

**DOMESTICATIONS AND DISRUPTIONS:
LESBIAN IDENTITIES IN TELEVISION ADAPTATIONS OF
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH NOVELS**

by

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Abstract

The first decade of this century marked a moment of hypervisibility for lesbians and bisexual women on British television. During this time, however, lesbian hypervisibility was coded repeatedly as hyperfemininity. When the BBC and ITV adapted Sarah Waters's novels for television, how, I ask, did the screen versions balance the demands of pop visual culture with the novels' complex, unconventional – and in some cases subversive – representations of lesbianism? I pursue this question with an interdisciplinary methodology drawn from queer and feminist theories, cultural and media studies, and film adaptation theory. Chapter Two looks back to Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (BBC 1990). I examine this text – the first BBC television serial to feature a lesbian protagonist – to establish a vocabulary for discussing the page-to-screen adaptation of queer identities throughout this dissertation. Chapter Three investigates Waters's first novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and its complex intertextual relationship with Andrew Davies's serialized version (BBC 2002). I also examine responses to the serial in the British press, tracing the ways in which dominant cultural forces seek to domesticate non-normative instances of gender and sexuality. Chapter Four examines Waters's novel *Fingersmith* (2002) in relation to Peter Ransley's adaptation (BBC 2005) to situate adaptations of Waters's retro-Victorian texts amid the genre of television and film adaptations of Jane Austen novels. I argue that Ransley's serial interrogates the notion of Austen as a “conservative icon” (Cartmell 24) and queers the Austen adaptation genre itself. To conclude this study I address Davies's television film (ITV 2008) of Waters's second novel *Affinity* (1999). In this chapter I examine how the adaptation depicts the disruptive lesbian at the centre of the text. I argue in particular that by casting an actress who does not conform to dominant televisual norms of femininity, the adaptation is able to create a powerful audiovisual transgendered moment which adds to the novel's destabilization of Victorian hierarchies of gender and class. This chapter considers, finally, how *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *Affinity* have contributed to lesbian visibility on British television.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: British television and lesbian visibility

Part 1. Lesbian hypervisibility on British television

In 2006 queer British media watchdog Stonewall published a report on the issue of queer visibility on BBC television entitled “Tuned Out: The BBC’s portrayal of lesbian and gay people.” The report’s authors, Katherine Cowan, a Policy Officer at Stonewall, and Gill Valentine, a Professor of Geography and Director of the Leeds Social Science Institute at the University of Leeds, “set out to investigate how gay people and gay life are represented and portrayed on BBC Television” (6). Their research questions included: “How does the BBC portray gay people’s lives?”; “Does television have a positive or negative impact on gay people’s lives?”; “What impact does the portrayal of lesbians and gay men have on heterosexual people?”; “Does the BBC challenge homophobia, or does it reinforce it?”; and “Do lesbian and gay licence-fee payers get value for money?” (6).¹

The British Broadcasting Corporation has long been committed “[t]o enrich[ing] people’s lives with programmes and services” that, as the official tripartite mission statement goes, “inform, educate and entertain” (“About the BBC”). This mission includes “bring[ing] people together from diverse backgrounds to share experiences that bridge potential divides (for example, of age, class, faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation or varying abilities)” (“About the BBC”).² With the money from its licence fees the BBC maintains eight national television channels plus regional programming, ten national radio stations, forty local radio stations, “and an

¹ This last question pertains to the BBC’s status as a public service broadcaster. Founded in 1922, the BBC is funded not by advertising or government subsidies but, as of Royal Charter in 1927, by licence fees, to which anyone wishing to “use any television receiving equipment” in the UK must subscribe annually (“About the BBC”).

² This statement is, incidentally, the only explicit reference I could find on the BBC’s extensive website to “sexual orientation”; generally its writers employ vague phrases like “diverse communities.”

extensive website” (“About the BBC”). The flagship channels, BBC One and Two, were the object of Cowan and Valentine’s investigation; the researchers estimate that queer viewers contribute an estimated £90 million to programming for these channels from an estimated total £190 million in annual fees. Despite the BBC’s statement about diversity, the reality, according to Cowan and Valentine, is quite different. Between May and July 2005 Stonewall researchers watched BBC One and BBC Two every other night between 7.00pm and 10.00pm (6). Later in the year they held focus groups with both queer and heterosexual viewers to add “qualitative research” to their “quantitative study” (6). In brief, Cowan and Valentine found that during 168 hours of BBC programming, gay, lesbian and bisexual characters and references filled a total of 38 minutes. During this time queer characters were represented positively for only six minutes: 4 minutes and 50 seconds for gay men, and 1 minute and 10 seconds of positive representation for lesbians. The report’s conclusions with regard to lesbians and bisexual women are thus doubly damning: on the one hand, as Cowan and Valentine put it, “[l]esbians hardly exist on the BBC” (6); on the other, insofar as they do exist on television, queer women are overwhelmingly associated with negative stereotypes.

In response to Stonewall’s “controversial” report (Carolin 31), well-known British lesbian magazine *DIVA* published an article called “Lesbians on TV,” in which journalist Louise Carolin asks: “Are they [Stonewall] watching the same telly as us?” Citing Cowan and Valentine’s statistics, Carolin states: “In these circumstances, you might expect a babble of condemnation from lesbians and gay men, outraged by the BBC’s neglect, but the response has been oddly muted and ambivalent. Do we really not care that the BBC spends our money on putting us down, or is it that we just don’t watch telly in the same way Stonewall does?” (31). Answering her own question she goes on to state: “Of course, part of the issue is that most people don’t only watch two channels for three hours a night” (31). Cowan and Valentine focus on the

BBC in order to record queer representation on the most mainstream and accessible channels in Britain, and they examine both factual and fictional output. For Carolin this perspective is simultaneously too broad (all genres) and too narrow (one network). “If you’ve got the full complement to choose from, the picture improves considerably,” she writes.

In fact, lately it’s felt like you can’t switch on TV without snagging a dyke story line. Far from feeling hard-done by, many lesbian channel hoppers are thinking they’ve never had it so good. Just think of *EastEnders* (BBC1), *Neighbours* (BBC1), *Bad Girls* (ITV1), *Footballers’ Wives* (ITV1), *Family Affairs* (C5), *Emmerdale* (ITV1), and *The L Word* (LIVINGtv). Not to mention the lesbian couples on BBC Three’s real-life *Wedding Stories*, Sue Perkins on BBC One’s *Newsnight Review*, and the queering of Agatha Christie in the recent *Marple* and *Poirot* dramatisations on ITV1, or the BBC’s own high-profile costume dramas *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*.³ (31)

There is an undeniable *quantity* of programmes here featuring lesbian and bisexual characters which seems to suggest that Stonewall’s “Tuned Out” might – as far as fictional programmes go – be productively recontextualized. The sheer length of the list certainly bears out queer film theorist Julianne Pidduck’s statement, made in 2003, that “we [queer subjects] now find ourselves in a cultural moment of ‘hypervisibility’” (“After 1980” 266). As the decade progressed, particularly in 2005 and 2006, this visibility of queer women on British television increased. Carolin’s article in May 2006 marks the apex of lesbian hypervisibility; since then *Footballers’ Wives* (2002-2006), *Bad Girls* (1999-2006), and *Sugar Rush* (2005-2006) have been cancelled; *EastEnders* (1985-) wrote out its lesbians; BBC One dropped *Neighbours* (1985-); *Emmerdale*’s (1972-) teen lesbian relationship was “just a phase.” *Family Affairs* (1997-2005), praised for its

³ Carolin has overlooked at least one programme; Channel 4’s *Sugar Rush* (2005-2006) featured a teenaged lesbian protagonist.

inclusivity of both sexual and ethnic minority characters, had already been cancelled in 2005, and even the now-venerable *L Word* (2004-2009) has not been renewed for a seventh season.

Presumably other shows and characters have appeared to replace some of these cancellations; however, it is this particular trajectory of lesbian hypervisibility on British television throughout this decade which provides an important cultural context for my project. Accordingly, I want first to investigate in greater detail the programmes that Carolin lists to establish what kinds of lesbians populated British television in the mid-2000s.

With the exception of *The L Word*, these programmes are mainstream, many of them soap operas (*EastEnders*, *Neighbours*, *Family Affairs*, *Emmerdale*), and again, with the exception of *The L Word*, available on terrestrial channels, so that any British viewer with a television licence could watch them.⁴ It remains to be seen, however, in what ways the queer characters in these programmes were developed. This is a crucial question because, as Cowan and Valentine observe of the focus groups: “The majority of heterosexual viewers first became aware of or encountered lesbians and gay men through television” (6). Carolin herself notes: “There’s no denying that television has a massive influence on social attitudes... If the lesbians portrayed on TV are as diverse and complex as in real life, that’s dandy, but if they all tend towards a single stereotype – manipulative, predatory, marriage-wreckers, say – then we’re in trouble” (31). In their survey of BBC One and Two, Cowan and Valentine found that queer lives were “positively and realistically” depicted for six minutes out of the 38 minutes that they were included at all (6). For the other 32 minutes, they write, “[t]he BBC relies heavily on clichéd stereotypes in its portrayal of gay people. It seems reluctant to present lesbian and gay people in everyday scenarios, such as stable relationships or family life” (6).

⁴ All shows mentioned here are set in British cities, except for *Neighbours* (Melbourne) and *The L Word* (Los Angeles).

Stonewall is very much invested in what Pidduck identifies as “a more traditional politics of lesbian/gay representation that champions ‘positive images’ within popular culture” (“After 1980” 284). While such a position would seem to indicate an important political intervention in terms of queer visibility, it is also problematically subjective. What, in other words, constitutes a “positive” lesbian image in this report? Cowan and Valentine equate the “positive” depiction of queer characters with their “realistic” depiction, but this equation does not apply equally across all genres of television programming. Positive and realistic representation is more likely to be achieved with the inclusion of more queer perspectives in factual programming, such as documentaries and consumer shows, in which queer people and issues are virtually invisible.⁵ There is also little queer representation in reality programmes and game shows; Cowan and Valentine single out a lesbian couple on *The National Lottery* show as the only significant realistic representation of lesbians on the BBC during the monitoring period (11); presumably the real lesbian couples that Carolin points to on reality programmes like *Wedding Story* also go some way to depicting lesbians “in everyday scenarios, such as stable relationships or family life” (6), even though the producers of such programmes seek eccentric or idiosyncratic couples to make for more interesting television. Carolin also mentions Sue Perkins, a lesbian comedian who occasionally appears on comedy quiz shows, but this popular British genre is dominated almost exclusively by white men.⁶

When it comes to fictional characters, however, the notion of “positive and realistic” images becomes far more unstable. As Samuel A. Chambers contends in “Heteronormativity and

⁵ While factual programming makes up 54 per cent of BBC One’s and Two’s output, only 3 per cent of queer references occurred during these programmes (“Tuned Out” 9).

⁶ While popular quizzes like *Have I Got News For You* (1990-), *Mock the Week* (2005-) and *Would I Lie to You* (2007-) all feature white heterosexual male team captains and frequently feature white heterosexual male guest players, *Quite Interesting* (2003-) and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* (1996-) are hosted respectively by gay comics Stephen Fry and (since 2006) Simon Amstell.

The L Word: From a politics of representation to a politics of norms” (2006), it is problematic to “analyse television solely by checking its adequacy against an idealised standard that somehow stands apart from the show in question” (85). “Television must be thought of,” he writes, “not merely as a ‘representation of reality’ – a reality ostensibly ‘out there’ beyond the screen – but as a cultural practice that produces and reproduces the norms of gender and sexuality that *are* our lived reality (both political and social)” (85; original emphasis). Rather than holding fictional programmes to “idealised standards” – particularly shows like *Footballers’ Wives* which are unlikely to offer up any “realistic” characters – it makes more sense, according to Chambers, to examine how lesbian and gay characters might challenge these norms or merely reinforce them.

Chambers seeks to push the debate on queer representation beyond the evaluation of what he calls “identity-ingredients,” the kind of analysis that asks “how many straights, how many gays, how many blacks, how many whites?” (86). In the case of *The L Word*, the question becomes not how many lesbians but what kind of lesbian and bisexual identities? Chambers suggests that, in the opening round of what he facetiously calls the “representation game,” *The L Word* “wins an enormous number of points by having so many lesbian characters,” but in the subsequent round “points are consistently lost for the show, since that group of lesbians is overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly feminine in appearance, dress and behaviour” (82). Although the show may lose more points in later rounds for other aspects of identity – its lesbians are also overwhelmingly middle-class, for example – or actually make “small gains based on tertiary characters” (83), neither proponents of *The L Word* nor its critics will ever definitively win the game. Both must conclude that *The L Word* has “a cast of ‘Beautiful People’” (83).⁷

⁷ Replacing this cast with a “balanced... number of butch and femme characters, and... a handful of racial minorities” is no solution, writes Chambers, because a move like this would simply provoke criticism that the show was being unrealistic (83).

Players of the representation game, asserts Chambers, fail to address more than “a small dimension of the politics of gender and sexuality” (83). “Norms of gender and sexuality may be changed by a show about lesbians, or they may not,” he writes. “To get at this political level of the show... requires both a different approach to it (no longer fixated on representation) and a clearer conception of norms” (83). I contend, however – and I will argue throughout this study – that representation (“appearance, dress, behaviour”) plays an integral role in producing and reproducing norms of lesbian gender and sexuality. Rather than “tak[ing] a detour around the politics of identity and the question of representation,” as Chambers does (82), I want to include them alongside other political axes of inquiry. The significance of televisual lesbians and bisexuals lies not only in their actions, in the ways in which they may or may not subvert social norms, but equally in the gendering of their appearance. Taken together, the television programmes listed by Carolin make a powerful argument for the inclusion of identity politics in the analysis of sexual norms: not a single queer female character among them is coded as masculine.

In their investigation of lesbian characters on the BBC, Stonewall’s Cowan and Valentine find that lesbians are visually stereotyped in two ways, appearing “either as masculine women, for example, in a sketch on BBC Two’s *Dead Ringers*, or as glamorous or very feminine women, such as BBC Two’s *Tipping the Velvet*” (10). The *Dead Ringers* sketch is, however, a notable exception in the context of Carolin’s programmes, in which lesbian and bisexual characters otherwise range from feminine – nurse Naomi Julien (Petra Letang) in *EastEnders*; surrogate mother Kelly Hurst (Nicky Talacko) in *Family Affairs*; teenagers Lana Crawford (Bridget Neval) and Georgina Harris (Adrienne Smith) in the Australian soap *Neighbours*; veterinary surgeon Zoe Tate (Leah Bracknell) in *Emmerdale*; teenager Kim Daniels (Olivia Hallinan) in *Sugar Rush*; bisexual radio host Alice Pieszecki (Leisha Hailey); tennis player Dana Fairbanks (Erin Daniels)

and bisexual writer Jenny Schechter (Mia Kirshner) on *The L Word* – to hyperfeminine, including überfemme personal assistant Urszula Rosen (Lucia Giannecchini), her bisexual supermodel lover Liberty Gidigbi (Phina Oruche), and glamorous football chairwoman Hazel Bailey (Alison Newman) in *Footballers' Wives*; and, on *The L Word*, gallery curator Bette Porter (Jennifer Beals) and her partner Tina Kennard (Laurel Holloman), café owner Marina Ferrer (Karina Lombard), disc jockey Carmen de la Pica Morales (Sarah Shahi), and wealthy English philanthropist Helena Peabody (Rachel Shelley).⁸ The lack of diversity here is striking; indeed, it suggests that individual feminine stereotypes have cohered into a new norm of female television queerness.

For some commentators, this prevalent femininity is simply the price of lesbian visibility. In a review of *The L Word* Stephanie Theobald writes: “I don’t think *The L Word*’s candy coat matters too much. Pushing lesbianism to the mainstream is all about Trojan horses, i.e. strategy” (qtd. Graham 21). While it is, as Chambers asserts, unhelpful to “fixate” solely on representation, it is also, I think, dangerous to dismiss it like this. Certainly, more critical work is needed to situate the appearance of these characters in relation to their words, actions and other characters, but this work cannot ignore the conspicuous intersection of the axis of norms with the axis of representation. Susan Wolfe and Lee Ann Roripaugh more productively invoke the two axes in their rather fanciful suggestion that *The L Word*’s creators struck a “Faustian bargain” with Showtime executives in order to make a lesbicentric programme in the first place (43). Unlike the notion of Trojan horses, this metaphor implies a compromise between identity politics and norms of gender and sexuality. What, then, are the political implications of this Faustian bargain? And who benefits from the systematic erasure of queer female masculinity from television?

⁸ Marina was written out of *The L Word* after one season but Carmen and Helena were both introduced in season two.

Where feminine “femme” lesbians can pass as conventionally feminine heterosexual women, masculine lesbians disrupt gender norms and call into question conventional (male) masculinities. In her seminal work *Female Masculinities* (1998), lesbian theorist Judith Halberstam writes: “Because masculinity has seemed to play an important and even a crucial role in some lesbian self-definition... we have a word for lesbian masculinity: butch” (119). She goes on to quote Gayle Rubin’s 1992 definition: “Butch is the lesbian vernacular term for women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones” (qtd. 120). Rubin demonstrates, for Halberstam, “that butches vary wildly in their investments in masculinity: some butches are invested in masculine accoutrements such as clothing and hairstyle, and others actually experience themselves as male; some are gender dysphoric, some are transvestites, some pass as men” (120). This proliferation of lesbian masculinities has been overlooked by “many lesbians [who] have seen and still do see the butch dyke as an embarrassment and furthermore as a dupe of sexological theories of inversion” (120).

In the 1970s and 1980s a particular strand of lesbian feminist rhetoric demonized both masculine and feminine lesbians in the name of positive lesbian imagery. At the height of second-wave feminism these lesbian feminists “rejected butch-femme and its forms of sexual role playing as a gross mimicry of heterosexuality” (121). The thriving butch-femme subculture of the 1950s and 1960s, which Halberstam describes as “an elaborate and carefully scripted language of desire that butch and femme dykes had produced in response to dominant culture’s attempt to wipe them out” (121), came under attack by some lesbian feminists who saw it not only as an embarrassment but as a reiteration of heteropatriarchal ideologies. As Halberstam asserts, however, “the butch is a *type* of lesbian as well as a lesbian stereotype,” as is, one might add, the femme lesbian; unlike the femme, however, “the butch makes dyke desire and dyke sexuality visible and exemplifies a dyke variation on heteronormative gender roles” (217; original

emphasis). “The rejection of the butch as a repulsive stereotype by some lesbian feminists,” observes Halberstam, “also had the unfortunate effect of pathologizing the only visible signifier of queer dyke desire; the rejection of the femme produced limits for lesbian feminine expression and grounded middle-class white feminism within an androgynous aesthetic” (121).

Lesbian feminist filmmakers who embraced the notion of positive lesbian imagery similarly erased all traces of butch-femme culture from their own cultural production. The masculine lesbian in particular has long been associated with negative imagery in mainstream twentieth-century film, used repeatedly as a two-dimensional villain, a manipulative predator, a perverted monster.⁹ Lesbian feminist films from the 1980s therefore “[depict] lesbian desires through the modality of sameness,” writes Halberstam. “The women in these self-consciously lesbian films, in other words, are shown to desire sameness, not difference” (217-8). Visually and otherwise masculine lesbians are replaced with the same “androgynous aesthetic” that defined this strand of lesbian feminism. “One could argue,” states Halberstam,

that since the butch dyke had long symbolized a homophobic stereotyping of lesbians, her disappearance within a lesbian cinema was supposed to signal the arrival of positive and responsible images of everyday lesbians. But by relegating the butch to the trash heap of homophobic cinema, lesbian cinema made butch women into the scapegoat for homophobic representation. (217)

For these filmmakers, the negative imagery of butch-femme relationships could be redressed through an aesthetic of sameness. The depiction of lesbians on mainstream television began to shift away from butch lesbians as well, but instead of androgyny television programmes began to depict increasingly feminine characters.

⁹ As Vito Russo demonstrates repeatedly throughout *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1987), Hollywood films have a long history of homophobic sexual representation.

The feminine television lesbian perhaps originated with one of the first British programmes to feature a lesbian character: *Tenko* (1981-1985), a WWII drama set in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, was a British and Australian co-production that aired on the BBC and ABC. Nurse Nellie Keane (Jeananne Crowley) only lasted for the first season, during which she fell in love with prisoner Sally Markham (Joanna Hole) after the latter required medical assistance. In an article on the history of queer characters on British television, posted on the BBC webpage for *Tipping the Velvet*, the anonymous writer asserts that Keane was “a sympathetic and caring woman, far from the stereotypical screen image of a mannish dyke” (“Get this filth off our screens”). This writer suggests that Keane’s character sharply contrasted with the unsavoury lesbians of programmes such as the popular drama *Prisoner* (1979-1986).¹⁰ The Australian production featured a number of lesbians on both sides of the bars, including prisoners Franky Doyle (Carol Burns) and Judy Bryant (Betty Bobbitt), Deputy Governor Vera “Vinegar Tits” Bennett (Fiona Spence) and prison officer Joan “The Freak” Ferguson (Maggie Kirkpatrick). While the latter was particularly sadistic among a cast of mean, scheming women, the characters on this programme, lauded for their complexity, were too multidimensional to be simple villains. Twenty years after *Prisoner* first appeared, *Bad Girls* brought the women’s prison drama back to British screens. Compared with the dirty, unkempt, unglamorous and decidedly masculine women – lesbian and straight alike – of *Prisoner*, *Bad Girls*’s Nikki Wade (Mandana Jones), obviously made up to contemporary television standards, does look feminine. But compared to the feminine and hyperfeminine lesbians in Carolin’s list, the short-haired Wade, who frequently sports a white tanktop or a masculine button-down shirt, looks positively mannish. Despite the masculine way in which she carries herself, *Bad Girls: The Official Site of the Award Winning Drama* describes her in these words: “Nikki was a lipstick lesbian before the

¹⁰ It was known as *Prisoner: Cell Block H* in the UK and USA and *Caged Women* in Canada.

term was even invented” (“Nikki Wade”). The website’s effort to claim her as feminine suggests a clear discomfort with lesbian masculinity and marks an attempt to repudiate any association of this character with a butch lesbian identity.

Beginning with *Tenko*, then, lesbian visual representation on television has shifted overwhelmingly towards femininity. In June 1993 veterinarian Zoe Tate (Leah Bracknell) came out on ITV’s soap opera *Emmerdale* (1972-), and “opened the floodgates for lipstick lesbians in soaps,” writes Vicky Powell in *DIVA* (33). The latter included Beth Jordache (Anne Friel) on Channel Four’s *Brookside* (1982-), who shared an eight-second kiss with another woman on 24 December 1993, and the BBC’s *EastEnders*’s (1985-) Della Alexander (Michelle Joseph) and Binnie Roberts (Sophie Langham) who appeared in 1994. Other mainstream programmes in the 1990s that featured lesbians, including the American sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004) and the British dramedy *Cold Feet* (1997-2003), feminized them equally through their appearance – long hair, revealing clothes, visible makeup – and through the baby plot. Ross Geller’s ex-wife Carol Willick (Jane Sibbett) on *Friends* gives birth to Ross’s baby at the end of season one; Rachel Bradley’s sister Lucy Bradley (Susannah Doyle) on *Cold Feet* arrives in Manchester solely to announce her desire for a baby (4.8). Even the homonormative British drama *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000), with its diverse cast of gay male characters, included Romey Sullivan (Esther Hall) and Lisa Levene (Saira Todd), a boring, broody lesbian couple who give birth in the first episode. It’s hardly surprising, then, that the very first dialogue we hear in the opening episode of *The L Word* consists of this exchange:

Tina Kennard: I’m ovulating.

Bette Porter: Let’s make a baby. (1.1)

These television lesbians are thus doubly feminized: first, culturally, through their appearance, and again, biologically, through the emphasis on their reproductive abilities. In these ways they

are rendered acceptable to mainstream audiences; rather than challenging any norms of gender or sexuality they are shown to be “just like” heterosexual women and therefore unthreatening.

The L Word is notable both for being the first American programme to make lesbians its protagonists and for showcasing such a narrow range of queer female types. On this show Shane McCutcheon (Katherine Moennig) is considered “the butch one”: she is certainly more masculine than her high femme friends – she never wears a skirt, for example – but her andro-glam look still fits comfortably enough with a show that has mocked visibly butch lesbians and made a clear effort to distance itself from them.¹¹ Candace Moore and Kristen Schilt write that *The L Word* “doesn’t *seriously* offer a wide range of lesbian representations, as the majority of the main characters, except perhaps Shane, are traditionally beautiful feminine women, indistinguishable from the straight women we see portrayed as ‘pretty’ on television every day” (168; original emphasis). They go on to state:

While this may have initially challenged straight viewers’ misconceptions that all lesbians are visually identifiable, it neglects to show that butch and masculine-identified lesbians are an equally important part of the culture – and yes, even the WeHo [West Hollywood] culture too. The show continues to play it safe by not yet providing any examples of lesbian characters that consider themselves expressly (and visually) butch, or who openly struggle with the dilemma of transitioning to male within a lesbian community. (168)

Moore and Schilt analyze masculinity in the first two seasons of *The L Word*. In its third season the show introduced butch lesbian Moira Sweeney (Daniela Sea), a plaid-shirt-wearing Midwestern self-identified butch horribly out of place among the glamorous lesbians of Los

¹¹ At the Dinah Shore weekend Alice spots a “hundred-footer,” a term that means, as Tina explains, “you can tell she’s a lesbian from a hundred feet away” because she has close-cropped hair and is wearing a sports bra and shorts instead of a designer bikini (1.11).

Angeles. Almost immediately Moira began transitioning to a male body and changed his name to Max. While more transsexual characters are certainly welcome on popular television shows, Moira's transition also suggests that such female butchness was unsustainable by a programme that has more in common with *Sex and the City* than with *Prisoner*.¹² Moore and Schilt conclude that *The L Word* "allows the show to maintain a crossover audience by avoiding confrontational identities that seriously challenge current ideas about masculinity and what defines being a man" (168). Since the testosterone shots seem to have given Max an increasingly conservative outlook on relationships between men and women, in addition to facial hair and violent outbursts, I would argue that *The L Word*'s introduction of a transman fails to challenge Moore and Schilt's assertion.

Putting *The L Word*'s queer characters in the greater context of women on television in Europe and North America, it is hardly surprising that the dominant trend is one of feminization. There are certain expectations about the way women should look on television; they generally conform to norms of age, race and body type – that is, young, white and thin – but I would argue that the norm that trumps all others is the norm of conventional femininity. As Paula Graham observes of *The L Word*: "Its protagonists *are* feminised, lip-glossed, air-brushed, stick-insects – but...these are not issues specific to lesbianism in particular but are general to the representation of women. The same criticism could be levelled at *any* of the glossy American shows which have become popular here [in Britain]" (25; original emphasis). While the norm for gay men on the BBC tends, according to Cowan and Valentine, to "very camp and effeminate figures of fun" (10), thus ensuring the visible separation of gay men from straight men, the norm for lesbians and bisexual women functions in the opposite way. By making television lesbians predominantly

¹² Diane Anderson-Minshall points out that *The L Word* appeared "just as *Sex and the City* was going off air" and that its original slogan – "Same Sex. Different City." – linked the two shows (12).

feminine in appearance, dress and behaviour, these programmes erase visible female queerness and render lesbians interchangeable with straight women as objects of heterosexual male desire. The butch lesbian may be “the only visible signifier of queer dyke desire” (Halberstam 121), but it is paradoxically the femme – and in many cases hyperfeminine – lesbian, indistinguishable from her straight counterparts, who is currently hypervisible on television.

Part 2. The politics of film adaptation theory

Louise Carolin’s list of programmes on British television with lesbian characters concludes with several literary adaptations, including “the queering of Agatha Christie in the recent *Marple* and *Poirot* dramatisations on ITV1, [and] the BBC’s own high-profile costume dramas *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*” (31). However, lesbian visibility functions very differently in these productions. In ITV’s recent *Agatha Christie Marple* (2004-), the series’ occasional lesbians are cast, to borrow Hilary Hinds’s phrase, as “villain or victim” (169), murderous or unfortunate characters who impede the series’ relentlessly heteronormative endings.¹³ Queerness signifies differently in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, both of which are serializations of novels by contemporary British lesbian writer Sarah Waters.

This thesis seeks to investigate the relationship between Waters’s novels and their respective adaptations. Since *Tipping the Velvet* was adapted by the BBC Waters has become a household name in Britain and is well-known internationally to queer audiences. An out and proud lesbian feminist, she states in an interview: “I’ve probably done more than anyone to

¹³ In *A Murder is Announced* (2005), for example, Amy Murgatroyd (Claire Skinner) is killed off for knowing too much, while in *Nemesis* (2007), Sister Clotilde (Amanda Burton) murders her lover to prevent her from marrying a man. Although Miss Murgatroyd is depicted in a “normal” relationship with the slightly mannish Lizzie Hinchcliffe (Frances Barber) in the former episode, in the latter homosexuality functions as the shocking and shameful secret at the centre of the mystery. This type of unmitigated lesbian villainy is nothing new, and certainly unsurprising in a novel first published in 1971.

actually appropriate the lesbian tag. I've never wanted to put myself in a position where I am playing it down, and also it's so obvious there as an agenda in my writing" (see Finding 4).

Waters was born in Neyland, Wales, in 1966. Before she established herself as a novelist she was a literary scholar, earning a BA from the University of Kent and an MA from Lancaster University, both in English literature, and a PhD from Queen Mary, University of London (previously University of London's Queen Mary and Westfield College). Her dissertation was titled "Wolfskins and togas: lesbian and gay historical fiction, 1870 to the present" (1995). In 1998 she published her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, followed rapidly by *Affinity* (1999), *Fingersmith* (2002), *The Night Watch* (2006), and *The Little Stranger* (2009), with at least one more work forthcoming. Waters's writing, especially in *Tipping the Velvet*, is informed by Judith Butler's performative theory of gender. In the same interview she notes: "My writing grew completely out of my academic work, which was rooted in feminism, particularly queer theory and performativity. I haven't been in academia since the late nineties, so I'm probably theoretically stuck there!" (Finding 4).

The adaptations of Waters's novels mark important milestones for lesbian representation on British television in general and the BBC in particular. *Tipping the Velvet* was serialized in 2002 for BBC Two, followed by *Fingersmith* in 2005 on BBC One. A television film version of *Affinity*, featured at the 2008 Miami and San Francisco queer film festivals, appeared on ITV One at the very end of 2008, and there have been rumours that BBC Two is adapting *The Night Watch* for 2009. Waters has clearly inspired a British cottage industry of adaptations. But how, I ask, do the screen versions balance the demands of pop visual culture with the novels' complex, unconventional – and in some cases subversive – representations of lesbianism?

In order to consider this broad question I turn to the increasingly popular field of film adaptation studies. Recent important contributions to the field have appeared from academics in

diverse disciplines, including film scholars Robert Stam and Kamilla Elliott, literary specialists Thomas Leitch, Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell, television theorist Sarah Cardwell, and narratologist Brian McFarlane. Adaptation theory provides a useful basis for my investigation, although it is clear that my purpose in comparing Waters's novels with their adaptations is evaluative and many theorists are opposed to using these tools for the purposes of evaluation. In *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), McFarlane describes "comparative evaluations of novel and film" as "a surely pointless enterprise" (197), because too often these comparisons, as Stam puts it, "[focus] on the rather subjective question of the *quality* of adaptations" (4; original emphasis). McFarlane and Stam both seek to deconstruct and devalue the frequent condemnation, in popular and scholarly commentary, of film adaptations for their "infidelity" to their sources. Stam has written extensively about this mode of evaluation, known generally as *fidelity discourse* or *fidelity criticism*. In his useful introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2005), an anthology that he co-edited with Alessandra Raengo, Stam states:

When we say an adaptation has been "unfaithful" to the original, the very violence of the term gives expression to the intense sense of betrayal we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, or aesthetic features of its literary source... Words like "infidelity" and "betrayal" in this sense translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love.

(14)

Fidelity discourse tends to be, according to Stam, on the one hand "profoundly moralistic," rife with terms like "infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "violation," "bastardization," "vulgarization," and "desecration," and on the other, relentlessly "elegiac," "lamenting what has been 'lost' in the transition from novel to film, while ignoring what has been 'gained'" (3).

McFarlane concurs that “much of one’s pleasure in reading a novel or film *is* subjective”; the problem is that these kinds of subjective and affective responses are “so variable as to offer no firm basis” for theorizing adaptation (195; original emphasis). McFarlane finds a much firmer basis in Roland Barthes’s “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” (1966). McFarlane is interested in the mechanics of adaptation: what gets adapted and how. Using Barthes’s narratological schema, McFarlane distinguishes between “those novelistic elements which can be *transferred* and those which require *adaptation proper*, the former essentially concerned with *narrative*, which functions irrespective of medium, and the latter with *enunciation*, which calls for consideration of two different signifying systems” (195). McFarlane supplements Barthes with Seymour Chatman’s *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978) which, unlike Barthes’s text, explicitly discusses film adaptation. These two theorists

use different terminologies but preserve the basic distinctions between those narrative elements which function independently of medium (Barthes’s “cardinal functions” and “catalysers,” Chatman’s “kernels” and “satellites”) and those such as character, atmosphere, tone, point of view (vague enough terms, certainly), which are intransigently tied to the medium which displays them. (196)

It is here that McFarlane and Stam part ways, however. Stam criticizes McFarlane for “draw[ing]... an overly neat distinction between narrative events... and enunciation” (49 n.45). “[I]t is difficult to separate narrative from enunciation,” he contends: “McFarlane speaks of narrative functions in the novel as those that are ‘not dependent on language,’ but in a novel everything is in a sense dependent on language... The problem is that cinematic enunciation... changes the narrative in an infinity of subtle ways” (49 n.45). With these reservations about Barthes’s narratological taxonomy, Stam turns to a different French theorist, finding the ideal

basis for theorizing film adaptation in Gérard Genette's *Palimpsestes* (1982). Stam notes: "Instead of maintaining the term 'intertextuality,' Genette proposed the more inclusive term 'transtextuality' to refer to 'all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts'" (27). Of Genette's five specific types of transtextual relations – intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality – it is the last, according to Stam, which is "perhaps the type most clearly relevant to adaptation" (31). Hypertextuality is defined by Genette as "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall of course call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (qtd. Leitch 94).

Transtextuality for Stam is the most effective tool with which to discredit fidelity discourse: instead of poorly or unfaithfully copying one monolithic original, film adaptations "are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (31). As Leitch puts it: "Genette's classifications thus have the considerable merit of subsuming film adaptations, a phenomenon that he never discusses but that clearly fits into the category of hypertexts, into a larger matrix of intertextual relations" (94). Like McFarlane, Stam proposes an alternative to fidelity discourse, in this case an investigation of textual relations that focuses so heavily on the adaptation that it risks losing sight of the source text.

While Stam wholeheartedly endorses transtextuality, this theoretical relation proves unsatisfactory for Leitch. In his impressive recent study *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (2007), Leitch asserts that the problem with Genette's "painstaking taxonomy... like that of other distinctions among modes or types of adaptation, is that it does not adequately demarcate the frontiers of adaptation, the places where it

shades off into allusion” (95). Thus, while Stam enthuses about Genette’s intertextuality, describing “the long chain of virtuoso, even exhibitionistic, long-take crane and steadicam shots,” used first by Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil* (1958) and subsequently by other directors, “each consciously referring to the earlier ones” (28), Leitch questions this very type of classification:

At what point does a stylistic device like Orson Welles’s systematic use of deep focus or Max Ophüls’s intricate tracking shots pass from a signature directorial flourish into the common syntax available to all filmmakers? Film grammar itself may be nothing more than intertextual borrowings regularized into prescriptive formulas. (123)

Genette, writes Leitch, “draw[s] a categorical distinction between intertextual relations like quotation and allusion and hypertextual relations like adaptation, [but] overlooks the slippery slope between adaptation and allusion and offers no place to draw a line between them” (95). Leitch proposes, then, to set out ten categories of adaptation in order to draw such a line himself. The most readily identifiable categories include celebration; adjustment; neoclassical imitation; revision; and colonization. These are followed by the less obvious (meta)commentary or deconstruction; analogy; parody and pastiche; secondary, tertiary and quaternary imitation; and finally the contentious category of allusion. When he reaches allusion, however, Leitch discovers that his categories, “however useful they may be in distinguishing particular strategies, are unable to separate particular adaptations into categories because even apparently straightforward adaptations typically make use of many different intertextual strategies” (126).

Leitch cites Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996) as a film that makes use of all ten strategies. “The result of this heavily overdetermined intertextual bricolage ought to be chaos or reductive irony,” writes Leitch (125). It is not, however, because audiences are “not so easily confused by logically incompatible modes of intertextuality” since they are

used to films that “freely mix different strategies” (125). In the conclusion to this chapter, Leitch writes:

The slippery slope between adaptation and allusion cannot be divided into discrete stages because it really is slippery. The moral to draw from this chapter’s failed exercise in demarcation is that intertextuality takes myriad forms that resist reduction to even so comprehensive a grammar as Bakhtin’s or Genette’s. Like [Kamilla] Elliott, however, Genette grasps a truth that eludes many students of adaptation: There is no normative model for adaptation. Both adaptation and allusion are clearly intelligible only within a broader study of intertextuality that will not begin until students of adaptation abandon their fondness for huddling on the near end of the slippery slope between adaptation and allusion, where categorical distinctions still seem seductively plausible. (126)

Since previous adaptation theorists, from Geoffrey Wagner and Dudley Andrew in the 1970s and 1980s to Kamilla Elliott in 2003, have theorized adaptation by creating new and different kinds of categories, Leitch’s reconception of categories as *strategies* of adaptation is nothing short of groundbreaking and marks a significant contribution to the study of adaptation. However, these strategies have only limited application to my own investigation because, rather like McFarlane, Leitch focuses on the mechanics of adaptation: that is, both explore which aspects of the source text get transferred and how this transfer is accomplished.

Since these theorists are not interested in evaluation their methodologies do not provide any tools for analyzing the effects of the changes an adaptation makes to a source text. However, it is precisely these effects that I seek to investigate. Stam’s desire to treat the adaptation as an independent text “with no clear point of origin” (31) is incompatible with my central research question: how do the screen versions of *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *Affinity* balance the demands of pop visual culture with the novels’ nuanced representations of lesbianism? I

approach this question from a queer and feminist perspective without privileging one text over the other, or relying on the “*mere* subjectivity” of fidelity discourse (McFarlane 196; original emphasis). Certainly, political analyses of adaptations need to avoid the “discourse of loss” (Stam 4) and moralistic judgments of fidelity critics; “[a]n awareness that some elements are more likely than others to survive transfer,” writes McFarlane, “could deflect reviewers and critics from pointlessly chastising a film for not reproducing their sense of the original text” (196).

