

“Queering the Genre”

Experimental Writing and Queer Representation in
Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only
Fruit* and Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet*

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Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven sammenlikner romanene *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) av Jeanette Winterson og *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) av Sarah Waters, som begge er eksempler på den lesbiske eller skeive Bildungsromanen. Oppgavens hensikt er å analysere hvordan de to romanene «queer»-er sjangeren ved å trekke ut elementer og leke med den grunnleggende strukturen på den. Ordet «queering» er sentralt i oppgaven og henviser til det engelske ordet som i denne sammenhengen brukes som et verb og kan oversettes til en form for «skeive lesestrategier». Romanene kombinerer og eksperimenterer med elementer fra ulike sjangre og jeg er interessert i effekten av dette. For å aktualisere oppgaven, ser jeg på skeiv representasjon i lys av den politiske og kulturelle debatten som foregår i USA der bøker som inneholder temaer knyttet til LGBTQ+ blir forbydd på skoler. Saken vil ytterligere fremheve viktigheten av romaner slik som *Oranges* og *Tipping*.

Det første kapittelet belyser sjangeren Bildungsromane, eller Dannelsesroman. Der gjør jeg rede for den tyske opprinnelsen av sjangeren, i tillegg til utviklingen av den, som blant annet har vært preget av en feministisk bølge. Siden opprinnelsen av Bildungsromanen har nye sjangre oppstått, slik som «coming-of-age»-sjangeren og «coming-out»-sjangeren. Dette kapittelet vil og inkludere en analyse av hvordan de to romanene i oppgaven blander ulike elementer av disse i deres prosess i å «queere» sjangeren. I kapittel to tar jeg for meg *Oranges* og *Tipping* sine representasjoner av lesbiske identiteter og lesbisk seksualitet med Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* som teoretisk rammeverk. Her aktualiseres konsepter slik som kjønnsfluiditet og performativt kjønn. Butler hevder blant annet at kjønn er noe som er performativt, og at det blir realisert gjennom handlinger. Butler kritiserer og den heteroseksuelle matrisen som viser til hvordan heteronormative normer og forestillinger preger og gjennomsyres i samfunnet. Det som kritiseres er hvordan den heteroseksuelle matrisen marginaliserer og ekskluderer mennesker som trosser den, blant annet på grunn deres kjønnsidentitet eller legning. I kapittel to vil jeg analysere hvordan *Oranges* og *Tipping* fremstiller disse temaene, ved å presentere ulike lesbiske identiteter og seksualiteter. Samtidig vil jeg gjøre rede for hva slags definisjoner av kjønn bøkene fremstiller. I tredje og siste kapittel vil jeg presentere ulike systemer og forhold som er undertrykkende, i tillegg til å vise til hvordan protagonistene forsøker å gjøre motstand og frigjøre seg fra dem.

Samlet sett fokuserer denne oppgaven på hvordan Winterson og Waters har bidratt til den skeive Bildungsromanens kanon. Gjennom dette sikter jeg på å fremheve viktigheten av representasjon og normalisering av slike historier.

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Table of Contents

Sammendrag	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Queering the Genre, Bildungsroman, Coming-of-Age story, Coming-out story, Postmodernist Fiction, and Historical Novel	5
1.1 <i>Bildung in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	14
1.2 <i>Postmodernist traits in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	17
1.2 <i>Bildung in Tipping the Velvet</i>	19
1.3 <i>Tipping the Velvet and Historical Fiction</i>	25
1.3 <i>Chapter Conclusion</i>	27
Chapter Two: Lesbian Sexualities, Sexual Identity and Butlerian Performativity and Gender Fluidity	29
2.1 <i>Butler's Gender Trouble</i>	29
2.2 <i>Lesbian Sexualities: Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	32
2.3 <i>Definitions of Gender and Gender Roles: Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	34
2.4 <i>Gender Trouble in Tipping the Velvet: Introduction</i>	37
2.4.1. <i>Historical Representation of Cross-Dressers</i>	37
2.4.2. <i>Gender trouble</i>	39
2.4.3 <i>Gender Performance and Performativity</i>	42
2.4.4 <i>Performance and Lesbian Sexualities</i>	46
2.5 <i>Intelligibility: Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit and Tipping the Velvet</i>	48
2.6 <i>Chapter Conclusion</i>	49
Chapter Three: Oppression and Resistance	51
3.1 <i>Reinstation of a Patriarchal Institution versus Sisterhood: Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	51
3.2 <i>Exploitative Relationships Versus Solidarity: Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>	53
3.3 <i>Classism and Essentialist Feminism: Tipping the Velvet</i>	55
3.4 <i>Intersectional Feminism: Socialism, Solidarity, and Fighting Homonormativity: Tipping the Velvet</i>	57
3.5 <i>Topography in London: Oppression of Women and Cross-Dressing as Resistance: Tipping the Velvet</i> ..	59
3.6 <i>Chapter Conclusion</i>	61
Conclusion	63
Works Cited	70

Introduction

“What happens when these specific books are no longer available is, it decreases representation remarkably, and when you are not represented, you know that you do not have power.” (Beaumont 2023)

The words above express the concerns of Adam Tritt, a high school English teacher in Melbourne, Florida. *Al Jazeera* interviewed him about the rising book bans in various school districts across the US, where many of the books that are banned touch on LGBTQ+ themes. In this thesis, I will draw inspiration from Tritt’s statement and do a comparative close reading of two novels which have contributed to queer representation in literature. The novels are *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) by Jeanette Winterson and *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) by Sarah Waters, both of which I understand as examples of the lesbian or queer Bildungsroman — that is, novels which draw upon and experiment with the basic structure of this genre.¹

The novels are notably different regarding writing styles, plots, and settings. Nevertheless, I argue that because of their experimental writing style where they play with and oppose classical genres, they meet in their queering of the Bildungsroman, and they are therefore worth comparing. Some important questions I want to answer are: *How are genres queered in the novels; why, and with what effect? More specifically, I will ask what the novels say about sex, gender, and sexuality and how their experimentation with genre serves to convey this.* My preliminary hypothesis is that, while the traditional Bildung narrative depicts a journey towards integration in a heteronormative social and economic order, the two novels I have selected for study leave the protagonists at the margins of such orders. In order to argue for my thesis, my discussion will draw upon genre theory, specifically relating to the Bildungsroman and successors of this genre, such as the coming-of-age-story and the coming-out-story, and queer theory, including Judith Butler’s ideas of *gender trouble*.

On several occasions I will use the term “queer” as a verb which refers to a kind of *doing* rather than *being* (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 3). “Queer” as a verb “holds the most political potential”, as opposed to the noun, which suggests identity. The reason is that it

¹ Sara Tibbs has already written a doctoral thesis in philosophy at Queens University Belfast on queering the Bildungsroman where she includes an analysis of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. To the best of my knowledge, *Oranges* and *Tipping* have not been compared on the field from such a perspective. Tibbs, *Queering the Bildungsroman* (Doctor of Philosophy: Queen’s University, 2015). <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.676612>

“focuses on resistance (rather than description) and practice (rather than identity)”. The topic of queering first entered academia “during the postmodern turn” and this period highlighted the importance of “language, deconstruction, difference, fragmentation, multiple truths, discourse and rethinking old grand narratives and ideas of how power is structured” (2020, 7). The result is that “queer theory ‘troubles’ our ways of talking about and understanding things” (8).

My thesis consists of three main chapters. Chapter 1 defines the various generic categories that have been used to describe the novels. Here I will make an account of the early definition of the Bildungsroman, and subsequent developments which have opened up for more inclusive forms of the genre. Although the coming-of-age-story and the coming-out-story originate in the Bildungsroman, they differ from it in some respects. On the topic of genre, I will also explain the historical novel and neo-Victorianism which are relevant when analyzing *Tipping*. Further, I will discuss how the novels mix these categories with particular effects. In Chapter 2, I will discuss how the novels’ queering of genres represents and conceptualizes lesbian sexualities and identities. Judith Butler’s ideas will serve as a theoretical framework here, where topics such as definitions of gender, gender fluidity, gender performance and gender performativity are central. I will apply Butler’s theories onto the novels and thereby explain how they conceptualize gender structures, and lesbian sexualities and identities. Chapter 3 discusses the oppressive structures and relationships depicted in the novels. Here I show how queer narratives open possibilities of resistance — such as politics, community and solidarity, and other forms of emancipation.

The topic of queering the Bildungsroman is now especially relevant due to the recent book bans in the US and I will make an attempt to shortly summarize the events. The book bans are driven by new laws and regulations which limit what kind of books children, teens and young adults can access in school libraries. The free speech organization, PEN America, has tracked the book bans since July 2021 and recently published a report showing that since the beginning of their tracking there have been more than 4,000 cases of book bans (Friedman and Meehan 2023). The books often address racial inequality or center on LGBTQ+ characters or themes that have been labeled “obscene”. The bans are rooted in bigotry and prejudice towards LGBTQ+ people and identities where, as Friedman and Johnson observe in the 2022 PEN report, the term “obscenity” is “being stretched in unrecognizable ways because the concept itself is widely accepted as grounds for limiting access to content” (Friedman and Johnson 2022). In reality, “many of the materials now being removed under the guise of obscenity bear no relation to the sexually explicit, deliberately

evocative content that the term has historically connoted” (2022). The book bans are more common in Republican-run states such as in Texas and Florida which were responsible for more than 700 bans alone (Pengelly 2023). According to PEN America, efforts to ban books containing LGBTQ+ themes are “frequently drawing on long-standing, denigrating stereotypes that suggest LGBTQ+ content is inherently sexual or pornographic” (Friedman and Johnson 2022).

The consequences of such book bans are, as high school teacher in Seattle, Jesse Hagopian states “devastating” for young students (Beaumont 2023). Hagopian was interviewed by *Al Jazeera* as well. His concerns are as alarming as Tritt’s and he fears that the result of the book bans is that “Young people will lose access to stories that will affirm their lives and help them build a more just society”. The Trevor Project found that “more than 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year”, and that “two-thirds of all LGBTQ+ youth (66%) — say recent debates about state laws restricting the rights of transgender people have negatively impacted their mental health” (The Trevor Project 2021). One of the bills that have been passed which contributed to the book bans is the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, also referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. The bill was signed by Republican Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis, and it prohibits public school teachers from “holding classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity” (Diaz 2023). The Trevor Project condemns the bill, saying that it will erase “LGBTQ identity, history, and culture — as well as LGBTQ students themselves” (Waver 2023).

In other words, queer representation is crucial, also in literature and in academia in order to sustain an inclusive and a tolerant society. When *Oranges* and *Tipping* were first published, they contributed to queer representation in British literature. They subverted conservative and heteronormative norms and were able to portray queer identities, sexualities and lives outside of a social and economic order. *Oranges* has in fact been and is still used for educational purposes in England and Wales today, as it is listed in the OCR England Literature A-Level module “Literature Post-1900” (Oxford Cambridge and RSA 37, 2022). It is paradoxical that *Oranges* and *Tipping* were published in 1985 and 1998, considering the political and cultural backlash that is happening in the US today, where conservative and restrictive forces have regained power. This emphasizes the importance of queer representation, both for those who can relate to the themes, and for the rest of society in order to spread tolerance and acceptance for diversity.

In this thesis I will compare two cases of the queer Bildungsroman and show how they queer the genre. The thesis will hopefully contribute to a widening of research of the queer

Bildungsroman as well as echoing American high school teachers' focus on queer representation and the importance of it.

Chapter One:

Queering the Genre, Bildungsroman, Coming-of-Age story, Coming-out story, Postmodernist Fiction, and Historical Novel

Oranges and *Tipping* combine features from different genres, alongside other forms of narrative experimentation. The result of such playful experimentation is a “queering” of traditional narratives and genres. The queering of genres troubles traditional structures and generates new and inventive ways of writing.

The first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, exhibits characteristics of the traditional Bildungsroman because it depicts the protagonist, Jeanette, from the age of seven until early adulthood through a “process of maturation” (Pascual 2000, 25). Her story mainly takes place at home, in church and at school in her hometown, but small glimpses of her adult life in another city occur near the end of the novel. Jeanette is dealing with questions about her identity such as religion, sexuality, origin and gender. Problems occur when she realizes how her sexuality as a lesbian girl is conflicting with the community she lives in.

Although *Oranges* incorporates elements of the traditional Bildungsroman, Winterson strays away from the conventional genre when it comes to writing style. Amy Brown points to Winterson’s playful writing style through how she keeps “turning and re-turning several types of narrative about the origins of identity and story-making” and thereby “reconstructs both some biblical texts and a hallmark of the gay and lesbian literary tradition as precursors for the prophetic voice of the main character” (2008, 233). Winterson tweaks and reinvents biblical references as well as giving homages to gay and lesbian literature, both of which define Jeanette’s upbringing. The result is that the main character becomes a kind of prophet, as she finds her own truths and views in life, dealing with questions of identity and origin, such as her lesbian sexuality and being an adoptive child in an evangelical community.

For instance, Brown points to the fact that the novel has a structure “patterned on the first eight books of the Bible” (2008, 234), which is the Old Testament. The content of the chapters and the fables, which symbolically coheres with Jeanette’s life, is on the contrary very different from its original intertext. When it comes to the “gay and lesbian literary tradition”, Brown provides examples, such as when “the job Jeanette takes after she leaves home provides ‘at least’ a ‘room of [her] own’ (Winterson 1985, 158)” (Brown 2008, 244),

referring to Virginia Woolf's extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Another example is the fact that Jeanette's dear friend, Elsie, reads Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market" (Winterson 1985, 30), while her mother "taught her to read by using Deuteronomy (30)" (Brown 2008, 244). The juxtaposition between the sources of reading Jeanette receives from liberal Elsie and her religious mother highlights the contradictory knowledge she learns from each of them. Jeanette combines the knowledge she learns and is able to create her own truth and way of living. Her own truth contains straying away from binaries and understanding that oranges are not the only fruit, which her mother always tells her. Winterson not only includes many intertexts in *Oranges*, but she also plays with narratives, time and storytelling, which I will analyze later in this chapter.

Oranges as a symbol is most likely a reference to Anita Bryant who was during the 1970s a "spokeswoman for an orange juice" (Kunerth 2009). It was not only ads for orange juice that interested Bryant, but she also became a "celebrity face of conservative Christian politics" and anti-gay activist. Among others, she led the "Save Our Children" campaign which contributed to "the passage of Florida's gay-adoption ban in 1977" (2009), which prohibited homosexuals adoption. The rhetoric Bryant used portrayed gay people as recruiters and child molesters, and it can be said to be echoed in the "Don't say gay" bill today. As Lillian Faderman states in an interview with *NBC* the "Don't say gay" bill "is a contemporary version on these older attempts to annul homosexuality" (Eugenios 2022). Bryant gained support but her acts also resulted in the LGBTQ+ community mobilizing. This led to a boycott of orange juice, as well as protests and parades (Fetner 2001, 412). Considering this, oranges work as a symbol for conservative and Christian beliefs, where homosexuality is condemned.

The second novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, follows Nancy (Nan Astley) who "progresses from oyster-girl to dresser...to housewife/parent and socialist orator" and "journeys towards a mature relationship with Florence, and social awareness" (Jeremiah 2007, 135). Nan starts as naïve and "very young" (Waters 1998, 132) at eighteen years old. She is brought up in a working-class family consisting of her parents (mother and father), her sister Alice and her brother Davy. Nan begins to work as a breecher in the music hall with Kitty Butler, who becomes her girlfriend. She is later betrayed by Kitty and lives off the streets of London. The rich widow Diana finds Nan in the streets and hires her as a kind of escort. After a while Nan is thrown out of Diana's home, and she finds Florence who is a socialist activist.

Emily Jeremiah suggests that the novel is a "historical work" (2007, 132) because it deals with a Victorian setting. However, *Tipping* is not a classical historical novel, and as

Naoise Murphy writes, Waters' novel refuses to be considered an "authentic depiction of Victorian lesbian sexuality". On the contrary, it is a "postmodern metafictional response to the field of queer history, which broadens the questions we ask of the discipline" (2021, 7). Waters experiments with time periods and mixes the Victorian setting with a queer plot which is defined by a contemporary lens. Waters herself states in an interview with *The Guardian*, that "*Tipping the Velvet* was never intended to be a work of historical realism" and that it rather depicts "1990s-flavoured lesbian Victorian London, complete with its own clubs, pubs and fashions" (*The Guardian* 2018). She refers to a "patchiness of lesbian history" that "invites or incites the lesbian historical novelist to pinch, to appropriate, to make stuff up" (2018). The effect of Waters' playful and experimental writing style and combination of genres is a "queer" narrative that is unique, and that troubles conservative ideas and perspectives. Further into the chapter I will elaborate on historical fiction and what genres *Tipping the Velvet* combines.

Before I analyze the novels, I find it useful to begin with a definition of the *Bildungsroman*. While the genre may seem straightforward at first glance, it has caused discussions and vexation since its inception (Allen 2020, 2114). Further I will explore generic categories such as the *coming-of-age story*, the *coming-out story*, and the *historical novel*, because these categories are also relevant to the novels. In order to explain how the novels "queer" genres, I will make account of traditions and developments within the genres. This will give context and a historical background for further discussion. Following on from this contextualization, I will analyze how the novels engage with relevant genres.

The Traditional *Bildungsroman*

The literary term *Bildungsroman* originated in traditional German literature and philosophy during the eighteenth-century. As a literary genre it "follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (Baldick 39, 2015). In the German tradition, the term *Bildung* entails development and personal growth where the ideal is determined by society (Gustavsson 1998, 17). *Bildung* is linked to an Idealist tradition of the Enlightenment which believed in "human perfectibility and historical progress" which "assumes the possibility of individual achievement and social integration" (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 1983, 5). The German philosopher and poet Friedrich Schlegel argued that autonomous self-development should result in a "harmonious unity" between the individual and the whole, "otherwise" the individual "would destroy itself" (Beiser 1996, 155–6). The philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey published the

influential *Poetry and Experience* in 1906 where he stated that the genre “reflects an interest in inner culture” and “gives expression to the individualism of a culture whose sphere of interest was limited to private life” (Dilthey 1985, 335). The idea of an “inner culture” has been criticized for being elitist, suggesting a privileged form of *Bildung*, which entailed only certain types of education, reading, arts and so forth. Studying these would make for fully formed characters with intellectual and emotional qualities that made them good citizens and leaders. “Inner culture” was only available to the middle and upper classes - not the lower classes. This tension between elitist notions and the pursuit of equality has been present since the beginning of *Bildung* as a concept (Gustavsson 1998, 30). During the nineteenth century this led to a strict separation between the “formed elite or class” and the “people” who were not formed. Advocates for *Bildung* often referred to the “people” as “peasants” or “the mob” (Gustavsson 1998, 30). The idea of a strong separation between the two would grow to be a dominant one, especially among the advocates for *Bildung*.

