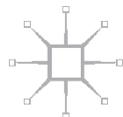
A large, thick black female symbol (a circle with a vertical line and a cross) is positioned on the right side of the cover, partially overlapping the text area.

SARAH WATERS AND CONTEMPORARY FEMINISMS

**EDITED BY ADELE JONES
AND CLAIRE O'CALLAGHAN**



Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms

Adele Jones • Claire O'Callaghan
Editors

Sarah Waters and Contemporary Feminisms

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Adele Jones
Swansea University
Swansea, United Kingdom

Claire O'Callaghan
The University of Nottingham
Nottingham, United Kingdom
Brunel University
Uxbridge, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-1-137-50607-8 ISBN 978-1-137-50608-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50608-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016941621

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of the contributors in our collection for sharing their research on Sarah Waters with us and for responding so diligently to all of our editorial queries. We also wish to thank Peter Carey and Paula Kennedy at Palgrave Macmillan for supporting our project and the anonymous reader for their kind comments and helpful insights on our proposal and the work presented here. Finally, we would like to thank Sarah Waters, her literary agents and John McSpadyen from Little, Brown Book Group for all of their help.

We are very grateful for permission to use copyright material from *Tipping the Velvet*, ©1998 Sarah Waters; *Affinity*, © Sarah Waters 1999; *Fingersmith*, © Sarah Waters 2002; *The Night Watch*, © Sarah Waters 2006; *The Little Stranger*, © 2009 Sarah Waters.

CONTENTS

1 Sarah Waters's Feminisms	1
Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan	
Part I Feminist Foremothers	23
2 Teasing (Out) a New Generation: The Writing of Sarah Waters	25
Lucie Armitt	
3 Quick and Queer: Love-Life-Writing in <i>Orlando</i> and <i>Affinity</i>	43
Kathryn Simpson	
4 'Accompanied by Ghosts': The Changing Uses of the Past in Sarah Waters's Lesbian Fiction	61
Natasha Alden	
Part II Second-Wave Hauntings	79
5 Anxious Affinities: Gender and <i>Déréliction</i> in Sarah Waters's Neo-Forties Novels	81
Jessica Gildersleeve	

6	The Feminist Gothic in <i>The Little Stranger</i>: Troubling Narratives of Continuity and Change	97
	Gina Wisker	
7	The Feminist Politics of Textuality: Reading the Feminism of Julia Kristeva in <i>Fingersmith</i>	115
	Adele Jones	
8	'Better a prison ... than a madhouse!': Incarceration and the Neo-Victorian Fictions of Sarah Waters	133
	Mari Hughes-Edwards	
	Part III Beyond the Second Wave	153
9	Written on the Body: Wounded Men and Ugly Women in <i>The Little Stranger</i>	155
	Helen Davies	
10	'My Dress Is Not a Yes': Coalitions of Resistance in SlutWalk and the Fictions of Sarah Waters	173
	Louisa Yates	
11	'Grisley "L" business': Re-valuing Female Masculinity and Butch Subjectivity in <i>Tipping the Velvet</i> and <i>The Night Watch</i>	193
	Claire O'Callaghan	
	Afterword: Sarah Waters and the Future of Feminisms	215
	Bibliography	227
	Index	243

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Natasha Alden is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary British Fiction at Aberystwyth University, UK. Her monograph, *Reading Behind the Lines: Postmemory, History, Story* (2014) explored the uses of the past in a selection of recent historical novels, focussing on postmemory as a lens through which to understand innovation in historical fiction representing the world wars. She is currently working on a monograph on the uses of the past in contemporary queer fiction. Her publications include articles and book chapters on Sarah Waters, Pat Barker, David Jones, Adam Thorpe, Ian McEwan and Emma Donoghue, and her research interests include memory, the historical novel and queer writing.

Lucie Armitt is Professor of Contemporary English Literature at the University of Lincoln, UK. Her principal publications include *Twentieth-Century Gothic* (2011); *Fantasy Fiction* (2005); *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (2000); (ed.) *George Eliot: Readers' Essential Guide to Criticism* (2000); *Theorising the Fantastic* (1996); (ed.) *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* (1991). She is a founding Executive Steering Group Member of the Contemporary Women's Writing Association and a former Associate Editor of the international peer-reviewed journal, *Contemporary Women's Writing*.

