The Spectral Double and the Deconstruction of Womanhood in Margaret þÿ A t w o o d ¿ s A l i a s G r a c e a n d S a r a h W a t e r s A f f i n i t y

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The Spectral Double and the Deconstruction of Womanhood in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* and Sarah Waters' *Affinity*

Mémoire présenté par Amélie De Decker en vue de l'obtention du diplôme de Master en Langues et Lettres Modernes, orientation générale, à finalité approfondie

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Introduction

When analysing Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* and Sarah Waters' *Affinity*, one of the first challenges is to define neo-Victorianism as well as the contemporary Gothic since both works belong to these genres. There is an ongoing discussion among the specialists about how to classify these revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth century literary aesthetics. It seems that delineating those etiquettes is a challenging task: neo-Victorianism as well as the contemporary Gothic are both recent trends that look back to the past, however one can only wonder: what are they revivals of exactly?

To begin with, Kirchnopf acknowledges those concerns by asking "but do we know what we mean by Victorian? Does the term refer to an age, a set of conventions, or an image of both based on a limited and biased selection of sources?" (Kirchnopf quoted by Van Ditshuizen: 10). It is indeed arduous to define the revival of a past aesthetic when the latter is itself disputed.

Similarly, it is quite challenging to define the contemporary Gothic because it emerges from a heterogenic and fragmented tradition, hence the fact that many critics have suggested to call the Gothic an "aesthetic" or a "mode rather than a genre" since "mobility and a continued capacity for reinvention" are two of its main characteristics (Warwick quoted by Reyes: 2). This aesthetic is marked by its ubiquity considering that many of its components have spread across literature: sometimes a piece of work cannot be called Gothic and yet it still recovers Gothic features, as Reyes notes:

> if a certain novel is not Gothic, it is bound to utilize motifs or to include literary aspects that have, at some point, been associated with the Gothic, from graveyards and ruins as memorable settings to rapacious monks, monsters, and ghosts as villains. (2)

The omnipresence of the Gothic characteristics makes it complex to draw the line between what is comprised within this label and what is not: a process often resulting in an overly reductive or, on the contrary, an overly inclusive definition (Reyes: 1).

Both neo-Victorianism and the contemporary Gothic are thus not easily definable, not only due to their origins but also due to their varying shapes and forms. The labels "neo-Victorianism" and "contemporary Gothic" include a wide variety of works, from re-writings, pastiches and parodies of Victorian and Gothic novels to adaptations, sequels or prequels, all of which varying in themes, styles and narrative effects.

Leaving these concerns aside, a broad description of the contemporary Gothic and neo-Victorianism would be that they are the resurgences of past traditions that try to revisit Gothic and Victorian themes, tropes and techniques with an emphasis on modern issues. It would be appropriate to reflect more in detail upon Victorianism and the Gothic as well as some of its sub-genres and reiterances (namely the female Gothic and the Ghost-wave feminism) in order to highlight their major characteristics: those pieces of information will help to understand why authors such as Margaret Atwood or Sarah Waters would use neo-Victorianism and the contemporary Gothic to question gender politics within their works.

Neo-Victorianism

Although there is still debate about the origins of neo-Victorianism, many critics maintain that this genre appears in the 1960s with novels such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, published in 1966, or John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, published in 1969 (MacDonald and Goggin: 1). This aesthetic emerges from a feeling of nostalgia for the Victorian period resulting in "a present-day understanding and valuation of the Victorians' culture heritage and socio-political legacies" (Kohlke: 207).

This process of looking backward is not something specific to our modern age: as Dana Shiller claims, literature is characterized by its "need to imagine and re-invent the past" (552). It is therefore not surprising that recent writers should consider a particular historical period or literary genre for their inspiration. However, what is significant with neo-Victorianism is the degree to which writers are so "self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians" (Heilemann and Llewellyn quoted by Banerjee).

Neo-Victorian novels are thus re-enactments of the past which aim to resurrect and reconfigure a wide range of themes such as depictions of poverty, crime and daily life, representations of industrialisation or portrayals of different social classes. Neo-Victorian works include the rewritings of Victorian classics, such as the novel *Mary Reilly* in which Valerie Martin imagines Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* from the perspective of a housemaid. Other writers create prequels to these Victorian fictions, as Jean Rhys did with *Jane Eyre* when she wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or sequels: Susan Hill's *Mrs de Winter* is a good example given that her novel is dedicated to the main protagonist of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

Even though those writers find inspiration in the Victorian period, they do not simply try to copy what has been done in the past but rather try to reiterate this material in more diverse and complex ways, reimagining these narratives while incorporating modern concerns to the plot (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger: 10). The neo-Victorian studies provide a space for examining received concepts from the nineteenth century, allowing the writers to study neglected topics including questions of gender, class and race.

The main contribution of this genre might be that it teaches its readers to becomes more critical towards a homogenized vision of the Victorian period and to question "the certitude of our historical knowledge" (Shiller quoted by Van Ditshuizen: 11). In doing so, those stories create an audience "less inclined to buy into naive comforting versions of the past" (Heillmann and Llewellyn in Kohlke: 208). Neo-Victorianism acknowledges different communities that were not mentioned before: many authors have used this genre as a medium to recover abandoned voices. As Rosario Arias Doblas argues:

> That the neo-Victorian novel honours the dead and silenced remains evident, especially in the way it textualizes concerns with (mis)representations of the past, often revisiting and revising the position allocated to those who have been underrepresented, marginalised or dismissed by the dominant culture. (87 in "Talking with the Dead")

A great number of neo-Victorian narratives thereby chose to reconstruct the lives of female characters and to ponder on gender politics in a male-dominated Victorian society.

However, this memorialisation of disempowered voices can also be problematic because of what Laura Fish refers to as "the boundaries of subjectivity and authorial ventriloquism": one can wonder whether or not those writers are intitled to recreate those voices and to what extent they can faithfully recreate them (Kohlke: 213). By filling in the gaps left by the Victorians, those neo-Victorian stories might become unreliable and inauthentic, not only because these narratives try to look back to unknown pasts but also because of the differences that exist between the writers and their characters. Different critics have claimed that even though the approach of neo-Victorianism seems good willing, the readers should always keep in mind the distance that subsists between the authors and the represented characters (Kohlke: 214).

Regardless of whether or not those stories are representative depictions of forgotten voices, what neo-Victorianism does manage to do is bring light to concerns that are still present in our contemporary society. This genre indeed highlights the fact that many issues from this

period are still very much alive today and that concerns such as women's place in society remain far from exhausted. According to Nadine Muller:

> [n]eo-Victorian fiction does not simply revisit issues such as race, sexuality, prostitution, pornography or hysteria in order to either shock or serve the current market. Instead, it engages with these themes because they present problems that are as fundamental to Western societies today as they were in the nineteenth century. (130)

The neo-Victorian literature, and thus novels such as Margaret Atwood's and Sarah Waters', raises a question: "does the Victorian world even matter here, aren't you just writing about the contemporary world cloaked in velvet gowns?" (Adair: 3).

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) stand at the intersection of two literary genres, namely neo-Victorianism and the contemporary Gothic fiction because not only do they examine the daily life of two working-class women and convicts during the Victorian period with an emphasis on their poor living conditions and the abuses they undergo but these novels also involve "the concept of the ghost and /or practice of spiritualism", which is one the most common tropes among neo-Victorian fiction, as Margaret Stetz identified (34). Moreover, the novels consider the relationships between the lower and the upper-classes as well as the relationship between women and men, depicting the burdens of sexuality, maternity and marriage in the Victorian age. Atwood and Waters also use different mechanisms from the Gothic genre: their stories are prison tales with crime and mental illness as the central themes since both novels describe the interactions between an interviewer who tries to determine whether or not the defendant is a murderess, a madwoman. The plots of these stories also include the supernatural and the occult, with the main protagonists practicing mesmerism and spiritualism and conjuring up spectral figures as their doubles, allowing them to transform into ghosts that haunt both novels. Since *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* are examples of the contemporary Gothic novel, a genre that resurrects the spectre of Gothic literature, it would be useful to consider this genre as well.

The Gothic and its Subgenres

The Gothic genre appears in Europe in the eighteenth century and draws its origin from the romantic movement. It emerges as a reaction against the new industrial world and the rise of rationalism and decides to rather look upon the barbaric past. Its name derives from the

Gothic architecture that thrived in Europe during the Middle Ages, the same austere and gloomy edifices were then used by the Gothic authors as the setting of their novels. Horace Walpole is considered to have written the first Gothic novel with *The Castle of Otranto*: published in 1764, this work will serve as a model for a number of writers who will follow his example and recover certain of its themes, patterns and tropes, thus creating the genre of the Gothic (Reyes: 1). This aesthetic combines components of romance and horror: many of these stories examine the intricate relationship between Eros and Thanatos while also submerging its readers into mystery and suspense. These fictions cover different topics such as vengeful persecutions, imprisonments, or murders and include supernatural elements: the resulting effect being an anxious, claustrophobic atmosphere (Reyes: 2). The Gothic remains an influential genre during the nineteenth century: the term "neo-gothic" refers to the Victorian's own fascination with the Gothic genre and their wish to recover something from it.

Given that this research will focus on womanhood, it seems crucial to mention the subgenre of the female Gothic: this term, introduced by Ellen Moers in 1976, refers to the works of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century women novelists. Those novels engage with different themes so as to describe women's fear of entrapment within their domestic sphere, their bodies and gender constraints as a whole (Ledoux: 2). The female Gothic includes similar narratives in which distressed female protagonists struggle against male authority and escape from a number of threats: sexual violence, marriage, maternity, extortion, etc. This subgenre includes the work of different major authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and the Brontës, whose work gave rise to a series of concerns, themes and tropes that will appear in this research, such as the portrayal of the madwoman. Even though the designation "female Gothic" is debated by a number of critics, it is undeniable that the production of these writers has brought light to themes that remained ignored by their male counterparts (Ledoux: 2).

In the tradition of the female Gothic, Cynthia Murillo defends that another tendency derived from the Gothic, also concerned with the "Woman Question", appeared in the wake of the first wave of feminism: she calls it the "Ghost-wave feminism". These works revisit many of the traditional Gothic motifs but adapt them to the context of the rise of the Progressive Era. These authors, more often than not women, revalue the concept of the female Other, making use of spectral figures to embody women's absence and lack of power. When Murillo tries to define this collection of works, she claims that:

> In many of the ghost stories of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, a ghostly doubling occurs that connects a Gothic and monstrous Other to the rebellious New

> Woman, a ghost in a wave of fiction that allows for the spectral visitor to deconstruct feminine labels, and ultimately serve as a conduit toward female agency and empowerment. (786)

These fictions are thus marked by the impact of the Suffragettes movement and the apparition of the "New Woman": educated, independent, assertive, and sexually autonomous. This New Woman, under the shape of a ghostly doubling, dismisses gender expectations and represents a new type of femininity. The Ghost-wave feminism conjures up the presence of spectral doubles to consider women who have stepped outside the conventions of womanhood, giving a voice to the forgotten, invisible and marginal women of this time (Murillo: 787). In these works, female protagonists gain agency through a form of "spectral reality" not attributed to the male characters. This genre does not limit itself to presenting women as victims of social constraints: it highlights the range of possibilities for women, from deconstructing gender norms to female empowerment (Murillo: 789).

Gender politics continue to be a major topic of the more recent trajectories of the Gothic. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw the emergence of many Gothic productions which have been attributed to the "contemporary Gothic", a subgenre first studied by David Punter in 1980 (Reyes: 17). Just as providing an all-encompassing definition of the Gothic was an arduous task, to determine the concept of contemporary Gothic seems equally problematic because this subgenre has been evolving until the present day. This term has indeed broadened and swallowed up different subgenres such as dark fantasy, supernatural fiction, dark science fiction, paranormal romance (Reyes: 13), thus creating hybrid sub-genres.

The main concern of the contemporary Gothic seems to be the reinterpretation of previous novels and myths whilst incorporating modern themes such as race, national identity or gender. Those works use, for example, the ambiguity of those traditional Gothic stories to focus on types of characters that have been forgotten in the past: "the contemporary Gothic has also sought to either complement, complicate, or else probe canonical Gothic texts where narrative events are deliberately left ambiguous in the originals or where authors feel that the voices of certain characters should be voiced" (Reyes: 12).

Atwood's and Waters' Wish to Recover and Question Past Womanhood

What appears to connect the contemporary Gothic, Ghost-wave feminism and neo-Victorianism is their revisionist approach to the past: they all provide a space for those who were ignored or underprivileged in the past fictions. It seems that Margaret Atwood and Sarah Waters have been influenced by these traditions, either because of the stories they chose to write or because of their wish to investigate gender politics throughout history. They indeed have dedicated most of their works to figures that have been left behind, focusing on female protagonists. As Atwood explains regarding Canadian history and historical writing in her essay "In Search of Alias Grace":

> it's the very things that aren't mentioned that inspire the most curiosity in us. Why aren't they mentioned? The lure of the Canadian past, for the writers of my generation, has been partly the lure of the unmentionable—the mysterious, the buried, the forgotten, the discarded, the taboo. (Atwood quoted by Lopez: 158).

Similarly, during an interview for *The Independent*, Waters asserts that her works "pay attention to women's secret history and lives, acknowledging meaning in their domestic lives" (Waters quoted by Kean).

In their novels *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*, both authors question the Victorian conception of womanhood by choosing female prisoners as their main protagonists. This allows them to examine how criminality and madness have long been seen as inherent to the female genre. Atwood and Waters investigate how social and biological determinism have repeatedly been used to explain women's culpability. This is manifestly linked to the Victorian conception of womanhood which confined woman's nature between two extremes: the "angel of the household" or "the demon in hiding". Women have been associated alternatively with the innocent or the diabolical, the submissive or the defiant, the sacred or the obscene. This understanding of the feminine goes back to the Bible where women are either assimilated to the sacred Virgin or to the sinful Eve.

Moreover, this period of time also saw the emergence of another label designated as "hysteria" to further enclose women and consider them as inherently mentally instable. In the novels, both Grace Marks and Selina Dawes are praised for their physical appearances and their model, almost saint-like, behaviour and are seen as sane and innocent women, yet they are simultaneously considered insane and licentious demons in disguise. They seem to be able to

wander between different etiquettes and to occupy a liminal position. Taking into account this restrictive notion of womanhood, it could be said that the protagonists' incarcerations are due, to a great extent, to the stereotypes surrounding the female genre.

The second part of this work will examine how both Atwood and Waters display self-aware characters, namely Grace Marks and Margaret Prior, who acknowledge the restrictive conception of the female genre: they are indeed aware that their voices are manipulated and discredited because of their gender and address their need to pretend and to twist the general narrative in their favour in order to escape their fate. They both try to reclaim ownership of their stories and get to express themselves through typically feminine genres: Margaret Prior writes a diary which is a traditionally feminine form of writing while Grace Marks makes her own quilt, needlework being a typically feminine form of expression. However, it seems that those are private activities that will not get their testimonies out in the public sphere, which explains why the protagonists take on masculine conventions. In *Affinity*, Margarets resembles her historian and scholar father in his thirst for knowledge and she imitates his method when she begins to write a report of her visits to Millbank. It is suggested that she might even be planning on publishing her journal. Similarly in *Alias Grace*, Grace progressively gains power over Jordan during their meetings while she is sewing. The doctor is progressively hypnotized by her and figuratively lets go of his pen, allowing Grace to manipulate his report. Grace and Margaret thereby hope that their testimonies will reach a larger audience and will be seen as legitimate in their male dominated society. By using typically feminine genres and incorporating a "male" rationality into them, they combine feminine and masculine codes and thus reaffirm their position of "in-between" characters. However, their testimonies can only leave the private sphere if they take on those masculine codes and it seems that Margaret's and Grace's voices are once again dependant on a male intervention or influence to be considered relevant. The protagonists still stand in the shadows of male mediators, namely Margaret's father and Dr Jordan. In *Affinity*, Margaret is trapped within male conventions that do not represent her and she eventually destroys her journal because this rational type of writing does not correspond to her. In *Alias Grace*, Grace still relies on Dr Jordan for the publication of a favourable report. Though the main characters of both books try to empower themselves by adopting male conventions, these latter turn out to be more enclosing than liberating. The occult and the figure of the spectral double appear as the only way for the protagonists to express their thoughts and (sexual) desires overtly without the influence of a male mediator.

Lastly, this work will consider the role of the occult sciences as well as the figure of the spectral double in *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* as ways for the female characters to deconstruct the notion of womanhood. This will require a brief account on the rise of the occult during the Victorian period and on how practices such as mesmerism, hypnotism and (most of all) spiritualism played an important role to question gender politics at that time. Not only did they allow women to be financially independent but they also gave them the opportunity to question men's authority and to express their thoughts and (sexual) desires freely. The occult also had a role to play in the display of homosexual feelings.

In Atwood's and Waters' novels, the occult serves as a means for the protagonists to escape from their physical prisons by convincing their audience that their powers are real. Moreover, both novels feature the manifestation of spirits as spectral doubles for the main protagonists, doubles which act as the characters' asserted selves and allow them to question different aspects of womanhood and manhood. In *Alias Grace*, there are several clues in the text that suggest that Mary Whitney entered Grace's body when she died and thus took the form of her double. It seems that Grace uses her friend's voice to empower herself given that Mary has a more confident personality: indeed, she is frank and even vulgar, she is outspoken and is not afraid to criticize the upper-classes or to warn Grace against men and their abuses. Mary's return as a ghost permits the female characters to question the cause of her death and to ponder on the fate of sexually compromised unmarried women. The spectral double could be read as the return of oppressed desires and could thus correspond to what Freud has described as the "uncanny". Mary's return in a spectral form and her possession of Grace's body to murder her employers could be seen as her attempt to take revenge over male abusers. Likewise, in *Affinity*, Peter Quick appears to function as Selina's double. He also has a strong personality: he is very critical towards men and punishes any inappropriate behaviour. Once again, the spectral double could be a means to release female (sexual) tensions and in particular to explore lesbian desires since Peter Quick clearly has a preference for women and the private séances during which the spirit appears seem to imply homosexual relationships.

The spectral double has been a recurrent motif of gothic literature to externalise the protagonists' desires. This figure is also significant in Ghost-Wave feminist fiction and relates to the distinction between the True and the New Women, which could also apply to Atwood's and Waters' novels: Mary Whitney and Peter Quick do seem to incarnate a new type of womanhood.

The presence of Mary Whitney and Peter Quick also challenges the notion of Victorian manhood by revising the male hold of rationality. In *Alias Grace*, Dr Jordan who is supposed to incarnate scientific pragmatism progressively becomes obsessed with his patient. His wish to scrutinize Grace's mind intertwines with his wish to have sexual relationships with her, which leads him to project his desires onto his landlady. Violent thoughts and fantasies about harming women begin to pervade his mind. His eventual loss of rationality occurs during the hypnosis session: after ridiculing spiritualism at first, the session leaves him astound and he comes to question his own belief in rationality. Jordan is unable to write his report and is discredited in the medical field because of his lack of objectivity. Later, his entire character is called into question given that he is not considered a gentleman anymore but rather a beastly man who cannot control his degenerate desires. Significantly, he loses hold of his narrative and becomes mental ill. In *Affinity*, Margaret Prior first doubts Selina's ability to communicate with the dead but her judgment is progressively called into question: she disregards the different clues that could help discern the convict's actual intentions and choses to believe in her powers until the very end when Selina escapes. Margaret loses the position she had as the trustworthy daughter of a scholar and historian: people suspect that she might have a role to play in the prisoner's disappearance and threaten to imprison her. Her mental illness gains control over her and she thinks about committing suicide. In both novels, the characters who were supposed to represent a male rationality are defeated and even become the enemies of said rationality. This power reversal therefore symbolises the victory of the spiritual over the rational, the feminine over the masculine. The spectral double allows once again the protagonists to become in-between characters and highlights the protagonists' ability to navigate between the world of the dead and the living in order to emphasize women's absence from the patriarchal society.

Summaries of the Novels

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*

The novel explores factual events that occurred in 1843, in Ontario, Canada: it tells the story of the murders of the wealthy gentleman Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery. The servants of the household, James McDermott and Grace Marks, are accused of the crime: MacDermott is sentenced to death by hanging whereas Grace Marks's life is spared. She is deemed culpable as an accessory to murder and was destined to a life of imprisonment. She is eventually found guiltfree and is liberated in 1872, after almost thirty years of incarceration.

The story begins in 1851 when Grace Marks is twenty-four years old: after having spent some time in an insane asylum, she is sent to Kingston Penitentiary in Ontario. Because Grace's behaviour has always been irreproachable, she is allowed to leave the prison and to work as a domestic servant in the house of the Governor of the penitentiary. Given her young age when she was arrested and the fact that she claims that she has no recollection of the day the murders took place, some people believe that she was innocent. A committee of gentlemen and ladies emerges, mainly from the Methodist church. Led by Reverend Verringer, this group of supporters wishes to have Grace pardoned and released. The committee hires Dr Simon Jordan, a psychiatrist, to interview her, hoping that he will be able to recover Grace's memory and will find her to be mentally ill rather than a criminal. This is a great opportunity for Jordan who wishes to experiment newly developed techniques and who wants to make a name for himself in order to open his own privately-funded mental asylum.

An arrangement is made so that Jordan will meet Grace during afternoons while she is busy sewing. Their interview usually goes as followed: Dr Jordan brings an object and asks Grace what associations it brings up to her, assuming that this will bring repressed memories from Grace's subconscious. Although she is quite wary of doctors and sceptical about Jordan's intentions, she slowly becomes more comfortable with him and proceeds to tell him the story of her life. The rest of the narrative goes back and forth between present events and Grace's report of the past.

The prisoner starts by recounting her childhood in Ireland: she describes how her mother had to marry an irresponsible abusive alcoholic who was unable to provide for their growing family, which led them to move to Canada in the hope of finding work. Grace's mother died on

the journey across the Atlantic, an event that is still haunting her years later. Once they arrived in Toronto, her father's behaviour worsened and she thought it was best to leave her family and work as a servant.

Grace began to work in the house of the wealthy Mrs Alderman Parkinson where she became friend with a maid named Mary Whitney, three years her senior, who showed her kindness and support and almost acted as a mother figure to the young girl. Mary appeared to be quite outspoken and she warned Grace of the dangers of the world: Mary was not afraid to criticize the upper classes and gentlemen in particular. Shortly after finding out that she was pregnant, presumably by one of her employer's sons, Mary died of complication from an abortion. This left Grace so devastated that she decided to seek work elsewhere and, after serving in many different houses, she eventually moved to the village of Richmond Hill where she worked for Mr. Thomas Kinnear, a wealthy Scottish gentleman. She served alongside Nancy Montgomery, the housekeeper and Mr Kinnear's lover, and James McDermott, the stable hand. A tense relationship gradually developed between the three servants: Nancy worried that Mr Kinnear would prefer Grace to her and the housekeeper ended up treating Grace harshly. In the meanwhile, McDermott harassed Grace and became jealous of every man she interacted with. He constantly tried to seduce her, and because she did not return his affections, he often ended up calling her names. The only friendly figures she met seem to be Jamie Walsh, a boy from a neighbouring family, and Jeremiah the peddler, whom she had already met before during her first position.