At the same time, adaptation theory needs to accommodate political analysis. Although Stam is eager to grant the adapted text full autonomy, he also describes how postcolonial, queer and feminist theories contribute to adaptation studies by “[critiquing] quietly assumed, unmarked normativities which place whiteness, Europeaness, maleness, and heterosexuality at the center, while marginalizing all that is not normative” (11). One implication for Stam is that these theories will “change the protocols of reading both novels and film” (11). Reading film – in this case television – adaptations from feminist and queer perspectives allows critics to analyze not only the conscious changes made to the source text (what elements are transferred, how a novel is *adjusted* [Leitch]) but the effects those changes have and the implications of those changes for viewers. This intertextual relationship should include not only the source text and its adaptation but the latter’s cultural reception. As Linda Hutcheon observes in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), “[a]n adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum” (142). Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation usefully goes beyond the mechanics of adaptation to discuss what she calls “context,” which “includes elements of presentation and reception, such as the amount and kind of ‘hype’ an adaptation gets: its advertising, press coverage, and reviews” (143). This “wider context” (144) is particularly important for sexual (and other) minorities who are underrepresented in mainstream

media, and for self-proclaimed lesbian feminists like Waters whose works are adapted for mainstream audiences.

Part 3. A brief history of the classic serial television genre

By dramatizing *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* each as three-part serials which aired during prime evening viewing slots, the BBC situated these productions within two of its longstanding traditions: that of the original television drama, and that of the classic serial television adaptation. In “Classic Serials—To Be Continued” (1982), an excellent article on this genre, Paul Kerr traces the origins of the BBC television adaptation to a non-serialized fifty-five minute production of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1938. Some twenty years later the BBC divided its Drama Department in two, creating, under the aegis of Head of Drama Sydney Newman, a department for popular series and serials, and another for the “prestigious single play” (15). The BBC poached the Canadian Newman from ITV, where he had enjoyed great success as the producer of *Armchair Theatre* (1958-1962), a programme featuring controversial social realist plays by working-class dramatists known collectively as “Angry Young Men.” This type of “kitchen sink” drama, as it was dubbed, was criticized by some commentators for its “lowlife excesses” (15) but proved popular with ITV audiences and later BBC audiences when Newman launched *The Wednesday Play* on BBC One. Although *The Wednesday Play* (1964-1970), later *Play for Today* (1970-1984), was phased out in the 1980s, the Wednesday night slot continued to be known by the press in the following decade as “The Controversy Slot,” states Hilary Hinds, “with a reputation for airing ‘difficult’ or controversial” material (159). *Tipping the Velvet* was broadcast on Wednesday nights in October of 2002.

While the single play constitutes “the most prestigious slot in the drama schedules, site of fine writing and great acting (i.e. Art),” the series, at the other end of the “aesthetic spectrum,”

“replac[es] popular cinema as the space of generic formulae like the cop show and the sit com (i.e. Entertainment)” (Kerr 7). Falling somewhere between these two genres in Kerr’s television hierarchy, the serial “straddles an uneasy middle ground embracing everything from family romance to science fiction” (7). The classic serial, however, is much more closely aligned with the single play. Defined by the “tortuously tautological” cliché that “classic serials are serialised classics” (7), the classic serial television adaptation combines a number of genres including, at the very least, the literary adaptation, the costume drama, and the television serial. The notion of literary adaptation in this context is inseparable from that of “canonical” British literary works, particularly those of the nineteenth century. “The BBC’s conception of literary classics,” as Kerr observes, “does not differ remarkably from Leavis’s Great Tradition,¹⁴ or the Penguin imprints ‘Penguin Classics’ and ‘Penguin English Library’” (9). In other words, “the nineteenth century novel... forms the core of the BBC Classic Serial output” (Robert Giddings, qtd. Cardwell *Adaptation Revisited* 108). Following the 1938 *Pride and Prejudice*, the BBC produced another one-off Austen adaptation, this time of *Emma*, in 1948 before launching its first serialized adaptation in 1951. “[T]he first TV serial of any kind,” writes Kerr, it was a six-episode serialization of Anthony Trollope’s *The Warden* (1855) (14). This adaptation initiated a tradition of nineteenth-century classic serial costume dramas on the BBC which stood in stark contrast to the contemporary kitchen sink dramas on *The Wednesday Play*.

Unlike the series, which appears in a predetermined number of episodes that make up discrete seasons, the serial can run from two or three to an indefinite number of episodes.¹⁵ In the case of continuous serials, such as ITV’s venerable soap opera *Coronation Street* (1960-), dozens

¹⁴ Leavis’s “Great Tradition,” from *The Great Tradition* (1948), originally consisted of Austen, Eliot, James and Conrad, though he later added Dickens.

¹⁵ Confusingly the North American term “miniseries” means a finite serial, and would more accurately be called the “miniserial.”

of characters spin out loosely related plotlines with no end in sight. Classic serials, however, “are finite[;] they are almost always anchored around only one or two protagonists and a clear-cut narrative thrust” (8). What they share with the continuous serial is their appearance at a regular time, notably, for classic serials, on Sunday evenings; Phillip Drummond observes that “the accustomed Sunday slot in particular involves a secularisation of religious awe into a kind of cultural humility” (qtd. Kerr 8). *Fingersmith* appeared in precisely this Sunday evening slot.

In the year that *The Wednesday Play* appeared on BBC One, the Corporation launched its second terrestrial channel. In its inaugural week BBC Two broadcast an adaptation of *Madame Bovary* (1964) under the supervision of Donald Wilson, the first BBC Head of Serials. In 1967 Wilson adapted *The Forsyte Saga* for BBC Two, the “immensely popular” serial based on John Galsworthy’s series about the Forsyte family (15). It aired in black and white before BBC Two broadcast an adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, Britain’s first colour classic serial, later that same year. The following year BBC Two adapted *Portrait of a Lady*, which proved more popular than *Vanity Fair*. In the following decades the BBC’s heavy reliance on the nineteenth-century literary canon for source texts began to result in an “extraordinary flattening” of its classic serials, a term Kerr borrows from Raymond Williams.¹⁶ “Careful comparisons between the novels in question [in this case *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights*] and their tele-versions,” writes Kerr, “reveals the tendency towards homogenisation in television adaptation. The very profound formal differences that Williams identifies between such novels became all but invisible on television” (11). The classic serial genre would be revolutionized, however, not by a new serialization of Austen, Dickens or Thackeray, but by an unprecedented eleven-hour adaptation of Evelyn Waugh’s twentieth-century novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).

¹⁶ In *1848: the Sociology of Literature* (1978), Williams analyzes *Vanity Fair*, *Dombey and Son*, *Mary Barton* and *Wuthering Heights*, all of which were published in 1848.

In his analysis of the BBC classic serial “Tradition of Quality,” Thomas Leitch investigates its evolution by contrasting the 1981 *Brideshead Revisited* with the *Pride and Prejudice* that preceded it by a year, and comparing it with the *Pride and Prejudice* that followed a decade and a half later. “*Brideshead Revisited* was the first of the BBC miniseries to establish an aesthetic distinct from either the radio or the theatrical aesthetic of its television predecessors,” he writes (173). What Leitch has somehow overlooked, however, is that *Brideshead Revisited* is not a BBC miniseries at all; it was produced by Granada Television for the BBC’s rival ITV.

In 1954 the Television Act enabled the creation of a commercial channel to compete with the BBC. The Independent Television network, consisting of several regional franchises, was launched in 1955 (“About ITV”). The most obvious difference between ITV and the BBC is that ITV is a commercial television broadcaster. Where the BBC is funded by licence fees, ITV relies on advertising, and as such its programmes include advertising pauses. “The BBC, of course, doesn’t have commercial breaks,” Erica Sheen reminds us in her analysis of the BBC’s 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* (22). In its first week the newly formed channel broadcast an adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*. “However,” writes Kerr, “while ITV tended to treat the [classic serial] as an exceptional indulgence, the BBC began to institutionalise it within its schedules and structures” (15). The classic serial genre clearly resonates with the BBC’s mandate to “inform, educate and entertain.” Thus, while classic serials frequently “[garnish] the schedule [of both the BBC and ITV] at important moments in the television year,” this ornamentation “is far more visible with ITV, whose Classic Serials coincide suspiciously with those periods when franchises are up for renewal” (Drummond, qtd. Kerr 8). Indeed, Granada Television, the ITV broadcaster for the North West of England, produced *Brideshead Revisited* when its broadcasting franchise was up for renewal in 1981.

Despite these differences, there are many ways in which the literary adaptations created by the BBC and ITV can be productively grouped in the same classic serial category. Certainly, Leitch's close analysis of the serial itself holds good; it is his interpretation of the relationship between ITV and the BBC and his contextualization of *Brideshead Revisited* which are in need of reconsideration. Leitch contends that the BBC learned a valuable lesson from the success of ITV's *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-1975). From the popular series, which followed the Bellamy family and servants through the First World War, the BBC discovered, contends Leitch, that "a classic adaptation did not require a classic original" (174). *Upstairs, Downstairs* was not based on a classic source text or indeed any source text; it had a total of nine writers who produced original scripts for five seasons. Leitch argues that the BBC put this lesson to use when it adapted Waugh's "best-selling middlebrow 1945 novel" (175). Here Leitch draws on Sarah Cardwell's analysis of the Waugh adaptation. "It is possible," writes Cardwell, "that the adaptation of *Brideshead* itself helped to reinforce a popular perception that the source novel is a modern classic" (*Adaptation Revisited* 109). Quoting this statement, Leitch writes: "[Cardwell] never points out that before the airing of its television adaptation, [*Brideshead Revisited*] was no more widely considered a classic than Dorothy L. Sayers's detective novels about Lord Peter Wimsey" (174). The BBC's adaptation of three Wimsey novels, asserts Leitch, "helped elevate Sayers from a genre classic to a middlebrow classic" (175); Leitch suggests that the BBC similarly elevated *Brideshead Revisited*. In fact the BBC attempted to compete with *Brideshead Revisited* by airing *The Borgias* (1981), a disastrous production which aimed to repeat the success of the BBC's well-received historical serial *I, Claudius* (1976).¹⁷

¹⁷ Filled with sex and violence, *The Borgias* was hampered by the thick accent of the Italian actor who played the serial's protagonist. One viewer recalls a scene in which "Pope Alexander VI (Adolfo Celi) shouted he wanted to see 'Nipples' – but it could well have been 'Naples.' I think it was the former as there was an orgy going on at the time" (*The Borgias*).

Paul Kerr contends “that it is less a ‘novel’ as such that is being adapted than its plot, characters, setting, dialogue and, of course, cultural status” (11). What ITV learned from *Upstairs, Downstairs* was that “cultural status” was not inherent but could be bestowed. Leitch writes that *Brideshead Revisited* marks a significant departure from the 1980 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* in which stiff actors and unmoving cameras create “a bare-bones Austen dominated by a theatrical aesthetic” (173). Conversely, the Waugh adaptation, dramatized by John Mortimer and directed by Charles Sturridge, resists both a theatre and a radio aesthetic, in part due to a much greater and more diverse use of music and sound effects, and in part to impressive visuals filmed at Oxford University and Castle Howard, locations “chosen for maximum visual splendor and sumptuously photographed” (174). The completed serial almost doubled its originally projected six-hour length for, as Sturridge put it, “the scenes had begun to expand based on the realization that the potency of the story evaporated without the detail” (qtd. Leitch 174). Thus, states Leitch,

the classic status of Waugh’s novel, among his least highly regarded during his lifetime, was secured not by any consensus among experts or by its status as a subject of academic study. Instead, *Brideshead Revisited* was canonized by a television adaptation that embalmed in exhaustive detail and epic length the narrator’s achingly nostalgic attitude, at once disillusioned and enduringly romantic, toward a vanished idyllic past and the fugitive promise of social mobility in an English society defined by class-consciousness. (175)

In this way ITV’s adaptation, treated and received as a classic serial, created, in rather a performative way, the cultural status of the novel, elevating it from middlebrow bestseller to “modern classic” (Cardwell *Adaptation Revisited* 109). The *Brideshead* “tele-version” marks a crucial intervention in the tradition of nineteenth-century classic serials. ITV followed it up with

the Granada production of *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984), a thirteen-episode serial based on Paul Scott's 1966 eponymous novel, the first of a tetralogy about the end of the British Raj in India during the Second World War. It was another lavish popularly- and critically-acclaimed serial which once again distinguished ITV from the BBC, and once again canonized a twentieth-century novel, in this case published only eighteen years before its adaptation.

While ITV has not institutionalized the classic serial genre to the same degree that the BBC has, in the cases of both *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Jewel in the Crown* it has benefitted from the BBC's institutionalization of this genre. "The very existence of the Classic Serial as an institutional – and institutionalised – category," asserts Paul Kerr, "has therefore meant that any serial scheduled in an associated slot and accorded similar special treatment by the company concerned has been automatically designated a classic" (15). The classic status, he continues, "refers both to the prestige of the original novel in the literary canon and to the standing of the specific serial in the television canon" (15). While Kerr has in mind "several historic/biographical serials" which, "while not originating in a novel from within the Great Tradition, share the settings, style, period and heroic personae of their literary predecessors" (15), the implications are significant for any contemporary writer whose works are adapted for British television, an increasingly common occurrence. Cultural scholar Hilary Hinds describes this trajectory of the "long tradition of literary adaptations on television" from nineteenth-century "classics" to more contemporary novels like *Brideshead Revisited*, "until, as with the instances of David Lodge's *Nice Work* and [Jeanette] Winterson's [*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*], adaptations followed very swiftly on the publication of the novel" (159). *Nice Work* was published in 1988 and broadcast in 1989 (BBC); *Oranges*, which I will discuss at length in the following chapter, was published in 1985 and broadcast in 1990 (BBC). The turnover between publication and adaptation for Waters's novels has also been relatively rapid; *Tipping the Velvet*

and *Fingersmith* were each serialized in three to four years, and although *Affinity* took almost a decade to produce, its screenplay had been written several years previously (Davies interview). Subsequent chapters will investigate the effects of the “institutionalised category” of the classic serial on Waters’s works. What kind of “special treatment” have they received, and should they – *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* in particular – be considered, like *Brideshead Revisited*, “modern classics”?

Part 4. The “recognisable trademark” of Andrew Davies

The classic serial has been on the whole a successful genre both in Britain and abroad; “Masterpiece Theatre,” the classic serial export, first appeared on North American screens in 1971. “The BBC learnt quickly,” writes Mike Poole, “that Tradition plus Englishness equal prestige and ‘respectability’” (qtd. Kerr 16). It worked tirelessly to cultivate precisely the kind of Tradition of Quality that François Truffaut derides in his 1954 essay “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” (“A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema”). In his attack on French filmmakers like Claude Autant-Lara and Jean Dellannoy, “whose films staked their aesthetic claims on the literary respectability of their sources,” Truffaut, writes Thomas Leitch, “turned the Tradition of Quality into a term of contempt” (152). Leitch identifies three Traditions of Quality in Truffaut’s essay, which all, in different ways, make fidelity to the source text their primary aim. “As a careful reading of Truffaut reveals, however,” states Leitch, “the quest for fidelity is always a fetish” (153). The BBC classic serials exemplify, for Leitch, Truffaut’s notion of “*scenarists’ films*: created not by producers or directors but by screenwriters” (172). The BBC’s elevation of its screenwriters above directors and producers is both the cause and effect of its “fetish[ization] of the original text’s dialogue, which is replicated as fully and literally as possible” (172). Leitch has in mind *Brideshead Revisited*, which used, according to director

Sturridge, “[Waugh]’s dialogue almost verbatim. Ninety-six percent of the words you hear on the screen are his” (qtd. Cardwell *Adaptation Revisited* 110). In this case, writes Leitch, “[t]he epic treatment of what had by no means been an epic novel amounts to a fetish with fidelity as comprehensiveness that would become closely identified with BBC adaptations” (174). Of course, *Brideshead* is not a BBC adaptation; nonetheless the BBC classic serial tradition is closely associated with the fidelity of comprehensiveness.

The obvious “patron author” of the BBC’s Tradition of Quality is not, happily, Evelyn Waugh but Jane Austen (Leitch 175). Her “unrivaled mastery of domestic comedy that can be scaled down for television viewers” (175), her prestigious Great Tradition status plus her Englishness, make her works ideal sources for the classic serial genre. Moreover, Austen adaptations lend themselves particularly well to the second BBC fetish element identified by Leitch: fidelity to the source text’s dialogue is complemented by “a carefully rendered set of period illustrations that are staged in cinematic terms but have the function of tableaux vivants, illustrations to a deluxe edition of a classic literary text” (172). This type of “heritage” adaptation, to use Andrew Higson’s term, “[transforms] buildings and grounds into deluxe landscapes[;] [a] miniseries in the Tradition of Quality,” writes Leitch, “can spend as much money for location shooting as a feature film” (175). ITV’s revolutionary *Brideshead Revisited* set the bar for classic serial adaptation in 1981, and fourteen years later the BBC rose to the challenge with *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) which, more than any other BBC adaptation, fully embodies the BBC Tradition of Quality. This “heritage adaptation” (Leitch 96) combines the obligatory faithful script with lavish interiors and exteriors. “[C]onsistently more colorful and lively” than its 1980 predecessor, it makes full use of mobile cameras, sound and lighting effects (176), in addition to well-cast attractive actors in richly coloured period garb. The six-part serial, adapted by Andrew Davies, aired in the Sunday night slot on BBC One between 24 September

and 29 October 1995. Despite its “outstanding success” with viewers (Cardwell *Adaptation Revisited* 134), it won only one of the numerous BAFTA awards for which it was nominated.¹⁸ However, the man who put Fitzwilliam Darcy in a wet shirt became a household name.

The 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* is, writes Cardwell, “generally perceived as being ‘faithful’ to its source book” (*Adaptation Revisited* 135). It was, however, the perceived “infidelities” which garnered Davies a great deal of positive and negative attention, particularly the brief “invented” scene in which Colin Firth as Darcy strips down to his white shirt and trousers and dives into a pond. This scene alone was almost entirely responsible for “the Dionysian frenzy,” as film scholar Erica Sheen puts it, “that pursued actor Colin Firth out of this production and beyond” (22) (presumably including some gay men in addition to the “millions of otherwise sensible women” who “lusted after” Darcy [*Radio Times*, qtd. *Adaptation Revisited* 155]). Fidelity critics, however, were not impressed. “[L]oyal readers of the [Austen] texts will more readily forgive omissions than inventions,” wrote David Nokes in the *Times Literary Supplement*, “and he was referring to what he saw as an unforgivable invention,” comments Sheen. “In the book Mr Darcy does not strip down to his frilly shirt, plunge into a green sun-dappled pool, to emerge spiritually reborn on the other side, like an Adonis from an aftershave advert,” objected Nokes (qtd. 22). In fact, Darcy does not emerge from the pond or even surface from his dive; we next see him striding across a field in a damp shirt. “There had been two other moments of a similar kind,” writes Sheen (22). In one Darcy gets out of the bath – any nudity tastefully precluded by a servant with a robe – and watches Elizabeth from the window; in the other, he “splash[es] himself with water after spending the night writing to her after she has refused him” (22). Nokes is representative here of fidelity critics who attacked Davies for daring to tamper with the Austen formula. Sheen asserts: “Nokes’s own idea of adaptation is to find

¹⁸ Jennifer Ehle (Elizabeth Bennet) won for Best Actress.

appropriate contemporary registers for a novel's moral force, and this kind of thing, apparently, just doesn't fit the bill" (22). Fidelity critics, as Brian McFarlane observes, tend "pointlessly [to] chastis[e]" adaptations "for not reproducing their sense of the original text" (196). But controversy makes for compelling publicity, so *Pride and Prejudice* and its discontents made Davies highly conspicuous in the British press and ever so slightly notorious.

If the BBC classic serial epitomizes Truffaut's *scenarists' film* and Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* epitomizes the BBC classic serial, if it is, as Cardwell describes it, "an archetype of a television genre at its height" (*Adaptation Revisited* 139), then it is remarkable that Leitch only mentions this scenarist once, in passing, three chapters after his analysis of the BBC Tradition of Quality. Writing about film auteurs, Leitch asks: "What determines who is to count—director Simon Langton? screenwriter Andrew Davies? novelist Jane Austen? the BBC?—as the auteur of the 1995 miniseries *Pride and Prejudice*?" (237). Given Davies's monopoly on adaptation in Britain for the last two decades it is worth investigating his work in greater detail, particularly since he has adapted a number of queer source texts beginning with Sarah Waters's novel *Tipping the Velvet*.

The undisputed British champion of adaptation began his television career writing kitchen sink drama for *The Wednesday Play* and *Play for Today* in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1987 he gave up a lectureship in English Literature at the University of Warwick to write full-time. Since then he has been tremendously prolific in his adaptation of classics and contemporary texts for the small and big screens. A glance at Davies's *curriculum vitae* reveals not only how productive he has been but that the classic serial is alive and well. In the last fifteen years alone he has adapted *Middlemarch* twice (2009, 1994); *Little Dorrit* (2008); *Sense and Sensibility* (2008); *A Room with a View* (2007); *Fanny Hill* (2007); *Northanger Abbey* (2007); *The Diary of a Nobody* (2007); *Bleak House* (2005); *He Knew He Was Right* (2004); *Daniel Deronda* (2002);

Doctor Zhivago (2002); *Othello* (2001); *The Way We Live Now* (2001); *Wives and Daughters* (1999); *Vanity Fair* (1998); *Emma* (1996); *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1996); and *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) for television. This list is incomplete without Davies's non-classic serial adaptations, which include *Sleep With Me* (2008); *The Line of Beauty* (2006); *Falling* (2005); *Tipping the Velvet* (2002); *Take a Girl Like You* (2000); *A Rather English Marriage* (1998); *Wilderness* (1996); and *The Final Cut* (1995); as well as the television film *Affinity* (2008); film adaptations like *The Tailor of Panama* (2001) and *Circle of Friends* (1995); his work, with others, on both *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004); and his recent film adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited* (2008), which garnered much comparison with its ITV predecessor. Clearly comfortable in a number of genres, Davies has also written several original scripts including two series of a situation comedy (imdb.com).¹⁹

Davies's lengthy career has earned him five BAFTA awards, three Writers Guild Awards, three Broadcasting Press Guild awards, an Emmy, a BAFTA Fellowship and a handful of miscellaneous trophies. In her book *Andrew Davies* (2005), Sarah Cardwell states that Davies's name has now become a "recognisable trademark" (16); although she doesn't specify of what, she seems to be suggesting that it is the trademark of a particularly English brand of "quality" television. Borrowing from auteurist film theory, Cardwell, in a move that would have undoubtedly irked Truffaut, "strongly impl[ies]" that Davies has enough creative independence over an adaptation to exercise a distinctive style for which he "ought to be considered as the (an) author of the 'performance work' – that is, the finished television programme – and not just of the screenplay" (*Andrew Davies* 33 n.23). Her claims for Davies's authorship flatly contradict

¹⁹ Davies is famously possessive of his scriptwriting work. *The Independent* reported that he "threw a small fit" when he learned that Emma Thompson would be adapting *Sense and Sensibility*. "They didn't even ask me," Davies tells John Walsh. "I didn't ask to play the female lead in *Howards End* [1992]. So what's she doing nicking my classic adaptations?" (Walsh).

Truffaut, who states uncompromisingly in “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema”: “I do not believe in the peaceful coexistence of the ‘Tradition of Quality’ and an ‘auteur’s cinema’” (qtd. Leitch 152). Nonetheless it was Andrew Davies who rose to prominence following the success of *Pride and Prejudice*, not director Simon Langton, and Davies who became such a popular brand that in November 2002 his BBC *Daniel Deronda* was scheduled to air in the same slot as his ITV *Doctor Zhivago*.²⁰

However, some commentators suggest that Davies is a victim of his own success. Sarah Vine, the Arts Editor of *The Times*, argues, in an article tellingly titled “A night in at the Andrew Davies strip joint,” that “costume drama [is] losing its allure” because Davies is “a monopoly provider of scripts.” Comparing Davies’s *Daniel Deronda* and his *Doctor Zhivago*, Vine writes:

Both contained all the now compulsory ingredients: dark, handsome leading men; pouting, extravagantly ringleted girls on the verge of womanhood; strife, financial and political; candlelit settings and swirling snowstorms. And yet both were strangely lacking in depth, only just skimming the surface of the two novels’ more complex themes. (Vine)

Davies’s monopoly on adaptation has, for Vine, resulted in a homogenization of classic serials, the same kind of “extraordinary flattening” that Paul Kerr found with adaptations in the 1970s and early 1980s. Kerr suggested that it was the networks’ heavy reliance on nineteenth-century novels as source texts – the repeated adaptation of Victorian plots, Victorian characters, Victorian settings, Victorian dialogue and Great Tradition cultural status – which erased the “profound formal differences” that Raymond Williams identified between those novels (11). But Vine provides a simpler explanation for the similarities between Davies’s adaptation of George Eliot’s

²⁰ It was only after ITV issued a public plea that the BBC moved their Davies adaptation from their Sunday night classic serial slot to Saturday night (Kirby).

Daniel Deronda (1876), set in Victorian England, and Davies's adaptation of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1957), set during the 1917 Russian Revolution. "The real problem here," asserts Vine, "is that sex is poking its smutty little nose everywhere, even where it's not really necessary." Davies, writes Vine, is in "such demand" because "[h]e has a proven talent for 'saucing up' otherwise demure material, for introducing 'contemporary' sensibilities – by which programmers mean sex – into a classical setting." She continues:

It's a formula that has so far won ratings. But like all winning formulas, in the end it becomes predictable. In *Deronda* and *Zhivago*, the simmering tensions that had us endlessly coming back for more in 1995's *Pride and Prejudice* now play like a tired hooker turning her umpteenth trick. If the characters are not actually having sex, they're either pre-coital or post-coital, all sweaty cheeks and bruised lips. (Vine)

Vine finds particularly problematic the addition of sex at the expense of "[Eliot's] social discourse" and "[Pasternak's] philosophising." "Do the programmers really think we're too thick to cope with anything that doesn't involve the exchange of bodily fluids?" she asks. "The excitement of period adaptations lies in the *anticipation* of sex, the repressed passions, the smouldering undercurrents. Persist in showing us the money shot and it takes on all the allure of a neon-lit doorway in Soho" (Vine; original emphasis).

There is a parallel to be drawn between Vine and David Nokes, who stated that "loyal readers of the texts will more readily forgive omissions than inventions" (qtd. Sheen 22). Nokes objects to the three scenes Davies added to *Pride and Prejudice* on the grounds that they did not occur "[i]n the book," a textbook example of fidelity discourse of the kind that "derives," in part, "from the a priori valorization of historical *anteriority* and *seniority*: the assumption, that is, that *older* arts are necessarily *better* arts" (Stam 4; original emphasis). Vine, however, identifies a broader trend, a formula ("simmering tensions") successful when it first appeared in *Pride and*

Prejudice but one that loses its appeal, she feels, as it recurs with increasing explicitness. It is a different magnitude of fidelity discourse: Davies is “unfaithful” to the entire genre of nineteenth-century “classic” novels, which have no sex in them. The increasing substitution of sex for “philosophising” frustrates her: “Just because viewers like a bit of tawdry fun now and then doesn’t mean they can’t appreciate something a little classier” (Vine). By inventing sex scenes and omitting philosophizing, Davies, implies Vine, devalues the cultural capital that “classic” novels have acquired by virtue of their anteriority and seniority.

“What is the logical next step?” asks Vine. “I’m sure Mr Davies can see all sorts of possibilities in a heroine named Fanny Price.” This is a rather curious statement, given that Fanny Price is, arguably, Jane Austen’s most pallid and disliked protagonist. Either Vine meant that Davies could find ways to “sauce up” even sickly Fanny Price, or she meant Fanny Hill, the heroine of John Cleland’s erotic novel *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748). More likely the latter, since Vine continues: “Even that might be too subtle for him, given his last dramatic outing – *Tipping the Velvet*.” In adapting Waters’s novel, suggests Vine, “Davies must have faced the unfamiliar challenge of trying to keep the production from becoming too pornographic.” In fact, Davies did go on to adapt *Fanny Hill* for BBC Four in 2007. If Davies’s name had become a “recognisable trademark” (Cardwell *Andrew Davies* 16) of “quality” television adaptations in 2005, by 2002 he had already earned a reputation as a purveyor of smut, a saucer-upper of classics. This reputation, as we will see, played a significant role in his promotion of *Tipping the Velvet*.

Part 5. Costume drama and the policing of sexuality

The classic serial genre has long been associated, like the French Tradition of Quality for Truffaut, “with aesthetic and political conservatism” (Leitch 176). Deborah Cartmell writes: “It

seems to be the case that ‘classic’ adaptations, on the whole, tend to ‘depoliticize’ the ‘original’ literary text; the assumption is that if it is a ‘classic,’ then it must uphold right-wing values” (24). This broad assumption includes the related position, illustrated by Sarah Vine’s condemnation of *Daniel Deronda* and *Doctor Zhivago*, that “classic” novels do not contain sex. Indeed, as the reception to Patricia Rozema’s film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999) demonstrated, it is sexuality in costume drama that is policed even more stringently than politics.

Jane Austen, whose six novels have been adapted for television and cinema thirteen times in the last twenty years, has been repeatedly claimed by these discourses of conservatism. Part of her appeal for programmers, not to mention her status as BBC Tradition of Quality “patron author” (Leitch 175), arises from the perception that she is “a conservative literary icon” (Cartmell 24). Both Shakespeare and Austen, states Cartmell, “are identified by the word ‘heritage,’ and screen adaptations of their work tend to perpetuate their assumed conservative ideology in spite of critical readings which suggest otherwise” (24). Challenges to Austen’s “assumed conservative ideology” are not well-received by either Janeites or fidelity critics (frequently one and the same). It wasn’t Andrew Davies, however, who “[saw] all sorts of possibilities in a heroine named Fanny Price” (Vine); it was Canadian lesbian director Rozema who anticipated Sarah Vine’s facetious comment.

Of the three major innovations that Rozema introduced to *Mansfield Park*, perhaps the most obvious was her treatment of Austen’s protagonist. Drawing on Austen’s early writings (the *Juvenilia*), writes Mireia Aragay, Rozema “transform[s] [Fanny]... from a sickly, timid lover of literature into a spirited young woman who is a writer in her own right,” a writer explicitly associated with Jane Austen herself (181). Rozema also recontextualizes Austen’s novel to foreground Sir Thomas Bertram’s dependence on slavery in Antigua and to interrogate British colonial history, a move which drew a great deal of criticism from scholars and film reviewers

alike. However, as Julianne Pidduck asserts, it was the film's "daring sexuality [which] stirred up even more controversy" (*Contemporary Costume Film* 39). Into a "sexually charged atmosphere" (*Costume Film* 40), Rozema threw in a scene in which Fanny (Frances O'Connor) finds Maria Bertram (Victoria Hamilton) and Henry Crawford (Alessandro Nivola) in bed together, and incorporated two "notorious 'lesbian' scenes" between Fanny and Mary Crawford (Embeth Davidtz) (Aragay 181). If fidelity critics objected to Davies's pond scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, they raised their voices in a "chorus of disapproval denouncing Rozema's *Mansfield Park* as a travesty and a betrayal of Austen's novel" (Aragay 178).

While all three invented scenes provoked a "critical outcry" (Pidduck *Costume Film* 40), the scene with Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford is far more explicit than the "lesbian" scenes; although partially concealed by blankets, Maria and Henry are obviously naked and having sex when Fanny stumbles across them. The homoerotic scenes are more subtle: in the first of these, Mary puts her arms around Fanny's waist as they rehearse a play "to show Edmund [Bertram] what he is missing by not taking part in the performance" (Aragay 183 n.9). Mary flirts with both Fanny and Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller) in this scene, but her goal is to titillate Edmund, who announces, after watching Mary's fingers provocatively circling Fanny's waist, that he has decided to take the role in the play after all. In the second scene Mary undresses a rainsoaked Fanny, pausing repeatedly to admire her body. "So lovely," muses Mary. "Tomorrow evening the ballroom shall be lit solely by your beauty." Lifting Fanny's arms, she adds: "You do have a fine form, my dear. I've no doubt why Edmund delights so in your company." Just as Mary finishes unfastening Fanny's corset the scene cuts to a close-up of Mary sensually playing the harp for Fanny.

Renowned Austen scholar Claudia Johnson wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* that many viewers "denounced Rozema's movie on the grounds that there's no sex in Jane Austen, a

conviction,” asserts Johnson, “egregiously inapt with respect to *Mansfield Park*, which is suffused with frustrated, illicit, wayward, or polymorphous sexuality” (qtd. Aragay 181).

According to Pidduck, the film is similarly characterized by an “economy of desires unspoken [which] gestures to an out-of-field polymorphous sexual expression” (*Costume Film* 41). It is this sexual expression, far more than the brief “lesbian frisson,” which gives Rozema’s film a queer sensibility (40); indeed, one has the impression that any combination of the film’s young, attractive, idle rich characters could end up in bed together. For fidelity critics, however, this “generally lascivious atmosphere” (40) was “unfaithful” to Austen and therefore reason enough for condemning *Mansfield Park*.

Astutely observing that this chorus of disapproval included “[s]cores of viewers who gasped with pleasure at a glimpse of Colin Firth’s extra-textual derriere in the BBC’s *Pride and Prejudice*” (qtd. Aragay 181), Johnson hints at a double standard of fidelity criticism to which viewers held Rozema. Those self-identified fans of Austen adaptations who denounced *Mansfield Park* surely must have contributed to the respective successes of *Pride and Prejudice* and Ang Lee’s *Sense and Sensibility* (both 1995), despite the “infidelities” of these adaptations. The latter, written by Emma Thompson, is “remarkably ‘unfaithful’ to the source text,” contends Aragay (180). In particular, it “romancifi[es]” Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, and, like *Pride and Prejudice*, depicts a “final celebratory double wedding” (180). The final chapters of Austen’s novels “do not dramatize,” writes Julian North, “but summarily report the marriages of their heroes and heroines and are concerned, rather, with uncomfortable moral reckonings and glimpses into the future, happy or otherwise” (qtd. Aragay 183 n.14). When Andrew Davies and Emma Thompson incorporated lavish wedding scenes into their respective adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, however, they provoked “no objections on the grounds of ‘infidelity’” (Aragay 183). Rozema’s *Mansfield Park*, however, “much in the spirit” of these

final chapters (Aragay 183 n.13), was not, like *Sense and Sensibility*, “an unqualified box office success” (180).

Deborah Cartmell observes that the “‘fidelity debate’... takes a different form insofar as production values of film adaptations are seen to smother the potentially radical critiques embedded within the original text” (25). When it comes to sexuality in Austen adaptations, the dramatization of non-normative, extramarital or queer desires is much more likely to be lambasted by proponents of conservatism for being “unfaithful” to Austen. While some fidelity critics, like David Nokes, complained about the sexualization of Darcy, heteronormative “infidelities,” on the other hand, are enthusiastically embraced and celebrated by Janeites for their “faithful” representation of the “spirit” or “essence” of Austen’s work. “It seems,” writes Cartmell, “that the film industry needs to confirm Austen and Shakespeare as belonging to ‘British heritage’; accordingly, they must be marketed as conservative icons” (25). This ideological marketing is reinforced by the financial success of films like *Sense and Sensibility* and the failure of *Mansfield Park*, which serves as a warning to other filmmakers who perceive Austen as a “radical proto-feminist” (Aragay 182).

This reputation for sexual conservatism extends, of course, to the adaptation of other nineteenth-century novels, leading Julianne Pidduck to observe that “costume drama is almost coterminous with heterosexual romance” (*Costume Film* 139). Nonetheless, Pidduck identifies a significant body of costume dramas in which a “complex choreography of desires also extends to same-sex romantic friendships... and non-normative ‘queer’ masculinities” (139). In Pidduck’s list some of these costume dramas are adaptations of “classic” novels (*Mansfield Park*, *The Bostonians* [1984], Forster’s *A Room with a View* [1986] and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* [1991]); some are adaptations based on biographies (*Carrington* [1995] and *Wilde* [1997]); and

some are original screenplays (*Daughters of the Dust* [1991]). But they are all films, with one exception: the only television costume drama is *Brideshead Revisited*.

In attributing the Waugh adaptation to the BBC instead of ITV, Thomas Leitch mistakenly credits the BBC with initiating the queer costume drama “White Flannel” trend of the 1980s. Pidduck groups *Brideshead Revisited* with three films that followed in the same decade – *Another Country* (1984); *A Month in the Country* (1987); and *Maurice* (1987) – which “represent one prevalent ‘White Flannel’ formula” (139). “Here, depictions of homosexual youths set in Edwardian Oxbridge and public-school settings rest on stereotypes of the English upper classes,” she writes, but they do “[explore] explicit same-sex desires” (139). Some queer commentators, like reviewer John Lyttle and avant-garde filmmaker Derek Jarman, have found the White Flannel formula particularly problematic for its endorsement of costume drama conservatism. “John Lyttle attacks a *Brideshead*-style conservative ‘heritage’ homosexuality,” writes Pidduck; “he claims that this legacy situates ‘contentious’ sexualities safely in the past” (139). Jarman, an important figure in the New Queer Cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, a movement which resisted all notions of “positive” imagery, “bitterly lambasted the ‘*Brideshead* recidivism’ of ‘heritage cinema,’ reserving a special scorn for the ‘revival of Empire epics’ such as *Brideshead* and *Chariots of Fire* [1981]” (145). His own costume dramas like *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Edward II* (1991), “at odds with *Maurice*’s bourgeois humanism,” make use of “non-realist aesthetics and [a] queer epistemology of the past” (145).

Despite their “heritage conservatism,” however, the White Flannel works brought queer identities to a mainstream audience. Pidduck contends that these films are important “as popular gay works of the Thatcher period” (143); *Brideshead Revisited* is particularly significant for its role as an accessible queerly-inflected television adaptation. The BBC article “Get this filth off our screens” states: “*The Jewel in the Crown* and *Brideshead Revisited* brought openly gay

characters ‘Sophie’ Dixon, Sebastian Flyte and Anthony Blanche to a mass audience, as well as others like Charles Ryder and Ronald Merrick whose sexuality was more complex and ambiguous.”²¹ Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, writing from an American perspective in 2006, also make the case for the small screen: “Arguably, television has done a much better job of bringing queer lives and queer issues to mainstream America, especially to viewers who would never go out to see a Hollywood film about queers (let alone an independent one)” (263). ITV similarly intervened in the early 1980s in Britain.

The 1980s saw not only *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Jewel in the Crown* on ITV but the Australian drama *Prisoner* with its numerous lesbian characters, which ITV broadcast as *Prisoner: Cell Block H*. The BBC’s forays into lesbian representation during this decade included, besides Nellie Keane in *Tenko*, the “manipulative vamp” Dr Rose Marie in *A Very Peculiar Practice* (1986-88), badly written “chapstick lesbian” Cecily Meldrum in *You Rang, M’Lord?* (1988) and a “tongues-and-all kiss” between Kate Buffery and Imogen Stubbs in an adaptation of D. H. Lawrence’s novel *The Rainbow* (1988) (Powell). But the BBC made a significant contribution to lesbian visibility in 1990 with *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the first British television production to feature a lesbian protagonist.