Helen Davies is a Senior Lecturer in English Studies at Teesside University, UK. Her first book, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2012, and her second monograph, *Neo-Victorian Freakery: The Cultural Afterlife of the Victorian Freak Show*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2015. She has published articles in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, *The Oscholars*, and *Autopsia* journal, and was the co-editor (with Claire O'Callaghan) of a special issue of *Journal of Gender Studies*: 'Feminisms, Academia, Austerity' (September 2014).

Jessica Gildersleeve is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. She is the author of *Elizabeth Bowen and the Writing of Trauma: The Ethics of Survival* (2014) as well as articles on other women writers, including Agatha Christie, Rosamond Lehmann and Pat Barker. She is currently working on a critical study of Christos Tsiolkas, and on the collection *Elizabeth Bowen: Innovation, Experiment and Literary Reputation* (with Patricia Juliana Smith).

Mari Hughes-Edwards is a Reader in English Literature at Edge Hill University, UK, having taught at the universities of York, Liverpool, Manchester, Liverpool JMU, and Salford. Originally a medievalist, she now focuses equally on contemporary British Literature, particularly on gender and sexuality. Her current contemporary research involves the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy, Susan Hill's spectral fictions, and the neo-Victorian narratives of Sarah Waters. Recent monographs include *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices* (2012) and her monograph on the complete poetic works of Carol Ann Duffy, for which she was awarded a British Academy grant, is forthcoming.

Adele Jones is a tutor in English at Swansea University, UK. She is a founding member of the Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network and her main research interests lie in this area. Her research also focuses on feminist theory (particularly psychoanalysis), space and place, and gender and sexuality in contemporary literature. She has published on the works of Michèle Roberts and Sarah Waters.

Claire O'Callaghan lectures in English at Brunel University, UK and works in researcher development at the University of Nottingham. Her research focuses on gender and sexuality in contemporary literature and culture (especially the works of Sarah Waters), feminist theory, neo-Victorianism, and the lives and afterlives of the works of the Brontë sisters. She is an editorial board member of the *Journal of Gender Studies* and was the co-editor (with Helen Davies) of a special issue on 'Feminisms, Academia, Austerity' (September 2014).

Kathryn Simpson is a Senior Lecturer in English at Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK. Her main research interests are in modernist writing, particularly the work of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield. Other research interests include the work of contemporary writers, Sarah Waters, Ali Smith and David Mitchell. She is author of *Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf* (2008).

Gina Wisker is a Professor of Contemporary Literature and Higher Education at the University of Brighton, UK, where she teaches Gothic and women's writing. Gina is current chair of the Contemporary Women's Writing Association (CWWA) and has published widely in twentieth- and twenty-first-century writing, including *Margaret Atwood: an Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* (2012) *Horror*

Fiction (2005), *Teaching African American Women's Writing* (2010) and essays on Nalo Hopkinson and postcolonial Gothic, Angela Carter and Poe, and women in H.P. Lovecraft's work. She is currently completing *Contemporary Women's Gothic* (2015).

Louisa Yates is Director of Collections and Research at Gladstone's Library and a Visiting Lecturer in English at the University of Chester, UK. She was a Gladstone Fellow at the University of Chester, where she completed her doctoral thesis—'Between Texts: the Resonant Fictions of Sarah Waters'—in 2011. Her research interests include neo-Victorian fiction and critical theory and she has recently published on the figure of the child in neo-Victorian families. She is currently working on the social and sexual afterlives of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre.

Sarah Waters's Feminisms

Adele Jones and Claire O'Callaghan

On 17 December 2008, Sarah Waters participated in a photo-shoot for one of the UK's oldest, feminist, charitable organisations, The Fawcett Society, of which she is a long-standing supporter. For the photo Waters wore one of the Fawcett's famous t-shirts emblazoned with the iconic declaration 'This is what a feminist looks like'. Standing with her hands in her pockets, Waters looks relaxed. Despite her casual demeanour, though, her gaze is in earnest; this is someone who takes feminism seriously yet someone whose feminist dedication is something of a second nature, something habitual, it is 'just an instinctive thing', as she has put it elsewhere.¹ Posted as part of the feminist gallery on Fawcett's website and associated social media outlets, the photo appears alongside Waters's response to the question, 'Why are you a feminist?'² She comments that 'feminism is part of a wider struggle against all inequalities' only to then retort, 'Surely the real question should be, not "Why are you a feminist" but "Why aren't you one?"'³ This carefully phrased response is important, for it not only registers how *being* a