Grace gradually gets to the part of the narrative that intrigues Dr Jordan and narrates what happened on the day of Nancy and Mr. Kinnear's murders. What remains of Grace's memories is quite vague since she claims she fainted twice because of the traumatic events she witnessed. She explains that while Mr. Kinnear was visiting friends in Toronto, Nancy decided to dismiss her as well as McDermott. The latter decided to take revenge and kill the housekeeper and, even though Grace tried to prevent him, he did eventually strangle her. Once Mr Kinnear returned, McDermott shot him. Grace claims that she was then forced to follow McDermott in his escape, taking the ferry to the United States where they were eventually apprehended.

The longer Dr Jordan spends listening to Grace's story, the more perplex he becomes: he cannot determine whether Grace is telling him the truth and truly suffers from amnesia or whether she is manipulating him. As his confusion grows, he begins to worry about his own

loss of sanity because his researches are often interrupted by sexual fantasies involving Grace. As a way to escape his desires, Jordan starts to have a disturbing sexual affair with his landlady Mrs Humphrey.

As a last resort, Jordan allows a spiritualist named Dr Dupont to hypnotize Grace, this doctor later turns out to be none other than her old friend Jeremiah. During the séance, it is revealed that Mary Whitney has been haunting Grace since she passed away because her soul was not freed when she died and she thus entered her friend's body. Mary tells the audience that she forced Grace to help McDermott kill Nancy and Mr Kinnear.

Unable to write his report and eager to escape the designs of his landlady, Dr Jordan leaves town, claiming he must attend to his ill mother. He then joins the Union Army, which leaves him wounded and amnesic. He eventually moves into his mother's house, forced to put his medical career aside and to marry the pretendant his mother had her eyes upon.

Grace remains in prison for an additional thirteen years before being pardoned: she is forty-six when she is liberated. Grace moves to the United States and marries Jamie Walsh, she spends her days sewing her own quilt and eventually reveals that she might be pregnant.

Sarah Waters' *Affinity*

The novel tells the story of Margaret Prior, an unmarried upper-class woman of almost thirty who lives in London during the 1870s. Since her father -a renowned Renaissance scholar- died, Margaret has been suffering from a form of depression, which led her to attempt suicide. She is medicated and is gradually recovering but her mental state is still quite unstable because of her disappointment in love. She was indeed devastated because of her brother's marriage to her friend Helen: Margaret and Helen were lovers and were planning on taking a trip to Italy before the latter caved under social pressure and married Margaret's brother instead. In an attempt to distract herself and cure her depression, Margaret decides to visit the female convicts at Millbank prison to offer them comfort and companionship. She is supposed to act as a moral example for these prisoners, to help them aspire to a better life. However, upon her arrival in the prison, she is warned by the matron that she must distrust the inmates since they are willing to do anything to escape their condition.

During her first tour of the cells, she is struck by a beautiful, young and mystic convict who is holding a flower. Margaret learns that this prisoner is called Selina Dawes and that she is a notorious medium: she is blamed for the death of Mrs Brink, the lady with whom she lived, and for hurting a lady who attended one of her séances, a certain Miss Sylvester.

Along her meetings with different inmates, Margaret learns about the harsh living conditions of those women: they are not allowed to communicate with each other, are expected to work in silence daily, are forced to cut their hair, are only allowed letters or visits from their relatives a few times a year, etc.

During her first meeting with Selina, the medium is quite distant and disagreeable. She tells Margaret that the flower is a gift from her spirit friends and that although she never receives any letters from her relatives, she is still visited by spirits which brings her gifts from the outside world. Margaret is put off by their conversation and quickly leaves the cell. However, over the next few weeks, both grow more comfortable in each other's company and they become friends. Miss Prior seems fascinated by the woman's reported abilities and questions her about her gifts. Margaret visits the medium more and more often and finds herself drawn to her. She begins to confide in the prisoner: she tells her about her father's death, her sister's honeymoon in Italy, her own postponed projects of going to Italy, etc. She also mentions to the medium the disappearance of her favourite locket and the strange emergence of different items in her home. Selina convinces her that those are gifts that she sends her thanks to the help of spirits.

Although Margaret keeps this new relationship secret, her mother does not approve of her visits to Millbank and tries to show her daughter the benefits of accepting a conventional domestic life. She worries that Margaret will never be able to find a husband and tells her to look up to her younger sister Priscilla who is about to get married. Margaret's mother pressures her to quickly recover, forcing her to take drugs and advising her to put her diary aside as writing is not a habit that should be encouraged in a woman. The strange apparitions within her house, her mother's overbearing behaviour and her own growing mixed feelings towards Selina make Margaret anxious and she starts to take larger quantities of drugs.

Despite her mother's recommendations, Margaret is eager to go back to the prison and even visits a spiritualists' library: there, she interviews the librarian about Selina's case. She learns that Selina is able to materialize a spirit named Peter Quick during her séances. Peter is Selina's spirit guide, a ghost that she has known since her childhood. Seductive, he seems to have a preference for female sitters and often requires Selina to have private meetings with them. Peter can also be quite coarse and usually dislikes the male participants of the séances.

As she studies Selina's past, Margaret becomes more and more convinced of her innocence. Selina eventually tells her about what happened the day of Mrs Brink's death: she claims that during a private meeting with Peter Quick, a young lady had a panic attack and could not be calmed down and, as Selina was holding her, Mrs Brink entered the room and had a heart attack when she saw the scene. Selina claims she never meant to harm neither Mrs Madeleine nor Mrs Brink, and that all of this was an accident.

Selina eventually confesses her love for her and Margaret realises that she shares her feelings: the young lady considers Selina as her soul-mate, her "affinity". Margaret agrees to help her escape: the medium claims her spirit friends will teleport her to Margaret's house, they then will be able to leave to Italy together. After some initial difficulties, Margaret manages to withdraw all the money that her father left for her and to persuade her mother to go visit her sister without her, leaving Margaret and the family maid alone in the house. After waiting hours without any sign of Selina, Margaret understands that she will not come. She later discovers that Selina did escape thanks to a warder's help because the medium had promised this woman to contact her dead son if she set the medium free.

It is revealed that Selina never had any intention of eloping with Margaret but rather tricked and deceived her with the family maid's assistance, who turns out to be Mrs Brink's former maid Ruth Vigers and Selina's fervent accomplice and lover. The two women escaped

with Margaret's money and belongings. The ending suggests that both women would organise séances with Ruth disguised as a man, pretending to be a spirit called Peter Quick to charm young rich ladies to earn money. Although Margaret acknowledges the treachery, whether or not Selina's powers are real is still an unresolved mystery to her by the end of the story. The novel concludes with Margaret falling in a worse mental state than ever, burning her diary and letters, and contemplating the eventuality of drowning herself.

Chapter I: Victorian Womanhood in *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*

Neo-Victorian fiction is characterised by its tendency to recover certain preoccupations that have been neglected in the past such as the treatment of women during the Victorian period, which is arguably the main focus of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*. Both stories indeed seek to question the notion of Victorian womanhood by focusing on the different implications this label carries and by emphasizing its problematic origins.

This chapter shall demonstrate that womanhood during the Victorian period is a diminishing male-created notion that belittles women and encloses them within fixed roles: men get to define how the female genre should behave and "what qualities are desirable in women, what should be considered deviant or unnatural or even criminal" (Ifill: 181). This conception of womanhood thus engages with different types of biological and cultural stereotypes that would justify women's behaviour. The following pages shall illustrate how the restrictive Victorian understanding of womanhood affects the main protagonists of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*.

Biological and Cultural Determinism

This paper will first examine the importance of biological and cultural determinism in both novels because, as Maria Medlyn argues concerning *Alias Grace*, what seems even more defining than the protagonists' social background seems to be their female gender: "Although both class and ethnicity are important factors that intersect to determine an individual's access to power and privilege throughout the novel, Atwood often isolates the role of gender in dictating an individual's rank and power within society" (2). Before demonstrating how biological and cultural determinism are relevant objects of study to understand the Victorian notion of womanhood, it would be interesting to ponder on the definition of "biological determinism" and its origins. *Oxford reference* describes the concept of "biological determinism" as follows: "The stance that males are the naturally dominant sex by virtue of anatomy and genetics or that women are naturally carers by virtue of their reproductive capabilities". What the public and political opinion in *Alias Grace* and in *Affinity* claim is that women would be more inclined towards deviousness because of their gender. This idea has been haunting the culture continually: it can be argued that one of its first emergence was in the Bible in the figures of the Virgin Mary and Eve.

As Vladimir Tumanov claims: “The Virgin Mary and Eve constitute two opposite sexual poles in the way Christian discourse has approached women since the time of the church fathers” (2). Mary represents the eternal virgin and is a superior spiritual being: she is untouchable and virtuous. She stands for motherhood and purity and therefore embodies a model which women should look up to. Her image is opposed to Eve’s representation, a distinction based on their different degrees of sexual involvement. Indeed, Eve incarnates the first woman to succumb to carnal pleasure and is therefore the inventor of female sexuality: “It is through her action of biting the fruit of knowledge that sexual activity becomes a part of human existence” (Tumanov: 10). Eve is seen as depraved and licentious and thus embodies a type of womanhood women should avoid. As the “daughters of Eve,” women are perceived “as lascivious and largely unable to control [their] weaknesses” (Tumanov: 9): they are naturally tempted and inclined towards corruption, which explains why men should distrust them (Tumanov: 10).

The Church fathers consequently emphasized the importance of virginity and condemned sexuality as a whole, thereby creating a dichotomic vision of womanhood, Mary and Eve respectively representing a failed and a successful womanhood: “women are either held to an impossibly high standard of sainthood or they are vilified and demonized when they fall short of these standards” (Medlyn: 4). The Mary and Eve opposition has given way to the Madonna and Whore dichotomy which is another tendency to reduce women in terms of two polar opposites.

Victorian womanhood is defined in contrast to masculinity and the two have often been differentiated according to the doctrine of the spheres: “this doctrine assigns man to the public sphere of individual exertion, business, and politics, and relegates woman to the private, domestic sphere of the affections” (Anderson: 13). The woman is seen as the core of domestic life, and to become the best version of herself, she must transform into an “angel of the house”, that is she ought to be agreeable, decorous, good-natured, giving, coaxing, cajoling, etc. The ideal woman is a modest maiden, a dutiful and chaste wife, “a penitent Eve bearing children or pruning branches under Adam’s thoughtful guidance” (Gilbert and Gubar: 9). This child-like and docile character makes her admirable and worthy to the male audience.

However, men must beware of women because they conceal their carnal Maddalen nature: the “angel in the house” is a façade to dissimulate women’s potential monstrosity. They

are intrinsically temptresses whose sexual knowledge and curiosity have caused the fall of humanity. As Lisa Appignanesi describes in the introduction of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, women are "killer(s) of men, less than human creature(s) with a fishy tail" (13) who can create false appearances to hide their vile natures: reasonableness, moderation, compliance and tranquillity are not laudable qualities but are rather signs of the female genre's duplicity. A woman's role as heart of the domestic life gives her the ability to develop a manipulative craftiness: "the fact that the angel woman manipulates her domestic/mystical sphere in order to ensure the well-being of those entrusted to her care reveals that she can manipulate; she can scheme; she can plot" (Gilbert and Gubar: 23). Woman will resort to lying, tale-bearing, backbiting, flirting, leering: those are abilities to lure men in order to satisfy her own private ends (Gilbert and Gubar: 322).

Therefore, men should distrust the female genre because every woman has the potential to repress this capacity for explosive rage, which is all the more frightening: the "angel of the house" is a domesticated animal, ready to succumb to her underlying monstrosity. Women should thus refrain their Eve-like curiosity and avoid a fall into guilty knowledge: they should protect their innocence and keep a child-oriented sexuality. Their position oscillates between victims of their gender and threats, causing "moral repugnance on the one hand and pleas for mercy on the other" (Anderson: 40).

The habit of enclosing women within two strict categories, the "bad" (monster, witch, whore) and the "good" (angel, princess, Madonna) is extremely present during the Victorian period and this is one aspect that Atwood and Waters question in their novels. In *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*, many female characters, and especially the alleged criminals Grace Marks and Selina Dawes, are framed as angelic figures who are able to conceal their true evil nature.

To begin with, Grace is frequently described as a beautiful young woman. Many newspapers paint her as "very handsome with a brilliant complexion" (Atwood: 25). Likewise, McDermott explains in his confessions that his attraction towards Grace made him help her:

> The good looks of Grace had interested me in her cause, and though there was something about the girl that I could not exactly like, I had been a very lawless, dissipated fellow, and if a woman was young and pretty, I cared very little about her character. (273)

Before meeting Grace for the first time, Jordan expects to meet a woman struck down by weariness and guilt and he is therefore quite surprised when he first meets Grace to find out that she does indeed look better than in her old portrait:

> In her portrait she looks older than she was, but now she looks younger. Her complexion is pale, the skin smooth and unwrinkled and remarkably fine in texture, perhaps because she's been kept indoors; or it may be the sparse prison diet. She's thinner now, less full in the face; and whereas the picture shows a pretty woman, she is now more than pretty. Or other than pretty. The line of her cheek has a marble, a classic, simplicity; to look at her is to believe that suffering does indeed purify. (103)

As it can be seen in the doctor's description of the convict, Grace's physical appearance likens her to the figure of an angel: she appears younger than she actually is, she has no sign of aging and thus looks like a child. Her face is pale and resembles marble: she has a statuesque profile. As Gilbert and Gubar states, a "pure white complexion" in a woman "betrays no self-assertive consciousness, no desire for self-gratification" (615-616). Jordan describes her beauty as something "other", something that goes beyond any other women's appearance. Likewise, he previously noticed that "the brim of a bonnet encircles her head" formed "a dark aureole" (67). Grace gives the impression of having a martyr-like physique: it as if the sufferings she underwent had enhanced her features. Those characteristics make Grace appear as a spiritual being, a puzzling beauty which for Jordan evokes typically feminine qualities such as innocence, selflessness, purity and moral superiority. Grace does seem to correspond to the ideal type of Victorian woman.

It is not only her beauty that assimilates her to an angel but also her admirable and docile behaviour as a servant, as a patient and as a prisoner. Grace is often praised as a committed servant and a model prisoner: this is indeed what many newspapers claim about her, that she is "brisk and smart about (her) work" and that she is "a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of (her)" (25). She tries not to disappoint her superiors and not to be distracted from her work. Mr Kinnear acknowledges Grace's hard work when he interrupts her while she is mending his clothes: "Always busy I see, Grace, he said. Yes Sir, I said, the Devil finds work for idle hands to do" (266). If the Devil is associated with idleness, then surely Grace can be related to an assiduous angelic figure. Likewise, Dr Joseph Workman notes that she has performed well at the Governor's house: she has "conducted herself with much propriety […] she was found a profitable and useful inmate of the house" (54-55). To many, Grace thus seems

obedient, submissive and unable to harm anyone, as she herself notes when Dr Jordan begins to interview her: “He does not feel any such rigmarole is necessary, as he considers me to be entirely harmless and in control of myself” (71). Jordan also describes her as being “calm as a marble Madonna” with “a smile of a dutiful child”: Grace corresponds to this innocent, obedient and submitted female figure that was praised at that time.

Grace’s angelic qualities also come from Grace’s supposed virginity. This is confirmed by the guards who compare Grace to an angel because she is still untouched. The guards laugh about the fact that McDermott and her were caught before they could be intimate:

> We’re the only men that’s ever going to lay a hand on you for the rest of your life […]. That’s the way Grace, says the other, up on your high horse, just like a spotless maiden, no legs on you at all, you’re as pure as an angel you are. (280).

It could also be argued that Grace’s name is another evidence of the fact that she belongs to a superior dimension. It reflects her physical beauty, but also her moral qualities, making her a sort of spiritual being.

However, despite her virtuous profile, many characters, more often than not male characters, distrust her and believe that she uses this ideal façade to manipulate men and obtain what she wants from them. Her good-looks and docile character would therefore be a stratagem to control the people around her. When she visits Grace, Susanna Moodie describes her as “a graceful figure […] Her complexion is fair, and must, before the touch of hopeless sorrow paled it, have been very brilliant. Her eyes are a bright blue, her hair auburn”, but her angelic beauty conveys a certain wickedness: “her face would be rather handsome were it not for the long curved chin, which gives, as it always does to most persons who have this facial effect, a cunning, cruel expression” (Atwood: 21).

Grace is likewise described as a temptress whose beauty convinced McDermott to commit those crimes:

> A pretty soft-looking woman too — and a mere girl! What a heart she must have! I felt equally tempted to tell her that she was a devil, and that I would have nothing more to do with such a horrible piece of business; but she looked so handsome, that somehow or another I yielded to the temptation. (273)

After presumably using her charms to eliminate her superiors with McDermot's help, Grace would continue using her good-looks to get out of prison. This is indeed what Dr Bannerling tells Dr Jordan in one of his letters, that Grace "is an accomplished actress and a most practised liar" (81) and that her beauty had previously distracted several male professionals who believed in Grace's innocence based on her appearance. These reasons lead Dr Bannerling to warn Jordan not to fall into her trap, thereby comparing her to a luring siren:

> Should you nonetheless decide to examine Grace Marks at her current place of abode, be pleased to consider yourself warned. Many older and wiser heads have been enmeshed in her toils, and you would do well to stop your ears with wax, as Ulysses made his sailors do, to escape the Sirens. She is as devoid of morals as she is of scruples, and will use any unwitting tool that comes to hand. (81-82)

Furthermore, Grace is often considered by the press as a dangerous beauty, "a female demon", "a wild beast, […] A Monster" (36). Her supposed criminality seems directly linked to her alleged licentiousness: like Eve, Grace is found guilty of attracting men and is therefore implicitly culpable by nature. Even her name could be reminiscent of Eve's fall from Heaven and therefore of humanity's fall from grace because of her guilty knowledge. Significantly, Jordan observes "the vapid pensiveness of a Magdalene" in Grace's expression (67).

The belief that woman is naturally corrupted because of her sexual involvement is also made clear by Jordan when he discusses prostitution with Dr Du Pont: he makes a clear distinction between respectable pure women and worthless prostitutes. As Medlyn notes: "Dr. Simon often censors his conversations when women are around him, refraining from discussing prostitution or other immoral topics" (4). Prostitution is indeed a topic that should not be addressed with ladies, according to Jordan, in order to spare their fragile constitutions, because such matters "pose a danger to their refined natures" (100). Simon expresses society's condemnation of prostitution of the time when he describes his landlady, Rachel Humprey: he explains that she is a respectable woman and that respectable women "are by nature sexually cold, without the perverse lusts and the neurasthenic longings that drive their degenerate sisters into prostitution; or so goes the scientific theory" (424). Women disposing of their bodies might be one of the worst offences at that time. Although Jordan does not appear to adhere completely with this theory, he does suspect to some extent that women conceal a twofaced nature:

> He's coming to hate the gratitude of women. It is like being fawned on by rabbits, or like being covered with syrup: you can't get if off. It slows you down, and puts you at disadvantage. Every time some woman is grateful to him, he feels like taking a cold bath. Their gratitude isn't real […] Secretly they despise him […] What contempt they all must have kept hidden, under their thanks and smiles! (422)

Jordan seems aware of this polarized vision of women: throughout his studies, he wonders what marvels the brain hides, which he describes as "that shadowy central den where the human bones lie scattered and the monsters lurk… The angels also, he reminds himself. Also the angels" (217). Once again, Jordan uses a vocabulary that has been used to describe women.

Concerning Grace's case in particular, Jordan also seems inclined to believe that Grace is hiding something. During their meetings, he ponders on the figure of Pandora and asks Grace what an apple makes her think of, as if he was trying to remind Grace of the female's tendency towards sexual transgression (Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 94). Jordan distrusts Grace and progressively acknowledges her duplicitous character: what goodness she initially seemed to possess disappears as he focuses on her more closely: indeed, he first describes Grace as "a marble Madona" to then add that she has a "cunning look in the corner of her eye" (421).

The idea that Grace is somehow culpable because women are sexually corrupted is also present in the prison guards' comments. They call Grace a devious woman because they become convinced that she allegedly slept with McDermont: "Were you noisy Grace, says the other, Did you squeal and moan, did you wiggle underneath that swarthy little rat", "you gave him liberties enough, a fine time you had of it I've no doubt" (280). They wonder why she will not do the same with them given that she seems to be a girl of easy virtue and that "once you've given it out to one of us, why then, the others must all take their turns" (280).

The farmhand Jamie Walsh believes something quite comparable: Jamie is in love with Grace and has always treated her kindly, but his opinion changes when he discovers that she has flown away with McDermott. When his turn arrives to testify on the stand, Jamie draws the jury's attention towards the clothes that Grace was wearing when she was arrested, thereby sealing Grace's fate. Grace understands that

> He felt betrayed in love, because [she]'d gone off with McDermott; and from being an angel in his eyes, and fit to be idolized and worshipped, [she] was

> transformed to a demon, and he would do all in his power to destroy [her]. (418)

However, throughout her recount of what happened, Grace continually denies having relationship with McDermott and she explains that he became violent and called her "a damned slut and a demon" (391) and an "awful female demon incarnate" (483) for refusing his advances.

To conclude, the contrast between the reactions that Grace generates is telling of the Victorian vision of the female genre: women are understood as superior angel-like figures and if they do not correspond to this etiquette then they are considered potential threats. The newspapers', Jordan's, the guards', James McDermott's and James Walsh's behaviours reveal the reason behind this classification of the female genre into a polar vision: the wish to control and/or to have access to women's body.

Likewise, women in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*, and especially the protagonist Selina Dawes, also shift from being perceived as an angel to a devil in disguise. Just as for Grace Marks, Selina's beauty leads other people to compare her to a superior being.

To begin with, Margaret Prior is intrigued by the prisoner's attractiveness when she first sees her: she describes her as a "fair-haired girl, quite young, quite handsome" (Waters: 42) and adds that "her hair, where it showed at the edges of her cap, was fair; her cheek was pale, the sweep of brow, of lip, of lashes crisp against her pallor" (27). This description corresponds to the typical depiction of the ideal Victorian woman: a woman's white complexion symbolizes her purity, a "virginal pallor" represents women's spiritual superiority (Gilbert and Gubar: 615). As mentioned earlier, this pallor, conveying a sense of purity, is a quality shared by Grace Marks.

Margaret assimilates the medium to various religious beings throughout the novels, comparing her to different paintings and sculptures from the Renaissance, explaining that she "was sure that (she) had seen her likeness, in a saint or an angel in a painting of Crivelli's" (27). Similarly, Margaret later affirms more confidently that she sees in Selina "the face of an angel" (153). She then observes Crivelli's *Annunciation* and admires "the face and hands of the Virgin — the face was Selina's, and seemed realer than my own" (243). Similarly, Selina's teeth are "parsnip white, as Michelangelo has it" (46).

