Spectacular Lesbians: Visual Histories in Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys

By

Jenna Smith

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

July 2006

A thesis submitted to

McGill University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the degree of

Master of Arts

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28578-7
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28578-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract / Résumé ii

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction: Lesbian Historical Fiction and the Politics of Visibility 1

Chapter 1: Multiply Monstrous: Disguise and Display in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* 12

Chapter 2: "How queer it is! – and yet, how very ordinary": Performative Identity in Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* 43

Chapter 3: The Cockpit and the Closet: "Invisible Visibility" in Helen Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* 79

Conclusion: Historical and Contemporary Lesbian Subjects: A Visual Lineage 114

Works Cited 117

ABSTRACT

As many theorists have pointed out, queer history is often erased within traditional, heteronormative historiography. Consequently, historians cannot recount the gay and lesbian past by conventional techniques of evidence and documentation. Instead they recuperate and reinvent queer history using strategies normally associated with the writing of fiction. This thesis examines three works of late twentieth century lesbian historical fiction that rewrite the past in order to render visible queer intimacy, sexuality, and desire. Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987), Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), and Helen Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* (1997) employ spectacularly visible lesbian heroines who symbolically reverse lesbian invisibility in mainstream historical narratives by displaying themselves as public figures or stage performers. There are ongoing debates in contemporary queer theory and historiography about the extent to which it is politically useful to privilege highly visible individuals when recovering the marginalized gay and lesbian past. Winterson's, Waters', and Humphreys' novels enact this debate, and exemplify a trend in contemporary lesbian historical fiction in which lesbian heroines are empowered by their ability to control their own visibility and to ensure the perpetuation of their history.

RÉSUMÉ

Tel que fût remarqué par plusieurs théoriciens, l'histoire gaie a souvent été effacée de l'historiographie traditionnelle et hétéronormative. Par conséquent, les historiens ne peuvent pas raconter le passé gai avec les techniques conventionnelles de preuves et de documentation. Au lieu d'utiliser des techniques traditionelles, ils récupèrent et réinventent l'histoire gai avec des stratégies de narrations fictives. Cette thèse se concerne de trois ouvrages de fiction historique lesbienne qui, parus vers la fin du vingtième siècle, réécrivent le passé pour rendre visible l'intimité, la sexualité, et le désir homosexuels. Trois romans – *The Passion* (1987), par Jeannette Winterson, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), par Sarah Waters, et *Leaving Earth* (1997), par Helen Humphreys – emploient des héroïnes lesbiennes qui sont visibles de façon spectaculaire et qui renversent, sur le plan symbolique, l'invisibilité lesbienne des narrations historiques traditionnelles en s'exposant en tant que figures publiques ou artistes sur scène. La théorie et l'historiographie gaies contemporaines débattent encore jusqu'à quel point il est politiquement propice de privilégier les individus fortement visibles dans la récupération du passé gai marginalisé. Les romans de Winterson, de Waters et de Humphreys incarnent ce débat et illustrent une tendance de la fiction historique lesbienne contemporaine, dans laquelle les héroïnes lesbiennes sont fortifiées par leur habilité à contrôler leur propre visibilité et à assurer la perpétuation de leur histoire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor, Allan Hepburn, for his invaluable guidance at every stage of this process. Ever generous with his time, he meticulously read several drafts of my thesis with an incredible eye for detail, and offered criticism and suggestions with a genuine sense of my goals for this project. I thank him for his honest, thoughtful, and constructive advice, his patience, and his encyclopedic breadth of knowledge. During my time at McGill, I have also been fortunate to work with and learn from Berkeley Kaite, Derek Nystrom, Ned Schantz, and Brian Trehearne.

Many thanks are due to my parents, Lesley Smith (who told me what I wanted to hear) and Bob Smith (who told me what I needed to hear). Their love and support know no bounds. Finally, my love and gratitude to Nicholas Smyth.

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian Historical Fiction and the Politics of Visibility

The historical fictions of Jeanette Winterson, Sarah Waters, and Helen Humphreys help recover a distinctly lesbian history from several centuries of heterosexist historiography. Winterson's *The Passion* (1987), Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), and Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* (1997) represent history in terms of sexual identity. These three novels, set variously during the Napoleonic wars, the fin-de-siècle in England, and the 1930s in Toronto, put lesbian heroines on display as monstrous "others," drag performers, or stunt artists. By a dramatic reversal of emphasis, these works of fiction call attention to suppressed lesbian stories in both history and fiction. Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys all explore lesbian erotics and female homosocial bonds in novels that evoke the oppressive but malleable nature of the written word and, thus, of history itself. These novels therefore participate in a critique of discursive knowledge production and, in particular, of the creation, perpetuation, and false naturalization of heteronormative gender and sexuality. Yet history in these novels is as much visual as it is textual. Winterson's work is pervaded by bodily grotesquerie and excess; Waters' novel is preoccupied with drag, masquerade, and disguise; Humphreys' fiction focuses on spectacular aerial stunt performance. While heterosexist patriarchal accounts of history have made many minority narratives invisible, these historical fictions participate in a recuperative gesture of making their lesbian heroines' histories spectacularly visible.

Winterson's Villanelle, Waters' Nan, and Humphreys' Willa are vividly displayed in their respective historical contexts. In *The Passion*, Villanelle is born with webbed feet, which mark her as a visibly "freakish" hybrid creature, and which she must

constantly conceal in the interest of self-preservation. While she deploys a strategic disguise to keep her bodily difference hidden, she also exhibits herself to the public gaze. Villanelle works in a carnivalesque Venetian casino where she dresses as a man and becomes a mysterious spectacle whose appearance begs onlookers to guess the "true" sex that her clothing hides. The highly orchestrated visibility of Villanelle's drag persona draws attention away from the heroine's deviance from a corporeal ideal and from the norms of compulsory heterosexuality, and allows Villanelle to explore her sexuality and learn to use it to her advantage.

In *Tipping the Velvet*, transvestism provides similar opportunities for Nancy Astley, who has a penchant for performance that lands her in the spotlight in several successive contexts. First, Nan works as a male impersonator in the London theatre. After she leaves this high-profile occupation, Nan continues to seek out opportunities for personal display. As a male prostitute she wishes for an audience to witness the various sexual deeds she performs; as a kept woman to an aristocratic sapphist she is exhibited regularly and purposively to prying eyes; finally, as an impassioned speaker for the socialist movement she returns to the stage. Her visibility, especially to the gaze of experienced lesbian spectators, allows Nan to locate and participate in several queer subcultures of fin-de-siècle London. Nan's ability to control her spectacular visibility gradually allows her to accept her masculine gender identity and to embrace her desire for other women.

Humphreys' heroine Willa Briggs, in *Leaving Earth*, is dazzlingly on display as she co-pilots a small airplane that circles Toronto harbour for nineteen days in the summer of 1933, in an attempt to break an in-air endurance record. For officials to verify

the success of the flight, the plane must remain visible at all times. Willa and her co-pilot, Grace, are subject to the constant scrutiny of fascinated spectators and the sensation-craving media. Despite the spectacular visibility that her career in aviation affords, Willa is unable to speak or to fulfill her desire for women. Her high profile does not attract the advances of a savvy lesbian, as it does for Villanelle, or introduce Willa to thriving lesbian subcultures, as it does for Nan. Visibility is, for Winterson's and Waters' heroines, a key to self-discovery that is enacted, somewhat surprisingly, through the gaze of a captive audience. But Villanelle inhabits the magic realist world of *The Passion*, in which fantasy abounds, and Nan lives an outrageous, comical life that, even as *Tipping the Velvet* works in the mode of narrative realism, is not quite credible. In *Leaving Earth*, Willa lacks the playful insouciance of Villanelle and Nan, and exemplifies a less affirmative, and perhaps more realistic, formulation of queer visibility in the past.

Efforts to recover an elided past have focused on making queer subjects visible throughout history, yet the politics of visibility and invisibility is a much-debated topic within queer theory and historiography. In the lesbian historical novel, a highly visible protagonist can work to fill in the gaps in heteronormative histories by making a lesbian presence indisputable. "From its very inception," writes Martha Vicinus, "lesbian studies has been concerned with 'making visible' the lesbian of the present and the past" (1996: 7). Yet Vicinus cautions that queer theory, and particularly the notion that gender is performance, can be troublingly ahistorical: "The wholesale embracing of a theatrical metaphor ignores the historical contingencies within which lesbian roles are constructed, and their specific meanings at different historical times" (6). Lesbian historians and authors alike must avoid reductive anachronisms when invoking highly visible lesbian

characters in the past. An attendant danger, Amy Villarejo argues, is that "The demand to make lesbians visible, whether as ammunition for anti-homophobic campaigns or as figures for identification, renders lesbian static, makes lesbian into (an) image, and forestalls any examination of lesbian within context" (6-7). While visibility is thus feared to erase differences among lesbians across time, space, class, race, and ethnicity, it can also overemphasize the experiences of individuals at the expense of queer issues of more widespread importance. As Bonnie J. Dow suggests, making "poster children" out of individual, eminently visible lesbians can result in "[the] neat turning of the potentially political into the personal" (133). Critics insist that the tendency to privilege visible lesbians can be a double-edged sword; either one lesbian's story stands in for all lesbians' stories, or one lesbian's story takes precedence over all lesbians' stories. In both cases, lesbian history remains incomplete.

Contemporary queer culture has been concerned with claiming icons in the present and the past. Unlike Winterson's Villanelle, who is not revered by adoring fans, Waters' Nan and Humphreys' Willa become icons for their queer spectators. Both authors highlight the importance of photographs and public performances in establishing a visual connection between queer people and their icons. Yet queerness complicates public personas. When a famous person is claimed for queer culture, this "outing" forcibly renders the icon's private life public. In *Leaving Earth*, closeted Willa avoids achieving celebrity status and prefers to keep her private desires out of the limelight. She also realizes, as does famous Grace's young fan Maddy, that celebrities cannot live up to their iconic mystique in reality.

Despite the problems that attend the creation of queer "poster children," the

successes of publicly valorized icons can provide valuable models for people struggling to achieve personal and social acceptance of their queerness. This is particularly true for queer people in the past, who were primarily exposed to discourses of homosexuality that pathologized rather than celebrated queerness. Queer icons are trailblazers who can represent possibility, especially for the closeted queer subject. In *Tipping the Velvet*, years after her final performance as a male impersonator, fans recognize Nan in a lesbian bar and, wielding a promotional photo of her and her costar Kitty, are eager to claim her as their icon. Nan's sudden awareness of her celebrity status is a double revelation: she realizes that her own queerness was never as invisible as she supposed, and she learns that she has provided to other lesbians the example of queer potential that she sought in her youth. If queer icons are not made visible, are not in some sense transformed into "poster children," their identificatory and affirmative power is diminished.

While Waters and Humphreys both represent queer icons, neither author promotes celebrity as unproblematic for lesbians. When authors and historians indiscriminately favour spectacularly visible queer subjects, they perpetuate stereotypical concepts of queerness that elide the many differences among queer people. Consequently, representations of certain highly visible individuals can hypostatize queerness into an essence. Yet allowing the lesbian subject of the present and the past to remain invisible is no more desirable an option than is rendering her static. Like Vicinus and Villarejo, Judith Mayne is wary of overly broad or haphazard attempts to make lesbians visible in the past. However, she insists that "Questioning 'visibility' is not the same as rejecting it..." (xxi). Rather than advocating a wholesale refusal of the importance of visibility, Mayne argues that in contemporary lesbian theory "the point instead is to situate and

understand, historically and theoretically, the desire to simultaneously affirm visibility and question it" (xxi). It can indeed be problematic to privilege the visible lesbian at the expense of those who have chosen to remain invisible. Yet Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys celebrate spectacular lesbian protagonists without anachronistically claiming their heroines' abilities to make their *lesbianism* readily apparent in their respective historical contexts. Villanelle, Nan, and Willa manage their visibility through carefully measured deployments of disguise and display that allow each woman to choose invisibility when discretion is in her best interest.

In their depictions of spectacularly visible lesbians, Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys "out" their fictional heroines in the present, if not in their respective historical contexts. Writing historical fiction allows these authors to evade the ethical problem of forcibly "outing" actual historical personages. The authors' hyper-exhibition of Villanelle, Nan, and Willa suggests that lesbians have not been invisible in the past. These authors participate in the re-writing of history not to make truth claims about the "real" lived history of their fictional characters but, rather, to make truth claims about the existence and legitimacy of a distinctly lesbian past. In its characteristic suturing of fact and fiction, historical fiction allows lesbian writers to invent a genealogy in which they can choose their own ancestors. Winterson's, Waters', and Humphreys' historical fictions promote a lineage between the lesbian past and the present. This genealogy evokes Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum, "a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience" (51), and speaks to Virginia Woolf's assertion that authors "think back through our mothers if we are women" (75). Ellen Bayuk Rosenman distinguishes between Rich's suspicion of tradition and Woolf's

championing of a new concept of tradition in which the woman author seeks guidance from female forebears:

> According to Adrienne Rich, women need to break the hold of tradition because it silences them. Tradition itself is not the problem, however; it is the patriarchal nature of tradition. Tradition can in fact be enabling in several ways.... [The] narrator's counter-tradition is a potentially important part of a woman writer's development. (70)

Just as a history of women's writing is of particular use to women writers, a documented lesbian "counter-tradition" can be a source of guidance and legitimation for contemporary lesbians. In recovering and supplementing lesbian history and fiction, writers confront a tradition that, while it carries much potential, often requires adaptation: some works must be reclaimed from the canon as lesbian texts, others must be recuperated from obscurity, having never been published or circulated, while still other texts must be written now, to fill in the gaps of a history that remains fragmentary.

Mainstream history and fiction tend to reinforce the status quo, and ensure that certain privileged documents achieve discursive perpetuation at the expense of others. Too often, minorities have been written out of history. Yet by their existence, "Marginal groups dispute the values of the societal norm and therefore challenge the narrative system which encodes those norms" (Farwell 41). The main task that queer historiographers face is to make visible that which, throughout history, has not been seen. Presented with suspicion rather than fact and gossip rather than testimony, embellishment, invention, and embroidery are unavoidable and indispensable strategies for the queer historiographer. Queer history must be pieced together from rumour,

conjecture, and scarce pieces of material evidence such as journals, letters, and extant legal documents. Since the queer past is still largely invisible in mainstream history and fiction, the contemporary foregrounding of spectacularly visible queers throughout history – whether fictional or "real" – is a defiant means to challenge narrative hegemony.

Postmodern historiography destabilizes the centre of received "truths" about history and promotes the recovery of the elided pasts of various marginalized groups. In his work on queer historiography, Scott Bravmann advocates "a postmodern writing of the past" in gay and lesbian studies: a rewriting of history that takes difference into account in order "to problematize and reframe the very meaning of history itself" (13). Similarly, postmodern historical fiction decentralizes and fragments the traditional focuses of canonical literature, and joins postmodern historiography in its quest to challenge the monopoly of mainstream historical accounts that re-entrench exclusive master-narratives of the past. Linda Hutcheon identifies a subset of postmodern historical fiction which she calls "historiographic metafiction," a genre that "refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (1988: 93). By equating the discourse of (ostensibly non-fictional) history with fiction, postmodern theorists ascribe to fiction a great deal of persuasive and discursive power. As Hayden White reasons, "One can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less 'true' for being imaginary" (57). Queer history, which relies heavily upon supposition and fabrication, reveals that invention is crucial to the writing

of any history.

M.-L. Kohlke writes, "As the symbolic Other of the white western male historical subject, women have repeatedly been relegated to the realm of myth, and sentenced to discursive non-being in the prison-house of patriarchal *His*tory" (153). While Kohlke fails to include sexual identity in her delineation of the historically dominant subject position, narratives that marginalize women in general must doubly marginalize the lesbian subject. Postmodern narratives privilege the elided "other," to the exclusion of those who have been the focus of mainstream historiography. Hutcheon notes that "the protagonists of historiographic metafiction are anything but types: they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (1996: 482). Villanelle, Nan, and Willa are the ex-centric heroines of representational works of lesbian historiographic metafiction that champion the inclusion of non-normative stories in the annals of history and fiction. By problematizing visibility, the historical fictions of Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys novelistically enact theoretical debates about the political efficacy of privileging visible lesbians. Published in 1987, *The Passion* helped set the terms for a genre that retroactively represents lesbian history by rendering queer heroines indisputably visible. A decade later, themes of disguise and display continue to preoccupy lesbian authors. Waters carries on Winterson's celebratory visual historiography in *Tipping the Velvet*, while Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* encourages the rewriting of lesbian history at the same time as it questions the benefits of lesbian visibility. These novels indicate that visibility debates stemming from early gay and lesbian studies remain unresolved in the realms of fiction and of theory and are, perhaps, unresolvable.

All historiographic metafictions are not identical in their use of the characteristic devices of the genre: of these three novels, Winterson's work is the most thoroughly conscious of its status as fiction, and the most critical of the selective and exclusive nature of epistemological systems; Waters' novel best exemplifies the intertextual nature of postmodern fiction, and draws the most attention to the elided subcultures of the lesbian past; Humphreys' novel is the most historically self-conscious in its deliberate inclusion and exclusion of accepted historical "facts," and is intensely critical of the stability of the written word. Kohlke argues that historiographic metafiction "may have exhausted its transgressive possibilities and become problematic rather than liberating to [lesbian] writers such as Waters, disillusioned with a postmodern tradition heavily criticized as ineffective in producing anticipated social and political change" (156). However, Patricia Juliana Smith argues that postmodern narrative strategies carry transgressive potential, and are particularly appealing to lesbian authors: "[just] as the postmodern narrative breaks down traditional 'rules' that govern the structures and closures of narrative, so does it possess the potential for representing lives and actions that defy traditional sex roles and mores – as does lesbianism" (13). Indeed, "the postmodern lesbian subject" is, according to Marilyn R. Farwell, "a disruptive hero in the culture wars.... These lesbian subjects have become, in this last quarter century, the most interesting and powerful contemporary strategy for women writers who intend to challenge the traditional narrative system" (17). In their historiographic metafictions, Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys depict spectacularly visible heroines who grapple with issues of display and disguise, performance and concealment. While they negotiate their visibility, attempt to fulfill their queer desires, and solidify their place in history,

Villanelle, Nan, and Willa challenge the cultural and discursive norms of the past and the present.

CHAPTER ONE

Multiply Monstrous: Disguise and Display in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*

> I think all you can do with the past is reinvent it so that people don't feel that they are in a place that they know, because the past is not a place that we know. We weren't there. And no matter what records are given to us, what objects, what stories, what histories, we don't know, because we weren't present. So to get at the past fiction is as likely a way of interpreting it as any. (Winterson, qtd. in Reynolds and Noakes 22)

> Perhaps it is especially important for us to realize that finally *there are no normals*, at a moment when we are striving desperately to eliminate freaks, to normalize the world. (Fiedler 1996: 8)

Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* is a literary freak show. Set in Europe during the Napoleonic Wars, the novel traces the experiences of a collection of diversely non-normative characters who produce a historical account that differs from those offered by traditional modes of historiography. *The Passion* is a fragmentary narrative that embraces the absurd and the fantastic, rather than making claims to unity and truth. Winterson's historical novel is written primarily from the perspective of a character whose identity places her on the margins of society, while traditional histories radiate from a hegemonic, and specifically heteronormative, centre. In mainstream historiography, a single, authoritative, often third person (and therefore ostensibly

objective) voice presents certain historical events and movements as natural and inevitable, obscuring their contingency and exclusivity. *The Passion* is a multi-voiced alternative that surpasses the limitations and the unavoidable exemptions of mainstream histories. Henri and Villanelle are the protagonists of Winterson's novel, as well as the co-narrators and, therefore, the co-historiographers of this literary rendering of life in Europe under the rule of Napoleon. While Henri's narrative accounts for the bulk of the text and frames the story as a whole, his spectacularly deviant friend and lover, Villanelle, captures the position of primary interest in the action of the novel. Her narrative represents a rupture in the authoritative voice of received truth. *The Passion* combines Villanelle's tale with a sustained critique of traditional modes of discursive knowledge production.

Villanelle is a corporeal "other" whose body is in many ways grotesque: first, because it integrates human traits with animal-like webbed feet that must be concealed under large boots that she never removes. She participates in a flamboyant practice of gender performance, donning masculine accoutrements and concealing her feminine traits for her job as a card dealer in a casino. As a lesbian, Villanelle is sexually "excessive," a deviation that she hides behind multiple affairs with men. Also, insofar as the grotesque body "transgresses its own confines [and erases] the limits between the body and the world" (Bakhtin 310), Villanelle's ability to continue living while her heart lies captive in her lover's home indicates that she inhabits the "inside out" characteristics of the grotesque body (Bakhtin 353). Villanelle's webbed feet, her penchant for drag, and her lesbianism mark her as "other," yet from this position Villanelle's power as narrator and history-maker is solidified. Villanelle becomes a master of disguise and display,

controlling her visibility in order to find sexual fulfillment and adventure. Indeed, her masculine gender performance attracts the attention of a married woman who surmises Villanelle's concealed sex and entices her into an illicit affair. Winterson juxtaposes Villanelle's queerness with the bodily "otherness" associated with freakish, monstrous, or grotesque bodies; in both cases, concealment of the subject's difference is often a necessary mode of self-preservation. Yet in her "otherness" to the corporeally coherent, male, heterosexual subject, Villanelle wields the monstrous power to control her visibility and to write her own history.

Male homoerotic desire is consistently present in *The Passion*, but it is never consummated. In contrast, lesbian sex is attainable for Villanelle. She meets the Queen of Spades while she is working at the casino under the cloak of darkness, in her masculine disguise. The Queen of Spades wins at Villanelle's card game, thus earning the only name that identifies her throughout the novel. She shares champagne with Villanelle and then leaves her "with [her] heart smashing at [her] chest" (65). Her fledgling relationship with the Queen of Spades forces Villanelle to interrogate the basis of her gender and sexual identity. Only having met while Villanelle is in her masculine casino uniform, Villanelle assumes that the Queen of Spades thinks she is a man. She considers whether to arrive for a dinner date in male or female garb: "Should I go to see her as myself and joke about the mistake and leave gracefully?" Faced with this decision, Villanelle ponders the performative nature of gender and wonders how she should define her "self": "Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters?" (71). Though the Queen of Spades knows that Villanelle is a woman, she refuses to have sex with Villanelle until she presents herself in feminine garb. On their first date, the Queen

of Spades insists that they can only kiss:

> And so, from the first, we separated our pleasure. She lay on the rug and I lay at right angles to her so that only our lips might meet. Kissing in this way is the strangest of distractions.... [The] mouth becomes the focus of love and all things pass through it and are re-defined. It is a sweet and precise torture. (73)

In *The Passion*, queer desire forces self-examination. This encounter with the Queen of Spades leaves Villanelle in a panic. She feels her trademark independence slipping away. An overwhelming "upsurge of self" makes Villanelle wish she could forget about her lover (74). Yet when Villanelle fears she will lose the Queen of Spades, she reveals her sex in a final attempt to prolong the relationship: "'I'm a woman,' I said, lifting up my shirt" (77). Once Villanelle has exposed herself as female, the Queen of Spades finally invites her to stay the night. The more experienced woman is interested in a lesbian relationship that unites two feminine subjects, not one that reiterates heteronormative pairings of the masculine with the feminine.