The Modern *Bildungsroman*

Over time the genre *Bildungsroman* spread outside of Germany and developed into a much broader one, without the specific requirements for individual formation. Jerome Hamilton Buckley’s *Season of Youth* (1974) is the first full-scale study of the genre in the English tradition. In his book he lists characteristics which he refers to as the “principal elements” a novel has to obtain (all but two or three) in order to be categorized as a *Bildungsroman*. These are “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy” (Buckley 1974, 18). In other words, the requirements for a novel to be described as a *Bildungsroman* in the English tradition are significantly reduced and open compared to the German equivalent. This has led to disagreements on what the correct definition really is.

Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out this issue and referred to the genre rather as “the image of — *man in the process of becoming*” (Bakhtin 1986, 19), and that man’s emergence is “inseparably linked to historical emergence” (23). This means that “emergence of man” reflects society and historical development. Cultural ideals and pressures in society follow and are reflected in the genre. As opposed to the original genre which Dilthey and Schlegel argued for, Bakhtin describes a novel where not only “man” has to adapt and integrate in society, but where society also changes through “man”.

The scholar Franco Moretti comments on Bakhtin in *The Way of the World: The *Bildungsroman* in European Culture* (2000, first published in 1987), writing that with the

“emergence of man” it is important to know “how to keep history *at a safe distance*, separating the destiny of the individual from the great collective waves of the nineteenth century” (Moretti 2000, vii). By this, he means that novels mainly keep to the “private sphere” and that historical happenings, such as the French and the industrial revolutions, have been placed as a “horizon” in the background (viii).

Moretti also points to “the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization” (2000, 15). The problem is that even though the rights including the “individual’s right to choose one’s own ethics and idea of ‘happiness’” are “declared in proclamations and set down in constitutions”, they are “not universally realizable” because they “give rise to contrasting aspirations” (15). In contrast, “socialization is based on a mere compliance with authority” and is characterized by “agreement, homogeneity, consensus” (16). Because ways of defining “happiness” and finding “one’s own ethics” are so various from one individual to the next, the need for self-determination is at odds with society’s normative socialization.

For the sake of this thesis, a section in Moretti’s study worth noting is where he points out the prominence of the white bourgeois male experiences in the novel of formation and the lack of what he calls “the other”, asking: “and the Bildungsroman of the others — women, worker, African-Americans...?” (2000, ix). He concludes that the problem is rooted in the fact that “west European middle-class men” obtained a “monopoly” on privileges, and thereby the “wide cultural formation, professional mobility, full social freedom” which made it possible to “imagine” the Bildungsroman (ix). In my opinion, his question emphasizes the fact that queer people have for a long time been placed at the threshold of society and the genre. Although Moretti lists a variety of groups of people who can be put under the label “others”, he fails to include homosexuals and other people identifying as “queer”. These groups become further marginalized within an already marginalized set of “others”.

New Prospects for the *Bildungsroman*

With scholars such as Bakhtin and Moretti in mind, it is evident that the modern *Bildungsroman* highlights both self-development in the protagonist as well as historical development in society. The historical development has led to new scholars and developments contributing to the debate on the *Bildungsroman*. One example is the feminist critique that appeared in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983).

In the introduction, the editors Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland point to the lack of the female experience in definitions such as Buckley’s, which

exclude “the wide range of female stories of development” (1983, 15). They write “in fact, while male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever” (7). Even though the genre had been altered and developed into a more progressive concept mirroring society, the lack of female prominence was still worthy of criticism.

In my opinion one can draw a parallel from the feminist critique to the queering of the genre by connecting this to Moretti’s statement about the “other”. He, as well as the feminist writers, fail to mention queer experiences among other marginalized groups such as “women, workers and African-Americans” (Moretti 2000, ix). Whether it was intentional or not, people identifying as queer were excluded while Moretti was writing about the “other”, which I think illustrates how their experiences have been silenced and ignored, also in the Bildungsroman.

Turning back to the feminist critique, Abel, Hirsch and Langland write something crucial that can also be applied to queer experiences: “in its course from the earliest Bildungsroman to their contemporary transformations, the collection expands and modifies the notion of development in fiction to include distinctive female paradigms” (1983, 19). The notion of the expanded Bildungsroman can further be applied to queer experiences. Ideas about social integration have traditionally been connected to integration into a heteronormative order, reproduced through the family unit, while queer theory asks how these assumptions and values might be challenged (Gamson and Moon 2004, 49).

One example of a queer perspective on the modernized interpretation of the traditional Bildungsroman can be found in a recent article by Michael Patrick Allen. He introduces what he terms “Thatcherite Bildung”, inspired by former English Prime Minister during the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher, who famously stated that “there is no such thing as society”, implying that the nuclear family is the only source of “order”. Thus, according to Allen, Thatcherite Bildung works as a modernized and individualistic version of the original Bildung, and this is something he problematizes. In this neo-capitalist form of Bildung, individualism is celebrated as opposed to community, society, solidarity and class. Thatcher’s ideology put an emphasis on the “nuclear family”. This idea was rooted in what she called “Victorian values” (Allen 2020, 2113), where men were supposed to provide for their families, while women belonged to the domestic sphere, raising children.

The family order replaces the focus on “society/the social order”, and this is why homosexuality is so threatening to this way of thinking. For people who identify as homosexual and/or queer, self-development would mean opposing the “nuclear family” or “social integration” in a heteronormative and conservative environment. The two cannot co-

exist without tension. As Moretti writes “socialization is based on a mere compliance with authority” which often stands in contrast to “self-determination” (2000, 16), which is also the case here. In Thatcherite Bildung there is no space for queer self-development, which leaves queer people at the margins of this environment. From a traditionalist perspective on Bildung, “autonomous self-development must take place in and through the society” (Allen 2020, 2115), and in this case “society” is replaced by the “nuclear family”, which queer people are not a part of. Finding one’s place in the “social order” would imply that one has to settle down in a heteronormative relationship where the “order” and quest for “self-development” is dependent on the “nuclear family” to “stabilize” it (2116). As a result, the social order rests on a “heteronormativity” (Gamson and Moon 2004, 49) which marginalizes queer people.

The Coming-of-Age and Coming-Out Story

Other genres worth discussing in relation to *Oranges* and *Tipping* are the *coming-of-age* and *coming-out* stories. “Coming-of-age” is an English term inspired by the Bildungsroman. The coming-of-age story is broader and does not include the importance of Bildung, or formation. Claudine Raynaud writes that the term coming of age “entails the achievement of the goal: one is finally ‘of age,’ mature, ready to face the outside world” and that “the genre permits the telling of a story of childhood and maturation within the poetic truth of creative invention” (2006, 110), in contrast to the Bildungsroman which “offers the ‘plot’ of an apprenticeship of the concurrent mutual shaping of the protagonist’s psyche and his integration into society at large” (108). In the coming-of-age story, the focus on integration into a so called “social order” or “society at large” is not an essential factor. It is rather the process of maturing that is important and there is more of a focus on individuality. The process of maturing is not necessarily related to institutions, the rest of society, or a nuclear family, and it is more important to mature in the sense that one is ready to be independent and tackle life’s obstacles as a grown person. Through obstacles, the protagonist becomes educated, reflected and resolves aspects regarding their own identity and their meanings and goals in life. The result is a mature version of the protagonist. One could in a sense argue that the coming-of-age story is a modern Bildungsroman, as modern societies often place more emphasis on individual self-development as opposed to community, and thereby reflects developments in society.

The process of “maturing” and “coming-of-age” coheres with one of the elements that Esther Saxey argues is essential to the *coming-out story*. Similarly, to the coming-of-age story one could argue that the coming-out story is another label for the modern Bildungsroman, depending on what is emphasized about the protagonist’s development. I will however try to

define the term. In her most succinct definition, Saxey writes that “the coming-out story describes an individual's path to lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity” (2008, 1) and that it “typically ends with the hero achieving a ‘true’ identity” and that “after having kept his or her sexuality a secret for some time, the main character comes out of the closet and finds ‘true self-expression’” (89). Although the definition is helpful, it is as Saxey herself points out a simplistic one, and the range of coming-out stories are varied and complex. In addition, the label “queer” does not always imply a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity, because it entails everything that is not heterosexuality. For instance, among others, being asexual, pansexual or transgender can also be defined as being “queer”.

When discussing the coming-out story, it is also relevant to mention the criticisms that has come with the genre, as many argue that it complies with heterodominance, or what has been referred to as “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1980, 633). For instance, through the fact that with a queer narrative, there often lies an expectation that the characters will “come-out”, disclose, and declare their sexuality, while with heterosexual characters there is no such expectation. The expectation stems from a bias towards heterosexuality and where queer sexuality is considered “deviant” (Rich 1980, 632). This is exemplified by Lies Xhonneux, using Saxey’s definition, as it can be perceived that “the coming-out narrative is understood as implying that the adoption of a true identity is the protagonist's main goal” (Xhonneux 2012, 99). This implies that the protagonist does not have other interesting aspects in life worth writing about.

However, Xhonneux uses *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as an example of a coming-out story which defies this trope. She writes “lesbianism is clearly not the protagonists' sole encompassing viewpoint, but rather a constituent” of Jeanette’s identity and that “this constituent therefore becomes a possible site for protest and change, instead of something these narratives are merely working to establish and fix” (Xhonneux 2012, 109). Because *Oranges* inhabits a “nuanced discussion of...gender” it “prevents it from turning sexuality into the only possible position with which to identify”. Xhonneux acknowledges the fact that coming-out stories often mainly concern “addressing the difficulties queers experience when coming out”, but also emphasizes how novels such as *Oranges* “display a much more general interest in discrimination, exploring as it does questionable attitudes toward ... women” (Xhonneux 2012, 109). This also applies to *Tipping the Velvet* as it highlights important identity markers other than the fact that Nan is lesbian. These are mainly class and gender.

Another critical approach towards the coming-out story points out that it often follows a rigid and generalizing structure when it comes to development of queer sexuality. Saxey

especially notices this regarding male coming-out stories as these stories often have a “common form” which is “fostered by their shared politics” and that “this conformity can prove exclusionary” (Saxey 2008, 78). Further, Saxey sees that this is often not the case for lesbian coming-out stories and that they “are far less engaged in the project of producing a stable identity than their male counterparts” (79). This is the case with both *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Tipping the Velvet* as they do not depict a kind of “stable identity” or are “exclusionary”. The novels are both stories about lesbian girls growing up, but the protagonists’ identities and ways of coming out are very different. Both novels critique not only heteronormative structures and institutions, but also abusive and toxic relations within queer communities, and thereby avoid stereotyping and producing a “stable identity”.

What Xhonneux argues about *Oranges* can also be applied to *Tipping*, which is that the novels “focus on many more issues than just lesbianism” and that the “plurality of focus turns homosexuality into one part of their protagonists’ identities, rather than fixing it as the only place from which they regard the outside world” (2012, 115-116). Instead of “complying with heterodominance”, *Oranges* and *Tipping* “present unacknowledged challenges to the heterosexual mainstream” (Xhonneux 2012, 115-116). Both novels are too complex to be labeled as solely coming-out stories. Although they are stories about coming out, they actualize topics such as class, community, religion and gender, defying some of the critiques that coming-out stories have received.

The Historical Novel and Neo-Victorianism

Tipping has been described as a historical work, but it is not a case of the traditional historical novel. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary of Literary Terms*, in a historical novel “the action takes place during a specific historical period well before the time of writing and in which some attempt is made to depict accurately the customs and mentality of the period” (Baldick 166, 2015). It “attempts a serious study of the relationship between personal fortunes and social conflicts” (166). While *Tipping* is set in a period well before the time of writing, it does not attempt to depict the period accurately. As already mentioned, Waters states that her novel reflects a “patchiness of lesbian history” that “invites or incites the lesbian historical novelist to pinch, to appropriate, to make stuff up” (*The Guardian* 2018). Examples of this patchiness are her use and sometimes misuse of “antique lesbian lingo” such as “toms”, “mashers”, and “tipping the velvet” which she found in dictionaries showing slang in 19th century pornography. She also includes “little nods to lesbian and gay icons such as Dorian Gray and Woolf’s Orlando” (*The Guardian* 2018). When referring to the “patchiness of

lesbian history” she states that it is “this that I wanted the novel not just to reflect but to reflect on it, to lay bare and revel in its own artificiality”.

Sarah Gamble points to a “neo-Victorian impulse” which emerges with “the intersection of gazes featured in this encounter—the contemporary gazing at the Victorian gazing at itself” (2009, 127). Gamble states that “when we look at the Victorians, we see a world whose sexual and social mores are both quaint and titillating” (127). In *Tipping*, both the author and the reader have a contemporary perspective on the Victorian. They write and read about the Victorian protagonist, Nan, who reflects back on her own life from the time of her youth in Whitstable. The “real” history of the period has been tweaked and played with, which results in special focus on only some of the aspects of Victorian society, which the author finds interesting.

Cora Kaplan points out two topics that intrigue the contemporary audience regarding the Victorian period, and why they are engaging. These are sexuality and class. She states, “when the end of class society in Britain was declared in the post-war decades, Victorian class culture became another available antiquarian topic for fiction to explore, its taboos and excesses almost as exciting and exotic as Victorian sexuality” (2007, 86). These topics are consistent and essential in *Tipping the Velvet*. The novel gives the impression that Waters looks back at the period with fascination and interest, especially regarding sexuality and class issues, but at the same time chooses what aspects should cohere with the historical reality of the time period and not.

The novel is set in the nineteenth century but has a twentieth century frame which Jonathan Loesberg refers to as “binocular narrative” (2007, 363). He fittingly describes it as “a narrative structure that makes us explicitly aware of seeing the Victorian period from a contemporary standpoint, of seeing the Victorians as they ostensibly would not see themselves, rather than merely reproducing them for our spectacle” (363). Waters plays with setting and time, inserting a queer and relatively liberal plot within a Victorian setting, and the result is a queer and unique novel.

1.1 Bildung in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit has been described as a “Bildungsroman” (Pascual 2000, 25), a “coming-of-age story” (Brown 1997, 233) and a “classic coming-out novel” (Xhonneux 2012, 95), as many characteristics of these traditional genres are found in the novel. The plot in *Oranges* takes place during the 1960s in an English town, and follows the protagonist,

Jeanette, from the age of seven until she is a young adult. Jeanette is adopted into a family of evangelists who are devoted to the Pentecostal church. This is important because it affects her process of formation and maturation.

Religion as well as class are significant aspects of Bildung in Jeanette's story. This is manifested in her mother's obsession with appearance. Jeanette is taught the "correct" ways to behave, what clothes to wear, and what people she should surround herself with, for instance, the fact that her mother claims that their shoes have to be clean at any point because "you can tell someone by their shoes" (Winterson 1985, 4), and that it is not acceptable to "buy everything from Maxi Ball's Catalogue Seconds" (4). Even though Jeanette's family most likely belongs to the lower middle class, it is clear that her mother is very much concerned about distancing herself from lower classes through focusing on how she and Jeanette present themselves. Her mother also instructs Jeanette to keep away from the ladies who run the paper shop, most likely a lesbian couple dealing in "unnatural passions" (7). Her mother's philosophy is that there are no "mixed feelings", and that there are "friends" and there are "enemies" (3), where people who deal in "unnatural passions" are enemies. Another element in Jeanette's life which is controlled by her mother is the limited literature she is exposed to until she enters school. Until this point, her reading material mainly consists of "Jane Eyre and the Bible" (74). Jeanette is brought up with thorough instructions in what is correct and what is not, which coheres with the traditional Bildungsroman because it focuses on what makes an individual a good citizen by specific criteria related to class and normativity.

Although *Oranges* incorporates characteristics of the traditional Bildungsroman, it also opposes the genre, as Jeanette's individual needs do not coincide with society's norms and expectations for her. She does not comply with the social "order", which in this case would be her mother and the church, her biggest transgression being her queer, romantic relationship with Melanie. Because Jeanette's individual needs are conflicting with the social order, *Oranges* meets three of Buckley's criteria for a coming-of-age story which are "ordeal by love, alienation, and the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (Buckley 1974, 18).

The first criterion is *ordeal by love*, as Jeanette's "unnatural passion" (Winterson 1985, 88) leads the church to carry out an act of exorcism to make her "repent" her "sins before the Lord" (108), and hopefully quit her "unnatural passions". Jeanette's sexuality threatens the social order of the church and this leads to exclusion and separation from her love interest, Melanie. At the time Jeanette's heartbreak feels like a "blood poisoning" but the romance story ends with Melanie marrying a man and the feelings she once had for Jeanette

being “dead” (170-71). As a second criterion, through the exorcism and the “education” she receives from church, Jeanette learns and experiences that she is not accepted, which results in the feeling of alienation: “I loved the church, but I began to see that as more and more complicated” (130). Because of this she feels isolated and lonely although she is surrounded by people. The only form of real guidance and support is Elsie Norris, a woman in the church. This is where Buckley’s third criterion, *search for a vocation and a working philosophy*, is relevant. Elsie is seen as a bit of an eccentric because she does not conform to every social norm in the community. She and Jeanette become close friends when Jeanette has to stay in hospital because of loss of hearing. Elsie visits Jeanette and keeps her company as she tells Jeanette “jokes” to make her “smile” and “stories” to make her “feel better” (28). As already mentioned, Elsie introduces Jeanette to varied and liberal literature and poetry, which opens Jeanette’s mind and makes her realize that there is more to the world than what her mother teaches her. Elsie accepts Jeanette for who she is, as Elsie is “always encouraging” (30) and gives space for growth and imagination through conversations. Elsie helps Jeanette to find her own path and beliefs, knowing that she is not in the wrong for being who she is. This final path for Jeanette includes straying away from the community she is brought up in, moving to another city and starting a new life, only returning to her childhood-town on a few occasions such as Christmas. Jeanette learns that oranges, which becomes a symbol for her mother and a heterosexual life, is not the only option. *Oranges* is, in other words, just as much of a coming-of-age story as it is a Bildungsroman.