As a spiritualist, Selina does indeed seem to have access to another dimension: she therefore acts as a sort of messenger between two separate worlds, just like angels. She is depicted as a religious being from the beginning since she is praying when Margaret first sees her:

> I studied her for, perhaps, a minute; and all that time she kept her eyes quite close, her head perfectly still. There seemed something rather devotional about her pose, the stillness, so that I though at last, She is praying!, and made my eyes to draw away in sudden shame. (27)

Margaret grows to believe that Selina is innocent: she progressively becomes convinced that the prisoner can communicate with the dead and that she has been wrongly incarcerated. Margaret even compares the medium to a martyr to the medium cause: "all these tokens of her queer career, they seemed to hang about her poor pale flesh and blur it, they were like the signs of the stigmata on a saint" (163).

It is also interesting to note that just as Grace's name is significant in this discussion about womanhood, Selina's could be relevant as well: her name could refer to this superior dimension she has access to. The name "Selina" finds its origin in the name of the Greek goddess of the moon, Selene. It also derives from the latin "caelum", meaning "sky" or "heaven" (Chakraborty). In both cases, the name Selina seems to be linked to something greater than human life. It is therefore noteworthy that Selina observes that the names "Selina, and Aurora. How well they look. They look like angels' name – don't they?" (114).

In the same manner as Grace, Selina's behaviour is also irreproachable: she is described as a calm, hard-working and dutiful prisoner by the guards who call her an "obedient lamb" (24). Before meeting the medium, a warder tells Margaret that Selina is a very discreet convict: she "keeps her eyes and her mind to herself – that's all I know. I've heard her called the easiest prisoner in the gaol. They say she has never given an hour's trouble since she was brought here" (42). They even go as far as to compare her with a lady: "'Perhaps Dawes, I said, was something of a lady? That made Miss Craven laugh: 'She has a lady's ways, all right!'" (42). Selina is aware that she has been behaving as a model prisoner and uses this argument when she is forced to move to another prison:

> She said now, Why should they send her there? Hadn't she been good and done her work? Hadn't she done all the things they wanted, and not complained? […] 'Haven't I said all my prayers, at chapel? And learned my

> lessons, for the school-mistresses? And taken my soup? And kept my cell neat? (246)

However, just as Dr Jordan is told to beware of his new object of study, Margaret is frequently reminded of the convicts' potential evilness. The prison guards call them "devils" who are "bred to mischief, most of them, and look for nothing better" (15): a guard explains to Margaret that the convicts are even capable of hurting themselves just for attention:

> They will swallow glass if they can get it, to bring on the bleeding. They will try and hang themselves, if they think they will be found in time and taken down […] a woman would do that purely to create a little stir with herself at its centre. (61)

Margaret is repeatedly warned against the inmates and that, even though she is to become a "friend to all of them", she should not become too familiar with them considering that they are willing to do anything to escape. Margaret is asked not to share information about what happens inside or outside the prison because the prisoners are quite cunning and could use those pieces of information to their benefit. A warder also advises her not to believe anything the convicts might tell her because they are capable to invent the worse lies to manipulate their visitors:

> 'If a prisoner were to tell you that her mother was ill and about to die', she said; 'if she were to cut off a lock of her hair and plead with you to take it, as a token, to the dying woman, *you must refuse it*. For take it, Miss Prior, and the prisoner will have you in her power. She will hold the knowledge against you, and use it to make all manner of mischief.' (16)

Margaret is also told to look out for convicts "palling up", a guard explains that certain prisoners share a romantic bond:

> White and Jarvis are notorious in the gaol as a pair of "pals", and were 'worse than any sweethearts'. She said I would find the women 'palling up' like that, they did it at every prison she ever worked at (67).

Margaret is quite uncomfortable when she finds this out: "I have heard them talk of 'pals' before, and have used the word myself, but it disturbed me to find that the term had *that* particular meaning and I hadn't known it" (67). To get their ways, the prisoners even go as far as seducing their guards: "There have been women here who have grown romantic over their matrons, and have had to be removed to other gaols for it" (67). This leads the guards to warn

Margaret that a convict could try to charm her: "you must watch that no-one tries to make a pal of *you*, miss" (67). The female convicts are thus described as immoral creatures able to use their charms to break free.

Furthermore, there is a recurrent circular movement that assimilates the prison to Dante's description of hell. The only physical activity that the prisoners are allowed to have is walking in circles: "They spilled into the yards and formed three great elliptical loops […] the loops were seamless" (14). Margaret is also uneasy because of the sinister architecture of the prison and compares it explicitly to Dante's circle of hell: "The matron led me into the tower staircase, and we began our careful circling descent to the lower, drearier wards: I felt like Dante, following Virgil into Hell" (28). This spiralling down effect implies that the prisoners are sinful creatures punished for their wrongdoings.

Concerning Selina Dawes' case in particular, different characters claim that she is a wicked woman: the proprietor of the hotel at which Selina lodged calls her a "very designing sort of girl", an "artful provoker of jealousies" (149). Similarly, Margaret's mother disapproves of her daughter's visits and calls the inmate "a wicked lamb" (268). When Selina eventually escapes, the rumour emerges that she received the help of the devil who "had borne her off upon his back" to leave the prison (325). Although Selina displays an angelic beauty, the fact that Margaret compares her plaited hair to "a slumbering snake" (239) likens the convict to the figure of Medusa (238), another female character whose appearance is dangerous, especially to men. Therefore, to many, Selina uses her good looks as well as her docile character in her favour. Those different reactions confirm the idea that Selina either appears as a spiritual being or as a monster in disguise.

In conclusion, the protagonists of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* are indeed enclosed within those labels: they are praised for their angelic physical appearance as well as their exemplary and virtuous behaviour but they are simultaneously described as cunning and licentious women. This dichotomic understanding of womanhood was already present in the Bible: women have to imitate the Virgin Mary, a pure and superior being, or else they will fall like Eve, the original sinner. This distinction left its mark on the Victorian conception of womanhood, which differentiates between the "angel of the house" and the "demon in hiding". The female genre is seen as "innocent or animal, pure yet quintessentially sexual", as Smith-Rosenberg observes (Smith-Rosenberg quoted by Murillo: 800). Ihsen Hachaichi describes this discourse as part of a general "male conspiracy" designed to control the definition of womanhood and thus to deprive women of speech (95). These contradictory images that are ascribed to the female

protagonists of both novels point to the liminal nature of those women: as this paper shall further examine, the main characters of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* seem to stand on the edge of several labels and coincidently never fully correspond to any of them. Here, their alleged licentiousness is called into question but their supposed mental illnesses also define them as "in-between" characters.

Hysteria and Mental Illnesses in the Victorian Period

One cannot examine Victorian womanhood without considering the disease which would supposedly be typical of the female genre and which was a major topic of discussion in the scientific fields of that time: hysteria. Both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* suggest that this illness might be an explanation for Grace's and Selina's criminality.

As Elaine Showalter indicates, there is a long tradition of inexorably associating the female genre to mental instability, a link that intensified during the Victorian period (1980: 159). There began to be a predominance of women among the insane during the 1840s: the number of female patients increased in the asylums due to the Lunatics Act in 1845. All counties were required to supply accommodations for pauper lunatics, which lead to the construction of larger public asylums. By the 1890s, women patients outnumbered men in almost every type of institutions: public asylums, licensed houses, workhouses as well as registered hospitals. Men still predominated among the private clientele of all categories and in registered hospitals: those places were more selective and expensive than the asylums (Showalter 1980: 160). However, women remained overall more numerous in the psychiatric institutions, which lead to the emergence of many new establishments such as surgical clinics, water-cure establishments and rest-cure homes, specialized in the "female illnesses" of hysteria and neurasthenia (Showalter 1980: 161).

The main explanation for women's predominant presence in these institutions was that the scientific discourse claimed that women's constitution was prone to mental illness, and more particularly hysteria. This form of insanity emerged as a natural consequence of the women's gender: from the ancient Greek word "hysterikos", hysteria was the disease of the womb, "the organ which was in the nineteenth century supposed to 'cause' [a] nervous disorder" (Gilbert and Gubar: 53). Although this disease affected both men and women, it was considered to be a typical female affliction caused by their reproductive system which "supposedly made them physically, mentally and emotionally volatile" (Ifill: 183). It was believed that women who

suffered from hysteria acted oddly because their uterus was wandering to contact other organs, which would generate symptoms such as "fits, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, paralysis" (Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 170). Isabella Beeton described in the 1860s what hysterical outbreaks looked like:

> These fits take place, for the most part, in young, nervous, unmarried woman…The fits themselves are mostly preceded by great depression of spirits, shedding of tears, sickness, palpitation of the heart, etc. The patient now generally becomes insensible, and faints; the body is thrown about in all directions, froth issues from the mouth, incoherent expressions are uttered, and fits of laughter, crying, or screaming, take place. (Atwood: 157)

This disease would modify women's behaviour and drive them to commit deviant and violent acts. The *Journal of Psychological Medicine* explained that it could lead to "changes of personality including 'morbid appetites', 'hysterical cunning' and 'monomaniacal cunning', 'numerous instances of strange and motiveless deceptions, thefts, and crimes', and 'moral insanity'" (Ifill: 183).

Different treatments existed to deal with hysterical women, many of which were inefficient, dangerous and would only drive them further into mental illness. Showalter cites different methods such as seclusion in padded cells, Turkish baths, the use of sedatives, purgatives, leeches and even surgeries: clitoridectomy or oophorectomy in the most extreme cases (1980: 166). As pictured in *Alias Grace*, hypnotism was also prescribed to those patients, although it received mixed results (Dmytriw: 47).

The concept of hysteria took "part in the dualistic systems of language and representation assigned to men and women" (Zhang: 26): it indeed consolidated the polarisation between masculinity and femininity, which this paper has previously touched upon. Men were associated with rationality, control, liability, whereas women were seen as helpless victims of their own passions and capriciousness. As Amanda Anderson states:

> The conception of womanhood constructed on the opposition with masculinity, whereas the masculine seems to possess "the capacity for autonomous action, enlightened rationality and self-control", the female genre lacks the autonomy and coherence of their counterparts. They are

> provided with a passionate nature, which makes them "far more liable to the lapses of control". (36)

The male dominated medical field had the possibility to define deviant behaviours, thereby controlling the notions of madness. This diagnostic of hysteria would apply to a various number of ills, and would englobe every behaviour that was not compatible with the strict concept of womanhood:

> Women who manifested a subversive or more active behaviour in Victorian society were thought to be a hysteric. In fact, it is true that "[h]ysteria [...] rose to a new prominence in the nineteenth century as a condition whose clinical criteria could be modified in order to diagnose all the behaviours which did not fit the prescribed model of Victorian womanhood" (Wood quoted by Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 12).

Hysteria was consequently a means to control women's voices and bodies, and especially their sexuality: a change occurred in the definition of "hysteria", as Adam Dmytriw argues: "a definite transformation of the nature of the meaning of hysteria from a disease of the womb to sexual deviance" (47). An important number of hysterical patients were sexually compromised women, which consolidates the idea that female sexuality, except marital and child-oriented sexuality, should be frowned upon.

Women were asked to accept the doctors' authority, even if it was "coercive and interfere[d] with their freedom" (Haichaichi: 93). Men supposedly knew the mystery of female identity and were therefore entitled to educate them, as Grace Marks notes when she discusses with Dr Simon Jordan: "This puts him in an instructive mood, and I can see he is going to teach me something, which gentlemen are fond of doing" (168).

In *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*, different characters explain the protagonists' alleged criminality by this notion of hysteria. Both Grace Marks and Selina Dawes are said to suffer from violent outbursts, typical of hysterical patients.

In Margaret Atwood's novel, the main character was institutionalized before she was sent in prison. The jury who examines her case is unsure about whether she truly has had fainting episodes caused by her hysteria, which would explain her not remembering anything, or whether she had simply been lying about her amnesia. The fits that happened during the murders and the different outbursts that she later experienced in the asylum correspond to Beeton's description of hysteria. Dr Samuel Bannerling, who doubts Grace's mental instability,

explains to Dr Jordan that she indeed suffered from "a number of supposed fits, hallucinations, caperings, warblings" in the asylum (Atwood: 81). Another fit occurs when Grace is working in the Governor's house, and it begins as such: "My heart clenches and kicks out inside me, and then I begin to scream" (32), the outburst goes on and Grace is hard to contain:

> I was brought round with a glass of cold water dashed in the face, but continued screaming, although the doctor was no longer in sight; so was restrained by two kitchen maids and the gardener's boy, who sat on my legs. The Governor's wife had sent for the Matron from the Penitentiary, who arrived with two of the keepers; and she gave me a brisk slap across the face, at which I stopped. (33)

The people around her treat her quite violently because "it's the only way with the hysterics" (33), and the Governor and his wife are told they had chance because this was a moderate fit, Grace has been completely out of control before: "she was a raving lunatic that time seven years ago, and you are lucky there was no scissors nor sharp things lying about" (33).

In Sarah Waters' novel, the prisoners of Millbank presumably suffer from madness as well: a prison guard explains to Margaret that they suffer from outbursts which they describe as followed: "What they term breaking out there is a mad sort of fit that they say takes the women sometimes, sending them smashing up their cells in fury" (Waters: 177). These outrages are typical of female inmates according to the prison guards:

> 'It is an odd thing, the breaking-out', she said, 'and quite peculiar to female gaols'. She said there is a thought that prison women have an instinct for it; […] 'And when they are young and strong and determined — well, then they are like savages. (177)

These reactions come naturally to the prisoners and they are unable to refrain themselves: "For when one woman has broken out, another is sure to follow. The urge, that has been slumbering, is woken in her; and then she almost cannot help herself" (177). The prisoners of Millbank experience a type of mental instability which causes them to resort to self-harm because of their alleged pathological need for attention. The same reasoning is used to explain Grace's outbursts: after calming her down, the people who witnesses her fit in the Governor's house ponder on what might have caused it and a guard accuses Grace of wanting attention (33).

Concerning Selina Dawes' profile, she is described early on as a "savage that cannot be tamed" (12), and as having a character "prone to fits of temper" (149). She can indeed suffer from violent crisis, as it is the case when she learns that she will be moved to another prison: she hurts a warder by brutally hitting her with her trencher (246).

The general understanding of Grace's and Selina's outbursts is that they are seen as examples of the potential physical brutality that hysterical women can display. However, this violence is explained otherwise by the main protagonists: different elements in both novels suggest that these female prisoners are not inherently mad but rather have become aggressive due to their ill treatment.

It can be argued that Grace does not suffer from hysteria but from panic attacks: the outburst quoted previously can be explained by the fact that Grace was terrified of the doctor who came to examine her in the Governor's house. She was indeed previously aggressed in the asylum by another doctor and she thought that she had recognized him: "it's the same doctor, the same one, the very same black-coated doctor with his bagful of shining knives" (32).

Grace's experience suggests that an important number of women who have been institutionalized and incarcerated have also been called hysterical when they were in fact quite sane, as Grace explains: "They wouldn't know mad when they saw it in any case, because a good portion of the women in the Asylum were no madder than the Queen of England" (34). Grace ponders on the many reasons that could lead a woman to be institutionalized, she also notes that many of the women she came across admitted voluntarily that they were not mentally ill: some have no home and being institutionalized is a way to escape the cold in the winter, others were alcoholics and only became mad once they were inebriated. Grace also observes that one of the inmates decided to be imprisoned "to get away from her husband, who beat her black and blue, he was the mad one but nobody would lock him up" (34).

Similarly, this notion of hysteria is also questioned by Dr Jordan when he discusses with Dr Dupont about prostitution: Dr Dupont asks for his opinion on prostitution and he wonders if Jordan agrees with the belief that it is "a form of insanity (linked) to hysteria and neurasthenia" (349). Although he does not approve of prostitution, Jordan challenges the idea that prostitutes are naturally depraved and deranged. He explains that they are not mad, but rather poor women trying to survive: "His own explorations have suggested to him that prostitutes are motivated less by depravity than by poverty" (424). He comes to the conclusion that a woman selling her body might be one of the most sensible and reasonable things a woman can do:

> If a woman has no other course open to her but starvation, prostitution, or throwing herself from a bridge, then surely the prostitute, who has shown the most tenacious instinct for self-preservation, should be considered stronger and saner than her frailer and no longer living sisters. (349)

What makes Grace's incarceration even crueller is the warders' vicious nature, who enjoy the inmates' sufferings and manipulate them to make them look mad:

> The matrons at the Asylum were all fat and strong […] Sometimes they would provoke us, especially right before the visitors were to come. They wanted to show how dangerous we were, but also how well they could control us, as it made them appear more valuable and skilled. (35)

The prisoners' poor treatment does eventually affect the women's mental health, which can indeed lead to mental illnesses.

Just as several elements in *Alias Grace* deny Grace's diagnostic of hysteria, different factors in *Affinity* seem to indicate that the prisoners' violent behaviour is a reaction to the hardships and abuses they suffer from.

Margaret Prior reevaluates what she had heard about Millbank and its prisoners when she first visits the place: "They were suddenly terribly real – not ghosts, not dolls or beads on a string, as they had seemed before, but coarse-faced, slouching women and girls" (Waters: 20). Margaret observes the convicts individually and catches "the humanity of them" (14).

During one of her family reunions, Margaret tells her guests what she has witnessed during her visits in prison before being interrupted. She claims that the prisoners are victims of unacceptable treatments:

> I had seen wretched things here. I said I had seen women unable to speak, because the matrons kept them silent. I had seen women driven mad. There was a woman dying there, I said, because she was kept so cold and badly fed. There was another who had put out her own eye—. (255)

Following Selina's outburst, Margaret pleads her cause and states that it is in Selina's nature to be good but that Millbank made her violent:

> Couldn't they see, how terrible her plight was […] They must only think of her: and intelligent girl, a gentle girl – the quietest girl, as Miss Haxby had

> said, in all of Millbank! They must think of what the prison has done to her – how it had made her, not sorry, not good, but only so miserable, so incapable of imagining the other world beyond her cell, that she had struck the matron […] 'Keep her silent, keep her unvisited', I said, 'I think you will drive her mad – or else, you'll kill her…'. (267)

After getting to know the convicts and their daily life better, Margaret's perception of them changes. They do not seem hysterical convicts to her anymore but rather wretched women, victims of their living conditions:

> [I] gazed in at the women as they sat in their cells – every one of them hunched and shivering, every one wretched, every one ill or nearly ill, hungry or nauseous, and with fingers cracked with prison work and with cold. (278)

The prisoners are indeed so affected by their detention that Margaret compares the prison to a grave and the convicts to corpses:

> All about me Millbank reared, bleak as a tomb, and silent, yet filled with wretched men and women. I had never, in all my visits, felt the weight of their combined despair as I felt it press upon me now. (278)

Margaret has grown to show them pity and to complain of their ill treatment, she starts to see them as "exhausted women" (337). Her vision of the convicts clashes with the opinion of the prison surgeon. After examining Selina and the guard she has hurt, he tells Margaret: "A quiet girl, from all I hear', he said. 'But there, the quietest bitch will turn sometimes, upon its mistress" (251). This conveys the thought that model prisoners are frequently more dangerous than their peers because they can hide their evilness better: once again, a character who represents the scientific discourse implies that this violence was expected.

Therefore, Grace Marks' and Selina Dawes' institutionalisation and incarceration reflect a misogynist discourse which claims that misconduct is a consequence of women's nature and which ignores the hardships of women's lives, as Showalter explains: "While physicians might pay attention to the contexts of the female complaint, such as poverty, the death of a relative, or physical complications, they were totally indifferent to content" (1980: 169). The public opinion will still attribute the protagonists' behaviour to their biological disposition and not to the injustices they might go through.

To conclude, womanhood during the Victorian period was a notion based on biological and cultural determinism: a series of stereotypes nurtured by male discourse to enclose the female genre. Women were traditionally comprised within two extremes: as described in the Bible with the distinction between the Virgin Mary and Eve, women were reduced to sacred beings or perverted beings. The ensuing dichotomy Madonna/Whore dominated the conception of womanhood during the Victorian period: the ideal women was an "angel of the house" but had the potential of becoming a demon. Hysteria was yet again another label predominant during the Victorian period to control the other sex: it was a disease directly linked to women's reproductive organs. Grace Marks and Selina Dawes disrupt the boundaries between strict labels applied to women: to some people they are sane young women, wrongly accused whereas to others they are insane licentious monsters deserving of their sentences.

Considering that the female protagonists have been repeatedly discredited throughout both novels, it seems logical that Atwood and Waters, as authors of neo-Victorian fiction, would try to recover those silenced voices. To let women have the possibility to express themselves is precisely the feature of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* that will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Chapter II: The Deconstruction of Victorian Womanhood with the Use of Feminine Genres and the Adoption of Male Conventions

In both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*, the main protagonists try to break free from the dichotomic vision of womanhood by acknowledging it and subverting it from within. The characters of Grace Marks and Margaret Prior in particular are self-conscious and frequently ponder on the discriminations from which they suffer.

Margaret Prior indeed expresses her concern over women's place in society. The Victorian opposition between angel and demon is alluded to during one dinner scene when Margaret and her mother invite friends over. They are all astonished to discover that Margaret has become a lady visitor at Millbank prison and wonder how she can bear to be among criminals:

> 'To think of your dear face amongst those convict women's – what a study *that* would make! There is an epigram for it, what is it? Margaret, *you* will know it: the poet's words, about women and heaven and hell.'
>
> She meant:
>
> *For men at most differ as Heaven and Earth, But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell*
>
> […] Mother said it was certainly true, what Tennyson said about women… (Waters: 33)

Even though Margaret does not ponder expressively on this quote, the suspension points suggest that there is more to what she thinks and that she might disagree with this understanding of womanhood, which is once again comprised within the two opposites of Heaven and Hell.

The novel abounds with reflections on Margaret's part about her life and how her own status of spinster prevents her from doing what she wants. She recognizes that her existence is limited to the domestic sphere and is constantly reminded that she does not fit the standard of the ideal Victorian woman. Margaret is twenty-nine years old and categorially refuses to get married despite her mother's many attempts to convince her. The protagonist is told that if she cannot resolve to accept a husband, then she should devote herself to taking care of the house and watching over her mother, as Margaret's mother tells her: "you must take up your proper duties in the house […] your place is here, at your mother's side" (252). However, the young lady has no interest in organizing receptions or chatting over tea: the monotony of this life

comes into conflict with her passionate nature. Constantly spied on by her mother and forced to obey her, Margaret has to put her wishes, such as studying or travelling, aside. This domestic life feels like a prison to her and she realizes it when she compares her situation to Selina's incarceration: "If she could only know how slow and dull and empty my days are! – as slow as hers" (207).