As a woman, Villanelle can meet her lover for platonic rendezvous in public without fear of censure. As lesbians, the women can meet romantically only in private: their courtship occurs by "clandestine meetings" and "snatched hours" (78). The relationship taxes Villanelle: she recalls, "In the hours we could not meet we sent messages of love and urgency. In the hours we could meet our passion was brief and fierce" (79). While Villanelle can physically consummate her desire for her female lover, a sustained emotional relationship with the Queen of Spades remains out of reach. "Could a woman love a woman for more than a night?" she asks (75). The answer proves

to be yes, but love alone cannot make a continued, fulfilling lesbian relationship viable in this early nineteenth century context. Villanelle and the Queen of Spades must conceal their difference: "For nine days and nights we stayed in her house, never opening the door, never looking out of the window. We were naked and not ashamed. And we were happy" (104). They must explore this love behind closed doors and shaded windows. Self-imposed invisibility is a defense mechanism. Knowing that "the heart may conceal itself," Villanelle keeps her heart hidden behind a "secret panel," adding love to the other aspects of her identity whose visibility she must carefully control (104).

That the Queen of Spades is married renders the affair doubly scandalous. Though so much of *The Passion* relies on the transcendence of various social norms, compulsory heterosexuality remains an obstacle to Villanelle's happiness. "Love is a fashion these days," muses Villanelle, "and in this fashionable city we know how to make light of love and how to keep our hearts at bay" (105). Passions must be suppressed if they don't conform to the social injunction toward heterosexuality, and Villanelle comes to believe that "There is no sense in loving someone you can never wake up to except by chance" (105). Though "She [loves] her husband" (106), the Queen of Spades' marriage is passionless. Winterson positions heterosexual marriage as a source of financial stability for the Queen of Spades, and a source of mobility for Villanelle. When Villanelle realizes she cannot be with her beloved, she hastily submits to an undesirable marriage. Her belief that "Men are violent [and that's] all there is to it" (119) allows her to justify her marriage to Napoleon's cook, despite his having beaten and raped her. Villanelle knows that she will never find a husband whom she will love with the intensity that she feels for the Queen of Spades. Although she has great affection for Henri,

Villanelle's love for him is never romantic. She claims to love him only "in a brotherly incestuous way. He touches [her] heart, but he does not send it shattering through [her] body. He could never steal it," as the Queen of Spades physically does (160). Heterosexual intercourse is purely functional for Villanelle: she is "pragmatic about love" and has "taken [her] pleasure with both men and women" (65). Villanelle uses sex as a form of social currency. She marries the cook so that she can travel the world at his expense and, when Henri is sent to the madhouse, she hopes that she can "buy him out for money and sex" (161). Finally, heterosexual sex provides Villanelle with a daughter – a personal guarantee of the perpetuation of her history.

Henri and Villanelle's child is an individual historical record of their lives. She has Henri's feet and Villanelle's "consuming hair," which strikes Villanelle as a sign that her daughter, too, "will draw her lot when the time comes and gamble her heart away" (164). Significantly, Henri's only thought of the daughter he has never met is, "I wonder what her feet are like" (167). Fearing that Villanelle has passed on her hereditary web-footedness, Henri craves normalcy for his daughter. Yet as Leslie Fiedler notes, "*there are no normals*" (1996: 8), and Villanelle realizes that even a stereotypically "normal" birth does not guarantee her child a painless life. Instead of chasing this nonexistent normalcy, Villanelle comes to realize that "The essence that *most* frees [the freak] is self-acceptance; when freaks can respect their own aberrations and malformations, they find ease, peace – they become whole" (Slay 101). Villanelle's multiply monstrous body is a site of contestation and rearticulation of received truths and dominant epistemological systems.

In "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts that "history

(like 'individuality,' 'subjectivity,' 'gender,' and 'culture') is composed of a multitude of fragments, rather than of smooth epistemological wholes" (3). He likens his edition of essays about monsters and monstrosity to "an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body" in itself (3). Winterson's alternative historical account collects and amalgamates various fragments, from several perspectives, into a similar "monstrous" whole. Like a monster, Villanelle's grotesque body and her homosexuality are emblematic of a multifarious nonconformity. "The monster," according to Cohen, "is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker" (16). As a web-footed, cross-dressing, thieving, whoring lesbian, Villanelle is fully aware that "[she's] no heroine" (80), at least, not in the traditional sense of the word. Within a culture that values and naturalizes conformity to corporeal norms and compulsory heterosexuality, Villanelle is a monster. Monstrosity is a significant attribute for the heroine of a novel that questions mainstream modes of historiography and cultural ideals of "normalcy," for:

> ...[monsters] bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge – and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression. They ask us why we have created them. (Cohen 20)

Villanelle is a monstrous "other" who contests classificatory systems in her multiple refusals to conform to, or be contained by, normative paradigms. She is the perfect

protagonist for a work of historiographic metafiction that engages with issues of contemporary significance in a historical setting. If a monster "is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again" (Cohen 4), Villanelle is the monstrous bridge between her time and ours.

Cohen asserts that "The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read" (4). Villanelle is a fantastic being who can walk on water and survive without a heart in her chest, yet she is still predominantly human. The terms "monstrous" and "freakish" overlap and are often conflated; however, a freak's bodily deviance is biological, while a monster's corporeal deviance is the product of cultural fantasy. As Allan Hepburn observes, freaks differ from monsters in Fiedler's estimation because "[freaks] are the product of nature, not imagination; when we look at them, we see ourselves, or nature, disturbed" (137). Villanelle is a monster because she has superhuman abilities and she deviates from normative social categories of gender and sexuality. Her hereditary web-footedness, however, brands her a freak. Villanelle manipulates her visibility by concealing her webbed feet and engaging in socially condoned heterosexual affairs, yet her practice of drag emphasizes her gender nonconformity. The heroine's strategies of disguise and display allow her to escape the objectifying gaze of the sideshow spectator.

"Whenever we study deviance," notes Robert Bogdan, "we have to look at those in charge – whether self-appointed or officially – of telling us who deviants are and what they are like. Their versions of reality are presentations, people filtered through stories and world views" (35). The early-nineteenth century context of *The Passion* situates

Villanelle within post-Enlightenment discourses that seek to classify and explain her bodily difference. The sources of and causes for monstrous births became the focus of a proliferation of scientific case studies in this period. For those seeking unscientific teratological precedents, the pages of mythologies provide seemingly endless accounts of babies born monstrous by excess, monstrous by deficiency, or monstrous by hybridity (Fiedler 1978: 20). Within this classificatory system, Villanelle is at least doubly monstrous. Her webbed feet are a sign of bodily excess, but also of hybridity. Most obviously, they imply a blend of human and animal characteristics but, within her specific genealogy, they signify the mixture of male and female anatomies. Villanelle is the progeny of one of the Venetian boatmen, a line of gondoliers reputed to possess webbed feet that enable them to walk on water. The trait of web-footedness is passed down through the generations from father to son and the patrilineal race of boatmen is thus perpetuated. The same feet that are desired and normalized on a baby boy mark Villanelle's anatomically female body as partially male. Her body visibly transgresses the rigid cultural division between the sexes.

Winterson playfully mocks and challenges the popular belief in early modern Europe that the "maternal imagination" was responsible for monstrous births. Enlightenment emphases on scientific and rational thought diminished the influence of these theories in medical and philosophical discourses, but the power of maternal impressions was still a popular belief well into the nineteenth century (Shildrick 43), where Winterson situates her monstrous heroine. "The concept of maternal imagination, or maternal impressions as it was more often known, held that the disordered thoughts and sensations experienced by a prospective mother during pregnancy were somehow

transmitted to her foetus such that at birth the child's body, and sometimes its mind, was marked by corresponding signs" (Shildrick 33). In this way, birth defects were wholly attributed to the mother, who was considered physiologically, mentally, and morally suspect in light of her deviant offspring.

According to tradition, a boatman's pregnant wife must perform an elaborate prenatal ritual in which she must "leave... offerings on the grave [of the most recently dead in her family] and beg for a clean heart if her child be a girl and boatman's feet if her child be a boy" (54). After her husband's sudden death, Villanelle's mother discovers her pregnancy and half-heartedly attempts the ritual, hastily overlooking certain crucial elements. With more relief than grief over the passing of her husband, she marries a prosperous baker before Villanelle is born. Villanelle recounts the tale of her arrival:

> It was an easy birth and the midwife held me upside down by the ankles until I bawled. But it was when they spread me out to dry that my mother fainted and the midwife felt forced to open another bottle of wine.
>
> My feet were webbed.
>
> There never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the whole history of the boatmen. My mother in her swoon... blamed herself for her carelessness. Or perhaps it was her carefree pleasure with the baker she should blame herself for? She hadn't thought of my father since his boat had sunk. She hadn't thought of him much while it was afloat. (55-56)

Villanelle's combination of female genitalia and "male" feet enhances her monstrosity. Both Margrit Shildrick and Marie-Hélène Huet trace the origins of the popular Renaissance belief in the monstrous imagination to Aristotle, who claimed that the birth

of a female child was, in fact, the most common birth defect. Aristotle "[made] a decisive association between the monstrous and the female as two departures from the norm, as two exceptions to another tenet of Aristotelian doctrine, namely, that 'like produces like'" (Huet 3). Villanelle complicates the Aristotelian concept of female deformity that insisted that "the maternal imagination erased the legitimate father's image from his offspring and thus created a monster" (Huet 8), as she is born carrying a genetic trait that has historically been the reserve of the male of the species. While Villanelle's body is monstrous in relation to corporeal and gender norms, it stubbornly bears the undeniable proof of her paternity. Villanelle is monstrous *because* her body replicates the image of her father.

Webbed feet, though a source of immense pride in boatman boys, are abhorrent in the infant Villanelle. Despite drastic measures, Villanelle's body will not be normalized:

> The midwife took out her knife with the thick blade and proposed to cut off the offending parts straight away. My mother weakly nodded, imagining I would feel no pain or that pain for a moment would be better than embarrassment for a lifetime. The midwife tried to make an incision in the translucent triangle between my first two toes but her knife sprang from the skin leaving no mark. (56)

Her mother and the midwife try in vain to make Villanelle's body conform to a recognizably "normal" shape. Normalcy is a matter of visual propriety; the women are concerned that the infant will not conform to aesthetic standards. Cohen asserts that a "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include

them in any systematic structuration" (6). In keeping with her masculine birth defect, as Villanelle matures her body continues to resist visual categorization according to sex. Once she is an adult, she has small breasts with "no cleavage" and is "tall for a girl" (60). Villanelle fails to fulfill some mainstream standards of feminine beauty while being stereotypically sexually attractive in other respects. She has "a beauty spot... in just the right place" (59) and "[her] red hair is a great attraction" (161). Not tidily classifiable according to standards of beauty, of femininity, or even wholly of humanity, Villanelle dwells in a peripheral space that evades categorization. Her deviance is, in all cases except for her queerness, a matter of visible difference. Villanelle develops strategies of disguise and display to manipulate her visibility for the sake of self-preservation. Like all boatmen, she disguises her webbed feet under a pair of boots, "And no boatman will take off his boots, no matter how you bribe him" (54). She compensates for her failed femininity by adopting a masculine masquerade for her casino job:

> I made up my lips with vermilion and overlaid my face with white powder.... I wore my yellow Casino breeches with the stripe down the side of each leg and a pirate's shirt that concealed my breasts. This was required, but the moustache I added was for my own amusement. And perhaps for my own protection. There are too many dark alleys and too many drunken hands on festival nights. (59-60)

This strategic display protects Villanelle from the unwanted attention that she would otherwise receive dressed as a woman at the casino; her disguising boots protect her from being branded a web-footed monster.

Villanelle bears the feet of a boatman, but is barred from "what [she] would have

most liked to have done, worked the boats, on account of [her] sex" (57). She does, however, retain the boatman's monstrous ability to walk on water. While her feet are the stuff of legend for the average Venetian, the men that Villanelle counts as family find nothing astounding about them. Her stepfather "never thought it odd that his daughter was born with webbed feet" (66) and, in fact, reassures his wife that "No one will see so long as she wears shoes and when it comes to a husband, why it won't be the feet he'll be interested in" (56). The baker is correct; Villanelle's husband is not concerned with her feet. His desire for Villanelle is a desire to possess a beautiful, unpredictable trophy. Much like Villanelle's female lover, Henri considers the legend of the boatmen's webbed feet to be a tall tale that is fit to be laughed at and promptly dismissed. When he finally sees her without her concealing boots, Henri is unfazed by Villanelle's duck-like feet. Seeing her walk on water, he doesn't react negatively to her monstrosity. Instead, Henri is curious about Villanelle's feet: "I wanted to touch but my hands were covered in blood," he recalls (148). Henri is careful not to soil Villanelle's feet with her murdered husband's blood. He does not consider the abnormal appendages a sign of Villanelle's corporeal impurity but, rather, a feature that makes her worthy of reverence. When Villanelle tells a group of Polish villagers about the legend of the Venetian boatmen, "the Poles [grow] wide-eyed and one even [risks] excommunication by suggesting that perhaps Christ had been able to walk on the water thanks to the same accident of birth" (114). Villanelle's freakish feature fails to shock. In *The Passion*, there is transcendent power in bodily difference.

"Freakery is… a facet integral to the world of the grotesque" (Slay 100), and Villanelle's monstrous body qualifies as grotesque because of its "exaggeration,

hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" (Bakhtin 303). This grotesquerie is crucial to Villanelle's power as a history-maker. As Mikhail Bakhtin articulates, "in the grotesque concept of the body a new, concrete, and realistic historic awareness was born and took form: not abstract thought about the future but the living sense that each man belongs to the immortal people who create history" (367). With her grotesque body, Villanelle claims the freak's right to produce new histories, and revise existing ones. Since, "[as] an aesthetic category, the grotesque is physical [and] predominantly visual" (McElroy 6), display is a primary feature of the marginalized individual's power to create a history of his or her own. The etymology of the word "monster" binds it closely to notions of display: "[it] derives from the Latin *monstra*, meaning to warn, show, or sign, and which has given us the modern verb *demonstrate*" (Thomson 3). "Lingering on the boundary between visibility and invisibility," argues Hepburn, "a monster inspires fear by virtue of its unlocatability" (137). Villanelle embraces this monstrous ability to be both visible and invisible: she displays her deviant masculine gender performance while concealing her deviant body and sexual desire.

Like monstrosity, freakishness has a strong visual aspect. According to Slay, Jr., "Freaks – especially in their literary manifestations as the visually overpowering are natural allurements of fascination and repulsion" (100). It is particularly apt, then, that Henri describes Napoleon in these exact terms, insisting that "He is repulsive and fascinating by turns" (14). Indeed, Napoleon is one of the freakiest characters in *The Passion*. His penchant for display contributes to his downfall: "Like a circus dog he thought every audience would marvel at his tricks, but the audience was getting used to him" (88). While Villanelle protects herself by strategically manipulating her visibility,

Napoleon loses the ability to control his own display. He is relegated to the status of sideshow act, mobbed by opportunists who "were going to make their fortunes exhibiting this lamed beast" (146). Fiedler asserts that "in [the Victorian] era the interest in freaks had reached a high point" (1978: 15), sparking a proliferation of sideshows that had people flocking to take in spectacles of abnormality. Even independently of the Victorian era, gawking at the assured "other" has long been a confidence-bolstering reinforcement of the viewer's sense of his or her own normalcy. In light of this, Robert Bogdan has postulated an alternate use of the word "freak":

> I have not used the term "freak" to mean people who have certain physical conditions. "Freak" is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people. It is not a person but the enactment of a tradition, the performance of a stylized presentation. (35)

The multiple definitions that various critics have given to the terms "freak," "monster," and "grotesque" converge on this notion of the corporeal "other" as spectacle. As the sideshow tradition illustrates, spectacular visibility can be used to objectify and marginalize deviant individuals. Yet Villanelle proves that the cultural "other" can control her visibility and redirect the gaze that would otherwise oppress her. Furthermore, Villanelle is able to pass as "normal" in most contexts, at which times "the distinction between audience and exhibit, we and them, normal and Freak, is revealed as an illusion" (Fiedler 1978: 36).

Villanelle and Napoleon are far from the only freaks to appear in Winterson's tale. In fact, *The Passion* is rife with the Napoleonic-era precursors of the "curiosity"-obsessed Victorian age. In her fictionalization of history, Winterson, like Bakhtin,

"privileges the rogue, the fool, and the clown, who are marginal characters with access to all levels of society" (Bratton 210). Indeed, Winterson's cast of characters provides a heterogeneous mix of perspectives from which history is produced. However, these characters are not marginalized in Winterson's semi-realistic world. The freaks of *The Passion* live and work alongside the "normals." Contrary to Elizabeth Grosz's insistence that "The freak is [not] unusually gifted" (56), Winterson's freaks often earn greater degrees of success and respect as the result of their extraordinary abilities.

Villanelle seeks advice from an ancient fortune-teller who lives in a crevasse in the wall of a remote canal. She is toothless and slimy, wears a crown of rats tied head-to-tail, and has "the appearance of a subterranean devil" (125). Henri's dear friend Domino is a dwarf who "came from a circus" (3) where Napoleon and Joséphine "had found him eating fire in some sideshow" (31-32). Freakery is a family affair for Domino, whose "father [had] made his living being fired from a cannon" (31-32). Patrick, "the defrocked priest with the eagle eye, imported from Ireland" (22) becomes Henri and Domino's constant companion during the wars. Patrick is monstrous on many counts: he is morally suspect, physiologically excessive, and nationally "other." Venice holds more than its share of extraordinary individuals. The raucous Carnival, for which the city is famous, exhibits "fire-eaters frothing at the mouth with yellow tongues," "a dancing bear" (63), a "fabulous three-breasted woman," and a "singing ape" (65). Further, Villanelle notes that "There are women of every kind and not all of them are women" (63-64). Like these monstrous people and humanized animals, Villanelle's webbed feet and penchant for codpieces are enough to transform her into a spectacle – an ambiguously gendered, human-animal hybrid to be objectified by the crowd. Villanelle is keenly aware of her

fellow citizens' hunger for a spectacle: "I've seen holy men come from the eastern lands," she says. "We had an exhibit of them once to make up for the law prohibiting bull-baiting" (78). One form of exploitation is as good as the next for the ogling crowds, and Villanelle's consciousness of her difference leads her to disguise herself strategically in order to retain her autonomy and relative privacy. "The freak," asserts Grosz, "confirms the viewer as bounded, belonging to a "proper" social category. The viewer's horror lies in the recognition that this monstrous being is at the heart of his or her own identity" (65). By refusing to allow her bodily or sexual difference to be displayed, Villanelle also denies the spectator the ability to exploit her in the service of reinforcing dominant ideals of the "normal."

Villanelle lives in a city where indeterminacy is valued and encouraged, but she is savvy enough to know which differences are best kept under wraps. By concealing her webbed feet, Villanelle avoids becoming a spectacle of carnivalesque proportions. However, an important aspect of Villanelle's monstrosity is her lesbianism; as Cohen notes, "The monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster.... [The] monster enforces the cultural codes that regulate sexual desire" (14). Characters in *The Passion* are repeatedly challenged to use their difference to their advantage and not to be content with total invisibility, which proves to be more destructive than helpful. Yet *The Passion* cannot imagine the union of two women as a publicly celebrated relationship in the early-nineteenth century; nor can the Queen of Spades. Villanelle resents her lover's conformity: "I was angry because she had wanted me and made me want her and been afraid to accept what that meant; it meant more than brief meetings in public places and

nights borrowed from someone else" (158). The concealment of Villanelle's lesbian relationship leads to heartache and dissatisfaction. Her transgression of compulsory heterosexuality occurs only in private. However, while it is not acknowledged or acknowledgeable in the context of 1805 Venice, Winterson's narrative makes historical homosexuality visible to her contemporary reader by rendering this relationship the most prominent and meaningful of Villanelle's many affairs in *The Passion.*

Once she realizes the oppressive nature of personal concealment, Villanelle renounces the masculine casino disguise that she believes has obscured her "true" gendered self. Ironically, drag derives its power from the spectacular attention it draws to that which has been made invisible by essentialist theories of gender. After all, "Gender is," as Judith Butler argues, "a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (1990: 178). The postmodern practice of drag lays bare the constructedness of gender by parodying "the very notion of an original" (175). Butler asserts that gender

> ...is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. (175-76)

"In *The Passion,*" contends Lyn Pykett, "the cross-dressing is a matter of both personal choice and cultural custom" (58). While drag *in general* contests the notion that individuals possess a stable, "true" gender identity, Villanelle's masquerade amounts to little more than play. Hardly a self-conscious political statement, Villanelle's masculine attire is simply a uniform that she wears to work at the casino; during her leisure time,

she dresses as a woman. "I dressed as a boy because that's what the visitors liked to see," says Villanelle: "It was part of the game, trying to decide which sex was hidden behind tight breeches and extravagant face-paste" (59). When "the game" is over she ceases to dress as a man and views her prior gender performance as a display of arrogance (152). "I don't dress up anymore," Villanelle reflects: "No borrowed uniforms. Only occasionally do I feel the touch of that other life, the one in the shadows where I do not choose to live" (164). While Villanelle conceives of gender as a choice rather than an inherent characteristic that corresponds to her anatomical sex, she also feels, *contra* Butler, that her "true" gender is feminine and that her masculine performance conceals this truth. Still, Villanelle's parodic use of gender signifiers refutes gender essentialism. When she dresses as a man she emphasizes her gender ambiguity rather than disguising it. The cook spends much time and energy trying to decide to which sex she belongs, while the Queen of Spades seems to know immediately that Villanelle's ostensibly "male" garb conceals an anatomical female. Neither suitor assumes that there is an intrinsic link between anatomical sex and the stylized external affectations of gender, but the cook's and the Queen of Spades' unequal abilities to read Villanelle's sex from her gender performance reveal the man's limited knowledge of vestimentary codes that the experienced lesbian easily recognizes.

