New Rhetorics:

Disciplinarity and the Movement from Historiography to Taxonomography

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It is fair to say that, by now, those working on the postmodern literary form have become thoroughly acclimatised to the notion of "historiographic metafiction", following the lead of Linda Hutcheon. In what is, essentially, a tick-box exercise, it has become easy to pick out metafictional self-awareness (tick) in conjunction with statements regarding the constructed nature of history (tick) and to then arrive at the generic formulation of historiographic metafiction. At least one of the problems with such an exercise, however, is that this classification seems to outshine all others; the meta-abstraction on both the literary and historical levels leaves us, like Beckett's protagonist in *Ohio Impromptu*, with little left to tell.

In this chapter, I will argue that the heyday of historiographic metafiction is, in fact, passing, but not necessarily, as one might expect, in the service of a revived realist mode. In the novels of Sarah Waters and Thomas Pynchon, the two very different case studies that will be deployed here, there is evidently a shift wherein historiography becomes a subset of taxonomography; the study of history gives way to the study of genre, of which history is one form.[i] Indeed, this piece will explore the ways in which the construction of genre has overtaken the construction of history, but will also attempt to find the point at which these two areas intersect. This has consequences for academic

readings of such texts, which are themselves shaped by a genre-formation process of disciplinarity, an element that current studies have overlooked and which will, here, be revised in light of the way that such fiction often addresses the academy itself. The final question that will be posed here is whether such explorations of genre have socio-transgressive potential, or whether, in actuality, they represent merely a further retrenchment in the excesses of metafiction; fictions about how we classify fiction.

By way of a brief orientation for the reader, this chapter will span three sections and a brief synthesizing conclusion. Beginning in the first section with some observations of genre theory and the history of historiographic metafiction in Waters and Pychon, the second and third parts will be dedicated one apiece to these authors respectively. Although very different in form, it will become clear that, in fact, Waters and Pynchon are aligned in their metamorphosis of form, with perhaps the only difference being that Waters can be considered born as a taxonomographic native, while Pynchon, given his long history of historiography, is more of an immigrant figure, migrating to genre from the foreign country of the past.

Genre, Taxonomography, History, Historiography

In order for any detailed analysis to proceed here, it is necessary to first distinguish between, and define, the ideas of genre, taxonomography, history and historiography that I am using. What, for instance, distinguishes between a work of historical fiction and a historiographic novel? What is the difference between a work of genre parody and a taxonomographic piece? The preliminary short answer must be, to pre-dispel any doubts: not always a great deal. Often, owing to societal placement, it can be difficult to delineate parody and the function that it holds. This potential blurring, which must always be kept in mind throughout the following, is, however, insufficient to excuse all attempts at schematic theorisation.

To begin with the more familiar concepts, I will first turn to history and historiography. As with the other binary of genre to which I will shortly turn, the second term in this pair ("historiography") is a relativising notion that, first and foremost, assumes that its counterpart ("history") is a constructed entity shaped by methodology and selection. The very implication within the term historiography is that "history" cannot refer to a stable series of chronological facts that objectively represent the truth of the past but must, rather, come into being at the interface of the way in which those truths (now plural) come to be pitted against one another in a series of competing discourses with an emergent victor. Historiographic metafiction (HM), a term proposed by Linda Hutcheon, (Hutcheon, 1988) refers to metafiction (fiction that indicates its own fictive nature) that treats the subject of history through a historiographic lens. HM, therefore, is inherently inflected towards history as a social construct. The form is also, however, frequently read as a ethical undertaking.

This ethical standpoint can best be seen in the emergence of counter-narratives that HM permits. If hegemonic biases are a risk in the transmission of history, then HM seeks, in many cases (which will be explored further below), to re-inscribe a counter-factual narrative that undoes the failings of factual representation. The narratives of historiographic metafiction are "counter-factual" because they remain fictional; the events described did not actually happen. They can, however, be designed to be a better representation of the factual situation than is permitted by a factual history that has been selected by societally dominant ideologies. This firmly aligns the premises of HM with the rise of postcolonial studies and that field's legacy of rootedness in the thought of Michel Foucault (through Spivak and Saïd (Saïd, 1978, p. 3)) and the inseparability of power-knowledge.

Pursuing this ethical line, or even just taking the basic notion of HM's genealogical origin in a relativist notion of history, it is clear that not all historical fiction, or even historical metafiction, is historiographic metafiction. A good case in point to illustrate this phenomenon is the exceptionally successful work of Hilary Mantel, whose *Wolf Hall* charts the rise of Thomas Cromwell under

Henry the Eighth. There are, though, several reasons why this text cannot be considered a work of historiographic metafiction that are worth setting out in order to exemplify the issues at hand. Firstly, mapping events surrounding the elite Royal Family of Great Britain and, arguably, the most famous of Britain's Tudor monarchs, yields Mantel little potential for ethical counter-factual narratives, even through her unique perspective. Secondly, Mantel's style deploys a quasi-realist mode that seemingly attempts to re-situate the reader within a historical epoch that would be, under an early Foucauldian archaeological model, epistemologically inaccessible. Thirdly, although Mantel's novel does make use of the historico-dramatic irony in the reader's foreknowledge of Anne Boleyn's subsequent execution, this metatextual significance is weak and implicit, rather than clear and stated. These three tenets demonstrate how novels can be situated along a spectrum from "historical" through "historical metafictional" until, at the extreme end, we reach "historiographic metafictional".