To fill her days, the protagonist decides to start visiting a prison: this new occupation allows her to distance herself from the family home and her mother's surveillance but her visits is another point of conflict with her mother. She argues that interacting with convicts can only rub off on her, that "mixing with the coarse women at Millbank is making [her] simple" (105). Moreover, Margaret's mother claims that it is the time spend there, caring for those women, which is making her ill and that her mother is only thinking about her health when she forbids her to go: "'I won't let you go to Millbank,' said Mother, 'since going there makes you so ill.' […] I had had too much freedom, my temperament did not suit it. […] I had too many blank hours and grew fanciful – *Etc. Etc*." (264). With her fragile constitution, Margaret is said to be unfit to have so much liberty in her hands. The protagonist is given chloral and then laudanum to help with her outbursts, which is also a way for her family to make sure she eventually fits the mould of the respected Victorian woman. Margaret is taken away from her centres of interests and discredited; how she is treated is reminiscent of hysterical women, as discussed previously. Margaret is turned into a fragile, dependent figure: the Victorian cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty has struck again. She does not correspond to the standard and therefore is a disappointment to her family, especially to her mother:

> I saw her growing bitter, because her son and her favourite daughter had homes elsewhere – had gayer homes, with children and footsteps and young men and new gowns in them; homes which, were it not for the presence of her spinster daughter – her *consolation*, who preferred prisons and poetry to fashion-plates and dinners, and was therefore no consolation at all – she would certainly be invited to share. (201)

Margaret Prior is conscious that she fails to be an "angel in the house" and rather becomes a spinster as she herself acknowledges, a category of women that were "more harshly discussed, more openly ridiculed and more punitively treated than any other female group" (Showalter 1980: 171). Her status of spinster is a paradoxical one because she has never been more watched before, yet her feelings are constantly disregarded. This leaves Margaret wondering "Why do gentlemen's voices carry so clearly, when women's are so easily stifled?" (229): once again,

she understands that a distinction is made between men's alleged natural assertion and women's submissiveness.

Margaret Atwood's protagonist is also acutely aware of being trapped within a dichotomic vision of womanhood as she reflects:

> I think of all the things that have been written about me – that I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim […], that I am of sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper […], that I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harms is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot. (Atwood: 25)

She mentions the typical features attributed to women by the Victorian polarity: Grace knows that the public either sees her as a cunning and envious femme fatale figure or as an innocent and simple-minded girl, when in reality her real disposition eludes them, to the same extent that the truth about the murders seems unattainable. She thus asks herself how she can generate such contradictory reactions: "And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once?" (25).

Grace is progressively deprived of her right to tell her story, a task which is placed in the hands of a series of male mediators. She recalls how her lawyer would tell her be more concise in her declaration and that she should stop "wandering" around what she wants to say (415). He asks her to her "not to tell the story as I truly remembered it, which nobody could be expected to make any sense of; but to tell a story that would hang together, and that had some chance of being believed" (415). He then more openly orders her to create a new version of what happened "in what he called a coherent way" and "according to plausibility" (415). A manipulation which reaches its paroxysm during the trial, where all the different versions of what happened collide:

> I can remember what I said when arrested, and what Mr. Mackenzie the lawyer said I should say, and what I did not say even to him; and what I said at the trial, and what I said afterwards, which was different as well. And what McDermott said I said, and what the others said I must have said, for there are always those that will supply you with speeches of their own, and put them right into your mouth for you too; and that sort are like the magicians who can throw their voice, at fairs and shows, and you are just their wooden doll. And that's what it was like at the trial, I was there in the box of the dock but I might as well have been made of cloth, and stuffed, with a china head;

> and I was shut up inside that doll of myself, and my true voice could not get out. (342)

Grace is metaphorically transformed into a puppet, muffled by the distorted versions of the truth. Soon after being incarcerated, she proves her ability to control her image: “The day of the Inquest came, and I took care to appear neat and tidy, for I knew how much appearances count” (413). Therefore, when Dr Jordan asks her to recount what happened on the days the murders took place, she answers that there is no use in repeating the story all over again and that he can “ask the lawyers and the judges, and the newspapers men, [who] seem to know [her] story better than [she] do[es] [herself]” (46). When Jordan insists on hearing her rendition, she understands that she could have some control over her narrative for the first time. During her imprisonment, she has practised her facial expressions to play the part: "I look at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practised" (43). She knows that how she behaves is as equally important as what she says to the public opinion: she explains that while Jordan writes she feels as if he was drawing her (79). Grace thereby compares the report to a portrait given that however Jordan choses to paint her will determine her involvement in the murders in the eyes of the public.

The protagonist is conscious of the different labels that have been given to her: by manipulating her meetings with Dr Jordan, she resists his definition of her and gradually deconstructs the generic narrative made about her. When Jordan asks her what an apple reminds her of, she knows he is inviting her to think about Adam and Eve’s fall, she realizes that he is expecting this specific answer: “There is always a right answer, which is right because it is the one they want, and you can tell by their faces whether you have guessed what it is” (45). However, Grace refuses to play his guessing game and thereby rejects any association with Eve the temptress. She chooses a more puzzling answer which leaves Jordan perplex, because as she says: “Now it is his turn to know nothing” (45). Grace navigates through those different etiquettes without fully committing to one and allows herself to dream with the possibility of being liberated: “I am a model prisoner, and give no trouble […] If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go” (5-6).

Alias Grace and *Affinity* thus portray two highly reflective main protagonists who are conscious of the many etiquettes that define women and they have the opportunity to express these concerns through typically feminine genres: a diary for Margaret Prior and a quilt for

Grace Marks. However, the private character of these genres restricts the extent of their testimonies and does not allow them to reach the public sphere.

The Use of Feminine Genres

Affinity opens with Margaret beginning to write her second diary. She is constantly watched by her family, by the servants, by doctors and she thus needs to express herself. She does so by seeking refuge within the pages of her private journal: "I said that *that* book was like my dearest friend. I told it all my closest thoughts, and it kept them secret. […] it had no one to tell" (Waters: 111). Her diary is the only space where she can speak freely about her visits to Millbank, considering that no one wants to listen to her at home. It is also where she is allowed to complain about the pression she suffers from: "It is the only place I can be honest in" (242). The fact that Sarah Waters makes her main protagonist confess her secrets in the written form of a diary is significant because it allows the novel to discuss the relationship between women and writing.

The diary has traditionally been understood as a feminine form of life writing, an inferior piece of literature compared to men's production. Indeed, according to the sphere theory, women during the Victorian period were defined as wholly passive figures whose "intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet orderings of domesticity" (Ruskin quoted by Gilbert and Gubar: 24): they were believed uncapable of writing anything valuable and they consequently were not encouraged to write. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, writing was considered a masculine activity: "The pen has been defined as not just accidentally but essentially a male "tool", and therefore not only inappropriate but actually alien to women" (8).

The works of women writers were criticized for their triviality, their superficiality, their melodramatic effect or their incapacity to engage with "stronger" types of literatures (Gilbert and Gubar: 14). They were consequently often restricted to the "lesser" subjects and genres such as children books, letters or diaries (71). Women writers were expected to bow down to their male colleagues, compelled to present their works as insignificant, "mere trifles designed to divert and distract readers in moments of idleness", in comparison with their peers' publications (Gilbert and Gubar: 61). When some of those women refused to limit themselves to the "lower" types of literature or to retreat into an angelic silence, they were frequently forced to supress their work or to publish it pseudonymously or anonymously.

Therefore, by choosing to express her concerns in the form of a diary, Margaret Prior comply with the belief that a woman was condemned to write unpublishable sentimental narratives. It is precisely what her relatives reproach her: they argue that, as a woman, she is not fit to write anything far-reaching and that writing a diary where she pours out her emotions cannot help her easily overwhelmed mind. The protagonist's mother is particularly vocal about this concern and she asks Margaret: "'What are you writing there?' She said it was unhealthy to sit at a journal so long; that it would throw me back upon my own dark thoughts and weary me" (70). Her brother-in-law also touches upon the criticism made against female writers:

> Two days ago, Priscilla put a novel aside and Mr Barclay picked it up, and turned its pages, and laughed at it. He does not care for lady authors. All women can ever write, he says, are 'journals of the heart' – the phrase has stayed with me. (70)

A diary is a private form: it is a narrative that is "usually written and read solely by the diarist, represents self-reflexive, inward-turned communion" (Brindle: 66): even though they represent one way for women of that time to express themselves on paper, the lack of diffusion of this form encloses women even more within the domestic sphere. This is visible in Margaret's answer to her mother's concern that writing a journal will eventually make her sick:

> I thought, If you don't want me to grow weary, then why do you give me medicine to make me sleep? But I do not say it. I only shut the book away – then took it out again when she had gone. (70)

If Margaret wants to save herself from the judgment of her family, she has to dissimulate her journal.

In the same way *Affinity* focuses on the tradition of women keeping diaries, *Alias Grace* also centres around an activity conventionally attributed to the female genre: needlework. This task offers women a space to express themselves although, like a written journal, it can only reach a restricted audience.

The textile has indeed long been associated with the female genre: women were limited to activities that connected them to the domestic sphere such as sewing, knitting or embroidering. Therefore, it seems evident that needlework also participates in the Victorian dichotomic vision of womanhood:

> The textile plays a fundamental role in the creation and perpetuation of the construct of femininity, as it brings together conceptual implications closely linked to the home, the nineteenth-century stereotype of the angel in the house, the devoted wife and mother and all her virtues around patience, docility, gentleness, and fidelity. (Torrejón-Tobío: 341)

Those tasks were very time-consuming: active men of that time had an engaging life which would prevent them to concern themselves with those tasks. Women, on the contrary, could dedicate their time and patience to these works. Furthermore, those were meticulous occupations and it was believed that delicate female hands were required to accomplish them. The textile is another part of the puzzle which creates the stereotype of the "angel of the house": women were kept within the safe and confining space of the home, devoting themselves to harmless occupations (Haig: 13).

It has often been argued in the past that needlework was used by women as a way to express themselves and that tasks such as sewing, knitting or embroidering became analogies for the act of writing. Indeed, an undeniable link seems to exist between these activities and writing: Margaret Cavendish famously prefaces her 1653 anthology *Poem and Fancies* by acknowledging that it was believed that "spinning with the fingers is more proper to our sex than studying or writing poetry, which is the spinning with the brain" (Cavendish quoted by Gilbert and Gubar: 525).

The textile world reflects women's ability to plot, to scheme and to organize a complex work. Even though women were often denied the right to legitimately use a pen to give evidence of their existence, they have used their needle to share messages through their works: as Kathryn Sullivan Kruger states, "weaving has long been a metaphor for the creation of something other than cloth, whether a story, a plot, or a world" (Sullivan Kruger quoted by Torrejón-Tobío: 341). Women transformed into weavers of fictions, capable of sharing messages with others.

History and literature abound with powerful female figures who used those activities to send important messages. Among them, many examples from the Greek and Roman mythologies such as Philomel, Penelope or Ariadne, women who exercised their art subversively and silently in order to defend themselves or to control the lives of men.

The important role of this type of handcrafting for women is particularly well represented in *Alias Grace*. Grace Marks learned those skills from an early age because of her

mother. She and her aunt would sew shirts for a living and Grace as well as her sisters would help them. The novel highlights the existence of those techniques as a feminine heritage: needlework was indeed an art which passed from mothers to daughters. Over the years, Grace has become an excellent seamstress:

> I watched my needle go in and out, although I believe I could sew in my sleep, I've been doing it since I was four years old, small stitches as if made by mice. You need to start very young to be able to do that, otherwise you can never get the hang of it. (Atwood: 76)

She has developed an extraordinary dexterity with the needle, a talent that suggests a certain automatism of gesture. Grace is often praised at work for her skills and it is said that "she can sew like the wind" (148), meaning that it comes naturally and effortlessly to her.

During her conversations with Dr Jordan, Grace is constantly sewing and making different quilts for the Governor's wife. The quilt is a pivotal image in the novel. First of all, it is a significant object of everyday life in Canada in the 1840s. Throughout the novel, the young woman is led to ponder on the question of the quilt and the reader gets informed over this type of bedspread: Grace explains that a quilt is an important component of a young woman's trousseau and that if she wanted to get married, she should own at least three quilts, that there exist various patterns according to the usage of the quilt, that it could be made of various materials and could be of different weight depending on the season, etc (185-186).

The quilt is more than a decorative object, it can also be a bearer of messages for the female genre. In the following excerpt, Grace metaphorically likens quilts to flags placed on beds. They serve as warning signs to inform women that a bed can be a perilous place for them:

> And since that time I have thought, why is it that women have chosen to sew such flags, and then to lay them on the tops of beds? […] And then I have thought, it's for a warning. Because you may think a bed is a peaceful thing, Sir […] But […] there are many dangerous things that may take place in a bed. It is where we are born, and that is our first peril in life; and it is where the women give birth, which is often their last. And it is where the act takes place between men and women that I will not mention to you, Sir, but I suppose you know what it is; and some call it love, and others despair, or else

> merely an indignity which they must suffer through. And finally beds are what we sleep in, and where we dream, and often where we die. (185-186)

Grace refers to the many difficulties a woman in the 1840s can face, notably the problem of mortality related to childbirth for children and women alike. She also mentions sexuality as another ordeal women must go through. Grace has indeed had the opportunity in her past life to witness the various consequences of sexuality for the female genre: Grace's mother for example has experienced a violent and nonconsensual form of sexuality that entrapped her within never-ending pregnancies, even though she could already hardly manage with her eldest children. With Nancy's case, Grace saw that having a child out of wedlock meant the end of a woman's reputation and the necessity to hold onto the father to survive. To have a child while being an unmarried working woman was a very risky business as Mary Whitney's story has proven: she could not keep the baby if she wanted to keep her position, so she got an abortion. When she passed away after the intervention, the discovery of her pregnancy was shocking to her superiors who thought that her body should be hidden, thereby using the quilt as a sort of shroud: "She said we were not to tell anyone of Mary's death until we'd got her looking presentable, with the quilt pulled up over her and her eyes closed, and her hair combed down and tidy" (206). Therefore, the quilt is indeed a warning flag that let other women from future generations know the dangers to which they are vulnerable to: it becomes the symbol of a "communal experience" of hardships and injustice (Murray: 73).

At the end of the novel, Grace eventual makes a quilt for her own marriage bed:

> While I am sitting out on the verandah in the afternoons, I sew away at the quilt I am making. Although I've made many quilts in my day, this is the first one I have ever done for myself. It is a Tree of Paradise; but I am changing the pattern a little to suit my own ideas. (533)

She modifies the initial design of Tree of Paradise so that it fits her story better: "Some who use this pattern make several trees, four or more in a square or circle, but I am making just one large tree" (534). She argues that there is no difference between the Tree of life and the Tree of knowledge, she rather believes that there is only one tree and that "the Fruit of Life and the Fruit of Good and Evil were the same […] Such an arrangement would appear to be more the way life is" (534). It could be said that the new design she creates represents her: she refuses

any strict division of her character between good and evil and choses a pattern that expresses her multiple identity.

The myriad of narratives surrounding Grace shows that she is a mysterious figure who eludes the comprehension of the contemporaneous commentators. As the reader discovers at the end of *Alias Grace*, the protagonist is potentially diagnosed with a multiple personality disorder, which means that she has taken on the identity of her deceased friend Mary Whitney but also that of her former employer and supposed victim Nancy Montgomery. The link between the tradition of quilting and Grace's multiple personality is alluded to when she eventually works on her own quilt: she explains how she will create a pattern that will reunite the three women by including pieces of the dead women's dresses:

> But three of the triangles in my Tree will be different. One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney's; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away.
> I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern.
> And so we will all be together. (534)

The quilt does indeed seem to be a way to manifest solidarity between women. As Roxanne Rimstead states: "Grace utters the last line of the novel like a pact, a prayer, or an incantation among women" (57). Grace's quilt reunites the lives of three women who suffered from their social and sexual conditions.

If her quilt can be read as the story of Grace's life, then it is as if the reader of the novel had access to the bedspread itself given that the structure of the novel mirrors the form of a quilt: Atwood's work is divided into fifteen sections (with forty-three chapters in total), announced by black and white designs. Each drawing introducing the different parts of the novel corresponds to a specific pattern of quilt from Canadian culture, patterns from which the fifteen sections take their names. There are links between the patterns chosen to represent the different chapters and their contents: the chapter intitled "Broken Dishes" for example could be named

after the teapot that Grace's aunt gave to her mother before their journey to Canada and which, after her death on board, gets accidentally broken.

How Atwood organizes the different textual materials in her novel also echoes the arrangement of a quilt: she begins each section with a variety of narratives concerning Grace's story, that includes different documents such as newspaper accounts, fragments of Grace's and McDermott's confessions, extracts from the Kingston Penitentiary Punishment Book, medical reports, excerpts from Susanna Moodie's description of Grace, letters from doctors or clergymen who interacted with Grace, engravings of the accused, but also pieces of literature such as poems. The result is a fragmentary work, pieced together as a patchwork.

To conclude, the quilt acts as a symbolic system of communication for those who practice this type of handcrafting: this implies that it is only meaningful for the female genre. This is what Grace acknowledges after pondering on the quilt pattern named "Log Cabin":

> A Log Cabin quilt is a thing every young woman should have before marriage, as it means the home; and there is always a red square at the centre, which means the hearth fire. Mary Whitney told me that. But I don't say this, as I don't think it will interest him [Dr Jordan], being too common. (112)

Although Jordan watches her work on quilts for hours, he never questions her further about the patterns and their significance: Jordan does not seem "the least bit interested in the quilt as a cultural object", as Rimstead notes (74). Quilting acts as a secret code between women that is beyond the male's grasp, which means that there exists a danger that those tales of feminine resistance such as Grace's may never be discovered and therefore remain ineffective. According to Hélène Cixous's thesis on female orality, "[Grace's] words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (Cixous quoted by Torrejón-Tobío: 342): it seems that Grace initially fails to express herself in the "masculine language" which would make her heard.

Nevertheless, it does seem that both Margaret Prior and Grace Marks adopt masculine conventions for their testimonies to be seen as legitimate in their male dominated society and for them to reach a larger audience: Margaret by aspiring to put her life down on paper as her scholar and historian father would have done and Grace by manipulating Dr Jordan into writing a favourable report.

The Adoption of Male Conventions

To start with, even if the main protagonist of *Affinity* is very curious and educated, erudition was not a desirable quality for women as it was considered that "manly intellect [was] off-putting" (Ifill: 205). Yet Margaret develops a passion for knowledge: she spends her time reading poetry, studying history, contemplating paintings, etc. This desire to learn comes from her father, George Prior, who allowed her to pursue her interests and who nurtured and encouraged her intelligence. Before he died, Margaret's father intended to write a book on Italian Renaissance and Margaret became his assistant. Both frequently visited the reading-room of the British Museum to conduct his research. She was supposed to travel to Florence and to Rome with her father and her friend Helen "to study in the archives and the galleries there" (Waters: 208). During the weeks preceding his death, Margaret spent her time preparing herself for those travels, impatiently learning more about Italy:

> […] when Pa was alive, I would lie awake and, instead of saying prayers or verses, I would count off all the towns of Italy – *Verona, Reggio, Rimini, Como, Parma, Piacenza, Cosenza, Milan*… I said I had spent many hours, thinking of how it would be when I saw those places. (211)

The protagonist cannot come to terms with the fact that her father's death implies that she will have to retrieve into a domestic life, she craves for knowledge and experience:

> I said she must imagine how it has been for me, to have spent so many years helping my father with his work; to have seen all the marvellous paintings and statues of Italy, in books, and prints – in blacks and whites and greys, and muddy crimsons. 'But to visit the Uffizi, and the Vatican,' I said, 'to step into any simple country church with a fresco in it – I think that would be, to step into colour and light!' (211-212)

Margaret is conscious that her interests are unusual for her genre:

> But people, I said, do not want cleverness – not in women, at least. I said, 'Women are *bred* to do more of the same – that is their function. It is only ladies like me that throw the system out, make it stagger –' (209)

When Margaret says "women like me", she means that not only is it unexpected for a woman to refuse to marry and not to dedicate herself to the creation of a home and family of her own, what is also deviant from the norm is her extensive, and thus "masculine", education: Margaret distances herself from the Victorian concept of womanhood and "makes her a problematic, transgressive figure" (Butterworth: 116). This is indeed what Margaret's mother reproaches her father: "She said, seizing on the one narrow point, that as a girl I had been indulged. She had left me too much to the care of my father and he had spoiled me" (223). Unlike her siblings, she is not similar to her mother: "I thought of Pris – who has always, like Stephen, favoured Mother, while I resemble Pa" (209). Margaret resembles her father too much and this explains why she has always been misunderstood by her family. She realises that she is not her mother's consolation after her father's death, but rather a burden:

> I heard people say it, at breakfast: 'You must be thankful you have Margaret, Mrs. Prior. So like her father! She will be a comfort to you now.' I am not a comfort to her. She doesn't want to see her husband's face and habits, on her *daughter*! (199)

Margaret's resemblance with her father can also be found in her desire to begin a diary: she explains to Selina that she started writing when she helped her father: "I told her then that I take my note-book with me wherever I go – that it was a habit I had fallen into when helping my father with his work" (111). She then began to compel those notes in a diary: writing is like a therapy for her to handle her anxiety. She wishes to keep a diary where order and control prevail, not feelings, whereas she considers her previous journal to be a messy emotional account of her state of mind:

> I have been thinking of my last journal, which had so much of my own heart's blood in it; and which certainly took as long to burn as human hearts, they say, do take. I mean this book to be different to that one. I mean this writing not to turn me back upon my own thoughts, but to serve, like the chloral, to keep the thoughts from coming at all. (70)

Margaret wishes her diary to anaesthetize her mind just like the drug that she takes does. She wants to rationalise her thoughts and compartmentalize them into "a catalogue, a kind of list" (241). She thus clearly expresses that she wants to avoid the stereotyped formula of "journal of the heart" that her close relatives despise so much.

The protagonist's attempt to write a diary could relate to Elaine Showalter's conceptualization of "gynocriticism" and the "feminine phase" of female writings. In her work *A Literature of their Own* (1977), Showalter is interested in women as writers and traces the history of the female literary tradition, which she suggests can be divided into three phases. She differentiates three stages from 1840 to the present days to define women's writings: she ponders on how women writers positioned themselves in contrast to their male counterparts (Showalter 1977: 13). Showalter calls the first phase the "feminine phase", which lasted between 1840 and 1880. During this period, "women [wrote] in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture" (Showalter quoted by Karmarkar: 37): the main characteristic is thus the imitation and internalization of the modes and values of the dominant male literary tradition. Showalter also insists on the use of male pseudonyms by female writers as one of the main features of this first phase. The second one is the "feminist phase": taking place from 1880 to 1920, this stage was marked by the Suffragettes movement and the legalization of women's voting rights. Showalter describes that in this period "women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood" (Showalter quoted by Karmarkar: 37). This phase involves protests against male conventions and a call for independency. The last phase is entitled the "female phase" which started in 1920 and is still ongoing according to Showalter. This phase is a search for identity and period of self-awareness for women during which they "reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art" (Showalter quoted by Karmarkar: 37).

Showalter's definition of the "feminine phase" seems particularly relevant to examine Margaret Prior's behaviour. The protagonist imitates her father's rigorous work as a scholar and a historian to gain legitimacy as a female writer and thus "asserts her wish to exercise male rational control over [her] female nature" (Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria":173). This is what Mark Llewellyn argues as well when he claims that Margaret Prior seeks "to find solace and peace from the tempers of her heart" by making use of "logic, reasoning and a masculine view of the role of the chronicler of history" (Llewellyn quoted by Brindle: 82).