A. Jones (✉)
Swansea University, Swansea, UK

C. O'Callaghan
The University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
Brunel University, Uxbridge, UK

feminist is a fundamental belief and part of Waters's everyday outlook, but signals implicitly her resistance to the idea of feminism as something outdated and stigmatised. Together, her photo and response indicate how *being* a feminist remains a necessity in a world that repeatedly tries to tell us that equality between the sexes is achieved and that feminism is no longer relevant. Here, Waters does not confirm what the terms "feminism" and "feminist" mean to her specifically, she only goes as far as evoking a particular political outlook and resists elaborating on its specificity. This collection, devoted to the exploration of contemporary feminism in Waters's writings, will not only testify to the fact that feminism as a political movement and a form of literary enquiry is still very much alive but will seek to elucidate what Sarah Waters's feminisms are in textual practice.

Waters's oeuvre is characterised by its dedication to an extraordinary range of feminist concerns, though until now much academic enquiry has either assumed or elided her feminist focus. Patriarchy, female confinement, madness and misogyny, exploitation, oppression, repression and subordination, pornography, abortion, marriage and spinstership sit alongside her passionate portrayals of female agency, desires, aesthetics, female sexual expression, and, of course, lesbianism, to name but a few. She is keen to debunk gendered and sexual stereotypes, highlight the way in which class intersects with gender and sexuality to maintain female oppression, and demonstrate the structural mechanisms that enable patriarchy's stranglehold. Yet while Waters's feminist textual practice is focused on a range of feminist issues, her writing—as this collection shows—does not sit comfortably within any singular conception of the terms "feminist" or "feminism". Holistically, Waters's novels are united by their 'powerfully woman centred' focus, but her feminist dedication speaks to a plethora of perspectives from contemporary feminist theories.⁴ The chapters presented here direct us to the ways in which Waters's portrayals of women and gender comfortably accommodate numerous feminist concerns from across the so-called "waves" of feminism: first, second, third (and even fourth?) wave feminisms and postfeminisms, as well as literary feminisms concurrently. There is no singular blueprint to elucidate Waters's feminism nor do any of her novels articulate any singular feminist narrative or discursive concern. But at the same time, the readings of her work presented by the scholars in this project seek to unravel and evaluate in more detail some of the particular feminist issues at stake in her writing. The collection, then, has a dual focus: the feminisms entwined in Waters's work and the enquiry into the different feminisms themselves.

1.1 FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

A renewed interest in women's history was one important achievement in the early years of the Women's Liberation Movement, something famously captured by Sheila Rowbotham and others during the infamous Ruskin History Workshop in Oxford in 1970. Through her fiction Waters reflects this concern. Her writings attend avowedly to women and women's histories; as she herself put it in an interview promoting her most recent novel, *The Paying Guests* (2014), 'I pay attention to women's history [...] To their secret history and lives, acknowledging meaning in their domestic lives'.⁵ Waters frequently explores the way in which dominant notions of womanhood have, at different points in the past, placed narrow parameters upon the way in which women experienced their lives. This concern is discernable, for instance, in the portrayal of homophobia that prevents Kitty Butler from living openly in a passionate relationship with Nancy Astley in *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), in the cruel power dynamic that makes Maud Lilly tell her story in *Fingersmith*, so that we 'might appreciate the forces that work upon me, making me what I am',⁶ and in the ridicule endured by both Kay Langrish in *The Night Watch* (2006) and Caroline Ayres in *The Little Stranger* (2009). Through these fictional characters, Waters explores how the personal is political, but she also interrogates precisely what the personal, the political, and their intertwining has meant at different points in women's history.

It is no coincidence that the period settings of Waters's fictions also correlate to the parameters of modern feminist history. Her earliest novels—*Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith*—take place in the late nineteenth century, across the period of first-wave feminism (in which, as is well known, women focused primarily on the campaign for legal enfranchisement), while the more recent books—*The Night Watch*, *The Little Stranger* and *The Paying Guests*—are situated in the nineteen forties and twenties respectively. These are the historical moments that shaped the advent of the second wave of feminism, commonly accepted as 1949, the year in which Simone de Beauvoir's classic work *The Second Sex* was published. That Waters sets her novels in and across these formative periods in women's history directs us to her concern for the issues that are at stake in the development and formation of feminism and feminist history. She is a writer acutely aware of women's marginal status in the traditionally patriarchal disciplines of history and historiography. Her writings not only challenge such marginalisation but contribute to the redefinition of 'what counts as history worth telling in the first place'.⁷

