

Santa Clara University
Scholar Commons

Women's and Gender Studies

College of Arts & Sciences

1-9-2015

Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction

Linda Garber

Santa Clara University, lgarber@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/gender>

 Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garber, L. (2015). Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19(1), 129–49.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Lesbian Studies* on January 9, 2015, available online:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.974381>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women's and Gender Studies by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance between Fact and Fiction
Linda Garber, Santa Clara University

Garber, L. (2015). Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19(1), 129–49.

Lesbian history has always been a self-aware field of historiographical creation as much as historical discovery. Unanswered questions dominate the landscape: What is a lesbian in the first place? What constitutes evidence of lesbianism in the past? How much does it help to recast “lesbian” as a continuum,¹ or an adjective,² or a question instead of an answer?³ The historical records, if they exist at all, frustrate as often as they inform. Spotty, written by men, open to multiple interpretations – traces of a recognizably lesbian past run aground on the rocky shoals of the history of sexuality itself.⁴ Some would claim the search for “lesbians” in a pre-homosexual era is not only futile but wrong-headed. As a great deal of historical scholarship points out, it’s unlikely that many cross-dressing and/or women-loving women in history would recognize themselves as the “lesbians” we are claiming them to be.

But who cares, really? I pose this question both flippantly and in all seriousness, not least because I myself care. Historians strive for nuanced understandings of the past that are as accurate as possible, adhering to academic principles that make the recovery of recognizably “lesbian” history difficult. Theirs is a crucial project. The majority of people, however, want the validation that comes with identification. So, like most histories, lesbian history has spawned a genre of imaginative fiction. As early as 1933, novelists began to project clearly identifiable lesbian imagery into the past.⁵ The number of lesbian historical fictions (novels, stories, and films) increased dramatically in the 1980s, roughly simultaneous with the rise of the Foucauldian insistence that homosexual identity didn't exist before the late nineteenth century.⁶ Their

proliferation signals the growing desire for more thorough historical underpinnings of the burgeoning lesbian identities, communities, and politics set in motion in the 1970s.

After a discussion of authors' own commentary on the genre of lesbian historical fiction, and an overview of lesbian historians' inventive research strategies, I will turn to three novels and one film that highlight both the yearning for lesbian history and the difficulty of finding it. Daphne Marlatt's experimental novel *Ana Historic*, Cheryl Dunye's mock documentary *The Watermelon Woman*, Paula Martinac's ghost story *Out of Time*, and Brenda Adcock's time-travel pirate romp *The Sea Hawk* all feature protagonists in search of lesbian histories inaccessible to academic researchers. These fictions satisfy lesbian readers with recognizably lesbian characters set in familiar historical landscapes, even as they underscore the impossibilities of finding mirror images of ourselves in the past.

We could date the rise of lesbian historical fiction to the era when lesbian-feminist history ran into a theoretical brick wall. Laura Doan and Sarah Waters sum up the dilemma of lesbian historical research in the light of postmodern insight: "[T]he lesbian past grows increasingly insubstantial the nearer one draws to it; ultimately, perhaps, there is no 'it' to be recovered" (24).⁷ Without much concrete evidence of sexual activity between women in the past (in most cases, Anne Lister notwithstanding), and with a widespread understanding of "lesbian" as a term and identity unavailable before the advent of sexology in the late nineteenth century, what more could be said that wasn't speculative or theoretical?

Enter the lesbian protagonist in period costume and setting. Based on traces of evidence, provocative images, cherished gossip – or nothing at all but fantastical desire – lesbians writing in English in more than a hundred novels and a handful of films provide fictional historical accounts of a wide ranging cast of marauding pirates, civil war scouts, western bandits,

homesteading pioneers, suffragists, schoolteachers, wealthy ladies, working class servants, prostitutes, and shopkeepers – all of whom enjoy fabulous, orgasmic sex with other women. And lest anyone mistake them for merely eccentric, many of the characters understand their identity to be different from other women.

Though the stories themselves are most often sexy romps meant for entertainment, they serve more serious political ends. Emma Donoghue, one of the best selling writers in the genre, explains, "Imagine living in a city where there are no monuments, no buildings from before 1970, no proof that you had grandparents or parents, no history at all. Wouldn't that make you feel like you were just a passing fad, that you could be blown away like leaves? . . . for any community to feel substantial and able to change without losing themselves, a history is absolutely crucial."⁸ For most lesbian historical novelists and filmmakers, the nuances of scholarly historiography don't seem to matter much; at least, they don't hinder the storyteller's progress. Donoghue distinguishes between writers "who make it all up" and those who research "desirous of having some historical reality," but she notes that it's "often best to only find a few" facts, since they can "spur" but also "fetter" the writer.⁹ All contemporary novels, irrespective of genre, include a statement designed to protect their authors and publishers from liability, declaring the books works of fiction, "any resemblance to actual events or people" being "coincidental." About a third of lesbian historical novels also include author's notes explaining their stories' grounding in historical fact, raising the question along with Donoghue of the role of the intervention performed by lesbian historical fiction "at still a relatively early phase of digging up – or shall we say creating" the lesbian past.¹⁰

At the end of *Life Mask* (2004) and *The Sealed Letter* (2008) Donoghue devotes several pages to describing the extant historical records about the novels' respective main characters, the

eighteenth-century sculptor Anne Damer and the nineteenth-century feminist Emily “Fido” Faithfull.¹¹ Donoghue explains at the end of *Life Mask*, “This novel is fiction, but the kind that walks arm in arm with fact.”¹² A small number of other lesbian historical novelists (e.g., Stevie Davies and Patricia Duncker, who are both academic scholars) devote considerable space to the available historical evidence about their characters. Most of the others who provide notes state the bits of historical fact on which they base an elaborate yarn, or the truth of the general subject matter, such as the existence of women-loving women on the North-American western frontier or women, often cross-dressing, forming relationships with women during the U.S. Civil War.¹³

Some notes address the deliberate liberties authors take with the historical record and their reasons for doing so. Anne Cameron's untitled preface to the Canadian frontier novel *The Journey* says, in part, “When one is re-inventing the world one cannot be concerned with minor details, and when one has become convinced, over a number of years, that the privileged patriarchal perspective is sick, one looks for alternatives.”¹⁴ Cameron’s statement in 1982 responds to Adrienne Rich’s lesbian-feminist call a decade earlier for “Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction,” which Rich called “an act of survival.”¹⁵ Cameron makes clear that the text she set out to rewrite is the popular Hollywood western, in which “The boys could identify with the heroes. We had Dale Evans. She was the one with no guns, the one on the slower horse, who rode behind Roy just in time to catch the mud flying from his gallant steed’s hooves.” Cameron's further reminiscence hints at the racist, colonialist mess of appropriation into which the lesbian historical novel steps whenever it Goes West: “[B]ecause I had long hair, worn in pigtails, and the stereotype did not allow me a six-gun, a rifle, or a knife, I spent many hours tied to trees, the captive Indian.”¹⁶ “Over a number of years” Cameron had become convinced that history must

have been different than the skewed story told and retold through biased popular culture, so she penned her own version starring heroic lesbians battling violent white men -- sadly replete with the same Chinese and Native American supporting cast found more widely in Westerns, running the gamut of stereotypes from sneaky laborers to benevolent healers.