The third genre that *Oranges* combines is the coming-out story. As I already have written, the coming-out aspect in *Oranges* is prominent but it does not rule the whole narrative alone, making for a complex and interesting story. Nevertheless, the coming-out element in Jeanette’s story is crucial when discussing the novel, as the tension between her coming out and the environment she grows up in is in many ways what makes the novel compelling.

The fact that Jeanette’s process of coming-of-age is among others a coming-out story shows, in the notion of Bakhtin, not only how “man” adapts to “society”, but also how “society” adapts to “man”. During the time of publication of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), Margaret Thatcher was England’s Prime Minister and Winterson’s novel stood in contrast to the ideals of the nuclear family. Because of this, in combination with Winterson’s use of the Bible, the novel was perceived as “controversial” (Al-Shara 2015, 238) considering the political and cultural climate at the time. However, since its publication, society’s general

attitudes towards people who identify with the LGBTQ+ movement have changed in favor of it.

One can see a parallel to Moretti's conclusion about the "others", where he argued that it was only the western bourgeois male who had the social freedom and privileges to explore and grow as a person, making the Bildungsroman "imaginable". This was no longer the case when *Oranges* was published. Novels such as *Oranges* show how it is imaginable with a plot of formation in the form of a female lesbian coming-out story. When stories such as these are prohibited from being read by youth, these plots of formation become harder to imagine. The result is that stories that can affirm the lives of LGBTQ+ youth and can build tolerance and understanding in society are removed.

Jeanette's coming-of-age is not a story about how she follows her mother's steps, becomes a missionary, or finds a husband to marry. Rather, it is coming to terms with coming-out as a queer woman and as Raynaud terms it "achieve the goal" where "one is finally 'of age,' mature, ready to face the outside world" (2006, 110). The reader learns that Jeanette has faced the outside world because she moves from her childhood town. In the beginning, the possibilities for Jeanette are marginal when it comes to social growth and identity development as queer. As Jesse Bordwin notes, she "is kept out of public school for as long as legally possible, restricted to interacting only with her mother's church friends, and given limited access to secular reading material" (2019, 233-34). Bordwin follows up with the question: "Given the circumscription of Jeanette's environment and narrative options, where is the potential for growth?". In order to mature, Jeanette is forced to detach herself from her own family and community. It is this detachment that leads to Jeanette's maturing and facing the outside world. Winterson's way of writing about a process of coming-of-age is both a contribution and an illustration of how "society" also can adapt to "man".

1.2 Postmodernist traits in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Oranges queers generic features from traditional genres and I will now make an account of its postmodernist writing style which is important in the novel's queering of genres. Several literary devices in *Oranges* highlight its postmodernist hallmarks, the first being its comedic, playful features. The reader learns through the first chapter "Genesis" that the narrative Jeanette has been told throughout life is driven by her religious mother. She states that she "cannot recall a time" when she "didn't know" she "was special" (Winterson 1985, 3), and that her mother adopted her in "a tag match against the Rest of the World" (1) because she

was “bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first”, so “she did the next best thing and arranged for a foundling” (2). The fact that her mother compares herself to Virgin Mary and that the only reason she wanted Jeanette was because of religion is absurd and emphasizes her mother’s religious fanaticism. The narrative Jeanette has been told seems absurd to the point that it gives a comedic effect. As Merja Makinen writes, the “success of the novel is that it has us laughing about things we realize should make us weep as the character is forced, in order to preserve her integrity, to mock the sacred” (2005, 5).

The second significant experimental feature is the novel’s focus on story-telling and narrative. Winterson sporadically includes fables and myths with biblical references throughout the novel. As Brown writes: “As in other works of biblical revision, the fables’ parallels with biblical themes and imagery effectively deny the biblical narrative a position of supreme or sole authority and foreground the malleable textuality of the Bible” (2008, 235). Winterson tweaks a narrative and story that is perceived as holy and untouchable by many. She dares to experiment and stray away from the normative and established, and is able to trouble our ways of thinking about narratives and truths. In the spirit of Bakhtin, Winterson has strayed away from the classical Bible and moved forward in time, where “man emerges” in history, and another narrative, which is queer, becomes more important.

One of the playful elements in *Oranges* is mentioned in the introduction to the novel where Winterson herself remarks on the non-linear narrative style: “Oranges is an experimental novel: its interests are anti-linear”. Fables and incidents jump from one to another and “you can read it in spirals”, which “allows infinite movement” (1985). As opposed to a classical Bildungsroman or coming-of-age story, this novel does not tell a strictly chronological story.

The third postmodern characteristic is the focus on multiple truths and breaking with old grand narratives. Winterson introduces several ways of thinking and troubles binary structures and ideologies, for instance, by the fact that Jeanette manages to find and navigate her own “story” or “narrative” in spite of her mother and the rest of the church community’s pressure. Jeanette’s way of thinking is not as binary as her mother’s and she does not think that “oranges are the only fruit”, although this is what she has been told in her upbringing. Instead of complying with social norms in her community, which include heteronormative relationships, wearing certain clothes, eating certain foods, liking certain people, Jeanette rather seeks her own independent self-development. She strays away from the collective and the social order. Jeanette follows her inner moral and ideological compass and thereby develops her own identity and maturity. As opposed to her mother, who in many ways

represents the church and the rest of the community, she thinks that “history is a string full of knots, the best you can do is admire it, and maybe knot it up a bit more. History is a hammock for swinging and a game for playing” (Winterson 1985, 176). Jeanette concludes with history being something one can tweak and play with, and that the dominant discourses, such as specific religious doctrines including heteronormativity are not necessarily right.

As Mara Reisman states *Oranges* shows “ways in which the dominant discourses can be overturned” (2011, 11) and by an extension, this creates a space for queer self-development. Reisman points to the sentences after Jeanette’s mother burnt all of her notes: “Walls protect and walls limit. It is in the nature of walls that they should fall” (Winterson 1985, 113), arguing in relation to this description that “the effort it takes to institutionalize and naturalize certain behaviors and beliefs — to maintain the walls — also points to places where the structures are weak because ideologies are in flux” and that in *Oranges*, “stories are the places where ideologies are most unstable” (Reisman 2011, 11). The stories, myths or fables in *Oranges* create a space where “walls” and grand narratives can be turned over. The “stories” illustrate how Jeanette does not follow only one book (the Bible), one community, and one social order, but manages to find her own beliefs, identity and development.

Experimentation, playfulness and challenging the established are all characteristics of *Oranges*. Winterson has written a queer story, not only because of the plot but also because of its literary style and mixing of genres, troubling the normative and the established. The result is a unique novel that challenges traditional definitions and genres, capturing maturation and formation.

1.2 Bildung in *Tipping the Velvet*

Tipping the Velvet depicts the story of Nan who lives a simple, and happy life in Whitstable, working twelve-hour shifts in her family’s oyster restaurant “*Astley’s oysters*” (Waters 1998, 3). At the same time, Nan’s family has expectations for her and her future, which are regularly hinted at and remind the reader that she does not fit in entirely. These expectations focus on what makes an individual a good citizen by specific criteria related to class and normativity, a characteristic of the traditional Bildungsroman. The social norms consist of settling down in a nuclear family, living in Whitstable and continuing the family business, and thereby contributing to the “social order” or the “whole” which is the family.

One of the hints occurs when the family questions Nan’s regular visits to the music hall. She goes there solely for the purpose of watching Kitty Butler, the male impersonator

she is enthralled by. The questioning seems innocent, but the core of the topic has a serious undertone. Nan's father takes for granted that she is there for a boy and not because of Kitty, or more likely he denies the truth as he says "Well, we are told it is Kitty Butler...If you ask me...I think there's a young chap in the orchestra pit what she's got her eye on" (Waters 1998, 19). Nan hides the real reason for why she visits the music hall and "[lets] them all think just what they [like] - and [says] nothing" (19). In the beginning she plays into this expectation, which is apparent by the fact that she has a "beau" (5) named Freddy, only because it is socially acceptable, and not because she actually likes him.

Another family member who expects Nan to be romantically interested in boys is Nan's sister, Alice, "my dearest friend of all — with whom I [share] a bedroom and a bed, and who [hears] all my secrets, and [tells] me all of hers" (Waters 1998, 5). Their intimate relationship crumbles when Alice notices Nan's fascination for Kitty as more than a platonic one and disapproves of it. When Nan confesses her admiration for Kitty to Alice, she is met with a reaction of shock and disappointment as she: "[is] gazing at me with an ambiguous expression that [seems] half amused, half distaste" (20) and further "[doesn't] speak" and "only [rolls] away from me and [faces] the wall" (21). While Nan tries to open up to her closest friend and family member, she is met with rejection. The result is that Nan becomes more afraid of disapproval from the rest of the family, and therefore distances herself from them and their norms.

Although Nan's parents have expectations for her, it is clear that they love her regardless of what she chooses and that they support her in what she does. Nan is however too afraid to take the chance and tell them the whole truth, and because of this, her journey of coming-of-age is the same route as for Jeanette in *Oranges*, which is to leave her family and community on a quest for individuality and social freedom. When Nan leaves Whitstable for London together with Kitty, her father says that she is a "grown-up woman, almost, and should be allowed to know her own mind" (59). Even though they had hoped to see her "marry a Whitstable boy and settle close at hand" he concludes that "children... [aren't] made to please their parents; and no father should expect to have his daughter at his side forever" (59). He continues saying "even if you [are] going to the very devil himself, your mother and I [will] rather see you fly from us in joy, than stay with us in sorrow - and grow, maybe, to hate us, for keeping you from your fate" (59). In other words, the reader and Nan herself do not know for certain that her parents would reject her if she told the truth, but it seems like even the thought of Nan being a lesbian has never occurred for her parents. Her experience

with Alice traumatized her so much, that she rather distances herself from them. This also leads her on her journey of self-development and maturing.

In the journey of coming-of-age, some of Buckley's principal elements are again relevant. These are "alienation", "ordeal by love" and "the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (Buckley 1974, 18). The alienation is caused by the situations where Nan is betrayed or disappointed by people she loves. For instance, when she visits Whitstable after moving to London in order to perform with Kitty. Before she leaves, her brother gives her a "goodbye gift" to remind her "where home [is]", in case she would "forget" (Waters 1998, 62). This works as a foreshadowing for what is to come. Apart from visiting Whitstable one time, Nan only writes letters home, which eventually ends as well. During the visit to Whitstable from London Nan brings gifts to everyone, which results in an embarrassing affair, rather than one of happiness and gratitude as she imagined. Giving her mother a silver backed brush and a hand-glass Nan "[thinks] at once...how queer they would look beside her cheap colored perfume bottles, her jar of cold-cream, on her old chest of drawers with its chipped glass handles" (157). Nan's gifts do not fit with her family's simple home in Whitstable. Instead, they seem odd, and *queer*, which works as a symbol for how Nan has become odd and queer in their house, both symbolically and literally. The situation reaches a climax when Alice receives a hat which she refuses to try on and she ends up bursting into tears. After the embarrassing event, they all try to forget it as they "[shoo]" Nan "away" when she offers to "join them" (159). Fittingly, they reason it with the fact that Nan is a "guest".

The incident is painful and shows how out of place Nan has become even in the house she grew up in with her own family. She does not fit into the normative life in Whitstable, and after distancing herself from the town for a while, it becomes even more evident. Nan feels like a disappointment to the family despite her success in London. Much of it stems from the fact that she is afraid of coming out as a lesbian to the rest of her family after telling Alice, and thereby hurt them by slowly cutting contact. At the same time, her sexual identity is a threat to the normative working-class community in Whitstable, forcing her to distance herself from them. Even her presence troubles their usual habits and ways of living. Nan is a guest, and she does not belong in Whitstable anymore, which alienates her.

Both Nan and Jeanette are condemned by their societies and families but in contrasting ways. Jeanette's condemnation is explicit as she goes through a process of exorcism and isolation where her sexuality is labeled as an "unnatural passion". Nan on the other hand, has a loving family, and the only explicit condemnation she is met with is Alice's rejection through a cold shoulder. Her parents support her, but after spending time in London, she is

alienated in her own childhood home, making the condemnation indirect and vague, in contrast to Jeanette's experience. Even though their experiences are very different, what they have in common is that the feeling of alienation is painful and isolating.

As already mentioned, Buckley's "love by ordeal" and "the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" are also themes in the novel. Similar to *Oranges*, "love by ordeal" is complicated by internalized homophobia and a homophobic society. I argue that this provokes a "working philosophy" for Nan. Kitty Butler, the performer whom she admires at the music hall eventually becomes Nan's secret girlfriend. Nan starts as Kitty's dresser, and eventually becomes a male impersonator on stage herself, as a "breecher".² The girls gain great success as stage performers and move to London to work in a large music hall. Nan is not only dealing with expectations from her family but also from society at large, connected to her romantic relations.

Nan and Kitty hide their relationship from the audience because they, especially Kitty, are afraid of being considered "toms". When they meet two fellow lesbian performers (Barbara and Ella), Kitty says to Nan "They're not like us! They're not like us, at all. They're toms" (Waters 1998, 131). In contrast to Kitty, Nan likes the ladies and relates to them. Kitty, however, struggles with an internalized homophobia and is afraid that her romantic relationship with Nan will be revealed to the audience and ruin their chances of further success. Kitty's fear is not unreasoned. The couple later experience that the audience of one of their performances begins to realize that they are more than "girls" and in fact are "toms" (141).

In my opinion Kitty's rejection becomes a part of Nan's formation where she gradually becomes prouder of who she is. As she experiences rejection by Kitty and the audience, she still chooses to defy it. Kitty's fear and internalized homophobia result in her betraying Nan and marrying their manager Walter. In shock and devastation Nan ends up living off the streets of London and earn her living as a prostitute. She cuts contact with her family and thinks to herself "Kitty was married! But I was poor and alone and uncared for"

² According to Mandy Koolen, "Breecher", meaning "trousers" was often a term used to refer to male impersonators. The breechers were popular entertainers in Victorian England. Koolen differentiates between Victorian "theatrical acts in the past where women adopted male dress" as "breeches" and the "contemporary onstage-crossdressing" as "drag". Koolen, "Historical Fiction and the Revaluing of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters' 'Tipping the Velvet'.", 372.

(Waters 1998, 191). Nan's heartbreak is one of the moments where she struggles the most and feels the most alone and alienated. At the same time, it is what initiates a "working philosophy" for her, where she connects with a socialist community and realizes the importance of fighting for one's freedom and rights. During hard times, her character develops the most. The difficult periods force her to mature and to grow stronger and more secure in her sexuality and identity.

Another example of when Nan is at a bad place in life is when she is hired by the wealthy widow Diana Lethaby to work as her personal "boy", for it "[is] always as a boy that I [travel] with her" (Waters 1998, 278). She lets herself be used by a rich lady and ignores her own troubling thoughts. Being Diana's employee entails having occasional intercourse with her and performing as "her boy" at public events in exchange for living in her house and receiving luxurious gifts. Further, Nan and the maid Zena betray Diana by sleeping together, and Nan is thrown out from Diana's house and onto the streets again resulting in another desperate situation. Nan is left alone at many instances, but in contrast to Kitty, she does not give into "authorities" and social norms. She follows her own destiny even if that means being alone. Nan accepts herself as a queer person and learns to live at the margins of (the rest) of society. She chooses who she surrounds herself with and finds a community which accepts her for who she is. This is something her family and Kitty fail to do.

Nan's path to a new working philosophy entails becoming a part of a socialist community which accepts her, and (declining and) leaving behind people in her life that do not. Nan finds this community through Florence, a girl who sometimes comes by to visit the poor family next door. She and Nan were supposed to meet up, but Nan met Diana that night instead. Near the end, Nan reconnects with Florence. She starts off as a housemaid in Florence's house but later becomes a part of her family, as Florence and Nan fall in love. Florence is a central activist for the socialists, working the rights of marginalized people and against conservative oppressive forces. Marginalized groups are amongst others the poor, the working class, women and queer people, which are groups Moretti would have called the "others". The socialist community does not conform with a "social order" dedicated to a nuclear family interests and values of the upper and middle class.

Nan's process of self-development and maturing is manifested in her emancipation and a pursuit of a destiny away from her family, Kitty and Diana. Instead of these relations, she chooses who she surrounds herself with, and finds a supportive family and community where there are others who can relate to her and support her. This is made clear at the end of the novel when Kitty tries to get Nan back and Nan rejects her, answering, "I belong here,

now: these are my people” (Waters 1998, 467). Rachel Wood points out the time when Nan realizes that she is surrounded by others who are like herself (Wood 2013, 312) and “is surprised to discover this sense of community and belonging” (Waters 1998, 417). Nan asks Florence: “Would you think me very foolish . . . if I said I had thought I was the only one?” (1998, 417). When Nan realizes that there are others that are like herself, she finally feels at peace and happy, and she is left with a feeling of relief and serenity. The fact that there are “others” affirms her identity, making it easier to accept herself. Again, the importance of queer representation in literature is echoed. After Nan’s socialist awakening, her philosophy in life is that she should live true to her own sexuality and identity, supporting marginalized people’s rights, and subverting conservative forces. By experiencing queer representation through being surrounded by people who are like herself and that accepts her, this becomes easier.

Questioning Nan’s Authenticity and Personal Development in *Tipping the Velvet*

Some critics argue that Nan’s formation and maturation is not authentic, and that her relationship with Florence is idealized. In this section I will make an account of what this argument is about and further give my own opinion on it. The relevance here is connected to Nan’s coming-of-age and maturing. One could argue that if Nan’s final destination where she develops a relationship with Florence is inauthentic, then she has as a result also not matured. Mandy Koolen states that “many critics argue that Nan gains agency at the end of *Tipping the Velvet* by shedding her desire to perform and developing a relationship with Florence that is more authentic than her previous relationships with Kitty and Diana” (2010, 391). Further, Koolen writes that through this perspective “Nan’s relationships with Kitty and Diana” has been linked to “performance and pain” and as a contrast, her relationship with Florence has been perceived as “therapeutic” (392).

