



Article Info/Makale Bilgisi

✓Received/Geliş:19.03.2018 ✓Accepted/Kabul:13.12.2018

DOI: 10.30794/pausbed.407636

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

Gündüz, E. İ., (2019). "Tipping The Velvet: Specularised Sexualities in The Victorian Era", *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, sayı 35, Denizli, s. 83-91.

TIPPING THE VELVET: SPECULARISED SEXUALITIES IN THE VICTORIAN ERA*

Ela İpek GÜNDÜZ**

Abstract

Sarah Waters's first novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) is a neo-Victorian novel that adopts aspects of the Victorian English reality to depict the marginalised existence of lesbian lovers. In Waters's novel, in which historical facts and imaginary notions are blurred, the homosexual female characters try to become visible and to offer an alternative lesbian history/lesbian counter-discourse to patriarchal discourse on sexuality and desire. In this article, *Tipping the Velvet's* presentation of the alternative lesbian history/counter-discourse will be evaluated through the discussion of the way Waters portrays the constructions of femininity and sexual interactions of lesbian lovers in England during the Victorian period. Particularly, creating different social circles and classes among queer people in Victorian times, Waters succeeds in avoiding the stereotyping of lesbians and adds credibility to their existence.

Key words: Sarah Waters, Queer, Neo-Victorian, Lesbian.

TIPPING THE VELVET: VİKTORYEN DÖNEMDEKİ GÖZLEMLENMİŞ İLİŞKİLER

Özet

Sarah Waters'ın ilk romanı *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Viktorya dönemindeki kadın hemcinslerin birbirlerine olan aşkının dışlanmış varlığını betimleyerek yeniden sunan neo-Viktoryen bir romandır. Waters'ın romanı tarihsel gerçekleri kurguladığı için, onun temsilleri, tarihsel gerçeklik ve hayal ürünü olan şeylerin bulanıklaştığı romanın gerçekliği haline gelir. Bu makalede, Waters'ın Viktorya döneminde Londra'da yarattığı alternatif lezbiyen tarih, Viktorya döneminde yapılandırılan kadınlık algıları üzerinden tartışılacaktır. Daha sonra, Viktorya döneminde, kadınlarda cinsellik ve arzu gibi kavramların var oluşlarının görmezden gelinerek dışlanmaya çalışılmasına rağmen, aslında lezbiyen aşkların cinsel ilişkileri bağlamında bile tezahür ettiği gösterilecektir. Romanda, Waters merkezde ve görünür olmaya çalışan lezbiyenlerin mevcut düzene karşı bir söylemini oluşturur. Viktorya döneminde yaşayan bu tuhaf (lezbiyen) insanlar arasında değişik sosyal çevreler ve sınıflar yaratarak Waters hem bir lezbiyen sterotipi yaratmayı engeller ve hem de en tutucu dönem olan Viktorya döneminde bile var olmuş olabilecekleri noktasına dair inandırıcılık sağlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sarah Waters, Tuhaf, Neo-Viktoryen, Lezbiyen.

* This paper is presented at 10th International IDEA Conference "Studies in English" 14-16 Nisan 2016, Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, Turkey.

**Dr. Öğr. Üyesi. Gaziantep Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, GAZİANTEP.
e-mail: elaipekgunduz@hotmail.com (orcid.org/0000-0001-7688-8470)

Sarah Waters (1966) is a famous contemporary British author who has written five novels, including her first novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) which won the Betty Task Award and received high praise.¹ *Tipping the Velvet*, as a neo-Victorian novel, reflects both Sarah Waters's present perspective as a contemporary author and that of the Victorian era through her recreation of the Victorian past from a marginalized gender evaluation. In this article, Waters's novel will be examined within the context of its fictionalizing the Victorian past from a lesbian perspective. Due to the focus of *Tipping the Velvet* to the issue of "rewriting history" (by adding new perspectives to the understanding of gender), the novel will be analysed based on the gender theories of Judith Butler about sex/gender and Michel Foucault's theories about "the history of sexuality."

