

## Not My Mother's Daughter: Matrilinealism, Third-wave Feminism & Neo-Victorian Fiction

*Nadine Muller*

(University of Hull, England, UK)

### **Abstract:**

The plot of Sarah Waters' third novel, *Fingersmith* (2002), is based on a complex web of matrilineal narratives, which eventually are uncovered as fictions. This essay will analyse these matrilineal fictions in terms of their influences on the novel's protagonists Sue and Maud, as well as considering the novel's matrilinealism first as a feminist metaphor for third-wave feminism and secondly as a metafictional device commenting on neo-Victorian fiction's relationship to the past. Finally, it will highlight the genre's similarities to third-wave feminism in terms of their shared concern for and treatment of the relationship between past and present.

**Keywords:** feminist fiction; feminist generations; matrilineal narratives; metafiction; metahistory; mother-daughter relationships; neo-Victorian fiction; postfeminism; third-wave feminism; Sarah Waters.

\*\*\*\*\*

If the daughter is a mocking memory to the mother – then the mother is a horrid warning to her daughter. 'As I am, so you will be.' (Angela Carter 2006: 144)

In *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), Angela Carter explores the significance of women and their sexualities in the pornographic writings of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), as well as discussing the role of the pornographer himself. Through an analysis of these works' protagonists (the female libertine and the virtuous female victim), Carter considers de Sade's representations of relationships between mothers and daughters, sex and marriage, and women and pornographers respectively. In the epigraph above, she illustrates the potential influence a matrilineal history can have on a daughter's life. Both the idea of the daughter as "a mocking memory" and the notion of the mother as a "horrid warning" acknowledge that a daughter's awareness of her mother's past and her consciousness of being her mother's progeny can have a significant impact on the way a daughter performs her own present identity. As Carter suggests, this performance is characterised by a paradoxical connection between imitation of and escape from the inherited maternal narrative, since the daughter can re-enact as well

---

as alter it, but never wholly free herself from her existence as her mother's sequel.

Such matrilineal genealogies have not only become a significant issue in feminist theory and a recurring motif in contemporary women's writing,<sup>1</sup> but they have also become an increasingly prominent theme in neo-Victorian fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, though by no means limited to the mother-daughter dyad. In Sebastian Faulks' *Human Traces* (2005), for example, Jacques Rebière desires to cure his older brother Olivier from his mental illness because Olivier is the last person alive from whom Jacques can obtain knowledge about their dead mother, knowledge that he considers the key to his own identity. Similarly, the frame narrative of John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004) relies on the protagonist's obsession with the secrets surrounding his mother's family tree and the significances these secrets may have for him. Sarah Blake's *Grange House* (2000), Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Emma Darwin's *The Mathematics of Love* (2006), and Jane Harris's *The Observations* (2006) are only a few of the numerous further examples in which matrilineal narratives are of considerable importance.

Amongst this range of texts, however, Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) distinguishes itself by presenting us with particularly complex and fragmented matrilineal genealogies and narratives. The novel centres on the maternal prehistories of Susan Lilly and Maud Trinder, two girls who were swapped by their mothers shortly after their births and who have consequently grown up as Susan Trinder and Maud Lilly, ignorant, for most of the narrative, of who their real mothers are. Sue, the illegitimate daughter of the gentlewoman Marianne Lilly, grows up with the baby farmer Mrs Sucksby in Lant Street, London. Once old enough to write, Mrs Sucksby's biological daughter Maud, relegated to an asylum during her early years, experiences the fate that Sue was spared through the swap: a life as the secretary of Christopher Lilly (Marianne's brother) at the secluded country house Briar. On Sue's eighteenth birthday, the girls are supposed to be told the truths about their mothers and each to receive half of Marianne's fortune, but Mrs Sucksby intends to sacrifice Sue for her biological daughter and appropriate both girls' inheritances. With the help of the villain Richard Rivers, she makes Sue believe that she is to assist Rivers in tricking Maud into marrying him by playing Maud's new lady's maid. Supposedly, after the marriage ceremony, Maud will be declared mad and confined to a

---

madhouse, leaving Rivers and Sue with her fortune. However, it is Sue who is actually disposed of at the asylum, while Maud, who has been promised a share of her fortune and a life free from her uncle, is brought to Lant Street against her will and comes to know the truth about her own mother as well as Sue's, and about Mrs Sucksby's plan.

This article will establish the significance of *Fingersmith's* complex network of matrilineal narratives with regards to the problematic identity politics of the novel's female protagonists, the gendered, criminal economics of its plot, and the ambiguous narrative solutions it eventually offers to its main characters. Taking into account theories on the significance of matrilinealism as a feminist metaphor, I propose reading *Fingersmith's* matrilineal narratives and the mother-daughter relationships they define as a comment on the (dis)continuities between feminist pasts and presents at the turn of the millennium, more specifically in relation to feminism's second and third waves.<sup>2</sup> The final part of my argument will examine matrilinealism as a metafictional comment on neo-Victorian fiction's relationship to the (nineteenth-century) past and highlight the genre's similarities, in this respect, to third-wave feminism.

### 1. "A fiction of herself": Matrilineal Narratives & Female Identity

Sally Shuttleworth notes that "mothers in Victorian fiction are distinguished by their absence" (Shuttleworth 1992: 44). In numerous novels and particularly in the sensation genre, deviant and/or mad mothers, despite their frequent absence, commonly have a threatening and dangerous presence in their daughters, who by heredity carry at least the potential for or tendency toward their mothers' behaviours or illnesses. Through its changeling plot, *Fingersmith* destabilises both this pathologised genealogy between mother and daughter as well as the idea of hereditary female identity more generally, since the swap of Sue and Maud results also in an exchange of their maternal narratives. Each girl grows up believing the other's actual or fabricated maternal prehistory to be her own, hence believing in what I will call a matrilineal fiction. In London's criminal underworld, Sue's matrilineal fiction of her mother, purportedly a thief and murderess executed for her crimes, is told with pride rather than shame or fear:

---

“What a thief!” Mrs Sucksby would say. “So bold! And handsome?”

“Was she, Mrs Sucksby? Was she fair?”