Historiographic metafiction might be, however, as I want to contend in the remainder of this chapter, past its prime. Indeed, the problem now lies in the continuation of forms that *look like* historiographic metafiction, and can in some senses still be classed under such a description, but which have more dominant mechanisms that are masked by the application of this label. I'd like to suggest, also, that it is in fact notions of genre and taxonomography that have superseded this form.

Like its history-historiography counterpart, the duality of genre-taxonomography comes with its own presuppositions about the constructed nature of genre and it is worth briefly dipping into some genre theory to illustrate this debate. In the most fundamental understanding, genre comes from the French for "sort" or "kind", itself descended from the Latin "genus", thereby resonating strongly with contemporary biological uses. This parallel to ideas of classification is, though, also problematic: framing genres in this way leads to what Wittgenstein might term a linguistic confusion in which the notion of "a genre" is reified; we tend to believe that there is a process wherein we file works into real, solid, existent generic labels. This does not seem to be

straightforwardly the case: genres do not pre-date constructions of their forms and cannot, therefore, exist except by human, social construction.

This leads, obviously, to questions of the origin of genre and entails a great many cyclical formations. Robert Stam has concisely identified several key difficulties of generic labels that are worth recapitulating: 1.) generic terms are often either too narrow or too broad to accurately represent their subjects; 2.) generic terms can lead to simplistic membership criteria; 3.) genre can lead to the false assumption that one generic title will be sufficient; 4.) it can be falsely assumed that genres evolve in a standardised way over a "life cycle" (Stam, 2000, pp. 151–152). Each of these issues must be considered when dealing with genre. However, Andrew Tudor points out a more fundamental problem of the way in which we classify works into genres:

> To take a *genre* such as a 'Western', analyse it, and list its principle characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are 'Westerns'. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principle characteristics' which can only be discovered *from the films themselves* after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle which first requires that the films are isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the film (Tudor, 1974, pp. 135–138).

It is worth noting, for reasons to which I will return, that this oft-cited formulation also encroaches, however, on ideas of academic disciplinarity. Academic disciplines are, in many senses, the genres of the academy and seem to be shaped by similarly cyclical processes of formation.

If, as these formulations suggest, the idea of genre as something into which artworks are assigned is problematic, then there might be a way of re-classifying genre as a "formation process" that can be of help. As a move towards such a setup, Stephen Neale has framed the issue thus: "genres are not systems: they are processes of systematisation" (Neale, 1980, p. 51, 2000, p. 163). This approach, which emphasises the dynamic nature of genre, ensures an answer to each of Stam's objections: genre no longer substitutes for a work's unique specificities; genre does not simply re-iterate pre-existing norms; and genre's development isn't treated as a pre-determined given. Such

as focus on process also allows a materialist analysis to surface as these "processes of systematization" need not be purely academic processes, but could also relate to market forces and so forth.

From this idea of "processes of systematization", it becomes possible to broach the theorization of taxonomographic metafiction: 1.) taxonomography is the study of genre, when genre is defined as a "process of systematization". Taxonomography is, therefore, more accurately defined as "the study of processes of systematization"; 2.) material conditions of production are important for a study of processes of systematization (genre); 3.) academic disciplines are formed as the outcomes of processes of systematization over which academics are not themselves the masters.

Several subset questions emerge regarding this theorization of "taxonomography", though, that will be considered over the course of this chapter. The foremost of these questions is as to whether taxonomography, like its literary forerunner historiography, can be considered ethical. The second, leading from and dependent upon the answer to the former, is to ask what this mode does for the form of metafiction. While metafiction was rooted in an ethical defence when dealing with history, is it possible that a shift to generic forms is a more introverted, inwardly-facing mode? Is there a danger for metafiction, in its turn towards the parody of the history of its own forms, that the tendencies for navel-gazing are renewed and its worst excesses amplified?