Through Waters' fictionalising the Victorian truths about sexuality, historical facts and fictional representations are blurred in her novel. The existence of same-sex love affairs in the Victorian period is a buried historical fact, but it turns out to be *Tipping the Velvet's* fictional reality. In this way, Waters "denaturalises" the Victorian history by "turning the events into facts through interpretation" (Hutcheon, 1989: 57); thus, in Waters' interpretation, the existence of the same-sex lovers in Victorian period becomes a fact and Waters invites the contemporary readers to question the accepted notions of Victorian history, especially about gender differentiations.

To understand Sarah Waters's construction of an alternative lesbian history of the Victorian London, it will be significant to scrutinise the constructions of femininity in the Victorian period first. When the written historical facts are examined, "what is known" about the Victorian women is their confirmed femininity as the "angels in the house" who are "obedient, denying their bodies and seeking fulfilment in maternity... [having] lack of sexual feeling or [being] 'passionless'" (King, 2005: 11). Furthermore, this feminine ideal is the ideological output of the Victorian society demanding from women to remain "sexless" as a moral duty (King, 2005: 11). To fulfil the expected norms of the Victorian society as virgins, mothers, and obedient wives, Victorian women are confined to home. As William Acton (1813-1875) claims: "The best mothers, wives, and managers of households know little or nothing of sexual indulgences... As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself" (qtd. in King, 2005: 16).

In *Tipping the Velvet*, by recreating a lesbian Victorian history, Waters reflects the power mechanism existing in that period. This power mechanism is mainly obtained by discourse. Victorian mentality positions sexuality in the discourse constructed by the mainstream ideology as Michel Foucault asserts: "a discursive formation" that includes its representation in discourse including the relation of "knowledge" and "power." Therefore, Victorian ideology/discourse shapes sexuality and the accepted norms of sexual behaviours (Halperin, 1994: 21). As Halperin explains about Foucault's "the repressive hypotheses":

...the conventional image of the Victorian era as a period in which the discourses of sex were oppressively silenced instead of explosively produced, or to the conceptualisation of power as a force of negation and prohibition instead of as a force of production and possibility. (Halperin, 1994: 21)

Within this kind of a repressive ideology suppressing and ignoring sexuality on the surface, it is very difficult for human beings to be true to their bodily desires. However, in Foucauldian analysis of sexuality, it is impossible "... to consider sexuality or desire exterior to historical configurations of power, knowledge and sexuality" (Halperin, 1994: 21). Therefore, although the Victorian master narratives exclude sexuality and desire by ignoring them, the denial of their existence is impossible.

In *Tipping the Velvet*, Sarah Waters illustrates not only the tendency of conservative Victorians to neglect sexuality and lesbians, but also the reality that they exist.² In the early chapters of the novel, the female protagonist Nancy narrates her story, identifying herself as a girl who, with her family, deals with oysters in Whitstable. As

1 She has written three novels taking place in Victorian England including "*Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002). Her other novels are *The Night Watch* (2006), and *The Little Stranger*" (2009). Retrieved July 10, 2012, from <http://www.sarahwaters.com>.

2 There was a belief about Queen Victoria that she personally intervened to omit lesbianism from "*the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885* (An act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes. It also strengthened existing legislation against prostitution and recriminalised male homosexuality" Retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://www.swarb.co.uk>. It is also speculated that the officers asked Queen Victoria if they should add the lesbians to this act, she rejects this by saying that there is no lesbians existing in their society). Her belief that there would not be that kind of a relation among women would be an evidence of their existence.

Nancy's narration continues in the new setting of London, Nancy becomes a male-impersonator (who has a lesbian relation with Kitty),³ during their programmes in a music hall stage; their relationship ends with Kitty's betraying Nancy with her manager Walter. Nancy begins living with a rich woman whose name is Diana. Eventually, Nancy's relation with Diana finishes because of the latter's relation with a servant girl, and Nancy moves in the house of Florence, a socialist feminist; their mutual love grows into a relationship (Jeremiah, 2007: 132). Nancy completes her identity transformation as a Sapphist⁴ and continues to live freely in Victorian society.