“Fairer than you; but sharp, like you, about the face; and thin as paper. We put her upstairs. No-one knew she was here, save me and Mr. Ibbs – for she was wanted, she said, by the police of four divisions, and if they had got her, she’d swing.” (Waters 2002: 11)

Mrs Sucksby also claims that she has witnessed Sue’s mother’s death on the gallows from the window of the room in which Sue was born, a fiction spatially linking the girl’s birth with her mother’s death and vice versa. Sue’s own admiration of this narrative is reflected in her thoughts about her mother’s death; not only does she prefer her to be dead rather than mad – an irony considering that her real mother is the madwoman of Maud’s matrilineal fiction – but she is also thankful that her mother was hanged for a “proper” crime:

I supposed it was a pity my mother had ended up hanged; but since she was hanged, I was glad it was for something game, like murdering a miser over his plate [...] some girls I knew had mothers who were drunkards, or mothers who were mad: mothers they hated and could never rub along with. I should rather a dead mother, over one like that! (Waters 2002: 12)

As she threatens the Lant Street bully John Vroom with shears and the words “bad blood carries. Bad blood comes out” (Waters 2002: 80), it becomes clear that Sue believes she has inherited her mother’s criminal potential. Indeed, she fosters this idea of a hereditary maternal identity throughout the novel. Later, when Sue realises she has fallen in love with Maud, the person she intends to betray, she considers the possible consequences of a return to Lant Street without the promised money: “They would laugh in my face! I had a certain standing. I was the daughter of a murderess. I had expectations. Fine feelings weren’t in them. How could they be?” (Waters 2002: 135) Sue’s identity as her mother’s daughter evidently causes her and others to anticipate that her character must be similar, or even identical, to that of the supposed murderess, an assumption

---

which engenders surprise at her own ability to have “fine feelings” at all, feelings which do not exist in her maternal fiction. Equally, her belief in sharing her mother's pedigree and her ambition to live up to her mother's criminal career provide her with confidence when she assists Maud in her escape from Briar in order for Maud to marry Rivers: “All my nervousness had left me, and I was suddenly calm. I thought of my mother, and all the dark and sleeping houses she must have stolen her way through, before they caught her. The bad blood rose in me, just like wine” (Waters 2002: 151). When Sue returns to London after her escape from the madhouse, she does so ignorant of the fact that Maud has also been betrayed and is convinced that it is Maud, not Mrs Sucksby, who tricked her into the asylum and who has now taken her place at Lant Street, an assumption which makes her exclaim: “Oh I'll kill her, tonight!” (Waters 2002: 476). Based on the fact that during their time together Sue has (un)consciously adopted and imitated aspects of Maud's identity (later allowing Rivers to pass Sue off as a ‘lady’ to the doctors and install her in the asylum under Maud's name), Lucie Armitt argues that now “Sue also mirrors Maud's previously articulated desire for murder” (Armitt 2007: 26) – albeit redirected from a male to a presumed female victimiser. However, considering Sue's belief in the matrilineal fiction that renders her mother a murderess, I would argue that this desire represents her final re-enactment of what she believes is her inherited maternal identity.

In Maud and her maternal fiction, we find very similar concepts of inheritance and identity, but not the admiration evident in Sue's case. Having spent the first years of her life in the asylum in which Marianne Lilly died, Maud is convinced it was here that Marianne gave birth to her as well as dying. This idea again links the daughter's birth to her mother's death. When Maud is able to read and write, Christopher Lilly installs his ‘niece’ as his secretary at Briar, where he raises her to copy and catalogue his collection of pornographic texts. Commenting on the locket with her mother's picture, he remarks that “wear[ing] her mother's likeness [...] will remind her of her mother's fate, and may serve to keep her from sharing it” (Waters 2002: 181) and makes Maud believe she has inherited a potential for her mother's madness. Like Sue, Maud thus feels she has become heiress to the identity of the woman she thinks gave birth to her, an idea that particularly manifests itself in her mind in the course of one her uncle's peculiar punishments:

---

Then he has my knife taken away, and I must eat with my fingers. The dishes he prefers being all bloody meats [...] my kid-skin gloves grow crimson – as if reverting to the substance they were made from [...] I am served it [wine] in a crystal glass engraved with an M. The ring of silver that holds my napkin is marked a tarnished black with the same initial. They are to keep me mindful, not of my name, but of that of my mother; which was Marianne. (Waters 2002: 196)

Maud perceives that by drinking wine from the glass marked with her mother's initials, she, like her gloves through the contact with bloody meat, is "reverting to the substance" she was made from – her mother's blood and what she believes to be her mother's history. Although her maternal fiction of madness is thus a potentially harmful inheritance, she fosters the idea of sharing her mother's blood in a similar fashion to Sue. When Maud forces herself to carry out Gentleman's plan and consequently betrays Sue despite her feelings for her, she suspects that the ability to do so must be a sign of "madness, my mother's malady, [which is] perhaps beginning its slow ascent in me" (Waters 2002: 270). This continually present fear evokes a hatred for her mother, which becomes so strong that Maud wishes she could kill the already dead Marianne Lilly, a desire she fulfils by imagining "it was my birth that killed my mother. I am as to blame for her death as if I had stabbed her with my own hand" (Waters 2002: 122). Reinforcing the link between her own birth and Marianne's death, Maud has developed an excessively bloody fiction accompanying this idea of being her mother's murderess:

I imagine a table slick with blood. The blood is my mother's. There is too much of it. There is so much of it, I think it runs, like ink [...] There is only, still, that falling blood – *drip drop! Drip, drop!* – the beat telling off the first few minutes of my life, the last of hers. (Waters 2002: 179-180)

Evidently, Maud fosters both the idea of "having her mother's blood *on* her hands" (Armitt 2007: 27, emphasis added) as well as *inside* herself.

This murderous fantasy also draws attention to the fact that Maud's identity as her mother's daughter is inescapably linked to her existence as

---

Mr. Lilly's secretary: she describes her mother's blood as "run[ning] like ink," the liquid with which her uncle's hands and tongue are "stained all over with" (Waters 2002: 75) and which, of course, is the fluid in which his pornographic literature and his index of it are written. Indeed, Maud perceives that by making her his secretary Mr. Lilly "has made me like a book" (Waters 2002: 124), a comparison implying that her identity, like Mr. Lilly's collection, is created and maintained by a man and for a man's pleasure and profit. Her association of maternal blood with ink consequently suggests that, with her belief in her inheritance of her mother's blood, she has also inherited her uncle's oppression, that is, she is not only heiress to a matrilineal fiction, but a fiction written by men. This connection, then, hints at an indivisible and ironic link between matrilineal inheritance and patriarchal oppression, namely that the latter is continued by constituting an ineradicable part of female heredity. Rivers therefore tells Maud that "your history as your mother's daughter, your uncle's niece [is] in short all that marks you as yourself" (Waters 2002: 227), and when Maud finds out that she is neither Marianne Lilly's daughter, nor Christopher Lilly's niece, she has to realise that her "life was not lived [...] it was a fiction" (Waters 2002: 337). This fiction of an inherited maternal identity and of inherited patriarchal oppression, then, was not only created by her uncle but also, and in the first instance, by Marianne Lilly and Mrs Sucksby, while it was ultimately fostered and performed by Maud herself. *Fingersmith* thus not only "concerns itself with *living with* a maternal prehistory" (Armitt 2007: 17, emphasis added), but, more specifically, with *re-enacting* it.