Interestingly, Koolen’s argument is that Nan and Florence’s relationship is in reality “idealized” because “Nan lies so that Flo will take her into her home and seems to perform the role of a political order to win Flo’s affection” (2010, 192). By this, Koolen refers to the fact that Nan is not completely transparent with Florence in the beginning because she is afraid of rejection. For instance, she does not tell Florence straight away who she is and how she got Florence’s address. Nan is confronted with it and tells the truth, which is that she visited the old office that Florence worked at, and by getting a glimpse of a confidential document, Nan managed to memorize it and desperately find Florence. Nan also lies to Florence about staying with a “gent” (Waters 1998, 354), instead of at a woman’s (Diana)

place because she is afraid that Florence will reject her if it turns out that Florence is not “tommish” (354) as she first assumed. By the “role of a political order to win Flo’s affection” (2010, 192) Koolen refers to the fact that Nan does not understand many of the political discussions taking place during her stay at Florence’s house, and even though it most likely shines through, she does not admit it. As she says, “I [live] in a continual panic that I [will] disenchant them — that someone [will] ask me my opinion” (Waters 1998, 378). Further she thinks “when I shyly confessed one time...that I scarcely knew the difference between a Tory and a Liberal, they took it as a kind of clever joke” (378). She knows that she is clueless of the political mission that Florence is engaged with but ends up as a success at the socialist rally by taking over for Ralph who fails to give his political speech because of stage fright. During this, Nan works her way into Florence’s heart and becomes a part of the socialist community as a public orator despite having minimal knowledge about the politics.

According to Koolen, because of Nan’s lack of transparency and authenticity, it is worth questioning if their relationship can be “accurately described as “mature” but also whether it aids Nan’s personal development” (2010, 392). I think that this perspective is interesting, and I agree with it to some degree. Some people put on an act of engagement, pretending to be interested in a topic such as politics, in order to gain, for instance, status, attention, or to gain someone’s affection. Sometimes these acts or performances result in authentic political engagement. In these cases, the performance only works as an entry to real engagement. The socialists’ political interests are positive for Nan, not only because Florence is involved in the community, but because it speaks in favor of her own rights. Nan chooses to follow her own path separate from her family, Kitty and Diana, and finally finds a community which truly accepts her. Even though the entrance for her involvement included an act driven by desperation, and maybe desire, I think that she shows authentic interest and a will to learn more. Nan finds her separate destiny in a community characterized by solidarity and acceptance which I argue is authentic.

1.3 Tipping the Velvet and Historical Fiction

In addition to combining features from the Bildungsroman, the coming-of-age-story and the coming-out-story, *Tipping* plays with the historical novel. In this section I will make account of the way Waters mixes elements from the Victorian period and the present time and explain the effects of it.

As Waters has stated herself, she wrote *Tipping* by “pinching, appropriating, and making stuff up”, including her own “invented clubs, pubs and fashions” (*The Guardian* 2018). Instead of writing a realistic historical novel, she has invented a fictional world by taking inspiration from the Victorian period and creating something new, characterized by modern terms and concepts, for instance the word *queer* which is used on different occasions such as when Nan’s father describes the oyster as a “real queer fish” (Waters 1998, 49), or when Nan thinks about her love for Kitty as “queer” (33). Waters’ use of the term is deliberate, and it can be found at several other instances throughout the novel.

I agree with Mandy Koolen who argues that the use of *queer* “playfully reminds readers that rather than being a period piece, this novel belongs to the realms of contemporary historical fiction”, and that the term hints to its former use meaning “strange, odd, peculiar” (2010, 374). Koolen uses the example of Alice’s letters where she describes Nan and Kitty’s relationship as “queer and wrong” (Waters 1998, 134). The term *queer* was originally used as a derogatory one, pointing to “deviant” or “abnormal” sexualities and genders (Monaghan, McCann 2019, 31), but it was reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community and used as “an umbrella term to designate resistant and non-normative sexuality” during the 1980s (2019, 2). The contemporary use of *queer* cannot be directly applied to the Victorian period, but in *Tipping* it makes sense. This is because Waters intentionally plays with it in order to make the reader reflect on its contrasting meaning in present and past time.

Another significant point made by Koolen is when she writes that “historical fiction may use the past to comment on issues of contemporary concern and, by establishing temporal distance between readers and characters, make difficult social critiques more likely to be heard and taken seriously” (Koolen 2010, 372). Some of the social critiques Koolen mentions will be analyzed in Chapter 3, which deals with oppressive structures and relations. *Tipping the Velvet* is set in a Victorian England in order to comment on contemporary England. The result is a potentially more powerful and smart method of presenting a social critique. The time-difference generates a distance between the novel and the contemporary reader. The distance can make the reader more receptive of social critiques, as opposed to a contemporary setting which would potentially be too intimate and close in order to initiate a process of introspection.

1.3 Chapter Conclusion

Both Winterson and Waters queer genres by combining traditional genres in playful and experimental ways. As I have shown in this chapter, the novels comply with Bakhtin's idea of the emergence of man in history; Hirsch, Abel and Langland's notion of expanded Bildung; Buckley's principal elements; and Moretti's bildungsroman of the *other*.

In the traditional Bildung there are specific norms and rules for how one is supposed to live, rooted in community and heteronormativity. For Jeanette in *Oranges*, Bildung is ruled by her mother and the church community, driven by religion and class. Winterson includes postmodern literary devices such as comedy, a non-linear plot and parallel stories within the novel. In *Tipping*, Nan's Bildung is not as visible but there is an expectation of a life in Whitstable with a boy and her contribution to the oyster restaurant. Waters delivers an effective social critique through her playfulness with Victorian England and contemporary society, causing as Koolen calls it, a "temporal distance" between the novel and the reader.

For both protagonists, coming-of-age means coming to terms with their sexuality and to accept and live with it, which makes the texts coming-out-novels. Although they are coming-out novels, the plots are not completely centered around this topic, making the stories further complex and interesting to read. Maturing and coming out entails the protagonists' emancipation from their original communities, which do not accept them, and to find a way of accepting themselves.

Another part of maturing is finding a new community which accepts them. The focus on the new community is more prominent in *Tipping* while this is more of a vague topic in *Oranges*. Nan in *Tipping* finds her own community away from her family which accepts her, illustrating how there is an alternative society apart from the heteronormative "order". *Tipping* shows how it is possible to find solidarity in a community as a queer woman and highlights the positive effects that representation have for her, as she finally can affirm her own sexuality and identity. Jeanette in *Oranges* also distances herself from her family, and although there is limited focus on an alternative community, it is indicated that she lives a more independent and freer life now, as she near the end thinks to herself "in this city, a past was precisely that. Past. Why do I have to remember?" (Winterson 1985, 163).

Winterson's literary devices and Waters' experimentation with time periods and gender adds a playfulness to the novels, making them queer and different, and resulting in unique stories. The novels play with and queer genres in different ways. However, in my view they are comparable because both authors dare to stray away from traditional ways of writing.

The novels portray stories of formations for lesbian women and show how they find their place in society in spite of being placed at the margins. It is this representation that makes such stories “imaginable”. The effects are powerful and important stories that are as relevant today as they were at the time they were published. The authors examine and argue for difficult social critiques, through non-linear stories, symbols and homages to the past, possibly making readers more receptive of their ideas. They defy the critique that coming-out-novels have received because they do not follow a rigid form or solely focus on the coming-out element. The result is that the novels challenge and trouble established ways of thinking about genres, and by extension, about received notions of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Two:

Lesbian Sexualities, Sexual Identity and Butlerian Performativity and Gender Fluidity

Queer theory is one of the main theoretical approaches I will apply when analyzing *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Tipping the Velvet*. It entails rethinking old narratives and expectations about gender identities, sexualities, and power structures (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 3), which both novels do. One of the most influential scholars within the field is Judith Butler, who argues in their book *Gender Trouble* (2006, first published in 1990), that gender is performative. As the title suggests, Butler problematizes the established perception of a binary structure of gender. In this chapter I will discuss how the novels' queering of genres represents and conceptualizes lesbian sexualities and identities, and Butler's *Gender Trouble* will work as a theoretical framework for this. First, I will give a short summary of some of Butler's main arguments, followed by an application of the theory to *Oranges* and *Tipping*. In my reading of both novels, I will discuss definitions of *woman*. As Leslie Feinberg writes: these definitions "may determine the course of women's liberation for decades to come" (1996, 109). In other words, it is important to note how we define *woman*, for several reasons. It rules who are included in the definition, and through being included, there are possibilities for "communities" and "liberation movements" (Feinberg 1996, 109). Definitions of gender, and the representation and conceptualization of lesbian identities are relevant to both novels, whereas notions of gender performance and performativity have a clearer relevance to *Tipping*. Waters' novel is more complex and interesting in its conceptualization of gender performance compared to *Oranges* and I will therefore focus this topic in my reading of *Tipping*.

2.1. Butler's *Gender Trouble*

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler introduces the terms "gender trouble", "gender performance" and "gender performativity" (2006). Gender trouble means challenging and troubling traditional and heteronormative ideas, definitions and notions about gender, and thereby deconstructing

gender as a binary structure (David Walton 2012, 172). One of Butler's main arguments is that "When the constructedness of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 2006, 9).³

In his book, *Doing Cultural Theory* (2012), David Walton contextualizes *Gender Trouble*, pointing to the fact that Butler wrote the book as a social critique of the "pervasive heterosexual assumption in the feminist theory of the time, which tended to restrict the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity and set up exclusionary gender norms which were often homophobic" (Walton 2012, 172). Further, he points to some of the main questions Butler addresses which deal with "how non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender linked to questions like, what is a woman, or a man?" (173). Butler problematizes the conception of "woman" and argues that it is no stable entity. Butler also asks the question "if gender is no longer to be understood as consolidated through normative sexuality, then is there a crisis of gender that is specific to queer contexts?" (Butler 2006, xi).

Relevantly, in one of the sections in *Gender Trouble* Butler discusses feminist scholar Monique Wittig. Wittig argues that non-reproductive lesbian women have no sex because they are "beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (Wittig 2016, 10). Wittig argues that lesbians are "a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society" (2016, 4). She argues that "the category of sex... is a specifically political category of nature that serves the purpose of reproductive sexuality" which makes the category of sex "gendered" and "not natural" (Butler 2006, 153).

Butler draws upon both Wittig and Simone de Beauvoir, writing "one is not born female, one becomes female" (2006, 153). Gender is arbitrary and Butler further suggests that "one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man". According to

³ As Walton points out, when applying Butler's *Gender Trouble*, it is important to distinguish between what they call "sex", "gender" and "sexuality". "Sex" distinguishes between male and female, (often relying on biological differences, such as chromosomes, hormonal differences, and reproductive/sex organs). "Gender" describes the characteristics that a given culture understands as masculine or feminine, and which are socially constructed. "Sexuality" concerns how individuals are classified with relation to sexual attitudes, orientation, choices and behaviour.

Walton, *Doing Cultural Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 172.

Butler, “the lesbian” is not consistent with the “presumption of the heterosexual matrix”.⁴ The category “appears to be a third gender” which “radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description” (Butler 2006, 153). Therefore, the idea of sex as “natural” should be challenged.

Another concept which is also discussed in *Gender Trouble* is *intelligibility*. It refers to a broad domain of normativity, and if a person is intelligible, they cohere with “standards of gender” related to norms and expectations in the heterosexual matrix. This includes sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. The unintelligible or the “deviant” is within the “culture” but is excluded from the “dominant culture”. The unintelligible can become intelligible, and thereby change cultural climates (2006, 105).

In *Gender Trouble* Butler not only subverts the idea of a binary opposition between genders but also argues that gender is performative, writing that “acts, gestures, and desire” produce “the effect of an internal core or substance” and that it is produced “on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 2006, 222). These acts are “performative” because “the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means”. This suggests that there is no gendered “ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute reality” and also suggests that “acts, and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Butler 2006, 222-23). In other words, gender is socially constructed, driven by outer elements, such as acts, mannerisms and desires. The imagined gendered “interior”, or a gendered “essence”, is only an illusion which is driven by heteronormative discourses.

In an interview with *Radical Philosophy* Butler makes a point out of distinguishing between *performativity* and *performance* (Osborne and Segal 1994, 33). Butler does not argue that gender is a performance because a performance “presumes a subject” choosing its gender and performing it (33). The existence of a subject is central and is what differentiates a performance such as drag (with a subject), and gender performativity (without a subject)

⁴ Butler refers to the “heterosexual matrix” where the gender binary is not only concerned with sexuality but a complete system of gender that reinforce it. This system is “an entire set of normative expectations that also encompasses embodiment and desire”.

McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), 9.

where actions and behaviors result in a gender identity, “contesting the very notion of the subject” (33).

Butler’s idea about an illusionary essence coheres with their thoughts about drag, as they argue “that drag is a parody without an origin” (Walton 2012, 179). They write that “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself — as well as its contingency” (Butler 2006, 187). It is not only drag that is imitating, but gender itself is performative, making the parody (drag) a parody of a “fantasy” (the fantasy of an original man or woman), rather than an “original”. This fantasy is based on cultural and social constructs and norms, not an ontological or biological origin. Butler writes that “the parody is of the very notion of an original” because a parody has to have an original in order to imitate it. At the same time “the notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy”, so “gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (188). Butler argues that “we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity” (2006, 188). Drag emphasizes and dramatizes discourses of binary oppositions between genders, and thereby creates a doubleness. As Walton paraphrases Butler: “drag (male cross-dressing) suggests the outside is feminine but the inner essence is masculine yet, at the same time, it suggests the opposite: that the outside (the body as gender) is masculine and the inner essence is feminine” (Walton 2012, 178). The fabricated unity is the fantasy of a fantasy of an origin, which is parodied and dramatized through drag. This creates a doubleness playing with feminine and masculine characterizations of the “outside” and “inner essence”, where drag implies both.

2.2 Lesbian Sexualities: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Discussing lesbian sexualities in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the topic “unnatural passions” is again relevant. In contrast to *Tipping the Velvet*, *Oranges* deals strictly with a community where lesbian identities are highly limited and restricted, as evident in the fact that lesbian sexualities are only referred to as “unnatural passions”. By giving “unnatural passions” a label, the church community acknowledges that they are a fact of life, that must be exorcised. The unnatural passions are connected to the “demon” (Winterson 1985, 105) and as Jeanette states: “all of us knew it was dreadful” (85). “Unnatural passions” threaten the church’s power and the ideal of a nuclear family, and therefore have to be exorcised.

Religion plays an important role in regulating sexual behavior in *Oranges* and is the reason for why there are few lesbian role models for Jeanette. The only encounters she has with lesbian women, except for Melanie, are with the two ladies at the paper shop and the closeted Miss Jewsbury. The two ladies give Jeanette “a banana bar” with her “comic” (Winterson 1985, 7) and she likes them, probably because she relates to them and because they seem, in contrast to most of the people surrounding her, free and open-minded. Even though Jeanette is very young at the time and does not know for certain that she is a lesbian, she feels a connection with the ladies. After Jeanette tells her mother about them, she is prohibited from visiting them because they “deal with unnatural passions” (7). The conditions of Jeanette’s childhood and adolescence are limiting the amount of lesbian representation and role models in her life. In addition, sexuality is a taboo topic in the church community, and her mother attempts to shield her from everything that has to do with it. This makes it difficult for Jeanette to understand and accept herself.

Another lady dealing in “unnatural passions” is Miss Jewsbury who is much older than Jeanette. Miss Jewsbury takes advantage of Jeanette after Jeanette and Melanie are forcibly separated by the church: “We made love and I hated it and hated it but would not stop” (106). Miss Jewsbury is an adult that has the chance to act in solidarity, by helping and building Jeanette’s self-esteem. Instead, she sexually exploits her, which leaves Jeanette further traumatized and insecure. Representation of lesbian identities are rare and often negatively associated for Jeanette. Miss Jewsbury’s character demonstrates how even though Jeanette encounters other lesbian women, it is not a given that she is met with solidarity and support. This results in a nuanced and realistic representation of queer communities, rather than reinforcing the myth that queer spaces are necessarily safe and inclusive. Instead of being a responsible and comforting adult, Miss Jewsbury preys on Jeanette who is in a vulnerable state, making it even more difficult for Jeanette to accept her sexuality and identity.

Even though Miss Jewsbury is a predator, Jeanette’s connection to her is complex. This is for instance shown near the end of the novel, when Jeanette meets Miss Jewsbury again. At the time Jeanette is working for the Elysium Fields (a funeral parlor) and while she is cleaning after Elsie’s funeral, Miss Jewsbury offers Jeanette a visit to her “flat” (Winterson 1985, 161). Since Jeanette learned from last time and is more mature now, she declines the offer but thinks about how Miss Jewsbury was “the first person” she had “confided in, apart from Elsie” (161). The fact that Miss Jewsbury was one of the few other lesbians that Jeanette opened up to and that Miss Jewsbury welcomed Jeanette into her home, contributed to a false feeling of connection between the two for Jeanette. Back to their most recent encounter,

Jeanette thinks about how she does not know why she “didn’t thank her, or even said goodbye” (161) when Miss Jewsbury leaves. The seeming warmth and comfort Miss Jewsbury offers still makes Jeanette confused and uneasy, highlighting the complex and difficult thoughts and feeling such an abusive relation can bring.

The uneasy feeling Jeanette is left with is caused by the fact that she realizes that she is a victim. Jeanette has a desperate need for connection with someone who can relate to her loneliness as a lesbian woman in the community, and she tries to find comfort in Miss Jewsbury. In other words, representation and community is essential for Jeanette. However, this time she is aware that Miss Jewsbury cannot satisfy her needs, and she also knows that Miss Jewsbury’s intentions are not characterized by empathy or care. Miss Jewsbury’s character represents a lesbian woman who works as both a victim and a predator in a strict religious institution. She is a victim because she stays closeted into adulthood and thereby limits her own freedom. She is a predator because she makes Jeanette another victim by exploiting her. In this sense, Miss Jewsbury defies the myth that queer people meeting other queer people will result in supportive relations.