Creating a lesbian discourse, Waters initially restricts 'queer relations' into the music halls, whereas later she exposes her readers to the perverse group labelled as "Toms"⁵ who are living underground and have secret relations, as in the case of Diana. In the end, within the socialists' meeting, 'queer relations' exist freely in public. Therefore, it could be said that in the beginning of the novel, Waters employs the conventions of the restricting values of the existing Victorian mentality ignoring the lesbians, but towards the end, as a solution, she does not refrain from showing their existence publicly.

As a framework, in the novel, Waters uses the Victorian power dynamics exploiting the marginal people (lesbians) and creates a counter-discourse of lesbians who try to become visible. Foucault argues,

There is no question that the appearance in the nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf to demand its legitimacy or 'naturalness' ... (Foucault, 1984: 101)

In other words, when the existence of homosexuality explicitly discussed within different scientific fields as a perverse identity, this acceptance paved the way for these preferences to germinate its own being. Although it was almost an impossible time for conceptualising lesbian identity in Victorian period, their existence may not be denied. The existence of the same-sex love was regarded as "abnormal" in the scientific framework: "In 1892, lesbianism is identified as a sexual perversion or 'inversion' of the sexual feelings, associated with 'temporary or permanent conditions of degenerative mental disturbance' in Tuke's *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*" (King, 2005: 144). From this perspective, within the domain of Victorian ideology, the power mechanism positions lesbianism as a perversion and thereby marginalises it. Especially in the beginning of the novel, Sarah Waters's lesbian protagonist is an "invert" who subverts the heterogeneous normality of the Victorian sexuality both by having lesbian desires and by showing her apparent masculine sexuality to women publicly. Still, as a lesbian, she is credible via this existence of "perverseness" in the form of marginal groups within the society.

Although discursive frameworks normalise the human body by ignoring women's sexual desire and labelling same-sex desires as "abnormal," Judith Butler's theory of the differences between sex and gender paves the way to the evaluation of gender roles via repetitive experience.

If woman, for example, is defined in terms of an anatomical facility for reproduction, then a certain model of fertile heterosexual femininity becomes idealised as a norm, a benchmark against which all women come to be measured ... a huge range of people – who are perhaps infertile, single, post-menopausal, gay, transsexual, intersexual... become defined as somehow less than a full (filled) woman. (Morrison, 2003: 46)

Lesbian identities are regarded as unhealthy/abnormal as a result of the idea that the natural/normal sexuality expected from women is heterosexuality and the accepted idea that women's function in sexuality is reproduction. The concept of sexuality must be analysed in terms of its being "(re)produced through time by means of ...

³ "Male-impersonators (drag kings) are mostly female performance artists who dress in masculine drag and personify male gender stereotypes as part of their routine. Drag kings often perform as exaggeratedly macho male characters, portray marginalized masculinities. In the late 1800s and early 1900s several drag kings became British music hall stars" (Aronoff, 2007: 7-29).

⁴ "Sappho is (early 7th century BC), Greek lyric poet who lived on Lesbos. Many of her poems express her affection and love for women, and have given rise to her association with female homosexuality. Sapphism is *formal* or *humorous* lesbianism" Retrieved July 10, 2012, from <http://oxforddictionaries.com>.

⁵ "Tomboy: a girl who enjoys rough, noisy activities traditionally associated with boys" Retrieved July 10, 2012, from <http://oxforddictionaries.com>.

repetition" (Morrison, 2003: 47) since, according to Butler, sexuality is produced through repetition and continuity as a performance:

And what is 'sex' anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal...? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or histories? Is there a history of how the duality of sex was established...? Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of some other political and social interests? (Butler, 2006: 9)

In terms of the history of lesbianism, there is not an accepted continuity and repetition. Contrary to heterosexuality being accepted as normal due to its being performed continuously, lesbians disprove not only its existence within history but also its normality due to its not being performed repetitively throughout the history.