In her first journal entries, the protagonist indeed wonders how her father would have started such a narrative:

> I wish that Pa was with me now. I would ask him how he would start to write the story I have embarked upon to-day. I would ask him how he would neatly

> tell the story of a prison – of Millbank Prison […]. He would start it, I think, at the gate of Millbank, the point that every visitor must pass when they arrive to make their tour of the gaols. Let me begin my record there, then … (7)

She convinces herself that she must leave the feminine details aside given that her father would not have bothered with them: "no, of course he would not begin the story here, with a lady and her servant, and petticoats and loose hair" (7). She thereby refrains herself from describing the clothes too much because she "daresay Pa would have not bothered with the detail of the skirts" (8), these superficial and feminine aspects must be excluded from her writing.

Margaret's desire to copy her father's work reflects her "desire for masculine mental empowerment" (Llewellyn quoted by Brindle: 82), and it could even be argued that she is planning on publishing her journal just as she is about to publish her father's letters. When her father died, he left some unfinished researches and an interesting correspondence behind. To prevent her from visiting the prison, Margaret's mother tries to keep her occupied and asks her to organize his letters. Margaret later briefly alludes to the fact that she wishes to publish them. Perhaps the protagonist has the same ambition for her own diary: she does acknowledge the importance of telling one's story and that any pieces of history can gain power: "Pa used to say that any piece of history might be made into a tale: it was only a question of deciding where the tale began, and where it ended. That, he said, was all *his* skill" (7). Margaret might think that her visits to Millbank are worth sharing with a larger audience. It could thus be argued that by mimicking men's autobiographical accounts, Margaret wants her prison tale to belong to the supposedly more legitimate and reasoned representations of history: she would consequently acquire "the 'virile' power of the pen" that women of the time were deprived of (Butterworth: 110).

It seems that something similar occurs in *Alias Grace* since Grace Marks recognizes the importance of telling her story as well:

> When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else. (Atwood: 345-346)

Her past life can only take form by being told to herself or to someone else: if repeating her story is essential to bring it together then surely have it written down is as equally, if not more, important. However, as seen earlier, Grace has been deceived in the past by the newspapers which failed to tell her story. They did not transcribe the situation faithfully because "like everything men write down, such as the newspapers, they got the main story right but some of the details wrong" (533).

When she meets Jordan, Grace is pleased to see that he writes everything she says: "I can say anything to him and he would not be put out or shocked, or even surprised, he would only write it down" (114). She progressively manipulates the interviews and gets to tell her own version of the facts. She has learned that she must keep some pieces of information secret and therefore punctuates her narrative with silences to organize it as she wants to: "I should not speak to him so freely, and decide I will not" (186). She feeds Jordan only enough bits and pieces of her story and knows how to arouse his curiosity:

> What should I tell him when he comes back? He will want to know about the arrest, and the trial, and what was said. Some of it is all jumbled in my mind, but I could pick out this or that for him, some bits of whole cloth you might say, as when you go through the rag bag looking for something that will do, to supply a touch of colour. (410)

Dr Jordan gradually grows more and more obsessed with Grace Marks: he becomes intrigued and attracted to her. When his mind wanders too much, he has to remind himself to stay focused: for example, when he takes care of his landlady's house, Jordan realises that he knows nothing about housekeeping and he thinks about asking Grace for advice on how to hire a maid, but then he immediately decides against it, arguing that: "He must retain his position of all-knowing authority in her eyes" (335).

However, Grace's power weighs on him and their meetings progressively leave him under her spell: hearing her calm voice recounting her story and seeing her sewing indefinitely with a repetitive movement contribute to the hypnotic effect:

> But today, listening to her low, candid voice […] he almost goes to sleep; only the sound of his own pencil hitting the floor pulls him awake. For a moment

> he's gone deaf, or suffered a small stroke: he can see her lips moving, but he can't interpret any of the words. This however is only a trick of consciousness, for he can remember – once he sets his mind to it – everything she's been saying. […] It's as if she's drawing his energy out of him. (338)

Jordan falls into a sort of trance which leads him to literally and figuratively let go of the pen and to become guided by Grace's words. She might not be the one holding the pen, but she certainly is the one writing his notes as Celia Torrejón-Tobío asserts: "Perceiving Simon as a powerful mode of access to the hegemonic position of authority he represents, Grace sews her verbal and behavioural negotiation through a meticulous and subtle conversational distortion of her past life, behaviour or mental instability" (351). This process deconstructs the power structures and reverses, even momentarily, the hierarchal relationship between the mute object of study and the interviewer.

Even when he leaves Toronto and escapes Grace's influence, Jordan still ponders on their encounters, which shows the extent of Grace's authority: he wonders "What has Grace really been thinking about him, as she sewed and recounted?" (439) and imagines her working on a quilt pattern, waiting for him to appear: "He pictures her sitting in her accustomed chair, sewing at her quilt: singing, perhaps; waiting for his footfall at the door" (480). Consequently, it is not that surprising that Jordan would eventually write a favourable rapport which helps with her liberation.

Grace progressively strips Jordan of his power, appropriating a male space of expression, and she passes from a passive victim to an active subject of her own story. According to Pedro Carmona Rodríguez:

> Grace se mueve oscilatoriamente entre lector y autor: lee lo que la opinión pública ha escrito sobre ella, expresa sus opiniones sobre esa producción atribuyéndole significados y, además, elabora un texto testimonial y memorístico que se concibe en muchos casos como una versión alternativa. (Carmona Rodríguez quoted by Torrejón-Tobío: 47)

Grace manages to claim ownership of his text, to deconstruct and reconstruct the narratives made about her. The reader has access to the protagonist's truth considering that, to some extent, Margaret Atwood's novel can be understood as Jordan's report.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* question the strict definition of womanhood during the Victorian period: not only do the female characters recognize the polarity between the sane "angel in the house" and the mad "demon in disguise", but they also question the strict opposition between womanhood and manhood. Both Margaret Prior and Grace Marks use typically feminine genres to express themselves, i.e. a diary and needlework. Moreover, whether it be Margaret Prior imitating her father's methods and planning on publishing her own diary or Grace Marks manipulating Dr Jordan's report, these two protagonists make use of typically male conventions. By doing so, they hope to free themselves from the domestic, and thereby private, sphere and are able to diffuse their testimonies. Margaret Atwood and Waters therefore dismantle the binary opposition which situated women "on the 'feminine' side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, thus differentiating themselves from men's 'masculine' side of reason, discourse, culture and mind" (Zhang: 26). Both protagonists indeed confront men's authorship over rational control and the access to writing.

By allowing a former servant and a spinster to share their experience, both authors do place their novels as neo-Victorian works: these are the accounts of forgotten and unheard figures from male oriented history and literature and they prove that those women's voices are as legitimate as men's.

If as Gilbert and Gubar affirms "A literary text is not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh" (6), then surely the protagonists end their story with more authority that they previously had. However, can those women really be empowered by imitating codes that do not fully correspond to them? It seems that their narrative is not entirely their own but are rather still influenced by male mediators and male conventions.

In *Affinity*, Margaret ultimately fails to maintain a self-contained form of writing: when Selina asked her if she even mentioned her in her diary "I wonder, Miss Prior, if you ever, when you are writing in your diary, write this name [Selina's] there?", Margaret is "struck with the thought of how often [she] *ha*[s] written of her" (Waters: 112). Though she wanted to impartially analyse her visits to the prison, it turns out that the medium has pervaded her text. The protagonist later has to recognize that her diary has become a record of her growing obsession for Selina, thereby repeating the fate of her previous journal:

> I remembered that comment of Arthur's, that women's books could only ever be *journals of the heart*. I think I thought that, in making my trips to Millbank, in writing of them here, I would somehow disprove or spite him. I thought that I could make my life into a book that had no life or love in it – a book that was only a catalogue, a kind of list. Now I can see that my heart has crept across these pages, after all. (241)

Margaret finds that she cannot keep a rigid and austere diary: she cannot compartmentalize her emotions and distance herself from what she feels. Even though she wanted to prove herself and her family wrong, she must come to terms with the fact that this aseptic form of writing makes no sense to her. By taking her father as a model, Margaret is confining her work within male conventions: her diary thus stands in the shadow of her dead father's books. Margaret's dream to resemble her father vanishes as she stares at herself in his mirror, "looking for him in it", but she must admit that "there was only myself" (202). According to Virginia Woolf's writings, the curse of the woman writer is that she is trapped within a double bind: "she had to choose between admitting she was 'only a woman' or protesting that she was 'as good as a man'" (Gilbert and Gubar: 64): Margaret must abandon the idea of gaining power through authorship and confess that, to everyone and herself included, she is no great writer, something that was foreshadowed by her mother: "You are not Mrs Browning, Margaret—as much as you would like to be. You are not, in fact, Mrs Anybody. You are only *Miss Prior*" (252-253).

The protagonist ends up destroying her diary:

> This is the last page I shall write. All my book is burned now, I have built a fire in the grate and set the pages on it, and when this sheet is filled with staggering lines it shall be added to the others. (348)

Margaret setting her own written record on fire represents women's self-burial in patriarchal society. There seems to be no space available, not spatial nor textual, for the protagonist to express herself freely: her work is destined to remain concealed and Margaret is complicit in silencing her past, as Marie-Luise Kholke points out: "she replicates the very writing-out of women […] from patriarchal history that she initially seemed to contest" (Kholke quoted by Brindle: 83). The ending reflects how women's stories were erased from public history and how they were trained to censor themselves.

Something comparable happens towards the end of *Alias Grace*: as much as Grace wants to believe that she can become the subject of her own story through Jordan's report, she has to

come to terms with the fact that her fate lies in someone else's hands. When Jordan suddenly leaves Toronto, Grace gets a guardian to send him a letter on her part in which she wants to make sure that he will publish a favourable report:

> You were to write a letter to the Government on my behalf, to set me free, and I was afraid that now you would never do so. There is nothing so discouraging as hopes raised and then dashed again, it is almost worse than not having the hopes raised in the first place.
>
> I do very much hope you will be able to write the letter in my favour, which I would be very thankful for. (Atwood: 489)

Her testimony can only reach a broader audience and leave the private sphere because of a man's influence: like Margaret Prior, Grace Marks is prevented to share her experience by herself.

It thus appears that even though Atwood's and Waters' protagonists manage to gain some power by taking on male codes, these latter turn out to be more enclosing than liberating. Nevertheless, the situation changes when *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* reach their climax with the intervention of the occult. The last chapter of this work will demonstrate how mesmerism and hypnotism in *Alias Grace* and spiritualism in *Affinity* switch the power dynamics between genres and how the figure of the spectral double further challenges the long-standing patriarchal definition of women as silent, submissive and irrational beings.

Chapter III: Aspiring Towards a New Type of Womanhood: The Intervention of the Occult and the Figure of the Spectral Double

The occult does play an essential role in both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity*, not only as a plot device that allows the protagonists to escape from prison, but also as a way for the female characters to further challenge the notion of womanhood. It would be useful to ponder on the origins of these (pseudo) sciences that appear in Atwood's and Waters' novels, i.e. mesmerism, hypnotism and spiritualism, in order to understand their importance in the stories.

The Rise of the Occult During the Victorian Period

The late eighteenth century in Europe and in the United States saw the emergence of a new interest in the supernatural, which generated practices such as mesmerism, spiritualism, hypnotism, healing therapies, fortune telling or palm reading as Arias Doblas describes (in "Talking with the Dead": 88). Mesmerism was created in 1779 by the Viennese doctor Franz Anton Mesmer: he claimed that all things and beings in the universe were surrounded by a magnetic field or fluid and that the manipulation of this field/fluid could have therapeutic benefits. This procedure would involve a mesmeric operator, more often than not a man, and a subject, usually a woman. The mesmerist would apply magnets to different parts of the patient's body as he would perform magnetic passes over her. The specialist would talk to his patient and guide her into falling in a state of mesmeric trance: the subject would thus lose control of her physical senses and gain other visionary powers. This procedure would often provoke some sort of crisis in the patient: she could fall in a state of panic, burst into laughter or tears, suffer from convulsions or even become violent. At the end of the séances, the operator would wake the subject from her trance (Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 88). The Scottish doctor James Braid was not fully convinced of the efficiency of this practice and introduced some new techniques, he then changed the name from "mesmerism" into "hypnotism". This latter method gradually suppressed mesmerism and entered the respectable fields of psychology and mental sciences (Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 89).

Spiritualism is another practice that appeared mid nineteenth century and that rapidly predominated over mesmerism: unlike the former method, here a woman would take the role of the medium and would communicate directly with the other world. The Fox sisters are said to have begun the movement in 1848 in the United States (Lotha): the sisters lived in a farm in Rochester, New York and claimed that they could communicate with the spirit that was haunting

their house. They became a sensation and were soon publicized widely. Spiritualism then spread to England and Europe where it was very popular until the end of the century (Pimple: 76). The mediums would meet sitters in a private room and deliver them messages from deceased loved ones to bring them comfort. This method would include different techniques to enter in contact with spirits, from "table-rapping, through automatic writing where the medium held the pen and the spirit supposedly guided it, to the spirit speaking through the body of the medium" (Rowland quoted by Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 90). By the 1870s, mediums even became capable of fully materialising spirits, and not just through the voice or automatic writing: this discovery was considered the apogee of spiritualism. The operators that trained to do so would use a cabinet in which they would be tied down to maintain the necessary conditions for the production of the spectral forms. This way, spirits would be able to "[make] an appearance at séances and [walk] about the room in full view of all those present" (Owen: 42). The most famous female spiritualist at that time was Florence Cook who had the power to conjure the spirit of a certain Katie King in her séances.

It might seem quite curious that such an interest in the occult and the spiritual would appear at a time when rationality prevailed. This is linked to the emergence of the gothic genre in the same period, as the introduction of this paper already referred to: this revival of former beliefs affected different areas of life, not only literature but science as well. Practices like mesmerism and spiritualism appeared in societies in which logical deduction was progressively replacing the religious fantasy as Max Weber described in his theory on the "disenchantment of the world". The fact that scientific progress would coexist with a revived interest in the occult seems contradictory considering that those occult sciences claimed that they could provide empirical evidence of the afterlife and asserted that communication with the dead was in fact possible. This contradicted the scientific discoveries that were made at that time. The occult has since been understood as a solution to the loss of faith that occurred in the Victorian period, a loss caused by the technological changes of the era (Pimple: 95). Practices such as spiritualism "seemed what a religion should be" (Dickerson: 252) in assuring an "antidote to the pessimism of the scientific materialism of the time" (Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 164). There was a need of spiritual knowledge to compensate the rapid advances of physical science.

The medical field did no look at the apparition of such "sciences" with a favourable eye: they considered these new activities of research as threats to their own practice as Arias Doblas explains: "These men believed their own materialist scientific culture was under attack" (in

"Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 162), more so when eminent members of the medical field showed sympathy to the spiritualist cause. It was argued that "human progress should leave religion and metaphysics behind" and the reputation of mediums was rapidly dismantled (Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 168). These new sciences were not thought to be serious enough, their arguments were judged too weak, and the practitioners were even called charlatans. Accusations of frauds quickly appeared, and many spectral apparitions were proven to be false: some mediums would indeed "go to great and fraudulent lengths to convincingly demonstrate otherworldly communication", from making the furniture rattle to engaging actors to create "fake ghostly materialisations" (Hall: 2). As a matter of fact, most of these methods are nowadays considered as pseudo sciences.

Leaving their facticity aside, it does seem that those practices had a purpose: they were not so much about contacting the hereafter but rather about liberating certain feelings. Spiritualism in particular, with the private and sensational atmosphere of the séances, gave the Victorian middle class "a chance to act out inner fantasies and disregard some of the social moral restraints under which they normally lived" (Hall: 2). The Victorian period was indeed marked by its strict gender politics with the two spheres theory previously explained which implied a hypocrite relationship with sexuality. It was a society of double standards with a male need of sexual activity with their wives whereas women were believed exempted from those urges: a conception of sexuality that did not align with the reality of Victorian society that included female desires, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution, homosexuality, etc (Steinbach).

Besides the reputation of mesmerism and spiritualism, what is interesting to note when considering those practices is the role given to women and the space provided to them to express their sexuality: female nature, characterised by the male medical discourse by its "passivity, receptiveness and lack of reason" (Byatt quoted by Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 89), made women prone to enter in contact with spirits. Those qualities meant that the female body was a favourable ground for ghostly manifestations. This association between women and the supernatural corresponds to the binary opposition that this paper has already mentioned: men are associated with rationality and therefore science, whereas women with their mentally instable characters connect with the occult. Ironically, those qualities which were weaknesses for the medical field turned out to be strengths for the female mediums since they would use these stereotypes to their benefit to gain some liberty (Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 169).

Though mesmerism implies female subjects directed by male operators, there were still possibilities for women to manipulate the séances in their favour and this is what *Alias Grace* suggests as the following pages shall make clear. They had an active role as operators and were in charge of the séances: they could ask questions freely, give orders, etc (Klonowska: 174). What can explain the popularity of spiritualism over mesmerism during the Victorian age is precisely the number of women who worked as mediums: it was one of the only professions available to lower- and middle-class women during the second half of the nineteenth century (Klonowska: 174). Indeed, the registers indicate that female mediums outnumbered their male counterparts. This profession became popular among women since it provided them with financial independency as well as a status improvement and a form of liberation.

Furthermore, the female medium would often "assume a male role and sometimes also a trance persona whose behaviour would be at odds with the Victorian idea of respectable womanhood" (Owen: 11): she would make fun of the sitters, she could use a direct and crude language, she could try to touch the people in the room, etc: in short, the female medium was free to do whatever she wanted. The operator could use the spiritual possession as an excuse for her behaviour as Arias Doblas explains: the medium would "relinquish control of her own self, because she claimed to be under the control of a spirit" (in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 169). Far from the passive, submissive and mute angels of Victorian womanhood, women therefore transgressed the strict societal codes and questioned the right of men's authority over them. The séances would "facilitate the expression of the inexpressible, and constituted a space within which silence could be broken" as Owen explains (144), which brought to the surface other taboo subjects, such as homosexuality. The sessions could indeed involve homosexual experiences with female mediums using their male persona to kiss and caress female sitters. This practice thus goes against the conception of the perfect Victorian woman, who was by essence heterosexual and whose sexuality was solely child-oriented. This aspect of female sexuality is also touched upon in *Affinity* as this chapter will demonstrate.

Margaret Atwood and Sarah Waters both seem conscious of the potential that mesmerism, hypnotism and spiritualism hold for women. Both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* focus on how the communication with spirits and more precisely the production of spectral doubles can help the expression of closeted desires or thoughts and how these practices supply "a space to reconsider ideas about gender, race and class" (Tromp: 46).

The Occult as a Means to Escape from the Literal Prison

It is interesting to note how Grace Marks and Selina Dawes use the occult as ways to convince the people around them of their innocence: for the two protagonists, taking on the role of the medium and possessing the ability to communicate with spirits have a decisive impact on their fates. Both novels imply that there is a high probability that practices such as mesmerism, hypnotism or spiritualism are fraudulent and that the séances are actually performances during which the protagonists manipulate their audience to get free.

Hypnotism has an important role in *Alias Grace*. This practice is a successor of mesmerism, as seen previously, which did not grant women the same involvement as spiritualism did: women were not directly in control of the sessions but were rather under the influence of a male operators who would interview them. However, it does seem that Grace uses this hypnosis session to her own advantage and thereby gains a certain degree of agency.

After Jordan has begun his interviews with Grace, another doctor presents himself at the house of the Governor: a certain Jerome DuPont who came from New-York and who has heard about Grace's case and would like to test his method on her. He calls himself "a trained Neuro-hypnotist, of the school of James Braid" (Atwood: 95) and would like to make a demonstration of his remarkable powers by interrogating the young woman. DuPont hopes that hypnotizing Grace could clarify what happened at Richmond Hill and determinate whether she suffers from amnesia or whether she has been lying all along about the murders. Even though Jordan is not convinced by his proposition, he allows DuPont to meet her. Many of Grace's supporters believe that this hypnosis session will finally clear her name, such as the Governor's wife who tells Grace that "she was glad to find [her] in a co-operative state of mind, and she had the greatest faith in [her] and was sure [Grace] would be found innocent" (444).

During the experiment, DuPont makes Grace enter into a trance and asks her to remember the day of the massacre. Grace progressively changes behaviour and does not seem like her normal self: she becomes arrogant and provoking and explains that she did try to seduce McDermott and Mr Kinnear. It is eventually revealed that Mary Whitney's spirit entered Grace's body after she died and that she controlled her friend's actions, which resulted in the killing of Nancy Montgomery and Mr Kinnear. Many people in the room are convinced by Grace's revelations and believe that DuPont's experiment proves Grace's innocence. Even Dr Jordan who was sceptical at first begins to consider that Grace might suffer from split

personality and must admit that "if Dr. DuPont's premise is accepted, Grace Marks is exonerated" (472). This session will indeed play a major part in her liberation years later.

What Dr Jordan and the audience of this meeting do not know is that Grace actually knows Jerome Dupont from before: they met at Mrs Alderman Parkinson's house when he was still a peddler selling articles of haberdashery to servants. Grace and Jeremiah, as he was then called, became friends and met again on different occasions. At first, it might seem unclear whether Grace's confessions were genuine or whether her trance was a contrived act but there is a series of elements in the novel that indicate that Jeremiah and Grace did organize this performance in order to liberate her.

To begin with, what strikes Grace when she first meets Jeremiah is his capacity to act: "he did an imitation of a gentleman, with the voice and manners and all, at which we clapped our hands with joy, it was so lifelike" (179). She also admires his magic tricks that he learned when he worked at fairs. Jeremiah rapidly establishes a kinship between him and Grace which puzzles her: "But then he said the strangest thing of all to me. He said, You are one of us. […] I was left wondering what he'd meant […] for I couldn't imagine what he might have had in mind" (179). He could be referring to their similar capacity to pretend and to do whatever is necessary to pull through.

After Marry Whitney has died, Jeremiah is the only friend she can count on, the only one to care about her situation. When she begins working at Richmond Hill, he helps Grace get rid of a drunken man who is trying to abuse her in an inn. He then tells her that he worries about her and, though she tries to keep up appearances, Jeremiah guesses what is happening between Mr Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery. Grace is surprised that he would be aware of such things and it seems to her that Jeremiah can read people's thoughts:

> regarding me with his bright and shining eyes. He had eyes like blackberries, and the air of being able to see more than most could; and I could tell he was trying to look into my mind; but in a kindly way. For I believe he always had a regard for me. (307)

Grace confides in him and admits that his friend is "a great man for divining what was meant, even when not spoken out loud" (308).