My next chapter will treat *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as an extended case study of lesbian translation from page to screen. Jeanette Winterson adapted her own debut novel (1985) for broadcast on BBC Two (1990); not only did the three-part serial feature a lesbian protagonist, it was also the first British television production to boast a lesbian sex scene. In this chapter I examine how Winterson translates the political dimensions of her novel for a mainstream television audience. There are both gains and losses in the translation from page to screen;

²¹ Ronald Merrick is the main protagonist of *The Jewel in the Crown*, in which “Sophie” Dixon plays a minor role; Charles Ryder is the protagonist of *Brideshead Revisited* in which Sebastian Flyte plays a significant and Anthony Blanche a minor role.

Winterson, I argue, makes a “Faustian bargain” (Wolfe and Roripaugh 43) of her own in order to challenge the norm of compulsory heterosexuality.

The following three chapters focus on Sarah Waters’s work. Chapter Three investigates Waters’s first novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and its complex intertextual relationship with Andrew Davies’s 2002 BBC Two serialized version. In this chapter I explore the tensions between what Judith Butler calls “disruptive” and “domesticated” cultural repetitions (*Gender Trouble* 176-7). The BBC serial provoked a massive response from the British press and inspired two further cultural adaptations, one in a tabloid newspaper and one on a comedy television programme. I argue that the dominant response to *Tipping the Velvet* was an impulse to domesticate non-normative instances of gender and sexuality and I trace the different ways in which dominant cultural forces carry out this domestication.

Chapter Four examines Waters’s third novel, *Fingersmith* (2002), in relation to Peter Ransley’s 2005 adaptation for BBC One. In this chapter I return to Jane Austen in her capacity as the BBC Tradition of Quality “patron author” (Leitch 175). While the novel takes a Victorian sensation novel as its main intertext, I contend that the adaptation situates itself amid the genre of television and film adaptations of Austen’s novels. It does so, I argue, in order to interrogate the notion of Austen as a “conservative icon” (Cartmell 24) and ultimately to queer the Austen adaptation genre itself.

To conclude this study I address the television film of Waters’s second novel *Affinity* (1999) which was also adapted by Andrew Davies and which aired on ITV in 2008. In this chapter I examine how the adaptation depicts the disruptive lesbian at the centre of the text. In Waters’s novel this character effortlessly crosses lines of gender and class in order to deceive characters in the diegesis as well as readers of the text. By casting an actress who convincingly passes as a man, the adaptation, I argue, effectively translates the novel’s destabilization of

Victorian hierarchies. In the scene in which the gentleman is unmasked and revealed to be a lady's maid, moreover, the adaptation creates a powerful audiovisual transgendered moment which dissolves the boundaries between male and female, spiritual and material, and most importantly, master and servant. This chapter considers, finally, how *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *Affinity* have contributed to lesbian visibility on British television.

Chapter 2

A Case Study of Lesbian Adaptation: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Part 1. Introduction

In Zadie Smith's critically- and popularly-acclaimed first novel *White Teeth* (2000), heterosexual matriarch Joyce Chalfen is "utterly fixated" by lesbians Neena and Maxine (348).

"[S]omething confused Joyce about gay women," the narrator explains:

It wasn't that she disliked them. She just couldn't *comprehend* them. Joyce understood why men would love men; she had devoted her life to loving men, so she knew how it felt. But the idea of women loving women was so far from Joyce's cognitive understanding of the world that she couldn't *process* it. The idea of them. She just didn't *get* it. God knows, she'd made the effort. During the seventies she dutifully read *The Well of Loneliness* and *Our Bodies Ourselves* (which had a small chapter); more recently she had read *and* watched *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, but none of it did her any good. She wasn't offended by it. She just couldn't see the *point*. (348; original emphasis)

Joyce's lesbian textual experience is limited, in the 1970s, to Radclyffe Hall's dreary 1928 novel of sexual inversion and a 1973 non-fiction feminist publication by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. The latter both appear outdated in comparison to Jeanette Winterson's 1985 lesbian *Bildungsroman*: not only has Joyce consumed *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* "more recently," she has "read *and* watched" it (348; original emphasis). By the time Smith is writing, therefore, Winterson's text has gained enough cultural currency to represent the contemporary "lesbian text" in Joyce Chalfen's failed attempt to "get" lesbianism; moreover, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* functions in Smith's novel as a lesbian signifier equally as a novel and as a

television adaptation. For Joyce, however, there is little difference between the literary and the televisual *Oranges*, an indistinctness which allows *White Teeth* to collapse the significant differences between the two texts. It is these differences that I investigate in this chapter.

My objective is to treat *Oranges* as an extended case study of lesbian adaptation from the queer and feminist perspective I identified in the previous chapter. There, my survey of film adaptation studies revealed that major adaptation theorists Thomas Leitch, Brian McFarlane and Robert Stam are primarily concerned with the mechanics of translating a text from one medium to another. These theorists avoid the evaluation of adaptations because they seek, as McFarlane and Stam do, to reverse the prevalent trend – in newspaper reviews, in scholarly writing – of fidelity criticism which always privileges the source text, or because they are interested, as is Leitch, in more esoteric questions of adaptation. I argued, therefore, that adaptation theory needs, on the one hand, to accommodate political analysis while, on the other, political analyses of adaptations need to avoid making moralistic judgments about adaptations. Scholarly critics who eschew the “discourse of loss” (Stam 4) and the tropes of fidelity criticism will be able to investigate the changes made to a source text in an adaptation and their effects without simply and “pointlessly chastising a film for not reproducing their sense of the original text” (McFarlane 196).

There are some feminist adaptation scholars, such as Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell, who have made important contributions to the field, and some queer film scholars, such as Julianne Pidduck, who write on film, including adaptations, from a feminist perspective, but none of these sets out to theorize adaptation more broadly. I am not proposing a unified theory of adaptation myself, but in order to analyze the changes made to lesbian and bisexual women from page to screen I require a vocabulary more specific to queer identities than terms provided by any of the scholars mentioned above. In this chapter, then, I read *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to establish a number of concepts specific to the adaptation of lesbian characters.

Although it precedes Waters's work by a decade, Winterson's text is a useful starting place for this project for a number of reasons. It was the first television adaptation on the BBC to feature a lesbian protagonist, and as the passage from *White Teeth* demonstrates, it is widely recognized by mainstream audiences as a lesbian text.²² Secondly, it appeared during the period of positive lesbian cinema discussed by Judith Halberstam and can be productively compared to and contrasted with other adaptations in this genre. Finally, it was evoked twelve years later when *Tipping the Velvet* aired on the same channel: Gerard Gilbert's review in *The Independent*, for example, is titled "Oysters are not the only bivalve." Since *Oranges* has become recognizable as "the" lesbian text it offers an obvious point of comparison with Waters's novel and its subsequent adaptation, both of which I examine in detail in the following chapter. In this chapter I ask what "Faustian bargain" (Wolfe and Roripaugh 43) did Winterson make in order to get her own novel on BBC television? How, in particular, did she translate her compelling lesbian protagonist? I argue that the serialized *Oranges* brings Winterson's protagonist in line with the televisual conventions of femininity in order to retain the prevalent social critique in Winterson's novel. The erasure of the source character's masculine-coded identity is necessary to maintain the adaptation's appeal for mainstream BBC audiences.

Part 2. The politics and pedigree of Winterson's novel

Described as "modernist" by Margaret Marshment and Julia Hallam (49), with its "non-linear plot, interspersed with fables and meditations" (41), *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* tells the very loosely autobiographical story of Jeanette, who grows up in small-town Lancashire under the care of her adopted parents, a reticent father and a domineering evangelical mother. When

²² References to Winterson's title appear in other queer-themed texts; in an episode of ITV's *Bad Girls*, for example, Nikki Wade takes a copy of *Oranges* from the prison library and suggestively hands it to Helen Stuart.

Jeanette falls in love with a girl called Melanie, Jeanette's mother and the pastor of their church publicly denounce and humiliate the teenagers. The congregation subsequently holds an exorcism to rid Jeanette of her "demon" (*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 105); her mother throws her out of the house when Jeanette ultimately refuses to repent. The narrative ends with Jeanette's return home for a partial reconciliation with her mother.

Oranges was already popular with queer readers when it won the Whitbread Award for First Novel in 1985. This literary prize, which signified "unusual recognition from the British literary establishment for a lesbian novel" (Marshment and Hallam 41), conferred a particular "cultural status" (Kerr 11) on Winterson's debut effort. The award, observes Hilary Hinds, "became an increasingly important part of Winterson's pedigree," one that "greatly augmented" the association of her writing with the concept of "quality" (155). In the previous chapter I examined the role that cultural status plays in the classic serial tradition of television adaptations; Paul Kerr suggests that it is as crucial to the source text as its plot and characters, and that the BBC in particular was drawn to nineteenth-century canonical novels for precisely this reason. In this case the Whitbread Award conferred "quality" status on the novel, giving it a claim to "high art" and thus making it more appealing for BBC drama executives as a potential source text. When Winterson adapted her own novel for the BBC, therefore, most reviewers were confident, suggests Hinds, that she was "simply translating her talents from one area of high culture into another: from 'Literature' into a television equivalent of 'art cinema': namely, 'art television'" (160). The eponymous three-part serial aired to an audience of six million viewers during prime-time in January 1990 on BBC Two, and was repeated that summer. It was well-received by critics and viewers alike, and went on to win three of the six BAFTAs for which it was

nominated, including the prestigious Best Actress and Best Drama awards.²³ Many commentators, as Hinds notes, suggested that these film and television awards were the “natural sequel to the novel having won the Whitbread” (160).

The adaptation’s success marked a significant cultural intervention in the homophobic political atmosphere of the time. In 1989, as Marshment and Hallam observe, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government introduced the Local Government Act which “prohibited local councils in Britain from funding organizations and/or projects deemed to be ‘promoting homosexuality’” (49-50 n.2). Although this part of the Act, which came to be known simply as Clause or Section 28, “only applied to local government bodies,” they write, “it created a climate of paranoia around gay issues that made many other institutions over-cautious” (41). The BBC, however, defied the government’s homophobic attitude by airing, the following year, both *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Portrait of a Marriage* (1990), which explored Vita Sackville-West’s tempestuous affair with Violet Keppel Trefusis.

The television serialization of *Oranges* was directed by Beeban Kidron and produced by Phillippa Giles, two women who headed a production team with an “[exceptionally high] proportion of women in key decision-making roles” (Marshment and Hallam 50 n.3). These included production designer Cecilia Brereton, casting director Michelle Guish, and composer Rachel Portman. Marshment and Hallam contend that the members of this production team “were aware of the sexual politics of their project, and sought to make their production a positive contribution to feminist/lesbian politics” (42). Winterson, too, makes it clear that she understood the ideological stakes of the adaptation; in the introduction to her published screenplay she writes

²³ Three of the performances in *Oranges* were nominated for Best Actress, including that of Emily Aston who played the protagonist as a child, and that of Charlotte Coleman who played her as a teenager. The award ultimately went to Geraldine McEwan in her role as the mother.

that *Oranges* “challenges the virtues of the home, the power of the church and the supposed normality of heterosexuality” (Great Moments in Aviation *and* Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit: *Two Filmscripts* 81). She goes on to state: “I was always clear that it would do. I would rather not have embarked on the project than see it toned down in any way” (81). But what exactly constitutes “toning down” for Winterson? While the adaptation takes an unapologetically queer-positive and feminist stance, it alters Jess’s identity enough to sell lesbianism to a mainstream Wednesday night BBC audience in a homophobic political climate.

Part 3. Strategies of adaptation and norms of gender

There is little written by film adaptation theorists specifically about the adaptation of queer novels, characters or issues, but Thomas Leitch’s sophisticated strategies of adaptation provide a useful starting point for my analysis. Leitch asserts that “[b]y far the most common approach to adaptation is *adjustment*, whereby a promising earlier text is rendered more suitable for filming by one or more of a wide variety of strategies” (98). One of the ten major strategies to make up his detailed taxonomy of adaptation, adjustment consists, at the most basic level, of the *compression* of lengthy novels and the *expansion* of short stories to render source texts more suitable for filming. Adjustment also includes *updating*, *superimposition*, and *correction*, substrategies which imply more ideologically-motivated – perhaps in most but not all cases financially-motivated – variations. Updating “guarantee[s] [the] relevance [of canonical classics] to the more immediate concerns of the target audience” (100). Correction similarly seeks to broaden the (commercial) appeal of films for viewers by making changes primarily to the plots of source texts. “Countless Hollywood adaptations have improved their sources by providing improbably happy endings,” writes Leitch (100). Other more subtle or implicit corrections include “toning down [a source’s] language or juicing it up” (100), and in the case of

Shakespearean adaptations, casting women in female roles instead of boys (100). These kinds of decisions no doubt originate with the film's director or producer; superimposition, on the other hand, takes into account external ideological pressures. Here Leitch examines how movie stars, for example, have affected films by demanding larger roles (100). He also looks at more subtle influences, including the demands of a particular studio or house style (101), "budgetary restraints... which might be said to constitute an anti-house style" (102), and finally how government censors like the Hays Office have affected the process of adaptation (101). "Industry censors on the watch for sexual innuendo, racial slurs, and unpunished infractions of the law had a decisive impact on the shape of such diverse adaptations as *Scarface* [1932], *Gone with the Wind* [1939], and *Mildred Pierce* [1945]," asserts Leitch (101). This last type of superimposition has important applications for adaptations of queer-themed source texts.²⁴

Winterson's screenplay broadly adjusts her novel in the sense that the source text "is rendered more suitable for filming" (98): she expands her 170-page short novel into a three-hour serial while compressing its fables and fairy tales into three magic realist or dreamlike sequences which respectively open each episode. Beyond that, the changes she makes are to characters, an aspect of adaptation to which Leitch devotes little space. Leitch's description of correction focuses mainly on changes to what Brian McFarlane, borrowing from Barthes, calls the *cardinal functions* of the novel. "[W]hen a major cardinal function is deleted or altered in the film version of a novel, (e.g., [.] to provide a happy rather than a sombre ending)," writes McFarlane, "this is apt to occasion critical outrage and popular disaffection" (14). Typically, the American film *Love* (1927), "in which Greta Garbo as Anna Karenina decides not to kill herself" (Leitch 100), alters a

²⁴ When Adrian Scott and John Paxton adapted Richard Brooks's novel *The Brick Foxhole* (1945), for example, which revolved around the homophobic murder of the homosexual "Mr Edwards," they preempted official censors by "eliminat[ing] all references to homosexuality," writes James Naremore, "emphasizing instead the theme of race hatred" (115-6). The film adaptation, *Crossfire* (1947), directed by Edward Dmytryk, therefore explored anti-Semitism rather than homophobia.

major cardinal function of Tolstoy's source novel. The most relevant example of correction, therefore, that Leitch gives is one that he explores in greater detail under *liberation*, a substrategy of *celebration*. Most films based on plays by Shakespeare, Leitch points out, cast women in the female roles instead of boys. Some adaptations "can pose as [liberations] of material the original text had to suppress or repress," writes Leitch (98). "The implicit rationale for these changes is that they present the stories liberated from the restrictions forced on Shakespeare by the conventions of his culture and his dramaturgy" (98). This liberation extends to the reasoning that "the plays are better served that way [with women in female roles] than by the Elizabethan proscription on actresses" (98). Liberation as a broad strategy has great relevance for recent or contemporary adaptations of source texts written in homophobic cultural milieux.²⁵ It is the liberation of casting, read as a form of correction, however, that applies most directly to *Oranges*.

Leitch does not apply this type of correction beyond Shakespearean adaptations, but it clearly has implications for all adaptations which seek to correct their source texts through the embodiment of their characters. Plain, unusually ugly or fat female characters in source texts are frequently corrected by decisions to cast conventionally feminine and attractive actresses to play them. Tara Fitzgerald, for example, shows no sign of Marian Halcombe's masculine features or famous moustache in a BBC television adaptation of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1997); Ruth Wilson makes a striking governess in the BBC's *Jane Eyre* (2006); Sarah Ozeke retains the insecurities of Zadie Smith's Irie Jones but not the chubbiness that causes them in ITV's *White Teeth* (2002). Male source characters are frequently corrected as well; for example, Neil LaBute transforms weedy English academic Roland Michell into a lantern-jawed American by casting Aaron Eckhart in his 2002 film adaptation of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990); small,

²⁵ E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice*, for example, which was written in the mid-1910s and only published in 1971, was adapted in 1987.

slight Nick Guest is similarly beefed up by six-foot tall Dan Stevens in the BBC's 2006 television adaptation of Alan Hollinghurst's *Line of Beauty* (2004). These are only a handful of hundreds of similar examples and they raise some important questions. Whose interests are best served by casting these actors? At what point do cultural norms of gender dictate casting decisions? When an adaptation brings a character in line with these norms should we read it as a form of correction or can we quantify it enough to call it superimposition?

In his interrogation of fidelity discourse Robert Stam questions this particular fidelity to source characters. "Should one be faithful to the physical descriptions of the characters?" asks Stam (15). "Perhaps so," he continues, "but what if the performer who happens to fit the physical description of a character also happens to be a mediocre actor?" (15). This is not, however, simply a matter of casting a red-haired actress to play Elizabeth I or a fat actor to play Collins's corpulent Count Fosco. The examples I have given above hint at the relentless cultural pressures to make characters conform with mainstream notions of gender. Lesbian characters on television in general, as we saw in the previous chapter, are under particular pressure to conform to conventional expectations of femininity. Thus it is hardly surprising that Winterson's protagonist, the masculine-coded Jeanette in the novel, transforms into the feminine-coded Jess of the television adaptation.

Part 4. Rethinking adjustment as domestication

Marshment and Hallam identify a single broad strategy of adaptation at work in *Oranges* which we might read as a form of adjustment. By "portraying one side in the conflict positively and sympathetically and the other side negatively and unsympathetically," the adaptation, they assert, promotes a single dominant reading "designed to encourage a mainstream audience to empathize with the lesbian protagonist against the church" (43). This adjustment works most

effectively in the exorcism scene in which the evangelical Christians behave with much greater violence towards Jess than they do to Jeanette in the source text. The corresponding scene in the novel elides the eleven and a half hours “the elders... [spend] praying over [Jeanette], laying hands on [her], urging [her] to repent [her] sins before the Lord” (105), and focuses instead on the surreal or hallucinatory conversation that Jeanette, locked up for thirty-six hours without food, has with an orange demon (105-7). In the adaptation, however, the Pastor, May, Mrs Green and Jess’s mother physically restrain Jess. “My National Service training still comes in useful,” the Pastor remarks as he ties Jess’s hands and feet together with the red “cords of love” (*Two Filmscripts* 141). This scene interrogates the motives of the evangelicals who tell Jess repeatedly that they are acting out of love for her. When May says: “Think about [Jesus’s] goodness and his loving kindness,” Jess responds: “There’s no kindness here. I hate you all” (141). After she bites the Pastor’s hand he manages to gag her with a handkerchief (142). He continues to straddle her while urging her to consider the sufferings of Christ; since, as Marshment and Hallam observe, Jess is wearing her school uniform, “[s]he looks more like a child than a sexually active adolescent,” while “[t]he sect members, adrenaline clearly flowing, appear morally repugnant: four adults grunting and panting as they terrorize a young girl” (43). In this scene, then, the singlemindedness and hypocrisy of the evangelicals is not so much “improved” as exaggerated: it is adjusted in a way that might better be called, rather than correction, *amplification*.

Despite the minimal physical characterization of Jeanette in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Winterson’s translation of her protagonist closely aligns with Leitch’s notion of correction as it overlaps with liberation. In the adaptation Jess is first introduced to viewers as seven-year-old Small Jess, played by child actor Emily Aston; teenaged Jess, played by Charlotte Coleman, occasionally comments by voiceover on Small Jess’s experiences, but, aside from the opening sequence, doesn’t appear onscreen until the very end of the first episode. Both Aston and

Coleman have vivid red hair which distinguishes them from the other characters and makes them stand out from the adaptation's generally muted palette, and yet Jess, assert Marshment and Hallam, "both as child and adolescent, is visually coded as 'normal'" (48). By "normal" they mean feminine, which is signified through Aston's and Coleman's identical pageboy hairstyles and their girlish clothes. Coleman, thin and small, could pull off an androgynous or tomboy look, but the femininity of her features is emphasized by the skirts she wears. "[F]ilmic characters in adaptations," observes Robert Stam, "gain an automatic 'thickness' on the screen through bodily presence, posture, dress, and facial expression" (22). This thickness offsets the loss of "the slowly evolving textured verbal complexity developed in a novel" (22). In this case Coleman's presence offsets the loss of the nuanced butch identity that Winterson sacrifices for the adaptation.

In the novel Jeanette's masculinity is depicted most explicitly in her response to her mother's homophobic revulsion. After Jeanette's relationship with Melanie has been exposed and crushed by the church, her mother accuses her "with disgust" of "aping men" (125). Jeanette comments:

Now if I was aping men she'd have every reason to be disgusted. As far as I was concerned men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless. I had never shown the slightest feeling for them, and apart from my never wearing a skirt, saw nothing else in common between us. (126)

Jeanette's refusal to conform to conventions of femininity is signified through her clothing. As Judith Halberstam observes, clothes make up an important part of butch lesbian self-fashioning. While "butches vary wildly in their investments in masculinity," writes Halberstam, clothing plays a crucial role for butch lesbians whether they are gender dysphoric, transvestites, passing as men or simply "invested in masculine accoutrements" (120). But it is not just this refusal to wear

skirts that defines Jeanette as a butch lesbian: it is her attempt to claim a space for masculine women in the face of her mother's sexual conservatism. Her mother's accusation about aping men recalls for Jeanette "the famous incident of the man who'd come to our church with his boyfriend. At least, they were holding hands. 'Should have been a woman that one,' my mother had remarked" (126). Jeanette's mother believes in a system of compulsory heterosexuality so rigid that she can only read queerness as an accident of sex; in other words, the gay man only makes sense to her as a failed heterosexual woman. By reconfiguring his sex from male to female she restores the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality. This reconfiguration is rejected by Jeanette who contradicts her mother's remark:

This was clearly not true. At that point I had no notion of sexual politics, but I knew that a homosexual is further away from a woman than a rhinoceros. Now that I do have a number of notions about sexual politics, this early observation holds good. There are shades of meaning, but a man is a man, wherever you find it. (126)

In this way Jeanette claims a sexual identity for gay men that is distinct from heterosexual women and that parallels the identity she claims for herself as a lesbian. Her own desire for Melanie does not make her a poor copy of a heterosexual man any more than the gay man's desire for other men makes him a failed woman; and nor does wearing masculine clothing mean that she seeks to imitate men. By emphasizing her lack of interest in biological maleness ("I had never shown the slightest feeling for [men]") she makes it clear that she wears trousers to express her own female masculinity.

In the adaptation, however, Jess appears in trousers only once (Marshment and Hallam 48), a costuming decision which reinforces, along with the casting of Coleman, the coding of Jess as conventionally feminine. "Presumably," write Marshment and Hallam, "the television drama calculatedly avoided any suggestion of butch" (48). In their analysis this absence of lesbian

masculinity is a wholly positive aspect of the adaptation: they go on to observe that “[n]one of the lesbian characters, or those involved in lesbian relationships, conform visually to butch stereotypes” (48). Small Jess is not a tomboy any more than Jess’s girlfriends Melanie (Cathryn Bradshaw) and Katy (Tania Rodrigues); Melanie, with flowing blonde hair, “resembles a pre-Raphaelite heroine” (48), while the closeted Miss Jewsbury (Celia Imrie) is also feminine in appearance and dress. They suggest, therefore, that the adaptation’s “visual iconography” challenges these stereotypes and the kind of “[h]omophobic ideology [which] maintains that homosexual people are identifiable by how they look” (48). This is certainly a valid assertion, and one that Marshment and Hallam make in a queer-positive way, but in doing so they fail to acknowledge the butch identity that Winterson had to erase in order to challenge this homophobic ideology. For Marshment and Hallam, then, Winterson’s novel is, in Leitch’s words, “better served” (98) with a feminine rather than a masculine protagonist in the adaptation, and casting and costuming can therefore be read as a deliberate correction of her main character. In Leitch’s example, however, the substitution of women for young male actors in Shakespearean adaptations can be categorized as a form of feminist liberation while in this case, I contend, contrary to Marshment and Hallam, the feminization of Jess erases Jeanette’s unconventional butch identity. For this reason I would suggest that Leitch’s notions of correction and liberation do not accurately reflect the losses and gains of Winterson’s adaptation. A better term is *domestication*, which is provided by Judith Butler in her analysis of the ways in which drag performances disarticulate sex and gender.

Jeanette’s rejection of her mother’s accusation that she is “aping men” anticipates Butler’s groundbreaking claim in *Gender Trouble* (1990), published the same year that *Oranges* aired, that “the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an

origin” (175). Citing Jameson’s definition of pastiche as “blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour,” Butler writes:

The loss of the sense of “the normal”... can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when “the normal,” “the original” is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived. (176; original emphasis)

Butler uses drag to interrogate the conflation of sex and gender which are “falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (175). “*In imitating gender*,” she argues, “*drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*” (175; original emphasis). The drag performance, then, calls into question the law of heterosexual coherence by “[denaturalizing] sex and gender by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (175). Drag, therefore, is a powerful medium through which to question conservative sexual ideologies that understand sex and gender in terms of a male-female binary opposition; it is not, however, inherently subversive. Butler goes on to assert: “Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (176-7). If we replace “parodic repetitions” here with “adapted lesbian characters” we can begin to describe the translation of Jeanette as something more than simply a correction. By “disruptive” Butler means acts of identity which trouble conventional gender norms. By “domesticated” I take her to mean those that have been tamed, defused, emptied of subversive meaning. In the BBC’s *Oranges* Jeanette is physically domesticated; the erasure of her butch identity makes her less dangerous, less challenging to conventional notions of gender. Despite Winterson’s claim that she “would rather not have

embarked on the project than see it toned down in any way” (81), the adaptation has been adjusted in order to portray its protagonist less disruptively and in a more visually “sympathetic” manner (Marshment and Hallam 43).

Part 5. “Barely Butches” and femme-inization

Judith Halberstam identifies a similar process of lesbian domestication in her analysis of butch lesbian characters on film. Halberstam sets out to reclaim “[t]he history of the butch dyke in film” from “the history of cinematic homophobia” (186). She states: “Before the emergence of an independent lesbian cinema, the butch was the only way of registering sexual variance in the repressive environment of Hollywood cinema” (186). She goes on to divide butch lesbians into six rough categories, each of which “attempts to reckon with the tension between stereotype and subcultural identity” (187). Halberstam’s fifth category, “Barely Butches,” examines four films from the 1980s and early 1990s, the era of “positive” lesbian representation from independent lesbian filmmakers. “The group of lesbian films that I examine in this section were all intended as contributions to a nonpathologizing lesbian cinema made up of positive images and role model material,” she writes (217). Two of the films in this category – *Desert Hearts* (1985) and *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) – are adaptations and provide useful cultural context for *Oranges*. Halberstam contends: “Wherever a novel has been turned into a film... the characters in the novels who were coded as butch have been noticeably softened into femmey butches or soft butches” (217). Where the cinematic “dykes, bulldaggers, cross-dressers, and butch perverts” (217) of earlier decades “wear the wrong clothes, express aberrant desires, and are very often associated with clear markers of a distinctly phallic power” (186), such as guns, cigars, leather, and motorbikes, where they frequently “swagger, strut, boast, flirt with younger and more obviously feminine women; [and] often go by male moniker[s]” (186), these “barely butches” are

heavily diluted versions of those potent female masculinities. “There are only occasional hints of cross-dressing or erotic attachment to male clothing in these films,” writes Halberstam (218). More importantly, all of the barely butch characters “are recognizable as women,” a “particularly significant development in *Desert Hearts* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* because in the novels on which these films are based, both butch characters are constantly mistaken for men” (218). This observation will gain particular resonance in the following chapter, in which I analyze Nancy Astley in Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*, who is not only mistaken for a man but passes as one.

Based on the novel *Desert of the Heart* (1964) by Canadian lesbian writer Jane Rule, *Desert Hearts* tells the story of uptight English professor Vivian (Helen Shaver) who travels to Reno and ends up falling for casino worker Cay (Patricia Charbonneau). It was directed by Donna Deitch who raised the film’s entire budget herself (Pidduck “After 1980” 284). While *Desert Hearts* downplays the homophobic realities of the late 1950s, film theorist Julianne Pidduck contends that it “remains a landmark film, its very generic conventionality facilitating the popular pleasures of humming along to Patsy Cline, enjoying a lesbian courtship and an unprecedentedly explicit and lengthy sex scene” (285). Deitch’s film did well at the box office, and until Nicole Conn’s *Claire of the Moon* (1992), contends Pidduck, “no comparable popular lesbian romance emerged” (284). *Desert Hearts*, then, a “unique event in the 1980s,” writes Pidduck, “long bore the lesbian ‘burden of representation’” (286). In the film this burden of representation is embodied by two “white, slim and pretty” actresses (“After 1980” 285); Shaver plays “the ‘East Coast’ ‘femme’ blonde” to Charbonneau’s “‘Western’ (slightly butch) brunette” (285). And that is precisely the problem for Halberstam, who contrasts the novel’s Ann Childs with her “slightly butch” counterpart in the film. Halberstam writes that the film “transforms the adorable butch wild child Ann from the novel into the groomed and model-like Cay” (220). Traces of Ann’s butchness appear in the film in comparisons with her brother, her (reported)

sexual conquests and her aggressive driving. As Halberstam asserts, however, “a big car, some fancy driving, and a sassy mouth cannot do the definitional work of making Cay butch,” leading her to conclude: “The translation of this novel to film brings home the real stakes in the 1980s lesbian cinema—the eradication of the butch and her desires” (220).

Halberstam traces a similar butch erasure in the adaptation of American lesbian writer Fannie Flagg’s novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987). Flagg wrote the screenplay for *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), directed by Jon Avnet, an adaptation that won a GLAAD media award “for its positive depiction of a lesbian relationship” (Halberstam 220). But Flagg’s butch character Idgie, “a whore-visiting, rough-and-ready passing dyke” in the novel, is transformed into “a rumpled *Playboy* model, a kind of Madonna look-alike” (221). It is this particular “softening” of masculine lesbians in film and television adaptations that I call *femme-inization*, a term that refers specifically to the depiction of butches in source texts as femmes on screen. If domestication is a strategy of adaptation, then femme-inization functions as a substrategy of domestication, a way in which to present lesbians as unthreatening by making them visually indistinguishable from heterosexual female characters. This translation of butches into femmes frustrates Halberstam, who asserts that the type of “‘positive’ cinema” from which *Desert Hearts* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* sprang “works only at the expense of masculine women” (217). “Indeed,” she adds, “it is still quite rare to find a truly overt butch image in contemporary lesbian film” (222). This statement resonates particularly with contemporary television, as we saw in the last chapter, for as lesbian characters appear more frequently in mainstream programming, they are almost inevitably aligned with mainstream norms of femininity. The rewards for femme-inization, however, are considerable, as evidenced by the box office success of *Desert Hearts*, by the two Academy Awards for which *Fried Green Tomatoes*

was nominated – including Best Adapted Screenplay – and by the critical and popular acclaim of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Part 6. The subversive uses of lesbian romance

Jess's case, I would argue, is more nuanced than that of Cay or Idgie, for while Winterson's protagonist is visually femme-inized she manages to be disruptive, "truly troubling," in other ways. Jess ensures that *Oranges* remains, like its source, a politicized text, and this politicization crucially differentiates it from the two films analyzed by Halberstam. We may in part attribute this difference to genre: while *Oranges* is a gritty Northern (English) drama depicted in a realist mode, *Desert Hearts* is a sweeping Western (American) romance. According to lesbian film critic Jackie Stacey, the main question the romance narrative invokes is "will they [the romance protagonists] (and importantly, how will they) or won't they overcome it [the obstacle]?" (97). Stacey writes: "The pleasures of romances... involve audience participation in the desire for love to win out over [certain] obstacles" (97). She contrasts the types of obstacles faced by heterosexual characters with those faced by lesbian lovers; the former include the "other lover or spouse"; a haunting past; illness or death; geographical separation; class, race or national difference; and lack of mutual attraction (97). The latter, however, are notably different, ranging from heterosexual men, suicide, murder, neurosis, isolation and depression, to homophobia and "fear of discovery" (97). Stacey analyzes how the obstacles in *Desert Hearts* are easily overcome (98-102), so easily, in fact, that while viewers "felt uplifted by the romance between two women that does not end in disaster or punishment" (96), they also experienced some disappointment with the film. "[T]he audience," she writes, "had not felt the usual emotions associated with romance films, such as fear of loss, desire for union under threat, or an elation [sic] at the union of the couple" (96). Some lesbian critics were particularly harsh on this count. For example, as

Julianne Pidduck observes, Mandy Merck and Teresa de Lauretis were quick to condemn Deitch's production for failing, in Merck's words, as "a truly challenging lesbian film": Merck argued that "[i]n order to succeed as a popular romance, *Desert Hearts* was divested of any social or political ramification or context that would restrict its generality"; while de Lauretis similarly dismissed "the romance of fairy-tale formulas" in films like *Desert Hearts* (qtd. Pidduck "After 1980" 285-6).²⁶

Oranges uses its short-lived romance between Jess and Melanie in episode two to illustrate the power of the church and the devastating homophobia of its members. The romance trajectory begins when Jess first sees Melanie, "a very beautiful Pre-Raphaelite looking [sic] girl," as the screenplay specifies (*Two Filmscripts* 121), at work gutting fish, and ends when Jess spends a final clandestine night with Melanie after the exorcism. Their final exchange is superimposed over a scene from the following day in which the evangelicals, convinced Jess has been "saved," pray for her.

Jess: Will you write to me?

Melanie: I can't. We've got to forget.

Jess: I won't forget. (145)

The answer to the question "will they or won't they overcome it?" is therefore a resounding *no*, a negative which is reinforced by a painful scene in episode three, in which Melanie briefly appears to introduce her fiancé Ian to Jess. Ian says to Jess: "I want you to know that [Melanie's] told me everything that went on between you... and I forgive you" (*Two Filmscripts* 156). Melanie's surrender to compulsory heterosexuality – a betrayal in itself in Jess's eyes – is compounded by

²⁶ See Mandy Merck, "Dessert Hearts," in *Queer looks: Perspectives on lesbian and gay film and video*, eds. Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar and John Greyson, Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993, 377-382 (380); and Teresa de Lauretis, "Film and the Visible" in *How do I Look? Queer film and video*, eds. Bad Object-Choices, Seattle: Bay Press, 1991, 223-276 (263).

Melanie's newfound evangelism and friendship with Jess's mother, which leads her to denounce Jess's second relationship with a recent convert called Katy. Jess's mother rants: "To think I trusted you... I wouldn't have believed it if Melanie hadn't told me herself. And to think it was her I blamed once" (*Two Filmscripts* 156). Jess is forced to "leave Katy to make it all right for her" (162), and, realizing that her "Mum hates [her] and the Pastor hates [her], and the whole Council's turned against [her]" (157), she leaves home and goes to live with Cissy (Barbara Hicks), the undertaker, at Elysium Fields Funeral Parlour. Her mother explicitly disowns her when the evangelicals find her serving ice cream at Elsie's wake. Insulted by Jess's presence, they prepare to leave. "She is a demon, your daughter," Mrs Green tells Jess's mother, to which her mother replies: "No daughter of mine" (*Two Filmscripts* 164).

Although the relentless homophobia in *Oranges* is leavened by Winterson's wry humour, it would nonetheless overwhelm the romance formula of films like *Desert Hearts*. While the obstacles in *Desert Hearts* are easily overcome, however, the independent film does explicitly depict lesbian desire in a sex scene that Pidduck describes as "a groundbreaking moment for lesbian sexuality on screen" (285). In this way Deitch's film is, compared with *Fried Green Tomatoes*, at least unconditionally queer. The adaptation of Flagg's novel, in its "nonthreatening" depiction of Idgie, argues Halberstam, serves to conceal the sexual relationship between Idgie (Mary Stuart Masterson) and Ruth (Mary-Louise Parker). "[T]he erotic nature of the relationship between the two women in the film," writes Halberstam, "was actually so submerged that many heterosexual audiences were able to categorize what they saw as a strong friendship between two women rather than a dyke drama" (220-1). The erasure of Idgie's butch identity, according to Halberstam, erases lesbianism from the text for all but those queer viewers accustomed to reading between the lines. "If heterosexual audiences had to watch a truly butch Idgie," she contends, "there would have been little doubt as to the nature of the relationship

between the two women” (221). Halberstam may be overstating the case; she is perhaps guilty of essentializing lesbian identities – after all, butch heterosexual women appear in film and on television from time to time, in police dramas, for example – but the femme-inization of Idgie, in the absence of any scripted queerness, obscures her lesbianism. Like *Desert Hearts*, however, *Oranges* makes lesbian desire explicit in a sex scene between Jess and Melanie.

Despite the unambiguous depiction of lesbian sex in *Oranges*, Hilary Hinds discovered that the primary mainstream response to this scene was to desexualize Winterson’s drama. Broadsheet reviewers generally “read [the sex scene] with the kind of romantic idealism the makers were trying to eschew,” writes Hinds, noting that the words *innocent* and *innocence* were used repeatedly in these reviews (165). Steve Clarke’s review in the *Sunday Times* reaches the pinnacle of romantic idealism with statements like “the two girls’ tentative exploration of each other’s bodies was almost Disneyesque in its innocent wonderment” (21 Jan 1990, qtd. Hinds 165). By constructing the scene as one of “innocent wonderment” between “girls,” reviewers implied, contends Hinds, that lesbianism is “an adolescent phase, a naïve exploration that would be outgrown” (165). Not surprisingly, these reviews failed to comment on the scene in terms of desire or eroticism; Hinds found only one broadsheet exception to the rule that “for lesbianism to be acceptable it had to be tender, innocent, essentially asexual” (166). This reading of the scene as innocent and asexual contrasted sharply with the response of tabloid writers who “made a concerted effort to construct a pornographic reading of the text” (166). Hinds found that “only the lesbian and gay critics who situated the text firmly within a discourse of desire” avoided the tropes of “male fantasy” and “‘Disneyesque’ tenderness” (167). In these reviews by queer critics, asserts Hinds, “[t]he very quality of innocence which the mainstream reviewers identified is denied..., and is instead replaced by its opposite: the assertion that Jess is ‘knowing’ and ‘sure of her desire’” (167).