Against Queen Victoria's neglecting the existence of lesbians, Sarah Waters, as a neo-Victorian⁶ author, tries to prove the opposite idea— the two sexes somehow continue secretly to perform sexual acts in a society that represses the sexuality of both sexes— in the form of fictionalised fact, viz., recreating historical reality in the fictional world of Nancy and Kitty whose hidden sexualities finds expression in "...disguise, performance, body modification and ...grotesqueness" (Morrison, 2003: 47). Also, as Butler points out, these hidden sexualities are produced by repeated performances. Through their drag-king performances in music halls, Kitty and Nancy manage to show their repressed queer identities. Furthermore, within the boundaries of the music hall, Waters's characters' cross-dressing and implied sapphist sexuality seems normal and expected—as Foucault observes—they are the "other Victorians."⁷ It is interesting that male-impersonation as a performance indicating the transformation of gender roles marks the first encounter of the two women in the novel. Nancy's hidden inner desires are evoked as a spectator directing her gaze to the male-impersonator/drag on the stage. She reverses the concept of male gaze to her own benefit as female gaze having pleasure from the subverted girl on the stage. Nancy says: "Each night at the Palace she kissed me farewell; in my dreams her lips stayed at my cheek – were hot, were tender – moved to my brow, my ear, my throat, my mouth..." (Waters, 1998: 41). Using the performer-watcher dichotomy in the Victorian music halls, Waters makes an attempt at creating a continuity of cross-gender identities both in a Victorian framework and in the (implied) modern times.

Waters further achieves this continuity through the interchangeable use of past and present terms. Waters attempts to create a past ground to discuss a present day debate of the place of queer identities in the society:

Sarah Waters' novel *Tipping the Velvet*, which is set in Victorian England, shows that queer historical fiction may not only aid theoretical revaluing of studies of historical continuities but also destabilise the idea that studies of differences and similarities across time must exist in tension and opposition to each other. (Koolen, 2003: 371)

In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters replaces the use of the present term "drag-king performances" and the past term "breeches performances" with the term "male impersonator" that is of contemporary use.⁸ Another example is Nancy's describing her love affair with Kitty using the word "queer",⁹ through which she expresses both the abnormality of their love according to the dominant Victorian proper moral conduct and the normality of their love according to her understanding and fictional domain: "... how queer it is! And yet, how very ordinary: I am in love with you" (Waters, 1998: 33). In one way or another, it is explicit that Waters is aware of the two-fold definition and usage of the term "queer"; "past definitions of this term mean 'strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric' as well as present uses to denote same-sex desire and sexual deviancy" (Koolen, 2003: 375). Waters plays with the past and the present meanings of the term "queer" again to create a sense of both familiarisation and defamiliarisation on the side of her contemporary readers.

⁶ "Neo-Victorian genre as a 'hybrid space' where it is possible to argue 'against long established clichés' and to address issues that remain highly relevant at present. Neo-Victorian re-workings, thus, often imply a revision of now as much as of then" (Madsen, 2012: 104).

⁷ In "We 'Other Victorians,'" Michel Foucault argues that the repression of sexuality begins after the seventeenth century and reaches its peak in nineteenth century as the result of the bourgeois morality which restricts sex into the home under the roof of the marriage; "Except for the clandestine world of brothels and pornographers [called] 'other Victorians'" (Rabinow, 1984: 293).

⁸ "Male impersonations, often referred to as "breeches" or "trouser" performances, were a popular mode of entertainment in Victorian England... "drag" [is used] in reference to contemporary onstage cross-dressings" (Koolen, 2003: 372).

⁹ "According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "queer" has been used since the end of the nineteenth century as a slang term for "homosexual"... the first usage of the term in such a manner was in 1894, after the time in which *Tipping the Velvet* is set and contemporary uses of "queer" refer to same-sex desire..." (Koolen, 2003: 275).