Thomas Pynchon: Genre, Sign and Play

Considering Pynchon's reticence to reveal himself in public, it may be that the closest we will ever get to the man himself will be the small figure in *Gravity's Rainbow* that can be read as one of the few avatars of the author. Indeed, shortly into part two, "Un Perm' au Casino Hermann Goering", Slothrop awakes from an amorous encounter to believe himself being robbed. As Slothrop gives chase the figure emits a "snicker" and then "From way down the hall, a tiny head appears around the corner, a tiny hand comes out and gives Slothrop the tiny figure", followed

closely by "unpleasant laughter" (Pynchon, 1995a, p. 199). This is certainly a reading experience familiar to the connoisseur of Pynchon's canon. As the reader gives chase and weaves interpretation, the tiny authorial presence gives him or her the slip and the finger; certainly it can feel as though unpleasant mocking laughter is ringing out from Pynchon's quarter.

Pynchon's "canon", though, is a broad entity that cannot be treated as wholly monolithic and while "play" is an important part of all of Pynchon's works, the uses to which games and playing are put and the way in which they are signalled differ enormously throughout his ouevre. One of the most frequent distinctions made to delineate Pynchon's range of writing is to think, as does Thomas Schaub, (Schaub, 2011) of a "California cycle" comprised of *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice* (as well as the newly published *Bleeding Edge*, despite its New York setting) in contrast to Pynchon's epics, *V., Gravity's Rainbow, Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*. There is, however, also a temporal progression through Pynchon's works that has been previously noted by Julie Christine Sears who sees *Mason & Dixon*'s handling of alternative sexualities as an attempt to move away from the early prejudices against "deviance" signalled in *Gravity's Rainbow* (Sears, 2003). So, whether one treats Pynchon's "canon" in terms of a California-Epic divide, or as a series of incremental changes, there are, I'm going to argue, distinctly different treatments of history in opposition to genre in different segments of Pynchon's body of work.

To attack at the clearest point, it is worth noting that it is *Against the Day* that most prominently effects a shift towards notions of taxonomography, as has been suggested by Brian McHale. Indeed, as McHale writes:

These are the genres that dominate *Against the Day:* juvenile adventure of the "Tom Swift" type, the dime-novel Western, and the "shocker" or spy novel. But though among them these three comprise the bulk of this novel's generic repertoire, they do not exhaust it - far from it. The attentive reader will recognize, dispersed throughout the novel, material derived from a whole range of other popular genres: Edwardian detective fiction, on the model of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes; scientific romance, on the model of H.G. Wells; other sub-genres of imperial romance, including African adventure and Polar adventure; collegiate novels, both the American dime-novel type associated with the generic college-boy hero, Frank Merriwell, and the comic Oxbridge type; and, more fleetingly, various theatrical genres, including melodrama and

operetta. *Against the Day* is, among other things, a massive anthology of popular genres - a virtual library of entertainment fiction (McHale, 2009, p. 8).

This, in itself, would hardly be a great insight – it is clear from the opening lines of the novel that Pynchon is effecting some form of genre parody with his Chums of Chance balloon boys – but it is McHale's realisation of a history-of-genre approach is far more interesting: "Pynchon appropriates the conventions and materials of genres that flourished at the historical moments during which the events of his story occur. His genre-poaching is synchronized with the unfolding chronology of his storyworld" (McHale, 2009, p. 10). McHale also indicates that he believes that this has been the case with all of Pynchon's post-1973 novels (i.e. from *Gravity's Rainbow* onwards) (McHale, 2009, p. 10) while concluding that, in addition to highlighting Pynchon's and the reader's own historical immanence, "to map an era's genre-system is in effect to map its popular self-representations" (McHale, 2009, p. 18).

This persuasive argument seems to hold up. Even *Vineland*'s troubling entanglement with television immediately becomes a very different proposition when that immersion is read as a product of a parodic exercise in representing the self-representations of an era. The two questions on which I want to focus here, though, and that extend McHale's arguments are: 1.) does the parody in Pynchon's practices and taxonomographic modes more generally free such fictions from the danger of merely reproducing the often problematic self-representations that are under critique?; and 2.) how do the ethics of this mode stack up against historiographic metafiction?

Interestingly, given her spectral presence throughout this work for her formulation of historiographic metafiction, it is Linda Hutcheon's early work on parody that lays the groundwork for an evaluation of the first question. As a model for exploration, consider that, in the forms of writing after Modernism, Hutcheon asserts that parody is based on repetition and difference: "an imitation with critical ironic distance" (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 37) in which "it is the fact that they *differ* that parody emphasizes and, indeed, dramaticizes" (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 31). This calls for an

evaluation of the ironic and critical distance that Pynchon deploys; is his a repetition with difference?