It may be tempting to argue that a masculine Jess could effectively resist readings of both “male fantasy” and “‘Disneyesque’ tenderness,” in the same way that, according to Halberstam, a “truly butch Idgie” would make visible the lesbian relationship between Idgie and Ruth. But *Oranges* risked alienating its mainstream viewership with such an unmitigated image of sexual alterity, and of consequently invalidating its queer-positive message. This, then, is the “Faustian bargain” that Winterson strikes: while Jess is nowhere near as feminine as the hyperfemmes of *The L Word*, she is femme-inized through casting and costume so that *Oranges* can remain politicized in other ways. Having made the bargain, however, Winterson effectively uses Jess’s femininity to level a critique at the church. When the Pastor tells Jess in episode three, “We let you have a man’s role [preaching] and you’ve taken on a man’s appetites” (*Two Filmscripts* 157) – a contention which echoes her mother’s accusation in the novel that she is “aping men” – she tells Cissy, “[the Council] think I want to be a man” (157). The discrepancy between this homophobic and anti-feminist accusation and the appearance of tearful, waif-like Jess in this scene is absurd. While the adaptation does not offer a masculine protagonist, it also uses this absurdity effectively to disarticulate gender and sexuality. Winterson makes Jess the site of a disruptive feminist femininity.

Winterson’s adaptation of *Oranges* ultimately succeeded in making lesbianism visible in mainstream culture in a queer-positive way. The adaptation aired “in a mainstream slot,” observes Hinds, “rather than in the furtive late-night positions of most representations of lesbian and gay issues on television” (168). It was praised by mainstream critics like Peter Tory in the *Daily Express*, a critic unsympathetic to “‘do-gooding’ liberal causes” (169) and more likely to condemn “as pretentious nonsense” Wednesday night serials like Dennis Potter’s *Blackeyes*, an adaptation about female exploitation which had aired in 1989. Most importantly, it was embraced

by the mainstream BBC audience that the production team had hoped to reach. For Winterson, Kidron and Giles, then, the Faustian bargain proved well worth it.

Part 7. A different *Portrait* altogether

While *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* deliberately eschewed visual female masculinity in its depiction of Jess, the notion of a butch female character was not entirely unthinkable on the BBC at that time. From 19 September to 10 October 1990 – in the same Wednesday night slot in which *Oranges* aired – BBC Two broadcast the four-part *Portrait of a Marriage*, a drama that depicted female masculinity in a queer context. Directed by Stephen Whittaker, *Portrait* was adapted by Penelope Mortimer from Nigel Nicolson's 1973 eponymous biography of his mother Vita Sackville-West. In flashback it details the affair that Vita (Janet McTeer) carried on with childhood friend Violet Keppel (Cathryn Harrison) from 1918 and through the 1920s. During this time Vita was torn between affection for husband Harold Nicolson (David Haig), with whom she had two children, and passionate desire for Violet, a woman who was herself being pursued by Captain Denys Trefusis (Peter Birch). Penny Florence calls *Portrait* “a bold and serious piece of programming” (129); the drama is an intriguing foil to *Oranges* for its depiction of a masculine woman.

In *Portrait of a Marriage* costume visually signifies Vita's struggle to express her masculinity against the imposition of gendered expectations. In her feminine guise – dining with her mother, for example – Vita is dressed in “appropriate female clothes of her class” (Florence 127), that is, elaborate gowns and elbow gloves, while her hair is swept up to show off the jewels at her throat and ears. In these scenes she conveys both dignity and awkwardness tempered by a subtle sense of confinement. In her masculine guise Vita moves freely, striding rapidly across the Knole grounds, for example, in knee-high lace-up boots, military jodhpurs, loose flowing shirts

and masculine jackets occasionally topped with a wide-brimmed hat. Her sartorial freedom is emphasized in one scene when she pauses to lift Violet, in constricting skirts, over a stile. In stature the six-foot-one McTeer dwarfs both Haig and Harrison; her strong features – particularly a prominent jaw and decisive eyebrows – are decidedly unfeminine.²⁷ The production’s makeup artists generally give her a very plain “natural” look which emphasizes her masculinity. McTeer was well cast for, in costume, with period bobbed hair, she looks not unlike the masculine Sackville-West herself.

In this drama Vita expresses masculinity through her clothing and demeanor, going so far as to experiment with passing. Early in the second episode Violet waits at a train station in a chaos of soldiers and military supplies. One soldier with a bandage about his head approaches her, and after she hugs him exuberantly he takes her suitcases and they leave the station. It is only in the following scene, when the soldier asks a landlady for a night’s accommodation, that Vita’s voice makes her recognizable. She is tall and masculine enough to pass easily, and the bandages conceal her hair. When the landlady shows her and Violet to a room without giving them a second look the scene is utterly convincing. Later in this episode Vita and Violet escape together to Monte Carlo for a wild hedonistic holiday during which Vita dresses in various masculine guises as they dance in jazz clubs. Reviewer Karman Kregloe writes: “McTeer’s Vita undergoes a palpable transformation when she leaves behind her life with Harold to globe-trot with Violet. She stands taller, speaks more forcefully, has fits of jealous rage and practically devours her secret lover” (Kregloe). As Violet’s lover Vita is spontaneous, commanding, playful, passionate. It is this forceful butch Vita with whom Violet is in love, the Vita she fears is being

²⁷ In an interview with McTeer, a reviewer for the *Guardian* describes her as “defiantly ungirly” (Chaudhuri).

domesticated by Harold who calls his wife, affectionately, Ma. Director Whittaker and scriptwriter Mortimer have, therefore, effectively created a credible butch character in Vita.

Unlike *Oranges*, *Portrait* allows for no easy division between sympathetic and unsympathetic characters. Harold is vulnerable when he confesses his own homosexual affairs to Vita, but he renounces his male lovers and pressures her with increasing urgency to give up Violet. When she finally does end this relationship Violet is more or less forced into marrying a man she clearly despises. Vita is devastated but when she suspects Violet of actually having consummated the marriage with Denys she becomes enraged and proceeds to rape Violet in a graphic scene of considerable violence. This sexual assault is far more explicit than the drama's earlier sex scenes between Vita and Violet, which amount to no more than pre-coital kissing and post-coital cigarettes. While *Portrait* initially shows, therefore, how much Violet loves Vita for her masculinity and how much she encourages Vita to be butch, it ultimately focuses on the danger and destructiveness of Vita's masculine violence.

The production team of *Portrait* had little if any investment in a queer and/or feminist agenda; not surprisingly, there was no lesbian involvement in the drama at any level. Florence asserts: "Lesbians were nowhere in the principal production roles or intended audience, and the idea that there should be any form of lesbian input was considered to be an irrelevance" (124). In the absence of "lesbian input," Mortimer based Vita's character on male masculinities; Florence finds it "iron[ic]" that Vita's character was "scripted by a straight woman, using men as a model, directed by a man and played by a straight woman" (126). If there is irony here it is surely that the lack of lesbian involvement allowed for the development of a butch character, for *Portrait* can be chronologically situated during the era of "positive" lesbian cinema that "[u]ltimately... proved to be disastrous for images of masculine women in lesbian visual contexts" (Halberstam 222). The result is a butch character whose masculinity contrasts unfavourably with that of

Harold, the trim, rational diplomat, and even Denys, the military captain, who is far more patient and far less violent than Vita. “[O]nly liberals would have been unaware,” writes Florence, “that [*Portrait*] would have to fail its subject (material and protagonist) if it was to succeed as an ‘investment’” (129). I think Florence is wrong, however; the adaptation doesn’t fail Vita, because it doesn’t femme-inize her. In its depiction of Vita, in fact, *Portrait of a Marriage* could be read as a television offshoot of the New Queer Cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, a genre that “defie[s] positive imagery” (Aaron 35). New Queer filmmakers, like Derek Jarman, Gus Van Sant, Monica Treut and others, “were unapologetic about their characters’ faults or even crimes,” writes Michele Aaron (35).

Although *Portrait* was nominated for a handful of technical BAFTAs, it did not enjoy the success or cultural popularity of *Oranges*.²⁸ *Portrait* was not “repeated as is customary” (Florence 129 n.14), and only resurfaced in 2006 when it was released on DVD. Nonetheless both *Portrait* and *Oranges* remain important BBC television productions for lesbian visibility. As Hinds puts it: “[p]recisely because of the lack of representations of lesbianism within mainstream culture lesbian texts which are available take on a particular significance” (170). Indeed, the next BBC adaptation to feature a major lesbian role did not appear for over a decade. In the following chapter I explore the relationship between Sarah Waters’s novel *Tipping the Velvet* and its television serialization written by Andrew Davies.

²⁸ *Portrait* was nominated for a Best Makeup BAFTA, and it won for Best Costume Design (as well as Best Design and Best Film Editor), an acknowledgement by the BAFTA establishment of its visual “quality,” but it was overlooked in the most prestigious categories such as Best Drama.

Chapter 3

Taming the Velvet: Domestications and other cultural adaptations of *Tipping the Velvet*

Part 1. Introduction

Following *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, more than a decade elapsed before the BBC serialized another lesbian novel for the small screen. *Tipping the Velvet* was first published in 1998 by Sarah Waters before being adapted by Andrew Davies for broadcast on BBC Two in 2002. The serial's widespread promotion provoked significant and varied response in the British media; discussions about *Tipping the Velvet* and, more broadly, sexuality, proliferated in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, lesbian magazines, television talk shows, and straight and queer online sources. Among these responses, the BBC serial inspired two cultural adaptations of its own: a semi-pornographic spread in *The Sun* newspaper, and a television parody by British comedy duo Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders.

Throughout this chapter I explore the ways in which dominant cultural forces exploit the processes of adaptation in order to domesticate non-normative instances of gender and sexuality. I focus on *Tipping the Velvet*'s protagonist, Nancy Astley, and her various articulations of gender, first establishing which of these in the novel can already be considered domesticated and which disruptive. I then analyze the BBC serial, arguing that it domesticates its lesbian characters through a number of methods including, but not limited to, femme-inization. Subsequently I analyze responses to the BBC serial in the British press, including broadsheet and tabloid reviews of the adaptation. I argue that the dominant response to *Tipping the Velvet* in British mainstream media was an impulse to deny lesbian subjectivity and repackage lesbian sexuality for a heterosexual male gaze. This domesticating impulse originated in the BBC serial but appeared most aggressively in *The Sun*'s Page 3 tabloid "tribute" to the serial. Perhaps more surprisingly,

broadsheet reviews of the serial were similarly inclined; the only mainstream resistance to the domesticating impulse emerged in a parodic comedy by two heterosexual women.

Part 2. The disruptive potential of male impersonation

Two years after the publication of *Tipping the Velvet*, Sarah Waters and Laura Doan published an essay on lesbian historical fiction of the 1980s and 1990s. *Tipping the Velvet*, I suggest, responds critically to this genre in its depiction of the past and its construction of lesbian identities. In “Making up lost time: contemporary lesbian writing and the invention of history” (2000), Waters and Doan describe a model of lesbian historical fiction in which lesbian history becomes an ahistorical struggle against patriarchal oppression. In the novels of Ellen Frye, Jeannine Allard, Isabel Miller, Caeia March, Ellen Galford, Penny Hayes, Sarah Aldridge, and Paula Martinac, they contend, the past “emerges... as an erotic and political continuum through which alterity can be mystically overridden” (18). This ahistoricization is further constructed through these writers’ use of prologues and afterwords to politicize their fiction by “recruit[ing] the reader into a community of shared lesbian interests understood to extend across history, and across the border separating history from fiction” (15). The ahistoricity of these texts is the necessary result, for Waters and Doan, of a problematic understanding of lesbian identities. Lesbianism is repeatedly constructed in these novels as “a ‘natural’ identity” which “tak[es] its ultimate authority from the imperatives of the body” (18). The problem with this “appeal to the authority of the desiring body” is that it “imagin[e]s that body as unlocated, undefined, unmarked by the cultural discourses by which bodies are constructed and contained”; in short, it necessitates “a refusal of history, an embracing of the trans- or ahistorical” (18).

This refusal of history leads to the genre’s “continual and dogged re-staging of lesbian ingenuousness leading to isolated romance,” which gives the impression, as they put it, “that

every lesbian couple in history must have been *Patience-and-Sarah*-style pioneers, raising new edifices upon the drab erotic landscape” (19).²⁹ The widespread understanding of lesbian history as a series of heroic isolated romances leads Waters and Doan to assert that “the motivating impulse behind much lesbian historical fiction is not historicism so much as nostalgia”: “the genre’s ingenuous lesbian protagonists all undergo experiences similar to that of [Jane] Eiseman’s heroine Joan [in *Home Again, Home Again* (1990)] who, on first reading the poetry of Sappho, feels ‘her confusion gradually lift[ing]... It was like coming home. She felt like she had come home’” (19). Beyond functioning as the site of nostalgia, Sappho of Lesbos is invoked by lesbian historical writers as the origin of a suppressed lesbian genealogy which lesbian characters recount to other lesbians. Historical figures like Marie Antoinette and the Ladies of Langollen – two Irish women who eloped to Wales in 1778 – are similarly claimed as proto-lesbians and assimilated to fictitious lesbian genealogies.

By contrast, the lesbian characters in *Tipping the Velvet* are marked by Victorian discourses of gender, sexuality, and class. Class differences are reinforced by the language Waters’s characters use to define themselves as lesbians (a term that never appears in the novel). Sappho is unknown to Waters’s working-class protagonist, Nancy Astley, who only learns about the poet from her upper-class lover Diana Lethaby. Accordingly, “Sappho” and “Sapphic” are recoded to signify upper-class exclusivity: Diana’s collection of lesbian pornography includes novels, states Nancy, “hymning the delights of what I would call tommistry but what they, like Diana, called *Sapphic Passion*” (266; original emphasis). While Diana invokes Sappho, Nancy refers to lesbians as *toms*, having learned the term during her career in the music hall.³⁰ Rejecting the “isolated romance” model of lesbian relationship, *Tipping the Velvet* situates its characters in

²⁹ *Patience and Sarah*, by Isabel Miller, was first published as *A Place for Us* (1969).

³⁰ While Waters did not invent the term *tom*, it was not as widely used as the novel suggests. “Tommy,” however, writes Terry Castle, “was probably the popular libertine term for a sapphic woman—a female

communities defined by class and sexuality. Diana maintains an exclusive circle of friends from the Cavendish Ladies' Club and connections to continental lesbian aristocrats. Florence Banner, a working-class lesbian from Bethnal Green, lives in a community of like-minded politically active working-class lesbians. Conversely, Kitty Butler, the lesbian character who does attempt to isolate herself, seeks invisibility because she is deeply marked by discourses of homophobia; she fears being exposed and punished for sexual deviation. In *Tipping the Velvet*, then, the characters are the products of the cultural matrices in which the novel is set.

Unlike the texts Waters and Doan name, *Tipping the Velvet* is not driven by lesbian nostalgia. Rather, it invokes Sappho, Marie Antoinette, and the Ladies of Langollen to parody the desire for a lesbian lineage. When Diana holds a costume party for her wealthy lesbian friends, three women arrive dressed as Marie Antoinette. "That, indeed," Nancy informs us, "was one of the predicaments of the evening: I counted fully five separate Sapphos, all bearing lyres; and there were *six* Ladies of Langollen – I had not even *heard* of the Ladies of Langollen before I met Diana" (307; original emphasis). This scene renders these figures absurd through proliferation, even as it reminds us of the class differences between Nancy, originally an oyster-girl from Kent, and London socialite Diana. Alterity is not "mystically overridden" in *Tipping the Velvet* but must constantly be negotiated by its protagonist.

Nancy's negotiations with other characters can be read productively as Butlerian modes of "doing" identity, for a Butlerian framework gives us a context from which to understand and determine the subversiveness of Nancy's actions. Reading Judith Butler's seminal works *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Ellie Kennedy divides

'equivalent' to *molly*, the slang term given to male homosexuals since the early eighteenth century" (Randolph Trumbach, qtd. Castle 242 n.11). The word appears in an anonymous pamphlet from 1782 (*A Sapphic Epistle from Jack Cavendish to Mrs D*****), which describes Sappho as "the first Tommy the world has upon record" (qtd. Castle 242 n.11). The pamphlet, according to Terry Castle, attacks "one Mrs Damer, notorious in the 1780s for her sexual pursuit of other women" (242 n.11).

modes of “doing” identity into three related categories: performance, performative, and passing. Each mode requires a subject and an audience and, according to Kennedy, the difference between these modes depends on the extent to which the subject identifies herself with a particular role and the extent to which the audience identifies her with that role. In the novel, for example, Nancy Astley becomes a male impersonator under the stage name Nan King. Each night she sings and dances dressed as a dandy, a soldier, an Oxford student, and so on: this is a performance since neither Nancy nor her audience identifies her with the male roles she assumes. Conversely, when both the subject and the audience identify her with the role, the mode is performative. Music hall audiences flock to see famous male impersonator Nan King, and Nancy herself enacts this identity by signing autographs, by receiving and answering fan mail, by taking curtain calls, all as Nan King; these actions affirm her identity as that famous male impersonator. Later in the novel, Nancy dresses and behaves as a young man on the streets of London: she does not identify herself with this role, but her audience – other Londoners – does: as long as they perceive her to be male then she is passing as a boy (Kennedy). For Kennedy, “the distinction between disruptive and domesticated gender repetitions can be pinpointed by paying attention to the way performance, passing or performative is employed in each case” (Kennedy). The following analysis focuses on performance and passing – specifically Kitty’s and Nancy’s stage performances as male impersonators and Nancy’s later passing as a young man – to explore what possibilities for disruption and domestication these modalities of doing identity offer. I will also argue that there is additional room for subversion when Nancy has multiple audiences who perceive her differently.

Music hall scholar Peter Bailey asserts that male impersonation was “an integral part of the English theatrical tradition” (64). It was a popular London music hall act from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. During this time, however, increased scrutiny of

music hall content led to regulations that effectively censored performers (see Pennybacker). While male impersonators of the 1860s and 1870s like Nellie Power (c.1854-1887) amused audiences with sharp topical satire, their successors relied on the visual aspects of male impersonation to entertain. Vesta Tilley (1864-1952), the fin-de-siècle impersonator who “provided the benchmark of excellence for all subsequent performers” (Ullman 194), dressed in impeccable suits and wigs and sang inoffensive jingoistic songs. She had less in common with Power than with Power’s famous male contemporaries George “Champagne Charlie” Leybourne and Alfred “Great Vance” Stevens, enormously popular rival comics who personified the London swell. The latter figure, a rakish man-about-town known primarily for his meticulous and obsessive preoccupation with his clothing (Bailey 54), was parodied by Power. Tilley, however, sincerely reiterated swellish masculinity in her own stage personae, appearing with requisite lavender gloves, monocle, handkerchief, hat, cane, and the appropriate attitude summed up by Charles Norman’s 1868 song title “So Much Depends Upon The Style In Which Its Done [sic]” (Bailey 59).

In *Tipping the Velvet* Kitty Butler’s act is modelled on Vesta Tilley’s. Nancy first sees Kitty in performance as a London swell; while a previous male impersonator at the Canterbury Palace of Varieties “had worn tights and bullion fringe, just like a ballet-girl – only carried a cane and a billycock hat to make her boyish,” Kitty is, by contrast, “a kind of perfect West-End swell” (12). Nancy observes:

She wore a suit – a handsome gentleman’s suit, cut to her size, and lined at the cuffs and the flaps with flashing silk. There was a rose in her lapel, and lavender gloves at her pocket. From beneath her waistcoat shone a stiff-fronted shirt of snowy white, with a stand-up collar two inches high. Around the collar was a white bow-tie; and on her head

there was a topper. When she took the topper off – as she did now to salute the audience with a gay ‘Hallo!’ – one saw that her hair was perfectly cropped. (12)

Like Leybourne and Stevens, Kitty sings “of champagne suppers and strolling in the Burlington Arcade” (25), and other songs about drinking and women “made famous” by previous music hall *artistes* (13): she effectively evokes the mythic territory of the London swell. Victorianist Judith Walkowitz disparages this type of male impersonation. In her study *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992), Walkowitz states: “Later male impersonators like Vesta Tilley were kinder to the gent; by emulating the dress and privileges of men, they even acknowledged male superiority” (260 n.15). Viewed in this way, Kitty’s masher act is more domesticated than disruptive.

Certainly, male impersonation in the Victorian music hall was generally affirmative rather than subversive of Victorian gender norms. Sharon Ullman contends that male impersonators “were judged on the degree to which ‘real men’ could *differentiate* themselves from them”; the successful male impersonator did not attempt to demonstrate “what a real man was like”: her role was “to show ‘the boy’” (197; original emphasis). Male impersonation was thus intended to uphold a binary between “real” masculinity and a lesser, youthful masculinity; the male impersonator must portray her male persona as a youthful male to emphasize what little threat he posed to the “real man” in the audience: this “boy” will never grow up to challenge the “real man.”³¹ According to Kennedy’s distinctions, Tilley’s music hall turn is a performance, for neither Tilley nor her audience identifies her with the male roles that she assumes. The pleasure of her performance for spectators lies in this separation of performer and role: they know that the performer is a woman playing a man.

³¹ As Marjorie Garber has observed, the term “boy” has been used, especially with racial connotations, “to designate an inferior, to create a distinction between or among men—of any age” (*Vested Interests* 89).

Nonetheless, I suggest that this form of late male impersonation contains the potential for subverting Victorian gender norms, and that it is, moreover, this potential that Waters exploits in *Tipping the Velvet*. I maintain that analyzing Vesta Tilley's performance – and by extension Kitty's – from a Butlerian perspective will reveal the subversive potential of male impersonation. Masculinity becomes something to be performed, with the right attitude – the style in which it's done on which so much depends – rather than something that follows from biological sex. In her analysis of contemporary gender performances by drag queens, Butler states: "As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' . . . , it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience that are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (175; original emphasis). Male impersonation similarly implies that gender is imitative and contingent in structure, in this way raising the possibility that sex and gender – those falsely naturalized aspects of gendered experience – can be disarticulated. In other words, male impersonators like Vesta Tilley, by imitating the dress and privileges of men, potentially denaturalize Victorian gender norms.

This potential denaturalization is fully realized in Waters's lesbian fantasy narrative, in which male impersonation subverts not only Victorian gender norms but also norms of sexuality. The first time Nancy watches Kitty perform, the gender performance enables her to question two prevalent social norms: first, that women must be feminine, and secondly, that women must desire men. Entranced by Kitty's masculine performance and appropriation of male prerogatives, Nancy is also attracted to Kitty's visible femaleness. She begins to realize that sexuality does not follow inevitably from gender, nor gender from biological sex. Butler writes of drag: "In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their

fabricated unity” (175). As a Butlerian spectator, Nancy is able to “see” this process of denaturalization in male impersonation, and this vision enables her to question the naturalization of Victorian sex-gender systems and of compulsory heterosexuality. Nancy subsequently flouts the law of heterosexual coherence, first assuming a masculine role of her own to join Kitty’s act, and secondly, becoming Kitty’s lover. While these parallel developments are clearly related and, at times, problematically conflated (Nancy observes, for example, a corresponding increase in her desire for Kitty “the further into boyishness [she] venture[s]” [124]), the text uses them to interrogate discrete axes of identity.

When Nancy herself becomes a male impersonator, by contrast, she struggles against a hegemonic gender ideology that succeeds in domesticating her gender performance. As Ullman contends, Victorian male impersonators were expected to “show ‘the boy.’” In *Tipping the Velvet* this differentiation between “real men” and “boys” is taken one step further in order to emphasize the underlying femaleness of the male impersonator. When Nancy first watches Kitty perform, the latter strides like a boy, stands like a boy, and appears “boy-like and slender” (13): she convincingly performs boyish masculinity. Nancy notices, however, that Kitty’s figure is “rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boy’s ever was” (13). She shows “the girl” under “the boy.” Kitty’s figure is in keeping with the norms for female stage performers of the time, the girls with cherry lips and curls, jutting bosoms and dimpling elbows, with whom Nancy has nothing in common except a passion for music hall songs (7). Despite Nancy’s own boyish angularities, however, the text makes it clear that she can be tailored to fit the norm. Kitty’s manager Walter Bliss has a suit made for Nancy, but when he initially sees her wearing it, he describes the effect as strangely “unpleasing” (118). Her theatrical landlady, Mrs Dendy, elaborates: “‘She’s too real... She looks like a boy. Which I know she is supposed to – but, if you follow me, she looks like a real boy. Her face and her

figure and her bearing on her feet. And that ain't quite the idea now, is it?" (118). Looking like a "real" boy is a disadvantage for Nancy because male impersonators are supposed to imitate masculinity rather than embody it. In order to reconstruct Nancy to fit the norms of femininity, Walter has her jacket re-sewn to give her the illusion of hips and breasts, replaces her boots with dainty shoes, and paints her lips and eyes. Thus "clad," she tells us, "not exactly as a boy but, rather confusingly, as the boy I would have been, had I been more of a girl," Nancy enters the music hall profession (120). By making Nancy a more "feminine" male impersonator, Walter ensures that Nancy's on-stage persona retains the transparency required of performance. The tailoring of her costume in this way reassures the audience of Nancy's femininity: her act consequently becomes one of Butler's domesticated parodic repetitions, emptied of subversive meaning by Walter and recirculated as an instrument of cultural hegemony.

It is not until her sojourn as a rent boy that Nancy creates a truly troubling parodic repetition of sex and gender, comprehensively disarticulating sex, gender, and sexuality. Broken hearted when Kitty leaves her for Walter, Nancy runs away from the music hall, taking with her only her bag of costumes. She lights on the idea of using these suits to pass as a boy after finding it terrible to live as a "solitary girl... in a city where girls [walk] only to be gazed at" by men (190). Examining the original suit that Walter had altered for her, she discovers that the jacket's seams have not been cut, only tucked and sewn. She cuts the stitches to make the jacket "its old, masculine self again," and, trying it on, concludes that with her hair trimmed, and a pair of boy's shoes on her feet, anyone, even Kitty, "might meet [her] on the streets of London, and never know [her] for a girl, at all" (192). It is still with some trepidation that she emerges into the slums of Clerkenwell dressed in her suit, but to her relief "the glances... only slithered past [her], to the girls behind" (194). Looking like a "real" boy is no longer a liability but an advantage, and

Nancy's attempt to pass is affirmed when she is first called "squire" by another man and then solicited by a female prostitute (194).

Nancy is emboldened by the success of what she calls "that first performance" (195), although I suggest that she is not performing but rather passing. To return to Kennedy's elaboration on Butler's identity theory, the difference between performance and passing lies in the audience's perception of the subject. Nancy does not identify herself as a boy, but, in order to pass successfully, she must be perceived as one by her audience. When she appears on the streets "as a handsome boy in a well-sewn suit," her audience – the prostitute, for example – identifies her with the role she has assumed, affirming the identity she has created. In other words, she passes successfully and is finally able "to walk freely about [London] at last" (195). An "unsuccessful" girl by Victorian standards, Nancy excels as a boy, her boyish appearance and the hours she spent "studying the men" with Kitty to broaden their repertoire helping her pass convincingly (86). Walkowitz writes that the traditional privilege of the male urban spectator is to "[stroll] across the divided spaces of the metropolis": like her male counterparts, Nancy "experience[s] the city as a whole" (16). She acts, in a word, as flâneur. Nancy's appropriation of this "bourgeois male pleasure" (16) is quickly complicated, however, when she becomes a rent boy, or male prostitute. It is here that Nancy creates a truly disruptive parodic repetition, for in blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity she makes the handsome boy in a well-sewn suit the object of the male gaze, and, as it turns out, the object of a lesbian gaze.

According to Walkowitz, the prostitute is the "quintessential female figure of the urban scene" in the late nineteenth century; she is "a central spectacle in a set of urban encounters and fantasies" (21). As a renter, Nancy is both flâneur and prostitute and must combine spectacle with spectatorship in her new profession: "Walking and watching, indeed, are that world's keynote: you walk, and let yourself be looked at; you watch, until you find a face or a figure that

you fancy; there is a nod, a wink, a shake of the head, a purposeful stepping to an alley or a rooming-house” (201). Calling herself “Kitty” – for the renters adopt girls’ names – Nancy creates her own “renter persona” based on her observations of the different types of male prostitutes; she combines aspects of the hyperfeminine “mary-annes,” with whom the clients “make rather free,” and the masculine guardsmen who never let themselves be touched (205). Lacking both the “viril[ity]” of the latter and the effeminacy of the former, she hybridizes gender, allowing “the girl” to show beneath “the boy.” Both “girl” and “boy” are fictions, however, and Nancy’s perceived femininity serves to conceal her biological sex: her first client says her mouth is “quite like a girl’s” (199). Her clients find her *girl-like* but do not suspect that she *is* a girl; they identify her as “Kitty the rent boy.”

While Nancy is passing she transgresses gender boundaries but does not subvert them, instead reiterating norms of masculinity in order to avoid detection as a girl. Her behaviour leads Jeannette King to state: “[Nancy] alone is conscious of her transgression of gender boundaries, so that its significance as a subversive act is nullified” (150). King’s assessment, in *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (2005), is only partly accurate, however, for Nancy subsequently learns of one spectator who has been unobtrusively watching her renter exploits. At first Nancy “regret[s]” that, “though [she] is daily giving such marvellous performances, they had no audience”:

I would gaze about me at the dim and dreary place in which my gentleman and I leaned panting, and wish the cobbles were a stage, the bricks a curtain, the scuttling rats a set of blazing footlights. I would long for just one eye – just one! – to be fixed upon our couplings: a bold and knowing eye that saw how well I played my part, how gulled and humbled was my foolish, trustful partner. (206)

The diction of theatre emphasizes Nancy's desire for a discerning audience, a spectator who will distinguish the subject from the identity articulated, and thereby turn her passing into performance. This appraising eye is provided by Diana Lethaby, a wealthy lesbian who has been surveying Nancy for some time from her carriage *precisely because she knows Nancy is a girl*. Diana does not identify Nancy with the renter persona she has assumed; thus Nancy's passing is, for Diana, a mode of performance. While Nancy's immediate audience – the foolish, trustful men she picks up – identify her as a rent boy, Diana, her secondary audience, simultaneously identifies her as a girl and therefore provides a witness to her subversion of gender norms.

In Waters's novel, then, various spaces are opened for subversion, and even somewhat domesticated gender articulations contain disruptive possibilities. Many elements of this subversive potential, however, are turned into harmless entertainment and into affirmations of dominant assumptions about gender when the protagonist is translated for the screen and the novel's readership is converted to a viewership.

Part 3. Domesticated lesbian identities in the televisual *Tipping the Velvet*

Tipping the Velvet aired in Britain on 9, 16 and 23 October 2002 and was viewed on average by over five million people, earning, if the BBC's own press is to be believed, "one of the highest ratings for a drama on BBC Two in recent years" (BBC Press Office). The adaptation was broadcast on Wednesdays at 9.00pm on BBC Two, Wednesdays being the weekday "Controversy Slot" (Hinds 159); 9.00pm being the watershed, a time at which more "adult" material may be aired on British television; and BBC Two being the (slightly) more experimental of the BBC's two flagship channels.

Clearly coded as controversial, the adaptation also received a certain degree of the kind of "special treatment" (Kerr 15) lavished on BBC classic serial adaptations. This special

treatment is mainly evident in Andrew Davies's involvement with the production. Davies, the undisputed "King of Dramatisation" in 2008 (Wollaston), could already lay claim to an impressive CV in 2002. Having made his name as a scriptwriter with the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* in 1995, he was credited in 2001 alone with a screenplay for *The Tailor of Panama*, collaborative work on *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a four-part BBC serialization of *The Way We Live Now*, and a 98-minute television film of *Othello* for ITV. Beyond translating *Tipping the Velvet* into a script, then, Davies lent the modest critical acclaim of Waters's novel (a Betty Trask Award, a John Llewellyn Rhys Award nomination) the considerable prestige and "recognisable trademark" (Cardwell *Andrew Davies* 16) of his name. Although Andrew Davies expert and television adaptation theorist Sarah Cardwell mentions *Tipping the Velvet* in her 2005 study of the scriptwriter briefly and only to dismiss it as melodramatic and "rather clumsily executed" (106), her argument that Davies should receive full credit for the "finished television programme – and not just the screenplay" (33 n.23) carries as much weight here as it does with *Pride and Prejudice*. Davies influenced *Tipping the Velvet* in numerous extra-diegetic ways, from his appropriation of *Othello*'s director and two of its actors from ITV to his promotion of the BBC serial in the press; he is quite certain, in fact, that *Tipping the Velvet* would never have been produced as a BBC programme without his involvement (Davies interview).

Davies stamps his "recognisable trademark" on the adaptation, notably in the sequence which wittily transforms Nancy's dreary work as a rent boy into a clever and colourful montage. The script reads: "Our pov [sic] is from inside the gentleman's trousers" (2.8). Nancy (Rachael Stirling) kneels in front of the man in an alley and fellates him to upbeat music. Comic effects are derived from close-ups of the man's contorted face and the inelegant sounds he makes. As he orgasms he throws out his arms, drawing attention to a poster under his hand with the word "Cumming" over a picture of a fountain, and another with a picture of a clergyman, reading

“Give Generously: A sovereign will bring so much relief.” With this climax his top hat falls ignominiously over his eyes, while Nancy, grimacing, swallows. The man gives her two gold coins (sovereigns) and as she walks past the camera, hand open to show the coins, we hear the *ka-ching!* sound of a cash register. “And so I began my new career as a streetwalker,” says Nancy in voiceover, “and I found it not so very different from acting on the stage. I told myself, it wasn’t Nan Astley who took men’s spunk in my mouth or in my hand, but Tommy Atkins or Eaton Bertie or Able Seaman Simms or Bobby Brown from Bermondsey” (2.9). As she names each persona, he pops up to the sound of the cash register. There follows a series of men’s ecstatic faces spinning around; gold coins rising and falling through the air; and a succession of quick shots from “inside the gentleman’s trousers” of Nancy opening many trouser flies. Of the latter we see only her face topped with different hats and her expressions ranging from amusement to disgust. The scene ends with a close-up of a horse loudly eating a carrot.

Camera position, quick cutting, non-diegetic music and sound effects combine in this sequence to create a humorous montage which no doubt facilitated the depiction of oral sex for television. Davies literalizes a Mulveyesque theory of the male gaze by locating the camera between the men’s legs: this “phallo-cam,” as it might appropriately be called, allows viewers to watch Nancy’s reactions to the parade of anonymous genitalia.³² The phallo-cam strategy underscores the men’s interchangeability, effectively translating Nancy’s observation in the novel that “with their trousers unbuttoned they [the men] all looked the same” (206). It also renders them absurd, a state bookended by the first man’s exaggerated performance and the final shot of the carrot. The acts of fellatio are therefore meaningless to Nancy except in their capacity to remunerate her: their profitability is represented visually by the fountain of coins and aurally by

³² The term “phallus-cam” originated in a discussion at a conference at the University of Wales, Bangor, in April 2006.

the cash register sound; the former image also represents the alchemical transformation of “spendings” – a metaphor in the novel for ejaculation and semen – from “men’s spunk” to gold. While the adaptation leaves out Nancy’s desire for revenge, it conveys her dominance in a situation in which men are reduced to a lucrative (and ludicrous) source of income.

Davies has always been drawn to the deployment of desire in the novels he adapts. The scriptwriter was inspired to adapt Waters’s novel on reading the scene in which Nancy straps on a leather dildo to pleasure Diana Lethaby; he was intrigued not only by the scene’s sexual content but by the visual impact Nancy’s costume would create on the screen (Davies interview). When Nancy is picked up on the streets one night by Diana (played by Anna Chancellor, who has been promoted here from Mrs to Lady Lethaby) she is dressed in the red guardsman’s jacket she wore as a male impersonator on the music hall stage. Diana sees through the disguise but she admires its effect, granting that Nancy “[wears] the outfit far better than most of the lads do” (2.16). She makes Nancy remove the trousers, telling her: “You may leave the jacket on. And the boots... And the hat” (2.17). The dialogue in this sequence is drawn almost verbatim from the novel; an earlier draft of the screenplay reads: “Now Nan is standing with as much dignity as she can muster, like a soldier’s nightmare – on parade without his breeches!” (Davies Screenplay second draft 2.27). This draft includes several such comments which have been omitted from the final screenplay as well as, in this particular sequence, two direct quotations from the novel. When Nancy is shown into Diana’s mansion, Davies quotes Waters’s description of the (unmistakably vaginal) front entrance hall: “The floor was paved with marble, in squares of pink and black. The walls, to match it, were painted a deep, deep rose; and this darkened further, where the staircase curved and lifted, like the interior whorls of a shell” (Davies draft 2.25). When Diana sends Nancy into the bedroom with a key to open the chest that contains the dildo, Davies quotes from the novel again: “There was a cheval-glass there, and I saw myself reflected in it: pale and wide-

eyed, breathless and curious, an unlikely Pandora, with my scarlet jacket and my saucy cap, my crop, and my bare bare bum” (Davies draft 2.28). On reading this line, said Davies, “I thought: ‘I’d like to see that on TV’” (Davies interview).

The comments on the script and quotations from the source in this draft reveal, I think, Davies’s genuine interest in the novel and investment in translating it effectively. Where comedy conveys Nancy’s empowerment in the renter sequence, however, it defuses the eroticism of the dildo scene. The camera is placed inside the wooden chest so that we see this “unlikely Pandora” when she lifts the lid and contemplates the dildo, picking it up at Diana’s offscreen command. In the earlier draft the dildo “juts out grotesquely” (Davies draft 2.28); on screen it humorously precedes Nancy through the door. Nancy kisses Diana; the scene dissolves to the women “shagging” on a ladder-backed chair to forty-seven seconds of crescendoing “Allegro in the Style of Wagner” (2.18). The camera circles them more and more quickly until Diana climaxes with the loud orchestral music. With impeccable timing she utters Waters’s line: “You exquisite little tart” (2.18). Lesbian reviewer Malinda Lo finds the non-diegetic score particularly distracting: “In Nan’s first experience with the dildo and Diana, the circus music inexplicably returns,” she writes, “making an extremely erotic encounter [in the novel] more of a laughable romp” (Lo). While it may be a stretch to describe the Wagnerian clip as circus music, the score nonetheless emphasizes the humorous tone created by the camera work. In the novel Nancy is torn between “self-consciousness,” imagining herself “straddled by a stranger in an unknown house, buckled inside that monstrous instrument,” and pure lust, “for the dildo that serviced [Diana] also pleased [her]” (243); lust wins out. Far from translating this “raw hunger” (Lo) to the screen, Davies and director Sax make the lesbian encounter a source of amusement. By turning this scene into a “laughable romp,” they render lesbian sex unerotic and thereby domesticate it.

While comedy undermines the dildo scene's eroticism, the adaptation effectively depicts Diana as a powerful and charismatic woman. Anna Chancellor brings an imperiousness to the role which conveys Diana's dominance of Nancy, of her peers, and the confidence which derives from her wealth and social standing not only to keep a lover dressed as a boy, but to flaunt her in erotic *tableaux vivants*.³³ However, Waters's three other major lesbian characters, particularly Nancy Astley, are definitively domesticated.