Jerome de Groot has noted how Waters's academic collaboration with Laura Doan marks 'a key moment in the development of [Waters's] public persona as a historical novelist'.⁸ Reflecting this, Kaye Mitchell acknowledges how Waters's novels have been:

crucial in the development of historical fiction as a genre, contributing to its enormous increase in popularity in recent years—on the 2009 Booker shortlist on which *The Little Stranger* appeared, for example, every single novel could be classified as a 'historical novel'.⁹

Mitchell's observation is important. For Waters, like many other contemporary women writers, the genre of historical fiction enables them and their female protagonists 'a way into history through the back door'.¹⁰ Sometimes her use of history is strategic and restorative, that is, in her feminist project Waters often recuperates lost or elided women's histories. Sometimes her use of history is creative, reflecting what Jennifer Terry describes as 'deviant historiography', a 'method for mapping the complex discursive and textual operation at play in the historical emergence of subjects who come to be called lesbians and gay men'.¹¹ At others times it is both of these things simultaneously; she is 'making up lost time' as she describes it in a collaborative piece with Laura Doan referred to by de Groot.¹² But although she is engaged in the creative re-imagining of history, this does not amount to the depiction of feminist utopias. To the contrary, not only does Waters often take on issues that cause divisions between women (such as class and economics) but her fictions also articulate the persistent challenge that feminist endeavour presents to women. Freedom, happiness and the resolution of feminist concerns are rarely granted easily to women in Waters's novels, but hope and the possibility of change are often (though not always) found in her trademark ambiguous endings.¹³

As Mitchell also notes, the question of Waters's use of feminism in the context of historical fiction 'runs through the critical reception of [Waters's] work' because, as noted, 'each of her novels engages with issues of gender politics in some manner and each evinces a feminist interest in women's lives, bodies, histories and relationships'.¹⁴ Yet because of her use of the historical genre, scholarly approaches to her work have, in the main, tended to frame her work most prominently in relation to the nineteenth century and nineteenth-century feminisms, something understandable given the period settings of these works. Thus, while Jeannette King

places Waters's early fictions in the context of a 'wider project, pioneered by second wave feminism, of rewriting history from a female perspective, and recovering the lives of women who have been excluded or marginalised', she primarily situates the work within a historical context, noting the way in which Waters's fictions speak to the broad discourses surrounding the "woman question" in the late nineteenth century (as the title of Kings's book indicates).¹⁵ Cora Kaplan, meanwhile, finds that *Fingersmith* articulates a 'coda' for an enlightened approach to understanding gender politics in the nineteenth century; one that brings to Victorian studies the benefit of hindsight and new insights offered by second-wave feminism, all of which offer greater understandings of women's history.¹⁶ And, although she does not reference first-wave feminism directly, Rosario Arias proposes that Waters's portrayal of female confinement—in *Affinity*, in particular—"incarnates the nineteenth-century image of the woman who lived outside the prescribed normativity, the celibate woman or spinster, and the lesbian".¹⁷ Even readings of gender in Waters's more recent novels set in the 1940s are, for many scholars, in thrall to the politics of the nineteenth-century past. Ann Heilmann, for instance, finds that *The Little Stranger* plays out 'a dual historical framework, the Victorians and the 1940s' that draws attention to the ways in which the post-war period remained haunted by unresolved issues of trauma and class that are at once nostalgic but problematised.¹⁸

Focus on the historicity of gender at play in Waters's writings has provided invaluable insights into the novels. As Rachel Carroll sees it, however, this approach emerges out of a privileging of the novels as 'historically grounded', because priority is given to the way in which Waters appropriates 'the sensibilities of late-nineteenth-century literary conventions'.¹⁹ A consequence of this is that an evaluation of her engagement with contemporary feminisms or their relevance for the present day is often overlooked, and it is significant that in her own academic writing, Waters herself has bemoaned the way in which 'preoccupation with the form of the historical novel [...] has obstructed analysis of its content'.²⁰ At stake is a potential oversight concerning Waters's significance as a contemporary feminist author, for she not only uses the historical form to comment on the present *and* modern gender politics but her writing is actively informed by them. Notably Mark Llewellyn gestures to this possibility in his discussion of *Affinity*, where he notes that while Waters employs 'a modern interpretation of gendered Victorian social norms which looks backwards for its settings', the novel also looks to