In *Against the Day*, continuing a trend in Pynchon's novels that was lamented by the late David Foster Wallace (Wallace, 1993, p. 183), it is clear that the tone is ironic, which can best be seen through the presentation of the dime novel balloon boys, the Chums of Chance. These figures are exemplary of the way in which Pynchon parodies the genre formations of the era under consideration. For example, in the first instance, they are naïve figures who only realise their own complicity in world events far too late into the proceedings. They are also, though, a parody of true dime novel figures; there are references to *The Simpsons* included in the dialogue within only the first few pages and they move, towards the end, into sexual relationships.[ii]

Most importantly for the topic at hand, though, it is these characters who most clearly demonstrate Pynchon's use of historical irony in relation to religious, social and economic spheres. While the Chums experience their moment of self-realization that the device holding them in this complicity is "fear" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 246) and that they are "being used to further someone's hidden plans" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 442), they are ultimately swept up in a tide of capitalism and "contracts" that grow "longer and longer" while the "good unsought and uncompensated" in the world grows harder to locate, thus binding the social and economic spheres. Even their own ship "has grown as large as a small city", incorporating "slum conditions" and her engines profiting from a "favorable darkness" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 1084). For Pynchon, though, there is a complicated intersection of agency and Calvinism at work here. While the Chums maintain their positivism and belief in progress as a linear concept, Pynchon returns, with supreme irony, to the Calvinist theme of predestination that had occupied such a central role in *Gravity's Rainbow* and concludes, as the final line of Against the Day, that it could not have been any other way: "[t]hey fly toward grace" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 1085). I cannot but see this as a grim irony; the grace that awaits is World War II.

There is, then, a twofold depiction of the Chums of Chance as moral agents. On the one hand, they are bound by a dubious Eichmann-esque interpretation of Kantian duty by their multiple codes of conduct and act in blind obedience for the system. On the other, they are enmeshed in Calvinist doctrine, the brutal system under which nobody can know of their preordained fate determined by the malicious being who has decreed that most will burn for all eternity. Famously, Calvinism is a system with which Max Weber was also preoccupied, devoting almost half of *The Protestant Ethic* to a discussion of its mechanism, describing it as above all responsible for the spirit of capitalism and deeply connected to the trajectory of Enlightenment. Calvinism, too, can be seen as a duty-based system for, although there is nothing one can do to better one's own situation (it has been predetermined), worldly activity and prosperity (under Weber's reading) is a sign of self-assurance and is, therefore, the correct behaviour to demonstrate one's own faith in being elect; a perverse optimism in the face of probable eternal torture (Weber, 2001, p. 67). In short: to revolt is to have insufficient faith in one's own election. Conversely, to work for the system does not guarantee election, but does at least demonstrate faith in God that one could be elect.

Yet, does Pynchon truly see this as the way of the world and how does he use history and genre to signal this? *Gravity's Rainbow* is in agreement with Weber on the brutality and inhumanity of Calvinism but the depiction in *Against the Day* is somewhat different. Firstly, the outcome of Calvinist predestination is inverted: the majority will achieve Grace, but this is actually the hell of World War II where "the world you take to be 'the' world will die" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 554). In this obscene reversal, *Gravity's Rainbow* shows us the grace of *Against the Day*: it is the "mass slaughter […] the putrefaction of corpses" that will dominate the landscape to come in a repeat of the First World War's catastrophe (Pynchon, 1995a, pp. 234–235). There are, however, two readings of this irony. It can, of course, be read as a confirmation of the Calvinist state: the Chums have faith in their own election, as all must, but are really to encounter their nightmare; "they fly toward grace" is Pynchon's dark humour resurfacing. In a second reading, however, it would be the

doctrine of Calvinism that is questioned here, confirmed by a final aspect of Pynchon's fiction: the result is actually known in advance. There can be no unknowable predestination in a postmodern historiographic novel, only, in a rare moment of certainty for the genre, absolutely known historical outcomes that induce further dramatic irony for the reader, even if they have taken "years to reach anyone who might understand what [they] meant" (Pynchon, 2006, p. 444). The narrator, the author and the reader, then, must sit outside the predestined sphere and, in looking back on history, assume the role of the Calvinist divinity. The narrator/author predetermines and the reader knows the outcome. These figures in Pynchon's writing, at least, sit outside the predetermined, unknown, Calvinist sphere and freedom again becomes a possibility.

It is notable, though, that this is a fairly tightly constrained field of agency that only seems to gain ethical purchase through retrospective amendment of the historical narrative. Even in counterfactual historical, ethical revision, there doesn't seem to be any way, in Pynchon's novels, that we can escape our own determination by socio-historical forces that surround us. In one sense, though, this is the function of Pynchon's critical history and his critical historiography: to make us aware, twofold respectively, that 1.) historical circumstances can metaphorically recur and that, therefore, it is foolhardy to render the present absolute; and 2.) there are narrative forces that determine our constitution. At the same time, though, Pynchon's fascination with genre and the way that popular representations are formed as a process of systematization also merits consideration.

In light of the above lead-in to ideas of critical history and critical historiography – which essentially form a reflective function upon the present and to which the latter section of this chapter on Sarah Waters will return – it now becomes possible to begin to answer one of the strange question that I asserted must frame the argument here: how is genre ethical? Simply put: there is a game of expectation-guessing at work here, a game of pre-emption that intersects with ideas of disciplinarity and that fulfils a critical purpose. Indeed, through ideas of taxonography, Pynchon's texts seem to attempt to work out how they will be read and to then confound those norms.