Still, Cameron's upending of the gender politics of the Western illustrates the novelist's freedom to invent where the historian must research. The balance between concrete evidence and informed speculation has been as much under consideration in mainstream academia as it was in the heyday of lesbian feminism. John Demos envisions historical fiction existing in a "borderland of surprising width and variegated topography" that joins history and fiction."¹⁷ Richard Slotkin argues that historical fiction goes beyond "stimulating interest in the study of history. . . . If properly understood, the writing of historical fiction can be a valuable adjunct to the work of historians in their discipline."¹⁸ He contends that fiction allows historians to explain what they "*understand*," which is often "more...than can be *proved* according to the rules of the discipline," leading to a choice "between knowledge and understanding: between telling the whole story as [the researcher] has come to understand it; or only what can be proved, with evidence and argument" (223).¹⁹ This may be what Patricia Duncker means when she writes in the afterward to *The Doctor*, a novel based on the life of a crossdressing nineteenth-century physician, "As to the inner reality of James Miranda Barry's life, here we can only guess at the truth, for there is very little evidence. And it is here that the novelist will always have the edge over the historian."²⁰ Detailing the sources she used to write *Life Mask*, Donoghue acknowledges that "For the private relations between" the characters, "of course, I've had to rely on educated guesswork."²¹ Isabel Miller's 1969 classic *Patience and Sarah* is based on the scant

evidence about an early nineteenth-century painter and her female companion. In an afterward, Miller writes, "We are provoked to tender dreams by a hint."²² (203).

Like Cameron in her prefatory note, a number of lesbian and queer historians embrace "telling the whole story," entertaining the alternative history that "reasoning, if not documentation, persuades us – must have been."²³ Lesbian historical researchers have long debated whether same-sex affection and erotic behavior in the past can be considered "lesbian" in the sense that we currently use the term. In the 1990s, transgender scholars and activists began to caution against claiming cross-dressing or passing women as lesbians, which can ignore transgender as an identity and/or historical phenomenon.²⁴ Many lesbians outside of academe follow Cameron, who notes that "Dedicated critics and committed historians will quickly find that this novel does not pay particular attention nor give much respect to the recorded version of history. Pickypicky!"

Instead of ignoring evidence, scholars tend to advocate viewing it differently than it has been, and they frequently disagree about the appropriate uses of terminology. Ruth Vanita makes a cogent argument that all vocabulary is culturally bound and presentist, not just the word "lesbian."²⁵ Anne Laskaya concurs, "Why some terms become the focus of energetic interrogation while others remain uninterrogated reflects either an inquiry into the limits of new intellectual frameworks or resistance to them."²⁶ Valerie Traub argues for "a new methodological paradigm for lesbian history" that takes seriously the similarities researchers and others perceive among women-loving women, particularly as they "recur, intermittently and with a difference, across time."²⁷ Queer theorists exploring temporality make similar claims; "queer time" in Carla Freccero's formulation, can productively "confound the temporalities we call past, present, and future."²⁸ Following Walter Benjamin, Freccero posits history as "a political project

for the present . . . For those seeking, in the present, a history that does not tell the story of the naturalness of one kind of erotic affectivity, it is important to rescue the dead from the enemy, because, if not, the dead risk never having been," a dire prospect with consequences for the future. Freccero thus advocates "anachronistic desire . . . queer in its reading of history for the pleasures of identification"²⁹ - a simultaneously postmodern and identitarian goal, both academically queer and plainly, politically, lesbian. Laura Doan states plainly that "history is always in the service of the present (this is not a problem of history, it is a condition of history)."³⁰

Doan's insight notwithstanding, disciplinary historians have rarely gone as far as literary scholars and cultural theorists. Even as the protagonist of Stevie Davies' *Impassioned Clay* informs her students in an Oxford history class that "*Without imagination...you will never be historians,*" she admits that "this heresy was not approved by the department."³¹ In 1990 the historian Judith M. Bennett first provided lesbian studies with the extremely useful, and careful, term "lesbian-like" to describe "women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behavior based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women."³² Bennett states clearly that she wants "to participate in the creation of histories that can have meaning for those women who today identify as lesbians, bisexuals, queers, or otherwise."³³

Doan distinguishes between two genealogical "modes of history writing": "What energizes ancestral genealogy is its confidence in - and political commitment to - the possibility of finding family resemblances to (or dissimilarities from) a largely stable modern homosexual. This is an object that queer genealogy, while acknowledging ancestral efforts as a necessary

early stage in the historiography of homosexuality, ultimately dismisses as theoretically naive, untenable, and even mired in transhistorical 'nostalgia.'"³⁴ Doan herself favors a third mode, "queer critical history," whose "use value is not to provide a usable past but to explain aspects of the sexual past that resist explanation in the context of identity history."³⁵ For most workaday lesbians, Doan's distinctions appear arcane and Bennett's "lesbian-like" simply doesn't go far enough. Monique Wittig's novel *Les Guérillères* tells women to "Make an effort to remember" in the face of history's silences, "Or, failing that, invent."³⁶ The unspecified mythic time of *Les Guérillères* is embodied in the queer-time, lesbian-historical Sappho -- both Lesbian (geographic/ historical) and lesbian (sexual/political) -- who promises in Fragment 60, "Someone in / some future time / will think of us."³⁷ The only way for modern lesbians to assemble a complete picture of our past has been to search out the fragments and inventively fill in the blanks.