'the present for its wider implications'.²¹ Louisa Yates, however, goes further, noting in her evaluation of *Tipping the Velvet* that while Waters is attentive to the gendered politics of the past, her use of genre (neo-Victorianism) appropriates the past as a stage to rehearse gendered and sexual concerns and debates of the present.²²

That Waters's feminist textual politics should be informed by contemporary feminisms in particular should be no surprise. After all, born in the late 1960s, her formative years took place across the years of the Women's Liberation Movement. Although she has said that her childhood was 'nothing memorable' and focused mainly on watching 'an awful lot of telly, sci-fi, horror and Doctor Who',²³ Waters grew up in the 1970s and the 1980s, a time of "women's libbers" when 'feminism was a public activity'.²⁴ Feminism's public "face" was manifest in and across political protests taking place at the time. The original Take Back the Night marches, for instance, took place across the early 1970s. The antinuclear and antimilitarisation of the women's Greenham Common Peace camp ran from 1981 onwards, and the end of the 1980s saw organised and widespread resistance to Clause 28 of the Local Government Authority Act of 1988 that prohibited authorities from promoting homosexuality publicly (to name just a few). Thus, as Victoria Hesford notes, feminism in the 1970s and 1980s 'was part of the everydayness of British life'.²⁵

This political climate certainly found expression in Waters's reading habits and later, via her academic writing, something which culminated in her doctoral thesis on gender and sexuality in contemporary historical gay and lesbian writing.²⁶ From this, Waters produced a number of research articles, all of which are connected by their shared feminist agenda.²⁷ These feminist readings and contexts, and the gaps she identified in them, inspired her creative writing. Thus Lucie Armitte astutely concludes in her chapter in this collection:

Waters is ahead of us in the games she knows we want to play with her works, laying out before us in fictional form the pre-existing theoretical concepts for which she knows we are searching. After all, it seems hard to believe that Waters could have written *Tipping the Velvet* without knowing Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990); unlikely that she could have written *Affinity* without being familiar with Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1984–5); improbable that she could have written *The Little Stranger* without reading Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993).²⁸

1.2 CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST CRITICISM

Diana Wallace notes that ‘the questions which some of the best [historical] novelists [...] ask about the relationships between gender, power, nationality, sexuality, religion and violence are still, sadly, all too relevant’ today.²⁹ Within the body of scholarship devoted to Waters, several scholars have been attuned to the ways in which Waters’s writing draws on, and is informed by, contemporary feminist theory. But what, specifically, has this body of work identified so far?

Rachel Carroll’s work has provided two persuasive explorations of heterosexuality in *Affinity*. Carroll demonstrates that, in *Affinity*, Waters’s representation of the trope of “ghosting” speaks to Terry Castle’s famous invocation of lesbianism as apparitional. The novel’s portrayal of the figure of the spinster highlights the way in which unmarried women continue to be glossed and misted over in a culture in which, as Adrienne Rich pointed out, heterosexuality (as an institution) requires women to comply with the expectation of marriage and children. Deviation from such gendered “scripts” means that non-normative expressions of female gender leads to cultural invisibility.³⁰

In a second discussion of *Affinity*, Carroll also finds that Waters’s displacement of heteropatriarchal gender and sexual categories facilitates a means of rethinking the historical “origins” of heteronormativity as much as queer identities and histories.³¹ Although a radically different topic, in a discussion of *Fingersmith* in relation to third wave feminism, Nadine Muller finds that Waters’s third novel similarly enables a rethinking of gender relations but this time with regard to mother-daughter relationships and feminist genealogy itself.³² Noting that matrilineal genealogies are a received metaphor in feminist discourse, Muller argues that the complex web of fractured mother-daughter relations in *Fingersmith* reflect a broader discursive debate between second and third feminism, in which the influence and knowledge of the former both shapes and restricts the definition of the latter. Although Muller comes to few easy conclusions surrounding this long-standing debate, her contextualisation of *Fingersmith* as playing out a broader theoretical debate is important in the context of the small but growing body of literary criticism on Waters that is informed by contemporary feminism.