Consider, for example, how *Vineland* ironically ridicules the "essential" works of Deleuze and Guattari (Pynchon, 1991, p. 97) or the difficult citation of Wittgenstein by a Nazi in *V.* (Pynchon, 1995b, p. 278) that cause trouble, in advance, for readers situated within theory-heavy discourse communities. Clearly, Pynchon anticipates that there will be attempts to read his work through these paradigms and sows turbulent seeds that then have real effects upon socio-linguistic reading practices, much like von Göll's film about the Schwarzkommando in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The way that this is fashioned seems to be through an exploitation of the cyclical process of genre-determination. Firstly, Pynchon reads the academic discourse communities and identifies the tropes that these communities have correlated with certain historico-generic moments. Secondly, Pynchon synchronizes these tropes with the historical moment about which he is writing, as noted in McHale's notion of mediated historiographies. Thirdly, this then impacts upon present practices, in the same way as a critical historiography, as certain methods for reading Pynchon's texts become pre-empted and encouraged or discouraged. Finally, in a cyclical history of reading, it would now be possible to return to the first point in light of the changes in discourse effected by works of fiction upon the academy. Combined with the ethical purpose of historiographic metafiction – that is, to reflect on the present but also to assert a narrative quality to supposed historical fact – this alteration of reading practices can be seen as far from trivial. Now turning to Sarah Waters, it is, in fact, this thesis upon which I want to lay the primary focus: taxonomographic metafictions have critical and ethical functions that alter present reading practices based upon cyclical pre-emptions, and then parodies, of the processes of systematization that the target discourse communities could bring to these texts, combined with the ethical work of traditional historiographic metafiction.

The Genres of Neo-Victorianism in the Novels of Sarah Waters

Although it may seem like an incongruous juxtaposition to abut Sarah Waters with Thomas Pynchon, given the extremely different register and mode in her novels, for the purposes of thinking about a shift to taxonomography, one might be harder pushed to find a better example. Indeed, even

in a mode of assigned-genre it is possible to see affinities between Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* and Pynchon's *Against the Day*, which have both been described in the picaresque tradition (Elias, 2011). Putting this mode aside, though, in order to more thoroughly chart the progress of the above thesis, this section of the chapter will hurtle at a somewhat breakneck pace through Waters' neo-Victorian novels *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith* in order to show how it is always, in each of these texts, a case of regress and pre-emption. As Waters puts it in *Affinity*, it becomes a matter wherein the statement "I guessed what she guessed" (Waters, 2000, p. 250) refers not just to the prison warder but also to the reader.

Indeed, engaging in notions of "serious play", Waters' works are closely aligned with Pynchon's mode, wherein textual-subversive tricks are used to bring about ethical transformations. In Waters' novels we also see, as with Pynchon's works, modifications to the historiographic metafictive form. The premise upon which I claim that this works, and that will form the argument herein, is sleight of hand. Waters' neo-Victorian novels are all premised on notions of hiding in plain sight. In fact, in clearly showing the reader beforehand how her twists will work, but also diverting attention so that surprise twists can be accomplished within (usually) lesbian romantic settings, generic play is clearly linked to emotional affect, while also effecting a reflective discipline upon reading practices.

In order to determine what we are supposed to see and not see in Waters' novels – for it is a highly visual trick that the text pulls – we need first to determine what aspects an academic discourse community will expect to find in a neo-Victorian novel and how Waters fulfils these criteria in a mode of quasi-wish-fulfilment. It can be said, without too much controversy, that the following, which all feature in Waters' works, could all be deemed key to the genre of the neo-Victorian novel: latent, historically under-represented sexuality and an overturning of the repressive hypothesis through Foucault; female confinement; the prison; historiographic traits; life-writing. Notably, under this schema, historiography is relegated to one generic mode among

others, rather than the primal force.

Each of these aspects can be easily traced throughout Waters' oeuvre. Beginning with *Tipping the Velvet,* Waters injects the counterfactual histories that were derived from her Ph.D. research (Waters, 1995). Focusing, initially, upon the 1890s music hall scene, the protagonist, Nancy Astley/Nan King falls into a deep lesbian attraction with Kitty Butler, a drag king performance artist. While she is eventually betrayed in this relationship as Kitty seeks a heteronormative environment – even as that setting causes her misery – Nan then finds a form of revenge in taking on the cross-dressed role of a gay male prostitute. On her path to her final redemptive relationship with Florence, however, Nan spends a sizeable period of time as the live-in sex slave of the sadistic, clearly-named huntress, Diana. This segment of the novel is among the most interesting because, as Mandy Koolen points out, in its exploration of "the power dynamics that exist in audience-performer relationships, *Tipping the Velvet* troubles the potentially dangerous myth that queer communities necessarily provide safe spaces for the expression of cross-gender identification" (Koolen, 2010, p. 372).