Rachael Stirling had played a small role in Davies's *Othello* before Sally Head Productions cast her as *Tipping the Velvet*'s protagonist. Although she is tall and thin like Waters's Nancy, Stirling lacks Nancy's "real" boyishness. Her effort to carry herself in a masculine way, writes Malinda Lo, "doesn't ever quite succeed" (Lo). But her femininity is most apparent in her face: the actress bears, as the press was fond of pointing out, a certain resemblance to her mother, Dame Diana Rigg.³⁴ Like her famous mother Stirling has what might be called "delicate" features, which are emphasized in the serial by the production's makeup artists who darken her eyes and lips, highlight her cheekbones, and pluck her eyebrows into tapered arches. There is little change in her makeup when she apparently passes as a boy; Stirling is "handicapped by costuming and make-up (ever-present eyeliner and lipstick) that constantly mark her as a pretty woman, [and]... effectively [mute] Nan's masculinity" (Lo). Her appearance led Waters to comment, in a 2002 online interview, that Stirling "[is] great—but she never looks very boyish. She's too gorgeous, she's too girlish. She never looks like she could genuinely pass

³³ In one sequence, which closely mirrors the novel, Nancy wears nothing but the dildo and a coat of gold bodypaint, and Diana introduces her as Hermaphrodite (2.21). "We were a perfect double act," says Nancy in voiceover. "I was the living proof of her perversity, I was the stain left by her lust" (2.21). The novel reads: "I was proof of all her pleasures. I was the stain left by her lust" (282).

³⁴ Less than two weeks before the first episode of *Tipping the Velvet* aired, Rigg was voted the Sexiest Television Star Ever by *TV Guide* (28 Sept 2002) for her portrayal of Emma Peel, the catsuit-wearing action heroine of the popular 1960s British show *The Avengers*. Despite Stirling's attempts to keep her mother's identity hidden, the media repeatedly foregrounded her relationship to Rigg. In this way Nancy

as a boy on the street” (*Moviepie*). While Stirling sounds like a boy – very convincingly, in fact, in one dimly-lit scene in which we cannot see her clearly but hear her picking up a client – she does not move or look like one.

There are few instances of visually convincing screen passing: American Hilary Swank passed as a male youth for a month in real life before playing Brandon Teena, the transgendered protagonist of *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999); Iranian-born Jasmin Tabatabai plays Fariba Tabrizi, the lesbian protagonist who passes as a young man in the German film *Fremde Haut* (2005); and in a supporting role American Miriam Schor plays male band member Yitzhak in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001). All three actresses appear effectively masculine in costume; Yitzhak sports a moustache and goatee while Tabrizi (whose decision to pass takes place over the course of the film) spatters mascara on her jaw to give herself the appearance of faint stubble. These examples, however, are drawn from independent films rather than mainstream television programming.³⁵ As far as passing goes, *Tipping the Velvet*’s Nancy Astley has much more in common with *The L Word*’s Shane McCutcheon (Katherine Moennig). Like Nancy, Shane is mistaken for male by other characters and, in a remarkable coincidence, Shane has “banked on this commonly made mistake to turn tricks as a male prostitute in her sordid past” (Moore and Schilt 160-1). Candace Moore and Kirsten Schilt argue, however, that Shane “ultimately reads visually and contextually – as one of a circle of *lesbian* friends – as undeniably female” (160; original emphasis). Moore and Schilt examine how dialogue in *The L Word*’s first season “leads us to believe that Shane is easily misidentified by gay men as male” (160). When a minor character called Harry meets

Astley became obliquely associated with the “man appeal” (M. Appeal) that supposedly defined Emma Peel.

³⁵ These audiovisual media differ particularly in timetabling. For example, Kimberly Peirce, the director of *Boys Don’t Cry*, spent a year researching Teena’s life and death in Nebraska, as well as interviewing lesbians and transsexuals. It took her a further four years to write the screenplay with her writing partner Andy Bienen (Allen). From adaptation to broadcast *Tipping the Velvet* took less than two years to assemble.

Shane in a gay bar, for example, he “refers to her as ‘him’ until corrected,” write Moore and Schilt, and expresses surprise and dismay at the correction. “Although Shane’s androgyny is readable in the script,” they contend, “it lacks full believability in season one. This allows the show’s producers,” they continue,

to have their cake and eat it too: they are able to successfully introduce the notion of a woman unintentionally being read or intentionally passing as male without visually alienating squeamish viewers by rendering one of *The L Word*’s permanent characters male in appearance, or worse, gender ambiguous. (161)

Moore and Schilt conclude that Shane only appears butch next to her hyperfemme counterparts, and that Moennig’s actual appearance does not match her character’s “*scripted* androgyny” (161; original emphasis). The parallels with *Tipping the Velvet*’s Nancy are striking: her ability to pass is similarly scripted in Davies’s adaptation, but like Moennig, Stirling lacks “believability.”

Malinda Lo speculates that Nancy might be “fairly femme” because *Tipping the Velvet* “was both written and directed by men,” and “female masculinity in a lesbian context is often threatening to men” (Lo). *The L Word*, however, is written and directed by women. More importantly, Nancy’s femininity “reminds us once again that butch women are very rarely seen on television or in films” (Lo). If the production company or the BBC had wanted to create a convincingly masculine “look” for the scenes in which Nancy passes as a boy, they could have made her up differently or even cast a different actress. The fact that they did neither suggests that a “convincing” masculinity was not their objective; Stirling herself told *The Sun* that the only quailm Sally Head had with her appearance was that her forehead might be too big (Oglethorpe).

The effect of Stirling in her renter’s costumes is one of femininity, much like Nancy’s performances as a male impersonator. In her Nan King persona, Nancy wears costumes on stage which draw attention to feminine details designed to disrupt any “authenticity” in her masculine

performance. Similarly, when Nancy passes as a “handsome boy” in the adaptation, Stirling herself creates a disjunction between the other characters’ acceptance of her masculinity and, as one television reviewer put it, “the inescapable fact that she is a girl” (Billen). Thus Nancy’s lesbianism – emphatically described by Waters as “butch” (Waters interview) – is coded as femme, and Stirling’s “girlish” appearance, like the tucks in the male impersonator’s jacket, render the spectacle more transparent than transgressive. The Victorian music hall domesticates its male impersonators by feminizing them in order to reinforce unstable gender constructions; the BBC adaptation, I contend, femme-inizes Waters’s lesbian protagonist to make her visually indistinguishable from the conventional heterosexual women on television who are coded as objects of heterosexual male desire. In this way the adaptation brings Nancy’s character into line with conventions of female desirability even as it forecloses on alternative (and thus “undesirable”) butch depictions of her character.

When viewers tuned in to the much-hyped first episode of *Tipping the Velvet*, therefore, they saw Stirling in sex scenes with Keeley Hawes (as Kitty Butler), an actress whose “crisp beauty” and “delicate sexiness” gave her, according to one television reviewer, “the appeal of a younger Kristin Scott Thomas” (Anthony).³⁶ “As cross-dressing lesbians go, they certainly went,” wrote another reviewer, “though having not read Waters’s novel, it is hard to tell whether they are meant to be this ravishing, or whether this casting was merely opportunistic bait to reel in the sort of horny heterosexual men who think that the main point of a costume drama arrives when the costumes come off” (Joseph). Waters’s Kitty is hardly butch, but Hawes and Stirling in bed together unavoidably evoke the pseudo-lesbian imagery of heterosexual pornography.

In addition to femme-inizing its protagonist, the adaptation domesticates lesbian male impersonator Kitty Butler through depoliticization. More specifically, the screenplay

depoliticizes her motives: in the novel Kitty is particularly marked by Victorian discourses of homophobia and these discourses come to define her relationship with Nancy. After meeting a lesbian couple – another *artiste* and her dresser – Nancy suggests to Kitty that the women are just like them, only to be sharply contradicted: “They’re not like us, at all. They’re *toms*” (131; original emphasis). Toms, for Kitty, are shameful women who make “a career out of kissing girls,” and she warns Nancy that they would have to give up the stage if “people thought [they] were – *like that*” (131; original emphasis). When Nancy protests – “I know that this ain’t wrong, what we do. Only that the world says it is” – Kitty dismisses her: “‘It’s the same thing,’ she said” (131). This comment reveals the extent to which she has internalized social norms of homophobia: she believes as much as “the world” that lesbianism is “wrong,” and hiding it does not make it acceptable; it is only necessary for social survival. Kitty makes Nancy promise to be careful; unlike the *artiste* and her dresser who behave too affectionately in the dressing room, Nancy “never kissed her, touched her, said a loving thing, when there was anyone to glimpse or overhear [them]” (127). Despite their carefulness, Kitty’s worst fears are realized when a drunk man in the audience one night viciously denounces her and Nancy as “a couple of *toms*!” (140). Kitty is terrified enough by this public humiliation to betray Nancy for a safe heterosexual relationship with Walter, initiating an affair that Nancy discovers on her return from Whitstable.

These cultural forces that police sexuality are largely erased from Davies’s adaptation.³⁷

Consequently, when Nancy finds Kitty and Walter in bed together, Kitty’s excuses sound weak and unfounded. The confrontation takes place at the very beginning of the second episode:

³⁶ Hawes had played the female lead in Davies’s *Othello*.

³⁷ Nancy’s sister is an exception: Alice “feels dirty” around Nancy and warns her not to tell their parents about Kitty (1.29). This exchange occurs, as in the novel, directly before Nancy returns to London, juxtaposing Alice’s disgust with Kitty’s internalized homophobia. But Alice also represents the stifling provincialism that Nancy leaves behind for the “variety” of London (66). A second homophobic exchange occurs in the third episode, when Nancy and Florence are chased by two men, but it has nothing to do with Kitty’s characterization.

Nan: Oh Kitty, what have you done?

Kitty: Don't be horrible to me[,] Nan, I couldn't help it[.]

Nan: Oh, he forced you did he? So that's what all your business meetings were about.

All this time when I thought you were mine[.]

Kitty: No, it wasn't like that. Until last night it was just talk and kisses. I swear it[,] Nan.

We were going to tell you everything[.]

Nan: Everything? Good god, what more is there to tell[?]

Walter: Kitty and I are going to be married[,] Nan. I'm sure in time you'll come to see

it's for the best[.]

Nan: Noo. Noo[.] [sic]

Kitty: Don't you see Nan, it wouldn't do to go on as we were[.]

Nan: I believe you've killed me. The pair of you[.]

Walter: Come now, compose yourself[,] Nan. I know this has come as a shock to you but

this carry on is quite out of proportion[.]

Nan: Out of proportion? Don't you know? Hasn't she told you about us?

Walter: I know that you were sweethearts of a kind[.]

Nan: Of a kind? The kind that hold hands? Didn't she tell you that we fuck each other?

Walter: I don't care to use such language Nan. And if I did, I wouldn't use that word for

anything a pair of girls can do. You need a man for that I think you'll find. Eh[,]

Kitty?

[Kitty raises her eyes and Nan knows she's lost. She leaves.]

Nan: Goodbye. (2.2-3)

The dialogue is primarily derived from the corresponding scene in the novel. When Nancy shouts: “Didn’t she tell you that I *fuck* her?” Waters’s text reads:

He flinched – and so did I, for the word sounded terrible: I had never said it before, and had not known I was about to use it now. His gaze, however, remained steady: I saw, with increasing misery, that he knew it all, and did not care; that perhaps – who knows? – he even liked it. He was too much the gentleman to make me a foul-mouthed reply, but his expression – a curious mixture of contempt, complacency, and pity – was a speaking one. It said, *That was not fucking, as the world knows it!* It said, *You fucked her so well, that she has left you!* It said, *You may have fucked her first, but I shall fuck her now and ever after!* He was my rival; and had defeated me, at last. (173; original emphasis)

Davies effectively translates Walter’s complex expression into his smug comment – “You need a man for that I think you’ll find” – a reply which establishes Walter not only as the rival who defeats Nancy but also as the representative of sexual normativity, the lover who can penetrate Kitty and therefore fuck her as the world knows it.

In the novel, however, Kitty’s betrayal is directly motivated by her fear of homophobic exposure. She tries to justify the affair, telling Nancy:

“[S]o long as I am looked at, I cannot bear also to be – *laughed* at; or hated; or scorned, as a –”

“As a tom!”

“Yes!” (171; original emphasis)

Kitty confirms Nancy’s guess that the affair started the night they were heckled (170). To stem the rumours that she is *like that*, Kitty has agreed to marry her manager, for, as she says, “[w]ith Walter as my husband, who would think, who would say—” (172). A husband is the ideal façade with which to conceal sexual deviance: Walter therefore benefits from Kitty’s submission to the

social pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. In the adaptation the disastrous stage performance and the conversation about toms are replaced by a voiceover statement in which Nancy tells viewers: “And I wished I could tell the whole world, but Kitty insisted we kept it a secret, even from Walter, for no-one else would ever understand” (1.26). Thus Kitty’s immediate reason for abandoning Nancy is omitted from the adaptation, leaving viewers to deduce from her excuses – especially that she “couldn’t help it” – that her betrayal was a matter of personal taste compounded by a vague unease that it “wouldn’t do to go on as [they] were.” While Waters’s Kitty tries to persuade Nancy that the three of them “shall be friends again” and that she will not let Walter take Nancy from her (172), Davies’s Kitty raises her eyes in implicit agreement at Walter’s assertion, at which point “Nan knows she’s lost.”

In the novel homophobic discourses are shown to enforce norms of heterosexuality; they compel Kitty to remain invisible. By erasing this homophobic context Davies depoliticizes Kitty’s character, for without the closet she appears motivated merely by (bi)sexual opportunism. The adaptation, moreover, brings Kitty’s character in line with heterosexist theories of Victorian sexologists like Havelock Ellis, who believed that relationships with men would bring the “normal instincts” of sometime lesbians into play (qtd. Faderman 241). Kitty’s “normal instincts” are hinted at on her arrival in London when she notices and returns Walter’s “special smile” for her (1.15). The scene is therefore set for an emotional confrontation which takes place in the adaptation unmitigated by Nancy’s insight in the novel that Kitty has acted out of fear. Malinda Lo likens the confrontation scene to a “gaudy melodrama” (Lo). Indeed, without the political dimension the narrative is reduced to the rather conventional trope of love and betrayal.

The third lesbian character domesticated by Davies’s adaptation is Florence Banner, a young socialist and union organizer. In the novel it is through Florence that Nancy discovers a community of politically active working-class lesbians in Bethnal Green. As it does with Kitty,

however, the adaptation domesticates Florence by erasing the social context in which the novel situates her. This erasure is evident in a small but significant change Davies makes to a scene with Nancy and Florence adapted from a conversation late in the novel. As their mutual attraction grows, Florence invites Nancy one night to a public house called *The Frigate* with a “ladies’ room” known as “The Boy in the Boat” (410). The latter is clearly meant to be a kind of Victorian lesbian bar, for, in addition to its name – a euphemism for clitoris – it is full of masculine patrons whom Nancy takes for men but who are, in fact, toms. “Most dress as they please, and live as others care to find them,” says Florence (417).

Sitting in a booth Nancy and Florence overhear a female prostitute telling her friends that a man paid her a sovereign to watch her have sex with another woman: “We flat fucked for a half-an-hour; then tipped the velvet while the gent looked on” (416). It is the only time the expression “tipping the velvet” is used in the novel. Nancy, who “[has] never heard such words before, in all [her] time upon the streets,” asks Florence: “*Tipped the velvet*: what does that mean?” (416; original emphasis). Florence gestures in reply: “she parted her lips and showed me the tip of her tongue; and glanced, very quickly, at my lap” (416). In this exchange it is Florence who is familiar with the colloquial terminology; in the adaptation, by contrast, it is Nancy who takes Florence to the public house, and their positions are similarly reversed inside:

Florence: I thought you said it was all girls in here.

Nancy: It is. You want to look a bit more carefully.

[And we see that the men are male impersonators.]

Florence: Oh. Did you used to come here as a boy?

Nancy: Now and then.

[They overhear another conversation.]

Gay girl: So he slapped down a sovereign, and Susie and me flat fucked for half an hour, and then tipped the velvet while the gent looked on. Easiest night's work we've ever had. We'd have done it for nothing, if only he'd known.

Florence: Tipping the velvet, whatever can that be?

Nancy: You don't know?

Florence: It sounds like something to do with dress-making or millinery [sic], but I don't think it can be, nobody would pay to watch that.

Nancy: It isn't.

Florence: Well what then?

[Nancy sticks out her tongue, wiggles it and looks down at Florence's lap.]

Florence: Oh.

Nancy: Or so I understand. (3.16)

In this reversal Nancy is empowered at the expense of Florence, while Florence is recoded as, if not sexually ignorant, then certainly naïve.

The implications for Florence's character are significant: Nancy falls in love with Waters's Florence in part because she is so different from Kitty. Kitty existed in the closet; she made Nancy promise to be careful about their relationship, and they maintained a "dreary kind of habit" of silence and invisibility in public (127). The novel subtly contrasts Nancy's lovers when Nancy and Florence arrive at *The Frigate*, for the nautical name "remind[s] [Nancy] how near [their] walk had brought [them] to the Thames" (414). It was not far from there that she first kissed Kitty, on a night when the river froze, an "extraordinary, ordinary transformation, that easy submission to the urgings of a natural law that was yet so rare and so unsettling" (101). Of this passage Jeannette King writes: "[this] miracle... reflects the 'natural' but 'rare' thing that is happening to her and Kitty... [Nancy] imagines walking across the river if it froze over, but Kitty

is too afraid, just as she is too afraid to acknowledge her sexuality in public” (148). Florence, on the other hand, lives, as she says of the toms, as others care to find her. When Nancy subsequently suggests that they should pretend to be friends for the sake of Florence’s homophobic brother Frank, Florence replies: “‘If Frank doesn’t like my habits, he can stop visiting. Him, and anyone else with a similar idea. Would you have people think we were ashamed?’” (434). It is Florence’s openness about her identity as a lesbian that appeals to Nancy. When Kitty attempts to win Nancy back, implying that her marriage to Walter is a sham, she tells Nancy that they would only have to be “a little careful” (466). But “careful” is the watchword of the closet for Nancy and she rejects its oppression for Florence’s frankness.

The stark contrast between Kitty and Florence is lost in the adaptation, although Davies defends the change he made to the pub scene. He argues that it is more logical that Nancy, who has spent time on the streets as a renter, should be familiar with the pub, its patrons and their slang terms (Davies interview). The effects of the change, however, are to isolate Florence both politically and socially and to erase her sexual experience and agency. In the novel, Florence is a regular at The Boy and has slept with “so many girls that she could put them into categories, like breeds of fish” (436). In the adaptation Florence (played by girlish Jodhi May) has never been to The Boy; she mistakes butch lesbians for men; she doesn’t know what tipping the velvet means; and the closest she’s come to a lesbian relationship is pining for the unattainable heterosexual Lilian. Florence is decontextualized; her network of lesbian friends is reduced to a single tom, Annie, who tells Florence: “[I]t’s about time you was in love again,” adding, to Nancy: “Perhaps you can show her the way[,] uncle” (3.17). Nancy does indeed show Florence the way, literally, to the lesbian bar, and figuratively, for she deflowers Florence later that night. When they first have sex in the novel, Florence penetrates Nancy with her fist (428); in the adaptation the characters kiss and lie down on the floor together before the camera pans discreetly away. Davies

translates Florence, then, into a sweet but inexperienced character, amputated from the lesbian community of Bethnal Green.

Florence's isolation, moreover, sets the scene for an ahistorical relationship of the kind that Waters and Doan criticize in "Making up lost time": that is, another one in "a series of obscure romances" that recur in the lesbian historical novels they analyze (17). Waters's novel rejects the "isolated romance" model by situating lesbian characters in urban communities where sexuality intersects with class. The toms Nancy meets in the dressing room invite her to "Barbara's party, after the show" (130), an encounter which suggests the existence of a queer music hall; Kitty, of course, declines the invitation. Before she finds Florence Nancy lives as the boy-mistress of wealthy Diana Lethaby, whom Nancy likens to "a queen, with her own queer court" (282). Diana's widowed status grants her much freedom from social norms, and she enjoys hosting lavish parties in her St. John's Wood mansion. She and her upper-class "Sapphist" friends (282) are rich enough to flout the laws of compulsory heterosexuality, and for this reason Nancy cannot imagine a lesbian social network without wealth. Florence's community of lesbian friends and ex-lovers is therefore important not only to Florence's lesbian identity, but to Nancy as well for the ways in which it proves that such a community can exist without class privilege.

I argued above that the adaptation domesticates Nancy's lesbianism by making her more feminine. This domestication extends, in different modes, to the sexual identities of Kitty and Florence: in Davies's hands the former becomes depoliticized, unmarked by homophobic discourse, while the latter becomes decontextualized, rendered sexually inexperienced. By translating Kitty as a bisexual who prefers penetrative sex with men and Florence as a virgin – common pornographic tropes – the adaptation makes their sexuality readily accessible to a heterosexual male audience. The novel's diverse portrayal of lesbianism is thus undermined in

three of the four main lesbian characters in the novel; it is hardly surprising, then, that Waters strongly disliked the reversal in the public house scene (Waters interview). Cardwell would remind us that the source text author's intentions have no reasonable bearing upon the analysis of an adaptation. If we remove Waters from the equation, however, we are left with a "lesbian" drama which conforms to existing stereotypes and fails to present lesbianism in ways either challenging or diverse; in other words, as Andrew Davies told the media, "men are going to love it" ("My TV show is absolute filth").

Part 4. The media is the message

Davies's words, spoken in a press conference some three weeks before the broadcast of *Tipping the Velvet*'s first episode, amount to an extra-diegetic attempt to domesticate the adaptation for a heterosexual male audience. The following day *The Sun* declared that Davies's "new lesbian sex drama" would contain "some of the most explicit sex scenes screened on British TV" ("My TV Show is Absolute Filth"). This brief article is notable for the way in which it situates the adaptor as the *auteur* of *Tipping the Velvet*. Waters's name is not mentioned here; she is rarely acknowledged in other tabloid reporting on the serial. Writing of the classic serial television adaptation, Paul Kerr contends that the position of the original author in relation to the adaptation is "an exceedingly ambivalent one: on the one hand she or he is foregrounded as guarantor of the cultural commodity on offer; but on the other, s/he often vanishes into the Classic Serial format" (13). Waters's position in relation to the tabloid press is similarly ambivalent: she guarantees lesbianism but she does not ultimately guarantee tabloid titillation. For this reason *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *News of the World* and other tabloids attribute creative power behind the production not to lesbian novelist Waters but to straight male adaptor

“Andrew,” who “promises,” in a tabloid-made catchphrase, that his TV show is “absolutely filthy” (“My TV Show is Absolute Filth”).

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon discusses the cultural context in which an adaptation circulates. “What I am calling context,” she writes, “includes elements of presentation and reception, such as the amount and kind of ‘hype’ an adaptation gets: its advertising, press coverage, and reviews. The celebrity status of the director or stars is also an important element of its reception context” (143). It was Davies’s own celebrity combined with his reputation for “saucing up” the classics (Vine) which generated an enormous amount of “hype” for *Tipping the Velvet*. In the ensuing media conflagration *The Sun* fanned the flames in various ways: one writer dubbed Davies a “sex maniac” (Shelley); others promoted the serial as outright pornography (‘Keeley [Hawes] and Rachael [Stirling] are seen romping naked and using sex toys with – literally – gay abandon’ [Iozzi “Keeley Hawes”]), but by far its most intriguing cultural contribution was *The Sun*’s own adaptation of the serial: between 12 and 18 October 2002, *The Sun* ran a five-part Page 3 series called “Victorian Secrets.” Where each edition of *The Sun* features a young, white female model posing topless on Page 3, “Victorian Secrets” adds corsets and frilly lingerie to the picture.

This was not the first time the British tabloids appropriated lesbian sexuality for a heterosexual male audience. When the BBC serialized Jeanette Winterson’s lesbian novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* in 1990, the tabloids, contends Hilary Hinds, “made a concerted effort to construct a pornographic reading of the text” (166). Hinds quotes a writer for the short-lived tabloid *Today*, whose “male friend” felt that “[i]n order to fully fulfil the ‘ultimate male fantasy’” the drama required “a lot more tits.” He suggests that Samantha Fox and Maria Whitaker would more satisfyingly fill the lesbian roles, to which the writer quips, “Had this transpired, I would have had to suggest a slightly different title for this excellent serial: Melons

Are Not The Only Fruit...” (*Today* 25 January 1990). At this time Fox and Whitaker were, according to Hinds, “perhaps the two most famous ‘Page 3’ models” (166). By referring to Fox and Whitaker as “potential participants in this drama, there is,” argues Hinds, “a clear – perhaps even rather desperate – attempt to recruit what had looked as if it was going to be ‘the ultimate male fantasy’ for that function” (166). She continues:

The serial had evidently fallen short of what might be expected of something that included “explicit nude lesbianism.” Since it was not close enough to the ethos of “Page 3,” it was necessary both to force this reading on to the text by means of such epithets as “torrid” and “steamy,” and to reconstruct it as a tabloid ideal by recasting and renaming it, both of which would emphasise more strongly its pornographic possibilities. Whilst, then, the “eroticism” of the text was acknowledged as central here, this review makes it clear that the text did not lend itself easily to the expected and desired pornographic understanding of lesbianism: it was seen as having a meaning independent of, or separate from, dominant male fantasy, and was thus in need of reworking in line with such conventions. (166-7)

When *Tipping the Velvet* aired twelve years later, *The Sun* didn’t simply force the ethos of Page 3 on the adaptation; it completely reconstructed the text as a “tabloid ideal.” In its renaming and framing of the serial, and by omitting all gender troubling signifiers from the text, *The Sun* created its own soft core pornographic adaptation.

The title “Victorian Secrets” associates the BBC serial with the American lingerie store Victoria’s Secret, a brand known for its print advertisements of scantily-clad female supermodels. *The Sun*’s title also cites the cultural connotations of the Victoria’s Secret catalogue as an

onanistic auxiliary for heterosexual pubescent boys.³⁸ Both the catalogue and Page 3 resemble what Jane Arthurs calls “docuporn,” her term for titillating late-night documentaries about the sex industry (46). Arthurs writes: “Generic assumptions about what and who these programmes are *for* tie them into a long history of institutionalized reading practices for pornography in which sexualized images of women are coded for men’s masturbatory pleasure” (98; original emphasis). Page 3’s invocation of Victoria’s Secret might seem redundant since both texts are tied into similar pornographic reading practices, but the reference to the lingerie catalogue serves to shift *Tipping the Velvet* decisively into the realm of male masturbatory fantasy. “Tipping the velvet” – a Victorian slang term for cunnilingus – is Waters’s lesbian-coded title for a text which refuses to meet the expectations of Page 3’s intended audience. *The Sun*’s alternative title, however, invokes the long history of sexualized images designed to appeal to its particular readership.

If the title hints at *The Sun*’s voyeuristic intentions, the captions accompanying the Page 3 images spell them out. These brief blurbs position readers as intruders gazing into the private spaces of the bedroom or the bathroom. The first “Victorian Secret,” 12 October, explicitly establishes this dynamic with the phrase: “Peep through the keyhole for a real frill [sic]...” Similarly, 18 October reveals “what the butler phwoar [sic]...”³⁹ The pun on “what the butler saw” invokes the classic voyeuristic scenario in which a butler observes upper-class female nudity by peeping through the bedroom keyhole.⁴⁰ And what did the butler see? Page 3 typically features a single model of the day, but four of the five “Victorian Secrets” depict two women posing together. The large-breasted, long-haired, lipsticked models in *The Sun* embody the *Today*

³⁸ For instance, the online *Urban Dictionary* – “a slang dictionary with your definitions” – defines “Victoria’s Secret” variously as “the best non-pornographic porn out there” and “poor man’s porn” (“Victoria’s Secret”).

³⁹ “Phwoar”: “As an enthusiastic expression of desire, approval, or excitement, esp. in regard to sexual attractiveness: ‘cor!’ ‘wow!’” (OED). In this case it is a play on “saw”; the final R would be silent.

⁴⁰ This voyeuristic scene was immortalized by the mutoscope, an invention known colloquially throughout England as a “‘what-the-butler-saw’ machine” (OED).

reviewer's "ultimate male fantasy" based on Samantha Fox and Maria Whitaker; they are meant to be read as lesbians for no other reason than that there are two of them.

Film adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch describes how pornographic film adaptations "empty their [source] stories of their original meaning in order to use them as a narrative framework for the sex scenes that are [pornographic films'] raison d'être" (110). In this case *The Sun* empties *Tipping the Velvet* of its original meaning in order to use the text's lesbian framework as the basis for its own pseudo-lesbian imagery. Once the BBC serial has been reconstructed as a "tabloid ideal," however, it becomes potentially unrecognizable, so *The Sun* must name the original title in each image's caption. 12 October's models Anna and Sarina are "toggled up like those girls in TV's *Tipping the Velvet*" in a "tribute to BBC2's Victorian lesbian drama"; 16 October depicts a "saucy scene inspired by BBC2's sizzling drama *Tipping the Velvet*," and so on. Each image, we are told, has been "inspired by" or "pays tribute to" *Tipping the Velvet*. This repeated citation of the original title appropriates Waters's "authentic" lesbian eroticism for the pseudo-lesbian scenarios offered up on Page 3, but the emphasis on "BBC2's drama" invokes the version that "men are going to love" and reinscribes Davies as the text's author. These acts of renaming and framing package the lesbian eroticism of *Tipping the Velvet* as a commodity to be consumed by *Sun* readers.

Despite the claim that Anna and Sarina are "toggled up like those girls in TV's *Tipping the Velvet*," "Victorian Secrets," with its corsets and frills, bears little visual resemblance to the BBC serial. In both the novel and the screen version, Nancy's cross-dressing onstage as a male impersonator and offstage as a male prostitute drives the narrative. Male impersonation, however, clearly does not figure in the "ultimate male fantasy," so it must be omitted from the tabloid ideal. This omission is evident in the 17 October "Victorian Secret," which features Corina "reflect[ing] on her saucy image [as she] adjusts her garter in a pose inspired by BBC2's

drama *Tipping the Velvet*.” Corina’s posing recalls an episode in Waters’s novel and Davies’s adaptation in which Nancy becomes the “sex slave” (in tabloid parlance) of wealthy widow Diana Lethaby. Kept for nocturnal pleasures, Nancy spends the daylight hours artfully arranging herself while she waits for Diana to return from business. In the novel she tells us: “There was drama to be had in the choosing of the chamber, and the pose, in which I would arrange myself for her” (265). For her sojourn with the older woman, however, Nancy dresses in masculine attire; in both the novel and the television serial she passes as Diana’s “boy” when they go out in public (278). Where Corina is draped in a lacy white dressing gown and sports a garter, Nancy is dressed in fine linen suits, with ties and cufflinks, men’s shoes and gloves. For Page 3, apparently, “Secrets” signifies voyeurism while “Victorian” signifies frilly knickers.

Male impersonation was not the only gender troubling signifier omitted from “Victorian Secrets.” *Tipping the Velvet* gained a certain notoriety for its dildo scene between Nancy and Diana. Described by a *Sun* television reviewer as a “frightening-looking 10 in[ch] leather sex toy” (Iozzi “Tasteful? Corset is”), the dildo made an appearance in the second episode of *Tipping the Velvet* in British television’s “first lesbian strap-on scene” (Powell). Vicky Powell, writing for the British lesbian magazine *DIVA*, states: “[w]hile *Tipping* did for lesbian sex what *Queer as Folk* did for gay sex, this period drama will be remembered for its star – the gargantuan strap-on dildo worn by Rachael Stirling” (Powell). Diana’s favourite bedroom accessory would seem to be the stuff that tabloids are made of; *The Daily Mirror*, for example, reported gleefully that the BBC had commissioned two “leather sex aids” from a saddler, and that one went missing while the other had to be “reshaped” because it was considered “too obscene” (“The Scurra”). Despite its titillating potential, however, the dildo, like Nancy’s suits, is omitted from “Victorian Secrets” because it disrupts the gendered coding of Page 3’s images. Writing about pornography made by lesbians, Colleen Lamos states: “the dildo flaunts its phallicism and in doing so throws into doubt

received distinctions between male and female as well as between hetero- and homosexuality” (91). This troubling of gender and sexual binaries is at odds with what Hinds calls the “ethos of ‘Page 3.’” Page 3 models smilingly pose as objects of heterosexual male fantasy, inviting male readers to penetrate them. If there are two models then both are equally available to the male gaze. The women in “Victorian Secrets” are clearly not interested in each other’s bodies or each other’s pleasure; instead, they look out of the photograph, soliciting the reader’s attention. A Page 3 “girl” wearing a dildo would evidently disrupt this equation: if she appropriates the phallic fantasy her invitation becomes an offer to penetrate him. The dildo, then, potentially threatens male heterosexual phallicism and for this reason must be omitted from Page 3.

The Sun invokes *Tipping the Velvet* as a “lesbian” text and therefore as a site of heterosexual male fantasy. This invocation is reiterated through the tabloid “epithets” that inevitably precede the title *Tipping the Velvet*: it is a “racy” “sizzling” “steamy” drama. But since the drama can be read “independently” of this fantasy, it has to be reconstructed as a “tabloid ideal.” While the BBC serial femme-inizes its lesbian protagonist, *The Sun* constructs its own fantasy in “Victorian Secrets.” In this way the newspaper can omit any elements that may disrupt or subvert its scopophilic economy. “Victorian Secrets” recalls Butler’s words on domesticated parody: through these images Waters’s non-normative lesbian tropes become “recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (177). *The Sun* can therefore be seen to domesticate the lesbian text more thoroughly than the television adaptation; while the latter femme-inizes, depoliticizes and decontextualizes its lesbian characters, the former comprehensively assimilates the text’s lesbian eroticism to its own heterosexual programme. In this way *The Sun* replaces Waters’s lesbian feminism with a heteronormative and antifeminist agenda.

The British tabloids promoted *Tipping the Velvet* as a “raunchy lesbo romp” (“The Scurra”), *romp* being the tabloids’ word of choice for lesbian (s)exploits.⁴¹ Following this “hyperventilating advance publicity,” as one reviewer put it (Joseph), *The Sun* reported complaints that the BBC serial “wasn’t raunchy ENOUGH” (“Lesbian Show ‘Too Clean’ Say Angry Viewers”; original emphasis). While some viewers predictably found the sex too explicit, others telephoned the BBC after the first episode to complain “that [*Tipping the Velvet*] didn’t live up to its billing as the ‘most explicit lesbian TV drama ever.’” A BBC spokesperson remarked that “some viewers were ‘disappointed’ at the lack of hot sex scenes” (“Lesbian Show”). In a review for *The Times* Joe Joseph analyzes this disappointment: “...by the time it came to actually watching the show our expectations were higher than Marge Simpson’s beehive. Anything short of *What the Butler Saw* as filmed by Russ Meyer was at risk of seeming like rather an anticlimax.”⁴² What viewers got, according to Joseph, was “*Moulin Rouge* for beginners... spiked with a few cosy lesbian sex scenes that wouldn’t have raised many eyebrows in a Fifties French art house movie” (Joseph). Joseph’s response is typical of broadsheet reviewers who adopted an intellectualized response to *Tipping the Velvet* in an effort to distance themselves from the tabloids’ reputation for a vulgarity and carnality associated with the working class. While this is hardly more surprising than the tabloids’ hyperventilation over the prospect of lesbian sex, there is a curious similarity among the broadsheet and tabloid responses: in attempting to distance themselves from the tabloids certain broadsheet writers ended up aligning themselves with the latter.

This trend is exemplified by Roland White in *The Sunday Times*, who concludes, after

⁴¹ “Nan later romps her way through London with various busty girls, becoming a sex slave on the way,” writes one *Sun* reviewer (Iozzi “Keeley Hawes”). “Cue ripping bodices and some steamy rumpy pumpy,” adds another (Roberts).

⁴² Meyer is known for directing softcore porn films such as *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965).

describing the first episode: “[D]espite its thin plot, *Tipping the Velvet* is as uplifting as a Victorian bustle. But shocking? No. I was only shocked at the way that middle age has wrapped me in its suffocating embrace. Two women squirming about in bed, panting and groaning, and it barely raised an eyebrow” (White). Instead he professes to have been “much more interested” in a programme on London sewers. White employs a style of urbane wit marked by clever figurative language to distance himself rhetorically from the phew and cry of the tabloids. This distancing is mirrored by Andrew Anthony in the *Guardian*. Dismissing the lesbian sex for displaying the same “standardised choreography” and “carefully positioned bedsheets” as any other television sex scene, Anthony writes: “The one novelty, and it was nothing to moan about, was that there were four breasts on show instead of the usual two” (Anthony). Anthony’s review is more thorough than White’s; he is one of the few reviewers to discuss the novel in any detail, noting that Waters “understood the erotic potential that lies between what is said and how it’s said,” a sexual tension that (he contends) the BBC serial lacks. Having made the comparison he gestures towards anti-fidelity criticism, admitting that it is “an odious business comparing a screen adaptation with the original novel” (Anthony). But for all his attempts to provide a balanced perspective, he, like White, remarks on the failure of the lesbian sex to titillate. Anthony concludes his review by declaring that “next week’s episode features a strap-on dildo,” another “novelty” which might succeed where the “four breasts on show” failed.

The broadsheet stance is perhaps best illustrated by John Preston in *The Sunday Telegraph*. He writes:

Like a lot of heterosexual men my attitude towards lesbianism goes roughly as follows: dead keen in theory; scared stiff of actual lesbians. *Tipping the Velvet*... was preceded by various windy pronouncements about how it revealed “human nature in all its glory” and “lifted the coat of Victorian sexuality.” Phooey! It’s aimed squarely at robust male

hypocrites such as myself; the sort of people who would come over very queasy at the thought of watching a porn film, but who are quite keen on those late-night Channel 5 movies in which bored housewife, Nina, decides to improve her backhand by taking lessons from statuesque tennis coach, Helga. (Preston)

Despite his expectations, however, Preston, too, is disappointed: “The sex, when it eventually came, proved to be an extremely damp squib, carrying no erotic charge whatsoever... Better Nina and Helga any day” (Preston). These writers are eager to prove how *untitillating* they find the spectacle of Kitty and Nan “squirming about in bed” as a way of affirming their own sophistication. It is in this very distancing, however, that they inadvertently align themselves with the tabloids. Anthony, Joseph, and particularly White and Preston may find the women in *Tipping the Velvet* unsuccessful sex objects, but they still *expect* to be aroused by them. Lesbianism, they imply, should be inherently titillating for heterosexual men. In condemning *Tipping the Velvet* for its failure to raise more than eyebrows, these writers implicitly validate the lesbian objectification openly championed by the tabloids. While superficially the broadsheet reviews appear to have nothing in common with “Victorian Secrets,” they exhibit a similar impulse to domesticate the lesbian eroticism of *Tipping the Velvet*.