In a different context, elsewhere both Nadine Muller and Claire O’Callaghan have examined the politics of pornography at play in *Fingersmith*. Where Muller sees the novel situated within third-wave

feminist discourses on pornography, O'Callaghan sees the novel as in dialogue with, and responsive to, the feminist debates deriving from the so-called feminist "sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s, in which scholars were divided about the nature and function of women's engagement with pornography.³³ Remaining with sexual politics, O'Callaghan has also found that the expression of lesbian sexuality in *Tipping the Velvet* celebrates the valorisation of lesbian sexuality articulated by numerous feminist scholars.³⁴

Away from the specificities of gender and sexuality, however, a number of scholars have used contemporary feminisms to investigate other themes and concerns in Waters's writings. Adele Jones, for instance, writes that *The Night Watch* 'is concerned with the interplay between identity formation and subjectivity, space and time'.³⁵ Jones draws on the work of feminist geographer, Doreen Massey, and Judith Halberstam, to argue that Waters's representations of both domestic and public places are spaces in which the voices of those marginalised characters become articulated, and the formations of those spaces are changed by the circulation of the non-normative desires expressed by the characters. Although this analysis speaks to the concerns expressed by, for example, O'Callaghan in her exploration of domestic space,³⁶ the discussion in Jones's article focuses on reading Waters through a feminist lens rather than reading feminism through Waters's representations.

Significantly, a number of scholars have also identified some of the cultural politics of lesbian feminism at play in Waters's writing. Paulina Palmer, for instance, views a connection between lesbian feminism and lesbian reading and writing practices in Waters's first four novels. Contextualising her approach within postmodern theoretical perspectives and contemporary constructions of the lesbian writer and reader, Palmer emphasises the metafictional and transhistorical nature of Waters's writings in an attempt to account for why her novels prove so popular to modern audiences.³⁷ Sonja Tiernan, meanwhile, has explored the strategic deployment of lesbian-feminist referents in *Tipping the Velvet*.³⁸ More recently, Rachel Wood has explored the role of walking practices as a lesbian-feminist trope in *The Night Watch* (although notably Wood is hesitant to label such practices explicitly as lesbian-feminist and opts for 'queer' as an umbrella term).³⁹

Waters's exploration of gender and women's sexuality has also been discussed in relation to queer theory, for, as Mitchell points out, one of the ways in which the relationship between the past and the present in Waters's writings are regularly attended to is through use of the term 'queer'.⁴⁰ Queer

readings of Waters's writings can be divided into those which focus on gender, with which this collection is concerned, and those that use queer strategies to analyse broader aspects of Waters's writings.⁴¹ With regards to the former, Sarah Gamble, Cheryl Wilson and Mandy Koolen have all provided useful readings of the queer narrative strategies deployed in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity*. Gamble, for instance, has focused on narrative and gender and sexual discourse, exploring the meaning of gendered and sexual authenticity in *Tipping the Velvet* and other neo-Victorian fictions.⁴² Wilson and Koolen, have investigated, in different ways, how *Tipping the Velvet's* framework is queer in and of itself, and how it connects and yet disconnects with Victorian conceptions of sexuality and sexual performance.⁴³ Wilson and Koolen's historicist-based readings return to the earlier point of prominence given by scholars to historicity in Waters's writing. They offer interpretations of the ways in which Waters queers history, something also found in Emma Parker's assessment of gender and the country house narrative in *The Little Stranger*.⁴⁴

More relevant to the representation of gender as discussed in this collection is, Helen Davies's consideration of *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity* in her monograph, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2012). Davies argues that Waters's use of voice (and its gendering) attends to the multiplicity of identity politics articulated by queer discourse. Davies is keen, however, to move beyond conceptualising the subversive in her use of queer theory and instead focuses on the way in which Waters's use of queerness functions as a feminist strategy to articulate concerns surrounding passivity and women's agency.⁴⁵ Likewise, in her discussion of *The Night Watch*, Kaye Mitchell's reading of the queerness of time attends to what Mitchell views as the political effect of the nonlinear structure of Waters's fourth novel.⁴⁶ Mitchell argues that the significance of Waters's fourth novel is not simply its articulation of queer (here gay and lesbian) experiences in the past via an atypical narrative pattern, but also its complication of, and challenge to, dominant conceptions of homosexuality and asynchronicity as backward. Reflecting this concern for the gender political in Waters's portrayal of time, O'Callaghan echoes some of Mitchell's findings in her reading of domestic space in Waters's first four novels, suggesting that Waters's queering of domestic space reclaims the domestic—typically the realm of the heteronormative—as expressive of queer identities and desires.

