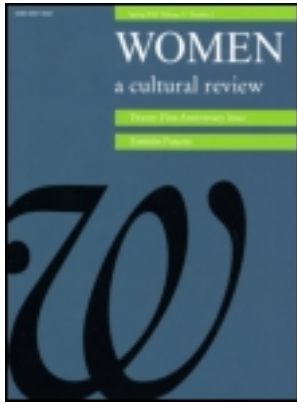


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Women: A Cultural Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwcr20>

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Version of record first published: 25 Jun 2008

To cite this article: Emily Jeremiah (2007): 'The "I" inside "her"': Queer Narration in Sarah Waters's Tipping the Velvet and Wesley Stace's Misfortune , Women: A Cultural Review, 18:2, 131-144

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09574040701400171>

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‘The “I” inside “her”’: Queer Narration in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* and Wesley Stace’s *Misfortune*

G

ENDER is not something one *is*, but something one *does*: a series of acts, repeated over time, which solidify to produce the effect of natural maleness or femaleness (Butler 1990:33). In this ‘performative’ view of gender proposed by Judith Butler, it is variation on repetition that constitutes agency; by means of subtle disruption, one can ‘work the mobilizing power of injury’ (Butler 1993:123). But one does not do this in isolation. As Butler acknowledges, performativity is always relational: ‘one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary’ (Butler 2004:1). This assertion has significant implications for understandings of the postmodern subject. In particular, it demands an awareness of the issue of community, which can be seen as a complex mesh of relational performances.

Community and consensus have been widely dismissed by postmodernist theorists, with their emphasis on plurality and dissonance, and viewed as the outdated results of a liberal humanist legacy. But as Sara Ahmed has argued, we need rather to explore and expand these ideas (1998:48–49). Literature offers a way to do so (Jeremiah 2005:241). Fiction deals in ‘imaginary others’ and can be seen to encourage the development of connectedness (Jeremiah 2002:7). Two recent historical novels by British writers, Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and

Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2005), illustrate this proposition. Both echo Butlerian thought, offering numerous instances of 'gender trouble' (Butler 1990). Both also raise the question of narrative, and both thematize and enact an ethical form of telling; these are postmodernist texts, then, that are concerned with community and care.

Literary texts are citational (see Bhaktin 1988; see also Butler 1993:12–16); they arise from and quote other texts. In so doing, they can 'work the mobilizing power' of previous, injurious narratives—as both *Tipping the Velvet* and *Misfortune* do. *Tipping*, Waters's first novel, is set in the late nineteenth century, mainly in London, and it features a first-person narrator, Nan. Nan begins life as an oyster-girl in Whitstable, but moves to London with Kitty Butler, a male impersonator in the music hall. The two develop a relationship, and Nan joins Kitty's act; but the affair ends with Kitty's betrayal of Nan. After a brief career as a (cross-dressed) rent-boy, Nan is taken in and 'kept' by a wealthy woman, Diana. Nan is eventually thrown out, and she makes her way to the home of Florence, a socialist feminist with whom she forms a relationship.

Misfortune, also a debut novel, is told largely in the first person and recounts the tale of a baby found abandoned in London in 1820. The baby is taken to Rose Hall and adopted by its young master, Loveall. Loveall marries the Hall's librarian, Anonyma, and the male infant is passed off not only as the heir to the estate, but also as a girl; he is named Rose. After the death of Loveall, the young Rose, confused by the recent revelation of his sex, flees to Turkey. Back in London, and following lengthy investigations, it is revealed that Rose is in fact the true heir to the Hall. Rose, who now comfortably wears a dress along with facial hair, moves back into the family home, ousting his greedy relatives. The house is given over to a hospice and then to the nation.

As these summaries suggest, *Tipping* and *Misfortune* are both 'historical' works that are also examples of the picaresque novel and the *Bildungsroman*. They cite and queer these genres, as we will see. Both works are concerned with history, with the novel itself, with queerness and with collectivity. And as they demonstrate, these issues can be linked.