When they meet again at Richmond Hill, Jeremiah tells her that he does not pay the customs duties on his goods and that he is not afraid of being caught because as he explains: "Laws are made to be broken […] A man with any spirit in him likes a challenge, and to outwit others" (309). Grace is once again made aware of the ease with which her friend can manipulate people. He later tells her that he is considering leaving his business aside because he is no longer earning as much and that he is thinking about working in fairs again:

> I could go about the fairs, he said, and be a fire-eater, or else a medical clairvoyant, and trade Mesmerism and Magnetism […] I was in partnership with a woman who knew the business, as the thing generally worked in couples; I was the one who made the passes and also took in the money; and she was the one to have a muslin veil put over her, and go into a trance, and speak in a hollow voice, and tell people what was wrong with them, for a fee of course. (309-310)

Jeremiah then offers Grace to join him and to become his assistant:

> You could travel with me, he said. You could be a medical clairvoyant; I would teach you how, and instruct you in what to say, and put you into the trances. I know […] that you have a talent for it; and with your hair down you would have the right look. (311)

He tries to convince her by saying that she could make a lot of money from this job and that it would save her from the dangers that surround her in this house (312).

When Grace meets Dr DuPont in the Governor's house, she immediately recognizes him but understands that she must remain quiet as he

> laid his forefinger alongside his nose, as if scratching it; which I don't believe anyone saw, as they were all looking at me; by which gesture of his I knew that I was to button my lip, and not say anything, or give him away. (354)

He then makes her understand that it is in her best interest to accept being hypnotized: "And he gave my chin a little squeeze, and moved his eyes up and down very quickly, to signal to me that I should say yes" (355). Even before the hypnosis session, she compares his appearance to a magic trick and is confident that he will help her one way or another under everyone else's nose:

> As for me, I could have laughed with glee; for Jeremiah had done a conjuring trick, as surely as if he'd pulled a coin from my ear, or made believe to swallow a fork; and just as he used to do such tricks in full view, with everyone looking on but unable to detect him, he had done the same here, and made a pact with me under their very eyes, and they were none the wiser. (356)

After the hypnosis session is over and Jordan has fled the town being unable to write his report, Grace writes to Jeremiah, who also began to work elsewhere, to tell him how things have been for her. She tells her friend that she did not try to contact him while he was still in Kingston because "it might have resulted in difficulties if discovered" (492): once again, she emphasizes the importance of their relationship being kept secret. In her letter, she also ponders on a button she received in prison and believes Jeremiah must have sent it to her since she has bought buttons from him in the past:

> I felt it must be you, to let me know I was not altogether forgotten. Perhaps there was another message in it also, as a button is for keeping things closed up, or else for opening them; and you may have been telling me to keep silent, about certain things we both know of. (496)

Grace acknowledges the importance of them keeping each other's secrets: "I know my secrets are safe with Jeremiah, as his are safe with me" (530). The reader also learns in this letter that Jeremiah has changed profession many times: he went from a neuro-hypnotist to a ventriloquist, to a mind-reader and medium.

Although Grace doubts at first about Jeremiah's powers and is unsure whether or not she will be put into a trance ("But then I recalled that he'd once travelled about as a Mesmerist, and done medical clairvoyance at fairs, and really did know the arts of such things, and might put me into a trance" (356)), she never overtly admits that she was indeed hypnotized or if all of it was planned with Jeremiah's help. However, taking into account the many evidences the text provides about Jeremiah's personality and his past, it seems clear that him and Grace organized this session. Even though DuPont claims that his practice has nothing with mesmerism ("This is a fully scientific procedure […] Please banish all thoughts of Mesmerism, and other such fraudulent procedures" (460)), or spiritualism ("This is not a séance!" (463)), it appears evident that it was an act and that Jeremiah himself does not believe in those practices.

Such pseudo sciences and the occult do have the power to deceive the public opinion which will lead to Grace's liberation.

Likewise, in *Affinity*, the occult also allows the main protagonist to escape. The novel is composed of different fragments from Margaret's and Selina's diaries in which the reader learns about spiritualism. Several elements in both diaries suggest that Selina's powers might be real.

Selina begins by offering consultations in a hotel occupied by other mediums: she claims that she is capable of contacting supernatural beings and that she does so to help people cure their illnesses caused by those entities or to receive messages to help the spirits' relatives grieve. Even when the weather prevents sitters from coming to their sessions, the mediums still try to call spirits: "We tried till 9 o'clock last night, but no spirit coming, we finally put up the lights" (Waters: 92). Mrs Brink sees Selina in one of her dreams and is convinced that Selina, unlike the many "crooks" she has consulted in the past (155), will be the one able to communicate with her dead mother. The medium reveals that she is also able to materialise a spirit called Peter Quick and, in the hope of helping even more people with her talents, she organizes séances with more participants. During those sessions, Peter insists that people should stop discrediting spiritualism: "there are disbelievers in this city, people that doubt the existence of spirits. They mock the powers of our media, they think our media leave their places & walk about the circles in disguise" (231). To further prove the spirit's existence, Selina ties herself down inside her cabinet. However, Selina's time as a medium stops when she meets Madeleine Silvester during a private séance: the young lady faints at the sight of the ghost and Mrs Brink has a heart attack when she enters the room. It is said that Selina provoked Mrs Brink's death and hurt Mrs Silvester. However, Selina has always claimed her innocence, saying that it was Peter who frightened them both: "Only a silly girl, who saw a spirit and was frightened by it; and a lady who was frightened by the girl, and died. And I was blamed, for all of it" (84).

When Margaret first visits Selina, she is sceptic of her capacities but she grows to believe that the medium is indeed guiltfree. Margaret also meets different people from a spiritualist library who are also convinced of her innocence, such as Mr Hither who claims that: "'The law has us as "rogues and vagabonds",' he said. 'We are meant to practise "palmistry and other subtle crafts". What was it Miss Dawes was charged with? Assault, was it — and fraud? What *calumny*!'" (132). Another lady who attended Selina's séances asserts that she is truly capable of communicating with spirits (150).

In Selina's diary entries, the reader has the possibility to learn about spiritualism from the medium's perspective and, even in her diary, she never makes it clear whether or not she is simulating those spectral apparitions. Nevertheless, some elements indicate that there are reasons to doubt her sincerity. Quite early on, Selina incorporates in her diary a list of "Common Questions and their Answers on the Matter of the Spheres" with advices on how to simulate supernatural events, such as keeping a flower from fading or making an object luminous (74). Although Selina later tells Margaret that she never used such tricks with Peter Quick, this casts doubt. Even though Selina has always refused her sitters' and Mrs Brink's money, she did accept their gifts. Moreover, the organization of the séances themselves are quite suspicious: Selina choses a room with an alcove and a door to the exterior. She forces her sitters to sing before and after the apparitions and only performs in a dim light not to hurt the spirits. Those elements, as well as the relationship that Selina and Ruth share, give the reader reasons to disbelieve them both.

However, it is in Margaret's diary that the reader finally learns the truth: the final pages reveal that Peter's apparitions were fabrications. Selina would take advantage of young mentally instable ladies with her accomplice Ruth Vigers and take their money. Margaret fails to see the evidences that could prevent her from falling in Selina's trap and succumb to the medium's charms. With the help of Ruth as an insider in Margaret's house, Selina manipulates Margaret into making her believe that they could escape together to Italy and Margaret has to prepare everything for their departure. Meanwhile, Selina convinces a matron that she could enter in contact with her late son and manipulates her into releasing her.

Like Margaret Atwood, Sarah Waters choses an ambiguous ending: although the end of the novel makes it clear that Peter Quick was fake and that it was Ruth all along, the reader can still wonder whether Selina's powers were a lie or not. Some elements previously mentioned do leave space for doubt, as Margaret concedes when she asks if Selina will feel their connection snap when she commits suicide, still believing the medium has superior powers: "you have the last thread of my heart. I wonder: when the thread grows slack, will you feel it?" (351).

Both *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* suggest that the occult and practices such as mesmerism, hypnotism and spiritualism offer women a financial independence and allow them to break free, not only from their physical prison but also from the cultural one.

The Occult as a Means to Escape from the Cultural Prison: The Role of the Spectral Double

The occult indeed leads to a liberation from cultural norms for Grace Marks and Selina Dawes: by becoming mediums, the two protagonists conjure spirits that act as their asserted selves and that are allowed to accomplish what those women were unable to do in real life and to voice concerns that both convicts were forced to keep silent. Throughout the novels, the protagonists use those spectral forms to question gender politics but also to denounce the different abuses and traumas that they have suffered from as well as to express their (sexual) desires.

In Atwood's *Alias Grace*, the protagonist's friend Mary Whitney becomes her double. After Mary has died due to the aftermath of an abortion, Grace is so shocked that she cannot realise that Mary is actually gone:

> And she looked at both of us very hard, and we curtsied. And all the time Mary was there on the bed, listening to us, and hearing about our plans to tell these lies about her; and I thought, She will not be easy in her mind about it. (Atwood: 206)

It is as if was Grace was still able to communicate with her and she was predicting her friend's reactions to the situation. Some time later, Grace believes that she hears Mary calling her and asking her to open the window:

> And then I heard her voice, as clear as anything, right in my ear, saying *Let me in.* I was quite startled, and looked hard at Mary, who by that time was lying on the floor, as we were making the bed. But she gave no sign of having said anything; and her eyes were still open, and staring up at the ceiling.
>
> Then I thought with a rush of fear, But I did not open the window. And I ran across the room and opened it, because I must have heard wrong and she was saying *Let me out*. (207)

Grace's fear regarding the need to open a window originates from her mother's death: when she passed away on the boat to come to Canada, the protagonist was told that it was a custom to open a window to allow a deceased person's soul to fly away.

Grace's lapses of memory begin immediately after Mary's passing away: Grace has her first faint and when she wakes up, she is confused about her own identity:

> when I did wake up I did not seem to know where I was, or what had happened; and I kept asking where Grace had gone. And when they told me that I myself was Grace, I would not believe them, but cried, and tried to run out of the house, because I said that Grace was lost, and had gone into the lake, and I needed to search for her. (208)

It is eventually revealed during the hypnosis session that this was the moment when Mary gained control over Grace. Because she did not open the window fast enough, her friend's soul could not get out and instead crawled inside Grace's body and later committed the murders of Nancy and Mr Kinnear:

> 'I was there all along!'
>
> 'There?' says DuPont.
>
> 'Here! With Grace, where I am now. [...] But Grace doesn't know, she's never known! [...] I only borrowed her clothing for a time [...] Her earthly shell'". (468)

There are several evidences throughout Grace's interviews with Dr Jordan that permit the reader to catch a glimpse of Mary's presence: Grace indeed keeps embodying Mary Whitney throughout the novel. For example, the protagonists interestingly enough choses her friend's name to sign her confessions, as Jordan points out: "It is written underneath your portrait, he says. At the front of your Confession. *Grace Marks, Alias Mary Whitney*" (117). Grace subsequently acknowledges that "without her, it would have been a different story entirely" (117): indeed, Grace would have never been imprisoned for murders if she had never known Marry Whitney. Grace also keeps on repeating that she had a hard time accepting her friend's death:

> It was very hard for me to believe that Mary was truly dead. I kept expecting her to come into the room, and when I lay in my bed at night I sometimes thought I could hear her breathing; or she would be laughing just outside the door. (229)

Grace feels her presence as if Mary had never really left her side.

Moreover, the main character keeps on using Mary's expressions and ways of speaking during her interviews with Dr Jordan and it sometimes seems that Grace is not simply repeating what her friend told her in the past but she is rather attributing to her friend new expressions

and conversations Grace herself is inventing: for example, when she tells Jordan how she dealt with Mc Dermott's advances: "I said that if he wanted someone who wouldn't answer back, why didn't he go out to the barn and make love to the cow, which is the kind of thing Mary Whitney would have said, or so I told myself" (306). These elements do point out to the fact that Grace has the ability to permutate with Mary.

By assuming Mary's identity, the protagonist takes hold of her double's characteristics and gains her assertiveness, which allows her to express hidden thoughts and repressed impulses. Mary is indeed a character that goes against the conventions of Victorian womanhood: she does not correspond to the mute, submissive and self-erased ideal woman of the time. Though she is hardworking and she respects her elders, Mary expresses herself when she has the possibility. She is often quite crude, even brash and cocky at times, which shocks Grace at first:

> Mary was a fun-loving girl, and very mischievous and bold in her speech [...] I was often astonished at the words that came out of her mouth, as many of them were quite coarse; it wasn't that I'd never heard such language before [...] but I was surprised to hear it from a girl, and one so young and pretty, and so neatly and cleanly dressed. (173)

Several examples of Mary's way of speaking can be found in Grace's narration which is punctuated by remarks Mary Whitney said or could have said, such as her friend's way of explaining why a lady cannot sit in a chair a gentleman has just left "Because, you silly goose, it's still warm from his bum; which is a coarse thing to say" (23) or when Grace tells Jordan about the doctor who attended her sick mother and who turned out to be "of no more use – if you'll excuse me, Sir – than tits on a rooster, as Mary Whitney liked to say" (138). "Mary's discourse, vulgarity and obscenity defy good manners" as Tamara Arthur states (66) and this aspect is not the only one which makes her an atypical Victorian woman.

Mary consistently encourages Grace and reminds her how valuable she is: "When I would make a mistake and become anxious about it, Mary would comfort me and say I should not take things so seriously, and if you never made a mistake you would never learn" (181). She teaches the protagonist not to let herself be trampled on by colleagues or employers and that Grace should "remember that [they] were not slaves, and being a servant was not a thing [they] were born to, nor would [they] be forced to continue at it forever; it was just a job of work" (182).

Grace also learns to distrust her employers and the upper classes in general because of Mary's influence. Mary claims that they are incompetent and that they cannot care for themselves:

> They were feeble and ignorant creatures, although rich, and most of them could not light a fire if their toes were freezing off, because they didn't know how, and it was a wonder they could blow their own noses or wipe their own backsides, they were by their nature as useless as a prick on a priest - if you'll excuse me, Sir, but that was how she put it. (182).

The protagonist's friend also points to the arrogance of the upper-class members who inherently despise the working-class and like to think themselves better than their employees: "lady or lady's maid, they both piss and it smells the same, and not like lilacs neither, as Mary used to say" (251). Mary notes in fact that they are equally as flawed but they hate being made aware of their resemblance with the lower classes: "the thing these people hated the most was to be reminded that they too had bodies and that their shit stank as much as anyone's, if not worse" (183). Grace is advised to beware of appearances given that the upper-classes are as dishonest and hypocritical as working-class members can be and they are capable to go to great extent to hide their faults: "People dressed in a certain kind are never wrong. [...] Mary Whitney used to say that" (36).

Mary also instructs Grace to question men's authority in particular and to look out for their abuses. When Grace first tells her friend about her family situation, Mary encourages her to revolt against her father's manipulation:

> She said I should not give him my money as he had not worked for it, and it would not benefit my sisters and brothers, as he would spend all on himself and most likely on the drink. I said I was afraid of him, and she said he could not get at me here, and if he tried, she would speak to Jim in the stables, who was a large man with friends. And I began to feel easier. (172)

When Grace's father finally comes to fetch her money, Mary does indeed help her friend get rid of him. Not only does Mary inform Grace of the economic pressure men can have on women, she mostly alerts her to their false promises and the potential physical attacks on women, and especially coming from members of the upper classes:

> the worst ones are the gentlemen, who think they are entitled to anything they want; and when you go out to the privy at night, they're drunk then, they lie in wait for you and then it is snatch and grab, there's no reasoning with them, and if you must, you should give them a kick between the legs [...] they'll try promising things [...] and if there's a ring, there must be a parson to go with it. (190)

She indeed warns her friend that many masters find it normal to have this kind of relationship with their servants ("As Mary used to say, there are some of the masters who think you owe them service twenty-four hours a day, and should do the main work flat on your back" (231)), but that Grace should avoid it at all cost.

These elements prove that Mary Whitney represents an unusual type of femininity and that she defies most norms of the Victorian conception of the female genre. Therefore, by becoming Mary's double, Grace Marks takes on her friend's personality and transforms into a transgressive character as well.

To begin with, by using Mary's voice during the revelation scene, Grace allows herself to copy Mary's attitude: during the hypnosis session, the protagonist laughs, sings, moans, shouts, she also mocks the people around her, is vulgar and interrupts the men in the room. As Arthur declares about the main character: she "moves away from conventional conversation and towards the vulgar. She sidesteps the rules that regulates proper speech by speaking in the voice of Mary" (65). Grace lets go of the conventions that would force her to repress those thoughts and stay silent. Instead, the "crude and to-the-point dialogue emerges in the guise of Mary's" (Arthur: 65) and gives Grace the power of expression she craves for, though she is not supposed to speak in such frank manner.

Then, by taking on Mary's assertiveness and by letting Mary killing her employers, Grace also responds to the different humiliations and ill-treatment Nancy and Kinnear have caused her. Mary's possession of the protagonist's body led to the exposure of internalized class tensions and it gave Grace the opportunity to take revenge over her own abuser (a passage from her confessions allows the reader to think that Mr Kinnear tried or did indeed abuse her).

Most importantly, this spectral double allows Grace to make justice for her friend and simultaneously grants Mary to come back from the dead to avenge herself. What is emphasized with Mary's death and her return as a ghost are the injustices regarding female sexuality and the fact that having sexual relationships outside marriage during the Victorian period supposed

a double standard depending on gender: women had to take the whole responsibility and deal with the possible consequences. Indeed, their reputation could be greatly affected, they could lose their job, and if they were to have children due to these relations, then they had to decide what to do with them, which involved other menaces such as death during childbirth. Men on the opposite were not preoccupied with such matters most of the time, all the more if they belong to an upper class.

Grace embodying her friend lifts the veil over her silenced death. Mary passed away in her bed with her bedcovers and the bottom of her nightdress covered in blood, the cause of her death thus seems obvious. The rest of the household consider it so shameful that it must be censored: this is indeed what their employer's reaction suggests when she enters the room: "she did not look sad, she looked angry, and also disgusted, as if she could smell a bad smell" (205). Grace is then asked to be silent about Mary's cause of death: "we will not say what Mary died of. [...] That will be best for all" (206). Though they all try to hide her passing away, Grace believes everyone understands what really happened: "the way in which Mary died was hushed up as much as possible. That she had died of a fever may or may not have been believed, but nobody said no to it out loud" (228). "Servants, staff and family alike deny the underlying sexual associations of her death", as Amelia Defalco notes, because her disappearance implies that she possessed some guilty knowledge (777). Her body is consequently quickly tidied, making sure to erase any evidence of what could denote sexual transgression. Her corpse is seen as something abject and it serves as a warning for Grace against giving in to her impulses as the prisoner remarks: "you should be careful about saying what you want or even wanting anything, as you may be punished for it. This is what happened to Mary Whitney" (113).

For the man responsible for Mary' pregnancy, the situation is very different considering that he is not burdened with the outcome of what he did according to the protagonist:

> Whoever he is, he is still alive and well, and most likely enjoying his breakfast at this very moment, and not having any thoughts in his head about poor Mary, no more than if she was a carcass hung up at the butcher's. (207)

He is even more protected because he remains anonymous. Grace's employer asks her not to reveal the gentleman's name (Grace hints that her employers' son might be the culprit) and when Grace tells her employer that she does not know who the gentleman might be, "she [Grace's employer] asked [her] to swear on the Bible that even if [she] did, [she] would never

divulge it, and she would write [Grace] a good reference" (230): her employer uses blackmail to make sure the gentleman's identity will be preserved.

Nancy Montgomery is also punished for her relationship with her master and the resulting pregnancy since she is destined to a tragic fate as well, as Grace alludes to:

> I wished Nancy no harm, and did not want her cast out [...] but all the same it would not be fair and just that she should end up a respectable married lady with a ring on her finger, and rich into the bargain. It would not be right at all. Mary Whitney had done the same as her, and had gone to her death. Why should the one be rewarded and the other punished, for the same sin? (321)

Nancy and Mary are both sexually compromised women with tragic outcomes: Grace laments the fact that responsibility always falls on women and that both Mary and Nancy, as intelligent as they were, could not avoid their fates: "I had a rage in my heart for many years, against Mary Whitney, and especially against Nancy Montgomery; against the two of them both, for letting themselves be done death on the way that they did" (531-532).

The use of a spectral double in *Alias Grace* could gain even more meaning in a Freudian reading: Mary's reappearance as a ghost could indeed be linked to the "uncanny", a concept that the scientist has described in his work "Das Unheimliche", published in 1919. The uncanny is the chilling return of the repressed, of that which "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud translated by J. and A. Strachey: 217). It is what generates fear because it feels strange yet known at the same time: it is what has been kept secret and hidden but has come to light (Wallace: 59).

In Atwood's novel, what appears to be concealed are different tensions and elements of discomfort regarding gender roles, more precisely female desire and extra marital relationships, but also sexual abuses and traumas, as well as discriminations against women. The existence of such things went against the Victorian puritanism and were kept out of sight. Mary Whitney and Nancy Montgomery thus defy the rules with their excessive and transgressive knowledge of sexuality and their consequent pregnancy: they fail to repress themselves appropriately and threaten to bring this secret to the surface (Defalco: 777). Both characters are therefore destined to die, as Defalco observes about Mary: "it is [her] excessive knowledge that annihilates her bodily presence" (776). The fact that the servant's death occurs in the chapter intitled "Secret drawer" seems significant for that matter: Mary has indeed become a part of what should be

kept hidden, an embarrassing fact to mention. These two characters' deaths prove that women who allow themselves to have relationships are punished by society and that desire ultimately holds dangers for women. Mary's eventual reappearance in the spectral form is therefore the resurgence of what had been repressed.

The uncanny in *Alias Grace* is indeed "an experience of haunting" (Defalco: 774) with the emergence of a spectral double that takes revenge on a man who had a mistress, who abused several women and made a woman pregnant but was not held accountable. When she was still alive, Mary voiced her concern for men's lack of responsibility in such situations. She reflects that Eve's real curse was not the menstruations and the pain that they induced, but rather the fact that "Eve was having to put up with the nonsense of Adam, who as soon as there was any trouble, blamed it all on her" (Atwood:190). Similarly, Grace explains that she blames the doctor who operated Mary as well as the men who seduced her for her death:

> it is my true belief that it was the doctor that killed her with his knife; him and the gentleman between them. For it is not always the one that strikes the blow, that is the actual murderer; and Mary was done to death by that unknown gentleman, as surely as if he'd taken the knife and plunged it into her body himself. (206)

Therefore, when Mary murders Mr Kinnear, it is as if she was taking revenge on what happened to her, which is what Grace alludes to during the hypnosis session when she reveals her double identity: "The wages of sin is death. And this time the gentleman died as well, for once. Share and share alike!" (466).