Drag functions as a red herring, drawing attention away from Villanelle's corporeal difference. Her flamboyant costume tells spectators that under these layers of clothing and cosmetics the card dealer may not be what he or she seems. While onlookers attempt to guess which sex hides beneath Villanelle's costume, her webbed feet remain invisible. Carolyn Allen notes that

> ...Villanelle is already a border creature. Her webbed feet must remain forever hidden because they pose too great a threat to epistemic order. In fact, their presence reduces the significance of costumed gender play by providing an even riskier possible revelation that she must hide by passing-as-gender-masquerade. However purposeful and seductive her disguise, it cannot match her more essential body secret. (55)

Villanelle's freakishness is an essence, even if her gender is not. Drag creates a diversion from Villanelle's most threatening form of alterity. She escapes objectification as a freak by keeping her feet hidden, and controls the public gaze by creating a spectacle of gender performance that attracts a captive audience. Yet she can put on this spectacular disguise, and take it off at will; she cannot do this with her physical deformity. Disguise plays such a permanent and, ultimately, repressive role in Villanelle's life that she is gratified by her eventual exposure: "that is the moment of pleasure, the moment when what was hidden is revealed" (137). Self-imposed invisibility is a mode of self-preservation, but one that impedes an individual's ability to live an authentic existence. Reclaiming, rewriting, and making visible a lesbian past is the contemporary writer's way to ensure that "what was hidden is revealed."

The Passion promotes spectacular visibility and rejects fixed accounts of history and identity. The city of Venice, its dazzling Carnival, and its motley citizenry celebrate indeterminacy and provide an apt setting for a rewriting of history in terms of sexual identity. "Since Bonaparte captured our city of mazes in 1797," Villanelle reflects, "we've more or less abandoned ourselves to pleasure" (56). Villanelle describes her city as one of "excess" (57), but also "of disguises" (61); the heroine shares these emblematic

traits. "[To] render and [*sic*] object as grotesque," argues Bernard McElroy, "is to situate it in a world which is grotesque. The artist of the grotesque does not merely combine disparate forms or distort surfaces. He creates a context in which such distortion is possible" (5). Winterson renders Venice a grotesque agent in Villanelle's story. The city both mirrors and engenders the traits of its inhabitants. Venice is "mercurial" (53), labyrinthine, and uncertain. This "fashionable city" (105) houses a continual display of disguise. Consequently, "truth" cannot be discerned in Venice. Venetians seem eternally in costume, and the question of a stable identity buried beneath the combined accoutrements of exhibition and obfuscation becomes irrelevant. Nevertheless, there are always prying eyes, striving to gain access to the identity of an "other": Villanelle says, "We are always watching or watched" (71). The human tendency to seek stability in the identities of others renders every individual both gazed upon and gazing and, as Villanelle realizes, "We are not always conscious of it, not always aware of what it is we hide from prying eyes or that those prying eyes may sometimes be our own" (103-4). Terrie Waddell asserts that, "Through an exposure of the hidden (body, sexuality, voyeur) [female grotesques] raze the notion of the unwitting female (or male) stunned into passivity, stereotyped and exposed by the gaze. In this context, the subject and object collapse into each other so that the gazer and the gazed become inextricably bound – one no more potentially vulnerable than the other" (212).

Although its inhabitants strive to see and be seen, the Venice of *The Passion* is nevertheless characterized by visual obfuscation. The city seems perpetually steeped in night. Even during the day, "darkness can be found; in the under-used waterways or out on the lagoon. There's no dark like it" (62). Darkness functions as a privileging of the

transitory: the night "sums up our lives, which are uncertain and temporary" (62). The Venetian preference for night also betrays a penchant for ambiguity and secrecy that mirrors Villanelle's concealment of both her bodily grotesquery and her queer desire. Villanelle rows around Venice in search of havens of darkness, much like she negotiates what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the relations of the closet" by regulating "the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit" (3) aspects of her identity. She controls her visibility in order to keep her queer identity in the dark. Navigating the recesses of Venice's labyrinthine canals, Villanelle inhabits a mobile closet. She explains that "This city enfolds upon itself. Canals hide other canals, alleyways cross and criss-cross so that you will not know which is which until you have lived here all your life" (124). Villanelle describes the uniqueness of Venice in the same terms as Henri uses to depict her deformity. He explains Villanelle's duck-like appendages as "not what I'd usually call feet. She unfolds them like a fan and folds them in on themselves in the same way" (148). Folds symbolize not only concealment, but also multifacetedness. Helene Bengtson observes that "[Villanelle] creates her Venice in her own ambiguous image, playfully manipulating oppositions such as land/water, male/female, hidden/visible, inner/outer to display a city that is 'never still'" (23). Just as Venice resists compartmentalization, Villanelle is human proof that "The cities of the interior do not lie on any map" (125).

Whereas Waters' and Humphreys' historical fictions reflect their authors' attentive research of the contexts in which they situate their tales, Winterson is not concerned with emphasizing the historical veracity of her depiction of Napoleonic Europe. Her novel focuses instead on criticizing the very structures that would provide

such "facts" to the contemporary world. Winterson's postmodern novel attacks grand narratives that claim universality and total explanatory power. Resistance to epistemological and ontological systems pervades *The Passion*. Like history, Christianity comes under fire as an ideological apparatus whose proponents perpetuate an exclusive system of knowledge. Villanelle sporadically attends church but, while she acknowledges the existence of God, she refuses to submit to his ultimate authority. "I never go to confession," she proclaims. "God doesn't want us to confess, he wants us to challenge him" (68). For Villanelle, there is nothing harmful in attending church "to bask in the assurance of Our Lord" (77), as long as one is simultaneously "pitting [one's] wits against him" (79-80) and maintaining control of oneself rather than submitting unquestioningly to religious authority. Winterson's critique of Christian dogma complements her insistence that the received "truths" of history be challenged.

By emphasizing the dubious virtue of religious authority figures, Winterson encourages suspicion of the purveyors of totalizing knowledge. Clergymen in *The Passion* are repeatedly exposed for their deviance from moral codes, especially those created and perpetuated by Christian dogma to regulate sexual desire. In all cases, erotic stimulation is contingent on the priests' gazing at sexual objects who are unable to control their visibility. Henri's village priest suggests that the boy have sex with girls whose appearance suits the priest's own taste. Patrick is excommunicated when a Bishop discovers that he has a telescopic eye that he uses to peek at unsuspecting women in various compromising positions – "What priest doesn't?" asks Henri (23). Patrick "[reckons]... that the Lord must have granted him this eye for some righteous purpose" (118). Notably, the Bishop that relieves Patrick of his clerical duties is shocked, not at

the nature of Patrick's indiscretions, but at their object. "[P]referring the smooth shapes of his choirboys he found the affair exceedingly repulsive. A priest should have better things to do than look at women" (23). Thomas Fahy notes that "Patrick loses his status as a priest primarily because his gaze suggests heterosexual desire" (98).

Queer desire dominates Winterson's depictions of Christianity. Villanelle conflates the queer with the divine when she attributes the attractiveness of Christianity to the coercive strategies of its spectacular ceremonies: "I'm never tempted by God but I like his trappings. Not tempted but I begin to understand why others are. With this feeling inside, with this wild love that threatens, what safe places might there be?" (68). "[T]his wild love that threatens" is not just divine love: it is also queer love. The passion that gives Winterson's novel its name is the passion shared by Villanelle and the Queen of Spades: "When she touched me I knew I was loved and with a passion I had not felt before" (105). Winterson repeatedly defines passion as a phenomenon that is precariously balanced "between fear and sex" (60, 67, 74, 83). Like divine love, queer love both attracts Villanelle and threatens her safety. As Butler observes, "'Queer' derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has been linked to accusation, pathologization, insult" (1993: 226). The "threat" posed by queerness is double. In heteronormative terms, queerness is a perceived threat to the coherence and perpetuation of a society dominated by compulsory heterosexuality. Yet queerness can also threaten the queer person. If Villanelle makes her lesbian identity visible, she will be subject to physical and social harm. Her well-honed ability to manipulate her visibility defends Villanelle against such harm.

Henri confesses that he "came to women late" (13). Several close male-male

homosocial bonds precede his eventual love for Villanelle, and Henri's infatuation with Napoleon is the primary male homoerotic relationship in *The Passion*. His devotion goes beyond the love that the French share for their Emperor. Henri craves proximity to Napoleon and reacts jealously when Joséphine suggests that he serve her instead of Bonaparte: "I was horrified. Had I come all this way just to lose him?" (39). Not only does Henri reject Joséphine's proposition, but he avoids contact with her as much as possible, reasoning that "Even to look at her was to wrong him. She belonged to him. I envied her that" (39). When Napoleon sends Henri to receive more military training, Henri is certain that his desire has been discovered. He coyly muses, "Perhaps he saw how I blushed, perhaps he knew my feelings" (40). Looking and being looked at determine Henri's sense of erotic transgression: he forces himself not to look at Joséphine, and he fears that his desire for Napoleon has become visible. The visibility of queer desire in *The Passion* is as dangerous for Henri as it is for Villanelle. Henri's choice to desert the French army is also a choice to abandon his love for this inappropriate and unattainable erotic object and to transfer his desire to Villanelle, a more appropriately sexed object. This act of falling in line with the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality does not ensure Henri's success as the masculine hero of *The Passion*; rather, it solidifies his path to madness. Villanelle, on the other hand, maintains her sanity by disguising her lesbianism rather than repudiating it.

The Passion is a historical account that admits to and embraces its own inventedness while imploring its reader to have faith in its veracity, hence the narrators' shared refrain, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" (5). As Bengtson notes, "[Henri] and Villanelle's 'trust me' stories are true because they are a more effective way of getting at

their identities than any regurgitation of facts, no matter how 'accurate'" (19). At the same time, however, the repetition of "Trust me" throughout *The Passion* begs the reader to question the veracity of this version of historical events and, by extension, of all historical accounts. The novel opens with a chapter narrated by Henri, followed by one narrated by Villanelle. The remaining two chapters alternate between the two narrative voices, which overlap in repeated phrases that each narrator periodically utters. Within days of meeting Villanelle, Henri insists that she is capable of "reading [his] thoughts" (110). Their use of identical phraseology and the increasing proximity and intermingling of their stories conflate Henri's and Villanelle's narrative voices to the point that the two perspectives often become one.

The entire account is, ostensibly, a long narrative that Henri writes from his cell in an insane asylum. He pieces together the story from his diary entries and reflections on his affair with Villanelle, and warns his reader not to put much stock in the veracity of his tale, born as it is out of misery, disorientation, and self-delusion: "I lose all sense of day or night, I lose all sense of my work, writing this story, trying to convey to you what really happened. Trying not to make up too much" (113). Henri fancies himself a historian, but insists that his reader be skeptical of his written account. When he begins keeping a diary, Henri is quite concerned with its veracity. "I started to keep a diary," he explains, "so that I wouldn't forget.... I knew how old men blurred and lied making the past always the best because it was gone" (30-31). Experience eventually teaches Henri that to convey "what really happened" will necessarily involve some invention of detail. "I don't care about the facts," he tells Domino. "I care about how I feel" (30-31). Instead of relaying a verifiable account of past events, Henri tells his story as he wishes it

had happened: "I embroidered and invented and even lied," Henri admits. "Why not? It made them happy" (33). His is a history that appeals to its audience, rather than one that adheres strictly to the dictates of the dominant social group from which it emerged. Yet Henri writes history the same way that mainstream history is written: using exclusion and exaggeration. The difference is that Henri makes his biases blatantly clear. His position resembles that of the author of postmodern historiography. Like Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys, Henri creates a fiction of the past using the strategies of embroidery and invention that are inherent to the production of historiographic metafiction, in which actual historical personages and events mingle with purely fictional ones.

Henri insists that "There are voices and they must be heard" (155), and that "everyone has a story to tell" (169). Further, he has "learnt to take what's there without questioning the source" (171). Whether or not a story is objectively true is inconsequential; what matters to Henri is the significance that the story takes on in the life of its reader ("It may or may not be true. It doesn't matter. Hearing about it comforts me") and its author ("I go on writing so that I will always have something to read") (173-74). Likewise, the process of simultaneously recovering and inventing a lesbian lineage is as beneficial to the lesbian author as it is to the lesbian reader. Yet Henri engages in a process of cultural production and consumption whose only implied reader is its author, thus denying the sort of community that the recovery of a lesbian lineage promotes. Domino has warned Henri that his diarizing will prevent an engagement with the present, in its perpetual reiteration of the past. While Villanelle lives in the present with a constant but tempered awareness of past and future, Henri becomes obsessed with a tragic past and a desired (but unattainable) future. As a result, he is neurotically divorced

from the present. In Winterson's anti-unitary approach to historiography, Henri's obsession with his own written history is damning. As Christy L. Burns notes, "self-written and enclosed fantasy is offered up as a potential lure into madness by the novel's end" (289). Villanelle's reverence for a sense of history that emphasizes ancestry and "belonging" (67) aligns her more closely with the project of queer historiography.

The novel begins and ends with Henri's voice, lending credence to his claims of authorship. However, in the sections narrated by Villanelle, she claims to be the storyteller:

> As I told you, for the first few months [after Henri was institutionalized], I thought him his old self. He asked for writing materials and seemed intent on recreating his years since he had left home and his time with me. (160)

As Henri has before her, Villanelle takes the authorial position and directly addresses the reader. Henri's narratives frame the tales told by Villanelle, but while he sometimes recounts tales that she has told him, he has no awareness of the events that occur in the chapter narrated solely by Villanelle. Villanelle, on the other hand, is fully cognizant of the existence of Henri's written version of events, and thus she takes on a position of omniscience. Aware of Henri's diarizing, his past, his madness, and his passions, Villanelle increasingly interjects her own experiences into his narrative. Her voice cannot be silenced. While Henri represents a partially informed, mentally unstable narrator who is obsessed with recording "what really happened," Villanelle represents a narrator who is primarily concerned with *living*, storytelling, and recounting a less static narrative. She prefers the malleability of oral history to the fixedness of written accounts.

Paulina Palmer insists that Henri's and Villanelle's stories represent a "contest

between masculine and feminine principles for mastery of the narrative" (105). On the contrary, the juxtaposed narratives work together, against any unitary conception of history. Far from competing with one another, Henri and Villanelle consistently join forces against those in power. The sentiments that they repeat verbatim create a sense of solidarity in their united narrative voice. Embracing and constantly reiterating the inventedness of their tales, Henri and Villanelle are not in competition towards the determination of a single, more legitimate historical account. Rather, their narratives show that several historical accounts can exist simultaneously, and one need not necessarily take precedence over the others. This reading of the juxtaposed narratives more usefully supports Palmer's later claim that the emphasis on various modes of storytelling in *The Passion* "has the effect of challenging the commonplace distinction between fact and fiction, history and literature" (108). Multivocal storytelling challenges the notion that a single voice can ever wholly "master" the narrative.

Realism and verisimilitude are of minor importance to Winterson's novel as a whole, and to the individual historical accounts provided by Henri and Villanelle. In Winterson's historiography, rumour and hearsay are accorded a status equal to eyewitness accounts of major events. For instance, Henri didn't actually attend Napoleon's Coronation, but witnessing an event firsthand proves unnecessary for its recording as history. Henri asserts, "Stories were all we had" (118). Indeed, stories combat the occlusion of historical minorities. The recovery of those historical events that *don't* warrant official perpetuation can only be effected by word of mouth, and by the persistence of accounts of personal experience. In *The Passion*, individual and familial stories gain primacy over those of supposed national or international significance.

Villanelle privileges the stories of her ancestors: ones that promote inclusion rather than marginalization. These are personal histories in which "The future is foretold from the past and the future is only possible because of the past" (67). Villanelle insists that, "Without past and future, the present is partial. All time is eternally present and so all time is ours. There is no sense in forgetting and every sense in dreaming. Thus the present is made rich. Thus the present is made whole" (67). The history that really matters is inclusive and reflective, and promotes belonging rather than exclusion.

Villanelle's conception of the important interconnection of past, present, and future recalls Adrienne Rich's call for the excavation of "a range... of woman-identified experience" that has been rendered invisible throughout history (51). Villanelle watches the Queen of Spades "staring at the palms of her hands" and wonders, "was she trying to make sense of her past? To understand how the past had led to the present. Was she searching for the line of her desire for me?" (81-82). Rich argues that "lesbian existence has been lived (unlike, say, Jewish or Catholic existence) without access to any knowledge of a tradition, a continuity, a social underpinning" (52). Villanelle imagines that her lover is searching for this genealogy on an individual level. Yet the future is as important to a lesbian lineage as is the past. While Villanelle is aware that there is little hope for permanent happiness to come of their union, she seeks proximity to the elusive Queen of Spades and wonders, "If I find her, how will my future be?" (67). In her approach to history, the richness of the present is as dependent on the unknown future as it is on the partially known past. The fantastic fortune-teller that Villanelle periodically visits is a reminder that any sense of historical continuity is incomplete without attention to the future. Helen Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* also includes a female fortune-teller.

These authors emphasize the importance of looking to the past and simultaneously to the future when recuperating a lesbian lineage. Too see the future is to make it visible in the present. To write spectacular lesbian heroines in the past is to make *them* visible in the present.

Whereas a linear conception of time is crucial to any teleological approach to history, Villanelle conflates past, present, and future and insists on the eternity of the present. As Hutcheon argues, "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (1988: 110). In their co-authored article, "Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History," Laura Doan and Sarah Waters write that for Winterson, "history becomes the means to explore contemporary culture, offering further evidence that [she] regards the past more as a useful site to rewrite, and thereby intervene in history-making" (24). Having written three lesbian historical fictions of her own at the time of the publication of this essay, Waters' statement indicates that she also sees liberatory possibilities in the genre of historical fiction. Controlled visibility dominates Villanelle's identity. For the sake of freedom and self-preservation as a monstrous "other," she must strictly regulate her visibility and avoid being rendered historically invisible by maintaining a careful balance of disguise and display. Like Winterson, Waters and Humphreys each position dramatic visibility as a vital feature in the recovery of the lesbian past. Winterson's historiographic metafictions help lay the framework for an emerging tradition of lesbian historical fiction in which spectacular lesbian protagonists open up discursive space for minoritized subjects to write their own histories.

CHAPTER TWO

"How queer it is! – and yet, how very ordinary": Performative Identity in Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*

In her essay, "Wolfskins and Togas: Maude Meagher's *The Green Scamander* and the Lesbian Historical Novel," Sarah Waters examines early- to mid-twentieth century historical novels by lesbian writers and concludes that these writers tend to rely on escapism as a means to recover and record a lesbian past that could not be explicitly championed in literary realism at that time. Jeanette Winterson's historical fictions, written near the close of the twentieth century, similarly rely on fantastic elements to illustrate same-sex passions that were not yet common in mainstream realist fiction. Writing a decade after *The Passion*, when queer theory and politics have entered the mainstream in many respects, Sarah Waters has the freedom to use plot-driven narrative realism to recreate a lesbian past. Though her historical fictions often involve the extraordinary, Waters never incorporates the fantastic; at the same time, she refuses to denigrate the escapist approaches that her predecessors favoured. "In our efforts to trace and recover our own cultural histories," writes Waters, "we should, perhaps, be more sensitive to the particular shape of the historical fantasies of earlier generations of female writers"; mining "the women's historical novel" for homoerotic subtexts can lay bare "the controversial twentieth-century lesbian body" (1996: 188). The controversial lesbian body is not hidden in Waters' novels; rather, it is boldly and unapologetically on display.

"The literary history of lesbianism," writes Terry Castle, "is first of all a history of derealization.... [In] nearly all of the art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

lesbianism, or its possibility, can only be represented to the degree that it is simultaneously 'derealized,' through a blanching authorial infusion of spectral metaphors" (34). Writing in the present *about* the past obviates the need for derealization in the literary representation of lesbianism. Historically, writers have rendered lesbians ghostly, ineffable, in short, invisible. In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters' lesbian characters are eminently visible. Situated in the past, her spectacular lesbians recover a history that has been elided in mainstream fiction. Waters' debut novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, features a lesbian protagonist whose indisputable visibility leads to her initiation into several homosexual subcultures of fin-de-siècle London. From music hall performer and male impersonator, to transvestite prostitute on the streets of London, to kept woman and trophy lover, to impassioned public speaker for labour reform, Nancy Astley (*alias* Nan King) defies concealment and embodies her lesbianism and masculine gender identity.

The word "history" appears throughout *Tipping the Velvet* almost exclusively in reference to various individuals' personal life stories. These histories are repeatedly shown to be malleable, constructed and, consequently, suspect. Nancy feels alienated from her past: "If I remembered the things I had left behind me," she muses, "I remembered them dully, as if they were the pieces of some other person's history" (184). Instead of facing her past, Nancy fabricates a history to win favor from her peers: "They had all had my history – my pretend history – from Florence," she says (377). History is uncertain, rumour-bound, and prone to invention. As a result, history can be deceptive to the receiver, who is left with partial or inaccurate knowledge. For the creator, though, the perpetuation of personal histories is a matter of significant power. If one's history is oppressive, it can be editorialized to produce a more desirable effect; if one's history has

been suppressed, it can be brought to light by individual efforts at historical recovery. Memory, to Nancy, is "a comfort, and a frightful torment, all at once" (185). She creates and recreates her history in order to adapt to changes in her surroundings, but she finds true liberation from the restrictions of her past only when she takes stock of, acknowledges, and accepts her entire history. Nancy moves from lover to lover, never looking back, and rarely learning from her experiences; her eventual confession to Florence of the events in her turbulent past is a turning point in Nancy's life. The comic heroine makes a career of disregarding her past; yet the narrative itself, written "two decades and more" (5) after she leaves her childhood home, indicates that Nancy ultimately learns to reflect on her past.