However, both girls not only cultivate their own fictional, matrilineal identities, but also each other's. Rivers is practiced in the creation and alteration of fictions, because he "spent a year putting French books into English [...] putting them slightly different each time, and pinning different titles on them, and so making one old story pass as twenty brand-new ones" (Waters 2002: 21) – an act similar to the means by which he creates new identities for the female protagonists. He illustrates Maud to Sue not as a girl who copies and reads pornographic texts, but as "an innocent, a natural [who] has been kept from the world" and who is "of sense, understanding and knowledge [...] perfectly shy" (Waters 2002: 30; 24). As he rightly predicts, Sue soon believes this false narrative of Maud because "[s]he will be like everyone, putting on the things she sees the constructions she expects to find" (Waters 2002: 227). Accordingly, at their first meeting Sue

---

is convinced that Maud “was an infant, she was a chick, she was a pigeon that knew nothing” (Waters 2002: 66), unaware that she herself is the intended “pigeon” who will be betrayed. Maud similarly is told that Sue is nothing more but “a sort of thief – not over-scrupulous, not too clever in her ways” (Waters 2002: 226), an illustration which is clearly proved false by Sue’s skilful escape from the madhouse and return to London. Still, Maud likewise believes Gentleman’s construction of Sue’s character and is confident that the girl only sees her “white flesh [...] but not the quick, corrupted blood beneath” (Waters 2002: 251). Accordingly, the first meeting of the young women is obscured by the fictions constructed by Rivers and those which they believe of each other. Both meet each other as fictions of themselves, fictions presented to them by Rivers, but which are, first and foremost, engineered by a female force, Mrs Sucksby.

## 2. A “sinister liberty”: Women, Crime & Gender Economics

This female complicity in oppression and exploitation – in the form of Maud’s and Sue’s intended betrayal of each other and, most of all, Mrs Sucksby’s initiation of the criminal plot – is simultaneously a product and generator of the maternal fictions which complicate the female protagonists’ sense of identity. This is evident if we consider *Fingersmith*’s gender economics through its complex network of criminal transactions and through its relation to the problematic connection established between female identity and hereditary matrilineal narratives.

Feminist critics, philosophers and anthropologists of previous decades have agreed that in patriarchal societies women usually serve as commodities within transactions between men (be it through marriage, prostitution, or other cultural customs); consequently, in such a structure, they are unable to act as autonomous transaction partners themselves.<sup>3</sup> In this case, for a woman, the act of stealing may represent a criminal offence that enables her to acquire a certain degree of agency by disrupting the masculine system of exchange, and it is the attempt of such as disruption that we repeatedly encounter in *Fingersmith*. Sue’s maternal fiction of a thieving and murdering mother is hence also a maternal fiction of female agency, a detail crucial to Sue’s participation in what she believes to be Rivers’ plan, since the criminal plot seems to offer her exactly such agency. Striving to live up to her mother’s supposed criminal talents and unaware that she herself will be betrayed, Sue believes that she will be a partner in a

---

transaction with Rivers, in which Maud and her fortune are the currency. Clearly, Mrs Sucksby has constructed Sue's maternal fiction carefully from the night of the infant swap onwards: when Sue is initially in doubt about whether to play her part in the plan proposed, Mrs Sucksby is able to persuade her easily by promising that Sue's mother "would have done it, and not given it a thought. And I know what she would feel in her heart – what dread, but also what pride, and the pride part winning – to see you doing it now" (Waters 2002: 47). For Sue, participation in the treacherous plan is thus a chance to continue her dead mother's criminal career and to perform the identity she believes to have inherited from her, an identity including a criminal female agency.

If we reconsider Maud's situation at Briar in such terms, it becomes evident that in her case theft promises not imitation of but escape from the matrilineal identity defined by madness and oppression by her uncle. Arguably, Maud may not seem to be the object of exchange in a physical sense, since her value for her uncle and his companions lies not within her physical person so much as within her function as the sexually innocent reader of Mr. Lilly's pornographic books. Yet without his niece, Christopher Lilly's meetings would lack the attraction his guests "speak about [...] as of some fabulous creature: the handsome girl at Briar, whom Lilly has trained, like a chattering monkey, to recite voluptuous texts for gentlemen" (Waters 2002: 224). Hence, Lilly does not accord her any autonomous subjectivity or personal agency in the proceedings. Maud's value as a commodity resides in the pleasure men take in her readings of books which, like her, have been created by men and for men's entertainment. Consequently, she is a currency in her uncle's homo-social transactions, a "property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985: 26). Her function within these male transactions, then, is fundamental to her agreement to Rivers' plan. He tells her that the plot he presented to Sue is only a pretence to assist the betrayal of Sue herself and, consequently, Maud believes "[s]he will persuade me, first, into marriage with him, then into a madhouse. But there she will take my place (Waters 2002: 227). As in Sue's case, it is the belief in her maternal fiction that drives Maud into Mrs Sucksby's criminal plot. Rivers reminds her that, since it is her maternal prehistory which renders her Lilly's commodity, Sue's confinement in a madhouse under the name Maud Lilly "will pluck from your shoulders the weight of your life, as a servant would lift free your

---

cloak and you shall make your naked, invisible way to any part of the world you choose – to any new life – and there re-clothe yourself to suit your fancy” (Waters 2002: 227). For Maud, the attraction of Gentleman’s plan therefore lies in the opportunity to rid herself of what she has come to know as her maternal prehistory and the patriarchal oppression inherited with it, an opportunity which she describes as “the liberty – the rare and sinister liberty – he [Rivers] has come to Briar to offer. For payment he wants my trust, my promise, my future silence, and one half of my fortune” (Waters 2002: 227). Sue’s position in her transaction with Rivers is thus put into perspective by this agreement between Rivers and Maud: she is not, as she believes, a transaction partner, who will profit from a cooperative deceit of Maud. Instead, she is the currency that Maud plans to exchange for money and liberty, that is, for the escape from her own name, her matrilineal identity, and her uncle’s tyranny.

Ironically, the agency both girls believe to gain from each other’s exploitation is rendered meaningless by the revelation that Mrs Sucksby has made them both the goods and currencies of her very own transaction. Ultimately, her undertaking is the result of an exclusively female transaction between herself and Marianne Lilly, a transaction which, due to the financial compensation both girls are to receive on their eighteenth birthdays, could have been an exchange leaving no one at a loss, despite the fact that Maud grows up under the oppression of Marianne’s brother and, as Marianne rightly predicts, comes to “hate her own mother’s name” (Waters 2002: 333). However, Mrs Sucksby betrays the dead woman and raises Sue solely with the intention to utilise her as a currency to be exchanged for Maud and Sue’s own share of Marianne’s fortune. Since at the madhouse, Sue is assumed to be Maud Lilly and thus Gentleman’s wife, he is the legal recipient of the other half of the money, which is his reward for bringing Maud back to Mrs. Sucksby. Hence, through their beliefs in their matrilineal fictions, both young women become female commodities of Mrs Sucksby.