2.3 Definitions of Gender and Gender Roles: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Definitions of gender are highly relevant in a reading of *Oranges* in relation to queer theory. As McCann and Monaghan write, queer theory entails “rethinking old narratives and expectations about gender identities, sexualities, and power structures” (2020, 3), which *Oranges* does through its focus on women and their roles. I argue that *Oranges* in some respects extends what it means to be a woman, while also enforcing gender binaries. When discussing “woman” as a concept, I want to bring back Butler’s question: “if gender is no longer to be understood as consolidated through normative sexuality, then is there a crisis of gender that is specific to queer contexts?” (Butler 2006, xi). I think the question is interesting when discussing *Oranges* because the novel in a way asks the same question. When Jeanette’s mother finds out that Jeanette likes women, she argues that Jeanette is “aping men” (1985, 129), suggesting that only men can love women, and that Jeanette is not a woman because of this. This way of thinking echoes Butler’s question, because if Jeanette is not a woman for the sole reason that she desires women, then what gender is she? The truth is that she is a woman, but the definition of woman has to be extended further than her mother’s conception of it. As

I will demonstrate in this section, *Oranges* extends the definition of “woman”, but it also upholds gender binaries.

Oranges breaks with traditional gender roles and thereby extends the definition of “woman”, through the fact that institutions are driven by matriarchs. For the most part of the novel, women are the matriarchs, instead of the men being the patriarchs. Jeanette’s mother is a great example of a matriarch, as she is generally the one in charge in the family, highlighted by the allegory “My father liked to watch the wrestling” being the passive participant, while “my mother liked to wrestle” (Winterson 1985, 3) as the active one. In contrast to her mother, her father works as a quiet and peripheral figure in her life. The church community is also ruled by matriarchs (the Sisterhood). A Pentecostal church community such as the one in *Oranges* would often imply a heteronormative and patriarchal structure, however this is not the case in this novel, and it thereby breaks and plays with traditional gender roles.

It is not arbitrary that Winterson has chosen to write about a matriarchal community. Through this she also shows how problematic such a system can be for people who deviate from normative ideas about gender and sexuality. The women in the Sisterhood are described as “strong and organized” (Winterson 1985, 127). Jeanette even goes to the extent of thinking: “If you want to talk in terms of power I had enough to keep Mussolini happy” (127). Jeanette comparing the women to a fascist dictator proves on the one hand how productive they are and that their ability to execute tasks and projects is strong. To look at it from another and more important perspective, it also shows how effective they are in regulating and subverting “deviating” sexualities and “unnatural passions” which they consider threatening. This essentialist ideology is harmful towards people like Jeanette. Their definition of “woman” is based on an “essential” and “biological” (Feinberg 1996, 109) origin. According to them, women who are romantically or sexually interested in other women are not considered “real women”.

Although the women in *Oranges* run most arenas, near the end of the novel Winterson shows how the church is usually a patriarchal and patrilinear institution oppressing women. The pastor comes back from a council meeting saying, “The real problem... was going against the teachings of St. Paul and allowing women power in the church” (Winterson 1985, 135). The affair ends with a patriarchal structure being reinstated, and Jeanette’s mother surprisingly agreeing with it. Jeanette thinks about how “Our branch of the church had never thought about it, we’d always had strong women, and the women organized everything”. After this she thought that it was “making no sense at all” (136). The matriarchal structure

which Jeanette has been brought up with is so engraved into their community, that when it is challenged, it confuses her perspectives on religion and gender roles.

Not only is Jeanette used to women being in charge, but her conception of genders results in an exaggerated dichotomy between women and men, which is highly conditioned by her circumstances. Whereas women are in focus, the men in *Oranges* are distant. Jeanette has a strong aversion towards men and her thought patterns result in her dehumanizing them. One of her greatest fears is the image of herself in a future heterosexual marriage, married to a “pig” (Winterson 1985, 71). Some of the causes behind Jeanette’s problematic relationship with men are her meek father, her sexual orientation, and mainly the church, which has created a strong stigma related to sexuality.

The image of men as pigs comes from an incident where Jeanette talked to a woman in their street who told her that “she had married a pig” (71), as a figure of speech. This is something Jeanette fixates on in a literal manner and therefore “kept watch on him after that”. In the same comical writing style as earlier described, Winterson writes that Jeanette thinks “It was hard to tell he was a pig. He was clever, but his eyes were close together, and his skin bright pink. I tried to imagine him without his clothes on. Horrid”. Jeanette also thinks about men as “beasts” after reading “Beauty and the Beast” at the library “Did that mean that all over the globe, in all innocence, women were marrying beasts?” (73).

Jeanette’s problematic relation to men is something that she holds onto into adulthood. Towards the end of the novel, she thinks that men are “unfit for romantic love” because “they want to be the destroyer and never the destroyed” (170). Even homosexual men are “further away from a woman than a rhinoceros”. Jeanette is a lesbian woman, but she does not seem to identify herself with homosexual men. She has probably inherited this way of thinking from her mother and the church because homosexual men also deal in “unnatural passions” and are in addition *men*. She also thinks that “a man is a man wherever you find it” (129), where I put an emphasis on the pronoun used (it), objectifying men.

Despite the fact that *Oranges* extends traditional definitions of women, the novel upholds gender binaries and there are no signs of viewpoints suggesting a kind of gender fluidity. Jeanette’s attitudes towards men are strongly based on a binary notion of gender, and it is driven by a fear of a heteronormative life. The binaries are exaggerated where women are “strong” and “able to love”, while men are “pigs” and “beasts” only wanting to destroy.

Jeanette’s perceptions agree with Butler’s point that societal constructs shape our conceptions of gender. The juxtaposition between genders is not a “truth” but something Jeanette is conditioned to think and feel. After being brought up in the church community, the

matriarchal figures and her fear of a heteronormative relationship generate a toxic and condescending view of men. It also contributes to her assumption that there are only women and men, and nothing in between. As a contrast, Jeanette's sexuality is something she cannot be conditioned to feel differently, and it opposes the church community's norms, causing problems for her.

2.4 Gender Trouble in *Tipping the Velvet*: Introduction

As *Tipping the Velvet* is a historical fiction, I find it relevant when discussing gender trouble to mention the historical context of gender-crossing and cross-dressers in Victorian England. Alison Oram and Rachel Wood have written extensively on the topic and I will use their work in order to give a short summary about the general views on lesbians, cross-dressers, and gender-crossing in England at the time, as well as acknowledging the information in relation to *Tipping*. Further I will analyze *Tipping*, identifying cases of Butler's "gender trouble" which can be found at several points in the novel, for instance, with Nan's first encounter with Kitty Butler, and in the process of preparing Nan for the stage at the music hall. In this section I will also give attention to the clothing Nan wears, and her associations connected to them in relation to gender. Further I will analyze gender performance, and the representation of lesbian sexualities. Here events such as Nan's strolling in the streets of London as an impression of the *flâneur*, and her stay at Diana's as an escort are interesting. I will also take a closer look at Nan's time as a performer in the music hall.

2.4.1. Historical Representation of Cross-Dressers

When discussing gender trouble in *Tipping the Velvet*, I find it helpful to compare historical representation of cross-dressers in Victorian England. Oram writes that during "the late Victorian period and early twentieth century" cases of women who successfully "passed as men" occurred "regularly and repeatedly" (2007, 1).⁵ Male-impersonation or "breeches" on-stage in music halls was relatively new during the late nineteenth century, but it grew to

⁵ The term "passing" in the context of gender means being perceived as another gender or sex than what was assigned at birth. For a transgender person, it means being "read" as a "cisgender" (a person's gender identity reciprocate with their assigned sex at birth) man or woman. The concept of "passing" was first introduced in "medieval Western Europe, the Church's legends of the female-to-male saints- being forced to hide a trans identity"

Urquhart, "Why is 'Passing' Such a Controversial Subject for Trans People?". *Slate Magazine* (2017).
Feinberg, *Gender Warriors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 107.

become a “vital and popular” part of entertainment (Oram 2007, 12). The parodies were usually of “contemporary masculine types” such as “the dashing swell or ladies’ man”. Later, during the 1920s, elements of “satire” and “mimicry” were often included in the performances (12). Rachel Wood points to how motivations behind these types of public acts were often related to marginal economic circumstances for the performers as well as a “desire for greater personal and physical freedom” (2013, 305). The information supplied by Oram and Wood is of interest to the novel’s representation of the freedom Nan gains in London by passing as a man, versus how uncomfortable she is as a woman. This is something I will write more about in Chapter 3.

Wood also interestingly writes about women passing as men and the “contrasting notions of *survival* and *identification*” (2013, 308), claiming that they were elements that generated a “gradual shift” from women passing as male in order “to marry or work” and the women passing as “butch” to message their sexual orientation and “desire” (308). Historically there are many people who passed for survival, and the punishments if one were to be exposed were cruel, such as “public humiliations” in 17th century England or being “burned to death” in 1760’s France (Feinberg 2006, 216).

For Nan, both survival and identification can be argued as motivations behind her cross-dressing. She begins with cross-dressing in order to work at the music-hall. This was not with the intention of passing as a man, which Wood’s notion of survival suggests. She does this because she is genuinely drawn towards this kind of performance. When walking around the streets of London, she changes into the costume from the music hall again, and this time the motivation is to escape unwanted attention from others, which enforces the notion of *survival*. After a while, Nan feels more and more comfortable in the masculine clothes in her private life, and by the time she is hired by Diana, they work more as an identity marker than a costume. Nan feels comfortable with the clothes and they express her identity as a masculine woman, which coheres with Wood’s notion of *identification*. The clothes signal her sexual orientation, which is clear for instance when Flo’s friend, Annie, assumes that Nan is a “cousin!” (Waters 1998, 404) referring to Nan being lesbian and a part of the community. To summarize, Nan cross-dresses both in the notion of *survival* in the streets of London and *identification* in the process of establishing an identity as a masculine lesbian woman.

Another relevant topic in *Tipping* is the public’s response towards Nan and Kitty’s cross-dressing. In order to compare, Wood writes about real historical women passing as men and that “In the popular imagination of the early twentieth century” they “did not imply sexual deviance” (Wood 2013, 306), where sexual deviance refers to deviations from

heteronormative sexualities. This is also true in *Tipping*. Nan thinks that “it [is] rather odd to think that no one in the audience [call] out Toms! now, or even appear to think it: they only [cheer] when the Prince and Cinderella [are] united at the end” (Waters 1998, 147).

“Breeches” such as Nan and Kitty were considered theatrical and as pure entertainment, both in the historical reality and in the novel. Their sexual orientation and their gender identification as private persons usually did not cross the audience’s minds. It may seem strange for a contemporary reader to think that the audience did not have any suspicions about Nan and Kitty’s sexualities. The audience’s ignorance sounds akin to a utopia, but this part of the novel is interestingly historically accurate. It is however worth noting the instance I have already mentioned, when a man in the audience attempts to turn the audience against Nan and Kitty by disclosing the fact that they are lesbians or “toms”. However, he does not gain much support, but it contributes to Kitty’s fear of rejection from the rest of society. This was probably an occasional part of the life as a historical breecher as well.

2.4.2. Gender trouble

Gender trouble is a topic that is very much present in *Tipping* and it is for instance manifested in the fact that Kitty’s last name is Butler, a tribute to Judith Butler. A topic worth discussing related to gender trouble is clothing. I find it relevant to analyze how Nan identifies with feminine and masculine elements of clothing. Nan journeys from being an insecure girl wearing dresses, to wearing masculine clothing as a costume on stage, to walking the streets of London passing as a man, and in the end finding her own identity as a woman wearing masculine clothing as an identity marker. The attention to clothing and descriptions of Nan’s feelings towards them demonstrate Butler’s ideas about gender and fluidity in practice.

First, early in the plot it is established that Nan as an eighteen-year-old girl is not comfortable with her own body and that she does not enjoy wearing feminine clothes. After visiting the music hall, Nan reflects on how girls with more feminine traits such as having “cherry lips”, “bosoms that jutted” and “elbows that dimpled”, are the ones made to be “onstage” and that they stand in contrast to her because she is “tall and rather lean”, her chest is “flat”, and her hair is “dull” (Waters 1998, 7). These thoughts occur before she gains success as a “breecher”, which proves her assumptions wrong.

Another example is during Nan and Kitty’s relationship. After Kitty rapidly gains greater success as a performer and appreciates Nan as both her dresser and her lover, she gifts Nan a dress. Nan is supposed to wear the dress on the occasion of a party arranged by the

conjurer of the music hall. While wearing the dress, Nan looks at herself in the mirror. The dress is “transforming” (Waters 1998, 94) and “practically a disguise”. Again, Nan does not feel comfortable in the dress and does not “look at all like pretty Kitty in her pink frock” but rather “more like a boy who [has] donned his sister’s ball-gown for a lark” (94). The description creates an image of Nan looking almost like a clown in the dress, proving how out-of-place she feels in it. The “chignon” hairstyle and the feminine materials of the dress such as the “satin” and “lace” do not harmonize with her masculine features. They accentuate the “hard lines” of her “jaw and cheek-bones” and her “wide shoulders” which become “wider” (94).

Ironically, when arriving at the party Nan is surprised, as she is complimented by the other guests, saying that they “[don’t] recognize her” (Waters 1998, 95) and that she suddenly looks like a “grown-up woman”. The flattering comments from others make Nan feel better about the dress but the reader knows that she does not *feel* beautiful in it. Even though Nan may look good to others, her interior is drawn to more masculine clothes.

Comparing these experiences to the time she receives expensive and masculine clothing from Diana, emphasizes how important the balance between the feminine and the masculine is for Nan. When wearing the expensive suit with a “bearing and a lustre all of its own”, she looks at herself in the mirror feeling like “a treat” (Waters 1998, 269). In contrast to the feminine dress she received from Kitty, the new masculine clothes compliment Nan’s features, as well as her interiority perfectly:

The bleached linen complemented the dull gold of my hair and the fading renter’s tan at my cheek and wrists. The flash of amber at my throat set off my blue eyes and my darkened lashes. The trousers had a vertical crease, and made my legs seem longer and more slender than ever; and they bulged at the buttons, where I had rolled one of the scented doe-skin gloves. I was, I saw, almost unsettlingly attractive... I looked not like myself at all, but like some living picture, a blond lord or angel whom a jealous artist had captured and transfixed behind the glass. I felt quite awed. (Waters 1998, 270)

Even though the dress Nan wore at the party was “beautiful” and “handsome” (92-93), it cannot match the superior feeling the suit gives her. The suit makes her, as Diana calls it “narcissi”, feeling like an “angel” and a “lord” (270). The words used to describe the suit such as “amber”, “vertical” and “bulged” harmonize with Nan’s own masculine features. This stands in great contrast compared to the feminine elements of the dress and the box it came

with, described with words like “cream”, “heavy lace” and “a bow wrapped in tissue”. These elements made her feel “pale”, “thin” and “tall” (94).

What these descriptions do is that they call attention to how it is not the quality of the clothing that generates the different reactions in Nan, because the outfits are both luxe and pretty, but it is rather the degree of masculinity and femininity which they express that are important. The reader knows that the dress looks beautiful on Nan because several guests compliment her on it, but Nan’s identity does not match its feminine fashion. Although Nan identifies as a woman, she is not drawn to stereotypically feminine clothing. According to Butler, there is no subject that decides one’s gender identity. It would be easier for Nan to be one of those feminine girls, but her masculine identity is something she cannot manipulate or decide herself. As Butler argues, the norms put onto gender from a reproductive perspective are purely a social construct, and Nan defies these norms, proving that the clothes she feels the best in are not ruled by her gender.

Another section where clothing is interesting in relation to gender trouble is the depiction of the process of Nan becoming Nan King — the stage performer. Nan, or rather Walter and Mrs. Dendy (the conjuror’s wife) begin to experiment with masculine clothing in the form of costume-wear on Nan. This is because they see Nan’s potential on stage with Kitty. She is dressed in a suit but there is something not quite right and Kitty says, “There is something queer about it” (Waters 1998, 118). Walter points out how “it’s a perfect fit” and that “the colour is good” but still “there’s something - unpleasing – about it” (118). After studying Nan for a while, Mrs. Dendy realizes that “she’s too real” and that “she looks like a real boy...Her face and her figure and her bearing on her feet”, stating “that ain’t quite the idea now, is it?” (118). Walter proceeds by tweaking her look by giving her a “waist” and “hips” and puts on some “carmine” on her lips and lashes to make her more feminine again. The result is “perfect” (119).

The point of dressing Nan for the music hall is not so that she can “pass” as a man. Her performances in the music hall belong to an own kind of art and entertainment. It demands the perfect balance between masculine and feminine traits, where she is not meant to look like either a man or a woman. She is only impersonating stereotypes or a fantasy of an “original” man. Nan’s look is supposed to be androgynous, unique, exciting and surprising. Her look is supposed to capture Butler’s concept of gender fluidity. It is not meant to look like anyone one can observe in the streets.

In addition to Nan's process of becoming Nan King, I think the descriptions of Nan seeing Kitty on stage for the first time perfectly encapsulates the concept of androgyny and fluidity. Kitty is described through Nan's eyes as a:

Very pretty boy, for her face was a perfect oval, and her eyes were large and dark at the lashes, and her lips were rosy and full. Her figure, too, was boy-like and slender - yet rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boy's ever was; and her shoes, I noticed after a moment, had two-inch heels to them. But she strode like a boy, and stood like one, with her feet far apart and her hands thrust carelessly into her trouser pockets, and her head at an arrogant angle, at the very front of the stage; and when she sang, her voice was a boy's voice - sweet and terribly true. (Waters 1998, 13)

The descriptions of Nan King and Kitty Butler sustain the notions of gender fluidity. Kitty looks like a "very pretty boy" but not like a "real boy" (Waters 1998, 13). She parodies a fantasy of an original, showing how gender is performative. The fluidity is inclusive and defies the homophobic "pervasive heterosexual assumption" which Butler criticized. This assumption "tended to restrict the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity and set up exclusionary gender norms" and "were often homophobic" (Walton 2012, 172). In *Tipping* gender has become "a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 2006, 9).