Romancing the Lesbian Archives

The protagonist of Daphne Marlatt's 1988 novel *Ana Historic* asks, "What if they balance each other . . . and we live in history *and* imagination?"³⁸ Certainly, she does, an exemplary heroine of a subgenre of lesbian historical fiction featuring characters who search the historical record aware of its limitations, whose stories highlight the simultaneous difficulty and necessity of lesbian history. Suzanne Keen calls these "romances of the archive."³⁹ They have in common protagonists searching for material or documentary evidence of times past, and the passion of their quests stands as a metaphor for the desired past that gives rise to the entire genre of lesbian

historical fiction. Seeming to rebut postmodern skepticism of the knowability of history, romance-of-the-archive plots purport to "answer questions about what really happened, though . . . without surrendering [the] license to invent."⁴⁰ Such books are less frequently studied than the postmodern novels that Linda Hutcheon notably termed "historiographic metafiction," which "openly assert that there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths."⁴¹ Marked by "provisionality and indeterminacy," historiographical metafiction is less interested in finding the truth than in questioning "*whose* truth gets told."⁴² Similar concerns are frequently explored, or at least implied, by lesbian historical fiction, but the desire for a *lesbian* past -- and the conviction that it must have existed -- lends itself as well to the convention of the realistic novel that provides a generally *usable* past. Employing a sexual metaphor well suited to lesbian studies, Davies puts it this way, "The historical record arouses without satisfying. What answers it provides are seldom those our questions solicit. Fiction, through its dissemblings and guesswork, can satisfy not only by faking evidence but also through mirroring those dissatisfactions."⁴³

Marlatt's novel satisfies both concerns, providing an avenue to a usable lesbian past while simultaneously dissecting the biases and limitations of traditional historical research. Marlatt illustrates the lesbian historical fiction project through her protagonist Annie, who tells a different story from the official record, one that makes her own present and future possible, and her past legible. Throughout Marlatt's novel, Annie researches the life of a "Mrs. Richards" in the local archive, dubbing her "Ana," imagining herself in the past as she creates Ana as a character for a novel. Marlatt's acknowledgements, at the end of the book, explain, "this is a work of fiction; historical personages have been fictionalized to possible and/or purely imaginary lengths" (n. pag.) Annie can find very little documentation of Mrs. Richards' life because, as she

knows, "history" is "the story . . . of dominance. mastery" (25). Annie learns that Mrs. Richards arrived in a small logging town in British Columbia to take her first teaching post, that she claimed to be a widow, that she bought a piano and taught in the one-room schoolhouse, and that she soon married, becoming Mrs. Ben Springer -- "the sweep of that part of her life summed up" in a text from the period written by a Major Matthews. Annie understands that "history is the historic voice (voice-over), elegiac, epithetic. a diminishing glance as the lid is closed firmly and finally shut. that was her. summed up. Ana historic" (48).

At first Annie is uncertain how far to go in filling the gaps of Mrs. Richards' story, which she had begun researching for her husband's academic project. Throughout the novel, Annie struggles through an internal dialogue with her deceased mother Ina, a woman stifled by her role as mid-century wife and mother, robbed by electroshock treatments of her "imagination," her "will to create things differently" (149). Seeking to understand and escape her mother's fate, Annie explores plausible alternatives for Mrs. Richards' story, because she realizes that "something is wanting" (48). Her pursuit is guided by a question she poses to her mother: "whose truth, Ina?" Annie provides a veritable map for future lesbian historical fiction when she responds to her own query: "when you're so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact -- what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up" (56).

Annie has dutifully internalized what history is supposed to be, as personified by her husband Richard (Dick!), her former professor and "a good historian" (134). She argues with her mother/herself that she isn't merely "telling stories" when she imagines a flirtation, perhaps an affair, between Ana Richards and Birdie Stewart, "that other enterprising woman who, flying in the face of family and church, establishes her house that same year" (108). Rather, she is "untelling" the horrific story of her mother's life, the frightening tale of her own conventional

life, and the official history of Ana Richards' life, in favor of "true stories and real" whose telling depends upon "a monstrous leap of imagination" (28, 141, 67, 135). Annie's work is "a testimonial to women's struggle to make room in history for their stories," according to literary critic Marie Vautier, "because to make room for their history is to make room for themselves."⁴⁴ Marlatt herself explains that she "as Annie . . . invented a historical leak, a hole in the sieve of fact that let the shadow of a possibility leak through into full-blown life. . . Mrs. Richards is a historical leak for the possibility of lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia."⁴⁵

Annie takes a leap of lesbian imagination in her own life, urged on by Zoe, into whose lesbian arms Annie literally leaps in the last pages of the book -- not an ending but a beginning, "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (n. pag.) Annie will survive and thrive by telling a story about Mrs. Richards that defies "good" history by giving her research subject/protagonist a first name, investing her with skills and opinions, and exploring the possibility that she was unmarried and secretly took a woman lover. She can only do so by writing a novel, ignoring the call of history: "come back, history calls, to the solid ground of fact. you don't want to fall off the edge of the world--" (111). In an interview, Marlatt makes clear the necessity of invention, exploiting the "historical leak," when she explains, "that scene that Annie writes between Birdie and Anna . . . is entirely concocted. It's entirely an invention and the book is quite clear about that, but it's an invention that allows the narrator to take that step that she's having trouble doing all through the book. It allows her suddenly to translate herself. . . She begins seeing the lesbian potential through the scripts of heterosexual romance she's grown up with, and through all the constraints of Victorian sexuality, because that's what she's dealing with: the residue of that as it's passed down through the generations."⁴⁶ Marlatt and her

protagonist perceive both the limits of the historical record and the potential of historical discourse.

By understanding the limitations of Ina's life and perceiving the lesbian possibility of Mrs. Richards/Ana Historic, Annie Richardson can recreate herself, Annie Present, and reach her full potential as the lesbian Annie Future. Or, to quote Jeanette Winterson in *The Passion*, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." In Winterson's fantastical historical novel, the character Henri explains that in a literal struggle for survival, "Stories were all we had."⁴⁷ Doan and Waters describe the brilliant historiographical turn of Winterson's postmodern novels, which "mark a break with the unwillingness of [most lesbian historical fiction] to abandon limiting paradigms, and the beginning perhaps of a more inventive use of history."⁴⁸ That is, novels of queer rather than ancestral genealogy. Nevertheless, the sheer and increasing number of historical novels provide material testimony to Henri's/Winterson's statement, even as they take more prosaic (even formulaic) routes to the telling of lesbian historical stories. Writing lesbians into recognizable - even cliché - versions of the past seems to intone, "We exist, we exist, we exist." I would go so far as to argue that the dichotomy of postmodern vs. realist lesbian historical fiction is an unproductive one. Readers and writers know that the lesbian historical novel is a flight of fancy, whether or not its historiographical mechanisms are laid bare. Meanwhile, Marlatt and Winterson provide a sophisticated depiction of the machinery at work -- but they also satisfy readers' cravings for historical representations of lesbians.

Historical Fiction as Productive Fake

Cheryl Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman* provides an example of archive-romance that illustrates my point, like Marlatt's novel simultaneously providing the sought-for historical lesbian and pulling back the curtain to reveal her invention.⁴⁹ Dunye's film is particularly important for its exploration of the intersections and divergences between historical reclamation projects focused on race and sexual identity. The film's protagonist is "Cheryl," a young, black, lesbian filmmaker played by Cheryl Dunye (a young, black, lesbian filmmaker). Cheryl has three on-screen relationships: one with her best friend Tamara, an African-American lesbian; another with Diana, a white lesbian who becomes her lover; and a third with the focus of her documentary project, Fae Richards, an African-American actress from the 1930s who was credited in films only as "The Watermelon Woman." As Cheryl researches her film within the film, parallels between her life and Fae's come into view. Both face racism and homophobia, and both encounter disapproval from African-American friends for taking white lovers. Cheryl develops a clear sense that she needs to understand her relationship to history, through Fae, in order to continue with her work in the present.