Koolen is entirely correct to point out, here, that the dehumanizing eroticization that Nan "endures in order to have her performances appreciated by Diana and her friends provides a complex commentary on the issue of eroticization and consent" (Koolen, 2010, p. 383). However, what seems to be missing is an acknowledgement of the clear subtextual reference to Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. Indeed, when Nan first enters Diana's house she wonders, as she climbs the stairs, whether "There might be ropes, there might be knives. There might be a heap of girls in suits – their pomaded heads neat, their necks all bloody", echoing the Bluebeard myth and Carter's subversive, feminist re-presentation (Waters, 1999, p. 238). This proleptic foreshadowing of complicity in degradation and physical abuse is achieved via a textually suggested generic grouping in the form of intertextual reference; *Tipping the Velvet* is pointing out its generic similarities, at this moment, to Carter's work and the reader is expected, therefore, to anticipate a parallel. The parallel

that might be expected, is, however, up for debate; reading practices are not formulaic and, of course, the identification of an "academic discourse community" is broad. That said, the conjunction of sexuality with female objectification might lead to the suspicion that it will be the feminist approach that is being borrowed from Carter's work.

This is, however, where Waters pulls the first of the generic sleights-of-hand that I'm going to cover here. Although, as shall be seen, it is less subtly framed than in *Affinity*, the actual borrowing from Carter, and neglected generic trope, is class discrepancy. This is clear in the resolution to this subsection of the plot for Nan suddenly realises, in relation to her next romantic interest, Zena Blake, that she has been using her surname-only address: "I had grown used to calling her only 'Blake'". Perhaps more importantly, particularly with reference to the subsequent *Affinity*, she also states that "I had grown used to not *looking* at her, not *seeing* her at all" (Waters, 1999, pp. 300–301). This movement from the commonplace generic tropes of female sexuality and feminist spins on objectification toward a redemptive focus on class is one that is replicated over the entire novel and throughout Waters' canon. It is, in the end, only through the socialist class struggle that surrounds the environment of the final section that Nan and Florence can finally forget Kitty and Lilian respectively.

If, in *Tipping the Velvet*, this sounds contrived, in Waters' second novel, *Affinity*, it is far clearer. Set in the London of the 1870s, *Affinity* is a text that distributes its narration across two women who experience same-sex desire: Margaret Prior and Selina Dawes. The action of the novel is driven by the philanthropic visits of Margaret Prior to Millbank prison wherein the second narrator, the spiritualist Selina Dawes has been sentenced to a five-year jail term for "fraud and assault". Told through Margaret's diary entries, the text implies a twofold mourning of the protagonist for her father and also for her previous object of desire, Helen, who is now her brother's wife. Over the course of the novel, Margaret's visits to Millbank intensify as she becomes romantically obsessed with Selina.

The themes of this text seem, superficially, easy to place. The foremost aspects of the work

appear to be the focus on female imprisonment and same-sex desire on the Victorian period, framed

through a life-writing diary mode. Turning initially to the first of these, the text has much with

which it seeks to lure the reader. Indeed, the Millbank prison that Waters describes does not appear

to be the subsequent design, but rather a Foucauldian-inflection of Bentham's Panopticon, which

was to originally stand on the Millbank site:

> She took us, via more featureless corridors, to a spiral staircase that wound upwards through a
> tower; it is at the top of the tower, in a bright, white, circular room, filled with windows, that
> Miss Haxby has her office. "You will see the logic of the design of this," said Mr Shillitoe as we
> climbed, growing red and breathless; and of course, I saw it at once, for the tower is set at the
> centre of the pentagon yards, so that the view from it is all of the walls and barred widows that
> make up the interior face of the women's building. The room is very plain. Its floor is bare There
> is a rope hung between two posts, where prisoners, when they are taken there, are obliged to
> stand, and beyond the rope is a desk. Here, sitting writing in a great black book, we found Miss
> Haxy herself – "the Argus of the gaol," as Mr Shillitoe called her, smiling (Waters, 2000, pp.
> 10–11).

This reference to the Greek figure Argus – whose nickname was Panoptes – clearly indicates, in

conjunction with Waters' multiple citations of Foucault in her Ph.D. thesis, the frame that we are

meant to summon:

> at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide
> windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells,
> each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the
> inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to
> cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a
> central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a
> schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely
> against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery ... Visibility is a trap
> (Foucault, 1997, p. 200).

The text also doubles, as Rosario Arias has noted, the number of imprisoned individuals than might,

initially and literally at least, be supposed (Arias, 2009, p. 259). While Selina Dawes is jailed in

Millbank, Margaret Prior is similarly caged by the ever-watchful eye of her mother who intends to

guard against Margaret repeating her previous suicide attempt. Indeed, it is only through her visits

to the prison that Margaret gains her (temporary) freedom, while it is on account of Margaret's

temporary visits that Selina effects her escape. Albeit for solid ethical and ideological reasons, note well that these narratives of female confinement are ones for which the academy is looking.

