

THE REPRESENTATION OF MADNESS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S ALIAS GRACE.

by

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Summary

The central tenet of the study is that language and madness are bound together, language both including madness and perpetuating the exclusion of madness as 'other'. The first chapter considers the representation of madness in Atwood's novels *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing* and *Alias Grace* from the perspective of Foucauldian and Kristevan theories of language and madness. *Alias Grace* becomes the focus in the second chapter. Here the syntax of madness is traced during Grace's stay in the mental asylum. Language, madness and sexuality are revealed as a palimpsest written on Grace's body. The final chapter looks at Grace's incarceration in the penitentiary and her dealings with the psychologist Dr. Simon Jordan where Grace's narrative tightly threads language and madness together. Underlying each chapter is a concern with how language and madness are in permanent interaction and opposition writing themselves onto society and onto Grace.

Key words:

Madness; representation; Atwood; Alias Grace; Dionysian; Apollonian; Kristeva; Foucault; Language; Nietzsche

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Statement by candidate

I declare that *The Representation of Madness in Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

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MRS A D KREUITER

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No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!

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INTRODUCTION

An intricately woven filigree spirals language and madness into one another. Madness is contained within the literary and iconographic expressions moulded by the discourse of language, but madness constantly liberates itself by transgressing and disrupting the order imposed by language. In the introduction to my work, I aim to focus on how language and madness are bound together. I shall make use of theorists such as Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva whose work on language and its relation to madness will be discussed. For these theorists madness finds its only means of expression in its challenging of the syntax of language in literature and poetry. Foucault's work on madness will be examined, showing how madness moved from a state of apparent freedom to the confinement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is the rise of the nineteenth century asylum and the development of the medical discourse concerning madness and its relation to women that will be of major concern within this introduction, as these issues form the background to my discussion of Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*. The evolving nineteenth century belief that hysteria was a strictly female malady will be shown to have its roots in language and its ability to mould discourses. This nineteenth century relation of language to the construction of female madness is epitomised in the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. In this introduction I shall undertake an extensive discussion of Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. I felt that it was necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of these texts in order to establish a framework against which the representation of female madness in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* could be contrasted, compared and examined.

The representation of madness has occurred in art and literature for centuries. These representations seem to reveal humankind's deep-rooted fear of 'unreason'. Each age can be seen to redefine madness and its relation to society. Madness has been represented as a state of exclusion, the outside of a culture. The mad have been physically excluded from society from the time of the Ancient Greek Bacchae, who had to celebrate their rites outside the boundaries of the cities. This exclusion continued in the medieval image of the Ship of Fools, discussed by Foucault in his work *Madness and Civilization*. This free-floating image of madness disappeared in the eighteenth century with the establishment of places of incarceration. These monolithic institutions developed into the asylums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and represented the modern form of excluding the mad from society. Yet, this physical exclusion is mirrored by an interior, or psychical, exclusion. The 'sane' person refuses to accept that at any stage they can become 'insane' psychically excluding the knowledge that the sanity is tenuous.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes that the mad were seen during the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance as possessing a sacred, higher knowledge that provided insights into the human condition and which was outside the scope of the rational. This altered with the establishment, in the seventeenth century, of places of internment for those who were seen as being outside the social order. Madness and the mad became deviant. The mad were enclosed in a syntax that could not be comprehended by the rational and became excluded on the grounds that they were 'other' and 'inferior'. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries madness became subject to objectivisation and 'rational' control within the confines of the asylum. It is the concept of the 'otherness' and 'inferiority' of madness along with its objectivisation and control that I will be exploring as aspects of Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*. This exploration of *Alias Grace* will rely on the theories of writers such as Foucault and Kristeva and will show how their texts can provide an access to, and understanding of, the liminal nature and syntax of madness.

Foucault, in his work *Madness and Civilization*, shows that throughout cultural history madness, which has been socially, politically, medically and religiously repressed, has managed to make itself heard. This is achieved by surviving as a speaking subject through literary texts. The literary work can never simply be 'mad'.

It is through the language used in the text that madness is given a voice. 'Language both constitutes what the work says but it also constitutes "that through which it speaks"' (During 1992 :69). The problem, though, is that of the place of the subject and the subject's position in relation to madness. This position is not defined through what is said or talked about, but through the place from where the subject speaks. The subject that speaks about madness will always be outside madness objectivising it through the use of language. The subject, through use of language, forces madness into a position of object against which the subject can determine its own subjectivity. Thus the subject can be seen as taking up a position which objectivises and exteriorises madness. As Kristeva indicates:

All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects (Kristeva 1984 : 43).

For Kristeva there is no language without the 'thetic.' It is a necessary boundary and a condition for both signification and representation. The 'thetic' is the positioning that is derived from the distinction between subject and object and results in the creation of identity or difference. This identity or difference is based on the formation of judgement and the installing of an 'other' or object against which to define the self of the subject. This place of judgement sets up an 'other' as difference and exclusion. Yet, examining this place in relation to madness only leads to the realisation of its displacement. To talk about madness involves the finding of a language other than that of reason, which masters and represses madness, or of scientific discourse which objectifies madness. Jacques Derrida has objected that any attempt to represent madness is a repression, as a work on madness can only be accomplished through the words and voice of reason. Foucault, aware that finding a language to talk about madness was impossible, knew that talking about madness merely denies it:

The constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect

words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made (Foucault 1988a :67).