Re-vising History

'Theory' is contingent and its recognitions are sometimes belated: 'Gender trouble is not new', Butler remarks, 'the hybridity of dissonance . . . is already here, already structuring the gendered lives of many people' (2005:24). Historical fiction is one site at which this recognition can be developed. By positing a queer past, one performs a 're-vision' of traditional accounts (for example, Rich 1979:35; Millbank 2004:162),

uncovering lives most often ‘hidden from history’ (Duberman *et al.* 1991).

In Waters’s *Tipping*, when Nan sees Kitty on stage, her view is ‘side-on and rather queer’ (1998:17)—an appropriate description of the novel’s take on history. Both *Tipping* and *Misfortune* can be set alongside the work of, for example, Lillian Faderman (1981) and Graham Robb (2003), which uncovers queer lives and which, at the same time, establishes a continuity between queer past and present—an important move if one accepts Laura Doan and Sarah Waters’s contention that ‘retrospection is a condition of homosexual agency’ (2000:12). These features—side-on views, marginal subjects, overlapping past/present stories—can be seen as key to a queer historiography and are also to be detected in the novels examined here.

Waters, the author of a PhD on queer historical fiction, as well as of three later historical novels, is an expert on these matters, as will become clear. While *Tipping* is told in retrospect in the first person, and follows a linear pattern—in a ‘traditional’ way—there are hints of a queer notion of temporality in the text, as when Diana gives Nan a watch, which she does not even bother to set at first: ‘there was really no need, of course, for me ever to wind it at all’ (Waters 1998:285). Time is irrelevant to her—a significant detail in the light of Judith Halberstam’s claim that queer subcultures ‘produce alternative temporalities’. They do so ‘by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death’ (Halberstam 2005:2). Significantly, in Waters’s most recent work, *The Night Watch* (2005), the narrative moves *backwards* in time, in what could also be read as a queer gesture.

Any historical novel, of course, is about the ‘present’ as much as it is about the ‘past’, as already suggested (see here Llewellyn 2004:204). There are numerous Butlerian echoes in *Tipping* (not least in Kitty’s surname); recent theory is drawn on and alluded to, then. In Waters’s later works, *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002), there are, similarly, Foucauldian echoes, heard particularly in their respective prison and asylum settings. Present-ness is also stressed in *Tipping* by the repeated use of the word ‘queer’ (Waters 1998:78),¹ whose insistent use appeals to and affirms a contemporary queer sensibility (see also Llewellyn 2004:213).

In Waters’s *Affinity*, the writing of history is itself thematized, as critic M.-L. Kohlke argues. Kohlke views the character of Margaret Prior as emblematic of the female historian struggling to assert herself, observing that ‘her would-be historical subjectivity stages itself in the shadow of her dead historian-father’ (2004:157); Margaret’s father, we learn, was

1 The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1922 as the date of the first recorded use of the word ‘queer’ to denote homosexuality.

interested in ‘the great lives, the great works, each one of them neat and gleaming and complete, like metal letters in a box of type’ (Waters 1999:7). Waters’s works challenge such a view of history, exposing it as messier and more queer than traditionally assumed.

Misfortune also presents history as cumulative and multi-layered, and subject to numerous interpretations. The novel ends with a National Trust-style guide to Love Hall, which is now a tourist attraction. Here, Stace parodies common ways of packaging the past, defamiliarizing the conventions of the heritage industry. The reader is made complicit in the actual history of the house, at which the writer of the guide can only guess. This strategy acts to expose and undermine traditional accounts of the past, accounts that ignore or misrepresent gender.

As in Waters’s work, there is in this novel the suggestion that time is not linear. The young Rose, standing before a painting of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, experiences a vision of a man in crumpled clothes lying by the pool inside the picture. Later, in a place named Salmacis in Turkey, he seems to enter the picture that he saw as a child: ‘From inside the canvas, I looked back . . . to my seven-year-old self . . . Time had folded in upon itself’ (Stace 2005:356). Here, time is cyclical and place shifting—and this in the context of ambiguous or multiple sexes/genders. Rose is, in Halberstam’s words, ‘in a queer time and place’ (2005), beyond those ‘paradigmatic markers of life experience’.