Leading on from this Foucauldian inflection on imprisonment and the feminist perspectives that are derived from this route, it becomes only a small effort to envisage how narratives of "lesbianism"[iii] that overturn the repressive hypothesis – via *The History of Sexuality Part I* – permeate Waters' novel. The Victorian setting can be seen, in this light then, as crucial because it was an era that at once suppressed and exposed lesbian desire, intersected in the figure of the spiritualist medium. As Mark Llewellyn writes: "Fundamentally, spiritualism allowed the expression of lesbian sexuality, and when Margaret and Selina talk in Millbank they utilise the language of the seance" (Llewellyn, 2004, p. 210). Again, because the text is pre-ascertained as historiographic metafiction (Margaret's opening gambit in the text reads "Pa used to say that any piece of history might be made into a tale" (Waters, 2000, p. 7)), this re-inscription of counterfactually liberating narratives into the historical record is something for which many academic readers, influenced by postcolonial models derived primarily through Foucault, Said and Spivak, seek.

Finally, for this appraisal of anticipated elements in *Affinity*, when the text is assumed to be a work of historiographic metafiction, it is notable that the work is conveyed in a life-writing style. This form, I would suggest, though, can be read twofold. It can be seen as a strengthening of the need for counterfactual histories, or it can be seen as a critique of historiographic metafiction itself. This is because *Affinity*'s diary objects are impossible.[iv] While the historical study of life-writing remains dependent upon the continued existence of the material artefact, *Affinity* destroys the intra-textual objects that would support its assertions. "How queer," the text finally puns, "to write for chimney smoke" as Margaret burns her diary (Waters, 2000, p. 348).

The way in which the Victorian is used here as a point of exploration for sexual repression, female confinement amid a diary form also suggests, however, that, in the text's use of temporal and

spatial differentiation to imply historical repetition (an affinity with the present), the text enacts a critique upon its own spatial and temporal origin; it has a critical utopian or dystopian function. We might call such a mode a critical historiography, an aspect that is well noted by Mark Llewellyn:

> In exploring in *Affinity* how women in the nineteenth century were ostracised, criminalised and placed outside society, having to operate and live within an underworld of their true feelings and desires, is not Waters also questioning her own role as a modern lesbian author? The use of an historical period can imply that there is a parallel or affinity between the age about which an author is writing and the one in which she writes (Llewellyn, 2004, p. 213).

This leads to the reasonable assumption that the point of the novel's historical setting might be concerned with this reflective function, that in writing about the Victorians, Waters is signalling aspects of contemporary society. I contend, however, that the biggest twist that *Affinity* pulls through this mechanism is, once more, to expose a contemporary academic blindness to class. Consider that, without the formalities of inter-class address, the reader would have been aware of the synonymity of "Ruth" and "Vigers". The fact that Vigers is never even prefixed as "Miss" encourages an identity that consists solely of a surname dissuades the reader, through the downplaying of class, in the genre process, from forging the connection between the two. As the narrator states: "What was she, to me? I could not even recall the details of her face, her look, her manners" (Waters, 2000, p. 340).

Affinity can be seen as a text that stages the typical clichés of the genre of the neo-Victorian novel, in order to set up a twist that shows how class has been neglected from this consideration. Indeed, what does the term "affinity" mean if not "similarity", a term heavily inflected towards notions of "genre"? Lastly, for this survey of Waters' novels, however, it is worth asking what can be said of this mode in Waters' final (to-date) neo-Victorian tale, *Fingersmith*? Well, first and foremost it can be stated that this is a novel that also takes seriously a game in which class is the cloaked basis of a plot twist. The novel's early references to *Oliver Twist* (Waters, 2003, pp. 4–5) provide not only the referential clue that a case of mistaken childhood identity will be key, but also that this will traverse an implied socio-moral order that correlates to class.

To unpack this statement, consider that it is a prerequisite of the text that the narration begins from the perspective of Susan Trinder. This is necessary because it allows a subtextual prejudice of class morality to emerge: Maud Lilly, the lady of social standing, is portrayed as a "poor girl" (Waters, 2003, p. 82), in need of defending (even by one of her supposed con-artists) (Waters, 2003, p. 131) and naïve. The reality, of course, is that Maud is herself the co-participant in a reversed (and therefore mutual) female betrayal of Sue and is hardly innocent: her uncle has brought her up from a young age to transcribe and index his pornographic library and she is more than happy to purchase her freedom through Sue's lifelong incarceration (as Sue was, likewise, happy to financially liberate herself through Maud's). The reader is, however, misled (despite the ominous proleptic hints) into believing that, because Sue's class position puts her in a position of seemingly greater material need, she will be more inclined to lie, to cheat and to steal. *Fingersmith*, however, is a text that works to unsettle this: "'I am not what you think,' I will say. 'You think me good. I am not good'" (Waters, 2003, p. 284). As Gentleman asks, knowingly, of Maud, but really in a pointed jibe at the reader: "who wouldn't, in her place, believe you innocent?" (Waters, 2003, p. 227).

