to occupy after the war, which is a role that is constricted by domesticity and marriage. They reject domesticity for different reasons, and Caroline seems to be stuck in her family's haunted past (and also, in many ways, stuck in Faraday's manipulative narration, as Wisker has shown),[121] whereas Kay is stranded in her memories of the war and in her relationship with Helen. Their domestic environments after the war display their own stagnating roles: Kay lives in a bedroom with blank walls, with no personal objects or decoration, in which she sleeps or suffers from insomnia; Caroline lives in a house that is falling apart alongside her family's ailing social prestige and financial condition.

While Waters' 1940s novels mostly provide the domestic sphere as an inadequate space for women, whereby women are figures who no longer fit into the domestic boundaries of home, domesticity is mostly associated with danger and imprisonment in her neo-Victorian novels. As I pointed out in the chapter 3, *Affinity* problematically suggests that domesticity could be a more perverse form of incarceration than prison. In *Fingersmith*, the plot about domesticity and incarceration becomes even more complex. Waters re-creates the sensation novel by adding elements of contemporary queer and feminist theories regarding performance, kinship, and pornography.

Mr. Ibbs' and Mrs. Sucksby's family kinship, for instance, is constituted by illegal activities, instead of the bloodline and heterosexual standards that usually establish family kinship. As a poor family living in Lant Street in South-East London, they rely on illegal activities for a living: childrearing is one of their businesses, in which Mrs. Sucksby sells babies for adoption; Mr. Ibbs specializes in producing fake coins. As Alden has noted, though there is no allusion to gender performance, as there is in *Tipping the Velvet*, all characters are trying to pass as something that they are not in

118 *Ibid*., p. 103.

119 Waters, *The Night Watch*, p. 5.

120 *Idem*, *The Little Stranger*, p. 9.

121 Wisker, "The Feminist Gothic in *The Little Stranger*: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change", pp. 100–101.

Fingersmith:[122] a gentleman passes as a well-to-do pornography collector as he visits Briar; Maud passes as a naïve country-girl to complete Gentleman's plan to steal Sue Trinder's fortune; and Sue must perform class manners to forge experience as a lady's maid in Briar. Maud's uncle, Mr. Lilly, runs a pornography business in Briar, and takes in his niece to copy pornographic stories and to read them aloud to men who come from London. At the end of the novel, pornography comes to be produced in the countryside, undermining the notion of sexual purity and morality in rural areas, and the city as a place for vicious habits.[123] The domestic spheres are depicted in the novel in parallel with horrific scenes in a mental asylum to which Sue is committed as part of a plot to steal a great amount of money that she is set to inherit once she turns eighteen years old.

In Waters' neo-Victorian novels, only Nancy finds a home with Florence in Bethnal Green in the sense postulated by Iris Young, who contends that "'home' can have a political meaning as a site of dignity and resistance".[124] Although the third part of Waters' novel is problematic in terms of working-class representation, as I have shown, it is in Bethnal Green that Nancy finds the support and strength necessary to engage with political struggles regarding feminism and socialist politics. Like Nancy, other characters in Waters' fiction, such as Julia, Helen, and even Kay, given that she lived with Helen during the war, construct their homes as a possibility to act out their sexuality and to provide affective means to endure the impossibility of living out their relationships in public. This takes place in contrast to, and possibly in spite of, the heterosexual norms of monogamy, marriage, and domesticity that also modulate their relationships within the domestic sphere.

In their homes, they attempt to live outside of the public sphere's homophobic and sexist constraints and, at times, they reproduce the heterosexual norms found in the model of the traditional nuclear family: in *The Night Watch*, Julia and Helen try to have a 'normal' life as a couple, but must be careful that the neighbors do not notice that they are partners;[125] Kay performs the role of a male provider taking care of her wife,

122 Cf. Alden, "'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction", p. 71.

123 For critical work about Waters' approach to pornography in *Fingersmith*, see Muller, "Sexual f(r)ictions: Pornography in neo-Victorian women fictions" in Cooper and Short (eds.) *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction*, pp. 115–133; O'Callaghan, "'The Grossest Rakes of Fiction': Reassessing Gender, Sex and Pornography in Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*", pp. 560–575; Palmer "'She began to show the words she had written, one by one': Lesbian Reading and Writing Practices in the Fiction of Sarah Waters", pp. 69–86. While Muller and Palmer both situate Waters' approach to pornography within the controversial debate about pornography in feminist theories from the 1980s, arguing that Waters appropriates pornography to re-write it actively as a lesbian and feminist text that allows for the expression of both female sexuality and desire, O'Callaghan contends that Waters depicts the debate about pornography by re-working it in terms of the sensational novel. For O'Callaghan, Waters' employment of pornography in the novel could be perceived as a way to undermine heterosexist and patriarchal discourses about lesbianism in pornographic culture.

124 Young, "House and Home: feminist variations on a Theme" in Briganti and Mezei (eds.) *The Domestic Space Reader*, p. 192.

125 Cf. Waters, *The Night Watch*, pp. 46–51.

as Kay and Helen live together during the war.[126] While there is socialist and feminist resistance in Florence's home, Nancy's role in the domestic sphere is similar to that of a homemaker, given that she cooks, cleans, and takes care of baby Cyril, who is Florence's former partner's baby. As is the case with Waters' first novel, the lesbian domestic lives displayed in *The Night Watch* work along the paradox of resistance and assimilation. Helen lives with Julia; she stays at home and is constantly worried about where Julia is, recalling a pattern of heterosexual monogamy and jealousy;[127] and Kay's attitudes at home with Helen reproduce patriarchal behavior of male protection and of a central source of financial income.

While Waters' characters either want to escape domestic confinement or re-create the domestic sphere as a site that accommodates and enables lesbian relationships, Hollinghurst's male characters want to use the domestic to reinforce the privileges that they already have in the public sphere, which are closely tied to masculinity, education, race, and class. Waters' and Hollinghurst's representations of the domestic sphere complicate clear-cut divisions between private and public, showing that the characters often act, in the private sphere, "with the public in mind – even if what they had and did [at home] was never observed by anyone else".[128] By contrast, as is the case with Nancy's discovery of the lesbian pub in Bethnal Green and Will's cruising routine at Hyde Park, many public spaces function as a kind of home "in terms, […] of retreat, relaxation, and intimacy".[129] Waters' and Hollinghurst's depictions of private and public implicate the ways in which the political (public) also informs the personal (private), pointing to the fact that what we call 'home' in the twentieth century is strongly constituted by discourses regarding gender, class, and racial relations.

126 *Ibid.*, pp. 259–263.

127 *Ibid.*, pp. 141–145.

128 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, p. 9.

129 *Ibid.*