As one critic notes, the character of Rose in *Misfortune* is ‘a creation as anachronistic as he is anomalous’, conversant as he is with such concepts as ‘gender roles’ (Greenland 2005). While the anachronisms in the text might be grounds for criticism, they are also interesting, for they encourage linkages between past and present and expose the contingent and partial nature of ‘theory’ which, as Butler points out, does not necessarily keep time with historical reality. The elderly Rose, narrating his tale, is able to compare historical genders (Stace 2005:98). His observations on the matter point to the shifting nature of gender and of theories of gender.

Representation—including the representation of the past—is an almost obsessive concern of this novel. The history of Love Hall is written in code; and it must, as mentioned, be deciphered for Rose’s story to emerge. Ballads are also significant—a song offers clues as to Rose’s past—and they tell stories that other, more prestigious forms of knowledge transmission might ignore. At one Love Hall celebration, there is in attendance a professional ballad scholar from the University of Oxford who ‘instructed the villagers in the correct singing of the songs that they knew better than he’ (Stace 2005:101). Thus the pretensions of academia are mocked and the vibrancy of popular culture and of unofficial narrative is asserted.²

² Stace, it should be noted, is also a singer-songwriter, performing under the name John Wesley Harding.

Stace also offers suggestions as to a feminist history, as Waters does. Anonyma reads to Rose from a book called *The Gallery of Heroick Women* (Stace 2005:130) and tells stories which Rose, in old age, tries to write down; the mother's voice is affirmed and female historical achievement celebrated. Franny, whom Rose encounters in Turkey, has a historian father. But, we learn, 'Franny wasn't interested in her father's history . . . She loved the people she saw around her' (Stace 2005:329). Like Margaret in Waters's *Affinity*, then, Franny struggles against traditional ways of ordering the past and of defining identities; as do *Misfortune* and *Tipping*.

Re-vising the Novel

Tipping and *Misfortune* both self-consciously and delightedly belong to a literary tradition. Both draw on and play with the conventions and style of the nineteenth-century novel, in particular the work of Charles Dickens. *Tipping* is also reportedly inspired by 'books like *My Secret Life: An Erotic Diary of Victorian London*' (Taylor 2004:16). In addition, Waters has cited the reportage of Henry Mayhew and the novels of Wilkie Collins as influences on her first three novels (Taylor 2004:16).

In borrowing from and alluding to other narratives, Waters's works raise complex questions about realism and representation. Kohlke notes that Waters's *Affinity* harks back to nineteenth-century realism, but it 'circumvents the standard in-built reticence on unpalatable and/or taboo subjects of the time' (2004:156). Thus, it appears to reflect Victorian reality more authentically than 'genuine' Victorian literature, constituting what Kohlke terms a '*new(meta)realism*' (156). *Tipping*, too, dislodges conventional ideas about 'realism', by means of mimicry (Irigaray 1985:76), or, to hark back to Butler, a subversive 'citationality' (1993:12–16).

Tipping, as mentioned, can be read as a picaresque novel, an episodic text that 'describes the adventures of a lively and resourceful hero on a journey' (Drabble 1985:763). It also invokes the *Bildungsroman*, 'a novel in which the chief character, after a number of false starts or wrong choices, is led to follow the right path and to develop into a mature and well-balanced man (sic.)' (Garland 1997:87). In Waters's novel, Nan progresses from oyster-girl to dresser, to music-hall artiste to rent boy, to sex slave to housewife/parent and socialist orator. She journeys towards a mature relationship with Florence, and social awareness. The picaresque novel and the *Bildungsroman* being by definition masculinist forms, the text is already overturning conventional cultural scripts in featuring a female protagonist; and her *Bildung* is a queer one, as we will see.