Nancy's tale begins in an oyster-parlour in her provincial birthplace of Whitstable. She describes her eighteen-year-old self as "slender, white-faced, [and] unremarkable-looking" (4). "I was tall, and rather lean," says Nancy. "My chest was flat, my hair dull, my eyes a drab and an uncertain blue. My complexion, to be sure, was perfectly smooth and clear, and my teeth were very white; but these – in our family at least – were counted unremarkable" (7). Nancy feels deficient in comparison to her beautiful, stereotypically feminine sister, Alice. The knowledge of her difference – a difference that amounts to inadequacy in terms of gender ideals – is a constant concern to Nancy. While she nurtures a love for the theatre, Nancy sees her beloved music-hall actresses as further reminders of her failed femininity:

> Mother said I should be on the stage myself.
>
> When she said it, however, she laughed; and so did I. The girls I saw in the glow of the footlights, the girls whose songs I loved to learn and

> sing, they weren't like me. They were more like my sister....
>
> No, girls like Alice were meant to dance upon a gilded stage, skirted in satin, hailed by cupids; and girls like me were made to sit in the gallery, dark and anonymous, and watch them. (8)

Nancy's desire to be acknowledged is a desire to be seen. She recognizes that, without possessing stereotypically feminine features, she is likely to remain invisible to the public. Her difficulty conforming to gender expectations causes Nancy much anxiety, but her sense that she is deviant multiplies when she recognizes her "dark and secret" desire for another woman (23). The realization that she prefers masculine attire exacerbates Nancy's sense of her own deviance. Nancy's corporeal, sexual, and gendered non-conformity to feminine ideals renders her culturally unintelligible. In Judith Butler's formulation,

> Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (1990: 23)

Lacking such intelligibility, people like Nancy are considered a threat to bodily and social "order." To express her masculinity, Nancy must successfully pass as a man, and create the image of a "coherently" gendered person. As a masculine woman, she is in danger of being rendered perpetually invisible by a mainstream historiographic tradition that still gives precedence to "Great Man" approaches to history, which re-entrench the primacy of

the corporeally coherent, heterosexual male subject.

Nancy's more "coherent" and "continuously gendered" sister is shocked to hear of Nancy's desire for Kitty Butler; Alice grows more cold and dismissive toward Nancy as Nancy increasingly avows her feelings for Kitty. "There was a look on her face," recalls Nancy, "a look of mingled shock, and nervousness, and embarrassment or shame. I had said too much. I felt as if my admiration for Kitty Butler had lit a beacon inside me, and opening my unguarded mouth had sent a shaft of light into the darkened room, illuminating all" (20). Alice's gaze implies accusation and judgment, and makes Nancy wary of the visibility of her lesbian desire. Kitty is a male impersonator in the music-hall circuit, whose anomalous presence in the sheltered, provincial town of Whitstable introduces Nancy to her desire for women and to her yearning for an outlet to express her masculine gender identity. Kitty, with her "handsome gentleman's suit," "white bow-tie," top hat, and "her hair... perfectly cropped" (12), awakens Nancy to possibilities that both problematize her identity and offer solutions to her acknowledged failure to materialize feminine ideals. Nancy's queer identity finds expression through transvestism because she is thoroughly mired in a heteronormative paradigm. Her attraction to women would be acceptable were she a man; thus Nancy's masquerade allows her to feel that she is somehow reiterating the norms of compulsory heterosexuality, even within a lesbian sexual relationship. Before she begins her own male impersonation, however, Nancy is content for Kitty to be the masculine object of her desire. In Whitstable, where Nancy dresses as a woman, she is disappointed to see Kitty arrive in feminine garb; here, Nancy expects to be the femme to Kitty's butch. Later, the moments of greatest erotic stimulation for Nancy are those in which she wears

a suit, and Kitty wears a dress.

Nancy begins to work as Kitty's dresser, and as their friendship develops she brings Kitty home to the Astleys' oyster-parlour for a meal. The family business is a source of great pride for Nancy's father, who extols the virtues of the oyster to the unschooled Miss Butler. "What a brute he is!" Kitty remarks, in reference to a particularly large oyster;

> Then she looked more closely at it. "*Is* it a he? I suppose they all must be, since they all have beards?"
>
> Father shook his head, chewing. "Not at all, Miss Butler, not at all. Don't let the beards mislead you. For the oyster, you see, is what you might call a real *queer* fish – now a he, now a she, as quite takes its fancy. A regular morphodite, in fact!" (49, emphasis mine)

Waters, in both her fiction and her critical work, has a penchant for punning on the word *queer*. As both aphrodisiac and "queer fish," the oyster is an apt symbol for Nancy's quest to understand her sexual and gender identity. The "morphodite" oysters, like drag king Kitty Butler, are queer figures that upset stable constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality. "The cultural effect of transvestism," writes Marjorie Garber, "is to destabilize all such binaries: not only 'male' and 'female,' but also 'gay' and 'straight,' and 'sex' and 'gender.' This is the sense – the radical sense – in which transvestism is a 'third'" (133). Garber stresses, though, "that the 'third term' is *not* a *term*. Much less is it a *sex*.... The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" (11). For Nancy, Kitty represents a fabulous world of opportunity.

Kitty's performances embody the erotics of display. "Displaying the body to the

gaze of others automatically implies the availability of that body for sexual exploitation," asserts Laurence Senelick. "Merely by coming on stage, an actor of any gender becomes a site for erotic speculation and fragmentation" (2000: 8). As a spectator and as Kitty's dresser, Nancy envies the intimate relationship that Kitty shares with her audiences:

> ...when she stepped into the wing at the end of her final number, pursued by stamping, by shouts and "Hurrahs!", she was flushed and gay and triumphant. To tell the truth, I did not quite like her then. She seized my arm, but didn't see me. She was like a woman in the grip of a drug, or in the first flush of an embrace, and I felt a fool to be at her side, so still and sober, and jealous of the crowd that was her lover. (37)

Nancy's envy here is double: she is envious of the crowd for sharing this intimate experience with Kitty, but she is also envious of Kitty for the liberation that her performances afford. Indeed, as Senelick postulates in his discussion of nineteenth-century theatrical glamour drag and male impersonation, "The benefits transmitted between performer and audience were... reciprocal.... The acts' polymorphous potential proved attractive at a time when gender identities were severely defined by costume and manners. [These] styles of performance functioned as wish-fulfillment" for both audiences and performers (1993: 93). For Nancy, Kitty's public display of masculine womanliness affords a temporary liberation that Nancy thinks she can only experience vicariously. In theatrical cross-dressing "homoerotic sentiments... could find a sanctioned refuge, without even implied recrimination" (Senelick 1993: 83).

Content to support Kitty off-stage, Nancy accompanies her to London when talent agent Walter Bliss books performances for Kitty in the city. The two young women

room together in a boarding house, "doubling up" in a narrow bed, and Nancy is not at all sorry for it, despite the landlady's apologetic caveat: "You'll be quite on top of each other in here, I'm afraid" (70). The arrangement amplifies Nancy's feelings of "desire and confusion" (71) toward Kitty, and she resolves "to swallow [her] queer and inconvenient lusts" and attempt to think of Kitty as a sister, rather than a lover (78). Nancy has previously shared a bed with her sister, Alice, an arrangement in which she insists her desire cannot be hidden. Nancy describes sexual fantasies that she entertains about Kitty while her sister lies beside her: "And all this – which left me sick with bafflement and pleasure – with my sister at my side! All this with Alice's breath upon my cheek, or her hot limbs pressed against mine; or with her eyes shining cold and dull, with starlight and suspicion" (41). Although Nancy resolves to limit herself to nocturnal fantasies when Kitty's body replaces her sister's in bed, Kitty soon reciprocates Nancy's desire. Kitty mimics Alice's disapprobation, though, as her first and abiding concern is for secrecy. Kitty prefaces the anxious and furtive kisses that mark the beginning of her and Nancy's physical relationship with the plea, "You won't tell a soul, Nan – will you?" (102). Their fledgling sexual relationship must remain private and disguised, even as Kitty continues to perform a non-normative gender role in public. Gender can be questioned and contested on stage, but Kitty and Nancy lack access to a public space in which their lesbian partnership can be legitimized. By the end of the novel, however, private space permits lesbian passion, while the stage is revealed as a space of liberating performance, but not of personal or sexual fulfillment.

In fin-de-siècle London, male impersonation was not a novelty. In fact, within such arenas as the music hall and the pantomime, sexual

> impersonation was not only tolerated, it was enjoyed; what is more, it was expected. Onstage, men dressed as women and women dressed as men, mostly to comic effect and often in ways that explicitly performed the culture's unconscious anxieties about the potency and nature of sexual difference. (Herr 137)

Faced with competition within this popular genre, Walter searches for a way to render Kitty's act exceptional. "A male impersonator who appeared solo did not shock public sensibilities," according to Senelick (1993: 93). *Two* male impersonators sharing one stage is the potentially scandalous angle that Walter settles upon to spice up Kitty's career. A reluctant Nancy is recruited to make Kitty's a two-woman act. In this move, Nancy is doubly *kinged*: she takes on the stage name "Nan King" and begins her career as a drag king on the London stage.

Feminine attire has never suited Nancy. She dresses plainly and rarely fusses over her clothing. Indeed, when Kitty buys an elegant, ultra-feminine dress for Nan, she is embarrassed to see her own reflection in the mirror. "The dress was so transforming it was practically a disguise," she says. "I looked... like a boy who had donned his sister's ball-gown for a lark" (94). On the other hand, the first time Nan puts on one of Kitty's suits to rehearse for her new stage career, she immediately feels both at home in her body, and aroused by her accoutrements:

> I had once, as a girl, worn a suit of my brother's to a masquerade at a party. That, however, had been many years before; it was quite different, now, to pull Kitty's handsome trousers up my naked hips, and button them over that delicate place that Kitty herself had so recently set smarting. I

> took a step, and blushed still harder. I felt as though I had never had legs before – or, rather, that I had never known, quite, what it really felt like to have *two* legs, joined at the top. (114)

Nan finally feels comfortable in gendered attire but, as Judith Halberstam notes, "more often than not, the trouser role was used to emphasize femininity rather than to mimic maleness" (233). Indeed, Nancy insists that Kitty's popularity relies on the audience's awareness that she is *not* a man. While Nancy often refers to drag kings as "mashers," she and Kitty reflect on Kitty's success as a male impersonator and "smile together, because [they both know] that if she really were a masher [her] wages would barely keep her in champagne" (39). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a "masher" was "a fashionable young man of the late Victorian or Edwardian era, *esp.* one fond of the company of women; a dandy"; but, also, "a womanizer; a man who makes indecent sexual advances towards women, *esp.* in public places." Victorian audiences were not interested in seeing a male dandy sing about his exploits; rather, audiences adored seeing a woman engage in the safe, playful staging of a parodic dissonance between sex and gender. When Nancy dons her first men's suit, the masculine corporeal style that feels so natural to her is uncanny to others. Walter insists that there is something "unpleasing," "queer," and "not quite right" about her appearance. Mrs Dendy, the landlady, solves the riddle: "'She's too real,' she said at last.... '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). Nan's attire is consequently altered to produce a more girlish form of masculinity, a style that she finds less attractive and less comfortable.

Kitty uses drag, as does Winterson's Villanelle, for professional purposes. Her identity is masculine only when it is staged, and her performances never exceed the realm of play with gender signifiers. Quite the contrary, performing in this strangely natural-feeling garb forces Nan to acknowledge her masculine gender identity. She reflects on her first performance as a moment of identificatory clarity:

> I had passed perhaps seven minutes before that gay and shouting crowd; but in those few, swift minutes I had glimpsed a truth about myself, and it had left me awed and quite transformed.
>
> The truth was this: that whatever successes I might achieve as a girl, they would be nothing compared to the triumphs I should enjoy clad, however girlishly, as a boy. (123)

Nan experiences the erotic relation of performer to spectator that she previously envied of Kitty. Her sense of liberation is coupled with a new realization of her own potential for success. Senelick postulates liberatory possibilities for "true transvestites in life" who choose to perform in drag: "their interior lives, hitherto led in abjection, would blossom; the role would authorize cross-dressers to lay innocent claim to their liberated condition, by channeling their inner feelings and physical appearance into the action and dialogue which, through the character, represent the cultural acceptance of gender" (2000: 11). Drag becomes a means for masculine-identified women to begin to explore their gender identity off-stage: "That some male impersonators carried over their cross-dressing practices into their everyday lives suggests that their relation to masculinity extended far beyond theatricality" (Halberstam 233). It also suggests, however, that theatricality is a major part of gender expression on- and off-stage. Nan's forays into theatrical male

impersonation allow her to explore the benefits of extending her performance beyond the stage.

"[For] women who were beginning to identify themselves as lesbians," says Senelick, association with professional male impersonators provided access to "a wider circle of more or less 'out' lesbians, not all of them in show business" (2000: 333). At the theatre, Nan identifies and befriends a lesbian couple who invite her and Kitty to a party, but Kitty is quick to reject their attempts to forge a friendship. Nan, on the other hand, is eager to connect with other lesbian couples. She tells Kitty that the lovers are "like us":

> "Nan!" she said. "They're not like us! They're not like us, at all. They're *toms*."
>
> "Toms?" I remember this moment very distinctly, for I had never heard the word before. Later I would think it marvelous that there had ever been a time I hadn't known it.
>
> Now, when Kitty said it, she flinched. "Toms. They make a – a *career* – out of kissing girls. We're not like that!"
>
> "Aren't we?" I said. (131)

Kitty refuses to identify as a lesbian, even to her lover. Indeed, she avows that she will not make a "career" out of kissing girls, and actively avoids such a fate. Kitty fears that Nan's extreme comfort in men's clothing and her associations with other lesbians will only draw more attention to their illicit relationship. As Kitty grows increasingly uncomfortable with her love for Nan, Nan begins to perceive her relationship with Kitty as, in part, a narcissistic one: "I had fallen in love with Kitty; now, *becoming* Kitty, I fell

in love a little with myself" (126). Nan's desire for Kitty is bound to her self-perception, and this desire increases as Nan grows more comfortable with her sexuality and her emergent masculinity. "Indeed," she realizes, "I seemed to want her more and more, the further into boyishness I ventured" (124). Unfortunately, the opposite is true of Kitty's attachment to Nan. "Kitty had given me leave to love her," says Nan. "The world, she said, would never let me be anything to her except her friend" (127). Kitty fears the public exposure of their relationship, and Nan's convincingly "natural" boyishness amplifies her paranoia. In Waters' critical work on the lesbian historical novel, she stresses that "Lesbian exposure... is both pleasurable and risky, the 'speculation' to which transgressive women are prone all too liable to be hostile" (1996: 183); hence, fear of public exposure consumes Kitty.

While Senelick argues that male impersonators in the nineteenth century were "outgrowths of a newly conspicuous homosexual subculture (1993: 82), Marjorie Garber cautions against the conflation of transvestism and homosexuality, which she sees as a connection that is often too quickly and paranoically made: "It is as though the hegemonic cultural imaginary is saying to itself: if there is a difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to *see* it, and if we see a difference (a man in women's clothes) we want to be able to *interpret* it" (130). Deviation from cultural norms is a matter of visibility. Kitty willingly engages in a lesbian relationship only when it can be concealed. As it becomes increasingly clear that Nan's masculine gender performance is more suited to her identity than her lifelong feminine performance had been, Kitty senses the imminence of her exposure as a lesbian. Patricia Juliana Smith alters Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of homosexual panic to insist that, in lesbian relationships as well,

same-sex desire is often mediated through an opposite-sexed third, setting up a structure of erotic triangulation. Faced with acknowledging one's lesbianism, the covert queer experiences "the fear of the loss of identity and value as object of exchange [among men], often combined with the fear of responsibility for one's own sexuality…; it is from precisely such fears that lesbian panic arises" (Smith 6). In her panic, Kitty decides to marry Walter Bliss, reasoning that Nan is "too much like a boy" for their relationship ever to remain undetected (171). She intends for Walter to serve as a decoy – visible proof of her adherence to normative heterosexuality – and thinks that she and Nan can hide behind the guise of her marriage. Kitty expects Walter to serve as "the facilitating but redundant third term" to her lesbian relationship (Waters 1996: 177). Nan refuses. As Waters concludes in her reading of Meagher's *The Green Scamander*, triangular relationships pale in comparison to "the more boldly lesbian butch-femme dyad" (1996: 187), a configuration of love and desire that Kitty repudiates.

When Nan flees her and Kitty's home, the only things she takes are her men's theatrical suits. After a period of self-enclosure and depression, in which she once again experiences life without her recently-discovered "pleasure in performance, display and disguise" (126), Nan decides to make a fresh start. This time, however, she attempts to live not as a male impersonator but *as a man*. Aware that gender is performative off-stage as well as on-, Nan experiences a rather fluid transition to lived transgender. She is skeptical as to whether she will be able to pass as a man on the streets of London, but Nan finds that her stage training has served her well. She escapes detection, and each time she goes out in public as a man, she "[finds] some new trick to better [her] impersonation":

> I called at a barber's shop, and had my old effeminate locks quite clipped away. I bought shoes and socks, singlets and drawers and combinations. I experimented with bandages in an effort to get the subtle curves of my bosom more subtle still; and at my groin I wore a handkerchief or a glove, neatly folded, to simulate the bulges of a modest little cock. (195)

Though Nan is emboldened by each successful foray into London as a man, she also knows that passing is a high-stakes performance. Acceptable as it was on stage, Nan's masculine attire could get her arrested if detected in public. As Leslie Feinberg notes, "By the nineteenth century, drag – male and female – took centerstage in English-speaking theater, yet most European cities in the nineteenth century enforced laws against public cross-dressing" (89). Feinberg asserts that passing is "a product of oppression," a practice that "means having to hide your identity in fear, in order to live" (89). Though Nan is pulled out of a paralyzing state of depression by her ability to live as a man, she is not at liberty to live as a masculine woman. "[She does] not want to live as a boy full-time" (193), and yet she must carefully circumscribe the contexts in which she will live as male or as female; a blending of or alternative to these two binary options is not possible in her context. After one landlady discovers her suits and thinks she is holding orgies in her bedroom, Nan moves in with Mrs. Milne, whose advertisement reads "*Respectible* [sic] *Lady Seeks Fe-Male Lodger.*" Nan recalls: "There was something very appealing about that *Fe-Male*. I saw myself in it – in the hyphen" (211).

Nan's preferred costume for evening outings is a bright red Guardsman's uniform that, unbeknownst to her, is a firmly coded signifier that the wearer is a male prostitute. As Jeffrey Weeks notes, there was "a common belief that the working class and the

Guardsmen (notorious from the eighteenth century and throughout Europe for their easy prostitution) were indifferent to homosexual behavior" and were readily available for rent (203). As Nan stands at the window of a tobacconist's shop, she is approached by a man who has interpreted her uniform according to subcultural codes. "You are admiring the display, perhaps," says the gentleman, though it is clear that it is *he* who is admiring *Nan's* display:

> I nodded – now I did turn to glance at him – and he looked pleased. "Then we are kindred spirits, I can tell!" He had the voice of a gentleman, but kept his tone rather low.... "There is something so very *masculine* about a tobacconist's shop – don't you think?" His voice, at the last, had dipped to little more than a murmur. Now he said in the same tone but very fast: "Are you up for it, Private?"...
>
> "I don't know what you mean," I said – although – to be frank, I felt the stirrings of an idea. (197)

Nan's naïveté comes off as coyly flirtatious and, indeed, it is. Even as she feigns innocence, she knows what this man wants from her. Rather than flee the scene, Nan agrees to and negotiates the terms of this transaction, which is her first sexual encounter with a man. Throughout the novel, Nan is intentionally naïve; she uses ignorance as an excuse for experimentation and believes she will escape censure as long as she can claim not to have known what she was getting herself into.

"Whereas with female prostitution," writes Weeks, "frequent sexual relations with men can lead to a woman's decision that her future transactions will be for money, the pattern is significantly different for male prostitutes. Here the dominant pattern seems to

be one of chance contacts, accidental learning, or association with a subculture (such as that of the Guards) with a tradition of casual prostitution" (206). Indeed, thanks to her Guardsman's uniform, Nan stumbles unintentionally into male prostitution and enjoys the power that she holds over her gullible johns. As long as she is careful to avoid "bum-work, bed-work" and clients seeking overnight company, Nan remains undetected as anatomically female (230). Just as Villanelle, in *The Passion*, hides her bodily secret behind a public veneer, so does Nan become an expert at the practice of simultaneous disguise and display. Nan's successful performance as a rent boy implies that, in certain situations, anatomical sex is inconsequential to sexual gratification; her convincing performance of masculinity satisfies her johns that their lover is a man.

Holly Devor asserts that in the nineteenth century "prostitution remained the one occupation most open to single poor women in which they could independently support themselves. Not surprisingly," Devor adds, "some females of the nineteenth century preferred to live honestly and independently as men" (22). Nan does both: alone and penniless in London, she chooses to live as a man *and* to work as a prostitute. She insists that her transition to prostitution as a means of subsistence does not entail a major shift in the nature of her work:

> It might seem a curious kind of leap to make, from music-hall masher to renter. In fact, the world of actors and artistes, and the gay world in which I now found myself working, are not so very different. Both have London as their proper country, the West End as their capital. Both are a curious mix of magic and necessity, glamour and sweat. Both have their types – their *ingénues* and *grandes dames*, their rising stars, their falling stars,

their bill-toppers, their hacks.... (203)

Working as a rent boy is no more objectionable to Nan than her acting career had been. She realizes that "To appear on stage is to display one's body to strangers [and that] a commodity available to the common gaze may, in given circumstances, be vendible in its entirety" (Senelick 2000: 9-10). Having already sold herself on stage, she perceives selling herself on the streets as yet another form of performative employment. Certainly, conflations of acting and prostitution are centuries old. Not coincidentally, Nan discovers that some of London's finest theatres "were rather famous in the renter world as posing-grounds and pick-up spots" (207). Her two performative professions occupy similar geographic and qualitative locations, yet renting lacks one of the greatest appeals that acting held for Nan: display. "My one regret," she says, "was that, though I was daily giving such marvellous performances, they had no audience" (206). Nan conceives of sex as a performance and, as such, believes it demands an audience; she soon learns that having an audience for her sex acts can be more oppressive than gratifying.