But everywhere Cheryl turns for information about "The Watermelon Woman" she finds partial answers and particular forms of resistance. No one she interviews on the street has ever heard of the actress. A gay black film memorabilia collector specializes in "race films" and black Jazz Age nightclubs in Philadelphia, but he admits that "women are not my specialty." At the library, Cheryl tells her friend Tamara, "It's not like I can go and ask for information about the Watermelon Woman." When she does, the white male librarian tells her to "check the *black* section in the reference library." Cheryl responds, "Well, how about Martha Page. She was a *white* woman director in the 1930s." The librarian directs Cheryl to the "*film* section," as if she hadn't already thought of it, then tells her, "The only thing that's coming up is Martha Page. She

is coming up in several non-reference titles on women and film. No, no Watermelon Woman." While Martha Page, who directed films starring the Watermelon Woman, can be found in books and articles about "women in film," the Watermelon Woman repeatedly turns up lost between volumes on women, presumed to be white, and black people, presumed to be men. But Cheryl is brave, like the editors of a seminal black women's studies volume from the 1980s, and she presses on.⁵⁰

The history of African American film alone, or lesbian film alone, can't satisfy Cheryl's needs, since they have been constituted primarily as two separate histories.⁵¹ Lesbian/queer history privileges whiteness, African-American history privileges heterosexuality, and the parallels are complicated by structural and historical differences between the studies and experiences of sexuality and ethnicity. For one thing, historical reclamation projects of recognized groups -- by race, ethnicity, gender, and the like -- demonstrate that a community survived and contributed, and that peoples lives have been as misrepresented as their ancestors were mistreated.⁵² Lesbian/queer history struggles first to establish group identity, the valid historicity of its subject. Facing objections and dead-ends researching a historical project with overt racial *and* sexual dimensions, Dunye ingeniously presents a documentary within a documentary that is actually a feature film. With her genre choices, Dunye seems to say along with Winterson, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me."

Matt Richardson discusses *The Watermelon Woman* as an instance of "Black Queer Signifying Practice,"⁵³ "documentary film is another historiographical tool and a method of signifying on the gaps in written history, not a replacement for history"⁵⁴ but rather a repetition of "cultural norms with a distinct, and analytical difference."⁵⁵ Film scholar Alexandra Juhasz, who produced *The Watermelon Woman*, classifies it as a "fake documentary," a type of film that

"make[s] use of (copy, mock, mimic, gimmick) documentary style and therefore acquire[s] its associated content (the moral and social) and associated feelings (belief, trust, authenticity) to create a documentary experience defined by [its] antithesis, self-conscious distance." As a "productive" fake, *The Watermelon Woman* "mirrors and reveals the sustaining lies of all documentary, both real and fake, producing the possibility for the contesting of history, identity, and truth."⁵⁶ Certainly the film functions on this level -- but only for the viewer who reads the credits at the end, where Dunye reveals the fiction of the otherwise straightforward appearing documentary. It is entirely possible to view *The Watermelon Woman* as a successful "hoax," as Thelma Wills Foote explains, because to "spectators who presuppose the veracity of documentary form, *The Watermelon Woman* becomes a prank at their expense."⁵⁷

At the end of the film, Cheryl presents the documentary within the feature, introducing it as, "What you all have been waiting for, the biography of the Watermelon Woman, Fae Richards, Faith Richardson," consisting of black-and-white films clips, stills, and Cheryl's voice over. Curiously, screen credits appear only a minute into the documentary. Attentive viewers raise an eyebrow by the second such credit, which lists the actors, including Cheryl Dunye as "Cheryl," and Lisa Marie Bronson as "Fae 'The Watermelon Woman' Richards." The credits flash by fairly quickly, several of them noting production, direction, cinematography, and the like in typical fashion. The eleventh credit screen is the big tipoff, for someone paying close attention, because it acknowledges the creator of "Photos and Home Movies of the Watermelon Woman," the contemporary photographer Zoe Leonard. Foote explains that "many film spectators" at a pre-release screening believed in the veracity of Cheryl's documentary even with the hints in the credits, failing to see the film as Dunye's fiction -- or "fake," or the director's favored term, "Dunyementary."⁵⁸ So Dunye added a final credit screen that reads, "Sometimes

you have to create your own history. The Watermelon Woman is fiction. Cheryl Dunye, 1996." Because the announcement is made quietly at the very end of the film, *The Watermelon Woman* can function as both a hoax and a productive fake. As Juhasz states clearly, "a fake documentary unmarked," or one that's so subtly marked, "is a documentary."⁵⁹

Like Keen's "romance of the archive," the hoax/fake documentary satisfies by doing two things at once, providing a historical lesbian character and her story in a recognizable narrative format (the documentary), *and* drawing attention to the historiographical complexities of queer research. In other words, even though Juhasz and Foote are right about the complexities of the fake documentary as it points to historiography and problems of history, the faked documentary of the Watermelon Woman and of Cheryl's search for her still satisfies the desire (or nostalgia) for black lesbian history just like the less sophisticated, straightforward romances do. We know we are reading fiction when we read lesbian historical romance. Though the apparatus doesn't exist there to point out the fake/hoax or the historiography, the reader is both aware of the fiction and satisfied by it. Foote explains, "With the campiness of a sophisticated drag performance, Dunye's faux documentary film mocks the sobriety of classic documentary films about the past and their nostalgia for the lost ancestor. Yet, Dunye's mock-documentary does not deny the meaningfulness of the past, nor does it overlook the epistemic violence perpetrated by the erasure of the black homosexual from the historical record. Rather, the film affirms self-determining acts of making a living and open history from a past whose meaning is forged by the mediating capacity of the creative imagination to traverse historical knowledge and desire."⁶⁰

Maybe *The Watermelon Woman* is such a successful hoax not only because of formal considerations, nor even audience desire that it be true, but also because the African-American archival story accompanies the lesbian one. Foote points out that *The Watermelon Woman* is a

particularly devastating hoax because the character Cheryl is conflated with Cheryl Dunye, and audiences trust a black lesbian to tell the truth about black lesbians. It's less possible to deny outright the existence of people of color in various historical situations because there *is* incontrovertible evidence that they were there. Dunye skillfully combines faked movie clips and stills of her character Fae Richards with pictures of African-American celebrities such as Hattie McDaniel, Dorothy Dandridge and Louise Beavers; she knows that most viewers can't see the difference between the fictional black lesbian actress Cheryl has discovered and the historical actresses they may or may not recognize. Using a similar technique in her novel *The Escape Artist*, Judith Katz interweaves her magical-realist lesbian plot with the known history of anti-Semitic pogroms in the Pale of Eastern Europe and their connection to an underground economy of Jewish prostitution in Buenos Aires.⁶¹ Many white lesbian authors include cross-dressing women in their historical fictions; we know they existed, too, and we have documentation that some of them married women – even though “lesbians” are not supposed to have existed until the medical establishment invented the idea in the late nineteenth century. In *Lesbian Romance Novels*, Phyllis M. Betz points out "the importance of incorporating accurate architectural, decorative, and fashion description" into the historical fiction narrative to "create the requisite fantasy element essential to the romance."⁶² *The Watermelon Woman* achieves its verisimilitude through depiction rather than description, relying on Zoe Leonard's still photographs and "home movies" of Fae Richards as portrayed by actor Lisa Marie Bronson.