Butler notes that there are certain coherent expectancies such as being heterosexual on the side of “the political construction of the gendered subject;” hence, true gender identity lies beneath “the surface of bodies” as inner truths of the individuals (Butler, 2006: 22-23). As gender identities in the society are drawn by essential behaviours and dresses, Waters creates her alternative “queer” world by her usage of costumes. She also strengthens the existence of the queer bodies firstly by creating a place for the survival of these marginal figures – the stage. Kitty as a queer embodiment exists only through her stage performance as a male-impersonator. Her performance indicates the realization of her true inner identity, which is against society’s gender codes. As Nancy expresses: “I like your costume ... songs and the way you sing them” (Waters, 1998: 31). Waters normalizes the existence of queer identities within her discourse.

Then, with the double-performance of drag-kings¹⁰ (male-impersonators) on stage, Waters paves the way both for the possibility of a “queer” love and the reality of the existence of a “queer history” within the Victorian era. From a Butlerian perspective, the marginal desires kept within the bodies and the outer realities represent something coherent to the discursive reality of heterosexuality imposed by the society, through impersonation, the hidden inner desires are revealed by “... subvert[ing] the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks ... the notion of a true gender identity” (Butler, 2006: 186).

As Newton asserts, “drag” is an inversion in the sense that: “... it symbolises [that] my appearance ‘outside’ [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ [myself] is feminine” (qtd. in Butler, 2006: 186). Therefore, with the performances of drag and cross-dressing, “... the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed” (Butler, 2006: 187) is deconstructed and in this way the heterosexual gender identities are parodied through the means of defamiliarisation. Exploring the “falsely naturalised” aspect of heterosexual identity as an imitation of real identities, “Drag-performances” reveal the falsity of accepting the heterosexual identity as an essential truth: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (Butler, 2006: 187).

After declaring their true identities and desires to each other and having sexual intimacy, Kitty and Nancy began acting as “Kitty Butler and Nan King” (Waters, 1998: 125). Both characters represent their real personages by mirroring each other, and through their performances— in spite of being restricted on stage— they prove the existence of their reversed identities as “Toms.” Especially, through their performance of Cinderella, “... sex and gender [are] denaturalised by means of performance which avows their distinctness...” (Waters, 1998: 188). Moreover, the spectators’ “specul(arisation)” fully reveals the two women’s hidden essence. The double cross-dressing indication of the term “Tom” is a slang term for lesbians attached to Nancy and Kitty by the male gazers—the mouthpieces of the Victorian ideology—in the hall. However, these acting/pretending “Toms” turn out to be the reality of these girls. Through the spectators’ gazes providing them specul(arisation), Nancy and Kitty get the chance to find and reveal their true queer identities as a result of the curved reflection obtained by the stage. Through their performances, Nancy and Kitty manage to show their same-sex desires to each other via the outcome of their reflected image through specul(arisation). This reality of transgressing the discursive sexuality of the Victorian period turns out to be the main theme of Waters’s novel.

However, there is a striking difference in Nancy and Kitty’s perceiving, performing, and expressing their gender identities. Kitty wants to prevent an explicit kind of performing their relation as same-sex lovers, whereas Nancy demands full appreciation by showing her true identity and living her love openly. Kitty argues: “They are not like us! They are not like us, at all. They are toms... They make a career – out of kissing girls. We’re not like that!... You would have to give up the stage ... and so would I, if there was talk about us, if people thought we were – like that” (Waters, 1998: 131). However, Nancy opposes this due to the fact that she wants to be true to her own identity instead of confirming to the expectancies of the society: “But what were we like? I still don’t know...! We’re not like anything! We’re just – ourselves.” (Waters, 1998: 131). Likewise, as a representative of the typical Victorian society, Nancy’s sister, Alice, blames her frankness about her same-sex love and attempts to make Nancy’s secrets invisible by destroying her marginal sister’s evidences:

¹⁰ “ ‘Drag-king’ is a term used for cross-dressing on stage in present discourse, whereas ‘breeches performance’ is used in the past; the term male-impersonation will be used both to signify similarities and discontinuities between past and present and to show the differences and discontinuities within the performances” (Koolen, 2010: 375).