What can be observed in Sue’s and Maud’s agreements with Rivers, as well as in Mrs Sucksby’s pacts with him and Marianne, is that the agency offered and the method with which it is acquired reinforce rather than challenge patriarchal gender economics. Each woman is willing to utilise the other as an exchangeable good for her own profit that is, they are willing to reinforce the status of women as commodities in masculine transactions by imitating the masculine role of the transaction partner who trades in

---

women, hence not altering the status or nature of the commodity. Consequently, the role of the transaction partner remains a gendered and masculine one, independent of sex. The only aspect altered in comparison to the male transactions of Mr. Lilly is the commodity's value. Clearly, for Mrs Sucksby, Sue's value lies in her exchangeability for both Maud and Maud's money. Maud, however, possesses not only a relative monetary value, in respect of her share of the fortune of which Mrs Sucksby will claim ownership; she is also the object of Mrs Sucksby's maternal love, giving her a value within herself, though never wholly apart from her role as a sort of 'possession' of her mother, just as she earlier functioned as her presumed uncle's 'property'. The acquisition of female agency thus replicates and reinforces the masculine system of commodification, exchange, and exploitation of women. While *Fingersmith* is, then, indeed a novel which explores the "possession and betrayal between women" (Kaplan 2007: 111), it does not portray these relationships as "fraught with its own power relations" (Kaplan 2007: 112) but as fraught with those of patriarchal gender economics.

Nevertheless, Marianne Lilly's and Mrs Sucksby's initial agreement does represent a challenge to these economics and to patrilineal inheritance, since their contract is drawn up "in defiance of [... Marianne's] father and brother" (Waters 2002: 532), guaranteeing that Marianne's fortune is to be passed on to her daughter rather than to her daughter's male guardian or husband. In her betrayal of Marianne, Mrs Sucksby utilises the marriage laws of mid-nineteenth century British society which, as Elaine Showalter points out, rendered women "legally powerless and economically marginal" (Showalter 1985: 73). Mrs Sucksby's manipulation of this system thus enables her to use Rivers' marriage to Maud to rid herself of Sue, securing – with Rivers – Marianne's full fortune rather than merely Maud's half of it. Hence, Mrs Sucksby defies a patrilineal system of inheritance on the one hand, but also Marianne's will on the other, proving that none of the agencies sought by Sue, Maud, or Mrs Sucksby through the adoption of a masculine role within an established patriarchal system can offer more than merely a sinister liberty.

### 3. "But I am still what he made me": Women, Identity & the Past

What solution, if any, does *Fingersmith* propose, then, for its female protagonists, whose lives and sense of identity are undeniably distorted and

---

determined by their matrilineal narratives, by fictions they believe are their pasts? For Maud, rejection and escape from her identity as Marianne's daughter does not have the positively liberating effect she initially hoped for. To the contrary, the loss of her maternal prehistory is, if at all, bound to be a problematic success, considering that her matrilineal fiction and the male oppression attached to it are all that comprises her identity. Hence the loss of the maternal fiction appears to Maud as "gaugeless, fearful, inevitable as death" (Waters 2002: 230). This dying process, so to speak, is initiated when she gradually starts to transfer her own identity onto Sue by transforming the London thief's looks into those of a lady – those of herself – according to Rivers' plan. From this point on, Maud perceives herself as "a ghost" (Waters 2002: 288), as the visible disembodied soul of a dead person, because the substitute "new life" Rivers promised she could "re-clothe" (Waters 2002: 227) herself in is not yet available to her. Maud experiences this loss of her identity as Mr. Lilly's niece and Marianne Lilly's daughter not as a self-liberation, but instead as a process which renders her literally self-less. If Mr. Lilly has made her like a book and if, as she says, she "suppose[s] all printed words to be true ones" (Waters 2002: 186), then her eventual destruction of her uncle's personified books at the end of the novel becomes, symbolically, another part of her erasure of her old identity, something that initially poses difficulties, but nevertheless results in relief:

Still it is hard – terribly hard, I almost cannot do it – to put the metal for the first time to the neat and naked paper. I am almost afraid the book will shriek, and so discover me. But it does not shriek. Rather, it *sighs*, as if in longing for its own laceration [...] (Waters 2002: 290, original emphasis)

Similar to the destruction of Mr. Lilly's texts, Rivers' and Mrs Sucksby's deaths are necessary if both Sue and Maud are to define themselves outside of their matrilineal identities. By murdering Rivers, Maud kills the person who has created the fictional identities as which Sue and Maud first met one another. By remaining silent when Mrs Sucksby claims to have committed his murder and is subsequently hanged for it, Sue (although at this point still ignorant of the fact that Mrs Sucksby has betrayed her) and Maud (who committed the actual murder) kill the woman

---

responsible for the creation of their matrilineal fictions and their betrayal. In Maud's case, her fiction of being her mother's murderess thus becomes true, but, more generally, it eliminates the authors of Sue's and Maud's matrilineal identities, who have to die if the young women are to define themselves outside the artificial prehistories constructed for them.

Finally, and most importantly, Sue and Maud both have to become aware that the maternal prehistories they believed to have inherited are untrue, and both react in similar ways when realising this. Once Maud has discovered that she is not Marianne Lilly's but Mrs Sucksby's daughter, she loses herself in the past which, she now knows, was not meant to be hers: "I give myself up to darkness; and wish I may never again be required to lift my head to the light" (Waters 2002: 345). However, following her recovery from this state "comes the remembrance [...] of [...] who and what I am" and she realises that most importantly she "*must get to Sue*" (Waters 2002: 347-348, original emphasis), that is, she must focus on and embrace the present rather than her past. Sue, having found out that her mother "was not a murderess, she was a lady" (Waters 2002: 533) and that her own foster mother planned her deceit, becomes ill with fever and falls into a similar distressed state to Maud. However, Sue attributes this more to her loss of the girl from Briar than the loss of her maternal fiction: "I still wept, and cursed and twisted, when I thought of Mrs Sucksby and how she had tricked me; but I wept more when I thought of Maud" (Waters 2002: 353). Again, recovery is dependent on a conscious return to the present, when Sue finally decides to find Maud because, unlike the fictions of their pasts, their presents, and hence their future relationship, can still be changed.

This process of realisation is followed by acceptance. In order to "become properly defined *as* women" (Armitt 2007: 28, original emphasis), not children defined by others' authority over their existence, both Sue and Maud must recognise that their lives and hitherto performed identities were someone else's inventions. They also have to acknowledge that, nonetheless their fabricated maternal fictions have shaped them to the point of becoming part of their present, and perhaps permanent, identities. As Maud eventually explains on Sue's return to Briar, neither Mr. Lilly's death nor her destruction of his books changes the fact that she, as a product of him and her artificial matrilineal fiction, continues to exist: "'Don't pity me,' she said, 'because of *him*. He's dead. But I am still what he made me. I shall always be that. Half of the books are spoiled, or sold. But I am here'"

---

(Waters 2002: 546, original emphasis). Clearly, she accepts that the fiction remains a substantial aspect of who she is now or might become in the future, an aspect which she is unable to erase with the adoption of someone else's identity or the destruction of the texts that dominated her life. It is only this realisation that allows Sue and Maud to meet anew, though never perhaps wholly outside the shadow of Rivers' or Mrs Sucksby's fictions.