Near the end of the film Dunye reveals her motivation for making *The Watermelon Woman*, when Cheryl looks into the camera and states that she needs to tell her version of the Watermelon Woman's story to enable her own life and creative work as "the one who says, 'I am a black, lesbian filmmaker'" -- an identity she had claimed only tentatively at the beginning of

the film. But Cheryl isn't the only person who needs Fae's story, and not all interested parties need it for the same reasons. June Walker, Fae's lover for more than twenty years after she left the movies, leaves Cheryl a letter and a packet of photographs and memorabilia she hopes will correct the record on Fae, including Cheryl's misinterpretation of her life. Cheryl had been thrilled to find out that Fae and Martha were lovers, and she soaked up any and all images she could find of Fae on film, however racist the scenario or depiction of black female characters. Having learned that, June writes, "I was *so mad* that you mentioned the name of Martha Page. Why did you even want to include a white woman in a movie on Fae's life? Don't you know she had nothing to do with how people should remember Fae?" Finding no alternative views, save the silence and scant evidence of the official record, Cheryl had been all too happy to claim the parts of Fae's life with which she could identify. She is thoroughly schooled by June, in a voiceover narration that plays behind still shots and home movies of June and Fae. "She did so much, Cheryl. That's what *you* have to speak about. She paved the way for kids like you to run around making movies about the past, and how we lived then. Please, Cheryl, make our history before we are all dead and gone. But, if you are *really* in the family, you better understand that our family will always only have each other." While June knows more about Fae than others do, ultimately Cheryl makes clear that June's version, like all others, tells an invested story. The truth is that Cheryl needs Fae for her own reasons. Like all documentarians, Cheryl created the subject of her film. And in case viewers don't understand the importance of her story, Cheryl/Dunye states it clearly. In order to live her black, lesbian life in the present, she needs to believe in a black lesbian past. Dunye seems to say, with Winterson, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me."

Supernatural Interventions

By their very genre, some lesbian historical fictions are much more obviously “stories” than Dunye’s convincing hoax. I would argue that the obvious contrivances of ghost stories and time-travel plots at least tacitly point to both queer and ancestral genealogies in Doan’s sense. The least academically inclined reader knows these are fantasies and can grasp the ways in which they reveal the constructedness of history as well as its usefulness to the present. Supernatural gothic and science-fiction devices figure prominently in lesbian historical fiction, allowing protagonists the actual interaction with historical lesbians that Cheryl craves. Paula Martinac’s ghost story *Out of Time* and Brenda Adcock’s pirate novel *The Sea Hawk* are romances of the archive that mobilize genre fiction devices in the service of lesbian history. Both feature lesbian characters who desperately need guidance from role models in the lesbian past, and their authors are not afraid to employ supernatural devices to give it to them. As Toni Morrison demonstrates with devastating brilliance in *Beloved*, fantastical plot devices can reveal historical truths beyond the reach of the realistic novel.

The protagonist of Martinac’s *Out of Time* is a lesbian graduate student in New York City whose life is at loose ends. At age 30, Susan Van Dine is in debt, unsure whether to move in with her lover, and bored with her doctoral program in English - her third graduate degree. One day while Susan is walking down the street, she takes refuge from a sudden rainstorm in an antique shop she has never noticed before. Inside, she is mysteriously drawn to a photo album chronicling the friendship of four women in the 1920s who call themselves “The Gang.” Susan feels connected to the women, who seem to look directly at her from their photos, “peer[ing] out at me seductively . . . beckoning,” she thinks.⁶³ Unsure whether the album is for sale, Susan

takes it while the shopkeeper's back is turned and leaves a check for what she considers a fair price (7). Exhilarated and surprised by what she has done, Susan becomes obsessed with The Gang. She falls in love with the women, fantasizing that she is the photographer interacting with them as they pose (15). Soon the women in the pictures start speaking to Susan. When she wonders silently, "How did I find you?" Harriet, the most flirtatious of The Gang answers, "Silly girl . . . we found *you*" (16). By the fourth chapter Harriet's ghost caresses Susan as she falls asleep; in chapter seven Susan finds out firsthand "what a kiss was like in 1926," and in chapter eight Harriet seduces Susan, convincing her that "It's for your education . . . Tell yourself it's for history" (55).

Susan takes a leave of absence from graduate school and then quits altogether to work at an antique shop aptly called "Out of Time" and focus her attention on the women. Confused, fearing she may be losing her mind, Susan shares only a little of what is happening with her level-headed lover, Catherine, a school teacher and self-taught community historian. Catherine's archival research about The Gang's four members turn up dates, news articles, even political writings by one of the women, but it leaves Susan cold. She far prefers first-person research to more traditional methods: "It all seemed like a lot of work to me, because I was convinced they would tell me their stories eventually and far more accurately than written records could" (19). Susan feels that Catherine's factual research is "cluttering things up" (45), because her "fascination with precise facts and dates left no room for intuition or imagination. Or romance" (48).

In historian Slotkin's terms, Susan seeks to *understand*, unsatisfied with what Catherine can *prove* "according to the rules of the discipline."⁶⁴ When Susan finally tells Catherine about what's happening, she explains, "I'm having this historical experience" (72). The couple

continues to pursue the history of the Gang in tandem, with Catherine grounding Susan and Susan urging Catherine to push boundaries. Martinac presents the haunting as real, leading the reader to accept Susan's version of events, tempered and contextualized by Catherine's historical facts. In other words, the reader participates in the historiographical debate that in an important sense is the subject of the novel.

While Catherine's interest in history is both academic and political, Susan's is personal. She needs lesbian history in the form of elders and foremothers to teach her how to navigate her own life. Harriet's ghost seduces Susan into examining the past, but it is the ghost of Harriet's lover Lucy who teaches Susan what to do with what she learns. Lucy's ghost literally places in Susan's hands one of the novels she wrote, an artifact that leads Susan to explore a box of Lucy's papers that she had acquired from Lucy's niece, based on information Catherine had uncovered at the lesbian archives (40, 66). The box contains letters, packages, and notebooks, "All precisely packed away. For history" (85). It also holds a fountain pen that Susan eventually realizes was Lucy's first gift to Harriet (136, 143). When Susan picks up the pen, she hears Lucy's ghost repeat the words Lucy had said decades ago to Harriet, "Write me something beautiful with it" (89). When Susan agrees to, she gets the first clue in answer to a question she will soon pose to herself, "Why me? What did they want of me?" The answer, as it reveals itself over the rest of the novel, gives Susan a clear direction for her life at long last.

