



The Parting Glass

Gina Marie Guadagnino

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Devoted maid Mary Ballard's world is built on secrets, and it's about to be ripped apart at the seams, in this lush and evocative debut set in 19th century New York, perfect for fans of Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* and Emma Donoghue's *Slammerkin*.

By day, Mary Ballard is lady's maid to Charlotte Walden, wealthy and accomplished belle of New York City high society. Mary loves Charlotte with an obsessive passion that goes beyond a servant's devotion, but Charlotte would never trust Mary again if she knew the truth about her devoted servant's past. Because Mary's fate is linked to that of her mistress, one of the most sought-after debutantes in New York, Mary's future seems secure—if she can keep her own secrets...

But on her nights off, Mary sheds her persona as prim and proper lady's maid to reveal her true self—Irish exile Maire O'Farren—and finds release from her frustration in New York's gritty underworld—in the arms of a prostitute and as drinking companion to a decidedly motley crew consisting of a barkeeper and members of a dangerous secret society.

Meanwhile, Charlotte has a secret of her own—she's having an affair with a stable groom, unaware that her lover is actually Mary's own brother. When the truth of both women's double lives begins to unravel, Mary is left to face the consequences. Forced to choose between loyalty to her brother and loyalty to Charlotte, between society's respect and true freedom, Mary finally learns that her fate lies in her hands alone.

A captivating historical fiction of 19th century upstairs/downstairs New York City, *The Parting Glass* examines sexuality, race, and social class in ways that feel startlingly familiar and timely. A perfectly paced, romantically charged story of overlapping love triangles that builds to a white-knuckle climax, this is an irresistible debut that's impossible to put down.

The Parting Glass Details

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Author : Gina Marie Guadagnino

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From Reader Review The Parting Glass for online ebook

Martie Nees Record says

Genre: Historical Fiction

Publisher: Atria Books

Pub. Date: March 5, 2019

This novel, set in the 1830s, has all the makings of great storytelling. You will read much about Tammany Hall (the name given to the notoriously corrupt Democratic political machine that dominated New York City politics during the 19th century. You will meet Maire O'Farrell and her twin brother Seanin. They are from Ireland and fresh off a boat that landed them in the poverty-stricken area known as The Five Points. You might know of the infamous Five Points from the book or the movie "Gangs of New York." The Points was a 19th-century neighborhood located in Lower East Manhattan that included Mulberry Street. Back then, Mulberry Street (historically associated with Italian-American culture, where the Mafia blossomed and made the street a household name) was filled with Irish rather than Italian immigrants. If interested, nowadays it is Chinese immigrants who walk Mulberry streets. On the other side of town is Washington Square, which was and still is a very wealthy area. These families hired cheap labor from the nearby tenements. This is how the twins end up working as servants in a Washington Square home. Mary becomes a lady's maid to beautiful Charlotte Walden, the belle of New York City's high society. Seanin, when not busy becoming the leader of an Irish gang, works as a stable groom for Charlotte's favorite horse. Both brother and sister fall in love with the mistress of the house. I am not giving anything away. All of this is described in the book's blurb. Are you in yet? I was. So why was I disappointed in the novel?

You must get by now that "Parting Glass" has a strong feel of "Upstairs/Downstairs," where "Downtown Abbey" meets the "Gangs of New York." For this reviewer, the tale should have been a captivating read. There is love, tragedy, and a good dose of Mulberry St. A neighborhood I used to live in. The storylines didn't feel properly linked together. By day, Mary is prim and proper. By night, she is getting drunk with gang members and slapped around (have no fear, Mary gives as good as she gets) in an Irish pub. I find it far-fetched that her secret nightlife could be as well hidden from her day life as presented in the book. I also had a hard time buying that Mary's sexuality was as accepted by all as the author writes, especially by the male gang members. Personally, I wish that was true. But sadly if I am not mistaken, there was not a thriving gay scene in the Lower East Side for more than a century later. It is clear that Guadagnino did her research on the history of violence in The Five Points. This makes it all the more confusing that she depicts a casually accepted gay woman in this setting. I think the author was attempting to emulate Sarah Waters' erotic thriller "The Paying Guests," or Waters' "Fingersmith," a historical crime novel. Both books are set in the Victorian era. Both books are page-turners that include lesbian love affairs. Guadagnino, like Waters, does a great job of writing intelligently on what in present time is known as "love is love." I applaud the author on this. The uneven storylines are where I take issue. I think a good editor could have made this book a far better read than it is.