2.4.3 Gender Performance and Performativity

Analyzing gender performativity and performance in *Tipping*, clothing is also important here. Waters is able to portray both concepts in a compelling manner by describing a gradual shift where Nan's masculine clothing becomes more of an identity marker instead of a costume over the course of the plot. The line between where her masculine clothes go from being part of a *performance* onstage to becoming clothes connected to identity as in *performativity* is gradual and fluid.

One of the central events connected to this transition occurs during her stay at Mrs. Best. After Nan leaves the music hall because of Kitty's betrayal by marrying Walter, she isolates herself in the room at Mrs. Best who runs a lodging-house (Waters 1998, 182). After a while she decides she wants to get some fresh air and observe the streets. However, her

experience as a woman in the streets of London is not a success, so she decides to dress as a man instead. This dimension of gender and oppression is something I will discuss at length in Chapter 3. In this section I will focus on the performance and performative element of this period in Nan's life. The example I will highlight is when she uses the costume from the music hall in order to look like a cisgender man. Again, the descriptions of this process capture the fine balance between feminine and masculine tweaks and details dealing with her clothing.

When Nan first realizes that she can use the costume in order to pass as a man, a challenge occurs: After the heartbreak, she "[has] become so thin that the trousers [sag] about" her "waist" and her "hips [are] narrower" and her "breasts even shallower, than before" (192). This in combination with the jacket being sewn in "[spoils] the illusion of being a boy". Nan solves the issue by using a knife to open up the seam and "soon the jacket [is] its old, masculine self again". She thinks to herself that with her "hair trimmed...and a pair of proper boy's shoes upon [her] feet!", anyone can meet her in the streets of London and "never know [her] for a girl at all!". Again, the fluidity of the masculine and feminine is present. The small details in the figure of her body and the seams in the jacket make important differences in the balance of performing gender. The difference between her performances in the music hall and the performance this time, is that she now does not want to look like an impersonator. This time she aims to pass as a man. This makes the small details such as the seam in the jacket very important.

The man Nan impersonates and performs walks aimlessly, and Rachel Wood connects her parody to the figure of the "flâneur" (2013, 311). This figure represents "urban life" during the 19th century in a form of a "lone man who walked with impunity, aplomb, and a penetrating gaze" (Nord, 1995, 1). Instead of being a cisgender man, Nan is a male-cross dresser which takes the role as the flâneur and challenges the original conception of the figure as having a "heterosexual male gaze" (Wood 2013, 312). It is during the act of playing the flâneur that Nan begins to invite gay men's sexual attention. She rents a room in Berwick street in Soho and sells herself, knowing that the men she meets are not in the know of the fact that she is a woman dressed as a man. Wood also points to how Nan during this time becomes aware of the "code of gestures and looks" within the "subculture of men who have sex with men" (2013, 312), and that through this culture, the role of the flâneur is captured as she is "walking and watching, indeed, are that world's keynotes: you walk, and let yourself be looked at; you watch, until you find a face or a figure that you fancy" (Waters 1998, 201). By

picking up the social codes of walking, watching, looking “available”, Nan is able to perform gender in the form of the flâneur.

In order to capture how Nan as the flâneur denotes the idea of gender performance I will highlight one paragraph, which shows how intentional Nan’s thought processes are when creating the flâneur and how she improves the role over time. Nan’s intention is what makes this a *performance* rather than *performativity*:

For on every visit, I found some new trick to better my impersonation. I called at a barber’s shop and had my old effeminate locks quite clipped away. I bought shoes and socks, singlets and drawers and combinations. I experimented with bandages in an effort to get the subtle curves of my bosom more subtle still; and at my groin I wore a handkerchief or a glove, neatly folded, to simulate the bulges of a modest little cock. (Waters 1998, 195)

Nan’s impersonation of the flâneur in a way resembles her process in becoming Nan King at the music hall. Similar to when she became Nan King, Nan goes through different visual changes in order to perform gender. The details are carefully thought out and tweaked if needed. The impersonation at the music hall and the impersonation in the streets are both cases of gender performance. Nan observes social codes and behaviors of men and incorporates them into her own exaggerated impersonation. She is imitating, playing and breaking norms through a repetition of gestures and behaviors. These gestures and behaviors are rooted in a set of norms, placing masculinity and femininity in specific categories of gender, excluding queer people. Nan is in both cases defying those norms by combining elements of both.

Continuing the analysis of Nan’s time in Soho, in the process of becoming a “renter” (Waters 1998, 195) she puts an introspective lens on herself and begins to almost question her own gender identity, showing how the line between performance and performativity is sometimes vague. In order to sell sex, Nan finds a “madam” which rents out a room she can use. Nan reflects on what this lady must think of her: “I think she [is] never quite sure if I [am] a girl [who] come to her house to pull on a pair of trousers, or a boy [who arrives] to change out of his frock” stating that “Sometimes, I [am] not sure myself” (195). Because Nan shifts from appearing as a man and a woman so interchangeably, she begins to wonder who she really is herself. At this point she is not certain if she is a woman, a man, or something in

between. It is not clear what and who is to decide what gender she is. It may be her clothes, her manners or her desires. This agrees with Butler who claims that when “gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice” the consequence is that a “*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler 2006, 9). As a renter, Nan is sometimes a masculine woman and sometimes a feminine man. Where the line goes between when she is unintentionally being “herself” in the form of *performativity* and when she is intentionally imitating and *performing* someone else is not always easy to tell, not even for herself.

Even though Nan as the flâneur is not performing as explicitly as she does on stage as Nan King, she is in fact performing and imitating a man in the streets as well. After touching a man and getting paid for it, Nan compares the two “There [is] no trouble over the coin. Thus easily - as easily, and fatefully, as I had first begun my music-hall career - thus easily did I refine my new impersonations and become a renter” (Waters 1998, 201-202). When Nan takes off her masculine clothes and changes into female clothes, she “becomes a woman”. When she puts on her “bandages” and wears a “handkerchief” she *performs as a man*. Performing on stage and in the streets might not be all so different:

It might seem a curious kind of leap to make, from music-hall masher to renter. In fact, the world of actors and artistes, and the gay world in which I now found myself working, are not so very different. Both have London as their proper country, the West End as their capital. Both are a curious mix of magic and necessity, glamour and sweat. Both have their types - their ingénues and grandes dames, their rising stars, their falling stars, their bill-toppers, their hacks”. (Waters 1998, 203)

In the performative sense, Nan’s transition from the life as an entertainer in the music hall to the life as a renter in Soho is in a way symbolic and not only a “curious kind of leap”. Butler writes that “it is not only drag that is imitating, but gender itself is performative” (2006, 187). By this, Butler argues that “acts, gestures, and desire” produces an “internal core or substance” (187). This internal core or substance is produced “on the surface of the body”, and “suggests...identity as a cause” (222). In other words, it is not only drag that is performative but also gender and identity.

Even though there is a difference between gender performance and performativity, performances like drag implies the fluctuation and fluidity that can rule gender performativity and identities. It is not only Nan King the breecher who performs gender. In the case of Nan

King, Nan is making the “parody” of the “fantasy” of an origin. As the flâneur she is performing as a man but also quickly shifting back to her usual self as a masculine woman, and the difference is not always easy to distinguish. This fluctuation between her “internal core” or “substance”, and her performances illustrates how interchangeable and fluid gender can be. Gender is not decided by some ontological original but are created through performativity — by repeated acts, gestures, desires. Waters uses depictions of gender performance and gender performativity in order to convey this.

2.4.4 Performance and Lesbian Sexualities

Another interesting stage in Nan’s life when it comes to performativity and performance occurs during her stay at Diana’s, where sex and sexuality is depicted in experimental manners by playing with gender and fluidity. As already mentioned, Nan works as a kind of escort for Diana. The first time Diana approaches Nan is during Nan’s performance as the flâneur in Soho. From her car, Diana follows Nan and observes her, just as the flâneur was usually observed and watched. Diana brings Nan to her home and the two go to bed. The focus on clothing continues to be important, also here. When Diana takes them off, Nan feels “like a man being transformed into a woman at the hand of a sorceress” (Waters 1998, 239). From being a man where her breast has been “put aside” with her “corset and chemise”, it now transforms into breasts and they “seem at” Diana’s “touch to rise and swell and strain against their wrappings”. In the streets when having sex with men, Nan passes as a cisgender flâneur. With Diana, she first appears to be a man, but her feminine traits are more present, and she “transforms” into a woman through Diana’s touch. Diana is fully aware of Nan’s performance and this is a part of her attraction towards Nan. She even states to Nan “What a little impostor you are!” and continues to make up a story about Nan in order to add more to the roleplay “But you have a brother in the Guards, I think. A brother - or, perhaps, a beau...?” (Water 1998, 235). These scenes play with how sex and sexuality can depict gender and gender roles as both flexible and fluid. It is also worth noting that Nan introduces herself to Diana as “Nan King”, proving how she is still performing (239) even though she is not trying to pass as a man any longer.

The playful way of describing sex and sexuality continues, as during the roleplay, when Diana undresses Nan, she makes a comment about how Nan’s crotch does not live up to the expectations given from the masculine appearance ““All your promise has come to nothing, after all,’ she [says]. Then she [laughs], and [steps] away, and [nods] to my trousers - now gaping whitely, of course, at the buttons” (Waters 1998, 240). Again, there is a reference

at Nan's appearance and what lies behind it which does not correlate to normative standards. Nan engaging in a lesbian sexual activity, dressed as a man challenges these standards and goes "beyond the categories of sex (man and woman)" (Wittig 2016, 10). She thereby "radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description" (Butler 2006, 153).

Playing with expectations of gender is also seen when Diana commands Nan to go into a "trunk" in her "bedroom" and in there lies "in short, a dildo" (Waters 1998, 241). The fact that Nan is the one who finds it, adds to the illusion and roleplay. Nan thinks "Perhaps Eve thought the same, when she saw her first apple. Even so, it didn't stop her knowing what the apple was for..." (241-242). The reference to Eve is another hint at how Nan challenges and troubles gender binaries, as the story of Adam and Eve is deeply rooted in heteronormativity. Nan bites into the apple by putting on a dildo and breaks with the narrative. The dildo is described as becoming a part of Nan as it follows her movements "When I [take] a step, the head [gives] a nod" (242). At the same time, it is not a part of her "The brass [bites] into the white flesh of my hips" (242). Even though Nan cannot feel the dildo herself, she touches it, and it gives her pleasure. Just the idea of it being a part of her is tantalizing:

I lifted my hand to still it; and when she saw me do that she placed her own fingers over mine, and made them grasp the shaft and stroke it. Now the base's insinuating nudges grew more insinuating still: it was not long before my legs began to tremble and she, sensing my rising pleasure, began to breathe more harshly. (Waters 1998, 242)

These descriptions play with the idea that gender and desire is automatically linked to sexuality and reproductive organs. It echoes Butler argument that "non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender linked to questions like, what is a woman, or a man?" (Walton 2012, 173). The conception of "woman" is not a stable entity and it is challenged without its connections to politics, economy, intelligibility and the heterosexual matrix. Sexuality in the form of a playfulness and fluidity such as shown with Nan and Diana problematizes the idea of biological sex as "natural".

Nan and Diana's relationship also actualizes the terms *butch* and *femme*. Within the queer community, and especially the lesbian subculture, the terms have sometimes been referred to where "lesbian and bisexual women who self-identify as 'butch'" represent as

masculine regarding “gender roles, gender nonconformity, and systemizing cognitive style” and those who “self-identify as ‘femme’ show a corresponding feminine profile” (Zheng, Guangju and Zheng 2018, 1009). The ones who “self-identify as ‘androgynes’ show an intermediate profile”. These terms are based off of stereotypes and for some they are considered pathologizing. For others who claim the terms back, the terms work as a form of self-identification. It has been argued that the butch and femme conform with gender binaries because they oppose masculinity versus femininity, but others argue that they “transcend and radicalize traditional gender roles” (Feinberg 1996, 85). It is relevant to take into consideration that the terms were first used during the 1940s and 50s (Levitt, Puckett, Ippolito and Horne 2012, 154).

I think that the case of Nan and Diana in the bedroom shows how lesbian sexualities are not as simple as masculinity versus femininity, and that it is much more fluid and complex than that. Nan goes from walking the streets passing as a male, then transforms “into a woman” (Waters 1998, 239) through Diana’s touch. By putting on the dildo (male organ), Nan becomes more masculine again. Nan’s profile being masculine/feminine is not fixed or static, it is continuous and changeable. Her gender is made through her actions and behaviors. It also depends on whether she is doing a performance as the breecher Nan King, or if she is being herself as in Nan Astley, enforcing gender performativity, and this is also fluid, changing back and forth. *Tipping the Velvet* breaks with the gender binaries and harmonizes with Butler’s ideas. Waters shows how gender can be fluid. She also tells a story of how gender performativity generates an identity, and not the other way around.

2.5 Intelligibility: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Tipping the Velvet*

Both *Oranges* and *Tipping* are queer narratives, and they reinforce Butler’s concept of *intelligibility*. Intelligibility refers to a broad domain of normativity and social norms. The intelligible is easy to understand because it coheres with what is expected. The unexpected and the “deviant” (Butler 2006, 105) takes time to comprehend and it is often excluded in culture. This intelligibility does not have to be related to gender or sexuality, it can also relate to other identity markers such as ethnicity or age.

I find that it relates to both novels in this thesis. If a person is intelligible, one is “straight”, which coheres with “standards of gender” and sexuality. In literature, this concept can be characterized by chronology and linear processes, which these novels do not follow.

Oranges jumps in time and narratives. Winterson plays with one of the most established cultural texts (the Bible) and invents her own matriarchal characters and plots within this frame. *Tipping* includes historical facts blended with fiction. The main character alternates gender expressions, performativity and performance, and family structures and relations are “deviant” from everything that is considered intelligible. By writing these novels, the authors contribute to a possibility for a cultural shift, making what has been considered unintelligible literature into intelligible literature, and normalize these types of narratives.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have applied queer theory in my analysis of *Oranges* and *Tipping*. One of the most influential thinkers on the field, Judith Butler, has been an important guide in order to define gender and performativity in the novels. Winterson’s novel sustains normative gender binaries, describing an oppressive community where lesbian women are either closeted or ostracized. Waterson’s novel, on the other hand, subverts gender binaries and depicts lesbian sexualities with variation and complexity.

With *Oranges* I found that the representation of lesbian sexualities contributed to an expansion of the definition of women and their roles but also showed how queer communities are not necessarily characterized by solidarity or empathy. Winterson’s novel also shows how important the structure of an institution, such as the church is to the people living in it, and in this case, it is organized by a group of strong women. Jeanette’s upbringing as a lesbian girl in a church community results in a problematic relationship to men. Her conception of gender upholds the social discourses that view gender as a binary relation, and the novel does not challenge this perspective that Butler subverts.

Tipping on the other hand, embodies Butler’s arguments to the fullest, challenging gender binaries and conceptions of gender in general. I started by considering how gender-crossing and cross-dressers in Victorian England compares to how it is portrayed in the novel. The conclusion is that there are many similarities between historical reality and the novel. Some important points made concerned the notion of *survival* and *identification* behind cross-dressers, as well as the fact that breeches were considered only entertainment because the audiences did not consider the acts to have a deeper meaning.

Further in the analysis of *Tipping* I found several cases of Butler’s gender trouble. Waters pays special attention to clothing and their expression of masculinity and femininity, for instance during Nan’s process of becoming Nan King. Another example of performance is

Nan's time in Soho imitating the flâneur. This is also an example of how the distinction between performance and performativity is not always self-evident, not even to the person in question.

The novel's settings with the music hall and the streets show how gender performativity is not only a fact onstage but the notion can be detected everywhere and with everyone. It is not only the breeches in the past or drag-artists today that is performing or imitating gender, but everyone does it, and the transitions from where it goes from being performative to a performance is not always clear. This is evident in the playful depiction of sex and sexuality between Nan and Diana, where Nan "transforms" and goes from being a man into a woman by the touch from another woman. This is an example of how Nan's performance of gender meets gender performativity.

Chapter Three:

Oppression and Resistance

There are several cases of oppressive structures and relationships depicted in both *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Tipping the Velvet*. These are usually caused by norms which serve to *other* groups such as women, poor people and people identifying as queer. These people are at the margins of society because of social discourses and ideas, rooted in a belief where some people are less worthy and should have less privileges than others. Both novels in different ways depict oppressive forces such as heteronormative and patriarchal church structures, classism, and exploitative queer relationships. At the same time, *Oranges* and *Tipping* are queer narratives which open possibilities of emancipation — such as politics, community and solidarity, for instance the socialist community in *Tipping*, and in some ways, the Sisterhood in *Oranges*. Such attempts at resistance take different forms in the two novels, as the Sisterhood in *Oranges* sustains essentialist gender binaries, and the socialist community in *Tipping* subverts them. Resistance in the form of politics and community is essential to *Tipping*. For Jeanette, her resistance is a more internal one, and not as explicit. In addition, the myth that subcultures within queer communities are ruled by solidarity, is subverted in the novels. In this way the novels break down stereotypes and prejudices about such communities. In this chapter I will discuss similarities and differences in the novels' treatment of these topics.

3.1 Reinstatement of a Patriarchal Institution versus Sisterhood: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Oranges deals with several forms of oppression but also depicts attempts at resistance. In this section I will make an account of different elements of oppression and resistance in the novel. I will focus on the matriarchal structure of the church and its downfall. The attempt at resistance appears in the form of a Sisterhood, which in its attempt to overthrowing patriarchy, also upholds dangerous essentialist ideas about gender, discriminating men as well as people “deviating” from heteronormative identities and sexualities. I also argue for how Winterson's way of writing is a case of resistance itself. Further, I will pay attention to queer

exploitative relationships. Jeanette's resistance against both religion and the exploitative relationships lies in her maturation by finding her own alternative queer narrative.