At first Susan thinks Lucy wants her to write a novel about the The Gang (164). When her attempt fails, Lucy's ghost leads Susan to her outline for a novel from 1929; Susan "only had to read a few lines to know it was the novel [she herself] had been trying to write" (166). Catherine is skeptical about Susan's plans to finish Lucy's novel without further research, reigniting the tension between Susan's yearning for lesbian foremothers and Catherine's

reverence for historical accuracy. Catherine's accusation that Susan "just want[s] to make up the story, *your* story, the way you see it" rings true, even to Susan's ears (167). Although Susan promises Catherine that she will "get the whole story" before she writes the novel, Susan knows she's not alone in her need to interact with the past on an emotional level. In case Martinac's readers don't consciously register the same pull in themselves, at a particularly enlightening juncture in her research Susan thinks, "This would be a novel about love and loss and remembrance . . . Lesbians would eat it up. I'm not the only one, after all, with fantasies about true and perfect love" (205).

It turns out that Lucy's ghost seeks Susan's help in publishing a finished manuscript titled *Our Time, Our Place*, which will bring lesbian history to life for others in the same way that haunting has brought it to life for Susan. The manuscript turns up in a box of Lucy's papers at the apartment of her former nurse -- another lesbian who becomes part of Susan's friendship circle (216). Lucy's ghost, who had empathized with Susan's difficulties as a kindred writer (162-63) plays midwife to Susan's professional writing career. Susan writes the introduction to and publishes Lucy's novel, which stops both the haunting and Susan's writer's block. In the closing pages of the novel, Susan begins writing a historical novel of her own and takes on the longer term project of editing Lucy's journals and short fiction for publication (218-19).

The literary ambitions and mentorship of Lucy's ghost help Susan in more ways than one. Susan gains focus as a writer, but her haunting by The Gang, especially Lucy, also leads Susan back to Catherine after a period of estrangement (144-45). If Susan and Catherine don't have "true and perfect love," in the end they have a strong relationship and a future together, warts and all, just like Harriet and Lucy had. Susan learns from Lucy's journal that Lucy, too, questioned her relationship, wondering about its long term viability (186). Lucy's ghost makes the

connection clear when she explains that she stayed with Harriet despite her infidelities for the same reason that Catherine and Susan recommit to each other: "Because you have something together other people can't see, don't want to see" (181). This parallel, once voiced by Lucy's ghost, makes Susan realize she has been on the right track: "That," she responds, "is what I've felt all along! Why the facts didn't matter so much to me! It's something else, something . . . deeper" (181). In other words, Susan's needs in the present, which compelled her pursuit of The Gang and gave rise to her relationships with ghosts, turn out to provide a useful impetus for understanding the past. She couldn't have done it without Catherine's level headed research, but Catherine could not have understood history fully until she came around to believing in Susan's personal knowledge.

By the end of Martinac's novel, Susan and Catherine are living together in a house recently vacated by the death of Elinor, another member of The Gang. Elinor's nurse Fleck lives on the bottom floor; they are frequently visited by Tuttie, Susan's trusted employee at the antique shop; Susan has weekly lunches with Lucy's lesbian niece Bea, who owns the shop where Susan initially found The Gang's scrapbook; and Susan has become friends with Lucy's nurse Sophia and her lover. In short, over the course of her "historical experience" Susan has put her relationship on a solid footing and assembled "[her] own gang" (193), bringing the novel full circle as lesbian community is reinvented for the present generation of lesbians through the intervention of their foremothers.

In several lesbian historical novels, spectral visitation provides the necessary ingredient for the fictional researcher to accomplish what Lisa Hogeland calls "speculative knowledge production," an endeavor vital to lesbian history.⁶⁵ Terry Castle demonstrated some years ago that the "apparitional lesbian" is a staple of western literature from the eighteenth century

onward. First used to stigmatize actual lesbianism, later to invoke it, the lesbian spectre wafts through mainstream culture until it is embraced by contemporary lesbian writers who "have succeeded in transforming her from a negating to an affirming presence."⁶⁶ As Paulina Palmer explains in *Lesbian Gothic*,

The protagonist's encounter with the spectral figure, while involving her on a psychological plane in a confrontation with a ghostly double who reflects aspects of her own personality, also furnishes her, in terms of woman's quest for origins, with an entry into the lesbian past. The encounter, though emotionally disturbing, is nonetheless represented as instructive.⁶⁷

In Palmer's terms, the lesbian ghost is a perfect vehicle for "personal and psychological" explorations of history.⁶⁸

If dead lesbians won't or can't visit contemporary protagonists, in some novels protagonists travel to the past to visit them. At the start of Brenda Adcock's *The Sea Hawk*, marine archaeologist Julia Blanchard has reached the limits of academic research into the shipwreck of the *Georgia Peach*. Like Susan in *Out of Time*, Julia's personal life is in shambles, "the perfect life she thought she was living . . . unexpectedly gone."⁶⁹ (1). Julia's fault isn't too little research, but too much; her lover is straying with other women because Julia is "always working." Confronted by Julia about her infidelity, Amy retorts, "Did you expect me to be waiting for you to come home from your little sea adventure, wearing an apron and stirring a pot of soup to warm you like a good little mariner's wife?" (8).

Workaholic Julia literally drowns her sorrows in her work. She heads out to sea alone and is stranded in open water when modern-day pirates steal her research boat (2-4). Dehydrated and nearly dead, after several days Julia finally "sobbed and gave herself to the sea" (17), then

wakes to find herself somehow miraculously rescued by a British frigate in the early nineteenth century (21). At first certain that she is dreaming, or has been rescued by a ship and crew performing an elaborate historical reenactment, Julia slowly concludes that she is "stuck somewhere in the past" (28). When the frigate is attacked by French privateers, Julia is captured - and captivated - by the striking female captain of the *Faucon de Mer*, Simone Moreau (30). Fierce in battle, ruthless in ship's discipline, and accepted as a woman-loving woman by her crew, Simone is immediately attracted to Julia as well. The plot twists through travels (Martinique), wars (the Battle of New Orleans), jealousy (of Simone's lover), flirtation, and avoidance until Julia and Simone finally declare and consummate their love -- only to lose one another at the brink of a happy ending. When Julia is pitched overboard in a storm, she cries out, "I love you, Simone! Never forget that!" She has just revealed to Simone that she is from the future (156), and as she loses her grip on Simone's hand, she says, "I can't [hang on], I don't belong here" (158-59).