The return of Mary as a spectre also leads to Dr Jordan's decline. Shortly after Jordan has begun interviewing Grace, he begins to have relations with his landlady Rachel Humphrey. Like Mr Kinnear, Jordan succumbs to desire and is indirectly punished for it: although he is not literally killed by Grace, Jordan's obsession with his patient as well as the lack of resolution of the case and his implication with his landlady drive him to enlist at war. When he comes back, Jordan has become mentally instable and, in the same manner as Mary whose death is hidden, Jordan is also silenced. His life is indeed controlled by his mother and he thus disappears as an active subject of his life and he also vanishes from the text considering that his mother controls his correspondence. As Defalco remarks: "Although he does not die physically, Simon Jordan's [...] desires relegates him to a textual limbo" (784): Jordan knows a similar fate as Kinnear, it

is as if he had died. Therefore, by killing Mr Kinnear and causing Dr Jordan's mental illness, Grace Marks and Mary Whitney have taken their revenge.

The double has a similar function in Sarah Waters' *Affinity*: through the spirit of Peter Quick, Ruth and Selina can manipulate the participants of their séances and they have the opportunity to voice the anger and frustration generated by the upper classes. Both women take revenge for years of social inferiority and neglect by playing tricks on their upper-class sitters in order to steal their money. However, it seems that the spectral apparitions primarily serve as strategy to diverge from codes of conventional womanhood: like Grace Marks, the character of Selina Dawes claims a more assertive personality for herself by using her double's voice. Even Margaret can see her change when she conjures Peter: "[Selina] has a way about her—I have noticed it, before to-day—a way of shifting mood, of changing tone, and pose" (Waters: 86). The medium ceases to be the silent, passive and model prisoner she can be when Peter talks through her and gains a more provocative, wayward and saucy disposition. Selina and Ruth carry out a series of transgressive behaviours during the séances: they laugh out loud, shout, walk across the room, move furniture, smoke, drink alcohol, etc. Like Grace Marks, the two women enjoy being more vulgar and giving orders: during a private session with a young lady, Peter tells the sitter that if she wants to become a medium like Selina, she must let herself be commanded by spirits. To prove his point, Peter shows the lady how Selina listens to him and is controlled by him: "'You must ask Will you, you must command her' [...] '*Stand up Miss Dawes*!' & I stood' [...] 'Join your hands, open & shut your eyes, say Amen' & I did all these things". (262)

Peter Quick has a particularly nasty personality and is described as being "rowdy", "mischievous" or "boisterous" repeatedly. He is particularly bad-tempered with male sitters: it seems that Selina and Ruth use spiritualism to respond to men's inappropriate remarks and actions in a way that these women could not in real life. For example, when Peter happens to dislike a man in the circle, he takes the gentleman's hat, puts it on and walks about the room. When the gentleman tells him that he can keep it, Peter answers: "'Now what shall I do with this? Shall I put it in the chamber-pot in Mrs Brink's room?'" (218). This remark causes Margaret to laugh: "I heard that & laughed, they heard me laughing in the circle & I called out 'O! Peter is teasing me!'" (218). This double allows Ruth and Selina to do such actions while distancing themselves from the spirit since Selina is surprised by the ghost's behaviour, or at least she pretends to be. Both women are able to avoid the repercussions of Peter's discourteous behaviour. The hat is eventually destroyed but the gentleman holds it as "if it might be made of

glass. He says he will have it put in a frame as a spiritual trophy" (219): he is apparently convinced of the existence of the spirit and does not question such a transgressive attitude.

There are other examples of the ghost holding men accountable for their behaviours: for example, Peter does not hesitate to respond to men's inappropriate attempts to seduce Selina. During another séance, two newcomers join the circle and exclaim that they did not expect Selina to be so charming:

> When they saw me they made me bows and laughed, one of them taking my hands & saying 'You must think us rude, Miss Dawes. We were told you were handsome, but I was sure you would turn out to be very fat and old.' (345)

Both gentlemen continue flirting with the medium and touch her arms which causes Peter to interrupt them:

> Then Peter grew angry. He said 'I think you have come only to mock my medium. Do you think she has me come across the Borderland only for your sport? Do you think I labour, only to have 2 little flash boys like you laugh at me?' (346)

Peter then proceeds to give the sitters some presents he has brought them, such as flowers and fruits, and when the gentlemen's turn comes, the ghost has another type of surprise for one of them: "Then the gentleman let up a shriek & I heard his chair scrape on the floor. He said 'Damn you, you devil, what have you put on me?' What it proved to be was, a crab" (346). Though the gentleman appeared not to believe in spiritualism, he is are scared of the animal because "feeling its claws moving over him in the darkness, he had thought it was a kind of monster" (346) and both men eventually leave the room. They leave the circle humiliated while the other participants laugh at them and congratulate Peter for his trick: it does seem that the spectral double is used as a device to question male authority in *Affinity*.

As in Margaret Atwood's novel, Sarah Waters' work brings to the surface tensions that the Victorian society would have preferred to keep buried. The motif of the spectral double challenges the conventions of womanhood and manhood, and it especially highlights the existence of female sexual desires and of lesbian desires. As it was said previously, spiritualism was indeed a way for women to carry out their impulses: "the darkness and necessary intimacy of the séance admitted a breach of normative social propriety, including touching, kissing and undressing, allowing for an open transgression of gender norms" (Butterworth: 116). These

types of behaviours mostly appeared during the materialisations of spirits for which mediums would undress themselves to prove they had no tricks up their sleeves and would even encourage sitters to touch and kiss the ghosts to prove its materiality. This was way for the Victorians to reunite and "indulge in inappropriate physical contact without risking public respectability", as Joseph Good notes (108).

The fact that the spectral double holds potential to relieve sexual and more particularly lesbian tensions is particularly represented in Waters' novel. The apparition of Peter Quick allows Selina and Ruth to have more intimate interactions with women during their séances. It is known that the spirit prefers to communicate with female sitters and only choses to appear in private consultations for women. Peter has a weakness for beautiful women and likes to flirt with them:

> You would see him look about him. Do you know what he was looking for? He was looking for the handsomest lady! When he found her, he would step very close to her and say, How would she like to walk with him, upon a London street? And then he would take her up, and have her walk with him about the room; and then he would kiss her. (151-152)

He compliments them, brings them presents and encourages physical contacts during the circle sessions: he invites the ladies in the room to kiss him, to hold his hands, to dance with him. Similarly, when Selina is tied down in her cabinet to prove the spirit's manifestation, she always asks a woman to do it: "Mind, she never had a gentleman do it: it was always a lady that tightened the ropes—always a lady that took her and searched her, and always a lady that tied her …" (152). This is indeed what happens when Peter brings a lady backstage to help him prepare Selina and prove that she is unable to escape from her ties:

> 'Do you see Miss d'Esterre, how my medium is fastened? Put your hand upon her & tell me if those bonds are tight. Take off your glove.' I heard her glove drawn off & then her fingers came upon me, with Peter's fingers pressing them & making them hot. She said 'She is trembling!' (231-232)

There does seem to be some erotic undertones in these interactions between the medium, the spirit and the female sitters, a tension which goes even further during the private séances: Selina suggests in her diary and during her interviews with the police that other things might have happened in the intimacy of these rooms. For example, Ruth advises a lady to watch out for Peter because he might join her in her room: "'Well, think of him tonight, when you are

alone & your room is quiet. He did like you. It may be, you know, that he shall try & visit you without his medium to help him" (233). Selina later argues during her interrogations that those practices do involve "a certain amount of laying on of hands" (145) and that getting unclothed is sometimes necessary for some ladies to develop their capacity to communicate with spirits. This is indeed what happens when Peter instructs a certain Miss Isherwood to help Selina take clothes off:

> Then he said 'Tell her to take off her gown.' [...] 'How fast her heart beats!' [...] 'Put your hand upon her, Miss Isherwood. Is she hot?' [...] 'You must also become hot.' [...] 'you are not hot enough for development to happen, you must let my medium make you hotter. You must take off your gown now & you must grasp Miss Dawes.' (262)

These lesbian relationships might be what caused Mrs Brink's death: the latter entered a room where Selina was having a private session with a young lady and Mrs Brink passed out: "the spirit had turned 'naughty'—that was the word she used. The spirit had turned naughty, and the lady, 'Mrs Brink', saw it all and was so startled [that] [s]he fell in a faint, and later died" (84). She might have seen something similar to the previous examples when she opened the door, i.e. some lesbian interaction, and was so shocked that it caused her to have an attack.

In addition, there are also the many puns on the word "queer", which keeps reappearing in the text in moments like those: "'Selina Dawes', she said, 'A queer one'" (42), "I took a breath, to nerve myself for whatever queer thing she might do next" (167), "I remembered that visit, and how queer and fanciful it had made me" (207). The omnipresence of this term hints at the importance of those homosexual feelings in the novel.

Therefore, through the apparition of a spectral double, Selina and Ruth explore "a libidinal energy that opposed Victorian conventions of womanhood" as Arias Doblas declares (in "Talking with the Dead": 100): they both go against the ideal of the submissive, silent heterosexual angel of the house, whose sexuality is inexistent or child-oriented. This again could relate to Freud and his theory on the uncanny: the resort to spiritualism and to the motif of the double could once more express what has been repressed by Victorian society, that is to say homosexuality. It was considered a crime to have same-sex affinities, an offense that had an "unspeakable quality" and that was "so shocking it was nameless by Victorian standards" (Good: 116). Therefore, "the dialogues between spirits and mediums facilitated the expression

of the inexpressible" (Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 100) and helped with the fulfilment of these unmentionable desires.

In conclusion, by becoming those doubles, the protagonists of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* challenge the notion of womanhood as well as men's authority, they warn against different types of abuses and express their (sexual) desires.

As Terry Castle explains, "the spectral figure is a perfect vehicle for objectifying and embracing that which otherwise could not be acknowledged" (Castle quoted by Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 101): the spectral double is far from being a new device in literature considering that it has been an omnipresent motif of the gothic genre. The doppelgänger, the alter-ego, the "madwoman in the attic" are figures that keep coming back in this genre and that are often used to express repressed, often sexual, desires. According to Gilbert and Gubar, "maddened doubles" function as "surrogates for docile selves" (17): doubles that are "witty, assertive, spirited, independent [...] even arrogant and nasty" (168), which contrast with the calm, passive and withdrawn protagonists.

The fact that madwomen externalize the protagonists' imprisoned rage and their wish for liberation is something that relate to the two novels examined in this work: Ruth Vigers (disguised as Peter Quick) and Mary Whitney can indeed be understood as madwomen in the attic. They are in fact two figures that are freed from conventions, that can be considered mad and that live upstairs. In *Alias Grace*, Mary and Grace sleep in the attic and after her friend dies, Grace thinks she can hear Mary talking on different occasions and feels her presence in the room. Likewise, in *Affinity*, Ruth sleeps in the attic and Margaret can hear her walking upstairs: "Only I sit awake—only I, and Vigers, for I hear her stir above me [...]—what has she heard, that makes her so restless?" (116).

The fact that Peter Quick and Mary Whitney act as the liberated doubles of the main protagonists also echoes the difference made by Ghost-Wave Feminism between the "True Woman" and the "New Woman": the True Woman is the conventionally acceptable archetype of women which stands against the "New woman", a term that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, during the Progressive Era and under the advent of women's suffrage. This name designated "the new breed of independent, more sexually aware and educated women" (Murillo: 788): a modern woman who "refuses to be passionless, refuses a hidden sexuality" (799). Cynthia Murillo explains that many gothic stories, which she joins under the adjective "Ghost-Wave feminist", establish a connection between the spectral doubles and this second

type of womanhood. The ghosts present in those stories embody this liberated woman who embraces her convictions and sexuality. As Murillo notes, "these ghostly doublings shift the critical perception of female identity as they work towards dismantling those binaries that limit female potential" (799). Mary Whitney and Ruth Vigers (playing the role of Peter Quick) do embody this new unapologetic type of woman, far from the self-erased True Woman.

Therefore, since Grace and Margaret incarnate emancipated mediums/ghosts, they correspond to what Anderson describes as "the public and impure women" who "serve as unsettling reminders of an aggressive female sexuality that the dominant culture sought to disavow and supress, since it upset the structuring binary opposition between masculinity and a sexless, maternal femininity" (13). Not only do the protagonists deny any distinction between manhood and womanhood based on sexuality, they also confront the male claim of rationality. Indeed, Grace and Selina further question the distinction between genders thanks to their doubles and the convicted women deny "the division that appears between science and spiritualism [which] follows clear gendered terms along male/science vs. female/spiritualism lines" (Bormann quoted by Arias Doblas in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 163-164). The protagonists turn the situation around and make the representants of masculine rationality, i.e. Simon Jordan and Margaret Prior, fall from their positions of power.

In *Alias Grace*, the apparition of Mary Whitney as a double represents the culmination of a complex process through which Jordan's belief in science and rationality weakens. He portrays the figure of the doctor who tries to remain unbiased and pragmatic but fails to do so because of his relationship with his patient and the influence she gains over him.

From the beginning, Jordan makes it clear that there is a link between the corporal and the mental and that to have access to his female patients' minds, Jordan must have access to their bodies as well:

> Knowledge with a lurid glare to it; knowledge gained through a descent into the pit. He has been where they could never go, seen what they could never see; he has opened up women's bodies, and peered inside. In his hand, which has just raised their own hands towards his lips, he may once have held a beating female heart. (Atwood: 94)

To study and heal someone's body, the doctor must "know it, and one cannot know it from a distance; one must rub elbows with it, so to speak" (86): as Hall argues, "carnal knowledge and scientific knowledge are inextricable" for Jordan (Hall quoted by Lopez: 160).

Over the course of their interviews, Jordan develops an obsessive preoccupation with his patient's mind and body, though he claims that he is only interested in discovering what his patient's psyche is hiding, it is made clear by the language of physicality which Jordan uses to describe his investigation that he also has an interest in Grace as a potential sexual partner (Lopez: 161). He indeed describes Grace as a closed container which content is out of reach: "a very hard nut to crack" (61), "a locked box, to which [he] must find the right key" (153). He remarks that Grace is too "self-contained" (153), that he wishes "to open her up like an oyster" (153) and that though she "shut herself up like a clam" (357), he "will at last crack open" her mind (357). Grace significantly notices Jordan's desire to penetrate her mind and also describes it as a physical sensation: it is "a feeling like being torn open; not like a body of flesh, it is not painful as such, but like a peach; and not even torn open, but too ripe and splitting open of its own accord" (79). Even though Jordan pretends to be motivated by his scientific research, the sexual connotations of the terminology he uses to describe his piercing through Grace's nature indicate that he is in fact troubled by volcanic passions towards his patient (Lopez: 161): his wish to scrutinize Grace's mind intertwines with his wish to have sexual relationships with her.

When he helps his landlady after she has fainted, Jordan notices that, as he is holding her, images of Grace appear in his mind. This leads him to reflect on why such images can pervade his mind and how the most rational of men cannot prevent unwanted thoughts from emerging: "He is both sane and normal, and he has developed the rational faculties of his mind to a high degree; and yet he cannot always control such pictures" (163). He ironically notes that "the difference between a civilized man and a barbarous fiend—a madman, say—lies, perhaps, merely in a thin veneer of willed self-restraint" (163): Jordan will indeed experience how easy it is to pass from the one to the other by the end of the novel.

Jordan is attracted to Grace more and more but since he cannot act upon his desire, he projects his frustrated sexual thoughts onto his landlady Rachel Humphrey, who acts as a substitute for Grace. When Rachel enters his room at night and makes her way into his bed, he imagines that Grace has rejoined him:

> Grace Marks is bending over him in the close darkness, her loosened hair brushing his face. He isn't surprised, nor does he ask how she has managed to come here from her prison cell. He pulls her down – she is wearing only a nightdress – and falls on top of her, and shoves himself into her with a groan of lust and no manners. (408)

His common sense fails him: only later does he realize that Grace cannot have broken free from prison and that the woman is no other than his landlady. Jordan becomes more and more involved with his patient, more and more subjective and less apt to judge her case.

Jordan's loss of rationality manifests itself through his sexual desires but also through his violent fantasies about hurting the women he is drawn to. For example, when Jordan reflects on Grace's culpability: "*Murderess*, *murderess*, he whispers to himself. It has an allure, a scent almost. [...] He imagines himself breathing it as he draws Grace towards him, pressing his mouth against her. *Murderess*. He applies it to her throat like a brand" (389). His longing for Grace seems to involve some wish to harm her as well. It appears that Jordan compensates his inability to fulfil those sexual desires by making violent sex to Rachel:

> He means more, he means further, he means deeper. He would like to make out an incision in her – just a small one – so he can taste her blood, which in the shadowy darkness of the bedroom seems to him like a normal wish to have. He's driven by what feels like uncontrollable desire. (425)

Once again, there are some murderous and even vampiric undertones in his interactions with a woman. Those brutal thoughts come back when Rachel tells him that her husband is coming back home and suggests that "he doesn't have to come back [...] He might have an accident. If nobody sees him. He could have an accident, in the house" and that Jordan could "bury him in the garden" (475). Jordan does not try to dissuade her and rather pictures a detailed scenario for which he would have to protect his landlady from her husband and murder him:

> there's a sharp blow with the spade, on his head, from behind. He falls with a wooden thud and is dragged by the heels down the passageway to the kitchen, where Simon's leather satchel awaits. A quick incision to the jugular with a surgical knife; blood gurgles into a slop bucket; and all is over. A spate of digging in the moonlight, and into the cabbage patch he goes. (476)

Jordan then even goes further in his fantasy and imagines that his landlady's maid Dora would have seen them and plans on killing her as well:

> But here is Dora, watching from the kitchen door. She cannot be allowed to escape; Simon chases her around the house, corners her in the scullery, and sticks her like a pig [...] Dora requires more digging, a deeper hole. (476)

Jordan's relationships with Grace Marks and Rachel Humphrey mark the beginning of his loss of subjectivity, a procedure which reaches its paroxysm during the hypnosis session. At first, when Dupont suggests that he might try hypnotism on Grace, Jordan firmly believes that spiritualists are frauds and that Dupont's remarkable powers are non-existent:

> 'Remarkable powers?' says Simon politely. He would like to know what they are. Possibly the fellow claims to levitate, or personifies a dead Indian, or produces spirit rappings, like the celebrated Fox sisters. Spiritualism is the craze of the middle classes, the women especially; they gather in darkened rooms and play at table-titling the way their grandmothers played at whist, or they emit voluminous automatic writings, dictated to them by Mozart or Shakespeare. (95)

Jordan ridicules these kinds of practices and cannot see how they can help Grace recover her memory but accepts out of politeness. When Dupont tells Jordan that he is welcome to participate in the experiment even though he is visibly sceptical of these practices, Jordan answers that he is "not a sceptic" but "only a medical doctor" (96). The latter thus positions himself against these spiritualists by associating with the medical field and argues that he has "no intention of being lured into some compromising and preposterous rigmarole" that those practices promote. (96). However, after hearing Grace's revelations and witnessing Mary taking control over her body, Jordan comes to question his initial reject of spiritualism:

> Throughout the evening he's maintained a plausible self-control, but now his brain feels like a roasting chestnut, or an animal on fire. Silent howls resound inside him; there's a confused and frenzied motion, a scrambling, a dashing to and fro. What happened in the library? Was Grace really in a trance, or was she play-acting, and laughing up her sleeve? He knows what he saw and heard, but he may have been shown an illusion which he cannot prove to have been one. (472)

Though he tries to "keep his head, and pursue a straight line of enquiry" during the entire session (465), his line of reasoning crumbles and he does not know what to make of this experiment. He must admit that "he can't state anything with certainty and still tell the truth, because the truth eludes him. Or rather it's Grace herself who eludes him" (473): the appearance of Mary Whitney as a double symbolizes the final blow to his loss of rationality. His interviews with Grace and the final hypnosis session do not bring him the answers he had hoped for and the

prisoner remains an enigma. Jordan is initially presented as the agent of knowledge but his incapacity to understand Grace eventually sentences him to "brain-sick ramblings" (490). Even after many hours interviewing his patient, he still cannot determinate her nature: "*Not to know* – to snatch at hints and portents, at intimidations, at tantalizing whispers – it is as bad as being haunted" (490). Whereas the doctor longed "to shed light on a puzzling obscurity" (89), his investigation leaves him "wandering in darkness" (490).

Even though Jordan claims to be a rational, objective and unbiased scientist, his abilities fail him when it comes to see through Dupont's performance: he cannot connect the different evidences that might have made him realise that the hypnosis session was an act. One of those clues is that he does not question the fact that "when [Dupont] speaks to [Grace] she looks up at him trustingly" (461): he does not notice that there could be some understanding between the two of them. He also remarks that Grace is walking "lightly enough now, and seems almost happy" after Dupont's intervention when she is supposed to have forgotten what has just happened before (469).

Jordan's latest discoveries leave him uncapable of sending the report that he intended to write in the first place. Reverend Verringer, who was present when Dr Dupont interviewed Grace, asks Jordan about his report and wants to make sure that the doctor will not make a reference to what happened with Dupont, claiming that "Surely the evening's proceedings are scarcely orthodox, from a medical point of view" (472): Reverend Verringer who seems to stand as a model of reason for Jordan thus denies the legitimacy of hypnotism.

Jordan knows that his colleagues in the medical field could never believe what he has witnessed and that his research will not be taken seriously if he mentions Dupont's intervention:

> they are hard-headed, practical men, who require solid evidence. If the report were to become public, and a matter of record, and widely circulated, he would become an instant laughing-stock, especially among the established members of the medical profession. (473)

He is aware that hypnotism cannot appear in his report as a way to prove Grace's innocence and that he cannot write a medical report based on such unscientific evidence. Jordan has definitely lost his scientific pragmatism and he ends up fleeing from Toronto.

Significantly, after his abrupt departure, people come to reevaluate Jordan's character. After eventually publishing his report, Jordan loses his reputation as a doctor and is disowned

by the scientific community when his colleague Dr Samuel Bannerling defines him as "either credulous to an infantile degree, or himself a great scoundrel" (504). Moreover, any plan Jordan previously had of opening his own asylum can never see the light as Jordan remarks because "who would subscribe to such an institution, knowing it to be run by some crack-brained believer in mystical voices?" (473). Simon Jordan is not only discredited from the medical field, his general respectability is called into question: several characters retrospectively describe him as a threat. The maid of the house where Jordan stayed compares him to a feline eager to attack his landlady Rachel Humphrey, a monster with "fearsome blazing eyes like a tiger's, as if ready to spring on her and sink his teeth into her" (494). Likewise, the Governor's wife likens him to a serpent and cannot believe that she let this menace enter her house: "she had been deceived as to his character, and she had been harbouring a viper in the bosom of her family" (495). Doctor Jordan has completely lost his credibility and the authority associated with his position of scientist. He is moreover no longer considered as a benevolent gentleman but rather as a beastly man who cannot control his degenerate desires.

It seems like a logical conclusion to Jordan's downfall that he should suffer from a brain injury after serving as an Army Surgeon in the Union Army. He thus becomes reliant on his mother, who decides that he will marry the woman she has chosen and who maintains her son's correspondence. Jordan therefore vanishes from his own narrative and is no longer the voice of reason he claimed to be.