While the protagonist of *Misfortune* is male, his *Bildung* is certainly not *straight*forward. Rose is transformed from abandoned baby boy to cherished daughter, to troubled young man to contented father and partner to a woman. Stace queers heterosexuality, as will be discussed later. His novel is richly allusive. It has been described as ‘a tongue-in-cheek homage to Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, Dickens’s *Bleak House*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as told by a Greek chorus of regulars from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*’ (Schlack 2005). One critic notes its similarities to ballad and folktale, and to Shakespeare (Greenland 2005). Stace’s ‘very jolly picaresque’ (Soloski 2005) ‘presents a world as crazily gothic as *Gormenghast* and as comedic as Thackeray’s *The Rose and The Ring*’ (Brace 2005). As in Waters’s work, then, familiar narratives are deployed and simultaneously disrupted, in the service of queerness.

Queer Bildung: Tipping the Velvet

Both *Tipping* and *Misfortune* recount a queer *Bildung*. Both, in so doing, avoid essentializing queerness—a danger against which Butler warns (1990:127). They avoid, too, the promotion of a queer individualism convenient to capitalism (see here Bristow 1997:222). In both cases, the *Bildung* described is no simple coming-out tale, and the protagonists of both books are forced to acknowledge altruism and alterity, even as they assert their (shifting, multiple) selves.

Tipping’s interest in gender and sexuality is signalled early on by the detail of the oysters. Nan’s father calls the oyster ‘a real queer fish’, ‘now a he, now a she, as quite takes its fancy. A regular morphodite, in fact!’ (Waters 1998:49). Already, then, a challenge to the boundaries between ‘male’ and ‘female’ is posed. A similar problematization occurs later when Nan sees an advertisement for lodgings that specifies a ‘Fe-male lodger’. She reflects: ‘I saw myself in it—in the hyphen’ (Waters 1998:211). Gender trouble is also effected by Nan’s ambiguous appearance, and by the changes to her body, which apparently becomes more male (Waters 1998:381, 368).

As mentioned, the word ‘queer’ recurs throughout the novel. It is also used by Kitty to describe Nan’s first stage costume, a man’s suit. Nan’s landlady identifies the source of the troubling ‘queerness’ of Nan’s appearance; the costume is ‘too real’ (Waters 1998:118). Nan looks, then, too much like a boy, and not enough like a girl dressed up as a boy. She ends up ‘clad not exactly as a boy but, rather confusingly, as the boy I would have been, had I been more of a girl’ (120). This episode is redolent of Butler’s work on drag; Butler asserts:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency... In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalised by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity (1990:137–8).

According to Butler, this performance gives rise to ‘pleasure’ and ‘giddiness’. In Nan’s case, though, the ‘radical contingency’ of gender (Butler 1990:138) is not exposed—she simply looks like a boy. Of course, this is also troubling, for it challenges the boundaries between the sexes, echoing Butler’s dismantling of the idea of ‘sex’ as a stable category: ‘the category of “sex” is, from the start, normative... “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs’ (Butler 1993:1).

There are other indications of a performative notion of gender in the novel, as when Nan and Kitty are told to go out and ‘study the men’, to capture their mannerisms and speech, to be better able to convey them in Kitty’s act (Waters 1998:83). There are also numerous references to performance and theatricality (for example, 1998:272, 335). In addition, the ‘expressive’ model of sexuality—the idea that one automatically desires a member of the so-called ‘opposite sex’—is debunked by Nan’s story. Ideas of difference and sameness are dealt with in complex ways, and linked subtly to gender (Waters 1998:46). The shifting identifications evoked point to the intertwined nature of desire and gender, while keeping open their relationship. As Butler observes, although being a certain gender does not mean that one will desire a certain way, ‘there is nevertheless a desire that is constitutive of gender itself, and, as a result, no quick or easy way to separate the life of gender from the life of desire’ (2004:1–2). Waters’s novel indeed eroticizes gender, but queerly, in opposition to heterosexism.