Few newspaper writers questioned this impulse, although *The Independent*'s Natasha Walter observed that “male homosexuals do not litter the pages of *News of the World* and *The Sun* as ‘sizzling’ and ‘provocative’ fodder for their heterosexual readers,” and the tabloid *Sunday Mirror*'s Eve Pollard was moved to ask: “Can you imagine how shocked men would be if women yearned to see photographs and telly programmes featuring homosexual men thrashing about together?” While *The Sun* wholeheartedly endorsed lesbian objectification, however, it published an article which revealed that men *do* enjoy watching other men thrashing about together. Dominic Mohan's “Guide to Match of the Gay” (a play on BBC One's venerable sports

programme *Match of the Day*) was written in response to a BBC scheduling conflict. The second episode of *Tipping the Velvet* aired the same night that the English national football team played Macedonia on BBC One, thus creating a “dilemma” for the “self-respecting” heterosexual male viewer forced to choose between “the tasty prospect of seeing David Beckham and Michael Owen in one strip [for England]” and “the even tastier prospect of some girl-on-girl action with Keeley Hawes and Rachael Stirling on BBC [Two]’s Victorian lesbian romp-fest” (Mohan). But Mohan has “fleshed out all the juicy bits” and provides a play-by-play guide so that the viewer “will know exactly when to pick up the remote and flick over for a quick perv.” The guide is full, as one would imagine, of sports and sex puns: at 9.15pm, for example, “England should have the job in hand by now and so does lady-loving Nan Astley over on [BBC] Two[, who] blows away the opposition.”

In this comparison the “girl-on-girl action” of the “lesbian romp-fest” is analogous with the boy-on-boy action of the football match, and both share the same objective. Mohan concludes: “Let’s hope [Nancy’s] not the only one who scores tonight.” Scoring a goal in football becomes interchangeable with “scoring” sexually, so that the homosocial context of the football pitch is made explicitly homoerotic. For the “self-respecting” heterosexual male viewers watching both programmes, moreover, the vicarious pleasures of scoring metaphorically and literally are also made interchangeable. Transferring the male gaze from footballers to fictional characters and back again, Mohan – whether inadvertently or not – succeeds in queering the male gaze by reconfiguring it from a heterosexual to a bisexual gaze. “Match of the gay” can thus be read as a reference to *Tipping the Velvet* or to England v. Macedonia. This article didn’t subvert the media objectification of lesbianism, but by making men – young, fit footballers – the object of a male gaze it provided one of the more subversive responses to the media frenzy. The BBC

itself, however, finally offered a version of *Tipping the Velvet* which effectively resisted the dominant domesticating impulse.

Part 5. French and Saunders's disruptive adaptation

Two months after the BBC serial aired on BBC Two, a third cultural adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* appeared during French and Saunders's "Celebrity Christmas Puddings" special on BBC One.⁴³ The nine-and-a-half minute parodic sketch, called "Tippin' o' the Velveteen," underlines the serial's cultural significance, for the comedians are known for their elaborate parodies of television and film blockbusters such as *Harry Potter*.⁴⁴ That French and Saunders is itself a BBC production likely helped the comic duo re-create the look and sound of *Tipping the Velvet*; the French and Saunders theme tune, for example, is seamlessly incorporated into the *Tipping the Velvet* incidental music, while sets, costumes, hair and makeup appear almost identical to those in the serial. The bodies, however, are unmistakably those of Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, who play, respectively, "Miss Nancyboy French" and "Miss Titty Saunders" in a parody which ruthlessly mocks the BBC serial even as it subverts notions of male fantasy.

In this version of *Tipping the Velvet* the characters are based on Davies's Nan Astley and Kitty Butler but strongly informed by critical responses to the BBC serial. Most reviewers liked

⁴³ It first aired 25 December 2002 and was included on the DVD "French and Saunders: On the Rocks" (2005). French and Saunders have produced six series from 1987 to 2004, plus numerous seasonal specials.

⁴⁴ "Harry Potter and the Secret Chamberpot of Azerbaijan" (2003) featured Dawn French as Harry and Jennifer Saunders as Ron Weasley and J. K. Rowling. Other blockbusters parodied include, for example, *Lord of the Rings*, *Titanic*, *Braveheart*, *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, *Alien*, *Cold Mountain*, and *Kill Bill*; horror films like *Misery*, *The Exorcist* and *The Silence of the Lambs*; film "classics" like *Gone with the Wind* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Film auteurs like Fellini and Ingmar Bergman get spoofed, as do television shows like *Baywatch*, *Big Brother*, *Dr Quin: Medicine Woman* ("Dr Quimm: Mad Woman"), and popular singers and bands including Madonna, Elton John, The Spice Girls, Britney Spears, and Björk.

Keeley Hawes but some found her lacking presence as Kitty Butler;⁴⁵ when Saunders appears on stage the audience struggles to hear her. Tabloid and broadsheet writers were much less kind to Rachael Stirling, frequently singling out her voice and accent for criticism. John Preston wrote that “[Stirling] sounded as if she had several sodden Kleenex jammed up her nose.” Her accent was likened to Janine Butcher’s on *EastEnders*, Rose Buck’s in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and that of Waynetta Slob.⁴⁶ When French first meets Saunders in her dressing room, the latter says: “So you’re my little fan.” French replies: “Yes, miss” – her voice drops an octave – “I think you’re *enchauting*, miss,” she blurts, imitating Stirling, sodden Kleenex, Cockney accent and all.

In their incorporation of the BBC serial’s media response French and Saunders also satirize the media’s sensationalizing of the serial, beginning with the name “Titty” which crudely foregrounds the expectations of nudity and lesbian sex that preceded *Tipping the Velvet*. The parody does indeed provide a lesbian sex scene replete with “titties,” but they happen to be enormous imitation breasts made of rubber. Feigning sexual excitement, Titty and Nancyboy rub their fake breasts together in a grotesque parody of sensuality; French tentatively pokes at one of Saunders’s rubber nipples. The artefactual quality of the scene – the strap-on breasts and latex buttocks – codes the lesbian bodies themselves as fake, an artificiality paralleled by the actresses’ deliberately unconvincing desire for each other. Through these anti-erotic strategies, the scene emphatically resists pornographic readings of the kind constructed by *The Sun*.

⁴⁵ For example, *The Times*’s Erica Wagner writes: “I had imagined the ‘masher’ (contemporary slang for a male impersonator) Kitty to be a forcefield of transgender sexuality; Hawes is beautiful, but you could not call her charismatic, and her voice is thin. Ethel Merman, where are you when we need you?” (Wagner).

⁴⁶ *The Daily Mirror* derisively describes Stirling’s “(admittedly accurate) impression of Janine from *EastEnders*” (Shelley); the *Guardian* compares Stirling’s looks with her mother’s but her voice with Rose Buck’s, adding “the accent alone was a carnal death knell” (Anthony); and *The Sun* states that the final episode “arrives in the nick of time to rescue Nan from turning into Waynetta Slob. Just check out that accent” (Roberts). All three characters, played respectively by Martine McCutcheon, Jean Marsh, and Kathy Burke, are working-class women with strong Cockney accents; Slob, a chain-smoking caricature, would shout: “‘Ah’m ‘avin’ a fag!”

French and Saunders's satirical critique of tabloid misogyny dates back to the "Two Fat Men" sketches of their earliest days, in which the comedians played unsavoury balding men in fat suits, driven by their unconsummated lust to hump inanimate objects. The Fat Men's frequent use of tabloid expressions such as "phwoar!," "I'd give her one!," and "she's begging for it!" – whether discussing Page 3 girls or the Queen – explicitly ridicules tabloid modes of hypersexuality and the objectification of women. Read in this context, the Titty/Nancyboy sex scene not only parodies Davies's serial but also deflates the sensationalistic media treatment of lesbianism; it is a grotesque performance for a grotesque audience.

Saunders further disrupts the sex scene by breaking character. Emerging from the blanket between French's legs she asks: "You're Diana Rigg's daughter, aren't you?" Temporarily abandoning her dubious Cockney accent, French replies in an upper-class voice: "Yes, but I don't normally like to make a thing of it at work." Saunders answers: "She's a good friend of mine. Give her my love; tell her I'll phone her. I've got my phone here somewhere, but I can't do it now, I'm busy." Combined with the scene's inescapable grotesquerie, this alienation effect, which codes the scene as "work" rather than carefree lesbian "romping," undermines notions of lesbian sex as inherently titillating for heterosexual men. The parody is thus "truly troubling," not to conventional gender norms as is Waters's protagonist, but to the domesticating impulse itself: "Tippin' o' the Velveteen" interrogates those cultural mechanisms which seek to "recirculate" non-normative instances of sexuality as "instruments of cultural hegemony" (Butler 177).

Although *Tipping the Velvet* aired three years before Stonewall's Cowan and Valentine began recording queer representation on BBC One and Two, the serial confirms that lesbians do indeed exist on the BBC. Davies's adaptation, however, reveals a clear if unconscious agenda to femme-inize the more disruptive aspects of lesbian identity in Waters's novel, while tabloid and

broadsheet writers domesticate the serial by mediating its eroticism through their own fantasies. These writers, including Davies, foreclose, moreover, on notions of female spectatorship by coding their audiences as heterosexual and male. French and Saunders, however, subvert the domesticating impulse on both counts: first, by satirizing this male appropriation of lesbian sexuality; and secondly, by embedding a female audience for their performance. This audience – one of several framing devices for the Christmas special – comprises two frumpy middle-aged women (also French and Saunders) with opera glasses sitting in an empty theatre. In the sketch's final scene the camera cuts to Nancyboy on stage singing Kitty's signature tune "Oh Rosie" from the BBC serial. She throws a rose into the audience which lands in Saunders's outstretched hand in the theatre. The Saunders spectator – who believes Nancyboy really is a boy – laughs: "Thank you, young laddy! But if you think I'm taking my pants off, you've got another think coming." French grabs the rose and exclaims: "I will!" In this way the parody reinstates the female spectators erased in Davies's comment that "men" would love the serial; in *The Sun's* construction of the "ultimate male fantasy"; and again in the broadsheet reviews written by men "quite keen" on television lesbianism. It suggests, moreover, that the adaptation had a lesbian spectatorship: French responds to cross-dressed Nancyboy's performance in a queer way: brandishing the rose, she sticks out her tongue and wiggles it, imitating Nancy's explication for Florence of the act of "tipping the velvet."

Tipping the Velvet, then, begins life as a novel which opens various subversive and disruptive possibilities for norms of gender and sexuality. Waters deliberately resists the ahistoricizing conventions of much lesbian historical fiction to sketch a complex interplay between social and temporal norms, peer expectations, and individual identity. Translated for the screen, Waters's themes and characters become subject to the sexist demands of mainstream visual media which deny lesbian subjectivity, force appearances to fit straight (televisual) norms,

and repackage lesbian sexuality for a heterosexual male gaze. The BBC adaptation and the attendant media frenzy proved a double-edged sword for queer visibility in that it significantly increased lesbian visibility in mainstream discourse, even while domesticating it. The cycle of disruption and domestication becomes complete – if only momentarily – through French and Saunders’s parody, which exposes and mocks the patriarchal domesticating strategies themselves.

Chapter 4

Queering New Ground: Sound, silence and subjectivity in *Fingersmith*

Part 1. Introduction

The BBC followed up *Tipping the Velvet* (2002) with a television adaptation of Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* in 2005. Taking in murder, madness and gothic mansions, the mid-Victorian *Fingersmith* is both darker and more melodramatic than *Tipping the Velvet*. Nonetheless, Waters's text also contains certain pivotal scenes which take place outside in daylight in the English countryside in Berkshire. When these exterior scenes are translated to television their lush greenery creates a striking visual contrast with the adaptation's gloomy interiors; the accompanying musical score, however, sounds entirely inappropriate for the pastoral imagery. It is this apparent contradiction in the audiovisual depiction of Waters's exterior scenes which, I argue, contains the key to the adaptation's queer subjectivities and which adds a whole new dimension to Waters's novel. In this chapter I want to approach Waters's lesbian identities through the adaptation's soundscape and through its picturesque exteriors. After discussing the novel, its adaptation and the media response to its adaptation, I turn to the significance of landscape in the BBC classic serial genre. Adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch asserts that the BBC fetishizes "period illustrations" (172). Nowhere is this fetishization more obvious than in adaptations of works by Jane Austen, the BBC Tradition of Quality "patron author" (Leitch 175). When Waters's exterior scenes are translated to television, I argue, they visually reference a pastoral idyll specific to Jane Austen screen adaptations. I propose, however, that *Fingersmith* invokes this Austenian imagery visually in order to subvert it aurally. Drawing on recent film music theory, I examine how dramatic scoring contributes to audiovisual media, and how it can be used to express characters' interiority. In this chapter I want to draw attention

to Richard Blackford's musical underscore for the BBC's *Fingersmith*, which, I argue, serves not only to express the lesbian subjectivities of Waters's protagonists, but functions implicitly to queer the now familiar "Austenque pastoral" of film and television.

Part 2. *Fingersmith*'s major intertexts

Set during the 1860s, the decade of Victorian "sensation" literature, *Fingersmith* adds a contemporary queer sensibility to its convoluted sensation plot by constructing an explicitly lesbian relationship between its protagonists Sue Trinder, a petty thief from the Borough in London, and Maud Lilly, an heiress in the countryside. Maud lives at Briar House with her uncle, the eccentric scholar Christopher Lilly, who keeps her virtually imprisoned in his isolated gothic manor. Lilly employs a young painter called Richard Rivers to help catalogue and frame his collection of prints and paintings. In reality, though, Richard is no artist but a con artist, and on meeting Maud he devises a plan to marry her, lock her up in an asylum, and make off with her fortune. From London he sends Sue, the thief – or *fingersmith* – to Briar as a maid, and returns to Briar himself to finish the cataloguing. For three thousand pounds Sue is to befriend Maud and persuade her to marry Richard. As planned, Richard helps Maud escape and marries her, with Sue as maid and witness, but when they arrive at the asylum, it is Sue, not Maud, who is locked up under the name Mrs Maud Rivers. Richard takes Maud to Sue's surrogate family of thieves in the Borough, where she discovers that she is not the niece of Christopher Lilly but the daughter of Grace Sucksby, the baby farmer who raised Sue and the mastermind behind an elaborate plot to secure Maud's fortune for herself. Meanwhile, Sue escapes the asylum and returns to Lant Street intending to murder Maud; in the ensuing confusion Richard is stabbed and dies instead. Taking the blame, Mrs Sucksby is hanged for his murder; Sue subsequently discovers that she is the daughter of Marianne Lilly and rightful heir of the fortune. The novel ends with Sue Lilly's

return to Briar House where she finds Maud Sucksby living alone in the crumbling mansion; reunited, they confess their love for one another.

First published in 2002 and short-listed for both the Orange and Man Booker literary prizes, *Fingersmith* draws on a number of literary and non-literary sources. In an interview in *The Times*, Sarah Waters tells Carola Long: “*Fingersmith* was influenced by sensation novels such as *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as well as stories about orphans such as *Oliver Twist* and *Jane Eyre*” (Long). In addition to various novels by Collins and Dickens and other Victorian writers, Waters points to the black, often grotesque, humour of British comic ensemble *The League of Gentlemen* as an influence.⁴⁷ Waters’s plot, however, most obviously invokes Wilkie Collins’s serialized sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1859-60) as its primary intertext. Beyond certain striking similarities between the two texts – for example, Waters’s Maud Lilly, like Collins’s Laura Fairlie, is orphaned and lives with her uncle; Richard Rivers, like Walter Hartright, travels to an isolated manor house to teach painting; Maud, like Laura, learns to paint (badly); Marian and Laura share an intimate relationship, as do Maud and Sue – Collins’s “wrongful incarceration” episode provides the twist in Waters’s novel. Laura Fairlie’s incarceration under the name of her identical illegitimate lunatic half-sister Anne Catherick, a minor sequence of events in a lengthy text, becomes, in *Fingersmith*, an integral part of Sue’s first-person narrative; it is, to use Leitch’s term, considerably expanded (99).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Initially a radio programme on BBC Radio Four, *The League of Gentlemen* (Jeremy Dyson, Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton, and Reece Shearsmith) became a popular BBC Two television programme in 1999. The show is set in a bizarre northern English village. “[T]hey pastiche different genres,” says Waters, “bits of high and low culture, draw on British visual traditions and then make them completely queer and grotesque” (Long).

⁴⁸ This is not to suggest that *Fingersmith* is an adaptation of *The Woman in White*, or even an analogue of Collins’s text. In his fruitless attempt to divide adaptations into categories, Thomas Leitch describes Helen Fielding’s novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1998) as an analogue of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (113). In light of Leitch’s ultimate conclusion that it is much more useful to think of strategies rather than categories of adaptation (126), however, we might consider the “points of analogy” (113) between Waters’s and Collins’s respective novels without labelling one an analogue of the other.

In addition to expanding the episode, Waters gives her protagonists a subjectivity that Collins's female characters lack. In *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcombe's diary appears to be a primary source for the novel, but Victorianist Lyn Pykett asserts that "Marian's voice is not heard directly" (57). Instead, her diary is "annotated" by the villainous Count Fosco, and has been further "edited" by stalwart hero Walter Hartright (57). Although Marian rescues Laura from the asylum by bribing a nurse, Walter deems their first-person accounts unreliable at best and "incoherent" at worst (Collins 433). Accordingly, he proposes to "relate both narratives, not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which [he] commit[s] to writing for [his] own guidance" (422). Curiously, despite Laura's "fragment[ed]" recollection of events (433), Walter is able to record the asylum nurse's exact words to her: "Look at your own name on your clothes... There it is, in good marking ink... Anne Catherick, as plain as print!" (436). "And there it was, when Miss Halcombe examined the linen her sister wore, on the night of their arrival at Limmeridge House" (436), concludes Walter's account of the episode. Walter's clinical third-person account may succeed in "[unrolling]... the tangled web... most speedily and most intelligibly" (422) but it does so by expunging Laura's experience and by "excis[ing] sections [of Marian's account] which are not of direct relevance to Laura's story" (Pykett 57). By contrast, *Fingersmith's* narrative alternates between the first-person perspectives of Sue and Maud and it is Richard Rivers who appears only indirectly through these characters' impressions. The BBC adaptation similarly cuts between the protagonists' respective points-of-view, in this way preserving the full force of the shock when the unsuspecting Sue is dragged into the insane asylum.

While music in many ways shapes the adaptation, it is sound, or rather the absence of sound, that defines the novel. When Sue first travels to Briar House, she is, like Walter in *The*

Woman in White, struck by how quiet it is compared with the crowded city she has left behind. Alone in her room, Sue finds “only an awful silence: you listened, and it troubled your ears” (61). In Collins’s novel, Limmeridge House is kept in silence because Frederick Fairlie suffers from delicate nerves. He lives in a state of monastic tranquillity; Walter observes that the “soft, mysterious, and subdued” light in his rooms “help[s] to intensify the deep silence, and the air of profound seclusion that possessed the place” (39). Fairlie, of “beardless” countenance, with “effeminately small” feet “clad... in little womanish bronze-leather slippers,” and “white delicate hands” adorned with rings (39), has “a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look—something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man... which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal experience of a woman” (39-40). In these ways Fairlie’s masculinity is shown to be suspect or “improper,” a threat to the “proper” white heterosexual English masculinity that, argues Richard Nemesvari, Walter Hartright must secure (96). Nemesvari cautions that “it would be risky to assert that Fairlie is homosexual,” but suggests that Fairlie’s “unmanliness... [nonetheless] implies sexual perversity” (100). Fairlie is therefore coded as queer in part through the silence that his delicate constitution requires. During Walter’s first meeting with Fairlie his new employer “close[s] his eyes, and [holds] up one of his white hands imploringly” when Walter begins to speak. “Pray excuse me,” says Fairlie. “But *could* you contrive to speak in a lower key? In the wretched state of my nerves, loud sound of any kind is indescribable torture to me” (40; original emphasis). These nerves ultimately prevent him from acting in a “properly” masculine way to rescue Laura from Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco.

Christopher Lilly’s demand for absolute quiet in *Fingersmith* is associated, conversely, with patriarchal authority, but this authority does not go unquestioned in the novel. The “stillness” of Briar House “bewilders and frightens” Maud on her first day there (183), and the

absence of sound seems tangible to her in her bedroom that first night: “My ears feel full, as if with water or with wax. That is the silence, that my uncle cultivates in his house, as other men grow vines and flowering creepers” (184). As a gentleman scholar, Lilly “cultivates” silence in order to carry out his work, the compilation of a massive encyclopaedic project on the topic of written pornography, formally titled his *Universal Bibliography of Priapus and Venus* (201). Although Lilly seems to embody the cliché of the dry academic – pornography holds only a bibliographic interest for him – he is associated, unlike Collins’s Frederick Fairlie, with a phallic masculinity: each volume in his collection is stamped with his emblem, “a clever thing of his own design—a lily, drawn strangely, to resemble a phallus; and wound about with a stem of briar at the root” (218). These books, Maud later tells Richard, he calls “his children, his foundlings, that have come to him, from every corner of the world” (218).

In Maud’s first days at Briar “the hush and regularity of [her] uncle’s house drives [her] to fits and foaming tempers” (192) which are harshly punished. She only submits to her uncle when, after one particularly bad outburst she “glimpse[s]... the surface” of her uncle’s “particular mania”: “I see that it is dark, and know that it is silent—indeed, its substance is the substance of the darkness and the silence which fills my uncle’s house like water or like wax. Should I struggle, it will draw me deep into itself, and I will drown. I do not wish, then, to do that. I cease struggling at all, and surrender myself to its viscid, circular currents” (194). In his privileged position, Lilly is perceived – by his peers, by his servants, by Sue – as a dedicated amateur academic instead of a deranged man like the lunatics Maud has witnessed similarly “labour[ing] at endless tasks” (194). “Had they [the lunatics] been gentlemen, and rich—instead of women—then perhaps they would have passed as scholars and commanded staffs,” she later speculates (194).

As Lilly's secretary, Maud spends her days copying texts in an oppressive silence interrupted only by the regular chiming of the Briar House bell. When Lilly's groom drives Sue to Briar from the train station, she hears "the slow tolling of a bell—a very mournful sound... not like the cheerful bells of London" (56). When she asks Mrs Stiles: "Does the clock chime all night?" the housekeeper replies: "All night, and all day, at the hour and the half. Mr Lilly likes his days run very regular. You'll find that out" (58). The regular days at Briar are irrevocably disrupted, however, by Richard's scheme. When Sue returns to Briar, at the end of the narrative, she finds the grounds "perfectly quiet and dark" (538). This silence has a different quality, a strangeness, she thinks, compared with the oppressive stillness on her first sojourn there. At the back of the house she discovers the cause of this difference: "The great white clock was there," Sue tells us, "but the hands—this shocked me, more than anything—the hands were stuck, the hour was wrong. The clock had not chimed, all the time I had walked: it was that, I think, that had made the silence so strange" (539). She learns subsequently that Lilly is dead; on discovering that Maud cut up a number of his books with his razor, he suffered a massive stroke. Emasculated by the destruction of his library, he lived on for a month while Maud looked after him. When Sue returns to Briar the silence of the grounds and house is no longer a stillness cultivated by Lilly; it signifies the absence of his authority.

Part 3. What a difference one Davies makes: *Fingersmith* on screen and in the media

Fingersmith was adapted by Peter Ransley and directed by Aisling Walsh for Sally Head Productions. Although the BBC used the same production company for *Tipping the Velvet*, the two adaptations are remarkably different. In Andrew Davies's translation, Waters's picaresque *Tipping the Velvet* became a dirty romantic comedy; incorporating unexpected camera angles, playful montages and comedy effects it created, as one critic observed, a Baz Luhrmann aesthetic

(Joseph) well-suited to its protagonist's sexual adventures. *Fingersmith*, by contrast, is a fast-paced, plot-driven gothic thriller inconducive to what *Guardian* contributor and author Bidisha calls "corny, porny lesbianism-for-guys" (Bidisha). The domestication of Waters's lesbian characters in *Tipping the Velvet* and particularly the femme-inization of her butch protagonist gave rise to this mode of pseudo-lesbianism, with the result that Rachael Stirling looked exceedingly unconvincing in her depiction of a masculine woman passing as a young man. The producers of *Fingersmith* are, however, largely able to sidestep the issue of femme-inization because neither Maud nor Sue is particularly androgynous or masculine. In this case, convincing casting requires actresses who resemble each other enough for the mistaken-identity incarceration plot.

For the main roles in *Fingersmith*, Doreen Jones cast Sally Hawkins, who played Diana's maid Zena Blake in *Tipping the Velvet*, as Sue Trinder; Elaine Cassidy as Maud Lilly; and Rupert Evans as Richard Rivers. "Some great new faces [are] supplemented by a smattering of old favourites," approves *The Independent's* Charlie Courtauld. Old favourites include Charles Dance as Christopher Lilly, Imelda Staunton as Mrs Sucksby, and David Troughton as Sue's surrogate father Mr Ibbs. Reflecting on these casting decisions, Sarah Waters wrote in the *Radio Times* of 26 March 2005:

[A]s far as casting was concerned, I had to hope for the best. The results, however, were inspiring. Rupert Evans was so much the charming Victorian villain of my imagination that seeing him wandering about the set in costume was quite spooky. Other characters were subtly transformed. My blonde 17-year-olds, Sue and Maud, became darker and older. Peevish Mr Lilly, when played by Charles Dance, became sexier and more menacing. Imelda Staunton was shorter and slighter than I'd imagined Mrs Sucksby – but her very smallness brings extra vulnerability to the role." ("Gains in translation")

It is significant that her article is titled “Gains in translation”: she considers the changes made to her characters in their embodiment for the screen without “lamenting what has been ‘lost’ in the transition from novel to film, while ignoring what has been ‘gained’” (Stam 3). Certainly the casting is exemplary for the purposes of the plot; Hawkins and Cassidy are well-cast for the wrongful incarceration; roughly the same height and slenderness, they are both dark-haired and pale-skinned. Stephanie Middleton, who plays Sue as a child, looks convincingly like a young Hawkins; more importantly, Cassidy’s facial features – particularly her nose – resemble those of Imelda Staunton’s enough to suggest that Maud is Mrs Sucksby’s long-lost daughter, a significant revelation that works, in the adaptation, on a largely visual level. These resemblances function, in other words, to “suture” viewers into the diegetic world of the adaptation, helping them be “absorbed” by the text (Kassabian 59).

While *Tipping the Velvet* aired in the BBC’s Wednesday night “Controversy Slot” (Hinds 159) on BBC Two, *Fingersmith* was treated as a bona fide classic serial. It was broadcast on BBC One on 27 March, 3 and 10 April 2005 on Sunday nights at 9.00pm, a day and time slot typically reserved for mainstream dramas like *Bleak House* (2005), the sixteen-part Andrew Davies adaptation to which *Fingersmith* lost the BAFTA for Best Drama Serial. Davies, of course, had no part in *Fingersmith* for it was adapted by Peter Ransley, less well known than and not nearly as controversial as Davies, but an experienced adaptor as well as original writer of screenplays such as *Fallen Angel* (2007), *A Good Murder* (2006), *The Cry* (2002), *Seaforth* (1994), *The Hawk* (1993), and *The Price* (1985). Andrew Davies had preceded the unknown Sarah Waters in the credits for *Tipping the Velvet*, but by 2005 Waters had garnered enough recognition to be, like the typical nineteenth-century source author, “foregrounded as guarantor of the cultural commodity on offer” (Kerr 13). Cited ahead of Ransley in the opening credits for *Fingersmith*, Waters received far more recognition than Ransley in the media and did not

“[vanish] into the Classic Serial format” as Kerr found many classic source authors did. Walsh, like *Tipping the Velvet*’s director Geoffrey Sax, was virtually unmentioned by television reviewers.

The response to the BBC’s *Fingersmith* in the British press was decidedly subdued compared with the media conflagration that engulfed *Tipping the Velvet* in 2002. One reviewer anticipated a similar flare-up in 2005: “Waters describes the lesbian scenes in [*Fingersmith*] as ‘more or less incidental’ but it’s safe to assume they won’t be incidental in the sales talk for the BBC dramatisation,” wrote Charlie Lee-Potter in the *Mail on Sunday*. But Lee-Potter was wrong; neither the BBC, nor Waters, Walsh nor Ransley used Andrew Davies’s provocative tactics to promote the adaptation. In the absence of such provocation, reviewers took to commenting on the media response to *Tipping the Velvet*. *The Independent*’s James Rampton observes: “When the last adaptation of a Sarah Waters novel was broadcast on the BBC in 2002, the tabloids got into a real state. They worked themselves up into a right old lather over the graphic scenes of lesbian passion in the Victorian love story, *Tipping the Velvet*” (Rampton). Lee-Potter recalls further details: “The last time they adapted a Waters novel... scriptwriter Andrew Davies... had to emphasise that it was ‘absolutely filthy,’ just in case we were worried the lesbian scenes wouldn’t be tantalising enough. ‘Men will love it,’ he added saucily” (Lee-Potter). *Fingersmith*, these reviewers go on to declare, is “positively decorous by comparison” (Rampton). While Ransley’s adaptation does contain one extended sex scene from the novel, depicted from Sue’s and subsequently Maud’s perspective, the scene is filmed without nudity. “[T]he tabloids will no doubt be sorely disappointed” by the lack of explicit sex, smirks Rampton, but Lee-Potter, writing in the tabloid *Mail*, finds that “the lesbian scenes are tender and touching.”

Even *The Sun*’s relentless pursuit of tabloid “filth” is eclipsed by what sounds like genuine interest in the story: “If you think period dramas are boring,” writes Kate Noble, “then

think again. *Fingersmith* is a torrid tale of thievery, romance and betrayal.” After explaining the adaptation’s connection to Sarah Waters, whose first novel was “successfully” adapted for television, Noble asks Cassidy how she felt about filming the sex scenes. This attempt to titillate, however, backfires curiously: “‘We had a great time!’ says Elaine... ‘The production team were fantastic and helped put Sally and I at ease. After all, we’re all professionals’” (Noble). By bringing the production team into the picture Cassidy reminds *Sun* readers that sex scenes on television do not occur without the expertise of numerous technical professionals. Cassidy and Hawkins are two members of this team who merely happen to work in front of rather than behind the camera. Noble’s review concludes on a note even further removed from the realms of male fantasy. Cassidy, adds Noble, “found Maud’s clothes a chore.” The actress says: “It was summer and we had all these layers on. Now I know why women in that era fainted so often!” (Noble). Not only is this work, it is, at times, difficult and unpleasant work. Elsewhere *The Sun* mentions in passing Ransley’s “[r]acy costume drama” (Motte), while the *Daily Mirror* refers to “some girl-on-girl action” (“Actresses Sally Hawkins and Elaine Cassidy get very hot under their bonnets in this tale of seduction and, er, more seduction” [Methven and Hudson]), but there is neither tabloid hyperventilation over nor sore disappointment with the adaptation. There are, as Fiona Sturges puts it, “no gold-plated dildoes here” (Sturges).

While tabloid and broadsheet reviewers generally condemned *Tipping the Velvet* – albeit for varying reasons – they wrote positively about *Fingersmith*. *The Observer*’s Kathryn Flett enjoyed the romance so much that, she writes, “I think I may have to take up Victorian-style lesbianism (are there clubs you can join?).” Lee-Potter gushes: “It’s the kind of drama which gives you heart palpitations. The plot races back and forth endlessly, like a learner driver doing a three-point turn. I was heartbroken when it came to an end.” Her enthusiastic assessment that “*Fingersmith* is a superb drama” is echoed by writers for *The Independent*: “*Fingersmith* works

superbly as a thriller and a romance and on both counts comes with a delicious sense of impending doom,” writes Fiona Sturges. Charlie Courtauld, who “fully expected to hate this one” after *Tipping the Velvet*, was “pleasantly surprised” by *Fingersmith*. “Ok, so the plot was a bit forced,” he equivocates, “the pace a little slow,” but the “superb” acting compensated for any drawbacks. “There were some pleasing incidental touches too,” he adds. “I particularly liked Dance’s all-black coach and four” (Courtauld). Even reviewers who disliked the first episode, like the *Daily Mail*’s Peter Paterson, were quickly won over. Initially dismissing Hawkins and Cassidy as “wimpish” (“Who’d have thought it?”), Paterson finds the doublecrossing of Sue and shift to Maud’s point of view “dazzling,” and declares: “Something that Waters shares with Dickens is the ability to tell a darned good story” (“Twisting the night away”). Although her subjects – “lesbianism, pornography, criminality” – are, he claims, more contemporary than Victorian, Paterson finds that Dickens’s influence “tramples all over Sarah Waters’s period novels like an elephant” (“Twisting”). “[Sending] out sudden brief sparks obliquely reminding the viewer of moments or characters in *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*,” *Fingersmith*, Paterson contends, “more so than *Tipping the Velvet*... has splendidly captured Victorian London” (“Twisting”). Observing that Mrs Sucksby was hanged “opposite the window she’d lucratively let out to spectators,” he approvingly concludes: “Good TV” (“Twisting”).

The only voice of dissent among this chorus of praise arose from John Preston in *The Sunday Telegraph*. I could find no evidence that any other *Fingersmith* reviewer had read the novel before watching the adaptation, but Preston had, and that is the source of his complaint. “When I read Sarah Waters’s novel,” he states, “I remember being so absorbed that I locked myself in the lavatory in order to finish it in peace.” As a result, he anticipated the screen version “with whatever the gruff masculine equivalent of breathless enthusiasm is” (“Review”).

Inevitably, however, he finds that the adaptation poorly replicates its source text: although Ransley's *Fingersmith* "looked good with a thick layer of soot and grime over everything... there wasn't much sign of either the atmospheric swirl, or richness of the original. In part, this was due to its leisurely pace, which ensured that it never quite did what it needed to do – namely, grab you by the throat and plunge you into the maelstrom of its plot" ("Review"). Having "assumed" that the "sensational twist" would conclude the first episode, Preston is disappointed when it doesn't. While Paterson and Sturges, for example, criticize specific aspects of the adaptation, Preston "pointlessly chastis[es]" *Fingersmith* "for not reproducing [his] sense of the original text" (McFarlane 196). Although he eschews the kind of "profound moralism" that frequently characterizes fidelity discourse (Stam 3), his review relies on the kind of subjective evaluation that frustrates McFarlane and Stam.

Preston is also the only reviewer to fault the sex scenes in *Fingersmith*. While most reviewers agreed that *Fingersmith*, "[u]nlike *Tipping the Velvet*... steer[ed] clear of empty titillation" (Sturges), Preston found the adaptations remarkably similar in their respective depictions of lesbian eroticism. "Of course, such things are a matter of taste," he writes, "but I also found the lesbianism didn't carry much erotic charge. Indeed, in contrast to everything else, it proceeded at an annoyingly brisk clip" ("Review"). Preston's words distinctly echo his condemnation of *Tipping the Velvet*: "The sex, when it eventually came, proved to be an extremely damp squib, carrying no erotic charge whatsoever" (Pedestrian Victorians"). The similarity of these comments serves to mask considerable differences between the adaptations. In the interview in *The Times*, Sarah Waters diplomatically states: "I was pleased to have a female director [direct *Fingersmith*] because she helped make the sex believable. In *Tipping the Velvet* the sex was done provocatively, and with a campy kind of eye, but this is a bit more serious, and full of sexual tension. Sometimes it can be much more erotic to suppress things" (Long).

Lesbian reviewer Malinda Lo put it more bluntly: the un-believable sex scenes in *Tipping the Velvet* “mostly resemble,” she wrote, “soft-core straight porn’s version of lesbian love-making.” “It’s clear that the director didn’t know anything about how lesbians make love, much less how they have sex,” Lo concluded. For Preston, however, who criticized *Tipping the Velvet* for failing to titillate “robust male hypocrites” like himself, “dead keen in theory, scared stiff of actual lesbians” (“Pedestrian Victorians”), *Fingersmith*’s “believable” sex offers no erotic charge.

Suppressed eroticism will never live up to the Nina and Helga of late-night Channel Five soft porn films, and nor does it lend itself to tabloid sensationalism. The absence of gold-plated dildoes, the lack of media provocation ensured that *Fingersmith* received a far different reception in the British press than its BBC predecessor. Without Andrew Davies’s involvement, *Fingersmith* failed to inspire a tabloid “tribute”; there was, needless to say, no sequel to “Victorian Secrets.” Ransley’s adaptation and Walsh’s direction instead open up vastly different avenues of exploration. In the following section I examine the ways in which pastoral imagery is deployed in adaptations of Austen’s work before exploring in some detail the functions and effects of music in film and television.

Part 4. The “Austen-esque pastoral” on screen

In *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past* (2004), film theorist Julianne Pidduck investigates the relationship between recent costume drama and landscape. She observes that “iconic English landscapes figure increasingly in [1990s] period drama” (29), particularly in screen adaptations of novels by Jane Austen. As we saw in Chapter One, earlier Austen adaptations, such as the BBC’s 1980 *Pride and Prejudice*, were filmed on sound stages, with little camera movement and virtually no exterior shots, creating what Leitch calls a “theatrical/radio aesthetic” (175). In more recent screen versions, Pidduck writes, “[r]ich production values

feature heritage interiors and grounds” (28); repeated from film to television serial, these Austen adaptations “share a striking stylistic and philosophical coherence” (28). For Leitch the coherence of BBC adaptations arises from the Corporation’s fetishization of “a carefully rendered set of period illustrations that are staged in cinematic terms but have the function of tableaux vivants, illustrations to a deluxe edition of a classic literary text” (172). The twin fetishization of “period illustrations” and “the original text’s dialogue” are, for Leitch, the hallmark of the Tradition of Quality the BBC pursues in its classic serial adaptations. It is expensive to make television adaptations like this, as Leitch points out – “[a] miniseries in the Tradition of Quality can spend as much money for location shooting as a feature film” (175) – but “British and especially international markets” (Pidduck *Costume Film* 28) make marketing England in this way a lucrative prospect.

While picturesque country views of (mainly southern) England have therefore become integral to Austen adaptations, Austen adaptations have become simultaneously integral to picturesque country views of England. The repeated association of the pastoral with Austen in screen adaptations over the last two decades has coded the televisual pastoral itself in various ways: as white and bourgeois, for example, and most importantly, for my purposes, as heteronormative. Invoking Andrew Higson’s notion of “‘an unchanging, traditional, and always delightful and desirable England,’” what he calls an “‘alluring spectacle of iconographic stability,’” Pidduck suggests that it might be exemplified by “the quiet countryside and peaceful Georgian houses of the Austen adaptations” (29). This green and pleasant England is now the requisite milieu for the “inexorable pull of the romance narrative toward the inevitable double weddings concluding *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*” (26), as well as, one might add, the heterosexual unions concluding *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and

Emma. As the “patron author” of the BBC’s Tradition of Quality, Austen has come to signify precisely this: heterosexual romance played out against “iconic English landscapes” (29).

In the last twenty-one years, Austen’s six novels have been adapted for the large and small screen no less than thirteen times.⁴⁹ It is this corpus of texts, replete with “iconic English landscapes” (29), that *Fingersmith*, I suggest, cites in its own pastoral imagery. The exterior scenes in *Fingersmith* take place ostensibly so that Richard, who is teaching Maud to paint, can work on landscapes with her; for the purposes of the marriage scheme these scenes put her in the exclusive company of Richard and her chaperone Sue. As Richard selects appropriate vistas for Maud’s brush the camera lingers on lush green fields and rolling hills, swans in the river: in the way that these scenes effectively evoke the familiar territory of the “Austenque pastoral” they function as what film theorist Erica Sheen calls “complexly intertextual moments of narrative recognition” (26). This recognition is, however, specifically visual, because in all cases the *Fingersmith* pastoral scenes are disrupted by the adaptation’s musical underscore.

