

Author Spotlight

SARAH WATERS



Sarah Waters is the *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The Paying Guests* (2014), *The Little Stranger* (2009), *The Night Watch* (2006), *Fingersmith* (2002), *Affinity* (1999), and *Tipping the Velvet* (1998). She has been short-listed for the Man Booker Prize three times and has twice been a finalist for the Orange Prize. Sarah Waters was born in 1966 and grew up in Wales in a family that included her father Ron, mother Mary, and a sister. Her mother was a housewife and her father an engineer who worked on oil refineries. She describes her family as "pretty idyllic, very safe and nurturing." Her father, "a fantastically creative person," encouraged her to build and invent. She lives in a top-floor Victorian flat in Kennington (south-west London) with her two cats.

Before writing novels, Waters worked as an academic, earning a doctorate at Queen Mary, University of London and teaching. The work for her PhD dissertation, "Wolfskins and Togas : Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present" served as inspiration and material for future books. Waters went directly from her doctoral thesis to her first novel. Her work is very research-intensive, which is an aspect she enjoys. With the exception of her most recent book, *The Little Stranger*, all of her books contain lesbian themes, and she does not mind being labeled a lesbian writer. She said, "I'm writing with a clear lesbian agenda in the novels. It's right there at the heart of the books." She calls it "incidental," because of her own sexual orientation. "That's how it is in my life, and that's how it is, really, for most lesbian and gay people, isn't it? It's sort of just there in your life." In the tenth and final Stonewall Awards, Sarah Waters was awarded with the title Writer of the Decade for the impact of her books on LGBT readers. She has earned the reputation as one of our greatest writers of historical fiction.

In *The Paying Guests*, it is 1922 and London is tense. Ex-servicemen are disillusioned and the out-of-work and the hungry are demanding change. In South London, in a genteel Camberwell villa—a large, silent house now bereft of brothers, husband, and even servants—life is about to be transformed, as impoverished widow Mrs. Wray and her spinster daughter, Frances, are obliged to take in lodgers.

With the arrival of Lilian and Leonard Barber, a modern young couple of the "clerk class," the routines of the house will be shaken up in unexpected ways. Little do the Wrays know just how profoundly their new tenants will alter the course of Frances's life—or, as passions mount and frustration gathers, how far-reaching, and how devastating, the disturbances will be for them.

Prepared by Maureen Socha

January 2019

Source: www.litlovers.com and www.nclive.org (Biography Refe



Discussion Questions for *The Paying Guests*

1. What role does domestic work play in this novel?
2. Discuss the role of class on the characters and their situations.
3. How has war impacted these characters?
4. Did you begin to doubt or question Lilian's motives after Leonard dies?
5. How do you imagine Lilian and Frances' relationship will progress now that the trial is over?
6. What impact did the murder and trial have on their relationship?
7. Did you suspect Len of cheating? Why don't you think Lilian shared this information with Frances?
8. Frances compares the notes of Lilian to the letters from Christina. Discuss the similarities and differences. Why is this important?
9. Frances' mother begins to treat Frances differently after Leonard dies. Why do you think this is? What are her suspicions?
10. Discuss the perception of lesbianism during this era. Why was this out of the question for Frances' parents to accept that she wanted to be with a female?
11. Frances accuses Lilian of wanting to be admired which Lilian denies. What do you think?
12. Before Lilian arrives on the bridge after the trial has ended, Frances contemplates jumping off. Do you think she was seriously considering suicide? Why or why not?
13. What is the significance in the end of Frances and Lilian being united by the words "I can't?"
14. There were several instances where Lilian wishes Leonard would die. Do you think that his death was fully an accident?

Source: www.book-chatter.com



Recommendations by Riverhead Table (courtesy of Riverhead Books) for a Tea Party Menu

Serve any kind of tea

Goat Cheese and Fig Cucumber Cups (Makes 6-8 servings; Prep Time: 15-20 minutes)

Ingredients:

1 large cucumber or 2 regular cucumbers

4oz soft goat cheese

2oz fig jam

Wash the cucumbers then score the skin of each with a fork (from top to bottom). Cut off the ends, then cut the rest into 2-inch pieces. Use a melon baller or teaspoon to hollow out the inside of each piece (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down) so that you have a well. Fill each cucumber cup with goat cheese and top them with fig jam.

Tomato-Cheddar Tea Sandwiches (20 tea sandwiches; Prep Time: 15-20 minutes)

Ingredients:

10 slices of white bread

Mayonnaise

10 slices of tomato

Aged cheddar

Basil leaves

Spread mayonnaise on white bread, then make a sandwich with sliced tomato, aged cheddar and basil. We prefer to trim off the crusts and cut into four triangles.

Cucumber Butter Tea Sandwiches (20 tea sandwiches; Prep Time: 15-20 minutes)

Ingredients:

10 slices of white bread

4 tbs softened butter

1/2 tsp grated lemon zest

1 tbs fresh herbs

1 cucumber, sliced

Mix the softened butter, lemon zest and fresh herbs in a small bowl. Spread on white bread and sandwich with sliced cucumber. Again, cut into four triangular pieces.



Source: <https://riverheadbooks.tumblr.com>



Homemade Pesto & Chicken Crostini (15 or so crostini; Total Time: 1 hour)

For pesto:

2 cups fresh basil
2 garlic cloves
1/4 cup pine nuts
2/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper

For the rest of this recipe:

2 boneless chicken breasts, cooked and sliced
1 baguette, sliced into thin rounds
1 container grape tomatoes, sliced in half

How to make pesto: Put the basil, garlic and pine nuts in a food processor. Pulse the mixture until it's roughly chopped. Then add a 1/2 cup of oil and process until you have a smooth mixture. Season with salt and pepper and mix in as much or as little cheese with a small spatula.

How to assemble the crostini: Spread a bit of the pesto onto each baguette round (you can add a bit of oil into the pesto if it isn't as smooth as you like). Top with sliced cooked chicken breast and grape tomato halves. Top with more pesto if you want!

Ginger Cookies (Makes 40 cookies; Total Time: ~1 hour)

Ingredients:

12oz plain flour
1 level tsp baking soda
2 level tsps ground ginger
1 stick and a half of butter
3/4 cup light brown sugar
4 tbs golden syrup
1 large egg, beaten

Pre-heat oven to 350°F. Put all of your dry ingredients into a bowl. Mix in the butter with your fingers until the mixture looks like bread crumbs. Add the sugar, syrup and the beaten egg. Stir well and bring it all together to form smooth pastry dough.

On a lightly floured surface roll out the dough to be about 1cm thick. Use a 2" round cookie cutter to cut out each cookie until you've used all of the dough. Evenly space them out on your baking tray and chill them for 20 minutes.

Place your cookies in the oven for 10-15 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the tray and place on a cooling rack.

Source: <https://riverheadbooks.tumblr.com>