Waters also avoids consigning lesbianism to a space outside (the dominant) culture, a move which Butler for one criticizes as ‘separatist prescriptivism’. Butler asks: ‘If to be a lesbian is an *act*, a leave-taking of heterosexuality, a self-naming that contests the compulsory meanings of heterosexuality’s *men* and *women*, what is to keep the name of lesbian from becoming an equally compulsory category?’ (Butler 1990:127). Waters’s acknowledgement of differences between lesbians—most notably class (a key issue in all of her novels)—avoids this unhelpful restrictiveness. When Nan prepares to go to a lesbian bar, she wonders: ‘What attitude would I strike?’ (Waters 1998:411).

Queer Bildung: Misfortune

Misfortune also frequently challenges the boundaries between ‘male’ and ‘female’, most obviously in having a protagonist who lives first as a ‘girl’ and who, after much struggle, becomes a ‘boy’. In the telling of this story, the narrator reflects, ‘pronouns are problematic’ (Stace 2005:82). Male and female are slippery terms in the novel; Loveall and his sister are described as a ‘girlish-looking boy and a boyish-looking girl’ (57). Rose’s cousin Victoria is a ‘tomboy’ (142), and later, when Rose walks the streets with her, bearded and in a dress, he reflects: ‘A fine couple we made, I as feminine as she was male’ (384), with ‘male’ offering a stronger challenge than ‘masculine’ would here, and recalling Butler’s view of sex as constructed. There is mention, too, of a doll of indeterminate gender, a female dog that looks male, and of a ‘squat, manly woman’ (Stace 2005:51, 396, 151).

Further challenge to gender polarity is offered by the ideals of the poet Mary Day, whose work *Anonyma* researches and catalogues. Day, we learn, wished for a time before the separation of the sexes, for an original and blissful state of androgyny (Stace 2005:97). *Anonyma*, we are told, thought that ‘no person was either completely masculine or completely feminine’. The genders, then, exist in relation to each other, on a continuum; and they are constructed. According to *Anonyma*, anticipating Simone de Beauvoir, ‘boys and girls were . . . made and not born’ (Stace 2005:98), and when Rose is struggling to define himself as a man, his mother is of the view that ‘I was naturally male, but I could be whichever gender I chose’ (240).

The motifs of disguise and performance in *Misfortune* echo Butler’s notion of performativity, as in Waters’s text. Rose and his friends Sarah and Stephen engage in various role-playing games. Rose, apparently a girl, dresses up in play as a male pirate; so a boy dressed up as a girl dresses up as a boy: ‘It all seemed most natural to me at the time. I did make a good boy’, Rose comments (Stace 2005:171). But troubling gender is not painless; Rose suffers confusion and alienation as a result of his upbringing, and his identity is uncertain: ‘was there even an “I” to speak from?’ he wonders (225). He is unable to experience pleasure, being alienated from his own body, and he even attempts suicide. *Anonyma*’s (and Butler’s) ideals are not easy to live out. Indeed, Rose questions the applicability of theory to life as it is lived (Stace 2005:241). While the text ultimately affirms ‘choice’ as far as gender is concerned—Rose ‘chooses’ to wear a dress, even as he assumes his maleness (Stace 2005:370; see also 516)—it also suggests, then, that this choosing is complicated by cultural factors (for example, Stace 2005:383), and that the performance of gender

is contextual. It is also relational, as Butler notes; when Rose is attempting to become a man, he realizes that ‘without Stephen, there was no one to make it seem natural’ (Stace 2005:237).

Like Waters and like Butler, Stace troubles heterosexist assumptions regarding the oppositional nature of desire. Loveall is an effeminate man, for example, and is rumoured—wrongly—to be a ‘bit of a Lady Skimmington’ (Stace 2005:25); common assumptions about the link between gender and sexuality are challenged. Moments of unwitting queer desire also occur; when Rose’s uncle gropes him (204), for example, and when Stephen kisses Rose as part of one of their games (175). There is also unwitting heterosexual desire, as when the young Rose and Sarah share a bed, and are aroused. As adults, Rose and Sarah form a relationship. In having the protagonist assume his maleness and then end up with a woman, it could be argued that the text ultimately returns to straight ideals. But, I would argue, in questioning the fixity of the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’, the novel in fact queers heterosexuality, proposing new, fluid forms of desire and relationality.