Nan grows content with her living and working conditions, and unlike some rent boys "[whose] aim was to be spotted by some manly young gentleman or lord and set up as his mistress in apartments of their own" (205), she doesn't seek an escape from street prostitution. Had Nan wanted to leave her new profession, as Weeks explains, "[t]he routes out were numerous, from being a 'kept boy' (either in a long-term relationship or in successive relationships), to integration in the homosexual world, or to a return to heterosexual family life" (209). Nan unwittingly takes the first two of these "routes out" of prostitution. When aristocrat Diana Lethaby enlists Nan's services, Nan becomes a kept wo/man and is introduced to a thriving lesbian subculture in which she is not so

much integrated as she is singled out and put on display. Though Nan has previously lamented the absence of an audience to witness her performative prostitution, she learns that Diana has been watching her work for some time. Just as the Queen of Spades knowingly decodes Villanelle's Casino disguise, Diana sees through Nan's performance, and is not deceived by her masculine attire. Nan attempts to explain her Guardsman's uniform to Diana:

> "Oh, the uniform is my disguise for the streets.... I find that a girl in skirts, on her own in the city, gets looked at, rather, in a way not always nice."
>
> She nodded. "I see. And you don't care for that? – being looked at, I mean. I should never have guessed it."
>
> "Well... It depends, of course, on who's doing the looking."
>
> I was getting back into my stride at last; and she, I could sense it, was also warming up. I felt for a second... the thrill of performing with a partner at my side, someone who knew the songs, the steps, the patter, the pose.... (235)

Indeed, Diana is better versed in codes of gendered performance, disguise, and display than is Nan, and Nan once again takes refuge in her demure naïveté. Their quasi-theatrical banter creates and amplifies the erotic tension of the encounter, while Diana slowly and carefully begins to establish herself in a position of power over Nan. As Nan comes to realize, little by little, that Diana has been following and watching her, she feels "horribly uneasy." Even though she had yearned for an audience to witness her "nocturnal performances," Nan can only experience pleasure from the *awareness* that she is on display. Retroactively, she enjoys the erotic pleasure of receiving Diana's gaze:

"now, the idea that she had watched me went straight to the fork of my drawers and made me wet" (237). Nan eventually becomes a similarly covert voyeur, and takes pleasure from inflicting a hidden gaze on her lovers; at the socialist rally that closes the novel, Nan gazes stealthily at all her lovers – Diana, Kitty, and Flo – unbeknownst to them.

When Nan works as a prostitute with male clientele, "[she] never [feels her] own lusts rise, [while] raising theirs" (206). However, Nan feels anything but professional detachment during her first sexual encounter with Diana. Arriving at Diana's house, Nan fears that her newest client is a sadistic murderess and expects her bedroom to contain such horrors as "ropes," "knives," or worse yet, "a heap of girls in suits – their pomaded heads neat, their necks all bloody" (238). Nan finds none of these things. Instead, she encounters "the queerest, lewdest thing [she] ever saw": Diana's dildo (241). Nan is simultaneously perplexed by the contraption and certain of its purpose. At Diana's command, she puts it on and feels herself taking on yet another sexualized masculine role. All the while, Diana regulates Nan's desire, and directs her performance:

> The more I fingered her the harder she kissed me, and the hotter I grew between my legs, behind my sheath of leather. Finally she pulled away, and seized my wrists.
>
> "Not yet," she said. "Not yet, not yet!"
>
> With my hands still clasped in hers she led me to [a] straight-backed chair and sat me on it, the dildo all the while straining from my lap, rude and rigid as a skittle. I guessed her purpose. With her hands close-pressed about my head and her legs straddling mine, she gently lowered herself upon me; then proceeded to rise and sink, rise and sink, with an ever

speedier motion....

> Soon her breaths became moans, then cries; soon my own voice joined hers, for the dildo that serviced her also pleasured me – her motions bringing it with an ever faster, ever harder pressure against just that part of me that cared for pressure best. (243)

Diana controls this sexual encounter. While Nan makes efforts to "[hold] her hips, to guide them," her assistance is unnecessary. Diana's pleasure is the purpose of the act, and her orgasm is its goal. Nan's gratification is subordinate, and her orgasm only incidental.

Melissa Fink argues that, "By directly portraying sex, Waters exposes that as on stage and street, gender is enacted through clothing, through sexual signifiers including the phallus and the dildo, and through the adoption of polarized roles, such as top and bottom, dominant and submissive" (8). Indeed, s/m is highly performative, "the most consciously *performed*," asserts Lynda Hart, "of any expression of lesbian sex" (57). S/m practices are also associated with several sex- and gender-related binaries. As regards "The relationship between the butch/femme couple and the s/m top/bottom," Hart points out that

> there has been a tendency to think of the couples as somewhat parallel. The butch is usually thought to be in some sense the "top," the partner who initiates, orchestrates the seduction, and commands the sexual exchange; whereas the femme submits to the seduction and allows herself to be mastered by the butch. The fluidity of these roles has been and continues to be the subject of much discussion within lesbian

communities. (77)

Although Nan, in her Guardsman's coat and sporting the "indecently rigid and ready" dildo (244), is clearly the butch to Diana's aristocratic femme, the opposition between butch and femme, top and bottom, is a binary that Waters refuses entirely to endorse. Indeed, as Erin Douglas argues, although Diana is the bottom and Nan is the top, "Diana takes control of her sexual desire and sexual performance in a way that is not only 'receptive,' but also very 'active'.... Diana verbally and physically directs her desires, redefining the femme sexual performance as 'active'" (40-41). Diana's near-complete domination over Nan shows Waters' refusal to posit lesbianism as free from oppressive power dynamics. M.-L. Kohlke asserts that, in her novel *Affinity*, Waters "calls into question the extent to which real lesbian relationships actually resolve gendered power imbalances" (161); similarly, in *Tipping the Velvet*, lesbian relationships involve the complicated power relations that accompany all configurations of sexual desire. Diana and Nan's s/m sex does not re-entrench hierarchical male/female, butch/femme, active/passive, top/bottom binaries; rather, it adds another performative dimension to Nan's identity. As Hart notes, "s/m conjures up the contradictory nature of all performance, which strives both to create the truth of illusion and unmask the illusion of truth" (68). Waters' depiction of s/m sex contests both traditional historiographical conceptions of late-Victorian female sexuality *and* traditional feminist conceptions of acceptable sexual practices. Indeed, lesbian sadomasochists "threaten not only mainstream feminism's foundation but also its foundationalist fiction of a coherent identity, which may in fact come to the same thing" (Hart 66).

Diana is not content to have Nan for just one night, and so asks her to be her

"tart":

> "you should have pleasure for your wages! You should live with me here, and enjoy my privileges. You should eat from my table, and ride in my brougham, and wear the clothes I will pick out for you – and remove them, too, when I should ask it. You should be what the sensational novels call *kept*." (249)

Nan agrees to this arrangement, and is initially extremely happy with the frequent sex and elaborate, elegant male wardrobe that the relationship provides. Having shared a sister's bed and a lover's bed, Nan is relegated to isolated sleeping quarters in Diana's house. Diana refuses to allow Nan to share her bed for any purpose other than sex, thus clearly delineating the limits of their relationship. For the first time, Nan is without a family, biological or surrogate. She realizes that she is a "servant" to Diana, but rationalizes: "I liked her kisses, I liked her gifts still more; and if, to keep them, I must obey her – well, so be it" (262). Nan's preference for gifts over kisses allows her to withhold affection from Diana and to exercise a modicum of power over her domineering lover. Soon, though, Diana's cruelty and carelessness become apparent, and Nan sees herself as Diana and her circle of friends define her: first as "Diana's *caprice*," then as her "*freak*," and, finally, "simply, her *boy*" (278). Nan is considered a sexual toy, but also a great source of entertainment within the lesbian subculture to which Diana introduces her.

Diana's circle of friends, the "Cavendish Sapphists," is a raucous group of leisured lesbians who provide company and competition for one another. They follow their own rules; their class position affords them a freedom that was not available to most women who identified as lesbians at the time. Weeks notes that, "Until comparatively

recently, very few people found it either possible or desirable to incorporate sexual mores, social activities, and public identity into a full-time homosexual 'way of life'" (202). The Cavendish Sapphists are composed of a minority of women for whom this sort of alternative gender and sexual existence is socially and economically feasible. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "while biology was considered destiny, the specific destiny was also based on class and status, [and] the most severe restrictions were placed on the rising middle classes rather than aristocratic women, who were often too powerful to be punished severely for breaking societal rules" (Bulloughs 145). Even within the Cavendish Ladies' Club, where masculinized female attire is the norm, the less audaciously deviant members are disturbed by the freedom of language and gender significations that Nan represents. Nan, whom Diana presents as "[her] ward, Neville King" (279), is once again *too much like a man* to be acceptable, even within a social group that promotes gender play. After Nan's first visit, in which one of the ladies objects to "the very great damage [Diana] is inflicting upon [their] club" (276) by introducing "Neville" into its ranks, a new rule is introduced that requires skirts to be worn at the Cavendish.

Dickie, who "likes to think of herself as the boy of the place" (273), is particularly peeved by Nan's arrival at the Cavendish Ladies' Club. She senses competition from the new "boy." Dickie's display of masculine-coded garments and behaviors is a privilege of her class. She is free to express her masculine gender identity in certain amenable contexts. At the club,

> She wore a boiled shirt and bow-tie, and her hair, though long and bound, was sleek with oil. She was about two- or three-and-thirty, and her waist

was thick; but her upper lip, at least, was dark as a boy's. They would have called her terribly handsome, I guessed, in about 1880. (273)

Dickie also wears a monocle, which Nan is "sure... was of plain glass" (273). The monocle is not used to improve Dickie's eyesight but, rather, to mark her belonging within the lesbian subculture. A sight-enhancer, the monocle also hints at Dickie's voyeuristic tendencies. According to Senelick, the men's "white-tie-and-tails" and the monocle were "marks of the elegant man-about-town [that] became fetish objects divorced from their association with the male body, a masquerade for female same-sex desire" (2000: 338). Garber agrees that this "extension of the costume of the male dandy... declared at once its difference from, and its alliance with, masculine social and economic power; it was for these women also a privileged marker of class." She reads the monocle as a phallic symbol that is reappropriated by the lesbian subculture: "Is it possible that this extravagantly beribboned piece of eyewear represents yet another displacement upward of the single and singular male organ – so frequently itself called 'one-eyed' in contemporary macho fiction of the Mailer-Roth variety?" (133).

Dickie represents a much-theorized subject in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century sexology, a field pioneered by Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Havelock Ellis. "Underlying the history of what Krafft-Ebing called 'the Mannish Lesbian,'" argues Garber, "is a lingering presumption that male *is* better, that, once again, to wish to be a man is perfectly 'normal,' and indeed, culturally speaking, perfectly logical" (139). Early theories of transvestism and homosexuality, or "inversion," did not tend to allow for the possibility that the adoption of masculine accoutrements is not necessarily (or only) indicative of a woman's desire to *be* a man. When a doctor includes

Dickie's sexual history in his medical text, most of the Cavendish Sapphists mock both Dickie *and* the author. Dickie defends the collection of case studies which, with its unnamed Latin title, is likely Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, published in 1886: "it is not a filthy book, it is a very brave one. It has been written by a man, in an attempt to explain our sort so that the ordinary world will understand us" (311). Dickie's "*vie sexuelle*" is yet another sexological text that is, as Michel Foucault observes of the genre, rife with "errors, naïvetés, and moralisms" that contributed to the pathologization of homosexuality (65). With regards to fin-de-siècle medical and political theories of sexuality, Garber writes, "[the] conflation of economic, professional, and political desires with sartorial and sexual ones... was a way of stigmatizing lesbians, female cross-dressers, the poor, and the unconventional by rendering medical judgment upon them" (135). Nan's professed lack of interest in reading has sheltered her from this body of work, which would encourage her to conceive of her queer desire as pathological. Ignorant of contemporary sexological discourses, Nan does not question the causes or implications of her sexuality; she recognizes her difference from heterosexual norms as little more than an inconvenience.

While Dickie is, on the one hand, eager for her "sort" to be more accepted in the mainstream, she still yearns to be unique among them, and envies Nan's spectacular success in blending male and female characteristics and accoutrements. Although Nan's association with Diana gives her access to a world in which her masculine gender identity is not only accepted but is *desired*, her position therein is less than enviable. Diana strictly regiments Nan's activities, only allowing her to leave the house in Diana's company and on specific occasions. Whether it is a visit to the Cavendish Ladies' Club,

a night at the opera, or a party at Diana's house, these events allow Diana to display her trophy. Performance has always been liberating for Nan; Diana's most cunning means to dominate her is to *force* Nan to perform – to take her most empowering practice and use it against her. Nan makes "public appearances" with Diana, and is also "displayed... at home"; she recalls that "it became a kind of sport with her, to put me in a new costume and have me walk before her guests, or among them, filling glasses, lighting cigarettes.... She grew tired of gentlemen's suits; she took to displaying me in masquerade – had me set up, behind a little velvet curtain in the drawing-room" (280). With Diana, Nan loses control of the gaze that has formerly empowered her. Diana dresses Nan as historical, mythological, and literary figures with associations to love, sex, and scandal: among these are Perseus, Cupid, an Amazon, Salome, and Medusa. One night, when Nan poses as Hermaphroditus, the degradation of her existence as the object of a predatory sexual gaze becomes painfully apparent:

> I wore a crown of laurel, a layer of silver greasepaint – and nothing else save, strapped to my hips, Diana's *Monsieur Dildo*. The ladies gasped to see him....
>
> Then Diana came, and put a pink cigarette between my lips, and led me amongst the ladies and had them stroke the leather.... I believe I thought I was a renter again, in Piccadilly – or, not a renter, but a renter's gent. For when I twitched and cried out there were smiles in the shadows; and when I shuddered, and wept, there was laughter. (281)

Nan is both ashamed and gratified by these performances. Though the arrangement is less than ideal for Nan, the idea of returning to a time and place where her lesbian desires

could not be expressed or fulfilled makes enduring Diana's treatment seem like her only option: "where else, I thought, but with Diana, in the company of Sapphists – where else would those queer hungers be assuaged?" (282).

The most highly symbolic of Nan's performances is her birthday gift to Diana: a faithful depiction of "the Roman page Antinous," whose life story "seemed to resemble [Nan's] own" (308). Waters' 1995 article, "'The Most Famous Fairy in History': Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy," details how a fin-de-siècle homosexual subculture "claimed [Antinous] as its own particular icon" (1995: 196). The author's in-depth knowledge of the Antinous story influenced her construction of Nan and Diana's relationship. Antinous was a beautiful youth, chosen by the Emperor as a companion who "accompanied Hadrian on a variety of imperial tours and was prominently displayed" (197).

> For many writers of the [late nineteenth-century] it was precisely the notion that Antinous had made a career out of beauty – a beauty entirely of surface, from which all moral significance had, indeed, been "evacuated" – that made him so compelling; as fin de siècle movements gathered momentum, he was rapidly appropriated by a variety of narratives that attempted to subvert social and sexual norms.... [In decadent literature, his] silences, his subjection to the fantasies in which the emperor chose to involve him, were inscribed into the decadent sadomasochistic plot, redefined as tokens of power rather than of subjection. (216-17)

In many ways, Nan is Antinous to Diana's Hadrian. Nan realizes the position of power that she holds, even within her subjugation to Diana's desires: "I was proof of all her

pleasures. I was the stain left by her lust. She must keep me, or lose everything" (282). Diana and Nan's relationship closely mirrors the master-slave dialectic that is embedded in the Antinous story. In their codependence, "[they are] a perfect kind of double act." Nan recalls, "She was lewd, she was daring – but who made that daring visible? ...Who, but I?" (282). Nan reciprocates Diana's control of the gaze, making Diana's sexuality "visible" to the gaze of others.

Waters' formulation of the Antinous story indicates that it provided the basis for a fin-de-siècle version of historiographic metafiction, and "by the early twentieth century," she notes, "it was clearly impossible to produce an Antinous fiction without invoking a weighty representational tradition. This was a tradition, however, in which the discrete strands of history, fiction, and myth were often extraordinarily confused" (1995: 229). In her 1954 work, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Marguerite Yourcenar re-tells the emperor's relationship with Antinous. True to the pattern that Waters observes, Yourcenar appends an "Author's Note" in which she draws attention to the generic hybridity of her text: "A reconstruction of an historical figure and of the world of his time, written in the first person, borders on the domain of fiction, and sometimes of poetry; it can therefore dispense with [a] formal statement of evidence for the historical facts concerned" (299). As is common for writers of Antinous fictions, Yourcenar adapts conflicting historical and mythological accounts to suit her version of events. On "certain controversial points, such as... the origin of Antinous, whether slave or free," she simply chooses an option that complements the tale she wants to tell, while "In other cases, like that of... the death of Antinous, the author has tried to leave that very incertitude which before it existed in history doubtless existed in life itself" (313). Indeed, the nature of Antinous' eventual

demise is a point of contention among scholars. In many fictions, Antinous kills himself to escape Hadrian's control: "he finds life as the emperor's catamite intolerable [and his] status as 'toy and bauble of a king' degrades and unmans him" (Waters 1995: 209). Waters quotes J.A. Symonds, who wrote both poetry and scholarly works on Antinous. Symonds' work is part of a tradition that situates Antinous "as a sexual servant or slave [who] resents the life of isolation and inaction to which Adrian's attentions condemn him. He longs to wrestle with the other Roman youths... [but Adrian] wants only to have him sit for sculptors" (214). The analogy to Nan and Diana's relationship is obvious. The master wants a beautiful toy to display as a status symbol, while the slave longs to experience physical closeness to and attention from same-sex others, without the alienation that servitude inevitably produces.

With Zena Blake, a young maid who Diana acquires through the mistress of a reformatory, Nan commits a social suicide that approximates Antinous' physical one. Zena was sent to the reformatory for having an affair with another maid. At Diana's birthday party, one of the Sapphists reads a story from Dickie's book that describes "a lady with a clitoris as big as a little boy's prick" (312). The story perpetuates beliefs, dating to the early modern period, that a woman who engages in "erotic contact" with another woman "[possesses] an enlarged clitoris with which she is able to pleasure both herself and her female partner" (Toulalan 55-56). Though any one of the lesbians in attendance at Diana's party could attest to the falsity of these claims, Diana abuses her aristocratic status to exploit Zena's working class body: "We think you must have a cock, Blake, in your drawers. We want you to lift your skirt, and let us see it! ...Good gracious, girl, we only want to look at you–!" exclaims Diana (314). She violates Zena

by subjecting her body to the prying eyes of the public; this violation leads directly to an attempt at a more physical violation, in which the room full of women prepares to tear Zena's skirt from her body in order to abuse and humiliate her. Diana and her friends assume and deploy the same purportedly objective medical gaze that has pathologized their own queer desire. They reiterate the features of this powerful gaze, which, with its focus on disciplining the body, "[gave] rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body" (Foucault 145-46). Nan cannot bear to witness Zena's subjection to such scrutiny, as it replicates her own victimization at Diana's hands. Nan rescues Zena from this exploitation by deflecting the gaze onto herself; however, she then uses Zena as an instrument of revenge against Diana. Nan leads Zena to Diana's room, has her put on the dildo, and replicates Nan and Diana's first sexual encounter; this time, however, Nan takes the active role, controlling and directing both women's pleasure. Diana enters her bedroom with a troupe of friends in tow, just in time to catch Nan and Zena *in the act*, as it were. Waters once again depicts sex as a theatrical performance with actors and an audience. Still exhibiting her aristocratic sense of ownership of the working-class body, Dickie encourages Diana to force the two to continue to perform: "Can't we see them fuck again? Diana, make them do it, for our pleasure!" (324). Just as she takes the controlling role in sex with Zena, Nan effects another role reversal: she finally refuses to submit to Diana's every command. Since Diana realizes that she has lost control of Nan's sexuality and performativity, the gaze ceases to be a source of erotic power for her. No longer able to direct how and by whom Nan is gazed upon, Diana loses interest and

expels both servants from her home.

Nan's final affair is with Florence, a charity worker and activist for workers' and women's rights. Unlike Kitty and Diana, "plain, kind Florence" (259) is content to live a behind-the-scenes lifestyle, though she is as open about her lesbianism as a woman in her class position is able to be. Though Nan soon develops feelings for Flo, she initially finds her enigmatic and distant, and assumes she has an overly righteous sense of morality: "I supposed she was too good to fall in love with anyone" (380). In fact, Flo is a more likely candidate to sustain a loving and truly reciprocal relationship with Nan than closeted Kitty and cruel Diana ever were. Once Nan realizes this, Flo awakens old passions and tendencies that Nan has long suppressed. Flo is initially unresponsive to Nan. This is the first relationship in which Nan has to work to be noticed by the object of her affection. As she had at Diana's house, Nan initially sleeps alone, this time on a "truckle-bed" in the parlour (380); she must earn a position in Flo's family, and in her bed. When Nan and Flo have avowed their desire for one another, Nan increasingly becomes a part of Flo's family, which includes a stable and supportive lesbian subculture:

> I had come to Quilter Street to be ordinary; now I was more of a tom than ever. Indeed, once I had made my own confession on the matter [to Flo] and begun to look about me, I saw that I was quite surrounded by toms, and couldn't believe I had not noticed them before. (403)

Once she learns what to look for, Nan finds herself in the midst of a previously invisible lesbian subculture. Her inclusion in a community of lesbians is politically and personally significant. As John D'Emilio argues, "Already excluded from families as most of us are, we have had to create, for our survival, networks of support that do not depend on the

bonds of blood or the license of the state, but that are freely chosen and nurtured" (111). These alternative family groups, argues D'Emilio, are a necessary precondition for any large-scale queer liberation movement. For Nan, the community represents a space of belonging in which she might learn to accept herself. Flo teaches Nan not to be ashamed that she is a lesbian. She blames Kitty for instilling the fear of exposure in Nan: "To think she kept you cramped and guilty for so long, when you might have been off, having your bit of fun as a real gay tom" (434). With Flo, Nan embraces her gender identity and wears men's clothing at home and masculinized female attire in public. On Quilter Street, where she lives with Flo, Flo's brother Ralph, and their adopted child, Cyril, Nan "[becomes] known... as something of a trouser-wearer" (407). Nan's return to her masculinity is liberating, for this time she is not a male impersonator, as she was with Kitty, or "living as a boy" (287), as she was with Diana. Nan is more at liberty to be a masculine-identified queer woman.