Part 5. The functions of film and television music

The contemporary study of film music originated with Claudia Gorbman’s “groundbreaking” 1987 work *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Buhler 40),⁵⁰ but it took almost two decades for film music theory to cohere as a recognizable and recognized academic discipline. In 2001 Robynn Stilwell lamented that undergraduate and graduate film courses “ignore sound with impunity”; that textbooks on film fail to address the topic; and that at “major

⁴⁹ In addition to the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Pidduck’s canon includes a television *Northanger Abbey* (1987), a television *Mansfield Park* (1990), a film *Persuasion* (1995), a film *Emma* (1996), a television *Jane Austen’s Emma* (1997), and a film *Mansfield Park* (1999), to which one might add a film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), a television *Persuasion* (2007), a television *Mansfield Park* (2007), a television *Northanger Abbey* (2007), and a television *Sense and Sensibility* (2008). The last two adaptations were scripted by Andrew Davies.

⁵⁰ Buhler, Neumeyer, Donnelly, Kassabian, Davison and Stilwell all agree on Gorbman’s importance.

international film conferences... papers on sound – let alone music – can be completely absent, and few people even notice” (168). Since then film music scholars including Kevin Donnelly, Anahid Kassabian, Peter Franklin, Annette Davison, James Buhler and David Neumeyer have made important contributions to the emerging body of film music scholarship; Stilwell has gone on to co-edit, with Franklin, *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music* (2008). In many cases, however, music is still overlooked by film theorists, musicologists and literary scholars alike. In *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (2001), Kassabian attributes this academic silence primarily to the “expert discourse” that has “claimed” music: “While film scholars do not generally feel a need to professionalize themselves in art history or linguistics before talking about ‘a film,’ the strong hold of the ‘expert discourse ideology’ of music has kept a tight lid on the production of film music, and an even tighter lid on their routine inclusion in courses, theorizing, and criticism” (10). In order to make her analysis more accessible, then, she proposes “to avoid the technical language of music studies wherever possible” (9). Kevin Donnelly’s anthology *Film Music: Critical Approaches* (2001) similarly appeals to a more general audience by including a non-specialist essay by James Buhler. Other theorists fall somewhere on the continuum between these works and the highly specialized musicological essay by Buhler and David Neumeyer in Donnelly’s text.

If film music theory comprises a tiny subgenre of film theory, then television music criticism makes up an even tinier subgenre of film music theory. Kevin Donnelly, one of the very few specialists in this field, writes that television was, for decades, limited by “the sort of miniscule speaker available... that could not deal with subtleties” (112). But just as “heritage interiors and grounds” have been used in Austen adaptations of the last thirty years to indicate “rich production values” (*Costume Film* 28), so, asserts Donnelly, has music. Since the 1980s, he writes, “the development of a notable zone of ‘quality’ drama production in British television has

increasingly used music as a guarantor of the high production values that are required in the international market” (117). “Prestige dramas,” he continues, “such as BBC costume dramas, use large numbers of musicians, significant amounts of music and expensive ‘name’ composers, who come together to produce highly evident ‘prestige’ music that is now more often a star than a bit-part player” (117). The difference between *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* in this respect is striking: the former relies primarily on cheap stock or library music interspersed with Adrian Johnston’s theme for the adaptation (in addition to the songs Terry Davies and Andrew Davies wrote for the music hall performances); the latter was entirely scored by “name” composer Richard Blackford, putting *Fingersmith* musically in a league with classic serial costume dramas like the BBC’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In this way *Fingersmith* fits Donnelly’s category of “expensive prestige dramas” which are, like films, “characterised by a lot of specifically written music” (115) more expensive to produce “than the cheaper, studio-based traditions of British television drama” (117).

Dialogue, sound effects and music make up a film’s soundtrack or *soundscape*, “an inclusive term” that Stilwell prefers, because, “[f]or most people, ‘soundtrack’ means a film’s musical score” (167). Of these three components it is the music of *Fingersmith* that concerns me primarily. Music in film and television is further divided by film music theorists into *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* categories, terms that Claudia Gorbman “imported” from narrative theory (Buhler 40).⁵¹ James Buhler writes: “Diegetic and non-diegetic define music in relation to narrative rather than image; for Gorbman, the primary question is not so much whether we see the musical performers⁵²... rather, Gorbman is interested in whether the music belongs to the diegesis, the world of the narrative” (40). Buhler goes on to add that Gorbman’s terms have “become a basic

⁵¹ Buhler points out that in narrative theory the term *extra-diegetic* is “opposed” to *diegetic*, but that Gorbman’s *non-diegetic* “has become the standard in film-music literature” (59 n.1).

⁵² Musicians who are visible on screen are paid more in the film industry.

analytical tool for studying interactions between music and image” (40), although for some theorists the reduction of film music to a binary does not sit well.⁵³ With one notable exception, sound in *Fingersmith* falls easily on either side of the binary.

Music in audiovisual media serves several functions. On a purely structural level, film music “serves as a formal frame” (Neumeyer and Buhler 35). David Neumeyer and James Buhler state: “Main-title and end-credit cues separate the film’s time from its surroundings and thus ease the viewer/listener into and out of the alien temporality of the filmic narrative” (35). For television dramas, particularly multi-part serials, the opening music “alert[s] the listener to the beginning of a programme” (Donnelly 113), serving what Philip Tagg calls a “reveille function” (qtd. Donnelly 113). In subsequent episodes the familiar opening music attracts the viewer “by providing an ident-branding [sic] of a particular programme” (Donnelly 113). Kassabian contends that two of the three “broad purposes” of film music – *identification*, *mood*, and *commentary* (56) – are present at the opening of a film: “Music signifying mood and identification at the same time is quite common, especially in theme songs” (59). Neumeyer and Buhler agree: “Main-title music announces genre, mood and setting” (36).⁵⁴ Carl Davis, the “name” composer who scored the BBC’s *Pride and Prejudice*, says of the opening credit sequence: “it’s the main chance the composer has to make a statement [and to] sharpen the

⁵³ Kassabian writes that “[m]any film theorists who have considered the relationship between the score and the narrative come from a background in literary theory, and have tended to treat this issue in dichotomous terms because they consider it in terms of narratology” (43). Particularly troubling to Kassabian is the notion that film music can be “grossly reduced as either ‘in’ (diegetic) or ‘out’ (nondiegetic) of the narrative world of the film.” She states: “This dichotomy is insufficient; it cannot comfortably describe music that seems to fall ‘in between’ these categories, much less account for its different character” (42-3). Instead, she borrows the terms *source music*, *source scoring*, and *dramatic scoring* from film composer Earle Hagen’s *Scoring Films* (1971). Source scoring “may be useful to describe musical events whose narrative status is open to interpretation” (47).

⁵⁴ Kassabian’s *identification* function and Neumeyer and Buhler’s *setting* function largely overlap, although the former includes “period, time, depth of field, and certain sociological factors,” in addition to “a character, a place or an object, a certain situation, or a recurrent idea of the plot” (57, 56).

audience's expectations of what's about to come" (qtd. Davison 223 n.31). "Davis's scoring techniques," writes Annette Davison, "are predominantly those employed in classical scoring. That is, an abundance of semiotic information is conveyed through musical signs or codes: through tempo, register, rhythm, orchestration, key, and harmony of the music" (217).

Fingersmith's main-title music announces genre and mood specifically while the soundscape as a whole announces setting. In the adaptation's opening shot the camera pans frame left across a city skyline to establish time and place – Victorian London – but if viewers were to listen to the opening scene rather than watching it, the street urchins, the seagulls and particularly the whinnying horse (1.3), would provide them with significant aural clues. Nonetheless, Blackford's score, like Davis's, "[conveys] an abundance of semiotic information... through musical signs or codes" (Davison 217). The establishing shot of St Paul's Cathedral, its white dome juxtaposed with dirty slum housing, is accompanied by a musical theme played by a bassoon and clarinet, punctuated by staccato violins. The theme is in a minor key and played in a slow tempo, musical codes which amount to a tense and ominous melody hinting at suspense. "Such musical codes inflect the audience's reception of what is seen on the screen" (Davison 217). In this way Blackford's classical score evokes the darkness of the sensation novel, *Fingersmith's* twin themes of madness and murder. These themes are immediately embodied by the narrative's protagonists, or rather, their mothers: viewers quickly learn that Sue's mother was hanged for murder, while Maud's died in the madhouse giving birth to her.

The underscore also functions structurally to bridge visual cuts. There is a significant musical bridge in a scene in the first episode, which begins as Sue, now grown up, holds one of Mrs Sucksby's babies as she gazes out of the window at the gallows opposite. The scene cuts to an extreme long shot of Briar House: in the foreground a man rows a boat on the river toward frame right; behind him black horses pull a carriage along the road toward frame left, and in the

background Briar House looms among a row of tall trees, separated from the road by a landscaped green field (1.12). The carriage is bringing Richard to Briar, although viewers don't know this yet. The music which bridges the cut between the two shots is an insinuating bassoon line, an echo of the ominous opening melody, which rises and then falls, cutting through the birdsong of the countryside. In its careful composition the extreme long shot resembles a "movement-image" that Julianne Pidduck analyzes in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995). Pidduck examines a sequence in which Elinor Dashwood (Emma Thompson) and Edward Ferrars (Hugh Grant) "walk out" from Norland Park:

The film's first extended exterior sequence, this movement-image perfectly sets the nineteenth-century landscape painting into motion. The protagonists' walk through the middle ground marks out depth in the image; their trajectory into the foreground toward frame right traces a diagonal leading back to the house, which serves as the vanishing point. (*Costume Film* 29-30)

The visual is completed by its audio accompaniment: in the previous scene Elinor's sister has been playing the piano; here "Marianne's piano score follows the pair outside, layering the precise banter, the romantic nuance of the scene" (30). In *Fingersmith* the shot of Briar similarly evokes the nineteenth-century landscape painting set in motion. The rowboat moves against the carriage while the manor house rises ominously in the background. In this instance, however, the score is used to radically differing effect; it suggests that Sue's disorderly, dirty and illicit world is about to spill over into the orderly world of Briar, with its bells every half hour, its silent servants, its carefully tended grounds. In addition to its structural functions, Blackford's underscore provides both a "mood" function and a "commentary" function (Kassabian 56).

Writing of the BBC's famous *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), Erica Sheen states:

"Adaptation from page to screen turns a novel into a soundtrack. In that respect it hands the text

over to the composer as much as to the scriptwriter” (23).⁵⁵ For the most part Blackford’s score supplements *Fingersmith*’s narrative, that is, suspenseful music underscores suspenseful scenes (the ride to the asylum, for example), while a romantic theme accompanies romantic scenes. In this respect the soundtrack unobtrusively parallels the image track. I want to focus, however, on three exterior sequences in which the soundtrack has the opposite effect, that is, the score counterpoints the image.⁵⁶ While film and television music are frequently perceived at a liminal or subliminal level by viewers,⁵⁷ the disjunction between sound and image makes the underscore more noticeable and draws attention to what Kassabian calls the commentary function of the soundscape. Kassabian writes that film music “might tell us that a seemingly romantic situation is actually humorous or that the daisy-filled meadow contains some unseen danger” (59). The latter is a particularly apt example to describe the three sequences in *Fingersmith*. In the following section I investigate the ways in which the score plays against the image track in order to draw attention to the interiority of the adaptation’s protagonists. By expressing what they are feeling the score creates a discrepancy between sight and sound, not only contradicting but subverting the image.

Part 6. *Fingersmith*’s “iconic English landscapes”

The first sequence occurs when Richard, having spent a week teaching Maud to paint still life – “still-death more like,” Sue tells us – decides to spend another week on landscape (1.47).

The corresponding scene in the novel reads:

⁵⁵ Annette Davison likes this quotation so much she uses it as the epigraph for her chapter on film music in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (2007).

⁵⁶ *Parallelism* and *counterpoint* are traditionally the two functions of film music in musicology.

⁵⁷ See Stilwell 169 and Kassabian 52-55.

This was the end of February, and still cold as anything; but just as everyone in that house perked up a bit to see Mr Rivers come back to it again, so now even the weather seemed to lift and grow sweet. The wind fell off, and the windows stopped rattling. The sky turned pearly instead of grey. The lawns grew green as billiard tables. (111)

The weather in the adaptation appears warmer and later in spring. The scene cuts to a grassy field with three figures in the distance. Sue, burdened with easel, paintbrushes, picnic basket and umbrella, slowly follows Maud and Richard. The scene aims for pastoral charm: the camera lingers on the curve of the gentle hill, the copse of trees at its summit, the blue sky dotted with cumulus clouds. This lush imagery is, however, immediately disrupted by the ominous bassoon which accompanies it. Dressed in green Sue blends in with the scenery, while Richard, in rich brown, and Maud, in burgundy, contrast with the natural shades. But Sue refuses to fade into the background; as Richard puts his arm around Maud's waist Sue drops the easel with a clatter, interrupting their intimacy. Later Sue sits beneath the umbrella, surveying Maud and Richard, while the melody changes to a very slow, deliberate theme played on a clarinet accompanied by a low throbbing guitar. As Maud paints, Richard murmurs to her:

Richard: You have an eye for the essence of things. Does she not, Susan? You just need...

Maud: What? You can speak plainly to me, Mr Rivers. I'm not a child.

Richard: Oh, if I could only take you to London, to my studio there. You have no lack of talent, Miss Lilly. In terms of artistic creation, you only lack what your sex, as a whole, lacks.

Maud: And what is that?

Richard: The liberty of mine. (1.48)

While Maud ponders this declaration, Richard takes a pear from the picnic basket, and, slicing it, smirks “Nearly ripe, I think,” to Sue (1.49). At his words the bassoons sound accompanied by discordant strings.

In the novel this conversation takes place in Maud’s parlour. By setting the scene outside in daylight instead of inside the gloomy and gothic manor, Ransley and Walsh create an immediate and intriguing contrast between the ominous and suspenseful music and the idyllic setting. Buhler asserts that non-diegetic music can “[read] an image against the grain, revealing a surplus in the image, a surplus in need of interpretation” (49). The exterior sequence in *Fingersmith* demands interpretation from viewers by counterpointing sound and image. In the words of Hollywood composer George Burt: “The music interacts with the intrinsic meaning of the sequence, as distinct from a surface-level meaning: it is addressed to what is implicit within the drama, not to what is explicit... that is, to what you cannot see but need to think about” (qtd. Buhler 49). The above scene appears, superficially, to depict a leisurely picnic, but intrinsically conveys the plot’s sensation machinations bubbling beneath the surface, signalling to viewers that appearances are deceiving, a lesson that Sue has yet to learn. Buhler continues: “The music grants insight into what must otherwise remain unseen and unsaid: psychology, mood, motivation” (47). Of course, this raises the question, as Kassabian puts it, “*whose* mood is being expressed?” (58-9; original emphasis). In the scene above I contend that Sue’s mood is expressed by the underscore. When Richard returns to Briar unexpectedly early, Sue has a revelation of sorts: “It hit me then, how happy I was, and how much I hated Gentleman” (1.44).⁵⁸ She tries, then, to protect Maud from Richard by behaving like a real chaperone, dropping the easel to prevent him from putting his arm around her, keeping a close eye on the ersatz painting

⁵⁸ “Gentleman” is the thieves’ nickname for Richard Rivers.

instructor. When Richard says “Nearly ripe, I think,” it is Sue’s anxiety viewers hear, her concern for Maud.⁵⁹

The second exterior sequence translates a scene in the novel which takes place on the first day of April.

The weather was too warm for the time of year. The sun shone bright in a sky of grey, and everyone said there would be thunder... The air was thick and warm and heavy, but the earth was cold to the touch: it had all the chill of winter in it still, and all the dampness of the river. The rushes smelt rank. There was a sound, as of a locksmith’s file, that Gentleman said was bullfrogs. There were long-legged spiders, and beetles.

There was a bush, with a show of tight, fat, furry buds. (116)

Sue’s description is hardly idyllic: the humidity, the dampness, the rankness, the crawling insects she is charged with keeping from the basket of cakes. The adaptation, however, conveys not her urban prejudices but a pastoral idyll. The scene opens with an extreme long shot of a large tree on the far side of the river, and pulls back to reveal a picturesque composition: the tree dominates the tableau, reflected in the still water of the river; to the left a small boat is tied to a wooden dock near the tree; to the right stands Richard near the black umbrella. The shot is sunny and green, and looks like nothing more than another nineteenth-century landscape painting brought to life. The camera cuts to a close-up of Maud painting; through birdsong and buzzing insects the pastoral scene is marred only by the ominous music which creeps in as Maud paints. Sue lies

⁵⁹ This is not to say that the entire non-diegetic score conveys Sue’s emotional state, nor is the score the only way in which viewers are encouraged to identify with Sue. Stilwell writes: “Film has many ways of coaxing the audience into [a subject] position, from character development, narrative discourse and events, to the more ‘visceral’ point-of-view shot composition and sound design” (173). When the main-title music fades out at the beginning of the first episode, Sue introduces herself in voice over. As Buhler notes, “voice-over narrative is extra-diegetic,” which gives it, despite the fictional narrator’s presence in the narrative, a certain “discursive authority” (51). Viewers are also “coaxed” into identifying with Sue through character development and narrative events: the first one and a half episodes take place through Sue’s eyes, so that we travel to Briar with her; we meet Maud with her, and so on.

asleep in the sun against an old upturned rowboat, and for a moment Maud gazes at her open-mouthed. The camera cuts to the reeds waving in the breeze, the blue sky dotted with white clouds, swans in the river. The composition suggests warmth rather than humidity and, were it not for the underscore, a decided tranquillity.

Sue wakes alone to dissonant music, a tense and anxious motif played by harp and strings. She looks around in the late-afternoon light; the camera cuts to Briar House looking serene against a background of blue sky and green grass, but this image is undermined by an ominous flute melody. Sue finally catches sight of Richard about to kiss Maud as a violin trill sounds threateningly. "I saw what the evil bastard was about," she says in voiceover, the first spoken words in this scene. "He was gonna kiss her, but not on the lips. Somewhere better, much better" (1.50). Frantic harp music layers the violin trill as Richard proceeds to unbutton Maud's glove, deliberately lick her palm, and then kiss it. Maud's face is not visible. Richard gives Sue a look of triumph, and she runs back to the rowboat. She sits, waiting; the sky has gone greyish and colourless, suggesting a shift from warmth to humidity. The non-diegetic music ceases as Richard and Maud emerge from the greenery, holding hands. Richard says loudly in the silence: "I'm so sorry I must rush back to that wretched print. You will be alright, Maud?" Then, as he packs up the easel, murmurs to Sue: "Hooked, but you must draw her in" (1.51). Thunder rumbles in the distance as Richard returns to the house with the painting supplies. Sue and Maud run through the rain and take shelter in the graveyard, where Maud tells Sue that Richard has asked her to marry him.

In the first part of this sequence the non-diegetic music creates a striking contrast between the idyllic scenery and the soundscape. It evokes a vague malaise which fixes on Sue. When she wakes up alone she becomes the main point of identification: the voiceover is in Sue's voice; the long shot of Richard and Maud is from her point of view so that Maud's face is not

visible to Sue or to viewers; and the score expresses her fear and anxiety at having let Maud out of her sight. The music builds and builds in tension, and since there is almost no dialogue it demands the attention of viewers. Sue's relief at finding Maud is cut short by her horror at Richard's actions. Sue knows how Maud protects her hands; that Maud works, eats and sleeps in gloves, and how unsafe she feels without them. The awful trill conveys Sue's revulsion, for even as she witnesses the apparent success of Richard's scheme, she realizes that she does not want it to succeed. She runs back to the boat to wait in the oppressive humidity. It is here that the music ceases altogether, but the undisturbed bird and insect effects are not tranquilly pastoral in the sudden absence of non-diegetic music. Film music theorist Michel Chion writes that music "often gets interrupted bluntly and suddenly, in mid-phrase, producing a silence in which the subsequent dialogue resonates strangely" (qtd. Buhler 47). Richard's comment to Maud sounds far too loud and forced in the ensuing silence, an artificiality reinforced by the way in which he grabs Maud's hand against her will so that, when Sue catches sight of them, they appear to be confirmed lovers. The non-diegetic music does not return until the following interior scene; after Richard leaves Sue and Maud only the diegetic sounds of the storm accompany their flight to the graveyard. The non-diegetic silence thus signifies, for Sue, Richard's masculine and heterosexual triumph, a triumph in which Sue is implicated and which will ultimately, thinks Sue, destroy Maud.

The previous sequence is reenacted in the second episode of *Fingersmith* from Maud's perspective. When Sue has been incarcerated Maud assumes the narrative voice of authority; she retells the events leading up to Sue's betrayal in order to justify her actions. In the second version of the exterior scene, Maud, painting, pauses to gaze at Sue who lies asleep against the upturned boat. The music is at first neutral, but then grows anxious as the Briar bell tolls and Richard bends to her and says: "Goddamn it, Maud. There's another hour gone" (2.41). But Maud is

more interested in Sue, and the camera lingers on Sue's sleeping body accompanied by edgy flute notes and an ominous violin trill as Maud continues to gaze at Sue. Richard suddenly understands Maud's fascination with Sue; the discordant and atonal strings culminate in a high flute note as a drop of red paint falls from the brush in Maud's hand onto her apron (2.42). This is an example of what Chion describes as "synchronous cuts in both sound and image track," that is, "salient moments of an audiovisual sequence during which a sound event and a visual event meet in synchrony" as "synch-points" (qtd. Garner 195). To emphasize the importance of this instant, a second drop of paint falls from the brush accompanied by a second flute note at a slightly lower interval. It is at this precise moment that Maud realizes that she is in love with Sue.

The music at once becomes unbearably claustrophobic. Maud stands to remove the apron but Richard grabs her, covers her mouth and pulls her out of Sue's sight to the trunk of a large tree.

Maud: Let go of me. I've lost heart for this.

Richard: Oh, lost it to a wretched little fingersmith? [Maud pushes him away. He grips her arm.] She'd laugh in your face if she knew. If I told her.

Maud: You mustn't.

Richard: Then agree. [pause] Do you want to stay here forever? Appear to love me.

Marry me.

Maud: I can't. (2.42)

Sue is heard calling Maud's name. As Maud turns to Richard and nods reluctantly, a wave of sound, in a low and threatening register, begins to build in the background. Richard reaches for her chin, but at the last second she turns away. "She's coming," he whispers, then kneels and takes her hand (2.42). As he unbuttons her glove and kisses her hand the ominous sound

crescendoes: it sounds, rather than music, like music played backwards to create a wave of sound that crests and submerges the scene.

This is the only instance during the adaptation in which this kind of sound is heard. It is ambiguous in two ways: first, it blurs the boundary between music and sound effect, and secondly, it blurs the boundary between diegetic and non-diegetic. I suggest that it is a moment of particularly queer sound associated with Maud's queer desire for Sue. This sound, however, does more than grant insight into Maud's state of mind: I contend it actually originates in Maud's mind, in this way exemplifying what Stilwell calls *subjective sound*. In the same way that a director can compose shots with the camera to create a point of view, she can use sound, writes Stilwell, to create a "point of audition" (173-4). Viewers might be able to hear, for example, voices in a character's mind that no other characters in the diegesis can hear. In *Fingersmith* this subjective sound lets viewers hear Maud's wordless panic and horror, the blood rushing in her ears, as Richard licks her palm. Her anguish at deceiving Sue, however, gathers such intensity that it exceeds interiority, rupturing the diegesis itself.

The evidence of this rupture lies in the order of the narrative. In Sue's account of events, this exterior scene is followed by a conversation between the two women in the churchyard in which Maud tells Sue that Richard has asked her to marry him. Sue's narrative thus establishes a heterosexual romance trajectory in miniature which originates in the pastoral scenes: Maud's landscape painting seems, for Sue and for viewers, to lead inexorably to the inevitable wedding, which does in fact take place after Richard has helped Maud and Sue escape from Briar House. In Maud's narrative, however, the scene under the tree dissolves to Sue and Maud in the love scene. This dissolve appears to signal a flashback, but it is actually a flash forward in Maud's story, suggesting that Maud's desire for Sue is so strong that it compels her narrative to circumvent the marriage proposal and jump ahead to this scene. In this way the Austenesque

romance trajectory is subverted by the instance of queer sound, which becomes the vehicle through which Maud's desire triggers a non-linear instance of queer time. News of the marriage proposal which viewers expect is supplanted by lesbian sex, and the pastoral becomes not the site of heterosexual courtship but the site of Maud's realization that she is in love with Sue. In this way *Fingersmith* subverts the heterosexual romance trajectory of the Austen narrative while queering the Austenesque pastoral itself.

Deborah Cartmell contends that Jane Austen, claimed by discourses of British cultural heritage, is both perceived and marketed as "a conservative literary icon" (24). Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999), as we saw in Chapter One, presents a notable exception to the rule that adaptations of Austen's work "tend to perpetuate their assumed conservative ideology in spite of critical readings which suggest otherwise" (24). In other words, "deeper questions" about "the stifling nothingness of the world that women were expected to occupy" in the nineteenth century are routinely expunged so that Austen's "heroines' savage loneliness, frustrated intelligence and boredom merely become the preamble to some romantic adventures in poplin frocks" (Bidisha). The domestication of Austen's proto-feminist inclinations identified by author and *Guardian* contributor Bidisha overlaps with the standardization of Austen adaptations as attractive audiovisual packages: romantic adventures in poplin frocks must be set to "prestige" music from a "name" composer and set off against lavish "heritage interiors and grounds" (Donnelly 117; Pidduck *Costume Film* 28). As a result, recent Austen adaptations have come, in Pidduck's words, to "share a striking stylistic and philosophical coherence" (28); their attractive depictions of what Higson calls "Heritage England" (78) sell well in domestic and international markets.

Waters's exterior scenes on the page, translated to the screen, acquire a particular resonance in relation to these Austen adaptations. As "complexly intertextual moments of narrative recognition" (Sheen 26), they invoke the "iconic English landscapes" that have come to

define contemporary Austen costume drama (Pidduck 29). As I have argued here, *Fingersmith* invokes the Austen of screen adaptations to interrogate this foregrounding of heterosexual romance, the (sexual) conservatism that has come to be associated with Austen and more broadly with the BBC Tradition of Quality. Richard Blackford's non-diegetic score provides the medium through which this interrogation is effected. The musical score for a film or television programme "radically transform[s] what the audience sees and hears," asserts James Buhler (47); Blackford creates an ominous and suspenseful atmosphere to counterpoint *Fingersmith*'s iconic English landscapes. The discrepancy between sight and sound opens up a space of queer possibility from which to interrogate, undermine and subvert the heterosexual romance trajectory of the Austen narrative.

Chapter 5

The Quack and the Dead: Spiritualist deception and gender disruption in *Affinity*

Part 1. Translating the invisible woman

In April 2008 the *Guardian* reported that ITV had postponed the air dates for much of its drama programming until incoming Director of Television Peter Fincham arrived to replace Simon Shaps on 12 May (Conlan). Andrew Davies's adaptation of *Affinity* (2008), previously touted as a highlight of ITV's spring fare, was among those programmes postponed indefinitely. While ITV reorganized its schedule, *Affinity* was released on DVD in the UK on 16 June and North America on 19 August 2008, and received screenings at the Miami and San Francisco queer film festivals that summer. ITV finally put *Affinity* in a post-watershed 9.00pm slot on Sunday 28 December 2008. The 90-minute television film, on ITV One, was drawn out to two hours with commercial breaks. For those viewers in the UK who missed it or wished to view it again, it was made available online on the ITV Player for a month after it aired.

Television scheduling in late December on the British terrestrial channels is largely determined by tradition and/or nostalgia, featuring venerable offerings such as *The Sound of Music* (1965), old James Bond films, and the now-obligatory *Doctor Who* special on Christmas Day. Programming at this time of year, contends *The Independent's* Liz Hoggard in a review of *Affinity*, "needs a feelgood element" (Hoggard). "We can't go to bed feeling wretched," she adds. *Affinity*, based on the darkest of Sarah Waters's novels, lacks this feelgood element, but nonetheless received solid ratings. The adaptation acquired some 2.8 million viewers which put it roughly on par with Channel 4's *Big Fat Quiz of the Year* hosted by comedian Jimmy Carr (2.7 million viewers), slightly behind BBC Two's *Real Italian Job*, about TV chef James Martin racing across Italy (3.3 million viewers) and well ahead of Channel Five's thriller *Secret Window*,

an adaptation of a Stephen King novel starring Johnny Depp (600,000 viewers) (Sweney). In its first half-hour it competed with the conclusion of BBC One's *The 39 Steps*, a remake of Hitchcock's 1935 adaptation of John Buchan's novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). At 7.3 million viewers *The 39 Steps* won the highest ratings of the evening; television critics, however, much preferred *Affinity* (Hume; Wollaston; Preston).

In Waters's gothic source text, set in the 1870s, protagonist Margaret Prior begins visiting female prisoners at Millbank Prison hoping to find distraction from her grief at the recent death of her father. She becomes enthralled with Selina Dawes, a spirit medium charged with fraud and assault, who nonetheless displays an uncanny familiarity with Margaret's life and who sends her gifts, she claims, through the spirits. Finally convinced of Selina's supernatural powers, Margaret plots their escape to Italy once the spirits have delivered Selina from Millbank. In the novel's twist (described as a "slap in the face" by Hoggard) Margaret is betrayed by her own servant Vigers who turns out to be Selina's maid and lover Ruth and has been secretly communicating the contents of Margaret's diary to Selina through a sympathetic prison matron. The two escape with the passports Margaret had arranged for herself and Selina, leaving the devastated Margaret to kill herself. Waters's tightly constructed plot unfolds through Margaret's diary entries from September 1874 to January 1875, which document her experiences at Millbank, interspersed with Selina's diary entries from September 1872 to August 1873, which record her increasing success as a medium. Selina's narrative frames Margaret's, opening the novel with her account of her patron Margery Brink's death on 3 August 1873, and closing the novel with Ruth's plan of 1 August 1873 to exploit the American heiress Madeleine Silvester.

The adaptor's greatest challenge lies in the depiction of Ruth Vigers, for, in her many guises – as Margaret's servant Vigers, as Selina's maid and lover Ruth, and perhaps most importantly as Peter Quick – she holds the key to *Affinity*'s plot. The latter persona, Selina's

“spirit control,” appears in the form of a burly man with bushy facial hair during the séances Selina holds for wealthy Victorians. A rude and mischievous spirit, Peter entertains his audience by flirting with the women and teasing the men while imparting to them “truths” about spiritualism and the afterlife. It is when Mrs Brink, Selina’s patron, accidentally discovers that Peter Quick is also Ruth that she suffers a heart attack and dies, and Selina is subsequently imprisoned. As in Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* cross-dressing lies at the centre of the plot; in this case, however, it remains invisible until the conclusion of the text. Although Waters offers subtle hints as to the identity of Peter Quick – Margaret notices, for example, that Vigers’s arm is “very thick” (313), rather like the wax mould of Peter’s hand (“five bloated fingers and a swollen, vein-ridged wrist” [130]) – in the British National Association of Spiritualists’s library; she also feels, while gazing at a portrait of Peter, that his dark eyes “[seem] *familiar* to [her]” (154; original emphasis) – the novel simply suppresses the crucial information by referring in Margaret’s narrative to *Vigers* and to *Ruth* in Selina’s. It is only late in the plot when the prison matron Mrs Jelf appears on Margaret’s doorstep seeking “Selina’s maid, Ruth Vigers” and assumes that Margaret has taken in Vigers “for Selina’s sake” (336) that readers can begin to solve the mystery, or indeed, realize that there is a mystery to be solved.

In order to keep viewers guessing about Selina’s innocence, therefore, a screen version of *Affinity* needs to withhold Vigers’s identity as Ruth. The adaptor must find a way to *show*, to use Linda Hutcheon’s term, that Selina is involved with Ruth without revealing that Ruth, Vigers and Peter Quick are the same person. Davies approaches this problem by depicting Ruth disguised as Peter Quick in Selina’s narrative, in the séances at Mrs Brink’s manor that Selina recalls in extended flashback scenes from her prison cell. This strategy necessitates a Ruth Vigers who can pass as a man in the adaptation, for if the male spirit appears in any way inauthentic viewers will know that Selina is a fraud. I argue that Davies’s *Affinity* succeeds in depicting a convincingly

masculine Peter Quick; as an audiovisual medium, moreover, the adaptation is able to create a powerful transgendered moment when Peter Quick is unmasked and Ruth Vigers is revealed. This transgendered moment encapsulates the novel's destabilization of Victorian hierarchies by dissolving the boundaries between male and female, spiritual and material, and most importantly, master and servant.

Like Waters's *Fingersmith*, *Affinity*'s many darkneses are conducive to a screen adaptation, and director Tim Fywell effectively depicts them in the dank and gloomy corridors of Millbank, in the uncanny séance scenes, in Margaret's stifling life with her domineering mother. The adaptation is generally shot in a mode of costume drama realism, underpinned by an unintrusive non-diegetic score by Frédéric Weber; occasional jerky close-ups for emphasis heighten moments of suspense even as they draw our attention away from the diegesis and to the camera work. Fywell's direction and Davies's script were met with approval by reviewers. "It is not every night of the year that one can say ITV produced a cleverly conceived historical drama," writes *The Times*'s Mick Hume, but *Affinity*, he finds, is just such a drama. The *Guardian*'s Sam Wollaston echoes Hume: "It's not often ITV scores a drama victory over the BBC on what is normally seen as BBC home territory (period drama and novel adaptations), but then this one was done by the King of Dramatisation himself" (Wollaston). Even *The Telegraph*'s John Preston, disappointed by both Davies's *Tipping the Velvet* and Ransley's *Fingersmith*, enthuses that "if lesbianism/double-crossing is your thing, then you will seldom see it done with such richness and verve" ("Women in jail – and in love"). Davies's dramatization closely follows Margaret's story, incorporating Selina's narrative through flashbacks that she experiences from her jail cell. His script replicates *Affinity*'s twists and turns, compressing certain aspects of Waters's plot to maintain the quick pace of television drama. He efficiently combines, for example, the minor prison characters into only one distinct prisoner, Black Eyed Sue, and one matron, Mrs Jelf.

More importantly, he cuts Margaret's younger sister Priscilla and the marriage subplot, so that Victorian compulsory heterosexuality is represented by Margaret's sister-in-law and former lover Helen, and by invented character Theophilus Finch who seeks to marry the spinsterish Margaret. Although Davies's script was languishing in a drawer in 2006 (Davies interview), it was eventually made as a Canadian-British-Romanian co-production between Cité Amérique, Box TV and Castel Film respectively, and produced in association with Movie Central, Corus, The Movie Network, Showcase, and Logo Features.

Part 2. Gendering Ruth Vigers

Selina Ann Dawes (Selina Mary Dawes in the adaptation) is appropriately named for a medium: she opens the doors to the afterlife.⁶⁰ Peter Quick is more cunningly named, for *quick* means living (OED).⁶¹ When Peter Quick first appears to Selina in the novel, she writes: "Then it was not at all as I had thought it would be, there was *a man* there, I must write *his great arms, his black whiskers, his red lips*" (193; original emphasis). Ruth's masculine guise surprises and disconcerts Selina (what exactly had she been expecting?) but Peter convinces Selina, Mrs Brink and her friends of his maleness. Casting director Matt Western has entrusted this pivotal role to British actress Caroline Loncq, and it is Loncq who ensures that Davies's *Affinity* succeeds as a compelling television film. While Ruth/Vigers maintains a minor but constant presence in the novel, Vigers makes only a handful of appearances in the adaptation. However, Davies gives her a crucial role in one invented scene to make her not only a memorable but sympathetic character as well. He sharpens the shock of her betrayal by amplifying Margaret's muted rapport with

⁶⁰ Margaret's brother, a barrister, recalling Selina's case, says: "Ah yes, the medium. Now, what is her name? Is it Gates?" The prosecuting lawyer for the case turns out to have been a Mr Locke (97-98).

⁶¹ The name "Peter Quick" also evokes the ghostly Peter Quint from Henry James's story "The Turn of the Screw" (1898).

Vigers in the novel, a bond established in a brief exchange between the two after Margaret returns from a disturbing Millbank visit one evening. Having taken more chloral than usual, Margaret has trouble dressing herself for her mother's supper party; the servants are too busy to assist her, but when Vigers sees her she murmurs: "The pins of your hair, miss, are working loose" (254). Margaret writes: "She held her tray against her hip a moment, and put her hand to my head—and it seemed the kindest gesture, suddenly, that anyone had ever shown me, anyone at all" (254). Margaret goes on to ruin the supper by describing prison punishments in graphic detail; finally her mother asks Helen to take her to her room. The adaptation keeps the supper party scene but when Margaret runs, in tears, to her room, it is Theophilus who follows her. In her bedroom he tries to kiss her and continues to force himself on her as she resists. "Do you know how much I want you?" he tells her, adding: "I should have done this a long time ago. I have your consent." Margaret manages to scream for the servants before he covers her mouth with his hand. Vigers enters the room and says sharply to Theophilus: "Better get off her, sir. Can't you tell, when a woman don't want you?"

The attempted rape scene therefore establishes Vigers as a sympathetic character while confirming that Theophilus is not to be trusted. This scene also gives viewers a close-up of Vigers for the first time and a sense of her physical presence. As Theophilus slinks off in anger and shame we see that Vigers matches him in height and breadth. When he has left, Vigers takes a step towards Margaret. "I don't think he'll be coming back, miss," she says then, and with a look of solicitude, she curtseys and leaves. In the novel Margaret describes her simply as "a long-faced girl" (68); when her sister Priscilla exclaims "A shame she is so plain!" their mother tells them that "Vigers would be a good girl... [because] [t]he plain ones always were, they were more faithful" (69). In the adaptation Loncq as Vigers, who is made to look older than the term "girl" suggests, is not coded as masculine, but her femininity is not emphasized like Rachael

Stirling's in *Tipping the Velvet*. The makeup artists of this production have given Vigers a "natural" look which complements the severity of her black servant's dress. With her strong features – broad forehead, large nose, firm jaw, deepset dark eyes under unplucked brows – she does not fit television conventions of femininity.

This scene also gives viewers one subtle but important visual clue about Peter Quick's identity: as Vigers reassures Margaret, she stands in a medium shot with her hands flat on the apron around her waist. Her hands are large and masculine; they appear massive against the white fabric, rather like the plaster spirit mould of Peter Quick's hand and arm that Margaret has seen earlier in the Spiritualists's library. To confirm this fleeting impression of Vigers's masculinity the scene cuts to a flashback in which Selina first summons Peter Quick from the spirit world. Here, however, Ruth's identity is carefully concealed under a top hat and suit, moustache and side whiskers. Director Fywell effectively lights the scene; at first only Peter's pale face appears behind Selina, hovering indistinctly and eerily in the darkness. "Oh God, are you real?" asks Selina. His face disappears and reappears at her other shoulder. "Ask him his name, Miss Dawes," says Mrs Brink. "What are you called, spirit?" she asks. "Peter Quick," replies the spirit in a deep, masculine voice. "My name is Peter Quick." It is notable that Ruth's working-class accent has been gentrified; Peter speaks not like a London servant but like a gentleman. In this way the adaptation uses both visual and aural detail to depict the disruptive character from the novel who effortlessly crosses lines of gender and of class.