Your letter was both a shock to me and no surprise at all, for I have been expecting to receive something very like it from you, since the day you left us. When I first read it I did not know whether to weep or throw the paper away from me in temper. In the end I burned the thing, and only hope you will have sense enough to burn this one, likewise. (Waters, 1998: 133)

After Nancy's visit to her parents in Whitstable and her return to London, she witnesses Kitty and Walter's love making and she is shocked for having a period of close intimacy with her. Nancy summarises her position as: "Kitty was married! But I was poor and alone and uncared for. I was a solitary girl, in a city that favoured sweet hearts and gentlemen; in a city where girls walked only to be gazed at" (Waters, 1998: 191). As a result of her despair, she wanders around in London streets as a rent-boy who has the chance "to walk as a boy, as a handsome boy in a well-sewn suit, whom the people stared after only to envy, never to mock... (Waters, 1998: 195). It is interesting that she feels some kind of a pleasure as being costumed as a boy who is not gazed at and she enjoys this privilege.

During her rent-boy session, Nancy meets Diana, a rich woman who is ten years her senior. Diana asks Nancy about her suits and whether she has a boyfriend and proposes to Nancy to come home with her. Diana further promises to provide Nancy with all the luxuries she needs under the condition that Nancy would accept the mission of satisfying her in response. Diana's words mark the beginning of their relationship: "'If you were King of Pleasure ... and I were Queen of Pain...'" Then in a different tone: "You're very handsome Miss. King" (Waters, 1998: 239). Diana—because of her old age and money—sustains her authority within the lesbian community by objectifying her lovers like Nancy. She behaves like a homosexual man with heterosexual world view by being the powerful woman who plays a leading role in Waters's counter discourse of lesbianism. Although Nancy has a private relation with Diana and has been accepted as a queer lover, she regards her position in Felicity Palace as "strange." This "strangeness" is related with Nancy's realisation that with Diana, she both experiences objectification in Diana's (a female patriarch) treatment and manages to continue her life as a real lesbian (without her fake performance on stage).

After a month with her, Diana decides to introduce Nancy as her lover in "the Cavendish Ladies' Club in Sackville Street" (Waters, 1998: 270). In the club, there are thirty Sapphists. About their existence within the Victorian society, Nancy says: "You might have passed any one of them upon the street, and thought nothing; but the effect of their appearance was rather queer" (Waters, 1998: 272). Diana strengthens the reality of the existence of lesbianism in the Victorian era because despite their rejection of the patriarchal domination, they also employ power strategies among these lesbian figures. Waters proves that lesbians living in the Victorian society are not so marginal figures as contemporary readers may imagine. In contrast, they embrace a conventional way of living that adapts patriarchal power structures.

Within the high-ranked Sapphist group of Diana, Nancy again turns out to be the performer to be gazed, failing to express herself freely due to her lower status. This is another evidence of the preservation of power dynamics within the lesbian community. Diana behaves like man through her gaze. In this way, lesbian history becomes more real and attains more credibility since like in the conventional Victorian society, there are power relations. Through this way, Waters does not idealize the lesbian community but tries to portray—as objectively as possible—the existence of a real homosexual community that is also defined by the same social and political problems that plague the heterosexual community. In other words, Waters normalizes lesbianism depicting it as a similar community to the patriarchal. Nancy (a representative of the suppressed lower social classes) and Diana (a member of the upper class) exemplify this similarity.

During those times passed with Diana, Nancy only functions as a Sapphist tool to satisfy all the needs of Diana. Nancy feels as if Diana is the insurance of her queer desires. She confesses:

I was proof of all her pleasures... She must keep me or lose everything. And I must keep her, or have nothing. I couldn't imagine a life without her shaping. She had awakened certain appetites in me ... in the company of Sapphists – where else would those queer hungers be assuaged?" (Waters, 1998: 282).