Nan prefers to remain ignorant to intellectual matters, as her willful naïveté allows her to escape responsibility and avoid personal growth. Yet Flo gradually introduces Nan to queer literary and historical personages. Flo's bookshelf contains Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, the latter "[demonstrating] a clear philosophical and stylistic debt" to the former (Cook 134). Both poets' works address homosocial and homosexual bonds and the plight of the working class. Sedgwick notes that "Whitman's influence on the crystallization, in the latter nineteenth century, of what was to prove a durable and broadly based Anglo-American definition of male homosexuality, was profound and decisive, but almost certainly not – in its final effect – at all what he would have desired" (1985: 203). Unlike Whitman,

Carpenter publicly avowed his homosexuality, and progressively asserted that "the loves of men for each other and similarly the loves of women for each other may become factors of future human evolution just as necessary and well-recognised as the ordinary loves which lead to the births of children and the propagation of the race" (qtd. in Cook 137). Nan's ability to express a gender and sexual identity that falls outside of the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality has always been a matter of class. Her relationships with Kitty and Diana could be concealed and performed in ways that her relationship with Flo cannot, because actresses and aristocratic women "fell outside the bounds of middle-class morality" and their lives were thus less circumscribed by class-based social mores (Bulloughs 154). Class-conscious Flo introduces Nan to the fact that her struggle for acceptance and recognition as a masculine-identified lesbian is a class struggle.

Nan uses her performative abilities and her power to control an audience to help Ralph make an impassioned speech for human rights and workers' rights before a jeering and restless crowd. "[The crowd] had grown momentarily silent," recalls Nan, "through sheer delight, I think, at seeing me leap, so dramatically, to Ralph's side. Now I took advantage of their hush to send my voice across their heads in a kind of roar" (456). She responds with ease to the "titters" of the crowd. She strategically modulates her voice, shouting to jolt her listeners to attention, then speaking in hushed tones to force them to listen closely. The speech is a performance, and Nan inspires Ralph to follow her lead: it was "as if I were a pantomime dame, and Ralph my cross-chat partner" (457). Nan's approach to political rhetoric mirrors that of Flo's idol, Eleanor Marx. Like Nan, Marx "was quick to take the temper of an audience... [and] often noted of the concerns

animating her listeners and devised an impromptu address. She was prepared to tinker and make detours" (Frank 45). In her personal life, too, Nan is a master of such "tinkering." She uses her affected naïveté to manipulate her lovers and acquaintances, and there is little evidence to suggest that her relationship with Flo is more authentic than those that have gone before. Nan exhibits a pattern of acquiring lovers who are more worldly than she, performing for these lovers in whatever way is most appealing to them, and then leaving them, and rarely looking back. Nan's confession to Flo of her past suggests a burgeoning potential for self-reflection, but the "rising ripple of applause" (472) that follows her declaration of love for Flo indicates that Nan continues to play a role to win favour from her lover; like her other roles, this one may be temporary. In her frame narrative, written years later, Nan gives no clues about the status of her relationship with Flo.

One of Eleanor Marx's primary concerns was to question and contest contemporary historiography (Frank 37). She "worked to forge links between history's humans, between their dead pasts – which found them separated by conditions not of their choosing – and their collective and living future" (57). Marx's project mirrors Waters' anti-hegemonic approach to historical fiction. Much as Nan realizes that "Truth is a queer thing, when it comes to rich men talking about the poor" (458), *Tipping the Velvet* takes a more democratic approach to questions of historical veracity, one that has the power to recover the lives of the socially marginalized from the sidelines of mainstream history. As Beth Newman argues, "the desire to be looked at expressed in the historically specific concept of display is a transhistorical aspect of human subjectivity" (6). In *Tipping the Velvet*, Nan progresses through various identificatory

incarnations, all of which involve her using performance as both a means to forge identities and as a defensive strategy of display and disguise. "[We] were girls with curious histories," says Nan, "girls with pasts like boxes with ill-fitting lids. We must bear them, but bear them carefully" (432). The ensured perpetuation of individual lesbian histories, and by extension a collective one, relies on the recognition that this history cannot be contained in dominant, heteronormative structures, that it must be continually reexamined and retold, and that it must be handled with care by the women who are the inheritors of this recovered past.

CHAPTER THREE

The Cockpit and the Closet: "Invisible Visibility" in Helen Humphreys' *Leaving Earth*

In historical fictions that recuperate a marginalized or intentionally elided lesbian history, visibility can be a heroine's most empowering tool. Winterson's Villanelle and Waters' Nan are able to manipulate their visibility in ways that protect them, gratify them, and enable them to locate other lesbians with whom to explore and affirm their sexuality. Historically, though, finding a queer community and consolidating queer bonds has not been a simple task. Willa Briggs, the lesbian heroine of Helen Humphreys' *Leaving Earth* (1997), is not as fortunate as either Villanelle or Nan. As a record-setting pilot during the Depression, Willa is highly visible to the public. She co-pilots a plane for nineteen consecutive days within visible range of downtown Toronto. The female daredevil excels in a male-dominated field and earns media attention and public interest as a result. Whereas Villanelle and Nan use their public visibility both to conceal and to facilitate lesbian desire, Willa's public exposure increases her risk of being "outed" in an intolerant and restrictive time and place. Her fear of the repercussions of voicing her queer desire keeps Willa firmly locked in the closet. Humphreys uses painstaking historical detail to tell the story of a spectacularly visible heroine whose queerness is painfully relegated to the realm of the invisible. In the public eye, Willa is both seen and not seen; she embodies what feminist film theorist Judith Mayne calls "the invisible visibility of lesbians" (xvii).

Although Willa's profession and her pastimes involve a degree of visibility similar to Villanelle's and Nan's, this visibility does not assist her in making connections

with other lesbians who could introduce her to a sexual subculture, provide support, and promote self-discovery. Rather, Willa restrains her desire for renowned pilot Grace O'Gorman because she is aware that it deviates from the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality. While visibility, in Winterson's and Waters' novels, ultimately enables the expression of queer desire, in *Leaving Earth*, visibility constrains Willa to conformity. When Willa and Grace embark on a record-breaking flight, they are suddenly subject to constant scrutiny. Grace is already a media darling, but Willa must learn to navigate life in the public eye. This position is rife with expectations, and as the media invents a persona for Willa, she is increasingly unable to locate her own identity. High visibility creates and enforces an imaginary identity for Willa, and the pressures to live up to public expectations limit her ability to express her emergent desire for Grace. Visibility is, in many ways, Willa's curse.

In her influential book, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle proposes that "To write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility" (28). Castle studies literature from the early-eighteenth century onwards, and finds that, "until around 1900 lesbianism manifests itself in the Western literary imagination primarily as an absence, as chimera or *amor impossibilia* – a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist" (31). For earlier authors to work around the impossibility of representing lesbian desire, it was necessary to render one of the lovers apparitional, to create a "ghostliness" that would neutralize the threat of a love that defied compulsory heterosexuality. Like a spectre, lesbian desire, "Even when 'there,'" Castle argues, "is 'not there': inhabiting only a recessive, indeterminate, misted-over space in the collective literary psyche" (31).

In many ways, *Leaving Earth* mimics these strategies of spectrality by leaving Willa Briggs' sexuality in the closet: private, unfulfilled, and largely invisible. Although Humphreys' novel doesn't feature any actual ghosts, it presents only traces of Willa's desire for Grace, thus rendering her lesbian identity apparitional.

Leaving Earth juxtaposes its spectacularly visible fictional heroines with ample historical detail as regards early aviation, the Depression, and anti-Semitism in Canada. Linda Hutcheon argues that "Historiographic metafictions, like both historical fiction and narrative history, cannot avoid dealing with the problem of the status of their 'facts' and of the nature of their evidence, their documents" (1996: 490). Humphreys appends "Acknowledgements" of her sources, and a self-reflexive "Author's Note" to her novel, in which she draws attention to her faithfulness to historical facts:

> *Leaving Earth* is a work of fiction but the historical details of the era, flight, mechanics and particulars of 1930s aviation are factually based. Most of the events and incidents that occur in the story are documented historical happenings within Toronto in August 1933. The places mentioned did exist....
>
> The flight in *Leaving Earth* is modeled on one made by American pilots Frances Harrell Marsalis and Helen Richey, who flew a Curtiss Thrush over Miami, Florida, from December 20 to 30, 1933, setting a national endurance record. (233)

Humphreys includes these "paratextual conventions of historiography" (Hutcheon 1996: 491) to insist on the veracity of the historical, political, and geographical setting of the novel, but concludes by asserting the fictionality of her characters within their not-

entirely-fictional context: "I have used some technical detail from the Marsalis-Richey flight but I have not attempted to replicate the women themselves. I only hope that in *Leaving Earth* I am able to capture the very real sense of flight as passion and vocation that these and other early women pilots lived" (234). Notably, the only passion that Humphreys defends here is the passion of women pilots for their vocation. Willa's passion for Grace, one that may or may not be reciprocated, is unmentioned in this addendum. Cold, hard, historical facts take precedence over the lesbian subject, and Willa's queer desire remains in "that space between visibility and invisibility" that Mayne insists characterizes many cinematic representations of lesbianism (xviii). Yet in Humphreys' apparent oversight she exemplifies the limited accessibility of the lesbian past. Martha Vicinus argues that "fragmentary evidence and ghostly immanences tease scholars" of lesbian history (1992: 473); she identifies these scholars as "the small number of individuals willing and able to pursue half-forgotten, half-destroyed, or half-neglected sources" (467). Humphreys' dedication to archival work identifies her as one such scholar, yet her novel and her addendum "tease" the reader in the same way that the patchy surviving details of the lesbian past "tease" scholars. Her lack of extra-textual reference to the presence and particular struggles of lesbian subjects in the 1930s supports Vicinus' argument "for the possibilities of the 'not said' and the 'not seen' as conceptual tools for lesbian studies." Vicinus insists that "Recognizing the power of not naming – of the unsaid – is a crucial means for understanding a past that is so dependent upon fragmentary evidence, gossip, and suspicion" (1996: 2). The 1930s setting of *Leaving Earth* does not represent a retreat from the politics of contemporary queer identity; rather, Humphreys' treatment of queerness draws attention to the processes by

which the lesbian historical subject is rendered apparitional.

In the summer of 1933, twenty-three-year-old Willa lives in an airplane hangar, gives flying lessons for a living, and learns to box in her spare time. Abandoned by her father and left with a snobbish, overbearing mother, Willa has very few personal ties. She is independent, and very talented, though she is lonely and insecure about her abilities. "[Unused] to anyone's positive attention" (112), Willa has internalized a sense of inadequacy that was bred in her from a young age. Visiting her mother's house, Willa is pained by reminders of her history:

> This is where she comes from – this woman, this house.... This is what she has learned from her mother: Make sure you always damp mop the ceiling, do the housework with gloves on, shake hands firmly. Pretend that you have never loved anyone, that they're dead or about to die any day. Don't ever say what you mean. Don't know what it is you feel. Don't feel. (28-29)

These reflections, and especially their conclusion, are the first indication that there is more to Willa's identity than the narrator has made clear in sketching the details of her life. Willa is still a young woman, and she has not yet been able to shake off the vestiges of a childhood that encouraged her to suppress her emotions and to conceal personal truths. Coming from this context into a public that will be equally unwilling to accept Willa's lesbianism, the heroine keeps her queerness below the surface, knowing, as Lillian Faderman observes, that "to live as a lesbian in the 1930s was not a choice for the fainthearted" (93).

Faderman outlines several reasons lesbians chose to remain "underground" in the

1930s, most notable among them was the enormous impact of the Great Depression on lifestyle options for lesbians. Specifically, she notes, "the narrowing of economic possibilities... necessarily affected a woman's freedom to live and love as she chose" (93). Faced with the difficulty of obtaining lucrative employment that would allow lesbians to be self-sufficient, and with the stigma directed at any women who were perceived to be "stealing" jobs that rightfully belonged to men, lesbians often were persuaded to marry men in the interests of their economic well being. John D'Emilio observes that avoiding marriage was easier for gay men than for lesbians, as "capitalism had drawn far more men than women into the labor force, and at higher wages. Men could more easily construct a personal life independent of attachments to the opposite sex, whereas women were more likely to remain economically dependent on men" (106). In his study of 1930s discourses of homosexuality and cross-gender identification, Henry L. Minton examines the work of psychiatrist George W. Henry, who studied male and female homosexuals over a period of several years. In interpreting Henry's conclusions, Minton finds that "both gender-role deviation and homosexuality were perceived as threats to the established heterosexual social order of male dominance" (6) in the thirties. Such skewed perceptions of "proper" gender and sexuality, and their relation to one another, meant that the pressure that all women faced to marry, bear children, and refrain from working outside the home forced many lesbians to abandon their professional pursuits and personal desires. "Among middle-class women," notes Faderman, "the depression was the great hindrance to a more rapid development of lesbian lifestyles, primarily because it squelched for them the possibility of permanently committing themselves to same-sex relationships" (94).

Leaving Earth does not simply take place during the Depression, the Depression figures as a determining factor in the story. "[With] the Depression at its crest, and over thirty percent of the city's wage earners unemployed" (*LE* 13-14), Willa is just scraping by on the salary that she earns from her sporadic teaching stints. Willa lives in the airplane hangar because "[she] can't afford to live anywhere else" (4), yet she is fortunate to have left the oppressive environment of her mother's home. Though she is distant from the restrictive realm of her youth, Willa has been unable to explore her sexuality. For lesbians during the Depression, according to Faderman, "[the] most difficult task as social beings was making contact with other lesbians in the context of a society that mandated that they be silent about their affectional preferences" (105). Indeed, a queer subculture promised a nurturing community but "at least through the 1930s this subculture remained rudimentary, unstable, and difficult to find" (D'Emilio 106). Locating a lesbian subculture is almost impossible for Willa, who seldom ventures far from the airfield. Yet Willa's life takes a dramatic turn both personally and professionally when famous aviatrix Grace O'Gorman asks her to participate in an upcoming attempt to break an in-flight endurance record that is held by her husband, Jack Robson.

In 1928, Amelia Earhart was invited to become the first woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean by air. "Why did I do it?" she asks, in an article that she wrote for the *New York Times*: "When one is offered such a tremendous adventure it would be too inartistic to refuse it" ("Fought" 1). Grace's unexpected proposal has a similar effect on Willa. Startled as she is, refusing Grace's offer is not an option. For the novice pilot, the chance to fly with the eminently artistic pilot offers significant professional advantages:

"'Grace O'Gorman is famous,' says Willa. 'If this flight works, if we set a record, it will raise my profile as a flyer. It will help my career'" (27). For both Earhart and Willa, flight means using the power of visibility to achieve personal goals. Earhart conceives of flight as artistry, the visibility of which will improve public perceptions of women's capabilities; Willa conceives of flight in terms of enhancing her public "profile" and thus her career. Privately, Willa puts much emotional stock in her impending adventure:

> It is still hard to believe that Grace O'Gorman, heroine of the skies, has asked Willa to help her break a record. Willa has never even dared dream of meeting Grace, let alone to be flying with her for twenty-five days as her only companion. It is both terrifying and exhilarating. A dream she was afraid to have that has come true anyway. (46)

Willa's professional admiration for Grace turns to personal affection, desire and, finally, love. In the air, Willa enjoys a space of personal freedom, where "Emotions that are used to the weighted order of the world below [can] be thrown into a spin..." (91). Though the endurance flight is physically taxing and often anxiety-producing, after two weeks aloft, Willa's affection for Grace eclipses her discomfort and sustains her in a "nervous kind of elation" (171). She thinks to herself, "*Grace. I want to stay up here with you forever*" (171), for in the air she can be alone with Grace constantly. The women share intense experiences that will cease when the plane returns to Earth. Knowing this, "there are things [Willa] just can't bring herself to say." She longs to ask Grace, "*Could you love me?*" (201), but decides that the risks are too great: Willa potentially faces both Grace's rejection and her own public exposure as a lesbian.

Willa and Grace push the limits of compulsory heterosexuality and notions of

acceptable femininity in 1930s North America. At that time, it was common for scientists like Henry to insist that homosexuality was the direct result of cross-gender identification, which was evident in an individual's personal and professional choices. Henry argued that "Masculinity in a female may be manifested in aggressive occupations, aggressive attitudes towards society, and through intolerance of the personal relationships involved in being a wife and mother" (qtd. in Minton 5-6). A woman who committed any of these transgressions was deemed a lesbian. Within this discourse, an unmarried pilot like Willa would be guilty of a deviant degree of cross-gender identification. Minton stresses that the Freudian idea that "homosexuality was an immature form of sexuality [and that a] child could remain fixated at this level of sexuality if he or she did not form an identification with the parent of the opposite sex" (8) also held much currency in the 1930s. In this respect, Willa's absent father presents another obstacle to her conformity to the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality. Grace is similarly suspect: much like Amelia Earhart, "keeping her own name in a childless marriage signifies a non-reproductive sexuality" (Herrmann 103). With a near-passionless, non-procreative marriage in which she occupies the dominant position, Grace resists the limitations of acceptable femininity.

To counter the possibility that her masculine habits will bring her sexuality into question, Grace plays up her striking femininity, flamboyantly displayed in "the red, red, red of her lips and her hair" (86). On the outside, she looks the part of the classic beauty; under the surface, "Air Ace Grace" is narcissistic, arrogant, and calculating. Grace repeatedly disregards her copilot, reasoning that "'Willa Briggs will be happy with anything'" (34). In the air, Willa finds Grace to be "methodical," "detailed," and

perceptive (112). Perceptive indeed, Grace soon senses Willa's love for her, even though Willa has been conditioned to suppress her emotions. Always having followed her mother's injunction *not to feel*, Willa seems out of touch with her sexuality until she falls in love with Grace. When this happens, Willa finds herself caught in the same trap as Jack: "The only way [Grace] can be assured of people trying to keep up is to have them fall in love with her. Then they will make the effort and be able to maintain her high standards temporarily" (231). As Grace becomes aware of Willa's feelings, she neither reciprocates nor discourages them, but exploits the power that this position affords.

Grace marries Jack Robson for convenience. Female pilots in the 1920s and 1930s could most easily gain access to airplanes and flying lessons through close male acquaintances, such as fathers, brothers, and husbands. According to Susan Ware, "Being married also protected women from harassment at airfields, as well as squelched the inevitable suggestions that aviators were less than 'full women' because of their unusual career choice" (81). Many of the first women pilots were married to the men who taught them to fly. Grace credits Jack with being the only pilot who was willing to take her flying at a time when it was considered neither safe nor proper for women to be pilots. She loves flying more than she loves Jack, and she expects her husband to be happy to help her break *his* record by flying the refueling plane that will allow Grace and Willa to stay aloft for twenty-five days. Jack agrees to his wife's request because he lives vicariously through Grace: "She is what he isn't, what he wanted to have been" (35). As a pilot, and as a woman, Grace wields an emasculating power that is analogous to the perceived threat to masculinity that is posed by the lesbian.

Willa's queer desire is never vocalized in *Leaving Earth* but exists, rather, in the

apparitional form that Castle argues is typical of the lesbian subject throughout literary history. Here, an aspect of Willa's identity is rendered apparitional, rather than her entire person. There is, however, a spectre that haunts *Leaving Earth*: the ghostly presence of Amelia Earhart. In her concluding note, Humphreys asserts that "Women such as Marsalis and Richey are largely forgotten now, their achievements distilled, simply, into the legendary figure of Amelia Earhart" (234). Although some female pilots of the time are mentioned in the novel, including Ruth Law and Amy Johnson, Amelia Earhart's name is never uttered. She is present only in a trace detail: young Maddy names her favourite carousel horse "Amelia" (15). Given Humphreys' extensive research on women in early aviation, she quite likely stumbled upon the following anecdote, recounted by Earhart's father in the *New York Times* on June 19, 1928, the day after Earhart became the first woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean by airplane: "'Once,' he said, 'Amelia had accepted a challenge to ride an 'outlaw' horse at a fair in Toronto, Ontario. She rode the animal and carried off the prize, though she narrowly escaped injury'" ("Father" 3). Notably, at a fairground in Toronto, a carousel horse bears the only trace in *Leaving Earth* of a woman whose efforts are synonymous with the history of women in aviation.

Although the efforts of countless women pilots have been subordinated to the figure of Amelia Earhart as aviatrix *par excellence*, it was never Earhart's intention to become the symbol of women in aviation. In fact, she made it clear in the books and articles that she wrote that her goal was quite the opposite. As Anne Herrmann notes, "Earhart as a woman seeks to reproduce herself in other women, by disseminating information about aviation in a way that normalizes her identity as aviatrix in order to

eventually make it obsolete" (91). Herrmann details how Earhart worked tirelessly to be considered unexceptional among women. Earhart insisted that, until female pilots became the norm, the glorification of any one aviatrix would only emphasize her difference from the average woman, and would thus reinforce the notion that other women were incapable of similar accomplishments. Humphreys' refusal to invoke this icon of women's efforts in aviation complements her attempt to normalize Willa's marginalized identity. Lesbian heroines as extraordinary as Winterson's Villanelle and Waters' Nan are unlikely to help *normalize* the lesbian subject. Yet the spectacular visibility of lesbian heroines is an important means of challenging compulsory heterosexuality. As Faderman has suggested, the complete concealment of lesbian desire is a misguided strategy that only serves to re-entrench the perceived abnormality of queer identity.

In *Leaving Earth*, the female aviator's struggle for recognition and acceptance stands in for the parallel struggle of the lesbian subject. Despite the growing numbers of women earning their pilot's licenses in the 1920s and 1930s, women like Earhart *were* considered exceptional, and women who attempted to break into the "boys' club" of aviation faced rejection, and even harassment, from the male majority. In *Leaving Earth*, as in Earhart's experience, the media trivialize female pilots' accomplishments with condescending newspaper headlines that emphasize their girlishness rather than their talent. Willa laments that, in the media, "The big question... is whether or not we're going to wear lipstick up there." She insists that they are "most definitely not" (17), and is thus surprised to find that lipstick is a staple of Grace's flying gear. Despite her consciously adopted feminine accoutrements, Grace is eager to tear the sponsor's

Adventure Girl logo from her plane after the flight. Such visible details play into the media's diminution of the women's efforts. The first women's long-distance air race was dubbed the "Powder Puff Derby" (Walker), and Earhart's and other early women pilots' accomplishments appeared in newspapers under headlines of a piece with those in *Leaving Earth*. Humphreys clearly models headlines such as "Girl Flyers Make It Through First Night Aloft" (65) and "GIRL FLIERS IN TROUBLE" (152) on similar ones from, for instance, the *New York Times*: "Girl Fliers Land After 122 Hours Aloft," "Miss Earhart Says 'Flying Clothes' Are Unnecessary for Women," and "Father Fears Return Hop." These headlines are rife with double entendres for the queer reader, with their images of the "Adventure Girls" (179) spending many perilous nights together, without any particular need for clothing. To the average reader, though, newspaper coverage likened female aviators to children, and their efforts were often relegated to the realm of the quaint. After Earhart became the first woman passenger on a transatlantic flight, the *New York Times* published a letter that they had received from Will Rogers, who states in a curiously ambiguous tone: "Certainly glad that girl made the ocean trip. Now the rest of these other women can devote their time to steady thinking of some other way to make the front page" ("Will Rogers" 29). Rogers seems wary of the visibility that daring women gained from their exploits. In *Leaving Earth*, women are similarly critical of the aviatrixes' accomplishments. Mary, secretary to the publisher of *Adventure Girl Almanac*, says "bitterly" of Grace's occupation, "what's the point" (39). In popular parlance, women's professional advances were considered threatening or humourous, and sometimes both.