Queer Narratives and Communities

As mentioned, the protagonists of both *Tipping* and *Misfortune* journey towards communality. In *Tipping*, while Kitty refuses to be labelled a ‘tom’, Nan would like to meet other lesbians and to embrace her ‘tommish’ self:

“You would have to give up the stage,” she said seriously, “and so would I, if there was talk about us, if people thought we were—*like that*.”

But what *were* we like? I still didn’t know. When I pressed her, however, she grew fretful.

“We’re not like anything! We’re just—ourselves.”

“But if we’re just ourselves, why do we have to hide it?”

“Because no one would know the difference between us and—women like that!”

I laughed. “Is there a difference?” (Waters 1998:131).

Nan’s relationship with Kitty founders on this issue. Kitty marries Walter in part so that she may pass as straight, respectable, wanting Nan only as a covert source of pleasure. Nan, now ‘out’ and with Florence, rejects this proposition (Waters 1998:468). As suggested, though, the idea of collective lesbian identity is not unquestioningly or simplistically embraced in the novel, although it is affirmed.

As performers, Nan and Kitty gain attention from female fans. Their iconic status in the lesbian subculture is confirmed later, in the pub Nan goes to, where a postcard depicting them is affixed to the wall (Waters 1998:420).³ Queer community is asserted here, as is queer kinship. Annie refers to Nan as a ‘cousin’ (404); and the household Nan forms with Florence, the motherless baby Cedric, and Florence’s brother, offers a model of alternative kinship, in keeping with Butler’s ideals.⁴

Nan narrates her story to Florence: “‘Have you ever,’ I said, ‘been to Whitstable . . .?’” (430). This question recalls the opening line of the novel itself (“‘Have you ever tasted a Whitstable oyster?’”). This echo puts us, the readers, in the position of confidante, or lover. Story-telling is highlighted here and presented as an act of trust, of intimacy (see here Lord 1999). *Tipping* is a lesbian’s story told to an implied lesbian reader/lover. Waters indeed has stated that she wrote her first novel hoping only that it would ‘appeal to lesbians’ (Taylor 2004:16). In the text, the occasional references to Nan’s current situation (for example, Waters 1998:5; 116; 268) imply a narrator who is engaging with us now, beyond the time-span the novel covers. As suggested earlier, a queer historicity implies merging stories/selves.

Authorship, then, is thematized in the novel, as it is in *Affinity* (see Llewellyn 2004:213). Waters names herself in her text, teasingly. Kitty loses her ‘Butler’ and becomes merged into the act called ‘Walter Waters and Kitty’: a sickly, oedipal affair (Waters 1998:291; 295; see here Halberstam 2005:136). This is perhaps a comment on the patriarchal nature of traditional narrative, which co-opts its subjects for its own ends, or on the oedipal ‘anxiety of influence’ (see here Bloom 1997; Gilbert and Gubar 1979:3). Butler notes, with regard to identity and authorship:

What I call my “own” gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself) (2004:1).

Authorial authority is, then, illusory, and ‘authorship’ a contested term.

Misfortune is also concerned with narration; and it also offers a Butlerian challenge to authorship. The opening of the novel is narrated in the third person, as if by an omniscient narrator. But a first-person narrator breaks in on page seventy-one, to reveal that the baby being described is in fact him. The next section begins: ‘Me. You know who I am’ (Stace 2005:75). The reader is thus apparently directly addressed (the ‘you’ in question, we later learn, is the narrator’s son) and the illusion of

³ In a pleasing parallel, *Tipping* itself has become, as Waters puts it, ‘a major reference point in the lesbian community’: ‘There’s a Dublin lesbian club called Velvet’, she observes (Dominic Lutyens, 2003, p. 32).