Pre Oder "The Parting Glass" on Amazon

I received this Advance Review Copy (ARC) novel from the publisher at no cost in exchange for an honest review.

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🌹rosa🌹 says

3.5 stars, full review forthcoming!

Caroline Mea says

Gina Marie Guadagnino's debut novel is rich with history and imagery, and is unlike any historical fiction novel I have read before. The book stars a small cast of characters, narrated by Mary Ballard - aka Maire O'Farren. Mary is a lady's maid and has quite a few secrets of her own. By day she is prim, proper, and the perfect example of a lady's maid to her beloved Charlotte Walden. By night, she is Maire, a regular at the pub, drinking and swearing with the rest of the boys. This is all complicated by the love triangle she finds herself in. A love triangle that involves her lady and her own brother.

I wasn't sure if I liked Maire at first; she was prickly and honestly was not easy to root for at first. But as we learn more about her backstory, I grew more sympathetic to her and her own confusion. I also grew to appreciate some of the other characters in the book, especially Liddie and Dermot. I did wish for a bit more development of Charlotte, as Mary's feelings towards her are incredibly important to the story.

Perhaps the best thing about this story was how much I learned about a time in U.S. history that I knew almost nothing about. I was unaware of how much racism existed toward the Irish and how this figured into U.S. politics in the 1830s. I knew nothing of the underground world that the Irish created for themselves. I found this aspect of the novel the most interesting and honestly wished for more!

Overall, this book was a good read but I felt like the ending wrapped things up a little too quickly. Also, fair warning that there is a goodly amount of strong language, graphic sex, and violence (including violence against women). I would recommend this book to someone who is interested in a gritty upstairs-downstairs story with Sapphic undertones. It is unlike anything I have read from the historical fiction genre!

Note: I received a complementary ARC via the publisher (Atria) and NetGalley in exchange for a review. All opinions are my own.

Claire says

I picked up the pre-release of this book at the ALA midwinter conference and DEVoured it on the flight home. When I saw the blurb on the front saying it was "Downton Abbey meets Gangs of New York" I was instantly interested and 100% not disappointed. The world that is created in this book is exquisitely detailed and captivating, and I could not put it down.

Bandit says

Well, it isn't Sarah Waters. But then again any historical fiction with Sapphic undertones is probably going to draw those comparisons, which frankly just isn't fair to the books themselves. For me there's nothing quite like Sarah Waters books, but then again even some of Sarah Waters books aren't Sarah Waters, which is to say her work is uneven, but when it's good it's sublime. But then again, this is a review of an entirely different book and a very good one in its own right. Parting Glass is essentially a love triangle (or two love triangles if you want to be technical) set in 1827 New York. Irish twins (actual twins not the saying) come to the city to improve their circumstances, get work as servants for a wealthy family (him as a stables groom, her as a lady's maid) and both fall madly in love with the young lady Charlotte, who reciprocates one directionally causing much strife between the siblings. So it's essentially Sarah Waters meets Downton Abbey meets Gangs of New York, since there's a lot of upstairs/downstairs goings on and there are a lot of politics of the time involved, the Irish weren't especially welcome or valued at the time in America (the attitude that's now extended to more or less all immigrants), so they had to fight their way to respect as it were and, you know lesbians. The historical fiction aspect of the novel is very well done, there's a certain grimy realism to the servant and working class characters and a glitz to the upper crust. And Long Island is a barely cultivated barely populated place, which is, all things considered, quite possibly the best version of it. The characters are well developed and possess their varied charms, my favorite was the stargazer to use the lovely colloquialism of the times. There was something ever so slightly lacking, but honestly I can't put a finger on it. Something about Mary/Maire's character and something about the last scene, but that's as close as I can get to figuring it out. But really it was a very enjoyable reading experience, if not completely immersive, than at the very least very engaging. For a debut it's certainly most auspicious. And it admirably stayed away from veering off into women's fiction, bodice ripper territory or any such inanity. This was the book I was really looking forward to reading ever since finding it on Netgalley and mostly it lived up to my expectations. Recommended. Thanks Netgalley.

Jessica Woodbury says

3.5 stars.

One very simple way to get me to read historical fiction is to make it gay. Put a *Fingersmith* comp in there and I am putty in your hands. THE PARTING GLASS is about a lady's maid who just happens to be desperately in love with her lady.