However, at the same time Briar itself remains representative of a dark past. As Sue notes, "It was only two or three o'clock but the dusk seemed gathered in the shadows already, waiting to creep and rise" (Waters 2002: 537). The women's new-found liberty remain a sinister ones, even in what Waters herself calls the novel's *happy* ending (Waters 2006). Indeed, *Fingersmith's* open ending is inherently ambiguous. On her return to Briar, Sue finds that Maud has started to utilise the "education" her uncle has given her and now writes and sells pornography herself, texts which, she explains to Sue, are "filled with all the words for how I want you" (Waters 2002: 547). Arguably, Maud does not occupy the passive space of the reader and copier of already written narratives anymore but, instead, has become the active creator of her own stories by utilising her uncle's tools and expressing her homosexual desires and fantasies. Waters' novel ends with a hint that Maud teaches Sue to read and write, as Maud "put the lamp upon the floor, spread the paper flat; and began to show me the words she had written, one by one" (Waters 2002: 548), sharing her newly gained agency with the so far illiterate Sue.

Nevertheless, this ending, which Cora Kaplan finds "ironic, but in no way punitive" (Kaplan 2007: 113) is much less liberating if we consider the previously established links between literacy, exploitation and oppression. As Maud tells us early on in the novel's second part, it was her meticulous handwriting which made her uncle take her to Briar and confine her there as his secretary: "I understand from his words that I have marked the paper with the marks of angels. Later I will wish that I had scrawled and blotted the page. The fair characters are my undoing" (Waters 2002: 182). Ink is not only directly connected to Maud's oppression by Mr. Lilly, as previously established, but it is also referred to throughout the novel as a form of poison. Consequently, Maud's uncle explains that by making her read and write his texts, "I have touched your lip with poison" (Waters 2002: 199). Maud adopts this idea and later threatens Rivers on their wedding night with the words: "Touch it and die. I have poison in me" (Waters 2002: 293).

---

Inevitably, the link between literacy, ink, and poison raises the question whether or not Maud poisons rather than liberates Sue by teaching her how to read and write, a possibility which significantly complicates Kathleen Miller's assumption that "[t]hrough the inversion of the gendered hierarchies involved in reading and writing, *Fingersmith* offers a corrective to the inheritance of a male-dominated pornography trade" (Miller 2007). Maud now occupies her uncle's space, literally – by living at Briar – as well as symbolically. In that case, she would once again merely be imitating a masculine role, adopting rather than challenging traditional gender roles within an already established, oppressive, and now exclusively female context. Equally, her own act of writing is a questionable appropriation of "the sexual and the literary imagination" (Kaplan 2007: 113): Maud admits that her writing is only profitable when she "write[s] swiftly" (Waters 2002: 547), a comment which justifies the suspicion that her texts represent "a lesbian profiteering from male desires by simulating fantastic sex on paper – presumably mainly heterosexual copulation" (Kohlke 2009: 349-350).

#### **4. Destabilising Matrilinealism & Breaking Feminist Waves**

As Tess Cosslett has pointed out, matrilineal narratives and "the matrilineal metaphor" (Cosslett 1996: 7) have frequently been utilised in both feminist criticism and contemporary feminist fiction. In the case of the former, matrilinealism has often functioned within the "recovery of the 'foremothers'",<sup>4</sup> while in fiction the portrayal of different generations of women "can figure feminist progress, and/or a way to a powerful female past" (Cosslett 1996: 7; 8). In fiction, the mothers within the familial feminist metaphor – or "matrophor" (Quinn 1997: 179)<sup>5</sup> – are usually representative for feminism's second wave of the 1960s and 1970s, while the figure of the daughter has come to stand in for the third wave, commencing in the 1990s.

Although I will argue that this is certainly applicable to the mother-daughter relationships in *Fingersmith*, the distorted and fragmented nature of the novel's matrilineal fictions also functions as a critical comment on the applicability and appropriateness of the "matrophor" itself. As discussed previously, the matrilineal histories Waters presents us with are, eventually, revealed to be non-existent and hence rendered fictitious. Sue is not the daughter of a murderess and Maud is not the offspring of a madwoman; yet, both have performed and fostered identities determined by these matrilineal

---

fictions. Consequently, any generational links established through their belief in the inheritance of their mothers' blood are entirely artificial and illusory. The mothers about whom they fantasise do not exist, and neither do their similarities to their 'daughters'. While utilising the familial feminist metaphor of matrilinealism, *Fingersmith* simultaneously undermines its very concept and the cross-generational continuity between feminist waves thereby implied: for the novel's daughters, any affiliation to their mothers is not biologically given, but psychologically constructed.<sup>6</sup>

This destabilisation is further substantiated in Maud's and Sue's handling of their matrilineal fictions, as well as in the novel's plot development. Both girls are unable to define themselves as individuals outside the (l)imitations of their matrilineal fictions, until Mrs Sucksby – a mother figure of sorts to both of them – is dead. As Astrid Henry explains in *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (2004), many second-wave feminist critics of the 1960s and 70s perceived that their movement as “a motherless one” and suggested that “there is something politically empowering about psychological matricide”, something which, as daughters of non-feminist mothers, subsequently enabled them to emerge “as political agents and makers of change” (Henry 2004: 9). However, as discussed previously, in *Fingersmith* rejection and death are not effective solutions. Mrs Sucksby's (and, for that matter, Rivers') death is symbolically necessary to terminate Sue's and Maud's fictional identities. Yet even as they are rendered parts of their pasts, their matrilineal fictions become enduring components of their future identities, though no longer comprising them entirely.

A question arises here with regards to a new feminism that inevitably defines itself in relation to its predecessor by calling itself “third wave”: How can the ‘new’ feminism classify itself as distinctly different without either discarding its necessary feminist forerunners or uncritically accepting these forerunners' feminist practices? I would argue that while *Fingersmith* does not provide a definite answer, it certainly offers a suggestion in the form of its ending and Maud's ambiguous occupation as a female pornographer. Despite Mrs Sucksby's criminal intentions, which defy not only Marianne's brother and father but also Marianne herself, both Sue and Maud eventually profit from the agreement their mothers signed. Implicitly, apart from Maud's wage as a writer, they ultimately live on what their mothers, in this case materially, enabled them to inherit. While their

---

dealing with their matrilineal fictions thus proved difficult and complex, their acceptance of their financial and material inheritance seems surprisingly unproblematic. In contemporary feminist politics, a similar phenomenon is evident: if the second-wave movement considered itself motherless, it nevertheless built on the substantial political achievements of its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forerunners, the first-wave feminists and suffragettes. Similarly, feminists of the early 1990s, such as Katie Roiphe, fiercely criticised and rejected the second-wave movement and claimed that its politics were, for young women of their own generation, oppressive and restraining in terms of individuality and sexuality.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, whether consciously or unconsciously, this generation profited and continues to profit from the second wave's hard-won successes, such as access to equal education and increased job opportunities, to name only a few.