Be that as it may, Julia has discovered a great deal about the past, and herself, during her time with Simone in the nineteenth century. For one thing, she learns that the ship she had been calling the *Georgia Peach* is actually the *Faucon de Mer*, and she knows about the ship's exploits and daily life on board in great detail. The fact that Simone's ship sunk off the coast of Georgia, scuttled by a cannon shot from inside the hull, leads Julia to understand that Simone lived the end of her life where she knew Julia would live in the future (176-77, 191). More important than archaeological facts, Julia learns a life lesson in love, as she tells her parents after she is rescued, "The sea . . . revealed the meaning of love to me . . . timeless love does exist. I never thought I would know that kind of love" (167). Though her parents think she must be hallucinating, Julia realizes because of her passion and intimacy with Simone that she had never really loved Amy.

Confronted by a repentant Amy, Julia tells her, "real love hurts more than you can imagine when you lose it. I was mad when I left, but . . . I didn't miss you" (169).

Because *The Sea Hawk* is a romance, Julia finds her lost love reincarnated in Simone's descendant, a dead ringer for the sea captain, who possesses a centuries-old portrait of a woman who looks exactly like Julia, "commissioned by a distant relative" (188). Simone Dhuperior tells Julia everything she knows about her ancestor and shows her the captain's journal, which corroborates what Julia knows to be true about the *Georgia Peach/Faucon de Mer* but couldn't publish without evidence (191). Julia tells her whole story to Simone Dhuperior, who says she doesn't believe in reincarnation but is certain that Julia is "the woman in that portrait who has been haunting my dreams for as long as I can remember" (189). As they compare notes they find too many coincidences to deny who they are. Standing next to the captain's grave, whose epitaph reads "*Je vous attendrai, ma bien-aimée*" ("I shall wait for you, my beloved"), Julia "drew Simone into a breathless kiss to welcome her home again . . . [She] didn't want to think about the past or the future, only what existed at that moment as she kissed her lover once again across time" (192). Turning away from the cemetery, Julia and Simone walk arm and arm into their future together. Julia's devotion to her work could bring her neither love nor complete understanding of the past. Once she let go and admitted she was at sea, lesbian history gave her everything she needed to succeed both personally and professionally.

Some lesbian historical time-travel novels, such as Sarah Dreher's *Captive in Time* and Catherine Friend's *The Spanish Pearl*, feature straightforward science-fiction visits to the past. Others, like Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* and Linda Kay Silva's *Across Time*, combine science fiction with Gothic supernatural elements in the manner of *The Sea Hawk*.⁷⁰ Time-travel plots seem to assert that lesbians can know the truth about women loving women in history

because of our present-day experiences of lesbian love. Unknowable through historical expertise (e.g., Julia's and Catherine's research), the historical existence of lesbian love is confirmed by protagonists' "historical experience." In *The Sea Hawk* and other time-travel fictions, lesbian love becomes a literally transhistorical phenomenon. To a certain extent, genre-fiction romances of the archives, by featuring researchers in need of fantastical interventions, are as effective as postmodern metahistorical novels in pointing up the vagaries of the pursuit of history and its results. While they may not engage in the "critical historiography" so aptly called for by Doan, or otherwise satisfy the rigorous demands of academic historians, they nonetheless point out the problems with historical research while satisfying lesbians' yearning for a usable past. The fantastical reaches of many plots make clear that contemporary lesbians want and need a history, as they explore the uses for that history enacted through obvious wish fulfillment.

Contemporary protagonists of romances of the archive stand in for the readers of lesbian historical fiction, showing what we desire and have to gain from contact with history. Whether genealogically queer or ancestral, identitarian or postmodern, the plots deliver a desired past. All of these novels engage the question of what it is about this queer time and place that compels us to discover, describe, and invent others. Hogeland quips, "Why do so many people write lesbian historical fiction? Because they can."⁷¹ "Why not imagine their stories as real, if not true?" Anita Diamant asks, "For the space of this entertainment, where's the harm?"⁷² In other words, I'm telling you stories. Trust me.

Notes

¹ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1986), 23-75.

² Lillian Faderman, "A Usable Past?" in Noreen Giffney, et al., *The Lesbian Premodern* (New York and Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 174.

³ Vivien Ng, "Looking for Lesbians in Chinese History," in Martin Duberman, ed., *A Queer World* (New York UP, 1997), 199-204.

⁴ Problems of interpretation are as thorny in gay male, bisexual, and trans* history -- but the historical lack of access to literacy and power in most cultures makes finding depictions of women (and hence, lesbians) particularly difficult. Worldwide, the historical archive of images and descriptions of men loving men is much larger than the archive of women loving women.

⁵ Maude Meagher, *The Green Scamander* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933); Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show* (New York: Viking, 1936). Sarah Waters, the leading contemporary lesbian historical novelist, wrote her doctoral thesis on Meagher's novel; an essay version was published in 1996 as "Wolfskins and Togas: Maude Meagher's *The Green Scamander* and the Lesbian Historical Novel," *Women: A Cultural Review* 7 (Autumn 1996): 176-88. Compiling an exhaustive list of lesbian historical novels published in English is a near-impossible task, since library catalog headings are not helpful, and because so many titles are out of print. Over the course of a decade I have identified 115 titles whose stories take place before World War II. Of these, only five were published before 1980; 21 were published in the 1980s, 30 in the 1990s, and 59 between 2000 and 2013.

⁶ Elsewhere I have termed this insight "the Foucauldian Orthodoxy" and pointed out its limitations, particularly in transnational context. Garber, Linda, "Where in the World Are the Lesbians?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14:1/2 (January-April 2005):28-50.

⁷ Laura Doan and Sarah Waters, "Making Up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History," in David Alderson and Linda Anderson, eds., *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2000), 24.

⁸ Emma Donoghue, qtd. in Alice Lawlor, "Emma Donoghue's Historical Novels," *Xtra! Canada's Gay and Lesbian News* (July 29, 2008), n.pag., accessed December 8, 2012, http://www.xtra.ca/public/Toronto/Emma_Donoghues_historical_novels-5128.aspx.

⁹ Emma Donoghue, "Picking Up Broken Glass, or, Turning Lesbian History into Fiction" (presentation at Lesbian Lives XII, University College Dublin, Ireland, February 10-12, 2006).

¹⁰ Emma Donoghue, "Picking Up Broken Glass."

¹¹ Emma Donoghue, *Life Mask* (London: Virago, 2005); *The Sealed Letter* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).

¹² Donoghue, *Life Mask*, 605.

¹³ For novels of the western frontier, see for example Anne Cameron, *The Journey* (New York: Avon, 1982), Penny Hayes, *Now and Then* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad, 1996), and Barbara Johnson, et al., *Tall in the Saddle* (Tallahassee, FL: Bella, 2007). For Civil War novels, see for example Nann Dunn, *The War Between the Hearts* (Gainesville, FL: Intaglio, 2005) and KI Thompson, *House of Clouds* (New York: Bold Strokes, 2007).