Sarah Waters creates something quite comparable with the character of Margaret Prior. As demonstrated previously, Margaret wishes to resemble her scholar father by writing an objective account of what happens in the prison. She allies herself with her father's rational search for knowledge and at first refuses to believe in the powers of spiritualism. When Margaret visits Selina in her cell, the latter asks the young lady if entering the prison made her change her mind about the existence of ghosts: "Doesn't it seem to you, now that you are here, that *anything* might be real, since Millbank is?" (Waters: 86). Margaret remains imperturbable and responds that "The prison might be hard—but that did not make spiritualism any truer. The prison was at least a world that I could see, and smell and hear. Her spirits [...] meant nothing to me" (86). After the medium has mentioned Margaret's deceased father in their conversation, the young lady refuses to hear another word from Selina and stops the conversation by telling her: "That is enough [...] You are talking nonsense!" (88).

Similarly, during a dinner party, Margaret talks about the veracity of spiritualism with the visitors. She asks her brother his opinion on the matter and he answers that he thinks: "what

any rational man should think, given all the evidence: that most spirit mediums undoubtedly were simple conjurors" (100). Her brother argues that mediums are illusionists capable of manipulating their sitters. He goes on to explain that men have been able to send messages from all around the world for years and that the supernatural powers have nothing to do with it:

> I may go to a telegraph office and communicate with a man, in a similar office, on the other side of the Atlantic. How is that done? I could not say. Fifty years ago such a thing would have been deemed perfectly impossible, a contradiction of all the laws of nature. But when the man sends me his message I do not suppose, for that reason, that I have been tricked—that there is a fellow secreted in the room next door and it is he that is tapping out the signal. Nor do I assume—as some ministers, I believe, assume of spiritualism—that the gentleman addressing me is really a demon in disguise. (100)

He explains that there must be a logical explanation to these séances and Margaret apparently agrees with her brother that Selina "is not to be trusted" for this reason (101).

However, Margaret progressively becomes unsure about spiritualism and begins to call her rationality into question. She admits that though the answers Selina provides her with are beyond belief, the convict does follow a particular rationality of her own: "she stood, gravely and earnestly, answering my questions, point for point, with her own neat logic" (85).

When the young lady visits a spiritualist library, she meets a certain Mr Hither who is convinced of Selina's innocence. He makes Margaret read different testimonies about the crimes Selina is accused of, to what Margaret tells Hither: "I hardly know what to make of this. Really, I know nothing of spiritualism. You think Selina Dawes has been abused—" (133). Margaret relies on Hither's knowledge of spiritualism to explain what she has just read. This case is beginning to be confusing for her and the fact that Mr Hither praises the medium's powers and good will makes the young lady doubt: "To hear him celebrate Selina; to hear her called, respectfully, 'Miss Dawes', 'Miss Selina Dawes', instead of 'Dawes' or 'prisoner', or 'woman'—well, I cannot say how disconcerting that was" (134).

During one of their conversations, Selina admits to her visitor that mediums have a list of tricks that they use during their séances to impress their sitters, yet she claims that she has never used any of those with Peter Quick and that his apparitions are real. Margaret doubts her but starts to believe in her powers:

> As to the larger power she was talking of now—her rareness—well, I have felt a little of that, haven't I? I cannot dismiss it, I know it is *something*. But there is a mystery to her, a shadow in the design, a gap… (168)

She comes to convince herself that there is indeed something inexplicable about her interactions with Selina and that the prisoner's supernatural capacities might be authentic.

When Margaret later goes to see the prisoner, she notices that there are traces of wax in her cell: she starts to believe Peter has come to pay a visit to the convict and admits that "there was a ghastly kind of logic to it, that impressed itself upon [her] and made [her] shudder" (187). She then tries to erase this thought from her mind repeating that "it was nothing" yet "[she] knew it was not nothing" (188).

Like Simon Jordan in *Alias Grace*, Margaret Prior fails to see the evidences that could give away Selina as a fraud. Among the different pieces of information that she could be suspicious of, Margaret does not question how Selina could tell her information only the young lady's close family members could know, such as the nickname her father would give her. Furthermore, Margaret believes Selina when she tells her that her locket was taken by a spirit or that the gifts and flowers were brought to her by those spectral entities. The visitor does not ask the medium how she could be aware of the code name that her former partner attributed to her. Margaret also disregards the fact that she feels like she has seen Peter's eyes before: "They seemed—how odd it sounds! —they seemed *familiar* to me, as if I might have gazed at them already—perhaps, in my dreams" (154).

The young lady thus gradually falls under Selina's charm and eventually believes in her innocence. Margaret, isolated by her loneliness, longs to believe in the spiritual world and not only does she develop a romantic interest in the prisoner but she also firmly believes in the existence of a spiritual link between her and the medium: "We were joined in the spirit and joined in the flesh—I was her own *affinity*. We had been cut, two haves together, from a single piece of shining matter" (336).

Margaret is so convinced of her innocence that when the matrons ask her if she knows what happened and how Selina escaped from her cell, Margaret claims that the medium's spirit friends help her get out: "'It was the spirits,' I said, 'that took her. It was her spirit-friends…'" (331). When she realises that spirits had nothing to do in the convict's breakout but that she was rather helped by a matron, Margaret cannot accept what she has just discovered:

> I watched her, still trying to understand what she had said; but her words were like some sharp, hot thing—I could not grasp them, I could only turn them about in a desperate, swelling panic. There had been no spirit-help—there had been only the matrons. (332)

The rational explanation to Selina's run away is a shock to her and cuts through her like a blade. Margaret still cannot come to terms with the truth and affirm that there must be a reasonable explanation for Selina's actions: "But I think she will explain it, when we find her. I think there might be a purpose to it, that we cannot see" (336). She tries to defend the medium considering that she cannot have been wrong about her character.

Just as Dr Jordan, Margaret feels like she has betrayed the rationality that she yearned to incarnate. By allying herself with her father's profession, she had acquired some form of legitimacy: for example, when the administrator of the spiritualist library learned that she was the daughter of an eminent scholar who did research on the Renaissance, Margaret stated that "The attendant said he has seen the work. The others, who do not know me, call me "madam" now, I have noticed, instead of "miss". (57). It seems that the people in the room granted her more authority after they had learned about this kindship. This is then echoed by the reaction of one of Millbank's prisoners when Margaret noticed how a convict reacted to her: "her manner seemed to cool, I thought, when I told her Pa had been a scholar" (106): due to her association with rationality, Margaret seemed to incarnate a trustworthy figure. However, whereas people tended to have confidence in her good character, the medium's disappearance make people wary of Margaret's intentions. When she goes back to the prison after Selina has flown away, the different warders and matrons accuse her of hiding the medium and ask her to bring the prisoner back:

> 'This is your lucky chance, Miss Prior, that sees *you* upon our wards, on *this* day! Don't say that Dawes has run to you, and you have brought her back to us?' [...] 'And so,' she said quietly, 'do you have her or not? You must know it is your duty, to surrender her to us?' (326-327)

The protagonist has converted into an enemy of reason: she is not worthy of trust anymore and cannot be considered as a figure of authority. The matrons warn her that that if she does not cooperate, she too could be imprisoned:

> 'And if I was found to have played the slightest part in it'— 'Well', she turned her eyes to the watching matrons, 'we keep *ladies*, too, upon our wards—

> don't we, Mrs Pretty? Oh yes! We have ways of making it very warm for *ladies*, here at Millbank!' (327)

When she eventually leaves the prison, Margaret has an oppressing feeling and it does seem to her that she could be trapped here forever: "For it seemed to me that, if I stayed another moment, then they would find a way to keep me there, for ever" (328).

Significantly, when she comes back home and finally faces the truth about Selina's getaway, Margaret's first reaction is to take hold of her father's knife to get rid of the collar Selina gave her: "At last I looked about me, for something that would help me [...] I saw first Pa's cigar knife, and took that up, and began slicing at the collar with the blade of it" (338). Margaret reaches for this symbol of rationality to break free from Selina's influence: if hearing the truth about the medium's disappearance previously felt like "some sharp, hot thing" (332), it is once again compared to a keen edge.

The protagonist's lack of judgment brings her to an end, to the same extent as Dr Jordan in *Alias Grace*: Margaret abandons her report and thinks about committing suicide, ashamed to have been tricked: "How deep, how black, how thick the water seems to-night! How soft its surface seems to lie. How chill its depths must be" (350-351). Though she aimed to imitate her father in becoming this image of objectivity and sensibility, she almost transforms into a criminal and she certainly loses her sanity.

With Dr Simon Jordan and Margaret Prior, Atwood and Waters create two characters who are supposed to represent rationality and knowledge but who ironically end up being the mentally instable ones. The existence of spectral doubles helps the two convicted protagonists of those stories to get rid of the binary opposition that defined genders. By being able to conjure spirits, Mary and Selina indeed challenge the belief that women are "situated on the 'feminine' side of irrationality, silence, nature and body" whereas men embody the "'masculine' side of reason, discourse, culture and mind" (Zhang: 26). The occult allows women to "to a greater or lesser degree, (to) take up the pen and tell their own stories without the interference of the male rational discourse", according to Arias Doblas (in "Between Spiritualism and Hysteria": 176). In these novels, the result of the prisoners' sleight of hand is indeed the victory of the spiritual over the rational, the feminine over the masculine.

By conjuring spectral doubles, the authors once more show their characters' ability to navigate through borders: as seen earlier, the protagonists are considered simultaneously "angels of the households" and "demons-in-hiding" and they also reconsider the line between

sanity and madness as well as between the feminine and the masculine. Furthermore, the spectral double helps the female protagonists to cross other boundaries, such as the line between the True and the New Woman, or the one between rationality and spirituality, as well as the frontier between life and death. By appealing to the figure of the female medium (capable of communicating with the Dead) and to the figure of the spectral double (which came back from beyond to haunt the living), the two novels point once again to the liminal position of women in patriarchal society. The female characters, by embodying either of those two figures, occupy a space of indeterminacy in life, as argued by Selina Vigers: "The spirit-medium's proper home is neither this world nor the next, but that vague & debatable land which lies between them" (Waters: 73). With the spectral double, the novels compare the status of women in Victorian society to that of a ghost: they are present yet absent, silenced and ignored, they are made invisible. Atwood and Waters investigate "women's status as the 'other'", as Vanessa Dickerson describes it. Both authors consider women as "living in a liminal position as ghosts and spirits who par(take) of two worlds, the worlds of the living and the world of the dead" (Dickerson quoted by Arias Doblas in "Talking with the Dead": 100). Therefore, the pallor which characterises the different female protagonists in both novels and which has been previously read as a sign of purity and of their sacred/spiritual nature could acquire a new meaning: their pallor could rather be a symbol of this liminal state and could liken the protagonists to ghosts. The character's appearance could thus reveal the haunting presence of women in Victorian society. There are different telling examples in both texts that suggest such connection. In *Alias Grace*, Grace Marks ponders on how her mother's body was thrown overboard during the trip to Canada. The thought of her mother's corpse sinking in the sea is a horrible image for Grace: "there was something dreadful about it, to picture her floating down in a white sheet [...]. It was worse than being put into earth, because if a person is in earth at least you know where they are" (Atwood: 140). This state of indeterminacy that her mother represents is a source of anxiety for Grace. The colour white is also associated to Mary's death: Grace notices that Mary is "white as a sheet" after undergoing the abortion (203). Grace later choses white peonies to put on her friend's coffin. When Mary returns by taking control of Grace's body during the hypnosis session, the same vocabulary comes at play. Dupont puts on the protagonist's head "an ordinary woman's veil, light grey [...] Now there's only a head, with the merest contour of a face behind it. The suggestion of a shroud is unmistakable" (462). Grace again acquires a ghost-like aspect by wearing this pale veil which evokes once more a state between dead and living.

This ghost-like appearance also comes into play in *Affinity*: Margaret Prior relevantly notes that she is becoming "distant" (Waters: 288) and that she is "separating [herself]" (288), "growing subtle, insubstantial" (289). She later comments that she "gaze[s] at my [her] flesh and see[s] the bones show pale beneath it. They grow paler each day" (289). She goes on to declare: "My flesh is streaming from me. I am becoming my own ghost! I think I will haunt this room, when I have started my new life" (289). Similarly, her mother tells her that she is as pale as a spectre when she comes back from Millbank (223). The protagonist is disappearing from her reality and excluded from her family: she is losing any bit of authority she had left and ends up completely alienated.

The figure of the medium, capable of conjuring spectral doubles, forces the people around the protagonists to listen to those female lost voices. The characters of those novels gain power from their ambiguous position, just as Selina claims when she encourages Margaret to talk about the spirits: "because talking of them gives them power" (86). The occult and the spectral doubles thus highlight women's absence in the Victorian society and provide them with a space of expression. It seems only logical that Atwood and Waters would choose women to incarnate the mediums of their stories because who better than a woman can notice the absence of other women as Margaret Prior observes: "It is the same with spinsters as with ghosts; and one has to be of their ranks in order to see them all" (58).

In conclusion, the female characters of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* are indeed transgressive in the sense that they cross many of the imprisoning boundaries that confine them, starting with the concept of Victorian womanhood. The occult and practices such as spiritualism gave women an active role as mediums and allowed them to display a more assertive behaviour through the apparitions of spirits. Both novels reevaluate the distinction between womanhood and manhood by attributing typically male values to female characters while using the liminal nature of the spectral double to explore women's in-between position in Victorian society.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how both Margaret Atwood and Sarah Waters deconstruct the notion of Victorian womanhood in their novels, a notion which enclosed women within different biological and cultural stereotypes. *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* question the supposed dual aspect of female nature which goes back as far as the Bible and the distinction between Mary and Eve. The Virgin Mary represents the ideal type of woman who generates respect: she embodies a sacred being and stands as a symbol of domesticity and maternity. However, if women fail to incarnate this model, they are doomed to become a figure of licentiousness that repulses and yet attracts male attention. Eve stands for the example that women should not follow. This vision of womanhood gave rise to the Victorian dichotomy that distinguishes between the archetype of the "angel of the house", a malleable woman who obeys her husband and takes care of the household, and the "demon in hiding", a tempting, manipulating and dangerous figure. The reader of *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* is constantly reminded of these various injunctions that determinate how women should behave. Both texts show how the people that surround Grace Marks and Selina Dawes perceive in them the potential to incarnate this ideal form of womanhood, while other characters see them as treacherous creatures luring and threatening men.

The notion of hysteria is also called into question in both works to define womanhood and to explain the protagonists' behaviour. Hysteria acts as another label attributed to women by the male scientific discourse to belittle them by claiming that mental instability is inherent to the female genre. Women's supposed insanity thus allows the public opinion in both novels to disregard the abuses the protagonists have suffered from and to further incriminate them.

Therefore, both Atwood and Waters highlight the problematic concept of womanhood in which their protagonists are trapped and condemn this society where women are only allowed to be silent, submissive and sexless Mary-like figures or are rejected as fallen and insane daughters of Eve.

The authors further question women's supposed natural lack of agency by including typically feminine genres in their novels. The female protagonists acknowledge the restrictive representation of the female genre and actively try to express themselves and to make their experiences known by a larger audience through two typically feminine genres: the tradition of needlework in *Alias Grace* and the elaboration of a diary in *Affinity*. The activities linked to the textile have long been associated to the female genre and have been used by women as a means

for them to communicate with each other and to leave messages for future generations. In Atwood's novel, the quilt is a particularly significant object for the protagonist since it symbolizes a warning for women against the dangers of marriage and pregnancy. The use of a diary by the protagonist in *Affinity* has a similar effect: this typically feminine form of writing allows the main character to express her thoughts and discuss the different forms of exploitation she endures.

Nevertheless, those media turn out to be ineffective since they do not permit the characters' testimonies to leave the private sphere: indeed, needlework is only comprehensible by a feminine public and a diary is a private form of writing exclusively accessible to its author. This leads the protagonists to incorporate male conventions into those genres to legitimate their stories. Grace Marks uses the repetitive nature of needlework to progressively hypnotise Dr Jordan, thereby having access to his report and manipulating it in her favour. Concerning Magaret Prior, she imitates her historian and scholar father's way of writing and tries to create an objective report of her prison visits to contradict the prejudices that exist against female writers. Therefore, the protagonists of both novels do not only deconstruct the notion of Victorian womanhood by questioning what women ought to be (i.e. the "angel of the house" stereotype: passive, silent, submissive, mother figures, without the necessary power to leave the private sphere), they also acknowledge a possibility for transgression. The female protagonists try to take hold of masculine values such as assertiveness, productivity, creativity, agency or rationality and, in doing so, associate themselves with science, culture and other male dominated domains.

Unfortunately, their attempt to escape male influence fails: Grace cannot get a direct hold of Jordan's power because he is the one who eventually writes the report and Margaret is not able to imitate her father's way of writing. The protagonists will have to find another means of making their voices heard. This is when the occult and the spectral doubles intervene, which will allow both women to explore a new form of womanhood.

The occult and more particularly spiritualism gave women a central and active role as mediums: not only did these practices permit women to make a living, they also gave them the opportunity to display transgressive behaviours during the séances, thanks to the apparition of the spectral doubles. The female mediums would make spirits appear which acted as their assertive alter egos. Women would thus be able to control the people around them and to manifest their sexual desires. These emancipated doppelgängers make it possible for Grace Marks and Selina Dawes to escape from prison, to tell their stories freely and to experiment

with their sexuality, allowing them to become the New Women they longed to be. The appearance of the spectral double reinforces the blurring effect between genders that both novels have developed. The emergence of Peter Quick and Mary can indeed be understood as the final step towards a complete subversion of the Victorian womanhood from within: both doubles represent a meeting point between rationality and spirituality, agency and passivity, science and nature. The climaxes of Atwood's and Waters' works show the premises of a new transgressive form of womanhood by attributing to their female characters features that go against the Victorian norm, thereby transforming them into in-between characters. *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* therefore hint at a womanhood which would be synonymous with perseverance, boldness, resourcefulness, sexual desires, etc. The spectral double thus serves as a liberating device for the protagonists, proving that resistance against the restrictive Victorian womanhood is possible.

However, this attempt at reaching a new form of womanhood seems unsatisfactory because of the necessary role of the spectral double. Grace Marks and Selina Dawes use their alter egos as disguises to become their assertive selves but they only have a momentary access to this new womanhood. After the doubles have served their purposes and the protagonists have managed to escape, Grace Marks and Selina Dawes are still unable to break free from social constraints. Both novels restrain from concluding with a happy outcome and rather depict the characters' doomed fate. It seems that the protagonists escape one form of control to find themselves entrapped into another one.

Indeed, when Grace Marks is liberated, she cannot believe she is finally free after almost thirty years of imprisonment but she quickly realises that this miracle will turn into a nightmare for her considering that she has nowhere else to go: she has no money, no possessions, no relations who could help her and she cannot hope to find work because of her reputation:

> I've been in this prison now for almost twenty-nine years, I have no friends or family outside it, and where am I to go and what am I to do? I have no money, nor any means of earning any, and no proper clothing, and I am unlikely to obtain a situation anywhere in the vicinity, as my story is too well known. (Atwood: 514)

Grace then thinks about becoming a prostitute to gain a living but she cannot seriously contemplate this possibility given the risks that this situation implies:

> what chance would I have, at my age and with so much competition, it would be a penny a time with the worst drunken sailors up an alley somewhere, and I'd be dead of disease within a year; and it made my heart fail even to consider it. (514)

Ironically, escaping from prison might be the worst thing that has happened to her since being imprisoned. Grace ponders on the dreadful fate that awaits her: "I was to be turned out into the streets, alone and friendless, to starve and freeze to death in a cold corner, with nothing but the clothes on my back, the ones I'd come into the prison with" (514). It is therefore not surprising that when Jamie Walsh, the boy who worked with her at Richmond Hall and who testified against her, asks Grace for her forgiveness and for her hand in marriage, she accepts. She is aware that if she wants to avoid a lifetime of misery, this marriage is the only option she has.

Becoming her own mistress is a relief for Grace who enjoys having a home of her own for the first time:

> Now I am sitting on my own verandah in my own rocking chair; it is late afternoon, and the scene before me is so peaceful you would think it was a picture. [...] On such days I think, This is like Heaven. (526)

The comfort Grace benefits from barely makes up for the fact that she has to satisfy her husband's strange fantasies:

> I have to tell him some story or other about being in the Penitentiary, or else the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto. [...] He listens to all of that like a child listening to a fairy tale, as if it is something wonderful, and then he begs me to tell him yet more. (530)

Her husband enjoys hearing her repeatedly recounting her traumas and he progressively develops a form of fetishism. He finds pleasure in hearing her describing the sordid details of the different forms of abuses Grace had to suffer. It seems that he is particularly keen on hearing the different episodes where Grace was sexually exploited, a ritual which often ends with Grace having to endure marital rape because the description of such scenes has aroused her husband: "he clasps me in his arms and strokes my hair, and begins to unbutton my nightgown, as these scenes often take place at night; and he says, Will you ever forgive me?" (531).

Grace ends her story by mentioning her possible pregnancy. This discovery makes her apprehensive because it is what caused Mary Whitney's and Nancy Montgomery's deaths. To bear a child is as a curse for Victorian women due to death in labour and *Alias Grace* illustrates this since pregnancies are rarely successful in the novel, as Defalco notes (779). Moreover, Grace is forty-six which makes it even more risky to give birth. Her potential pregnancy might be her final sentence: she is a victim of "Eve's punishment", that is to say "the anguish of maternity" (Gilbert and Gubar: 198).

However, the protagonist is unsure about her condition and believes she could also suffer from a tumour. Whatever Grace's swelling turns out to be, a tumour or a baby, it seems that the protagonist's fate might already be sealed and her life could take a tragic turn. This potential dreadful outcome reinforces Grace's liminal status previously discussed. As Grace ponders: "It is strange to know that you carry within yourself either a life or a death, but not to know which one" (533): Grace is caught between life and death and finds herself once again "à la frontière entre les deux mondes" (Simonson: 7).

Affinity envisages a similar constraining future for Selina Dawes: though she has managed to escape with her accomplice to Italy, her scheme is known to the public and she is bound to move from country to country, forced to change identity many times along the way, with the fear of being imprisoned once again. By the end of the novel, Selina's fate is still controlled by a third party since she continues to be exploited by Ruth who only sees her as a tool to make money:

> She says she is thinking of Little Silvester's money, & what we might do with a share of money like that. She says 'Did you suppose I wanted to keep you at Sydenham for ever, when the world has so many bright places in it? I am thinking how handsome you will look, say in France or Italy. (Waters: 352)

The medium remains Ruth's "property or pet" according to the last final words of the novel (Brindle: 106): "'Remember' Ruth is saying, 'whose girl you are.'" (352). Though she has manipulated other women, Selina can be seen as a victim of Ruth's masochistic control and she has indeed "become [the] plastic instrument" that Ruth advised her to become (261).

To conclude, this new form of womanhood that *Alias Grace* and *Affinity* promote seems only attainable through the intervention of the spectral doubles and it is not inherently attributed to women but rather gained through efforts. The protagonists find within themselves the power to challenge the stereotypes but without their doppelgänger's help, they seem unable to escape

the former type of womanhood. The spectral doubles of Atwood's and Waters' novels announce a future womanhood, one that would not limit women's potential but would prepare the ground for generations of women to come.

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