To begin with, the first example of resistance in *Oranges* is through Winterson herself as she puts women at the centre of an institution which traditionally has oppressed women. For instance, women's role in the church community. It is clear through Jeanette's reaction to the patriarchal structure being introduced, that matriarchs have been controlling the church until this point. The church community and their "branch" have "never thought about it" and they "always had strong women, and the women organized everything" (Winterson 1985, 136). In my opinion, this is a form of a meta move of resistance from Winterson. By creating a fictive community where it is self-evident that women are the ones in power, she destabilizes the belief that a church needs to be patriarchal. Xhonneux mentions something similar by referring to the novel's structure, pointing out how "the novel's eight chapters are named after the first eight books of the Old Testament", and that "Winterson undermines...their patriarchal model" (2012, 109), by changing the narrative and including the story of a lesbian girl. Xhonneux argues that by changing the story where "men are crucial..., Winterson playfully removes them from 'Genesis'" (2012, 109). Through her writing, Winterson destabilizes traditional gender roles and the patriarchy.

Although Winterson's novel starts off with an almost utopia-like church community where women are in power, it is eventually evident that women are ultimately victims of the patriarchy here as well. The women are strong and great at organizing, but towards the end the Sisterhood is brought down by church customs. The novel's "Sisterhood" recalls a "branch" of radical feminists which appeared during the 1960s, which aligns with the time period that the novel was published. This was a part of a "'second wave' feminism and views on sexual oppression/freedom" (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 61). The branch focused on gender, and that "women's sexual desires are oppressed by men". The solution was a "gender revolution", where the goal was to "overthrow the patriarchy" through a female "sisterhood" (61). The term "sisterhood" is inspired by a "Marxist conception" of a class-struggle, where women are understood as a "class (a 'sisterhood')", dominated by men who occupy a more privileged position in a gender hierarchy" (60).

As I have already mentioned, the Sisterhood denotes an essentialist definition of gender, where deviations from heteronormative sexualities and gender expressions are excluded. The Sisterhood's downfall shows how the patriarchy still rules and oppresses women in *Oranges*. There is an attempt at obstructing the patriarchal structure as "there was uproar", but Jeanette's mother changes her view, arguing "that women [has] specific

circumstances for their ministry, that the Sunday School [is] one of them, the Sisterhood another, but the message [belongs] to the men” (Winterson 1985, 133). Jeanette’s mother, the “queen” (110), goes from being a strong and powerful woman in the Sisterhood who effectively challenges male power, into complying with the sexist and paternalist structure in a very short period of time. Her turn is described by Jeanette as a form of “spiritual adultery” (134) and is considered a great betrayal by Jeanette and other members of the Sisterhood.

As discussed, Jeanette has a strong aversion towards men, and this is not only detected in her, but the whole community of women, in the Sisterhood. The Sisterhood enforces an essentialist, radical feminist position where men are considered meek and weak, and less worthy than women. The Sisterhood can be considered an attempt at resistance against patriarchy, but it is in fact a bigoted group, marginalizing people who are not like themselves. The people being marginalized are not only normative cisgender men, but also people who deviate from essentialist definitions of gender. This form of resistance is problematic because it enforces binary structures and discrimination, leaving people who identify as queer at the margins. The consequence of creating and enforcing strict rules of gender binaries can be dangerous because it generates ideas about some groups being worth less than other groups. Such thought patterns produce processes of dehumanization and degradation of people being othered. Instead of acting through equality for all genders, identities and sexualities, this essentialist attitude invokes discrimination and segregation. In the novel it leads to the women’s downfall and ultimately makes them the victims of oppression, instead of being the oppressors.

3.2 Exploitative Relationships Versus Solidarity: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Another form of oppression in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* occurs in the form of exploitative relationships, for instance that between Jeanette and Miss Jewsbury which I have already written about. There are hints at a kind of resistance, as Jeanette declines Miss Jewsbury’s offer to visit her again. This depiction of lesbian sexualities and relationships defies the myth that a queer space is a safe and supportive space. In relation to *Tipping*, Murphy writes about “the importance of queer communities” and “queer ancestors and models” for Nan, and how “it is in knowing about these ancestors, in asserting similarities between the past and the present, that queer people find ways to understand their own identities” (2021, 12). I think this statement is also relevant in the case of Jeanette in *Oranges*.

In contrast to Nan in *Tipping the Velvet*, Jeanette does not find a community of solidarity. It is important to find queer ancestors, models from the past, or a community in order to find one's own identity, but Jeanette does not have this as an opportunity.

One sign of resistance against exploitative relationships and a heteronormative community is shown in the character Elsie, who works as a supportive friend and role model for Jeanette in the beginning. She opens Jeanette's mind through poetry and art and shows acceptance towards Jeanette. This leads Jeanette to a belief that she can create her own narratives and her own truths as "history is a hammock for swinging and a game for playing" (Winterson 1985, 176). This belief works as an internal form of emancipation. The resistance is, however, not as explicit and highlighted as it is in *Tipping*, and there is never a moment of complete emancipation for Jeanette.

Another example of an exploitative relationship is that between Jeanette and her mother. The lack of an unambiguous emancipation for Jeanette is clear in the end when she has moved to another place, but is still connected to her mother, who "had tied a thread around her button, to tug when she pleased" (Winterson 1985, 182). The "thread" that connects Jeanette to her mother is supposed to be a symbol of an umbilical cord which connects a mother to its baby. The baby is completely dependent on this thread in order to survive in the mother's womb. The symbol is interesting, as Jeanette is adopted, and her mother never biologically gave birth to her. Nevertheless, the emotional ties between Jeanette and her mother are genuine, which the threads represent. The statement "to tug when she pleased" shows how Jeanette's mother continues to control and influence Jeanette.

The reason why Jeanette's mother adopts her is in order to make her a "missionary child" and "a servant of God" (Winterson 1985, 10). Instead of genuinely wanting a child, her mother adopts in order to "train it", "build it" and "dedicate it to the Lord", "it" being the child, Jeanette (10). When Jeanette's birth mother one day appears at their door, Jeanette's mother refers to the adoption as "formalities" (100) and does not tell Jeanette the truth. Essential elements forming identity, such as *sexuality*, *origin* and *religion* have all been altered and controlled by Jeanette's mother throughout her life. This, in combination with a seemingly non-existent queer community for Jeanette, results in her continuing to feel a strong connection with her mother also into adulthood. Despite the fact that Jeanette did not receive a typical form of love in her childhood, her perspectives are heavily influenced by her mother.

3.3 Classism and Essentialist Feminism: *Tipping the Velvet*

Debating classism and essentialist feminism in Waters' novel, I call attention to Koolen who writes that *Tipping* "demonstrates that historical fiction may use the past to comment on issues of contemporary concern and, by establishing temporal distance between readers and characters, make difficult social critiques more likely to be heard and taken seriously" (2010, 372). Waters actualizes several social critiques through her depiction of queer communities in *Tipping*, for instance, classism represented in the form of the exploitative relationship between Nan and Diana. Diana is a part of a community of wealthy lesbian women, the "Cavendish Sapphists" (Waters 1998, 278). According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the term "sapphist" can be defined as "women who have a sexual interest in other women" and or "engage in homosexual relations between women" (OED 2022). Doan and Garrity write that sapphism is "a useful term in that it distances us from the more rigid contemporary categories of identity, such as 'butch' or 'femme', and reminds us that the claiming of a sexual identity is relatively recent" (2006, 3). This opens possibilities for a more varied view on women-to-women relationships, departing from stereotypes.

Even though the word sapphist has been considered a more inclusive and less offensive term than others, it is associated with classism and essentialism in *Tipping*. The reader can vaguely understand from Nan's point of view that Diana is engaged in women's rights and that she has a central role in this. She is known as a "philanthropist", who gives "money to certain charities", and sends "books to girls in prisons" (Waters 1998, 280). She also writes "letters... very often" and is "involved in the producing of a magazine for the Suffrage, named *Shafts*" (280). Diana shields Nan from this material, and Nan has to "settle on the cartoons in *Punch*" instead. This is a way of prohibiting Nan from attaining relevant knowledge, preventing her from realizing that she is being exploited.

Similar to the Sisterhood in *Oranges*, the community Diana is a part of is essentialist and only supports *some* women. The Sapphists are ruled by classism, where upper-class women oppress poor women. They are also essentialist in the sense that "femme" lesbians, such as Diana, mock "butch" lesbians, such as Nan. An example of this is in the way Diana objectifies Nan. Diana invites "wealthy circles of the world" to a party and marks the invitations with "Sapphists Only" (Waters 1998, 307). This is one of the few "public appearances" where Nan is introduced to Diana's social circle, as Diana keeps Nan "close, for the most part" and only "displays" her "at home". Diana treats Nan as a trophy and an object, only worth looking at. She is not supposed to be too involved. Diana limits "the numbers"

who are allowed to “gaze” at Nan, and Diana says that she fears “that like a photograph” Nan “might fade, from too much handling” (280), as if she is an object and not a person. Another example is when Diana admits that she has been watching Nan in the streets for a long time from her carriage, speaking metaphorically of Nan as a fox, and herself as a predator: “One may follow one’s quarry like a hound with a fox - and all the time the fox not know itself pursued... I might have had you, dear, a dozen times: but oh! as I said, why spoil the chase!” (236). Because Nan is poor and in a desperate situation, Diana knows that she can have Nan whenever she wants. She can treat Nan how she wants and perceives Nan as her own property.

It is not only Diana who objectifies and fetishizes poor women. Her friends do it as well. As Wood puts it, Nan becomes a “sexual plaything to an upper-class ‘sapphist’” (2013, 309). In the cases where Diana introduces Nan to her friends, Nan performs for them: “I had posed for Maria and Dickie and Evelyn in my trousers with the scorch-mark and my underthings of silk. When they came a second time, with another lady, Diana had me pose for them again in a different suit” (Waters 1998, 280). The first time Diana’s friends meet Nan, Maria says “the creature even speaks!” (273), again objectifying and treating her like an animal in a zoo, just because Nan does not dress as the stereotypical feminine girl. The maid Zena is another poor woman who is being exploited. Her story is a “sad one” (301), involving poverty and prison. Diana helped her out from prison by hiring her as a maid, but her intentions were not kind. During Diana’s party, the women begin to discuss Zena and how girls in prison have “cocks”. They exclaim how they “have been reading a book full of stories of girls like her” (314) and “Miss Reynolds” orders her to “Come along” and “lift” her “skirts”, continuing with “good gracious, girl, we only want to look at you” (314) when Zena refuses. Nan is the one who saves Zena from this situation. In spite of being “sapphists” or a part of a feminist movement, these ladies fetishize, dehumanize and exploit girls who are not a part of their upper-class society.

The representation of exploitative relations such as the sapphists in *Tipping the Velvet* shows how discrimination and oppression also exists within queer communities. I agree with Koolen who writes that “by exploring power dynamics that exist in audience-performer relationships, *Tipping the Velvet* troubles the potentially dangerous myth that queer communities necessarily proved safe spaces for the expression of cross-gender identification” (Koolen 2010, 372). Nan works as a performer for Diana and her friends, and this environment is not ruled by solidarity, but by objectification and degradation of women who are not like themselves. Another view of Koolen’s that I agree with is that *Tipping the Velvet*

highlights the “diversity among ‘lesbian’ audiences and relationships”, and so “complicates homogenizing views of ‘lesbians’” (2010, 394-44). This opens up for “development and dissemination of reductive stereotypes about queer women”. Instead of enforcing stereotypes, Waters depicts various sexualities, gender expressions and cases of gender performance and performativity. Koolen also writes that the novel “uses the past to encourage critical awareness of the hierarchies that exist in contemporary queer spaces and, in doing so, may inspire readers to take action in order to make these space more inclusive and supportive” (2010, 394-94). The hierarchies are such as the classist essentialist feminists that Diana and her friends belong to. These communities oppress poorer women, people identifying as something else than “normative” or “femme” lesbians, and people with “cross-gender identification” (Koolen 2010, 372). Waters’ fictional past opens possibilities for introspection and self-examination for present day readers, which is important in order to create an inclusive and tolerant society.

3.4 Intersectional Feminism: Socialism, Solidarity, and Fighting Homonormativity: *Tipping the Velvet*

While *Tipping the Velvet* depicts oppressive and exploitative relationships between classes and within queer communities, there are also several instances of resistance and emancipation in the novel. One example of this is the socialist community, or as Wood terms it the “working-class community of ‘toms’” (2013, 309). Near the end of the novel Nan becomes a part of this community, which fights against classism and essentialist feminism, and, I would argue, *homonormativity*. The term *homonormativity* originates from the 1990s and reflects a process of “mainstreaming in LGBTIQ politics” (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 157). The term refers to politics aiming for “equality within an existing system”, while “maintaining current norms”. Rooted in “neoliberal ideas” of “the private sphere”, equality involved “individual domestic liberties” such as marriage, “instead of collective public issues” (157). Although the aim was equality, it was still not equality for all, as it favored “normative LGBTIQ people” who were “white” and a part of the “upper-middle-class”. It excluded and oppressed others who did not enforce the already established norms such as “discrete sexuality categories and the gender binary” (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 157).

Nan in *Tipping* is part of the excluded group, as she has a working-class background and also subverts gender binaries on stage and in private. One relevant scene occurs near the

end of the novel when Kitty tries to win Nan back by judging their surroundings, thus exposing her classist perspective: “Look at your clothes, how plain and cheap they are! Look at these people all about us: you left Whitstable to get away from people such as this!” (Waters 1998, 466). Nan answers that she “belongs here, now” and that “these are” her “people” (467). Kitty reveals her “class pretensions” as well as “her individualistic, shameful, and repulsed attitude toward her sexuality and class origins” (Wood 2013, 312), while Nan has gained confidence and security through belonging to a community.

A key element in Nan’s introduction to the socialist community is her relationship with Florence and the rest of the family which also works against homonormativity. Florence’s family consists of herself, her brother Ralph, Lillian’s baby Cyril, and eventually Nan. At first, this appears as a typical heteronormative family with a mother, father and a child, as Nan assumes, thinking that Flo “[has] a husband, and a child” (Waters 1998, 347). In reality the household becomes an alternative “queer” family, because it works against the normative arrangements of a family. It consists of siblings (Flo and Ralph) coparenting a baby who is an orphan, and later Nan who becomes Flo’s girlfriend and involved in coparenting. Another alternative “queer” community is the socialists, where Nan finally feels like she “belongs”, “surrounded by toms” (Waters 1998, 404). This focus on community differs from *Oranges*. Whereas Nan finds a community which accepts her, this is vague and not likely when it comes to Jeanette.

The notion of a queer collective is discussed in Elisabeth Freeman’s roundtable discussion “Theorizing Temporalities” (Dinshaw et al. 2007) where several thinkers in queer theory discussed the topic of temporality. Dealing with the “relationship between queerness and ‘the future’” (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 213) raises questions about how the past, present and future relate to queerness. Christopher Nealon says that he was interested in “lesbian and gay writers who lived before the time of a social movement were dreaming of collectivities, and forms of participation in History- with-a-capital-H, that they might never, themselves, experience” (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 179). As already established, representation is essential in order to understand and affirm one’s sexuality and identity. Representation can among others take form in community and literature about the past and the present.

In *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters has invented a queer community of socialists who have the opportunity to organize and meet. They have formed a family construction which deviates from normative conventions. This construction consists of several people who have the

responsibility of raising a child, and it almost resembles a generational family structure. More adults sharing the responsibility of raising children may open possibilities for a more successful up-bringing. Humans are dependent on each other, and by growing up in a family surrounded by people, the chances of feeling isolated, and the parents becoming exhausted are smaller. This fictional history may not be historically realistic, but it presents an optimistic opportunity for a queer future, by inventing a queer past. It also works as a form of emancipation from homonormativity by showing communities that are inclusive, breaking with classism and the gender binary.

3.5 Topography in London: Oppression of Women and Cross-Dressing as Resistance: *Tipping the Velvet*.

The topography of London in *Tipping* is interesting because the portrayal of the city depends on Nan and what gender she performs. On the one hand, the city can be dirty and dangerous for a woman, and on the other, it can be exciting and diverse for a man. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a motivation for Victorian English women to dress as men was to gain the freedom that came with it, which is also prevalent in *Tipping*. I will discuss two figures connected to gender, the “fallen woman” and the already mentioned “flâneur”. While the “fallen woman” is oppressed and endangered, the “flâneur” can walk aimlessly and freely.

Walking the streets, Nan is at first “overwhelmed by the unpleasantness of the experience”, as she is “stared at and called after...by men” (Waters 1998, 191). Through this, she reevaluates her feeling of belonging to the city: “I had lived for a year and a half in London and called it my own” (190). Nan has not experienced the city in this way earlier and she is questioning her perception of it. Because she is a woman, she is watched and mocked, and the men treat her like she is an object which they can stare at and harass. For Nan as a young woman, London it is described as “terrible”, “busy”, “dirty”, “crowded”, “dazzling”, and “loud” (190). She thinks to herself “I [walk] fitfully, blinking at the traffic about me; and such a girl, I suppose, is a kind of invitation to sport and dalliance...” (191).

In Victorian England women walking the streets with no purpose were seen as “problematic”, and their “public visibility” was “implicitly mapped onto sexual availability” (Wood 2013, 311). Related to this, Nora Epstein writes about “the fallen woman” which captures the women on the streets during the 19th century, whose role was to work as an “instrument of pleasure” for the alienated male spectator (1995, 2-3). Women were not

supposed to stroll the streets alone and if they did, they were “either in danger or dangerous”, as they became a symbol of “contaminants” and “unsanitary conditions”. Just by walking the streets as herself, Nan represents “the fallen woman” and people assume that she is dirty and inviting sexual attention. Without her costume from stage, she feels naked, exposed, and confined, and the city becomes a noisy, unsafe, and filthy place.

Nan reflects on the issue of her gender and that the city “favoured sweethearts and gentlemen... where girls walked only to be gazed at” (Waters 1998, 191). She further reflects on the cons of being a girl in this place and how she never had to confront these concerns earlier because she was always transported in a carriage as a performer:

What a cruel joke it was that I, who had swaggered so many times in a gentleman’s suit across the stages of London, should now be afraid to walk upon its streets, because of my own girlishness! If only I were a boy, I thought wretchedly. If only I were really a boy. (Waters 1998, 191)

The subject of her gender generates a shift, where she decides to be the one who watches instead of only being watched. Rather than representing the “fallen woman”, she decides to become the “flâneur”. She finds the old blue serge suit from her time in the music hall and starts walking the streets passing as a man. This time, the suit is not for entertainment purposes, but a way of surviving the streets.