Of course, some men supported and respected the accomplishments of female

pilots. Willa enjoys a casual friendship with professional boxer Simon Kahane, who is not a pilot and is therefore not threatened by Willa's success in the industry. The two have agreed to trade boxing lessons for flying lessons, and Simon has no reservations about being taught by a female pilot. Kahane's acceptance of Willa likely stems from his own marginalized identity as a Jewish man in a city plagued by anti-Semitism. The welcome ease of Willa's dealings with Simon is not common to her professional relationships with male pilots: "She spends most of her time at the airfield, tolerated by the men but excluded from their easy camaraderie" (136). Joyce Spring paints a pleasant picture of solidarity among Canadian pilots, regardless of gender: "If a woman showed an interest in flying, male pilots accepted her as 'one of the boys,' and she was accorded any assistance they could provide.... The discrimination against women flying came from society generally, but rarely from male pilots" (9). On the contrary, Shirley Render insists that, "much to their chagrin, [women pilots] found that they were not always welcomed. 'A woman's only place in flying is as the mother of a pilot,' was the reputed opinion of the president of the Regina Flying Club" (7). Indeed, as Ware observes, "The continued need for separate women's professional organizations in the postsuffrage era suggests an in-between stage of women's equality: no longer excluded from male professions but not yet fully accepted into them" (84). Humphreys credits the Ninety-Nines, a professional organization of women pilots, as a resource for her information about early women's aviation. Although organizations like the Ninety-Nines existed, Willa remains isolated from any real community of women. This isolation exacerbates her lack of queer self-knowledge, since "The formation of self-conscious women's communities can be seen as a necessary precondition for a lesbian identity" (Vicinus

1992: 472).

As a highly visible female role model, the legendary Grace O'Gorman has a number of adoring fans, not least of whom is twelve-year-old Maddy. Maddy's uncle Simon laments that "he's no longer her hero. He's been replaced with all those Queens of the Air" (32). Indeed, Maddy "has no interest in any god except for the almighty Grace O'Gorman" (107). She is a loner and a tomboy whose adoration for Grace manifests itself in several ways: Maddy idolizes Grace as a role model, conceives of Grace as her ideal mother, and lusts after Grace in a way that suggests queer desire:

> Maddy presses her face against the picture of Grace O'Gorman on her wall. Her hot cheek against Grace's cool, cool paper skin. She waits for the noise of the Moth over the voice of her father, but it's too distant yet to hear. Maddy closes her eyes, pushes hard into the shiny, smooth lips of the famous aviatrix. "You mustn't wait," she whispers. "I haven't long." (69)

Maddy thinks about Grace obsessively, fantasizes about being near her, and imagines her voice as a titillating "purr" (160). Maddy's queerness takes the form of idolatry and mother-worship because her youth and sexual inexperience prevent her from understanding her desire for Grace. Maddy is, however, old enough to know something about heterosexual sex. In one scene, she sees Miro's penis and proclaims, "'It's ugly. I'm not touching it'" (58). In another, ostensibly referring to the shelter she takes in an abandoned boat, Maddy expresses disdain for "those nosy, prying, bumping, climbing, pushing boys who were trying to get inside her secret place" (109). At twelve years old, the pubescent girl is disgusted by the male body and has obsessive fantasies about a

beautiful woman. The nature of Maddy's affection for Grace suggests that she is a younger version of Willa: an aspiring pilot whose hero-worship becomes lesbian desire.

Maddy envies boys' freedom. She thinks "She would like to be a working boy. She could work in the temporary Air Harbour and clean Grace O'Gorman's plane" (160). Maddy wants "to be a working boy" because she rejects the opportunities that she sees available to her as a girl, including the expectation that she will fulfill a heteronormative female role. When her father, Fram, makes a hypothetical comment about Maddy one day becoming a mother, Maddy snaps, "'I don't want wee ones.... You keep getting it all wrong'" (15). For Maddy, the only way that a girl can transcend social expectations is through a career in aviation; she is unaware of how excluded female pilots are within the male-dominated field. Maddy is discouraged when she can't participate in a model-airplane building contest because "'The contest is just for boys'" (110). As Herrmann notes, it was common for girls to be "barred from participating in airplane model contests [that stipulated] that eligible contestants need to be members of manual-training and shop classes" (95). Despite gains being made by women in aviation, girls were still encouraged to abandon dreams of adventure and individual fulfillment in favour of working towards the goal of heteronormative domesticity.

The elements pervade *Leaving Earth.* Humphreys makes regular reference to fire, water, earth, and air, frequently depicting the latter two as contrasting existential spaces: Willa wonders about "the difference between airborne reality and earthbound reality" (90). Close to the heavens, the air is a liminal space of possibility for Willa, and she wants to stay in flight with Grace permanently. However, Willa also considers her airborne existence as "exile" (48) and "stasis" (92). Although "She is leaving earth" (48),

the air is a space of avoidance, not permanent transformation. Willa cannot "live in the sky": she must return to "that earth below, [where] there is no one who really loves her" (136). Still, Willa relishes her times in the air as a welcome respite from the realities of earth. To Willa, flying is about passion and freedom. She flies not to get noticed but to escape notice, and to flee the limitations of her life on the ground:

> [Willa has] never been much of a stunter and it unnerves her a little to be in a plane that's bucking and kicking on its axis. She's annoyed with Grace for this display of acrobatics. Willa likes a more sedate pace to flying. It's being in the air that she likes, not chewing it up with wings. Her dream is to be able to get a job that will keep her in the air all day, every day. Nice steady flying work.... None of this wrapping the plane around pillars of air. But she knows that this is Grace's idea of flying – stunting or record-setting. (119)

For many early women pilots, flying "symbolized freedom and power and being in control of their destiny. In command of a plane a woman was master of her fate and had a sense of liberation that she might not experience elsewhere" (Render 6). As was common for women in aviation, Willa flies to feel liberated from the constraints of her daily life. While Humphreys presents air as a space of freedom, she also insists that "the women who fly," to whom she dedicates her novel, must unavoidably return to the limitations of earth.

In contrast to Willa's more mellow brand of flying, Grace's passion for aviation focuses on stunting, creating a spectacle, breaking records, and earning fame. Grace insists on posing for photographs, wearing lipstick, and carrying a comb and hairpins to

maintain her appearance mid-flight; furthermore, "The stories say she always flew with an evening gown as her only luggage, so that if she was invited out for dinner she could go in style" (119). Grace's flying style mimics the exhibitionism of her personal style. Although "female stunt pilots were quite common" in the 1920s and 1930s, according to Mary Russo, "such feats [as loops and barrel rolls] were disparaged despite their popularity because, although they contributed to the growing definitions of professionalism within aviation, they were increasingly the sign of the counterfeit, exhibitionistic, unprofessional pilot. Women in this category were doubly suspect, even as they were intriguing to audiences" (20). Russo positions stunt flights as "grotesque performances." In this context, a female stunt artist can signify, on the one hand, "a model of female exceptionalism (stunting)," but also, and more problematically, "the doubled, dwarfed, distorted (stunted) creatures of the sideshow which stand in as the representatives of a well-known cultural presentation of the female body as monstrous and lacking" (22-23). The female pilot is both too much and not enough: her profession takes her beyond the limits of acceptable femininity, while her gender marks her as less than a "real" pilot.

Willa avoids drawing attention to herself as a stunt artist and distances herself from the realm of grotesque performance. Her more modest, less flashy brand of flying helps Willa keep her difference out of the public eye. While Grace seeks visibility and exceptionality, Willa represents the everyday lesbian who strives for social integration rather than further marginalization. Such individuals, according to Vicinus, are the extremely important and under-theorized subjects of contemporary lesbian historiography:

> ...a contemporary perspective that is limited to the visible, self-identified lesbian will reduce an understanding of both the daily life of the homosexual and her multiple relationships with the dominant heterosexual society and its cultural productions. A more open definition of women's sexual subjectivity, and of the nature of lesbian desire, will enable us not only to retrieve a richer past, but also to understand the complex threads that bind women's public actions with their private desires. (1996: 2)

The queer subject need not be spectacularly extraordinary to warrant recovery from the margins of history. Vicinus promotes an examination of the choices that lesbians make to control their own visibility. Lack of spectacular visual evidence does not indicate an absence of queer desire. Willa navigates the heteronormative structures of her cultural context by deciding when and how to be visible.

If, by virtue of her excess, Grace is "freakish," she is in good company in *Leaving Earth*, which features enough freaks to rival the sideshow that Winterson conjures in *The Passion*. Grace aims to finish the endurance flight by landing at the Canadian National Exhibition "to become an exhibit" (5) at the event. Here, the pilots are to share an audience with the C.N.E.'s other freakish attractions: "high-wire artists," "the fat lady," and several "dwarfs" (156-57). Maddy's parents, who work at an amusement park, take her to the C.N.E. "*For research*, they always say, so they can look at the newest freak display or game, something they can appropriate for Hanlan's next year" (160). The most notable freak in *Leaving Earth* is Miro, "King of All Fat Babies." Miro is "a twenty-seven-year-old dwarf who sits propped up in a display case at the front of his tiny house every day from noon to midnight, dressed in diapers and holding a rattle. People

can tap on the glass and he'll roll around a bit to show how fat he is and how difficult it is to move" (57). Maddy enjoys a sadistic power over Miro, who pays her to bathe him:

> "You torture me," says Miro into Maddy's shoulder.
>
> "I like to," she says gently, before she pushes him away from her embrace. (123)

Feeling powerless in other areas of her life, Maddy seizes the opportunity to dominate Miro, who is already stigmatized, weaker than she, and vulnerable: "If he makes too much of a fuss, she slaps him until he shuts up" (58). Maddy and Grace both enjoy playing the dominatrix, a role that allows their tough public personas to hide their respective private fears. In *The Passion*, Winterson treats freaks as indispensable members of society whose exceptional abilities make them highly valued by their contemporaries. In *Leaving Earth*, Humphreys' freaks are victims of an intolerant society that mocks and marginalizes those who are different.

The stunting aviatrix walks a fine line between reverence and freakishness, and her treatment in the media helps determine whether she is valued or scorned by the public. Grace uses her "cinematic" good looks (197) to charm the media, "always trying to stay the press's darling so they'll treat her kindly" (131). In her study of Earhart, Herrmann calls the female pilot "America's dandy," and notes that "The aviatrix is less preoccupied with creating her image than with selling it, and maintaining its marketability" (103). In "this age of glamour aviation" (*LE* 101), as long as she remains in the public eye, Grace will continue to garner sponsorships that enable her to fly frequently. This privilege is an indisputable luxury in the midst of the Depression, when "flying seems a frivolous extravagance" (138). *Adventure Girl Almanac*, the magazine

whose name is emblazoned on Grace's airplane, sponsors the endurance flight in exchange for the "exclusive rights to coverage" of the event from the women's perspectives (37). Money influences which stories are told, and how.

Newspaper coverage is the most prominent mode of historical documentation in *Leaving Earth*. It is not painted in a favourable light. Out of spite, Jack feeds fake news stories to the media while Willa and Grace are aloft. He maliciously suggests that Grace is the weaker pilot. On his refueling flights, Jack sends his editorials down to the *Adventure Girl* airplane, to ensure that Grace is aware of the way she is being portrayed in the media. Grace is increasingly angered, as "Almost every day there's a fresh news article about them, things they've supposedly said and done that have nothing to do with their actual experience" (100). Although the newspapers that contain myriad "quotes of things she never said" (66) perplex Willa, she comes to appreciate Jack's fictional tales as they increasingly depict her as the more capable and indispensable pilot. Jack's stories temporarily disrupt the camaraderie between Willa and Grace, pitting them against one another. His falsified accounts of the flight bring into question the credibility of all newspaper versions of current events. Willa's partial acceptance of the fictional accounts shows how tempting it can be to allow untruths when they serve one's own interests. Because "Jack's articles are getting better than her own fantasies" (152), Willa takes their falsity in stride. Not so with Grace: "she can't cope with the possible public erosion of her superhuman image" (153). These stories reveal that official historical documents are selective, often invented, and work to serve special interests while falsifying or ignoring the truth. Willa, who in Jack's stories takes over Grace's "superhuman image," eventually feels oppressed by her inability to live up to "the way [she is] in Jack's

stories" (170). In *Leaving Earth,* official historical records invent and circumscribe identity.

Willa and Grace's record-setting endurance flight bears meaning to the women that is radically different from the publicized versions of their experience. They are alone in their airplane, so Willa's burgeoning love for her copilot, while it emerges in the context of her most visible action, is invisible to the public eye. "Given the threat that sexual love between women inevitably poses to the workings of patriarchal arrangement," notes Terry Castle, "it has often been felt necessary to deny the carnal *bravada* of lesbian existence" (30). Yet, as we have seen, Willa is caught in a double bind: a spectacularly visible and exceptional lesbian subject can further marginalize queerness, while the widespread concealment of lesbian desire can have the ultimate effect of rendering queerness less "normal." As Faderman asserts, with regards to the widespread concealment of lesbian and bisexual desire in the 1930s,

> That secrecy meant, among other things, that it was impossible for women who saw themselves as "lesbian" to construct their own public definitions of what that label meant, since they were intimidated into speechlessness by the prevalent notion that feelings such as theirs were "queer" and "unusual." Since they could not speak out to correct those images, the public definitions of them continued to be formulated by those on the outside. (99)

In their airplane, Willa and Grace are similarly unable to author the accounts of their own experiences; their relationship is defined from without. To temper this, Willa must negotiate her simultaneous exhibitionism and concealment; adherence to either extreme

may make public her failure to reinforce the gender and sexual norms that support compulsory heterosexuality. Willa's high visibility does not guarantee the understanding or acceptance of her queerness by a society dominated by heteronormative paradigms.

Leaving Earth privileges the ineffable as a valid aspect of any historical account. Willa, an apparition of sorts, thinks that history exists in ghostly remnants rather than in static official documents: "Willa believes that ships and planes carry the faintest traces of those who sailed or flew in them. Memory brushed into the hulls, the sails and wings. A part of everyone who ever touched the rails or worked the ropes. That should be respected..." (55). Memory, for Grace, inscribes itself in the body: "She has probably pulled the nose of the Moth up by hauling back on the stick thousands and thousands of times, and that feeling of the stick under her hand, that short distance it travels back, are so familiar they exist in her body now, in the memory of her body" (44). These histories cannot be factually transmitted. The memory of Grace's body, for instance, is personal and subjective, and will never appear in official documents detailing her flight. Similarly, the "faintest traces" of Willa and Grace that inhere in their airplane make up a history that can only be felt. The early destruction of the flight logbook eradicates such details as "their exact time of departure," their daily schedules (49), and Willa's first impressions of the flight: "*It's as if no one's down there*" (60). When paper and writing instruments are lost to the women, concrete records of their experiences are no longer possible: there will be "No record of the record-breaking trip except the fabricated news articles by Jack" (101). The only thing remaining to tell the solid, indisputable facts of their flight is the barograph, or black box; "Without it there's no official recording of the flight. Without it they won't know how long they were in the air and whether they did

break the record or not" (222). Aside from the barograph, the flight will exist primarily in the bodies and minds of the pilots. The women's interviews with the *Adventure Girl Almanac*, various newspaper articles, Jack's fictional tales, photographs of the women's departure, and the wreckage of their downed plane will combine to produce the official history of the flight: one that only approximates the truth.

Creating historical documents is something that Willa and Maddy have in common. They both love and idolize Grace O'Gorman, and have produced accounts of her achievements over the years. "I used to cut your pictures out of magazines," Willa admits to Grace. "When I was younger. I made a scrapbook" (22). Later, Grace and Jack share a laugh over Willa's admission: "Grace sighs: 'Oh, Robson. She's young enough to have kept a scrapbook of my flights'" (24). Just as Maddy seems to be a younger version of Willa, in many respects Willa is a younger version of Grace; Willa's precocious abilities indicate that her talent and fame might someday supercede her heroine's. Like Willa, Maddy collects photos of and articles about Grace; she also follows the flight path of the Moth, collecting debris that has been tossed from the plane. She keeps "a calendar of found objects from the *Adventure Girl*. August 17 – chicken bones from one of their airborne meals. There are some spaces in the cataloguing, days when Maddy couldn't find anything that could possibly have fallen off or been thrown out of the plane. Days without an archaeology" (197). Maddy often kisses these objects: not only the photographs, but the "mouldy apple core" and the "fragment of chicken bone" as well. She covets these items. Her mode of historiography, while born out of love, breeds delusion. Maddy's impression of Grace O'Gorman is as biased and subjective as Jack's newspaper accounts. Just as Willa does, Maddy invents Grace to fill

a void in her life, but she eventually finds that "The Grace [she] was waiting for doesn't exist" (227). Grace equates love like Maddy's, based on fandom, with the love she receives from Willa and Jack: "what do they fall in love with, anyway?" she thinks to herself. "Air Ace Grace, Queen of the Skies, the image they've created and bought into" (231).

In addition to their shared adoration of Grace, Willa and Maddy both struggle to deal with aspects of their identity that, if revealed, will leave them vulnerable to stigma and hatred. For Willa, the secret is her love and desire for Grace. For Maddy, as yet unaware of her own queerness, the secret is her Jewish heritage. By 1933, the effects of Hitler's growing influence in Germany and abroad were being felt in Canada. In accordance with Humphreys' attention to historical detail, anti-Semitism figures prominently in the Toronto of *Leaving Earth.* Maddy's mother is Jewish and her father is a Scottish Protestant. Reacting against inflammatory newspaper headlines that have repeatedly emphasized his Jewishness, Maddy's uncle Simon proudly has Del sew a Star of David onto his boxing shorts. He enhances the visibility of his marginalized identity: "I'm going to play into their stupid race war," he tells Willa (17). Unlike Simon, Maddy does all she can to distance herself from her Jewishness. She imagines that "It would be good to be away with her father, away from her mother and the thing she is that nobody likes. The thing she is that Maddy refuses to become" (78). Though Maddy knows very little about Judaism, she knows enough to want to avoid its repercussions, having endured "The taunts every day from the Bell twins, all the way home from school this spring. *Jew-girl. Dirty little Jew-girl*" (78).

Humphreys weaves documented instances of anti-Semitic propaganda and

violence in Depression-era Toronto into *Leaving Earth.* Simon and Del are shocked and frightened to read news coming out of Europe that reports the abhorrent treatment of Jews, for they see the same anti-Semitic sentiment in their own city. Simon fumes over the "Swastika Club in Toronto painting swastikas on the canoe club building and walking up and down the boardwalk – whole gangs of them – in their blue shirts and pants, wearing that stupid chrome swastika badge. 'Help get rid of the Jews. Keep the beaches clean'" (67). Such "gangs of youths wearing swastika badges who harassed Jewish people on public beaches and in the parks" existed in significant numbers in 1930s Toronto (Betcherman 45). Del tells of several "Gentiles Only signs outside the fancy hotels and the yacht club" near her home (68). These signs, according to Lita-Rose Betcherman, "were like weeds. Eradicated in one area, they sprang up in another" (50-51). Hate speech turns to physical violence when Simon wins a match against a German competitor, and Del is beaten by a gang of Swastika Club members who burn down her fortune-telling booth to punish Simon for his victory.

Queer Theory and the Jewish Question is a collection of essays that aim "[to explore] the complex of social arrangements and processes through which modern Jewish and homosexual identities emerged as traces of each other," and "[to analyze] the rhetorical and theoretical connections that tie together the constellations "Jew" and "homosexual" (1). Indeed, in anti-Semitic and homophobic rhetoric that emerged in the late-nineteenth century, the two categories were often blended:

> [Claims] abound in both popular and scientific literature in Europe and America insinuating the Jewish male's difference from other men [as a result of which] modern Jewishness became as much a category of gender

> as of race.... Significantly, this crossing went both ways.... It is not just that the modern Jew was being secularized and homosexualized – the "homosexual," whom *scientis sexualis* and its various practitioners were so busily identifying and diagnosing, was also being "raced." (Boyarin et al. 4)

The pseudo-science of eugenics had gained currency by the 1930s, and the Depression exacerbated xenophobia in Canada and abroad. Around this time, "the Canadian 'race' was invented as an amalgam of biological, cultural, and geographical qualities" (Strange 16), and anyone perceived to be a threat to the purity and homogeneity of the nation faced hatred and violence. Both Jews and homosexuals were deemed "unfit" and were targets of the eugenics movement in Canada. Karen Duder observes that "Sexual behavior and its regulation was an important focus of eugenic reform. It was, after all, through the appropriate sexuality of the 'fit' that the race would be saved from degeneration.... Eugenics, and those influenced by it, held fast to gender norms..." (67). Willa knows that she deviates from an exclusionary ideal of "fitness" that her society clings to; she laments that "The world that we live in and give our lives to does not care for us at all" (199).