Mary dresses her lady, does her hair, washes her, and tends to her. She also leaves her window open once a week so her lady's lover can sneak into her room. Oh, and that lover just happens to be Mary's brother. Mary (real name Maire) and her brother Seanin are Irish immigrants hiding their real relationship and their real names to get positions in the same house so they can stay together. But their mutual love of Charlotte threatens to come between them.

That's not the only thing to come between them but I'll save you spoilers. If you like stories of maids and ladies, courting and balls and downstairs drama, there is plenty of that here. There is also lots and lots of sex (when I say I like it gay, I do prefer sex be included).

Ultimately this came short of 4 stars for me with an ending that wrapped up too quickly when there were so many balls in the air. I also felt like some of the relationships could use a bit of fleshing out. I didn't feel like I really knew Charlotte all that well, which is tricky when she's the primary focus of Mary's attention. The prose sometimes took a bit of effort to get through, it just didn't quite have a rhythm.

Paula Ptomey says

Have you ever wanted someone so badly, but knew that they were out of your reach? Mary Ballard in Gina Marie Guadagnino's *The Parting Glass*, can understand how you feel. She knows that if her employer knew her true background, she would be sent away. However she loves her mistress more than she can imagine. So much so that she keeps her mistress' secrets, even when it drives a wedge between her and her brother. So what does she do when her mistress' secrets maybe found out? Now that her mistress knows Mary's secrets as well, is she in jeopardy? The parting glass will have you reading at a break neck speed to find out what happens next. Wonderfully told and historically correct. Awesome read!

Cathy says

I struggle to review this because I enjoyed the author's writing style, historical accuracy, and descriptive language. However, be forewarned that the sex scenes are graphic and in my opinion, gratuitous.

Katherine Riley says

Despite surface appearances, *The Parting Glass* is no historical novel of corsets and bodices. This is a novel of “the whalebone beneath” — of the women of the house playing against men like chess pieces. It is also a timely microscope on the cyclical struggle against racism that has imbued this country’s entire bloody history, in this case focusing on Irish immigrants and the brutality and subjugation they incurred in the century before they became simply white. But what raises this story to the level of magic, and makes it utterly unique, is the unrequited love that drives it, and the young gay female point of view from which it’s told.

R says

I find historical fiction stories fascinating when they are well written and researched. *The Parting Glass* was such a book.

This was a story of love...between an Irish brother and sister...and a shared love of an English heiress. But this was also a story where social class and racism were a part of everyday life...where Nativists and the Know Nothing party spread hatred and incited violence against immigrants and Catholics. It was not a time for a forbidden love to flourish, especially those harboring life altering secrets.

Gina Marie Guadagnino effectively captured this NYC time period of diversity, politics, violence, corruption...and made it into a very captivating read.

Kelsey says

Certainly the sexiest historical novel I've ever read but with an intense, fascinating political backdrop and fully realized, complex characters that make this hist fic of the highest order

Pascale says

Disclaimer: I got an advance reader's copy from NetGalley in exchange for a fair and honest review.

This is being billed as being tailored for those of us who love Fingersmith, so I had to pick it up; and I am not disappointed that I did.

Much like Fingersmith there are some twists and turns and an upstairs/downstairs romance, but I think that the setting here played a greater role. I quite enjoyed the descriptions of 19th century New York, especially after reading the author's afterword detailing her love affair with the city and its history.

I thought it a bit unlikely that no one would notice that Seanin and Maire were twins, and how quite a few people were presented as having a relatively open mind about two women in a relationship together.

I also got a bit annoyed when one character referred to herself as a 'gay girl', when the first documented use of the word 'gay' to signify 'homosexuality' was recorded in 1953, like a 100+ years after this book. But this seems to me like the only element that was really out of place. Everything else, pacing, characterization and descriptions were wonderful.

I'd recommend this to lovers of historical fiction, and those trying to read more diversely.

Kris Waldherr says

Just finished reading THE PARTING GLASS. Stunning writing paired with incredible research make for a lush, immersive read that's impossible to put down. Think Edith Wharton by way of Emma Donoghue—yup, it's that good! More to come closer to publication. Many thanks to the author and the publisher for the advance e-galley.

Jess says

Review forthcoming!

Julia Phillips says

Wow. So lush and immersive, so intelligently written. I loved this. Found myself thinking of the characters hours after I finished reading, as if they were friends I cared for and worried about. Sharp, vivid, excellent