Another issue regarding feminist self-definition is illustrated in the situations attached to the protagonists' matrilineal fictions in *Fingersmith*. The initial intention to defy a patrilineal system arises out of very different circumstances: Marianne's experience of her father's and brother's oppression as a gentlewoman and Mrs Sucksby's need for money as a working class criminal. Similarly, this carries forward to Sue and Maud, when the latter suffers from her uncle's tyranny, while the former finds in Mrs Sucksby a rather self-sufficient and independent – if criminal – mother figure. In terms of social class the novel hence represents women as individuals rather than a unified group, acknowledging that as women, as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake put it, “what oppresses me may not oppress you” (Heywood and Drake 1997: 3). Along similar lines, the question of sisterhood is addressed through Mrs Sucksby's betrayal of Marianne and through Sue's and Maud's willingness to take advantage of each other for their own benefit. While, chronologically, patriarchal oppression is initially at the very heart of the novel's plot, it subsequently becomes a force lingering in the background of female mutual betrayal and exploitation, reminding us that (patriarchal) oppression need not occur in a male form. Amongst women, then, “what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and what oppresses me may be something you participate in” (Heywood and Drake 1997: 3). While in earlier women's fiction, as Cosslett notes, potentially “the mother is also a sister, another woman with whom

there can be a feminist solidarity” (Cosslett 1996: 8), in *Fingersmith* this potential is, if not completely eradicated, at least deeply complicated.

Hence if sisterhood remains a problematic concept for third-wave feminism *within* their own generation (due to differences in, for example, race, social class, or sexual orientation), as well as *across* feminist generations (due to changing socio-political and socio-cultural backgrounds), then it seems inevitable that new feminist theories must accommodate and even approve of contradiction between different feminisms for different women. Heywood and Drake put it as follows:

Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are the products of all these contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether. (Heywood and Drake 1997: 3)

When applying third-wave feminism as a conceptual model to Waters’ text, it seems significant that Sue and Maud must accept their matrilineal fictions despite the fact that they are completely at odds with their actual maternal prehistories, yet remain part of their formative identities as women. In her attempt to theorise the difference between postfeminism and third-wave feminism, Sarah Gamble explains that the latter not only “feel[s] at ease with contradiction” but even “accept[s] pluralism as a given” (Gamble 2001: 52). So too must Sue and Maud, and the novel implies as much through its acknowledgment of the differences in the agencies and agendas between women of different social classes.

Maud’s final role as a writer of pornography constitutes a further feminist issue of the novel that cannot be ignored. For decades, pornography has been the cause of disagreements between feminists and, as noted previously, the text affords a far from unambiguous view on the subject.<sup>8</sup> As Waters recently explained, *Fingersmith* “ultimately tries to at least gesture towards the possibility that women could write their own porn themselves” (cited in Dennis 2008: 43). Melanie Waters comments on this potentially positive development in relation to third-wave feminism:

---

By describing sexual experiences and fantasies in their own words, but in an established pornographic rhetoric, it might be argued that the authors of these works successfully utilise the tools by which anti-pornography feminists claimed women were oppressed in order to subvert the gendered power differentials that were suspected to underlie this oppression. (Waters 2007: 261)

However, considering that ink is a poisonous liquid throughout the novel and that, at Briar, Maud literally occupies her uncle's (masculine) space, one should be wary of a strictly positive view of the novel's ending.

Yet, what interests me about Waters' suggestion is the appropriation of something previously employed for another purpose and/or in another context. Indeed, at least in *Fingersmith*, I would argue that matrilinealism as metaphor for third-wave feminism highlights a central concern about constructive ways of dealing with what has come before (be it events, identities, or generations) and of reflecting on how these shape the present without either dismissing or simply imitating previous movements or refusing to acknowledge one's own indebtedness to their achievements. Any continuity between feminist generations, then, is a fictional one, characterised – like Waters' matrilineal fictions – by fragmentation as much as unity, by disavowal as much as obligation.

##### **5. Neo-Victorian Fiction & Third-wave Feminism**

What connects third-wave feminism with recent neo-Victorian fiction, I believe, is exactly their concern with the relationship between past and present. For the final part of this article, then, I want to illustrate how the two are linked through *Fingersmith's* matrilineal narratives, which, I will argue, can be read as a metafictional and metahistorical comment on neo-Victorian fiction's relationship to the nineteenth century.

Linda Hutcheon characterises historiographic metafiction as a genre which “can often enact the problematic nature of the relation of writing history to narrativisation and, thus, to fictionalisation” (Hutcheon 1988: 93), a feature which, in *Fingersmith*, is represented by and forms the very essence of matrilinealism. What Sue and Maud suppose are their maternal histories, the facts constituting their pasts and their identities as daughters, are nothing more than fictional narratives constructed by Mrs Sucksby and

---

Mr. Lilly respectively, but which nevertheless have functioned as ‘truths’ for them for most of their lives. Fiction can thus create a history, while history can be turned into fiction, a point which is also evident in other examples of neo-Victorian fiction. If anything, Harwood’s *The Ghost Writer*, for example, makes an even stronger claim regarding the non-existent distinction between history and fiction, when, eventually, it turns out that the ghost stories written by the protagonist’s great-grandmother contain more truth about the family secrets than his aunt’s letters, which he believed to be authentic, but which – like Maud’s and Sue’s matrilineal fictions – constitute part of an elaborate trap into which he is lured. Similarly, in Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*, the heroine’s autobiographical fiction is a highly unreliable narrative about her life as a prostitute in Victorian London, and Holman’s *The Dress Lodger* includes a social explorer who is shown to constantly dramatise and hence misreport the circumstances of the prostitute he interviews.

Consequently, multiple histories and truths exist, since “narrative singularity and unity [are challenged] in the name of multiplicity and disparity” (Hutcheon 1988:90). The events of *Fingersmith* are narrated first from Sue’s and then from Maud’s point of view rather than in chronological order, suggesting that history as a concept, due to its subjectivity, cannot exist as a singular entity but has to be defined in the plural and depends on the extent and nature of the narrator’s knowledge. That narratives and the truths they intend to convey are always inevitably influenced by the persons who create them, and by their historical, ideological and social background (see Hutcheon 1988: 18), is emphasised by the fact that Maud (re)writes pornography, a genre which was previously intended to arouse men, in order to now express her own sexual desires. Simultaneously, by “piec[ing] together a melodramatic plot of [her] own, drawing on all those aspects of Victorian culture which still fascinated and intrigued [her]: asylums, pornography, bibliophilia, the world of servants, the world of thieves” (Waters 2006), Waters herself refashions and reuses established, gendered nineteenth-century discourses and plots by writers such as Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens for her own feminist and lesbian agenda. As a result, our inheritance of the Victorians and our knowledge about them remains, like the novel’s matrilineal narratives, fragmented and incomplete.