In his evaluation of Waters's use of the term 'queer', Jerome de Groot considers the complexity of the term at play in her work at both a thematic and discursive level, noting that the author's use 'of the word seems a minor

wink to the reader' as it 'reaches out, explicitly brokering a relationship between the historically authentic and the contemporary'.⁴⁷ De Groot goes on to discuss in detail the different ways in which Waters deploys the term and how it is often signified. What he does not make explicit, however, is that with regard to gender and sexuality in existent criticism devoted to the novel, the discussion of queer theory is rarely problematised. On the one hand, as Davies has pointed out, 'it has become a critical commonplace to note the influence of Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance' in Waters's novels (especially *Tipping the Velvet*).⁴⁸ On the other, 'queer' is often conflated with, accepted as analogous to, or shorthand for, feminism. This is not strictly the case. As Elizabeth Weed has noted, although 'When feminism meets queer theory, no introduction seems necessary', since both theories seek to emancipate gendered and sexual minorities from heteropatriarchal oppression, it does not mean that feminism and queer theory are easily commensurate'.⁴⁹ The theories *do* have many similarities. As Weed points out both are connected, 'directly or indirectly, to political movements outside the academy, in some cases to overlapping movements'.⁵⁰ Both are interdisciplinary modes of enquiry, and both constitute themselves in 'critical relation to a set of hegemonic social and cultural formations',⁵¹ assessing how gender and sexuality are controlled and maintained according to arrangements in the dominant social order. Both approaches also offer theoretically informed solutions as to how heteronormative regulation should be resisted.

However, while feminism and queer theory 'share commonalities and affiliations', they are also, as Weed notes, 'something of an unmatched pair'.⁵² For many scholars, feminism is in opposition to queer theory when it comes to matters of gender and sexuality because feminism's and queer's 'modes of reference, their priorities and call for action' are antagonistic: queer theory's interest in discursive construction and linguistics is typically contrasted with feminism's interest in the structural analysis of concepts such as patriarchy and capitalism.⁵³ Queer's exploration of the deconstruction and the fluidity of identities is distinct from feminism's focus on the materiality of the body and how the female body is violated through violence.⁵⁴ Moreover, queer focuses on 'local' and individualised 'sites of performative transgression' while feminisms engage a broader, global struggle concerning women's participation in 'state, political and economic arenas'.⁵⁵

Returning to existing scholarship on Waters, the tension between feminisms and queer theories is one that O'Callaghan has explored extensively

elsewhere by tracing the way in which the recurrent trope of pearls in Waters's novels often speaks to both feminist and queer theoretical significations. In this collection, two chapters extend critical analysis of the dual presence of feminism and queer theory in Waters's writing; Kathryn Simpson takes up this line of enquiry by exploring the queer/feminist overlap in Waters's *Affinity* through the frame of Virginia Woolf's classic gender-bending novel, *Orlando* (1928); and Louisa Yates pursues this avenue through an exploration of parallels between recent feminist/queer activism and expressions of sexual resistance in Waters's novels. It is Waters's skill as a novelist that her writings can offer such rich, compelling and sophisticated modes of gendered enquiry.

1.3 WATERS AND A TRADITION OF WOMEN'S WRITING

Waters is well aware of her own position within—and in relation to—a tradition of women writers, something which Armitt, Simpson, Natasha Alden and Jessica Gildersleeve attend to in this collection. Waters has credited the work of numerous women authors as influencing her work, including Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Taylor and Iris Murdoch among others.⁵⁶ She has also noted numerous women writers of lesbian novels as inspiration and influence, notably Sylvia Townsend Warner, Mary Renault, Ellen Galford and Isabel Miller among the most well-known. Reviewers, too, have drawn parallels to other women writers. In her famous review of *Tipping the Velvet*, Mel Steele gleefully compared Waters's writing to that of Jeanette Winterson.⁵⁷ Yet Waters herself has been quick to indicate that one of the differences between her work and Winterson's centres around their different approaches to the stability of the categories of sex and gender, something Winterson rescinds as part of a 'modernist tradition, which I don't feel part of', and which Waters retains with her emphasis on women, their lives and histories.⁵⁸ Philip Hensher, like Gina Wisker here, also situates Waters within a tradition of female Gothic and female middlebrow authors of the mid-twentieth century. Hensher views Waters as making 'a great link between the secrecy of queer sexualities and the secrets and revelations of the Gothic tradition. I think she's a big feminine novelist in the large-scale English ensemble tradition of Rosamund Lehmann [and] Elizabeth Bowen.'⁵⁹ Wisker, in this collection, draws parallels between Waters and Charlotte Brontë, Susan Hill and Daphne Du Maurier, while in a very different essay, Gildersleeve reads an affinity between Waters's neo-forties novels and the writing of Elizabeth Bowen.