Insofar as Jewish identities and queer identities are both marginalized, repudiated, and subject to intolerance and harm, Maddy and Willa share a similar need for concealment. Ignorance and bigotry meant that both Jews and homosexuals often were perceived as threats to social order and traditional values. In response to "Blatant declarations [of hatred]" against Jews in Ontario, Stephen Speisman notes that "the typical Jewish reaction was to attempt to remain as inconspicuous as possible, [and to

ingratiate] themselves to the non-Jewish population" (118). While Willa remains highly visible as a pilot, as a lesbian she uses inconspicuousness as a means of self-defense. Just as Maddy insists, "I'm not Jewish.... I'm Canadian" (125), the subject whose identity marks her as deviant from the majority takes refuge in the closet or, in Willa's case, in the cockpit. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that notions of "'The closet' and 'coming out' [are] now verging on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation" (1990: 71). This seeming catch-all, according to Sedgwick, isn't an appropriate metaphor for the situation of any and all minority groups. "Vibrantly resonant as the image of the closet is for many modern oppressions," she argues, "it is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions," namely those based on *visible* difference, such as racism, gender oppression, ageism, and so on (75). However, "Ethnic/cultural/religious oppressions such as anti-Semitism are more analogous [to homophobia] in that the stigmatized individual has at least notionally some discretion – although, importantly, it is never to be taken for granted how much – over other people's knowledge of her or his membership in the group" (75). Here, Sedgwick evokes a contestable analogy between homophobia and anti-Semitism. Janet R. Jakobsen cautions that:

> Analogizing queers to Jews violates the categories that might otherwise separate them. This category error is potentially a space of constraint or of possibility. After all, queers, in all of their diversity and complexity, are not like Jews, in all of their diversity and complexity. But, if read in a complicated manner, the analogy can be seen to sustain both similarity and difference. (86)

To analogize queerness and Jewishness in *Leaving Earth* is not to elide the many crucial differences between these categories. However, queer self-concealment and anti-Semitism are juxtaposed in the novel; together, they evoke a historical climate of intolerance against all that was perceived as threateningly "different" to a downtrodden and paranoid nation.

In a city plagued by small-mindedness, Willa's love for Grace can't be publicly expressed or explored. Not surprisingly, Humphreys, careful to reproduce closely the realities of the historical context of *Leaving Earth*, doesn't provide Willa with a way out of the closet. Within mainstream culture, Willa knows that her identity is unspeakable; when she tries to voice her queer desire, she finds conventional language inadequate to the task. In order for Willa to attempt to express her love for Grace, the women must transcend the limits of spoken language. To combat her growing sense of isolation, Grace, who is in the forward cockpit and can turn around to face Willa, invents a gestural language with which to speak to her copilot. Under the din of the engines of the plane, Willa and Grace cannot hear one another speak. This inaudibility parallels the invisibility of lesbian desire both historically and novelistically. When the women begin to invent their alternative language, seeing and speaking become blurred to the point that Willa describes "Language as a visual echo" (167). Beginning with basic words that describe their surroundings, Grace slowly builds a vocabulary with which to articulate their experiences. The development of this language serves as a diversion for Willa while she flies the plane: Grace invents a sign, and Willa guesses its meaning. The language also restores a sense of connection that has been lost to Willa for some time. She becomes dependent on these "conversations" with Grace, and "[starts] to think that if she can't see,

then she won't be able to talk" (167). Language becomes visual, and being able to see becomes an indispensable element of proper communication. Humphreys also emphasizes the importance of history to this language, which is enhanced by the concept of time: "Once Willa and Grace have a word for *time* they are able to express more concepts.... The past or history is *back time*.... The future is *ahead time*.... Memory or remembering is *head time*" (113). Grace's language incorporates both visibility and history. Similarly, *Leaving Earth* makes Willa highly visible as a means of expressing her presence in a past in which lesbian subjects have been silenced by written and spoken language and, therefore, by traditional modes of historiography.

The corporeal nature of Grace's gestural language introduces a new, erotic dimension into the women's interactions:

> Grace points to herself, taps her breastbone with her right forefinger.
>
> *I.*
>
> She points to her lips, oiled red from the lipstick.
>
> *Kiss?* thinks Willa. She shakes her head in confusion.
>
> Grace opens her mouth and closes it, mimics speech.
>
> Willa nods.
>
> Grace reaches across and touches Willa gently on the side of the face.
>
> Cheek. Lips. Breast.
>
> Body. Mouth. Body.
>
> *I will talk to you.* (104)

The new language breaks a barrier that has separated Willa and Grace, and allows them to relate on an experiential and physical level. At the same time as it opens the door to

communication and provides a new and distinctly bodily connection between Willa and Grace, Grace's gestural language proves insufficient to convey precise meaning or emotion. Intended and received meanings do not always correspond, and Willa wonders, "What happens in the space between what is meant and what is taken?" (167). Furthermore, Willa soon realizes that Grace controls their communication, and that Grace is not talking *with* Willa but, rather, *at* her. "The more complex their language becomes," Willa realizes, "the more it effectively excludes Willa from participating.... Willa becomes increasingly aware that their signing is really about Grace talking to Willa" (114). Grace's new language usefully employs visibility as means of personal connection but, like traditional linguistic modes, it primarily keeps Willa silenced.

Although "Willa sees what they are making not just as a substitute for words, but something instead of, better than words," a language that foregrounds "The body as the word" (113), this new language has not allowed her to express her desire. Willa invents another mode of communication that is more corporeal and comprehensive than Grace's system of gestures. Willa writes messages with her fingers on the bare skin of Grace's neck and back, and "If she goes slowly enough there is a way to say everything" (150-51). Cautiously, Willa cherishes the connection that this new language facilitates between her body and Grace's. Willa's mode of communication holds the promise of a freedom of self-expression that she has never known. Tracing letters on Grace's body is an act of hope and a sign of potential for Willa: "Willa wants to write *and and and* across the warm flesh of Grace's back. The hopeful arc of it. The way it loops out, just like that line of light in the sky, a path that dances between two points, that defines a connection, that says, *Yes, these things can be joined together*" (151). The grammatical

conjunction becomes a metaphor for Willa's desire for Grace, and her hope that Grace can reciprocate her love. Willa and Grace are the "two points" that flirt with "connection"; their linguistic bond indicates that perhaps these *women* "can be joined together" physically, as they have become emotionally. While Willa's new mode of communication gives her access to these thoughts, they remain closeted in her mind. At the end of the novel, Willa's desire is unexpressed in any of the languages that both separate her from and connect her to Grace. Willa must carefully measure her words in any language, for

> The thing she wants to say to Grace is a thing she's afraid to tell her. Afraid that if she spells it out on Grace's smooth, warm skin, Grace will pull away from the words. It is both the most simple and the most complicated thing she's ever wanted to say to someone else and the more she doesn't say it, the more it bangs against the inside of her head, trying to get out. (178-79)

While the women's improvised languages do much for their peace of mind, they do not provide an alternate discursive space in which Willa can freely express her feelings. As close as her tactile language brings her *physically* to Grace, Willa remains guarded emotionally: "don't tell her, she thinks. Don't mention love. Be careful." She thinks that her secret is safe, yet "Willa has no way of knowing how much Grace already senses about what Willa feels" (201). Grace knows that Willa's feelings for her extend beyond an admiration of her skills as an aviator. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick discusses "the radical uncertainty closeted gay people are likely to feel about who is in control of information about their sexual identity.... After all, the position of those who

think they *know something about one that one may not know oneself* is an excited and empowered one – whether what they think one doesn't know is that one somehow *is* homosexual, or merely that one's supposed secret is known to them" (79-80). In Sedgwick's terms, Willa is in "the glass closet"; she doesn't know that Grace knows her secret. Furthermore, she has no idea whether Grace reciprocates her desire.

Vicinus takes issue with some feminists' insistence on the role of language in either enabling or limiting lesbian self-identification. She faults Esther Newton with subscribing to the former camp by insisting that the terminology introduced by late-nineteenth century sexologists opened up a space in language for lesbians to talk about their desires. Yet Vicinus also disagrees with Faderman's allegiance to the converse position, namely that sexological language limited lesbians' ability to self-identify by presenting them with a model that pathologized queer desire. "Both interpretations," insists Vicinus, "though diametrically opposed, give inordinate power to language as either a freeing or a disabling means of self-identification for lesbians" (9). She cautions against generalizations about the power of language and asserts that being able to speak queer desire is not tantamount to being able to live a queer lifestyle, nor does silence about queer desire necessarily imply closetedness. To apply Vicinus' model to *Leaving Earth* is to see why, though their intimate new modes of communication bring Willa and Grace together emotionally, they do not provide a liberating path to free expression of lesbian desire. Vicinus argues that "Too many people, whether experts or beginners, remain excessively concerned with knowing-for-sure... We seem to accept only what is seen and what is said as evidence" (2). Humphreys doesn't provide her reader with such verifiable access to the "true" nature of Willa and Grace's relationship. Does Grace

reciprocate Willa's love? The novel ends with telling, and not telling, words from Grace. A reporter asks,

> "Can you talk about what this was for you?"
>
> Yes. I can.
>
> *Remember me.*
>
> But I won't. Not to the flashbulbs. That's something not for the public.
>
> Grace stretches across and shakes Willa gently by the shoulders.
>
> "Wake up, Willa Briggs," she says. "I've got something to tell you."
>
> (232)

Never shy of cameras in the past, Grace has come to a realization that must remain invisible to the flashbulbs, unheard by the reporters, and unread by the reader. Humphreys prevents us from "knowing-for-sure" exactly what this realization is.

Willa's story reflects a crucial aspect of the lesbian past that must be recuperated: the pervasive experience of thwarted desire and abjected identity. Heather K. Love observes that many contemporary lesbians distance themselves from the most theorized lesbian character in twentieth-century English literature: Stephen Gordon, the protagonist of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Love argues that Stephen's self-hatred, fear, and suffering deter lesbians from identifying with her as a forebear, and insists that

> We need a genealogy of queer affect that embraces the negative, shameful, and difficult feelings central to queer existence.... While it is painful to recognize our continuity with figures like Stephen Gordon, it is through such shaming acts of identification that we come to terms with the

difficulty of queer history and its legacy in the present. (515)

Spectacular visibility in the lesbian historical novel does not guarantee recognition or understanding. Contemporary lesbians can find positive points of affinity with fictional forebears like Villanelle and Nan, but must not concomitantly render the Willas and the Stephen Gordons of queer historiography invisible by repudiating their less triumphant experiences of their queerness. In *Leaving Earth*, Willa's exhibitionist profession allows her to temporarily escape the pressures of living as a closeted queer in 1930s Toronto. Yet high visibility does not lead Willa to accept her sexuality, or to form connections with a queer community. Instead, exhibition is a tempting but hazardous space of negotiation, in which Willa must constantly regulate her visibility and invisibility.

CONCLUSION

Historical and Contemporary Lesbian Subjects: A Visual Lineage

As historiographic metafictions, *The Passion*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Leaving Earth* question the extent to which history is knowable. These three novels interrogate dominant modes of telling history, and embrace a plurality of identities and experiences that cannot be contained, and have not been told, by mainstream historical fiction. Villanelle, Nan, and Willa join a body of fictional lesbian heroines who anchor the lesbian subject to the past while augmenting the present. These women engage in professions and pastimes that render them highly visible to the public, and each heroine becomes adept at regulating which aspects of her identity to brilliantly display, and which to conceal. Whereas Winterson and Waters, in *The Passion* and *Tipping the Velvet*, make spectacular visibility the path to queer self-discovery, in *Leaving Earth*, Humphreys' lesbian subject is constrained by her visibility. Fear of exposure causes Willa to engage in the same practices of simultaneous disguise and display that characterize Villanelle's and Nan's lives, yet her mastery of this technique does not lead to erotic fulfillment or positive affirmation. Theorists continue to question the political utility of privileging the visible in attempts to recuperate a lesbian past. These three works of fiction indicate that debates about visibility take place not only in the realm of theory, but also within contemporary lesbian historical fiction.

As Ellen Bayuk Rosenman says of Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, the fictional heroine becomes "a kind of Everywoman whose lack of a 'real' existence does nothing to mute her explanatory power" (74). Villanelle, Nan, and Willa are not "real" in

the sense of having a verifiable existence in the past, but their stories indicate that the "ex-centrics" of history finally have begun to attract discursive attention and to warrant discursive perpetuation. Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys do not present lesbian visibility as unproblematically liberating, nor do they advocate lesbian invisibility as an entirely safe refuge from the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality. Rather, these lesbian authors depict invisibility as oppressive when imposed from without, but liberating when the lesbian subject can decide when and how to remain invisible. As Terry Castle notes, "Used imaginatively – repossessed, so to speak – the very trope that evaporates can also solidify" (46-47). Even when she exists apparitionally, the lesbian subject is always present in history. Linda Hutcheon suggests that all history is known through its ghostly remnants, rather than through solid, indisputable facts: "Historiographic metafiction reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning. And, even more basically, we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present" (1988: 97). *The Passion*, *Tipping the Velvet*, and *Leaving Earth* are the works of three lesbian authors and historiographers who are dedicated to promoting the contemporary and historical visibility of the lesbian subject by reclaiming her presence from the margins of history and fiction.

Scott Bravmann argues that "Lesbian and gay historical self-representations – queer fictions of the past – help construct, maintain, and contest identities – queer fictions of the present" (4). For as long as "lesbianism remains subject to violent erasure and abjection by cultures driven by homophobia and misogyny, including nominally

progressive and queer ones" (Villarejo 8), it will be necessary for writers of postmodern history and fiction to continue to render visible the lesbian past, thus reaffirming lesbians' existence and legitimacy in the present. Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys use historical fiction to recuperate, nurture, and make visible a lesbian lineage. *The Passion* demonstrates Winterson's dedication to celebrating and spectacularizing the lesbian past. While Winterson has achieved fame as a postmodern novelist, the popularity of her novels is not sufficient to guarantee continued interest in the recovery of lesbian history. As Villanelle's co-narrator Henri insists, "There's no such thing as a limited victory. You must protect what you have won. You must take it seriously" (145). The injunction to "protect what you have won" aptly promotes the further study and production of queer fiction and history. The historical fictions of Sarah Waters and Helen Humphreys join forebears like Winterson in the continued effort to recover lesbian history using highly visible fictional heroines. In *Tipping the Velvet,* Nan recognizes the potential loss of lesbian history and insists that "girls with curious histories" must "bear them carefully" (432). Willa, in *Leaving Earth*, considers the constructedness of history and wonders if "everyone invents the world in order to describe it to someone else" (202). In lesbian historical fiction, history is indeed an invented world, and historical truth is multiple. Winterson, Waters, and Humphreys depict the past as a space of connection to the present and the future. Its recreation is crucial to the maintenance and legitimation of a lesbian lineage.

Works Cited

Allen, Carolyn. *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. 1965. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Bengtson, Helene. "The Vast, Unmappable Cities of the Interior: Place and Passion in *The Passion*." Ed. Helene Bengston, Marianne Børch and Cindie Maagaard. *Sponsored by Demons: The Art of Jeanette Winterson*. Odense, Denmark: Scholars' Press, 1999. 17-26.

Betcherman, Lita-Rose. *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties*. Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975.

Bogdan, Robert. "The Social Construction of Freaks." Ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York UP, 1996. 23-37.

Boyarin, Daniel, Daniel Itzkovitz and Ann Pellegrini, eds. "Strange Bedfellows: An Introduction." *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003. 1-18.

Bratton, Mary. "Winterson, Bakhtin, and the Chronotope of a Lesbian Hero." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 32.3 (2002): 207-26.

Bravmann, Scott. *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Bullough, Vern L. and Bonnie Bullough. "Women and Cross Dressing in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*. Philadelphia:

U of Pennsylvania P, 1993. 145-73.

Burns, Christy L. "Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson's Recovery of the Postmodern Word." *Contemporary Literature* 37.2 (1996): 278-306.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

---. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Carpenter, Edward. *Towards Democracy*. 1883. London: Allen & Unwin, 1921.

Castle, Terry. *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. NY: Columbia UP, 1993.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 3-25.

Cook, Matt. *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

D'Emilio, John. "Capitalism and Gay Identity." Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. New York: Monthly Review, 1983.

Devor, Holly. *FTM: Female to Male Transsexuals in Society*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997.

Doan, Laura and Sarah Waters. "Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History." Ed. David Alderson and Linda Anderson. *Territories of Desire in Queer Cultures: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2000. 12-28.

Douglas, Erin. "Femme Fem(me)ininities: A Performative Queering." MA thesis. Miami U, 2004.

Dow, Bonnie J. "*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18.2 (2001): 123-40.

Duder, Karen. "The Spreading Depths: Lesbian and Bisexual Women in English Canada, 1910-1965." Diss. U of Victoria, 2001.

Earhart, Amelia. "Fought Rain, Fog and Snow All the Way." *New York Times* 19 June 1928: 1.

---. "Miss Earhart Says 'Flying Clothes' Are Unnecessary for Women." *New York Times* 22 June 1928: 3.

Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Fahy, Thomas. "Fractured Bodies: Privileging the Incomplete in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*." *Mosaic* 33.3 (2000): 95-106.

Farwell, Marilyn R. *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*. New York: New York UP, 1996.

"Father Fears Return Hop." *New York Times* 19 June 1928: 3.

Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Fiedler, Leslie. *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.

---. "The Tyranny of the Normal." Ed. Carol Donley and Sheryl Buckley. *The Tyranny of the Normal*. Kent, OH and London: Kent State UP, 1996. 3-10.

Fink, Melissa. "Narrating Gender: Dress-Up, Strap-Ons, and Sexual Performance in

Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*." English 662: Feminist Textuality. McGill University, Montreal. 2004.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. 1978. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Frank, Lisa. "On the Uses of Eleanor Marx." Ed. Paul Le Blanc. *The Working-Class Movement in America*. New York: Humanity, 2000. 37-63.

Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

"Girl Fliers Land After 122 Hours Aloft; Motor Trouble Ends Their Record Flight." *New York Times* 10 Jan 1931: 1.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit." *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York UP, 1996. 55-66.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998.

Hart, Lynda. *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

Hepburn, Allan. "Monstrous Bodies: Freakish Forms and Strange Conceptions in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*." *ARIEL* 33:3-4 (2002): 133-158.

Herr, Cheryl. *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1986.

Herrmann, Anne. "On Amelia Earhart: The Aviatrix as American Dandy." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 39.1 (2000): 77-107.

Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1993.

Humphreys, Helen. *Leaving Earth.* Toronto: HarperCollins, 1997.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction.* New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

---. "'The Pastime of Past Time': Fiction, History, Historiographical Metafiction." Eds. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction.* Durham: Duke UP, 1996. 473-495.

Jakobsen, Janet R. "Queers Are Like Jews, Aren't They? Analogy and Alliance Politics." Ed. Boyarin, Daniel, Daniel Itzkovitz and Ann Pellegrini. *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question.* New York: Columbia UP, 2003. 64-89.

Kohlke, M.-L. "Into History through the Back Door: The 'Past Historic' in *Nights at the Circus* and *Affinity.*" *Women: A Cultural Review* 15.2 (2004): 153-66.

Love, Heather K. "'Spoiled Identity': Stephen Gordon's Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History." *GLQ* 7.4 (2001): 487-519.

"Masher." *Oxford English Dictionary Online.* <http://dictionary.oed.com> Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Mayne, Judith. *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.

McElroy, Bernard. *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Minton, Henry L. "Femininity in Men and Masculinity in Women: American Psychiatry and Psychology Portray Homosexuality in the 1930's." *Journal of Homosexuality* 13.1 (1986): 1-21.

Newman, Beth. "Display, Invisibility, and the Victorian Feminine Ideal." *Subjects on*

Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity. Athens: Ohio UP, 2004.

Palmer, Paulina. "*The Passion*: Storytelling, Fantasy, Desire." Ed. Grice, Helena and Tim Woods. *"I'm Telling You Stories": Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. 103-16.

Pykett, Lyn. "A New Way with Words? Jeanette Winterson's Post-Modernism." Ed. Grice, Helena and Tim Woods. *'I'm Telling You Stories:' Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. 53-60.

Render, Shirley. *No Place for a Lady: The Story of Canadian Women Pilots, 1928-1992*. Winnipeg: Portage & Main Press, 1992.

Reynolds, Margaret and Jonathan Noakes, ed. *Jeanette Winterson: The Essential Guide*. Vintage Living Texts. London: Vintage, 2003.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*. New York and London: Norton, 1986. 23-75.

Rogers, Will. "Why Will Rogers Is Glad Miss Earhart Succeeded." *New York Times* 19 June 1928: 29.

Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. *A Room of One's Own: Women Writers and the Politics of Creativity*. New York: Twayne, 1995.

Russo, Mary. "Up There, Out There: Aerialism, the Grotesque, and Critical Practice." *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial*

Desire. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

---. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1990.

Senelick, Laurence. "Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural Origins of Glamour Drag and Male Impersonation on the Nineteenth-Century Stage." Ed. Lesley Ferris. *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 80-95.

---. *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage, 2002.

Slay Jr., Jack. "Delineations in Freakery: Freaks in the Fiction of Harry Crews and Katherine Dunn." Ed. Michael J. Meyer. *Literature and the Grotesque*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995. 99-112.

Smith, Patricia Juliana. *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.

Speisman, Stephen. "Antisemitism in Ontario: The Twentieth Century." Ed. Alan Davies. *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier UP, 1992. 113-133.

Spring, Joyce. *Daring Lady Flyers: Canadian Women in the Early Years of Aviation*. Lawrencetown Beach, NS: Pottersfield Press, 1994.

Strange, Carolyn. *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. "Introduction: From Wonder to Error – A Genealogy of

Freak Discourse in Modernity." *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York UP, 1996. 1-19.

Toulalan, Sarah. "Extraordinary Satisfactions: Lesbian Visibility in Seventeenth-Century Pornography in England." *Gender and History*. 15.1 (2003): 50-68.

Vicinus, Martha. "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity." *Feminist Studies* 18.3 (1992): 467-97.

---. "Introduction." *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996.

Villarejo, Amy. *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003.

Waddell, Terrie. "Revelling in Dis-play: The Grotesque in *Absolutely Fabulous*." Ed. Alice Mills. *Seriously Weird: Papers on the Grotesque*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. 207-23.

Walker, Mike. *Powder Puff Derby: Petticoat Pilots and Flying Flappers*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.

Ware, Susan. *Still Missing: Amelia Earhart and the Search for Modern Feminism*. New York and London, Norton: 1993.

Waters, Sarah. "'The Most Famous Fairy in History:' Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. 6.2 (1995): 194-230.

---. "Wolfskins and Togas: Maude Meagher's *The Green Scamander* and the Lesbian Historical Novel." *Women: A Cultural Review* 7.2 (1996): 176-88.

---. *Tipping the Velvet*. 1998. London: Virago, 2003.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the

Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." Ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. New York: Meridian, 1990. 195-211.

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Ed. Michael Moon. New York and London: Norton, 2002.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion*. 1987. Toronto: Vintage, 2000.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. Orlando: Harcourt, 2005.

Yourcenar, Marguerite. *Memoirs of Hadrian*. Trans. Grace Frick. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1954.