Significantly for Maud, the potential similarity to her mother, originating from her idea of being a madwoman’s daughter and, possibly, a

---

madwoman herself, is a threatening and haunting one. Sue, in contrast, feels pride in and admiration for the fiction of her mother the murderess, striving to imitate her. These different attitudes toward their fictional pasts resemble the ambiguous motifs for our contemporary, continuing fascination with the Victorians, be it in culture, literature, or on screen. On the one hand, our creation of the nineteenth century as something characterised by oppressed sexualities and strict and oppressive norms with regards to gender roles serves the construction of our own times as radically more liberated in every sense. On the other hand, Simon Joyce pertinently notes, fiction and scholarship constantly seem keen to uncover “those who don’t fit in within our received notions of the Victorians [...] (feminists, colonial subjects, socialists, sexual minorities, and so on)” (Joyce 2002: 5), recoveries which potentially bring the nineteenth century closer to ourselves and our Western societies.<sup>9</sup> Thus, our traditional notion of the Victorians functions as our ‘other’, while what we perceive to be the Victorians’ ‘other’ functions as a resemblance of ourselves.

If this is the case and if, the writing of history and of fiction always remains ideologically and socially conditioned, then it is inevitable that any scholarship or fiction concerning itself with the Victorians after 1901 is bound to contain as much, or more, information about society at the time of writing than about the nineteenth century itself – even in the case of collections such as Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff’s *The Victorians since 1901* (2004), which itself seeks to trace such representations. Waters’ text, in my view, is clearly aware of this paradox. While in many examples of women’s fiction “the mother is often the prosaic figure in the middle [and] the grandmother and the daughter can be points of mystery and potential, leading off into the unknown future or past” (Cosslett 1996: 8), it is this “mystery and potential” and the “unknown future or past” which is central, rather than peripheral to *Fingersmith*. The novel’s narrative is only partly concerned with the origins and circumstances of the protagonists’ mothers, while it predominantly seeks to explore the impacts of these histories on the daughters. Through this focus on Maud’s and Sue’s imitations of their mothers’ identities and their eventual acceptance of their matrilineal fictions as parts of themselves, the novel emphasises that we actively create our presents through our pasts. At the same time, however, our “present [also] shapes the interpretation of the past” (Shiller 1997: 544), as is evident in Maud’s and Sue’s imaginative additions to the fictions they have been told.

---

Hence, Waters' rewriting of the Victorians exemplifies both how we alter our perception of the Victorians, depending on the subsequent development of our culture and society, and how the Victorians, as parts of our pasts, still constitute our present (national) identities, regardless of whether this fills us with pride or anxiety.

Christian Gutleben argues that neo-Victorian fiction's repeated return to the nineteenth century signifies postmodern nostalgia and society's inability "to propose a new model for the present [...] as if it were not able to progress and had to turn around and step back" (Gutleben 2001: 8). Yet, I would argue that just this return facilitates the making of such a new model. What *Fingersmith's* matrilinealism suggests is that no identity – be it literary, national, cultural or personal – can properly define itself except in comparison to what it perceives to be its past, and without (re-)negotiating and accepting, fictionally or otherwise, its relationship with that past. Neo-Victorian fiction does not simply revisit issues such as race, sexuality, prostitution, pornography or hysteria in order to either shock or serve the current market (see Gutleben 2001: 11 and 37). Instead, it engages with these themes because they present problems that are as fundamental to Western societies today as they were in the nineteenth century. Hence, neo-Victorian fiction functions as a literary space in which such issues can be critically explored for contemporary contexts.

Both neo-Victorian fiction's and third-wave feminism's return to and reconsideration of their pasts do not lead into a cul-de-sac, but allow their practitioners to substantiate their presents in order to envision desirable, possible futures without escaping into utopia. If as Jeannette King argues, particularly women authors of neo-Victorian fiction are "[interested] in what the Victorian period can add to the modern reader's understanding of gender" (King 2005: 6), then it is interesting that, so far, critics have left untouched this common phenomenon of such fictions and third-wave feminist theories. Much as historical fiction looks and writes backwards to comment critically on the present and look forward into a potential future, Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, for instance, point out that the third wave's aim is to "indicate a crossroads where the past and present meet in order to mark out trajectories for future feminist praxis" (Gillis, Howie and Munford 2007: xxx).

I am neither suggesting that twenty-first century neo-Victorian fiction is an essentially third-wave feminist genre, nor that its authors can

---

collectively be labelled (or would label themselves) as third-wave feminists, although certainly a great many neo-Victorian texts thematise the constructive relationships between women's pasts and presents which have become so characteristic of contemporary feminisms. Rather, an analysis of matrilinealism in *Fingersmith* serves to highlight the parallels between two turn-of-the-millennium movements, their shared interest in how fragments of the past shape their presents, and how an acknowledgment thereof can lead to fruitful re-definitions of established customs and politics. Neo-Victorian fiction may thus well be – and, potentially, continue to be – a genre that enables contemporary feminist writers to combine third-wave politics and literary form.

### **Acknowledgement**

I am grateful for the support I received from Prof. Lucie Armitt and the University of Salford throughout the initial stages of writing this essay.

### **Notes**

1. For discussions of matrilinealism as a theme and feminist metaphor in contemporary women's writing, see, for example, Tess Cosslett's 'Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the "House of Women" in Contemporary Women's Fiction' (1996) or Yi-Lin Yu's *Mother, She Wrote: Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2005).
2. It is important to differentiate between third-wave feminism and postfeminism. Stéphanie Genz has argued that, unlike third-wave feminism, "postfeminism does not exist as an emerging political movement and ideology with strong affiliations to second wave feminist theory and activism" (Genz 2006: 341). It is this relationship with its feminist past, I will argue, which connects third-wave feminism (rather than postfeminism) with neo-Victorian fiction. More generally, third-wave feminism can be said to consist of those feminist voices emerging towards the latter half of the 1990s which insist upon their dependency on, as well as their need to move away from, the feminist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Third-wave feminism also opposes the 1980s backlash against feminism and the second wave's focus on white, middle-class, heterosexual women, emphasising the necessary co-existence of

a multiplicity of feminisms and female experiences, dependent on, for example differences in ethnicity, sexual orientation and social class.