Nancy and Diana's relationship foregrounds the existence of the Sapphist women in Victorian period. Compared to her fantasy/music hall love with Kitty, she has a Sapphist lover who does not hesitate to declare her relation publicly. Besides, Nancy is fond of her position as a lover since she is benefiting from the luxuries and pleasures provided by Diana. Although Nancy is a Tom, she still behaves like a protected female because of her low socioeconomic status. She feels secure within the material comfort provided by Diana. Diana is using Nancy and her sexuality in response.

In a costume party given in Felicity Palace, when Diana and her friend ridicule Zena—Diana's servant who has a tragic life story— by putting their hands upon Zena's skirts, Nancy protests saying "leave her alone!" (Waters, 1998: 314). Then, again Diana reminds Nancy of her social position: "Why, you are a servant! What is it to you, if I ask my girl to bare her backside for me? You have bared yours for me, often enough! Get back behind your velvet curtain!" (Waters, 1998: 315). When Nancy and Zena have a sexual intimacy upstairs and Diana discovers the two servants' affair, Nancy permanently loses the comfort of Felicity Palace. Nancy's symbolically rebels against the powerful status of Diana by having an affair with a person of a lower status. Nancy subverts the power of Diana that is solely defined by her material wealth. Nancy's infidelity may be regarded as another example of the existence of a lesbian community consisted of real people.

Nancy is now penniless and owns nothing but has Zena. However, although they promise to be together as Toms to support each other, Zena abandons her. Zena as a weak and untrustworthy character again proves the fact that Waters's lesbian characters are not idealized but very realistic and thus she normalizes the lesbian community. After Zena's betrayal, Nancy desperately thinks about a solution. She remembers that Florence has a position in an institute that takes care of helpless women; Nancy goes there and finds Florence's address. She stays at Florence's small house with Florence's brother. Diana and her friends as well as Florence make evident lesbians' respectable position in the mainstream Victorian society. They are not necessarily marginal. Nancy exemplifies any Victorian woman—regardless of her sexual orientation—who is struck by poverty; again Waters normalizes lesbians.

Although, after a while Nancy shows her interest to Florence, but she deduces that Florence cannot be a Tom in the sense that she never flirts with anybody. Then, Nancy is exposed to Florence's miserable life story including the unions that are dealing with women's issues, her admiration to Eleanor Marx,¹¹ and the death of her lover, Lilian. Nancy and Florence's flirtation begins after joining a public-house near Cable Street—which is full of toms— called "The Boy in the Boat" (Waters, 1998: 410). At night, in their private room, Nancy tells her about Kitty and Diana, and their queer relationship starts. In the end, amid a public meeting about social rights and democracy, Nancy gets the chance to see all her ex-lovers: Kitty, Zena, Diana. The public meeting dedicated to social justice in which lesbians participate makes evident the existence of lesbians who do not distinguish themselves from the mainstream society. In contrast, they are active members of it and desire its betterment advocating universal human rights. The active participation of lesbians in the social and political evolution of the mainstream Victorian society is also manifested in Florence and Nancy's collaborative speech advocating socialism—a social, economic, and political system that undermines Patriarchy's promotion of power relations within the English Victorian society. Nancy states: "You will see all these things written, and hear them said by rich men. Does that make them true? Truth is a queer thing, when it comes to rich men talking about the poor" (Waters, 1998: 458).

When Nancy firstly meets Zena, who mentions Diana's being there, Nancy does not talk to Diana. And when Nancy informs Florence about the presence of her lovers, Florence protests: "All you have eyes and thoughts for is yourself; yourself, and the women you have" (Waters, 1998: 453) and Nancy replies: "The women I have fucked, I suppose you mean... I am sick to death of hearing about Lilian... You wish she was here instead of me" (Waters, 1998: 453). In this speech, both women behave like the average jealous possessive partner, appearing, thus, very mainstream in their perception of a love relationship. The two women's dialogue above is another example of Waters's normalization of lesbianism in *Tipping the Velvet*. Nancy and Florence are reunited and they become "careless of whether anybody watched or not, [she] leaned and kissed her" (Waters, 1998: 472).