Part 3. The materialism of spiritualism

At the conclusion of this successful séance the audience members stream from the room, each pausing to drop some coins in a bag held by a maid in the doorway. The adaptation draws attention, as the novel does repeatedly, to the connection between the spiritual and the

materialistic. In the corresponding scene in the novel Selina writes: “When they went, 2 or 3 of them left money for me with Ruth, I heard them putting the coins into her hand. I was so tired however, I could not have cared if they had been pennies or pounds” (194). Selina’s indifference is unusual for she is meticulous about recording her earnings in her diary. While she lives at Mr Vincy’s cheap hotel in Holborn, she typically earns two or three shillings for a consultation with the spirits; although she does not ask for money her clients always leave her a small fee and she writes down the client’s ailment along with the amount. Mrs Brink, who has been led to Selina by a dream, pays her a whole pound for each consultation. Eventually Mrs Brink, telling Selina that she is “too rare a jewel to be kept in a poor box like this” (95), moves her to her own house in Sydenham. In return for manifesting Mrs Brink’s dead mother daily, Selina lives in a luxury she has never experienced before. Mrs Brink even gives Ruth, her personal maid, “entirely over to the care” of Selina and takes another maid for herself (155). While the adaptation must omit Ruth, it depicts Selina’s arrival at Mrs Brink’s and her delight and awe at the house; as she does in the novel, she removes her shoes and dances a polka in her enormous bedroom.

The intersection of the spiritual and material worlds becomes the location in the novel of the lesbian erotic. The dark circles provide an opportunity for Peter to pick out wealthy, suggestible, attractive and, crucially, hysterically-minded young ladies for subsequent private séances. The symptoms of hysteria take various forms in the novel, including Miss Driver’s “queer fits”; Miss Noakes’s “pains at the joints”; Miss Mortimer’s “irritation of the spine”; and Madeleine Silvester’s endless weeping (301; 347). Miss Isherwood, who is treated in greatest detail, tells Selina that she hasn’t been able to sleep since Peter touched her face and hands; “she can still feel his fingers there, they left invisible marks that weep a fluid or a rheum, that she feels flowing from her like water” (260). Selina replies: “You are so full of spirit-matter it is seeping from you, that is the fluid you feel, it wants to rise. We must help it do so, & then your powers

will grow strong as they were meant to. They only want what we call *development*. If we neglect this thing, then your powers will wither, or else they will twist inside you & make you sick” (260; original emphasis). She summons Peter, who instructs Miss Isherwood that a medium must be “a servant of the spirits... You must let your spirit be *used*,” he commands, “your prayer must be always *May I be used*” (261; original emphasis). He demonstrates that Selina “must do as she is bid,” and follow both his and Miss Isherwood’s commands. Then he gets Miss Isherwood to command Selina to remove her gown in order to show her “how the spirit appears when the body has been taken from it,” and how hot her body becomes when the spirit is “very near the surface of her flesh” (262). He tells Miss Isherwood: “[Y]ou are not hot enough for development to happen, you must let my medium make you hotter” (262). Then he orders her to remove her gown and hold Selina. Selina writes:

I felt her arms come about me & her face come close to mine. Peter said “How do you feel now Miss Isherwood?” & she answered “I am not sure sir.” He said “Tell me again, what must your prayer be?” & she said “May I be used.” He said “Say it then.” She said it, & then he said she must say it faster, which she then did. Then he came & put his hand upon her neck & she gave a jog. He said “O, but your spirit is still not hot enough! It must grow so hot you will feel it melting, you will feel mine come & take its place!” He put his arms about her & I felt his hands on me, now we had her hard between us & she began to shake. He said “What is the medium’s prayer Miss Isherwood? What is the medium’s prayer?” & she said it, over & over & over until her voice grew faint, & then Peter whispered to me “Open your eyes.” (262)

It is under this guise of spirit power development, then, that Selina and Ruth force women to submit to unsolicited intimate contact. The language of Selina’s diary, however, is deliberately ambiguous and resists interpretation; when Peter Quick tells Miss Isherwood that she will feel his

spirit take the place of hers the implication is that he will penetrate her, but readers are never told directly what causes her voice to grow faint, or indeed what Selina sees when she opens her eyes. In her most explicit entry, Selina writes: “Peter [held] [Miss Noakes] at the head while I knelt and breathed upon her” (301). Whether it is sexual exploitation or not, however, it meets with a favourable response: a friend of Miss Isherwood’s, Miss Driver, tells Selina that “Miss Isherwood never felt so well as she did now, & it was all thanks to the spirits” (301). Miss Driver, writes Selina, “stayed for one and a half hours, her treatment being the same as for her friend, though taking longer. Peter said she must come back” (301). Miss Driver pays £1 (301); Miss Noakes’s cunnilingual treatment for two hours elicits a rather more generous donation of £3 (301). Mrs Brink’s friends are considerably wealthier than Selina’s clients at Mr Vincy’s; the sums here are far more than Selina ever earned in Holborn.

The adaptation shows viewers even less than the novel tells readers, but it effectively translates the ambiguous language of Selina’s diary. When Agnes d’Esterre returns for a private séance the script merely implies the sexual intimacy of the novel. In this scene Selina ties a ribbon around Agnes’s eyes and instructs her to call Peter silently. Peter appears suddenly from the side of the frame; the dialogue closely follows that of the novel:

Peter: Nothing that happens in this room must be spoken of outside it. You must keep the spirit secrets. Can you keep a secret, Agnes?

Agnes: Yes, sir.

Peter: To develop your powers you must let your spirit be used. Your prayer must always be *May I be used*. Say it, Selina.

Selina: May I be used.

Peter: Agnes.

Agnes: May I be used.

Peter: Selina. [Selina unbuttons her robe and takes it off.] Now you, Agnes.

Agnes: Please, sir.

Peter: May I be used. Say it.

Agnes: May I be used. [Selina unfastens Agnes's dress, then removes the band across her eyes. When she sees Peter she starts.]

Selina [to Agnes]: You must keep close, very close.

Peter: Say it.

Agnes: May I... be used.

Peter: Again.

Agnes: May I be used.

Peter: Again.

Agnes: May I be used.

This scene balances eroticism with a gothic sensibility, in part through the bluish half-light in which it is filmed and in part through the non-diegetic score consisting of an anxious piano motif overlaid with ethereal and wordless vocals. As Selina undresses Agnes she draws the ribbons from her dress through her fingers slowly and sensuously; Peter moves behind Agnes so that she is held, like Miss Isherwood, tightly between him and Selina. There is no nudity here, however; both Agnes and Selina are in white undergarments while Peter, in shirt and vest, continues to wear his top hat. The séance is shot very closely to the actors, with many extreme close-ups of mouths and hands. This camerawork has the effect of both heightening the scene's eroticism and concealing what Peter and Selina are doing. When Peter makes Agnes repeat the "prayer" she gasps with each repetition, but the camera is in too close to show viewers Peter's hands. In this way the adaptation shows viewers that Selina and Peter are "using" Agnes, but by not pulling back to reveal the full picture it maintains a sense of mystery.

Part 4. The reversal of master and servant

Affinity's plot depends on Ruth's position as a lady's maid – her female sex – to give her access to the most intimate parts of Mrs Brink's, Selina's, and Margaret's lives. This knowledge enables Ruth to undermine the master/servant relationship; with Selina she completely upends it. Ruth quickly figures out that Selina is deceiving Mrs Brink by impersonating her mother's spirit. During these séances, in Mrs Brink's room, Ruth sits with her employer, "only watch[ing], with her black eyes" (174). After these manifestations Ruth takes Selina back to her room and prepares her for bed. On one occasion, as she brushes Selina's hair, Selina begins to cry. "[Ruth] said then 'Why are you crying?' I said the brush was pulling at my hair. She said 'Fancy crying over a brush!' She stood & laughed, & then she brushed again a little harder. She said she would give me a 100 strokes, she made me count them" (174-5). Ruth is amused by Selina's distress and, rather than desisting, brushes harder because, as she tells Selina, "I know how handsome ladies like to have their hair brushed. Look at my great arm. I can brush a lady's hair from crown to waist until it lies smooth as water or silk" (174). Selina cries until Ruth puts the brush down and poses her in front of the mirror. "Now, Miss Dawes," says Ruth, "don't you look handsome? Don't you look like a proper young lady, & awfully fit for a gentleman's eye?" (175). It is here in the space between this entry, of 8 January 1873, and her following entry, of 25 January 1873, when Selina tells Mrs Brink to invite her friends to their first dark circle, that Ruth creates Peter Quick, the gentleman who will admire Selina.

Peter is Selina's spirit guide or "control" (166); to control her is his objective. During the dark circles, scenes of dominance and submission are repeatedly played out for Mrs Brink and her friends, but they – and readers and viewers of the text – fail to understand what they are reading or seeing because Ruth is disguised as a spirit. When Peter first appears to Selina in the novel, as

she sits behind the curtain in her “cabinet,” he whispers to her: “Say it is your master” (193). This order sets the tone for the way in which Peter interacts with Selina; initially content with verbal dominance, he soon incorporates bondage into the séances. Two months after his spiritualist debut, Peter tells the audience that Selina “must be fastened in [her] cabinet” (231); in order to prove the validity of spiritualism to “disbelievers,” he claims, he must have Selina tied to her chair and blindfolded. “You must do this now at each dark circle,” he tells the audience. “If you do not do this I will not come” (231). After getting Miss d’Esterre to examine the bonds he whispers to Selina: “It is for you I do this... I am all your power” (232). When she agrees, “he put[s] a band of silk across [her] mouth & then [draws] the curtain closed & [goes] among them” (232). To the ropes and bands of silk he later adds a velvet collar with a cord attached to its buckle. During one séance a skeptical gentleman asks Miss Noakes, who is holding the cord: “Lord, must you do that? Must she really be tied like a goose?” And Miss Noakes replies: “It is for persons like you that we do this. Do you think any of us enjoys it?” (346). The audience might find certain aspects of the séance “not quite pleasant” (151), as Ada tells Margaret, but Peter Quick enjoys the authority he exercises over the dark circle and particularly over his medium. While the bondage scenes carry an erotic charge, however, the novel never directly tells readers what happens behind the curtain. A woman who attended several of these dark circles, called Ada in the adaptation, tells Margaret in the novel that “[t]hey would know when [Peter] arrived... for Selina would cry out” (151). And when Peter returned to the spirit world, “Miss Dawes would cry again. Then there would be silence” (152). When they untied her, Selina “would be only then so weary and so weak” (153). After Peter’s first appearance Selina “shook so hard [she] could hardly walk” (194), and when Ruth appears and asks, “Why does Miss Dawes look so pale?,” the sound of her voice makes Selina “[shake] worse than ever” (194). Selina’s

narrative, equally elliptical, reveals only that when Peter arrives in the cabinet he “put his hand upon [her] very hard” (231).

In translating the séance scenes the adaptation emphasizes certain aspects of their eroticism. In the first dark circle she holds at Mrs Brink’s home, Selina, played by Zoë Tapper, sits not behind a velvet curtain but in a chair on a raised platform next to a single candle, facing a group of Mrs Brink’s friends. In these flashbacks Tapper, with enormous blue eyes and golden curls falling to her waist, embodies the picture of white feminine beauty described in the novel. As she makes her way through the audience to the pedestal in this scene she resembles nothing more than a sacrificial virgin in some arcane rite. A maid puts out the other candles in the room before the camera slowly zooms in on Selina’s face; her eyes are closed as she begins to cry out. As the music climaxes she opens her eyes and Peter Quick’s face appears. After speaking to Peter, Selina relays information to a woman in the audience from the spirits:

Selina: Does the name Bertie mean anything to any lady here? A lady by the name of
Ada.

Ada: Oh yes! My poor husband Albert!

Selina: He wants you to know that all his pain is gone. He asks you to forgive him, Ada.
He says you will know what for.

Ada: Tell him I forgave him long ago.

Selina: He is happy to hear it. [in Peter Quick’s voice] He longs for the time when you
will join him.

A man in the audience chooses this moment to strike a match to light his pipe; as Mrs Brink grabs his arm, Peter shouts: “Who calls me?” Selina cries out several times in Peter’s voice and swoons; Mrs Brink revives her and the audience applauds. *The Independent’s* Liz Hoggard writes that the séance scenes in *Affinity* “have an orgasmic quality” but that this eroticism is also

“highly disturbing” (Hoggard). While the appearance of Peter’s apparently disembodied white face is disconcerting, the emanation of his masculine voice from Selina’s feminine body is exceedingly uncanny. The ventriloquizing effectively conveys Peter’s dominance of Selina: she is merely a vessel, the dummy through which he controls the dark circle.

The following séance begins with Selina sitting with a black velvet band over her eyes while a woman ties her to her chair. Peter has no need to prove, as he does in the novel, that Selina has not left her cabinet because her chair is on a platform in front of the audience. The bondage, rather, simply signifies the sadistic aspect of his dominance over Selina: she is bound here because he wants her bound. Selina, blindfolded, points to a girl in the audience who identifies herself as Agnes d’Esterre. Selina gets Agnes to examine the knots, as her wrists are tied to the chair. “Are they good and tight?” she asks. “Tight,” Agnes replies. “I think, too tight.” When Peter appears, Agnes tells him: “I think you have hurt her, sir.” Ignoring Agnes he says to Selina: “You know it is for your sake that I do this... I am all your power.” The two lines translated almost verbatim from the novel, whispered there by Peter to Selina behind the curtain, spoken here aloud in front of the dark circle, chillingly convey Peter’s very public power over Selina. “I know you are,” she whispers in reply. The text remains ambiguous about the extent to which Selina enjoys this sadistic attention. Mrs Jelf reveals in the novel that she saw Selina weeping over the flowers that Ruth sent her at Millbank (337); Margaret bitterly imagines Ruth “hammering [her initials] into the soft red flesh of Selina’s heart,” but suspects a reciprocal masochism: “if she ever did that, then... Selina must have parted the bones at her breast, to let her” (341).

Part 5. The anti-nostalgic impulse in Waters's *Affinity*

In Chapter Three I examined how Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* responds to a genre of lesbian historical fiction which is, according to Waters and Laura Doan, motivated by nostalgia (19). In "Making up for lost time," Waters and Doan explore how these nostalgically-driven texts refuse history. Embracing instead "the trans- or ahistorical," they repeatedly depict lesbian bodies as "unlocated, undefined, unmarked by the cultural discourses by which bodies are constructed and contained" (18). Nancy's picaresque adventures in *Tipping the Velvet* are designed in part to show differently located lesbian bodies marked by different cultural discourses; in this way Waters's novel resists the notion of "the past" created in these historical novels – "which ought to proliferate with such differences," but instead "emerges from the lesbian historical genre as an erotic and political continuum through which alterity can be mystically overridden" (18-19). Doan and Waters single out Caeia March as a lesbian novelist whose works posit a "shared lesbian community" in which same-sex desire effortlessly trumps all other differences (18). "[A] typical scene," they write, "has a lesbian couple reading Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* [1978]: they might, they think, 'have been any women lovers, anywhere in the world, any time, in any living-room'" (qtd. 18). Like *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity*, I suggest, shows that alterity cannot be "mystically overridden," but it does so in a different way. Where Waters's first novel parodies the prevalent nostalgia of these lesbian novels in humorous scenes, such as the party at which Nancy encounters three Marie Antoinettes, five Sapphos, and six Ladies of Langollen (307) – figures who bear the burden of lesbian nostalgia in these historical narratives – her second novel brutally explodes it.

Margaret's biggest mistake is to assume that mutual desire will override all other cultural differences: "*You are like me*," she thinks of Selina (82). When Selina tells Margaret that she is Margaret's *affinity*, she very deliberately echoes Margaret's own words: "We are the same, you

and I. We have been cut, two halves, from the same piece of shining matter... [O]ur flesh is the same, and longs to leap to itself. It must do that, or wither! *You are like me*" (275; original emphasis). Margaret is half-convinced when Selina plays her trump card: "Do you think," she says, "that I will be like *her*—like *her*, that chose your brother over you?" (276; original emphasis). When Margaret's first lover, Helen Gibson, submitted to the norm of compulsory heterosexuality by marrying Stephen Prior, Margaret was devastated. Margaret wants desperately to believe that Selina will not change, as Helen did; Selina, however, uses the notion of affinities to draw Margaret's attention away from the differences between them.

The crucial difference between Margaret and Selina is one of class and it comes into play particularly when they plan their escape to Italy. Margaret holds a deeply romanticized vision of Italy, one that is bound up with a curious nostalgia for a trip that never took place. Her father, a scholar, had intended to visit the galleries and archives of Italy with Margaret and Helen, but he died before they could make such a journey. Since then, Margaret tells Selina, Italy "had become a kind of mania with [her], a kind of emblem" (208), and she is particularly devastated when her sister Priscilla honeymooned there with her new husband Arthur. "I think Italy must be the most perfect place on earth," she tells Selina (211); she imagines it filled with paintings and statues; she longs to visit the burial places of Keats and Shelley in Rome. But it is not just the art and the poets that draw her: "Imagine the days, that were long and warm all the year round. Imagine every corner with a fountain at it, and boughs of orange-blossom—imagine the streets, filled with the scent of orange-blossom, where ours were filled with fogs!" (212). It is not difficult for Selina to persuade her that Italy will be their destination, but Selina's concerns are rather more pragmatic. "She said we shall need money," writes Margaret, "all the money I can find; and we shall need clothes, and shoes, and boxes to put them in... [W]e must seem like a lady and her companion and have the luggage to show for it" (286). Selina tells her that they will also need

tickets, for the train and the boat, and passport papers. “I had not thought of it as she had,” writes Margaret (286).

The precarious living Selina makes at Mr Vincy’s – even her secure position at Mrs Brink’s – contrasts sharply with Margaret’s own financial position. Unlike Selina, Margaret doesn’t have to work for a living. Her brother Stephen confirms that she is quite wealthy. “I have known this, of course,” she writes, “but it has always been, for me, an empty kind of knowledge—a useless knowledge, so long as my wealth has had no purpose” (290). She learns that she can withdraw her income from the bank by presenting a money order that has been countersigned by her brother (292). Stephen fills in a practice money order for her and signs it, leaving a blank space for the amount; at Selina’s suggestion, Margaret withdraws as much money as she can, thirteen hundred pounds in cash (302). Although the bank clerk seems reluctant to give her the money, conferring with a senior clerk, she writes, “But after all, what could they do? I am a lady, and the money is mine” (302). In the adaptation she practices Stephen’s signature so that she can forge it.

She buys clothes for Selina, and tickets for the train and the boat, and then has passports made up for herself, and one for Selina under the name *Marian Erle*. The name is from Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a poem imbued, for Margaret, with longing and nostalgia: not only do Marian and Aurora move to Florence, but Helen’s nickname for Margaret when they were lovers was *Aurora*. Margaret’s narrative is filled with references to Browning, Shelley and Keats. When Selina tells Margaret to pick a day for their escape, she picks 20 January because it is St Agnes’s Eve. Delighted with the date’s significance, she recites several lines from Keats’s poem to Selina, but Selina “only [stands] watching, not knowing—not knowing!” (300). Dismayed at first, Margaret thinks: “Why should she know? Who was there ever, to teach her things like that? I thought, *That will come*” (300). Margaret acknowledges the difference

between herself and Selina here only because she can see a way to erase it that fits with her romantic vision of Italy.

Ruth and Selina take advantage of Margaret's loneliness and isolation, her chloral addiction, and her class blindness to swindle her. Vigers uses her access to Margaret's room as a female servant to read her diary and to remove or add items to make Margaret think the spirits have been there. Shortly after Margaret reveals her vision of Italy to Selina, she discovers a vase of orange blossoms in her room for which neither Ellis nor, of course, Vigers, can account. In the novel her mother assumes they have arrived from Priscilla and Arthur in Italy; in the adaptation she assumes they are from Theophilus; Margaret reluctantly concludes that Selina sent them to her. She also discovers Selina's plait of hair on her pillow one morning; in the adaptation she wakes up to find it lying beside her, and has to conceal it hastily beneath the pillow as her mother enters the room. Selina's final "gift" is particularly symbolic: after Margaret secures the money for the trip she finds Selina's black velvet collar tucked in the pages of her diary. She puts it on and wears it under her clothes until she discovers that she has been betrayed. Enthralled with Selina, she is unknowingly in thrall to Vigers.

One of the reasons that Margaret finds Vigers's betrayal so devastating is because Vigers is a servant, a virtually anonymous, emotionless member of the working class, interchangeable with Boyd, her predecessor, and Ellis, the Priors's other servant. For the duration of her servitude, however, she has been manipulating Margaret; she has had ulterior motives; plans; emotions. Feeling ill, Margaret writes: "I thought of the orange-blossoms; and of the collar, which I found pressed between the pages of this book. I thought of this book, where I wrote all my secrets—all my passion, all my love, all the details of our flight" (339). It is an elegant plan enabled by Vigers's reading of Margaret's diary; Vigers dresses Margaret every morning, and then suddenly she disappears with Margaret's clothes, "gowns and coats, and hats and boots and

gloves and brooches—things... that she has handled in her time here, things she has cleaned and pressed and folded, and kept neat, kept ready” (339). Vigers has also taken the clothes for Selina, the money, the tickets, the passports, even the rope of Selina’s hair. She has taken “everything, except the books” (339). Margaret can hardly countenance the relationship between Vigers and Selina. “*Vigers*,” writes Margaret.

What was she, to me? I could not even recall the details of her face, her look, her manners. I could not say, cannot say now, what shade her hair is, what colour her eye, how her lip curves—I know she is plain, plainer even than I. And yet I must think, *She has taken Selina from me*. I must think, *Selina wept, for the wanting of her*. I must think, *Selina has taken my life, that she might have a life with Vigers in it!* (340; original emphasis)

The scope of the betrayal overwhelms Margaret and leaves her feeling poisoned (340), stained (349), and ultimately suicidal. While the lesbian historical novels analyzed by Waters and Doan repeatedly construct a model of “isolated romance” between their lesbian protagonists (19), the bleak ending of *Affinity* destroys Margaret’s fantasy vision of a life in Italy with Selina.

Part 6. The unmasking of Peter Quick

Ruth Vigers’s destabilization of rigid Victorian hierarchies, particularly of class, results not only in the death of Margaret but of Mrs Brink. This destabilization is revealed in the moment of Peter Quick’s unmasking. It is a moment described ambiguously by Selina in the novel’s opening. Selina is trying to “develop” the spirit powers of Madeleine Silvester, a wealthy American girl, but Madeleine becomes hysterical when Peter appears. Selina and Peter are violently restraining her when Mrs Brink hears her screams and unlocks the door. Selina writes:

She [Mrs Brink] looked at Madeleine lying stiff upon the parlour floor with all her red hair about her, & then at me in my torn petticoat, & then at the blood upon my hands, which was not black now but scarlet. Then she looked at Peter. He had his hands before his face & was crying "Take the light away!" But his gown was open & his white legs showed, & Mrs Brink would not take the lamp away until at last it began to shake. Then she cried "O!" & she looked at me again, & at Madeleine again, & she put her hand upon her heart. She said "Not her, too?" & then "O Mamma, Mamma!" (2)

It is Peter's open gown that exposes Ruth's body and reveals to Mrs Brink that Selina is another sham spirit medium, just like the many others that, as Ruth tells Selina, "proved crooks," and that Mrs Brink and Ruth "soon saw through" (155). Mrs Brink, who has spent years searching for a medium powerful enough to contact her dead mother, is devastated by the revelation and dies shortly after.

Davies's adaptation opens with Selina running to Mrs Brink's room but the older woman, seeing her, screams in horror. The scene cannot be played out in its entirety at the beginning of the adaptation, as it is in the novel, because it would collapse the careful distance between Ruth, Vigers and Peter Quick. At the adaptation's conclusion, the scene "rewinds" to show Mrs Silvester and Madeleine arriving at Mrs Brink's. "Madeleine is such a good friend of Agnes d'Esterre and I understand Agnes has never felt so well," Mrs Silvester tells Mrs Brink. "I wonder, could Miss Dawes try developing Madeleine's powers too?" Unlike Agnes, however, Madeleine is terrified of Peter Quick, and begins screaming when he appears. "What's this, you silly little girl," says Peter, "do you want to be made better or not?" He seizes her and falls on her awkwardly. "Hold her, stop her screaming!" he shouts to Selina, his voice rising from its masculine pitch. The scene cuts between Madeleine screaming and Mrs Brink hurrying up the

stairs with a lamp. As Peter and Selina try to restrain Madeleine she knocks off Peter's top hat and pulls off his moustache.

Peter is astonishingly transformed: Madeleine hasn't succeeded in pulling off all of his whiskers so that his face is still framed by bushy mutton chops, but his overcoat has fallen open to reveal Ruth's breasts. It is in this instant that Peter/Ruth is both male and female; with Peter's face and Ruth's body Loncq could be a man half in female drag or a woman half in male drag. But this duality is fleeting. The camera cuts to Mrs Brink who holds up the lamp. "Ruth?" she quavers. When the camera cuts back Peter has vanished: the mutton chops have disappeared and Ruth's hair has come unpinned and hangs over her shoulders, so that she appears only female. Mrs Brink approaches Selina. "Oh my god!" she gasps, then clutches her heart and collapses. This sequence translates compellingly from a mode of telling to a mode of showing; the adaptation makes use of both the visual and aural to create this powerful transgendered moment. It is not merely the boundary between male and female that Peter/Ruth destabilizes here; his/her transgendered body also dissolves the line between the spiritual and material, and upends the division between master and servant. Mrs Brink suffers a heart attack not only because she discovers that Peter Quick is a woman, but because he is not a spirit after all, and because Ruth is her maid.

Of all Sarah Waters's lesbian characters, Ruth is perhaps the least sympathetic: she bullies Selina; takes advantage of Mrs Brink and her friends; manipulates Margaret. She's violent, jealous and sadistic; in a word, ruthless. But she is also a lady's maid, and she is irrevocably marked by discourses of class and gender. When the novel ends, in Selina's lavish bedroom at Mrs Brink's, Ruth, "smoking one of Peter's cigarettes," is thinking of Madeleine Silvester's fortune "& what [she and Selina] might do with a share of money like that" (352). Like Selina, Ruth must earn a living; unlike Selina, Ruth has international ambitions: "Did you

suppose I wanted to keep you at Sydenham for ever, when the world has so many bright places in it?" she tells Selina. "I am thinking how handsome you will look, say in France or Italy. I am thinking of all the ladies that will like to gaze at you there" (352). As Selina prepares to go to Mrs Brink she records one final sentence in her diary: "'Remember,' Ruth is saying, 'whose girl you are'" (352). While Ruth and Selina do seem to escape successfully – from prison, at least – the novel's final line firmly resists any sense of nostalgia-driven isolated romance by reminding readers that Ruth owns Selina. Despite illustrating this possessive relationship, however, the final scene of Davies's adaptation strays into the kind of romantic idealism that Waters deliberately disrupts in the novel.

The adaptation's denouement dramatizes a number of scenes which are only implied at the novel's conclusion. Margaret finds her diary open at a page on which Selina has written: "Please don't think too badly of me. It was Peter Quick. He made me do it." The camera cuts to Selina and Ruth standing on the deck of a ship in the Thames, wearing new clothes. Ruth looks rather shaky and slyly relieved; Selina, with her shorn prison hair under a hat, appears cunning and pleased. The scene flashes back to Selina and Ruth lying on a bed. Selina, in her corset and petticoat and stockings, lounges with her long hair splayed out about her; Ruth's normally neat hair is untidy; the skirts of her servant's dress are pulled up and her stockings pulled down to reveal her bare leg. In this post-coital disarray Ruth kisses Selina briefly, holds a cigarette in a long holder to Selina's mouth, then, after Selina exhales, kisses her firmly. While Selina smiles, Ruth pulls away, giving her a possessive look, and hands the cigarette to Selina. She leaves Selina gazing after her; there is no doubt that Selina is Ruth's girl.

The final scene suggests, however, that Selina significantly reciprocates Margaret's feelings for her. As Margaret throws herself from a bridge into the Thames she says in voiceover: "There is no longing in me now. You [Selina] have taken all that. You have the last thread of my

heart. I wonder, when the thread goes slack, will you feel it?" Just before her body hits the water Selina opens her eyes and exhales sharply. The camera cuts between Margaret's body floating underwater, and Selina on the ship. A second, identical Selina stands near Selina and Ruth, and this double dives into the water. Ruth puts her arm around Selina's shoulders and says: "Come." As Selina pulls away she leans in close: "Remember whose girl you are." Selina nods briefly; Ruth takes her hand and they prepare to go below deck. In the adaptation's final shot the second Selina, whose hair is not cropped but fans out behind her, embraces Margaret underwater to the sound of mournful violins. Liz Hoggard writes: "Davies has worked his magic to turn an unkind trick into something more romantic, if also more anguished" (Hoggard), but this romantic transformation is precisely the problem. Davies's *Affinity* comes nowhere near the male fantasy imagery of *Tipping the Velvet*, but this scene, with its sensuously floating female figures caressing each other in slow motion, comes awfully close to the kind of sentimentality that Waters's novel vigorously resists.

The final image of the two feminine bodies underwater serves to distract attention from the butch-femme couple standing on the deck of the ship. Curiously, Ruth looks far more masculine in Margaret's clothes – including hat, gloves, earrings, and lipstick – than she does in her servant's uniform. Loncq, then, creates a doubly disruptive character in Ruth Vigers, a "truly troubling" figure (Butler 176). As Peter Quick, Loncq disrupts viewer expectations when she is unmasked, and in this final sequence as Ruth, Loncq disrupts conventional television norms of femininity. The "Faustian bargain" of casting feminine or hyperfeminine actresses to play androgynous or butch lesbian roles is thus resisted in the casting of Loncq.

Vigers, of course, plays a relatively minor role in the adaptation next to Waters's protagonist Margaret Prior. There is little description of Margaret in Waters's novel; she describes herself as plain compared to her "handsome" sister Priscilla (203), although not so plain

as Vigers (340). In the adaptation Margaret is played by Anna Madeley, an actress who is about as plain as Rachael Stirling in *Tipping the Velvet*. But where Stirling is “handicapped by costuming and make-up (ever-present eyeliner and lipstick) that constantly mark her as a pretty woman” (Lo), Madeley is made up to look pale and drawn with dark rings under her eyes. Director Fywell, moreover, makes use of camera angles, lighting and costume to emphasize the planes of her face, giving the impression that she has particularly sharp features. She rarely smiles except after she has been shopping for Selina for their Italian escape, and in that scene, when she takes a cab back to her house, her smile appears unnatural and almost grotesque. In the novel, Margaret describes a girl in a fashionable cuirass gown as “an ankle in a well-shaped boot,” adding, “I knew I would put the same gown on and look like a sword in a scabbard” (205). Madeley, tall and thin, conveys this angularity in her movements. She is not masculine, but she brings a severity to Margaret, the chloral addict, that resists the “pretty woman” conventional television femininity of *Tipping the Velvet*.

Before *Affinity* aired, *Guardian* contributor and author Bidisha wrote: “I have high hopes for *Affinity* as it offers little scope for the corny, porny lesbianism-for-guys that Andrew Davies clearly enjoys” (Bidisha). Indeed, the “corny, porny lesbianism-for-guys” that marked *Tipping the Velvet*, particularly in the sex scenes between Nancy and Kitty, is absent from *Affinity*. Although the adaptation is filled with suppressed eroticism – in the séances, in Margaret’s prison visits to Selina, for example – there are no sex scenes in *Affinity*. Lesbian desire is made explicit only in brief glimpses: the flashback in which Margaret kisses Helen; a single chaste kiss between Margaret and Selina; the possessive kiss Ruth plants on Selina. The only female nudity in the adaptation is made as unerotic as possible: at Millbank new female prisoners – young and old, thin and fat – are stripped and sprayed with water as Margaret watches. Margaret subsequently dreams that Selina is among the naked inmates, but where they cringe from the stream of water –

and by extension the camera – she refuses objectification; standing defiantly with her arms covering her breasts, she returns both Margaret’s and the viewer’s gaze. While Sarah Vine of *The Times* bemoaned Davies’s tendency to “sauce up” his classic serial adaptations, *Affinity* contains far less sex than *Daniel Deronda* or *Doctor Zhivago*. Not surprisingly this adaptation, with little fodder for sensationalism, received far less media attention than *Tipping the Velvet*.

It is impossible to judge the effects of *Tipping the Velvet*’s media attention on the “cultural moment” of lesbian “hypervisibility,” to use Julianne Pidduck’s terms, on British television in the mid-2000s, but it is reasonable to assert, I think, that *Tipping the Velvet* anticipates this cultural moment. Certainly *Tipping the Velvet*’s broadcast in 2002 and *Affinity*’s broadcast in 2008 bookend it. Lesbian hypervisibility may be on the wane – judging from the number of programmes from Louise Carolin’s list which have been cancelled and the number of lesbian characters which have been cut – or it may not; but the Waters adaptations have contributed significantly to lesbian visibility even as they have interrogated established genres like the costume drama and the classic serial.

In “Tuned Out,” Stonewall’s Cowan and Valentine assert that lesbians are underrepresented on the BBC and that when they do appear they are stereotyped, an assertion that leads them to call for more “positive and realistic” depictions of queer characters on the BBC. As I suggested in the introductory chapter, this advocacy is more readily applicable to reality and quiz shows, where queer people are poorly represented. But the Waters adaptations point to the futility of this kind of lobbying when it comes to drama and fictional programming. Many of Waters’s literary lesbians are not “positive” and none of them could accurately be described as “realistic”; some of her most “negative” characters, such as Ruth Vigers and Diana Lethaby, are most compellingly depicted on screen. I am much more concerned by what I have identified as a new norm of female television queerness, the reiteration of feminine and hyperfeminine lesbian

and bisexual characters in the television programmes listed by Louise Carolin in *DIVA* magazine, and particularly the femme-inization of butch source characters. The eradication of lesbian masculinity erases what Judith Halberstam calls “the only visible signifier of queer dyke desire” (121). Among the Waters adaptations, Loncq’s *Vigers* presents the only significant resistance to this trend; when the BBC adapts *The Night Watch* one wonders how the adaptation will depict mannish Kay Langrish and her tomboy friend Mickey. Perhaps the success of *Affinity* will allow producers to avoid making a “Faustian bargain”; perhaps there are enough feminine characters in Waters’s novel, both queer and straight, to satisfy the demands of television gender norms.

Waters’s pseudo-Victorian novels queer the homosocial spaces of Victorian society; they reconfigure the relationship between servant and served – Nancy and Kitty; Sue and Maud; Ruth and Selina – into one of lesbian desire. I argued in Chapter Four that Peter Ransley’s *Fingersmith* deliberately invokes Austen costume drama in order to subvert it, but even a thoroughly domesticated adaptation like *Tipping the Velvet* implicitly subverts what Thomas Leitch calls the BBC Tradition of Quality. The Waters adaptations have “peeked under the stiff skirts of Victoriana and found an unspoken lesbian subculture nestling there” (Bidisha). By depicting lesbian characters and relationships in nineteenth-century costumes and settings, in other words, the Waters adaptations interrogate, to varying degrees, the norm of compulsory heterosexuality reiterated, and in the case of Austen adaptations, openly celebrated, in the sexually conservative genre of costume drama.

All three of Waters’s adapted novels have been “accorded special treatment” of the kind reserved for nineteenth-century classic serials (Kerr 15). If Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* was canonized when ITV took advantage of the classic serial “as an institutional – and institutionalised – category,” as Kerr puts it (15), should Waters’s first three novels then similarly be considered, to use Sarah Cardwell’s term, “modern classics”? Perhaps Waters has only, like

Dorothy L. Sayers, been elevated “from a genre classic to a middlebrow classic” (Leitch 175). The adaptations have, more importantly, increased the novels’ popularity with heterosexual readers. Waters’s first three novels were already popular with queer readers when Davies adapted the first. Waters herself dates her sudden crossover popularity to 2002, when, as interviewer Helen Sandler puts it, “[Waters’s] Victorian melodrama *Fingersmith* was short-listed for the Orange and Man Booker prizes, broadsheet reviews multiplied and *Tipping* was televised” (Sandler). “I read at an event in Muswell Hill [in North London],” says Waters, “and, for the first time, there were more middle-aged, book-group ladies than lesbians” (Sandler). Despite being “foregrounded as guarantor of the cultural commodity on offer,” the source text author, as Paul Kerr has observed, “often vanishes into the Classic Serial format” (13). The opening credits of each Waters adaptation illustrate in miniature Sarah Waters’s “ambivalent” position, to use Kerr’s term (13), in relation to the adaptations: in 2002 well-known adaptor Andrew Davies was billed ahead of Waters in the opening credits of *Tipping the Velvet*. By the time *Fingersmith* aired in 2005, however, Waters preceded the relatively unknown name of Peter Ransley. When ITV finally broadcast *Affinity* at the end of 2008, “Based on the novel by Sarah Waters” edged out “Screenplay by Andrew Davies” by one frame. With this third adaptation Waters’s name has been thoroughly established as a marketable brand, and future adaptations of her work will undoubtedly foreground her name prominently. Waters’s success as a source author has perhaps encouraged drama commissioners to look to other young lesbian writers like Ali Smith, Charlotte Mendelson and Joanna Briscoe for source texts. Briscoe’s thriller *Sleep with Me* (2005) was adapted for ITV One by none other than Andrew Davies, but like *Affinity* it was postponed and is still awaiting a broadcast date.

While lesbian adaptations have moved decisively into mainstream British television via costume drama, the reign of the nineteenth-century source text for British adaptations may be at

an end. The *Guardian* reported in January 2009 that newly-appointed controller of drama commissioning Ben Stephenson would like BBC Drama to explore other historical eras (Holmwood). This announcement follows the poor showing of BBC One's *Little Dorrit* (2008), adapted, of course, by Andrew Davies, in comparison with those set in the twentieth century: *The 39 Steps* (2008), adapted by Lizzie Mickery, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (2008), adapted by Deborah Moggach. Leigh Holmwood writes that the BBC plans gradually to leave behind the traditional "bonnet and breeches" drama to focus on more contemporary source texts. Forthcoming dramas include an adaptation of Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), which explores the lives of Jamaicans who immigrated to Britain in the 1940s, and original productions such as *Desperate Romantics* (2009-), a Pre-Raphaelite soap opera "set among the alleys, galleries and flesh houses of nineteenth-century industrial London" (Holmwood). This "evolution" (Holmwood) of the BBC classic serial is bound to ensure Waters's continued popularity, however, for *The Night Watch*, set in London during and after World War Two, neatly bridges the gap between nineteenth-century costume drama and contemporary literary adaptation.

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