⁴ Butler writes warningly, in connection with gay ‘marriage’, that: ‘efforts to establish bonds of kinship that are not based on a marriage tie become nearly illegible and unviable when marriage sets the terms for kinship, and kinship itself is collapsed into “family”’ (Butler 2004:5).

objectivity and distance is shattered. Rose explains his decision to open his account in the third person, thus:

I didn't think my own voice would be persuasive enough, so I opted for the old-fashioned narrator, the All-Seeing One—or let's call him God.

No one knows how God knows everything he knows—after all, it's bound to be a Man (and He blithely assumes that you are also male)—but He says he knows and we all believe Him. He speaks with knowledge and the force of history on His side (Stace 2005:77).

In order to tell this story, then, Rose is 'performing' traditional authorship, only then to disrupt the role and reveal its limitations, in particular its masculinist slant. Rose declares God dead and continues: 'The remainder of this must count, I suppose, as autobiography' (Stace 2005:79). Thus the text thematizes narration, drawing attention to its inevitable partiality. It also highlights the relationship between writer and reader or, more precisely, between speaker and listener; Rose, we learn, is dictating this account (103). As Nan relates her story to Florence in *Tipping*, so Rose tells his story in *Misfortune*: 'How many people will read this book? It is a matter for conjecture. The only thing I can say with certainty is that you are now; so, between the two of us' (82).

Texts play a key role in this story. Rose's father, taking inspiration from *Tristram Shandy*, wishes to compile a 'Rhodopaedia', like Shandy's father's never-finished Tristrapaedia (Stace 2005:126), and to capture every detail about his 'daughter' in writing. As stated, texts in fact hold the key to Rose's identity, yielding the truth about his origins. In so doing, they also link Rose to the poet Mary Day, whose descendent he happens to be, and thus to a female or feminist literary tradition. Of a punning and cryptic poem by Day called 'Their', it is noted. 'The narrator of this poem was not the bearer of the child but the child itself, the "I" inside "her", the "heir" to "their" Love Hall' (Stace 2005:464). The mother-writer here affirms her voice and her child's inheritance, in what might be seen as a challenge to the patriarchal order. (Day was forced into a marriage from which she fled.)

Rose's sex is revealed to her/him by means of a word, 'Boy', that is daubed around the house by a malicious member of staff—the signifier of his sex heralds its reality, a detail that recalls Butler's notion of 'sex' as constructed, and her view that 'language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different' (Butler 1993:69). When Rose realizes that he is a boy, he goes to the library to read up on the condition (Stace 2005:225). Again, the idea of gender as relational is implied, this time in the context of writing and reading. As argued earlier, literature is a site at

which a relational performativity can occur. In Turkey, Rose reports that ‘I was as eager for their story as [my hosts] were for mine’ (326); story-telling, then, is a matter of exchange.

As in Waters’s novel, the chief protagonist here comes to form a kinship group based on shared ideologies (Stace 2005:378), as well as on desire and on care. Rose’s group is composed of former members of Love Hall’s staff and selected members of his ‘real’ family, including cousins Victoria and Robert. As mentioned, Love Hall is given over to a hospice; like Waters’s Nan, who comes grudgingly to socialist awareness, Rose arrives at altruism.

Identity in both these works, then, is relational and communal. Both protagonists change according to the actions and expectations of others; one might note that of *any* novel’s protagonist, a fact that suggests that the novel as a form is an ideal way to explore relationality and ethics. As feminist philosopher Lorraine Code argues: ‘novels locate moral analyses and deliberations in textured, detailed situations in which a reader can, vicariously, position and reposition herself to understand some of the implications, for people’s lives, of moral decisions, attitudes, and actions’ (1991:168). Traditional models of authorship (as God-like, masculinist, or oedipal) having been now debunked, the way is clear for a queer form of story-telling to emerge, where ‘queer’ denotes not only so-called ‘same-sex’ identifications, but all kinds of imaginative projections of self onto other. Narration, according to this view, is a matter of risky trust: a fragile, partial, temporary—but potentially transformative—consensus between self and other.

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