¹¹ "Eleanor Marx Aveling (1855 –1898) was the English-born youngest daughter of Karl Marx. She was active in British politics and the international working-class movement. She was the founder of the Socialist League in 1884" Retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://www.marxists.org>.

Becoming fighters of the social good strengthens their dignity as individuals and reinforces them to dare to publicly acknowledge their lesbianism without any feeling of shame or guilt imposed by the patriarchal authority upon its subjects. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters treats the systematic silencing of the history of lesbianism by patriarchy as that of any socio-political group that utters a counter-discourse to master-narratives in the various fields of human activity. Thus, in the end of *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters normalises lesbianism without compromising its sound resistance to the patriarchal view on human sexuality.

Through the repetitiveness of her performance as a drag-king, and then through her real lesbian relations, Nancy completes her identity transformation as a conscious queer subject. Nancy transgresses the boundaries as the drag-king who dresses as a male, as the rent-boy, as the “tart” of a lady, and lastly, with her real identity dressed as the boy within her relation with Florence. Therefore, the fantasy progressively turns out to be reality. Creating different social circles and classes among queer people in Victorian times, including male-impersonators in music halls, rent-boys in London streets, Sapphist circles, and toms, Waters both deconstructs the lesbian stereotypes and adds a credibility to their existence even in the most conservative period—the Victorian era. Waters’s characters exemplify that same-sex lovers may not be sexually “perverse” people; instead, they have “normal” loves, desires and sexual lives. In this way, she creates relevance, continuity and history for her “queer subjects” through their performative sexualities. Furthermore, in *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters’s recreation of the Victorian past from a specul(aris)ed¹² perspective becomes within the historical context of the need for an essential socio-political reform defining the Victorian society of the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, focusing on the ‘invisible’ lives of the lesbians as ‘other Victorians,’ not only as sexual beings but also as social and political beings, Waters devises an alternative fictionalised history.

¹² “...Freud ... confines female sexuality within phallic parameters as nothing to be seen ... Irigaray coins the term ‘specula(risa)tion’ to capture this economy...” (Code 275).

WORKS CITED

- Aronoff, J. (2007). "Competitive Drag Kings Strut Stuff: With some spit and polish, women perform in growing world of cross-dressing pageantry", South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Daily Gamecock, 7-29. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://media.www.dailygamecock.com/media/storage/paper247/news/2005/10/19/TheMix/Competitive.Drag.Kings.Strut.Stuff-1025370.shtml>.
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York.
- Code, L. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, Routledge, London.
- Foucault, M. (1984) *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, (Trans: Robert Hurley), Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Halperin, D. M. (1994). "Historicising the Subject of Desire: Sexual Preferences and Erotic Identities in the Pseudo-Lucianic Eroses", *Foucault and the Writing of History*, (Ed. David M. Halperin), Blackwell, Cambridge, pp: 19-34.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Routledge, New York.
- . (1989). *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York.
- Jeremiah, E. (2007). "'The 'I' inside 'her'": Queer Narration in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace's Misfortune", *Women: a Cultural Review*, 18/2, pp: 131-144.
- Gross, E. (2010). "Irigaray and Sexual Difference", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 1/2, pp: 63-77.
- King, J. (2005). *The Victorian Woman in Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Koolen, M. (2010). "Historical Fiction and the Revaluating of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*", *Contemporary Literature*, 51/2, pp. 371- 397.
- Morrison, J. (2003). *Contemporary Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Madsen, L.H. (2012). "Lesbian Desire and Mainstream Media: Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* on the Screen". Retrieved July 10, 2012, from http://ual.es/odisea/Odisea11_Madsen.pdf .
- Rabinow, P.,ed. (1984). *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon Books, New York.
- Waters, S. (1998). *Tipping the Velvet*, Riverhead Books, New York.