¹⁴ Cameron, *The Journey*, n. pag.

¹⁵ Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35.

¹⁶ A separate essay titled "Tomgirls and Indians" will explore the phenomenon in more depth. Lesbian historical novels set in the American West outnumber all other subgenres by far.

-
- ¹⁷ John Demos, "Afterword: Notes From, and About, the History/Fiction Borderland," *Rethinking History* 9 (June/September 2005), 329.
- ¹⁸ Richard Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purposes of History," *Rethinking History* 9 (June/September 2005), 222.
- ¹⁹ Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purposes of History," 223.
- ²⁰ Patricia Duncker, *The Doctor* (New York: HarperCollins, 199), 375.
- ²¹ Donoghue, *Life Mask*, 606.
- ²² Isabel Miller, *Patience & Sarah*, 1969 (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005), 203.
- ²³ Anne Laskaya, "A 'Wrangling Parliament': Terminology and Audience in Medieval European Literary Studies and Lesbian Studies," in Giffney, et al., *The Lesbian Premodern*, 17.
- ²⁴ See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998) and Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors* (Boston: Beacon, 1996).
- ²⁵ Ruth Vanita, ed., *Queering India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4-5.
- ²⁶ Laskaya, "A 'Wrangling Parliament,'" 2.
- ²⁷ Valerie Traub, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, eds., *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 125, 126.
- ²⁸ Carla Freccero, "The Queer Time of the Lesbian Premodern," in Giffney, et al., *The Lesbian Premodern*, 68.
- ²⁹ Freccero, "The Queer Time of the Lesbian Premodern," 62-3.
- ³⁰ Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 89.
- ³¹ Stevie Davies, *Impassioned Clay* (London: Women's Press, 2000), 42.

-
- ³² Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (2000), 9-10.
- ³³ Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like,'" 4.
- ³⁴ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 58-9.
- ³⁵ Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 61.
- ³⁶ Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. Peter Owen, 1969 (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1985), 89.
- ³⁷ Mary Barnard, *Sappho: A New Translation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), n. pag.
- ³⁸ Daphne Marlatt, *Anna Historic*, 1988 (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1997), 139. Subsequent page references will appear in the text in parenthesis.
- ³⁹ Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (University of Toronto Press, 2001), 139.
- ⁴⁰ Keen, *Romances of the Archive*, 3.
- ⁴¹ Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 109.
- ⁴² Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction," 111, 123.
- ⁴³ Davies, "Hearing Voices: From History via Fiction to Radio Drama," *New Welsh Review* 61 (Autumn 2003), 29.
- ⁴⁴ Marie Vautier, "Canadian Fiction Meets History and Historiography: Jacques Poulin, Daphne Marlatt, and Wayson Choy," *Colby Quarterly* 35 (March 1999), 27.
- ⁴⁵ Daphne Marlatt, "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis," *Tessera* 8 (Spring/printemps 1990), 15.

⁴⁶ Beverley Curran with Mitoko Hirabayashi, "Conversations with Readers: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt," *Studies in Canadian Literature / Etudes en littérature canadienne* 24 (1999), 115.

⁴⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (New York: Grove, 1987), 5, 107.

⁴⁸ Doan and Waters, "Making Up Lost Time," 20.

⁴⁹ *The Watermelon Woman*, Directed by Cheryl Dunye (Dancing Girl, 1996).

⁵⁰ Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1982.

⁵¹ In the film, Cheryl looks for books at the Philadelphia Public Library. An actual keyword search of the library's book catalog in 2013 turns up the following results: *women and film*, 231; *African-American and film*, 105; *lesbian and film*, 62; *women, African-American, and film*, 16; *lesbian, African-American, and film*, 4. Matt Richardson points out that when *The Watermelon Woman* was released in 1996, "there were only a few books by black feminist scholars that focused on the interpretations and experiences of black women spectators . . . [and] Popular books at the time about the secret world of lesbians in the mainstream film industry . . . gave a history of the lesbian experience in the film industry that was entirely white" (Richardson, "Our Stories," 101).

⁵² Mattie Udora Richardson (aka Matt Richardson) refers to "the tradition of representing Black people as decent and moral historical agents" (64) in "No More Secrets, No More Lies: African American History and Compulsory Heterosexuality," *Journal of Women's History* 15:3 (Autumn 2003), 64.

-
- ⁵³ Mattie Udora Richardson (aka Matt Richardson), "Critical Reconstructions of History: Black Lesbian Literature and Film, Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2005, 8.
- ⁵⁴ Matt Richardson, "Our Stories Have Never Been Told: Preliminary Thought on Black Lesbian Cultural Production as Historiography in *The Watermelon Woman*, *Black Camera 2* (Spring 2011), 102.
- ⁵⁵ Richard, "Critical Reconstructions," 8.
- ⁵⁶ Alexandra Juhasz, "Phony Definitions," in Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, eds., *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 7.
- ⁵⁷ Thelma Wills Foote, "Hoax of the Lost Ancestor: Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman*," *Jump Cut* 49 (Spring 2007), n. pag., accessed December 23 2009, <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/WatermelonWoman/index.html>.
- ⁵⁸ Foote, "Hoax of the Lost Ancestor," n. pag.
- ⁵⁹ Juhasz, "Phony Definitions," 10.
- ⁶⁰ Foote, "Hoax of the Lost Ancestor," n. pag.
- ⁶¹ Judith Katz, *The Escape Artist* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1997).
- ⁶² Phyllis M. Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis* (Jefferson, NC and London: MacFarland, 2009), 86.
- ⁶³ Paula Martinac, *Out of Time* (Seattle: Seal, 1990), 6. Subsequent page references will appear in the text in parenthesis.
- ⁶⁴ Richard Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purposes of History," 223.
- ⁶⁵ Lisa Hogeland, panel presentation on Judy Grahn, National Women's Studies Association Conference (Atlanta, GA: 2009).

⁶⁶ Terry Castle, *The Apparational Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 65.

⁶⁷ Paulina Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 64.

⁶⁸ Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic*, 19.

⁶⁹ Brenda Adcock, *The Sea Hawk*, (Nederland, TX: Yellow Rose Books, 2008), 1. Subsequent page references will appear in the text in parenthesis.

⁷⁰ Sarah Dreher, *Captive in Time* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 1990); Catherine Friend, *The Spanish Pearl* (New York: Bold Strokes, 2007); Jewelle Gomez, *The Gilda Stories* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1991); Linda Kay Silva, *Across Time* (Midway, FL: Spinsters Ink, 2008).

⁷¹ Lisa Hogeland, private conversation, San Francisco, January 2013.

⁷² Anita Diamant, *The Last Days of Dogtown* (New York: Scribner, 2006), xvi.