The first time she wears the costume from the music-hall she experiences a whole new freedom, and she considers it a “success” (Waters 1998, 195). It makes her “bold” and she returns to “Soho for another turn, and [walks] further; and then” she goes “again, and then again” (195). She becomes “quite a regular at the Berwick Street knocking-shop” (295), and she rents a room there “three days a week” and sells sexual services passing as a man. In this way, she learns about the acts, gestures and social codes among the gay men on the streets.

She repeats the process and betters her performance as the flâneur. The role as the flâneur has gone from being a strategy of survival into becoming a performance driven by curiosity, empowerment and joy. Her cross-dressing works as a form of resistance against the oppression she experienced as a woman. The role of the flâneur has given Nan the chance to discover new perspectives, places, and subcultures of London. After a while, she realizes that she enjoys London again, but only as the flâneur. She reflects on the satisfying feeling of walking freely and more importantly “to walk as a boy...whom the people stared after only to

envy, never to mock”. Her feeling of belonging to London is regained, and she thinks that the city can “never wash dim” (195).

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

As I have discussed in this chapter, *Oranges* and *Tipping* both depict oppressive structures and relationships. In doing so, the novels share similarities but are also different in some respects. What they have in common is that they offer important social critiques while also opening possibilities for resistance and emancipation for the people being oppressed. These possibilities can inspire readers and provide an optimistic outlook for the future.

The novels also bring the theme of oppression of women on the agenda. *Oranges* describes the church as a patriarchal institution, where the resistance lies in the Sisterhood. Nevertheless, it also depicts how a radical feminist perspective (such as the Sisterhood) can result in reverse oppression. *Tipping* depicts oppression of women in the form of the “fallen woman”, as Nan wanders the streets of London. Her emancipation consists in transforming into the “flâneur” as she performs as a male wanderer of the city. Nan feels empowered as the flâneur because she can walk freely in the streets without being harassed by men.

Another theme the novels address concerns exploitative relationships. Jeanette in *Oranges* has to deal with among others, Mrs. Jewsbury whose behavior towards her is manipulative and harmful. By contrast, Elsie serves a supportive figure, helping Jeanette to accept herself. In the end, however, Jeanette’s emancipation by separating herself from toxic relationships and finding a new community is vaguely depicted. In *Tipping*, Nan struggles with the classist prejudice of Kitty and the sapphist Diana. She is also harassed because of her gender fluidity. Her emancipation lies in the community she finds through Florence, which opens possibilities for future queer communities and relationships, breaking with restricting assumptions rooted in heteronormativity and homonormativity. By forming queer family structures, they gather in solidarity towards all gender identities and sexualities and showing resistance against classism and oppression.

Another theme that the novels have in common is that oppressive characters in the novels try to censor important knowledge for the protagonists. For instance, Jeanette’s mother who prohibits Jeanette from visiting the two ladies at the paper shop, and from reading other literature than Jane Eyre and the Bible. If Jeanette was allowed insight into these, it could contribute to affirm her sexuality and identity which would be threatening for her mother. For

Nan, this can be seen in Diana, who prohibits Nan from reading feminist material, which would make Nan realize sooner that she is exploited.

One of the major differences between *Oranges* and *Tipping* is the fact that *Oranges* upholds the gender binary through the Sisterhood, while *Tipping* destabilizes it through many examples of gender fluidity. A second difference is Nan's emancipation from heteronormativity and patriarchy is more complete than it is for Jeanette in *Oranges*. Nan's story points to an optimistic queer future, as there is a great focus on solidarity and community, while for Jeanette, this is ambiguous as she is still strongly connected to her religious mother and her new life in another city is hardly mentioned.

Conclusion

Having completed my comparison of the two novels, it is pertinent to return to the question raised in the introduction to this thesis, concerning the novels' queering of the Bildungsroman and how such queering serves a critical project. The novels I have selected for study queer the Bildungsroman by depicting stories of people who have been "othered", thus troubling traditional ways of thinking about gender, sexuality, and identity. My aim in comparing them was to provide a new perspective on and contribution to the studies of queer Bildungsromane and to highlight the importance of queer representation in fictional literature.

As suggested in the title, the term "queer" as a verb is essential to this project, referring to a kind of *doing* rather than *being* (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 3). As already mentioned in the introduction, the term as a verb "holds the most political potential" because it "focuses on resistance (rather than description) and practice (rather than identity)" (3). The focus on resistance and practice coincides with many of the themes in the novels, such as politics, solidarity and community.

As I wrote in Chapter 1, the traditional Bildung narrative depicts a journey towards integration in a heteronormative social and economic order, which the novels in this project oppose. The traditional Bildungsroman preferably includes a male heterosexual protagonist, who goes through specific stages of development in order to reach the end goal, to become a valuable citizen who contributes to society and shares its values. He reaches this integration by conforming with heterosexual norms of masculinity and ideals rooted in classism. As my preliminary hypothesis suggested, the two novels I have selected for study leave the protagonists at the margins of such orders.

By including lesbian protagonists in narratives of Bildung, the authors provide critical perspectives on the traditional genre which traditionally have excluded queer people. Despite the fact that Jeanette and Nan are placed "at the margins" of society, their stories of growth are depicted in a way which demonstrates how society has developed since the prime of the traditional Bildung, making it possible to "imagine" the lesbian Bildungsroman. It is evident that both novels have elements of Bildung in them, but they reflect the modern developments of the genre (the expanded Bildungsroman), theorized by thinkers such as Bakhtin, Moretti and Buckley. In the modern Bildungsroman it is not only "man" who has to adapt and

integrate in society, but society also changes through “man” (Bakhtin 1986, 23), and in this context the development of the “other” is interesting. As Moretti puts it, ways of defining “happiness” and finding “one’s own ethics” are so various from one individual to the next, that the need for self-determination is in many instances at odds with society’s normative socialization (2000, 16). This is also the case for Jeanette in *Oranges* and Nan in *Tipping*, as their sense of happiness oppose the rest of society. At the same time, these novels show how it is possible to find solidarity and community at the margins of a dominant social order. The protagonists have been rejected by their original community, and it is therefore crucial to seek and find a place to belong somewhere else. For Jeanette, this can be found in her good friend, Elsie, and in the new independent life she leads apart from her family and the Pentecostal church, while Nan finds community in the socialist party and Florence. Through stories of emancipation, the novels show how there is a place for queer people in society.

I want to bring back Butler’s term “intelligibility” in the context of queering the genre. As mentioned, intelligibility refers to a broad domain of normativity and social norms, where the intelligible is easy to understand because it coheres with expectations. The “deviant” (Butler 2006, 105) which breaks with what is expected, takes time to comprehend and it is often excluded in culture. What Winterson and Waters have accomplished with their novels is that they have queered the genre and contributed to a possibility for a cultural shift. The shift alters what has been considered unintelligible into something intelligible. By opposing the traditional Bildung narrative, the possibility for a cultural shift is established. This shift entails queer representation such as queer identities, family structures, sexualities and gender being a self-evident part of society and culture.

As a contrast to the traditional narration of Bildung, *Oranges* and *Tipping* depict lesbian protagonists who find their own place outside the rest of society, where their end goals become alternative ways of forming communities, families and ways of living in general. They reject what is expected from them (such as conforming to a heterosexual marriage or upholding religious or classist sentiments) and rather choose to live free from these restrictions. Both protagonists show resistance against oppressive forces. Examples of this in *Oranges* are Elsie who introduces Jeanette to varied literature, counteracting the influence of Jeanette’s controlling mother, or in the Sisterhood which works against the patriarchy. Resistance in *Tipping* occurs with the socialists who fight classist prejudices, in gender fluidity subverting the gender binary, and the alternative queer family structure (consisting of Florence, Nan, Ralph and Cyril) which opposes the heteronormative ideal of the nuclear

family. In other words, *Oranges* and *Tipping* are able to change conventional ways of thinking about the Bildungsroman by changing the end goal for its protagonists.

Novels such as these contribute to a normalization of queer narratives and create possibilities for positive queer futures. This is important, especially for those who can relate to the protagonists but also in order to create a tolerant society. As already mentioned, representation is crucial, as it creates a feeling of belonging and a way to find and affirm one's own identity. It is this representation that the American teachers, Tritt and Hagopian, call for. What Murphy writes in her article about *Tipping* is again relevant here. She writes about the "importance of queer communities" and "queer ancestors and models" and how essential it is "knowing about these ancestors" when "asserting similarities between the past and the present" and as a result "that queer people find ways to understand their own identities" (2021, 12). Contributions of the lesbian Bildungsroman result in their becoming a part of mainstream literature and a self-evident part of culture. In this process they break with stigmas and prejudices and expand the definition of the intelligible Bildungsroman, demonstrating how Bakhtin was right when he claimed that it is not only "man" who has to adapt and integrate in society, but where society also changes through "man" (1986, 23).

The term "intelligibility" can also be seen in relation to current debates in the US, where the label "obscene" has been applied by the advocates for book bans. As already mentioned, the label is misused in order to "accept grounds for limited access to content" (Friedman and Johnson 2022) by conflating "books that contain any sexual content or include LGBTQ+ characters with 'pornography'" (Pengelly). Labels like these are harmful towards LGBTQ+ people and perpetuate bigoted ideas about these groups in the rest of society. *Oranges* and *Tipping* are examples of novels that worked to subvert such discourses and contribute to queer representation. Interestingly, a parallel can be drawn between the book bans in the US and the novels. As I mentioned the novels have in common that oppressive characters censor important knowledge from the protagonists. These were Jeanette's mother who prohibits Jeanette from visiting the two ladies at the paper shop, and from reading other literature than *Jane Eyre* and the Bible, and Diana, who prohibits Nan from reading feminist material. If Jeanette and Nan were allowed access to these, it would threaten the people oppressing them. For Jeanette's mother, this is not purposely wicked because her actions are rooted in her Christian beliefs, while for Diana it is intentional and exploitative. In the US, the people banning books with LGBTQ+ content most likely do so because they think that the books threaten their values. If examples of representation and knowledge in the form of books such as *Oranges* and *Tipping* are made available to young people, their ideals of a Christian,

heteronormative nuclear family are put at risk. What the proponents of book bans fail to see is the harm they cause towards LGBTQ+ people, especially the young. *Oranges* and *Tipping* prove how important representation and community is, and how effective it is as resistance against oppressive structures and relations. The censorship in the novels and in the US today show just how effective and important representation is.

It is not only through telling the stories of lesbian protagonists that the authors have expanded what is considered intelligible. It is also through their ability to play with basic structures, mixing and experimenting with elements of the classic Bildungsroman, the coming-of-age novel, and the coming-out story. In some ways the novels align with these genres, and in others, they oppose them. As I mentioned in the introduction, the topic of “queering” in academia is characterized by “language, deconstruction, difference, fragmentation, multiple truths, discourse and rethinking old grand narratives and ideas of how power is structured” (McCann and Monaghan 2020, 7). By combining elements from several genres, the novels “‘trouble’ our ways of talking about and understanding things” (8). The novels break with expectations and conventions, and challenge and subvert old ways of thinking of them.

Examples of experimental writing and combination of genres can be found in both novels. Winterson intertwines the story of lesbian Jeanette with the Bible as an intertext, and she invents new fables and stories. She plays with time and narratives, straying away from the linear and taking a humorous perspective on serious topics such as religion, gender oppression, oppressive sexuality and adoption. Elements of Bildung are seen for instance when Jeanette’s mother teaches Jeanette specific ways of behaving related to class, only to find that Jeanette is unable to meet her mother’s expectations. Waters writes about a fictional Victorian England where some elements are realistic while others are created by herself through “appropriating” and “inventing” her own universe (*The Guardian* 2018). By playing with time and inserting a masculine lesbian woman in a Victorian setting, Waters represent a fictional queer past where gender and sexuality can be fluid and playful, such as Nan’s performance as the flâneur and as Nan King on stage, but it can also be serious and painful, such as the focus on clothing for Nan in her process of finding her gender identity. The class element of Bildung is also found in *Tipping* through Diana and Kitty, who show condescending attitudes towards people poorer than themselves. Although the novels are coming-out stories, the novels break with the stereotype that a coming-out novel has to be centered on this topic exclusively. Apart from the process of coming out as a lesbian, the novels include other important topics that determine the protagonists’ coming-of-age, such as

classism, oppression of women, and religion. The novels queer genres by incorporating elements from traditional genres while defying them in significant ways.

The novels also present alternative conceptualizations of several themes. These are gender performance and performativity, gender roles, structures of power, and sexuality. A part of the novels' experimental and playful writing styles is the troubling of traditional ways of thinking about these themes. In *Tipping* gender and gender performance are presented as potentially fluid and non-binary, as opposed to *Oranges* where the gender binary is upheld. Both novels align with Butler in that gender roles are social constructs. In *Oranges* they create oppressive structures and thought patterns such as patriarchy/matriarchy and sexism. In *Tipping* gender roles are performed, as shown with Nan in the streets of London and as Nan King. Structures of power are important in both novels, and as shown in Chapter 3, there are several instances of resistance against these, especially in *Tipping*, where politics, solidarity and community are important tools of resistance. Sexuality is a theme which can be a topic of taboo and shame, such as in *Oranges*, but it can also be characterized by experimentation and performance such as in *Tipping*. Topics that have earlier been ruled by binaries and rigidity are in these novels presented in new ways, forcing their readers to think differently, and making the stories unique and innovative.

Having summed up the main findings of this thesis, I want to consider some possibilities for further research. A way of continuing the research would be to include novels written earlier than the novels I have studied and to introduce a gendered approach by studying narratives written by men and featuring male protagonists. *Oranges* and *Tipping* deal with lesbian women, but it would be interesting to compare these with a queer male narrative. Men are also victims of the patriarchy with the pressures of conforming to “cultural norms of masculinity” (Idriss 2022). An example of a novel that captures both the male victim of patriarchy and is written earlier than the two other novels, is *Maurice* (1914) by E.M. Forster. The novel was written in 1913-14, revised several times, and published as late as in 1971, with varied critical reviews (Toda 2001, 133). It follows Maurice Hall from a young age, into adulthood. He learns from various institutions in life, such as family, public school and University how an ideal man should act in order to integrate into the social order. This ideal is connected to the upper class, where people from the working class are seen as “outsiders” to the “system of transmission of power and ideology represented by the public school/University system” (Toda 2001, 142).

Because of its focus on a specific type of Bildung related to class, *Maurice* in many ways echoes the German origin, where the idea of an “inner culture” is essential. As

mentioned in Chapter 1, this “inner culture” entailed only certain types of education, reading, arts and so forth, and studying these built the potential for fully formed characters with intellectual and emotional qualities that made them good citizens and leaders. Through his education, Maurice learns a “conceptualization of relations between men” which is characterized by “intense emotional links between young men as long as physical desire is silenced, sublimated or repressed” (Toda 2001, 142). The relations are supposed to be platonic, and men are supposed to commit to a heterosexual marriage when they enter adult life (Forster 1971, 130). This becomes problematic as Maurice is physically attracted to men. Similar to the other novels, *Maurice* actualizes themes such as class, homosexuality, and family. In this novel however, the patriarchy affects the protagonist differently because he is met by an expectation of conforming to norms of masculinity that oppose his sexuality. His replacement of the goal of social integration is to leave society altogether to live with his lover, Alec, who belongs to the working-class.

As mentioned, *Maurice* differs from the other novels in that it is set in Victorian England and written during the period in 1914. This was a time when homosexual acts between men were illegal in England. The circumstances of its creation were in other words different than for *Oranges* and *Tipping*. In comparison, *Maurice* portrays the Victorian era without the modern and retrospective lens which *Tipping* applies. *Maurice* would most likely share more similarities with *Oranges* in the sense that they both have a special focus on the taboos around homosexuality. In *Oranges*, Jeanette goes through an act of exorcism, while in *Maurice*, Maurice attempts to “cure” himself by the help of hypnotism. Both acts are attempts of “curing” “deviant” sexualities. Both novels also include former lovers (Melanie in *Oranges*, Clive in *Maurice*) who eventually commit to heterosexual marriages. The former lover who commits to a heterosexual marriage also appears in *Tipping*, in the case of Kitty. However, Kitty attempts to win Nan back, after her marriage with Walter. It can be argued that this suggests the novels’ modern origin. A wider and more detailed study would most likely provide many examples of similarities and differences.

The Bildungsroman deals with topics related to identity and the relation between the individual and society. In this thesis I have analyzed how both *Oranges* and *Tipping* narrate the lives of people who have been “othered”, as they are queer protagonists who do not conform with the social and economic order, traditionally connected to the Bildungsroman. This project points to how the goal of social integration with ideals of heterosexual marriage, traditional conventions in family structures, and norms connected to class, are replaced by emancipation through solidarity, community and liberation. For Jeanette this means liberating

herself from her mother and the church community, and for Nan it is to engage in the socialist community and forming a family with Florence.

The novels create hopes and potentials for positive queer futures by representing alternatives to the traditional Bildung and depicting resistance against oppressive forces. Considering the political and cultural backlash in the US where books with LGBTQ+ content are banned, the focus on queer representation in literature continues to be urgent and necessary. The protagonists in *Oranges* and *Tipping* are at the margins of a social and economic order and have to navigate around it, and it is this that makes the stories interesting. Through the authors' experiments with the basic structure of genres, they are able to critique and challenge hierarchies of power and structures that marginalize queer people. The traditional Bildung narrative has perpetuated hierarchies of power, however, novels such as *Oranges* and *Tipping* contribute to a cultural shift, where they queer the genres and expand what is considered intelligible. Since their time of writing, similar narratives have been written, expanding the genre, but what is happening in the US points to a more somber future where queer identities and sexualities are threatened and under pressure. In the movement of queering the Bildungsroman, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* worked as one of the pioneers and *Tipping the Velvet* as a successor. They contributed to the significant change in what is considered intelligible and added lesbian protagonists' Bildung to the canon. Let us hope the canon continues to expand.

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