This is the generic play of *Fingersmith*: to inculcate presuppositions in the reader, once again, that the novel's focus is upon: 1.) female confinement; 2.) hysteria and madness; 3.) a re-inscription of "lesbianism" into the Victorian period (overturning the repressive hypothesis). The signs are clear, though, that the text is actually one that is, like each of Waters' neo-Victorian texts, a taxonomographic distraction con. Like Susan, the reader "will be distracted by the plot into which I shall draw her. She will be like everyone, putting on the things she sees the constructions she expects to find there" (Waters, 2003, p. 227).

The question that truly arises, when the reader is "putting on the things she sees the constructions she expects to find there", is how class became the least-expected aspect of the neo-Victorian novel at the surface-level. Interestingly, then, for all the potential feminist lesbian

implications that may be seen when Waters' works are taken as pieces of historiographic metafiction, it is not, ultimately, in that form that the true value of her novels lie. Instead, they are a disciplinary framework that aims to re-introduce class into contemporary reading practices through a "fool me once, shame on you" logic. Readers – and especially those within the academy, for whom so many of Waters' high-Theory references appear as a treasure hunt – who do not wish to be fooled twice must, as an outcome of Waters' practice, be once more on the lookout for aspects of class in the contemporary, neo-Victorian novel. At the end of the day, for all their transgressive potential, the way in which Waters' texts are dependent upon class as their key aspect is extremely conservative; a re-creation of the fundamental building blocks of the original Victorian novel edifice.

Conclusions, Metanarratives and Totalising Statements

It is often tempting, having spotted a trend that coincides with time's forward march, to declare that there must be a definitive shift in practice, predicated on only a few examples. This marks, though, the continual tension between the specific and the general, the particular and the whole, the ability to speak, or to say nothing. In this case, it would be fair to say, at one level, that the fictions of Thomas Pynchon undergo a definitive shift towards a mode of taxonomographic metafiction in which the focus devolves away from history as a central tenet to one wherein history is merely another generic precept. Whether one situates this, as does McHale, in all of Pynchon's post-'73 novels or instead locates it as a distinctly post-millennial phenomenon through *Against the Day*, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* remains a personal choice. In the fiction of Sarah Waters, however, it is absolutely clear that generic play that anticipates reader expectations of the Victorian novel is central. This is evident in *Tipping the Velvet*, but becomes far more pronounced in *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, both of which rely upon a hidden-in-plain-sight generic play upon the Victorian novel's obsession with class.

On the other hand, can these observations, formed from the study of just two authors, albeit two extremely different writers, be said to constitute a trend, a movement, a metanarrative? Perhaps. This wavering is not just a hedging of bets, though. It is, rather, because all fiction is, to some degree, concerned with notions of genres, of processes of systematization. Indeed, it is the basis for all intertextuality, referential practice and textual kinship. What distinguishes taxonomographic metafiction, however, from being a term that is universally applicable (and therefore meaningless) is the way in which some works can be said to rely, focus or play upon this process of systematization. The problem that this raises, however, is the question of whether such works are actually, at the end of the day, more self-absorbed than their historiographic antecedents. Is this intra-aesthetic model disempowering, losing even the claims of HM to side with the historically marginalised? There is not space to pursue this further here, so I will instead leave you, like Pynchon's Oedipa, on the brink of revelation, except to point out that, in the narrowed field of agency, it seems to be our own reading practices that the disciplining techniques of taxonomographic metafiction target.

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i   As an important note: the material throughout this piece derives from, and builds upon, my previous writing on taxonomography in the work of Sarah Waters (Eve, 2013).

ii   Interestingly, there are a whole series of dime novels with highly suggestive, innuendo-laden titles on which Pynchon could surely be drawing for the loss of innocence. Sally E. Parry mentioned, but did not comment upon, *Don Sturdy and the Big Snake Hunters* at International Pynchon Week 2013, while the Tom Swift series contains multiple titles to bring colour to the cheeks of more prudish readers, most particularly *Tom Swift and his Giant Dirigible* and *Tom Swift and his Great Oil Gusher*. These texts are "smoldering with unmistakable eroticism", as Michael Bronski puts it (Bronski, 2002).

iii   I use "scare quotes" here because, under a Foucauldian rubric, it might be inaccurate to claim this as an identity formation at this historical point of exploration.

iv   I am grateful to my student, Siobhan Garrigan, for first bringing this aspect to my attention.