3. See Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), and Gayle Rubin's 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex' (2004 [1975]).
4. Undeniably, one of the most famous examples of this use of matrilineage is Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929).
5. For Quinn, the term "matrophor" illustrates "the persistent nature of maternal metaphors in feminism" (Quinn 1997: 179).
6. Whilst the destabilisation of matrilinealism in the novel also functions as an emphasis of the lack of lesbian history and of lesbian feminist foremothers, my argument will focus on female sexuality and third-wave feminism more generally rather than on homosexuality and lesbian feminisms in particular.
7. See in particular Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus* (1994).
8. Examples of pro- and anti-pornography feminist writings include Catherine A. MacKinnon's *Only Words* (1993), Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), and Lynne Segal 'Only the Literal: The Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism' (2004).
9. Joyce suggests that today's Victorianists tend to employ three different strategies in their research on the nineteenth-century, two of which are of particular interests here: the interest in marginalised figures, discussed later, and a technique of "stress[ing] those elements of nineteenth-century society or culture that most closely resemble our own" (Joyce 2002: 5). The third strategy Joyce identifies comprises of those Victorianists who refuse to take a culturally superior standpoint towards the Victorians, acknowledging that "[we] are scarcely in a position to dismiss past alternatives" (Joyce 2002: 6), and who therefore approach "the nineteenth century as the repository of just such options" (Joyce 2002: 6).

### **Bibliography**

- Armitt, Lucie. 'Dark Departures: Contemporary Women's Writing after the Gothic', in Benjamin A. Brabon and Stephanie Genz (eds.), *Postfeminist Gothic*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 16-29.

- 
- Bailey, Cathryn. 'Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism', *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 12:3 (Summer 1997), 17-28.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Blake Sarah. *Grange House*. New York: Picador, 2000.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Carter, Angela. *The Sadeian Woman* [1979]. London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2006.
- Cosslett, Tess. 'Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the *House of Women* in Contemporary Women's Fiction', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 5:1 (March 1996), 7-17.
- Darwin, Emma. *The Mathematics of Love*. London: Headline Review, 2006.
- Dennis, Abigail. "'Ladies in Peril': Sarah Waters on neo-Victorian narrative celebrations and why she stopped writing about the Victorian era", *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1 (Autumn 2008), 41-52.
- Faber, Michel. *The Crimson Petal and the White*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002.
- Faulks, Sebastian. *Human Traces*. London: Vintage, 2005.
- Finding, Deborah. 'Interview with Novelist, Sarah Waters,' *Feminist and Women's Studies Association Newsletter*, 50 (June 2007), 4-5.
- Gamble, Sarah (ed.) 'Postfeminism', in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. London: Routledge, 2001, 43-54.
- Gardiner, John. *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect*. London: Hambledon & London, 2002.
- Genz, Stéphanie. 'Third Way/ve: The Politics of Postfeminism', *Feminist Theory*, 7:3 (December 2006), 333-353.
- Gillis, Stacy, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (eds.). 'Introduction', in *Third-wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*. 2nd ed. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, xxi-xxxiv.
- Gutleben, Christian. *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2001.
- Harris, Jane. *The Observations*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.
- Harwood, John. *The Ghost Writer*. London: Random House, 2004.
- Holman, Sheri. *The Dress Lodger*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999.
- Henry, Astrid. 'Feminism's Family Problem: Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope', in Rory Cooke Dicker and Alison Piepmeier

- 
- (eds.), *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003, 209-231.
- . *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Heywood, Lesley; and Jennifer Drake (eds.). 'Introduction', in *Third Wave Agenda*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 1-24.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Catherine Porter (trans.). Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Joyce, Simon. 'The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror', in Christine L. Krueger (ed.), *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002, 3-17.
- . 'Other Victorians and the Neo-Dickensian Novel', in *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007, 140-165.
- Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- King, Jeannette. *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise. 'The Neo-Victorian Sexsation: Literary Excursions into the Nineteenth Century Erotic', in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Luisa Orza (eds.), *Probing the Problematics: Sex and Sexuality*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2009, 345-356, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/publishing-files/idp/eBooks/ptp%202.2.pdf>.
- Langbauer, Laurie 'Queen Victoria and Me', in John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff (eds.), *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 211-233.
- Llewellyn, Mark. 'Breaking the Mould? Sarah Waters and the Politics of Genre', in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (eds.), *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 195-210.
- Lubenow, William C. 'Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*: The Rise and Fall of the Intellectual Aristocracy', in Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorians since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, 17-28.
- MacKinnon, Catherine A. *Only Words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

- 
- Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Victorian England*. London: Transaction Publishers, 2009.
- Miller, Kathleen A. 'Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*: Leaving Women's Fingerprints on Victorian Pornography', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 4:1 (Spring 2007), n. pag., <http://ncgsjournal.com/issue41/miller.htm>.
- Orr, Catherine. M. 'Charting the currents of the third wave', *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 12: 3 (Summer 1997), 29-45.
- Palmer, Paulina. "'She began to show me the words she had written, one by one': Lesbian Reading and Writing Practices in the Fiction of Sarah Waters", *Women: A Cultural Review*, 9:1 (April 2008), 69-86.
- Peters, Joan Douglas. *Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002.
- Quinn, Rebecca Dakin. 'An Open Letter to Institutional Mothers', in Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan (eds.), *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 174-182.
- Roiphe, Katie. *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1994.
- Rubin, Gayle. 'The Traffic in Women' [1975], in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 770-794.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaption and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia: University Press New York, 1985.
- Segal, Lynne. 'Only the Literal: The Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism', in Pamela C. Gibson (ed.), *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, 2nd ed. London: BFI Publishing, 2004, 59-70.
- Shiller, Dana. 'The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel', *Studies in the Novel*, 29:4 (Winter 1997), 538-560.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady*. London: Virago Press, 1987.
- Shuttleworth, Sally. 'Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era', in Linda M. Shires (ed.), *Re-writing the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1992, 31-51.
- Siegel, Deborah L. 'Reading between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a "Postfeminist" Movement', in Lesley Heywood and Jennifer Drake (eds.), *Third Wave Agenda*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1-24.

- 
- Thompson, Edward P. *The Making of the English Working Classes*. New York: Vintage, 1966.
- Waters, Melanie. 'Sexing it Up? Women, Pornography and Third-wave Feminism', in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (eds.). *Third-wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 250-265.
- Waters, Sarah. *Fingersmith*. London: Virago, 2002.
- . 'Sensational Stories: Sarah Waters on the echoes of sensation novels in *Fingersmith*', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2006, viewed 8 Sept. 2007, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/bookclub/story/0,,1799518,00.html>.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Widdowson, Peter. 'Writing Back: Contemporary Re-visionary Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 20:3 (2006), 491-507.
- Woolf, Virginia. 'A Room of One's Own' [1929], in Morag Shiach (ed.), *A Room of One's Own/ Three Guineas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 1-150.
- Yu, Yi-Lin. *Mother, She Wrote: Matrilineal Narratives in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.