But there other celebrated feminist writers who are also clearly influential for Waters, the most notable being Angela Carter. In an interview with Abigail Dennis in 2008, Waters says of Carter that what she:

loved about her was that she was very literary, in the sense that she was very aware of the canon and literary tradition, and was a very ambitious writer herself, with this wonderful linguistic kind of verve. But she was also a feminist, utterly feminist, and was using all her literary stuff to push an explicitly feminist agenda.⁶⁰

Both writers share an awareness of a tradition of women's writing that is informed by feminist literary theory. In 1972, during the Women's Liberation Movement, Adrienne Rich wrote of re-vision as, 'the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction'.⁶¹ Rich claimed that this feminist textual practice was 'more than just another moment in cultural history, but would distinguish itself rather as an act of survival for women'.⁶² For both Waters and Carter, an emphasis on women's drive to self-knowledge more 'than a search for identity' lies at the heart of their feminist literary agendas.⁶³

1.4 THE CHAPTERS

A fuller understanding of Waters's engagement with contemporary feminisms requires an exploration of her work from different perspectives: situating her work within a tradition of feminist women's writing; contextualising her novels as in dialogue with the concerns of previous (and particular) feminist moments and theories, especially those of the second wave (a period we have noted coincided with Waters's childhood and subsequent academic development); and exploring how her work speaks to current and/or ongoing feminist movements and concerns in the twenty-first century. It is for this reason that the essays in this volume are split across these three broad areas, and together they provide a sustained analysis of Waters's engagement with contemporary feminist literary, cultural and political theory. This split broadly follows the wave metaphor within which feminisms are usually placed, though we acknowledge that this organising structure does, in some ways, elide the ongoing nature of feminist activism and enquiry.

The first section of the collection, entitled 'Feminist Foremothers', focuses on literary feminisms and the feminist intertextual relationships

and strategies at play in Waters's writing. The second essay by Lucie Armitt opens with an important discussion of Waters's novels in relation to the feminist literary strategies articulated by Susan Gubar in her 1981 essay "The Blank Page" and the *Issues of Female Creativity*, and, later, Gubar's pioneering literary criticism produced with Sandra Gilbert. For Armitt, the orientation of Waters's writing is avowedly second wave in its impulse. Armitt argues that through the narrative connections between storytelling and women's bodies, Waters's novels bridge the (often) negative connotations of female creativity associated with the second wave of feminism (in the sense that creativity is often linked with women's suffering) and a newer, more emboldened appraisal of the power of that creativity to be read as feminist. Armitt also contends that the ways in which Waters is situated—and situates herself—in a tradition of women's writing *and* literary criticism (evaluated by Gilbert and Gubar), suggests that Waters's self-conscious awareness of the feminist strategies identified by these bastions of feminist literary criticism are tropes and signifiers that she herself carries forward in her fiction.

The next two essays, by Kathryn Simpson and Natasha Alden, address the different ways in which Waters's work is in dialogue with, and responsive to, the writings of Virginia Woolf, often considered one of literary feminism's modern founders. For Simpson, the intertextual relationship between Woolf's 1929 novel, *Orlando*, and Waters's *Affinity*, offers new insights into feminist understandings of lesbian desire. Simpson argues that both novels not only trouble heteronormative constructions of women's sexual identities in the past but reductive perceptions of non-normative female sexuality in the present. Woolf and Waters, Simpson argues, share a penchant for subtly articulating the damaging effects of homophobia and the repressive effects of Victorian ideals of femininity and gender norms. But, through their unique tales of lesbian passion, *Orlando* and *Affinity* are united in their shared utility of queer conceptions of female same-sex desire as a feminist strategy to explore the intersection of agency and sexuality. For Simpson, this parallel creates an important dialectic between Woolf and Waters as feminist women writers.

Building on Simpson's discussion of the relationship between Woolf and Waters, Natasha Alden takes up a similar concern from a different perspective by exploring the ways in which Waters uses notions of the past in her narratives of lesbian passion. Alden traces a discernible trajectory in Waters's feminist writings that move from an early preoccupation with queer discourses to more overt feminist politics in her latter works.