Kristeva believes it is in the challenging of a fixed syntax that madness can be identified. This disruption of syntax is a realisation of the surfacing of the semiotic. The semiotic precedes the distinction between the subject and object and is to be seen in the gestures, laughter and echolalia of the mad. The semiotic thus violates the order of the symbolic, which represents rational language and subject and object positionality. It is in this disturbance of syntax that both Foucault and Kristeva see the possibilities for the representation of madness. For Derrida it is the impossibility to be found in the mutual exclusion between language and madness that needs to be explored. In his view Foucault's work could only perpetuate this exclusion, as the structure of language itself creates the division from madness. Language deflects madness through a strategy of difference and pushes it away. Thus where madness is, language is always elsewhere. As Shoshana Felman suggests, 'The exclusion of madness is the general condition and constitutive foundation of the very enterprise of speech' (Felman 1985 :44). Derrida regards the central tenet of madness as silence and it can thus not be rendered through language. Foucault on the other hand sees madness as a 'false concept': the real meaning of the state of 'madness' is that it has no actual meaning. "What then is madness?" asks Foucault, "Nothing, doubtless, but the absence of production" (Felman 1985 :54). Therefore madness is a lack of meaning, which is continually in the process of transforming itself. However, Derrida, Kristeva and Foucault would agree that madness is best revealed in literary language, Kristeva finding the irruption of literary madness to be at its most extensive in poetry.

The representation of madness in literature reflects and questions the discourses of culture, medicine, politics and religion of the time in which the literary works were written. It is the relation between madness, syntax and the changing positionality of subject and object underlying 'insanity' in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, which I plan to discuss. Foucault and Kristeva's work facilitates an interesting reading of Atwood's text. Foucault's own discourse in *Madness and Civilization* tries to occupy the gap, the liminal position between madness and literature. This he accomplishes through the presentation of motifs both visual, exploring paintings of madness, and

through the use of elliptical and fluid wording and imagery, a seemingly mad syntax. This mad syntax is opposed to the monolithic syntax of reason found in the city, asylum and society. The Ship of Fools is the intermediary gliding between the syntax of reason and that of unreason, and transgressing the spatial boundary that seems to exist between them.

The madman in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* was incorporated into medieval life through motifs both literary, in the form of the *Narrenschiff*, and iconographic, as in the works of Dürer and Bosch. In the work of these artists the Ship of Fools becomes the striking symbolic representative of the madman of the Middle Ages:

Because it symbolised a great disquiet, suddenly dawning on the horizon of European culture of the end of the Middle Ages. Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men (Foucault 1988a :13).

The image of the free-floating madman menaced and mocked culture. The medieval madman came to occupy the position that death had previously occupied in medieval times subsuming the position of the feared 'other' previously allocated to 'death'. This mad figure appeared as the mediator between life and death. To be mad thus represented an aspect of death in life. Madness had its own reality, but it was medieval social practices and beliefs which determined how madness was viewed and incorporated through iconographic and literary means. Madness was pushed outside the societal norms as 'other' because it did not conform to societal practices. However, it was at the same instant inside the culture, residing in its representation within art and literature.

In the eighteenth century, madness, according to Foucault, underwent a profound change when it entered into an oppositional relation with 'sanity'. As 'insanity' lost its relation to the mystical or higher plane of existence it was confined to a defined social space - that of the excluded 'other'. For Foucault the confinement of madness was the manifestation of non-being, and madness was allocated the unenviable tag of 'difference'. For certain feminist theorists, like Showalter, the relation established between madness and difference is mirrored in woman's relation to man. Man has

established woman as the 'other', the 'object' to his 'subject'. She represents all that is 'different' and that needs to be reconstructed by man's rationality. Woman joins madness on the negative side of the binary system that man has introduced. The emphasis on women and her relation to madness was extensively stressed during the Victorian period as was her 'otherness' to man. This nineteenth century concept of difference between man and woman can be seen as analogous to that represented by Foucault between madness and sanity:

women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind (Showalter 1987 :3-4).

The female, particularly during the nineteenth century, was associated with the irrational and therefore with madness and the 'other'. The attributes that have been assigned to women, those of irrationality, silence, nature and body place her in direct opposition to the qualities associated with the masculine, reason, logic, culture and mind. Her lack of reason is equated with a lack of 'masculine' control and responsibility.

Female corporeality, sexuality and madness were linked in the nineteenth century to the classic female disorder "hysteria". Hysteria was one of the focal issues that allowed for the emergence of psychoanalysis and the definition of female sexuality and femininity. Here a medical discourse was set up which defined how the feminine and female sexuality were to be viewed and treated. In the nineteenth century hysteria was seen as a hereditary condition created by bad genetic material but it was also seen as caused by sexual frustration. It became preferable to see women as lovelorn rather than to consider the possibility that they might be intellectually frustrated. Their lack of autonomy and confinement to the domestic sphere were overlooked as possible causes of 'hysteria', and instead were regarded as natural female positions in society. Women with radical ideas who challenged the norms of expected feminine conduct could be committed to lunatic asylums where they merely exchanged one form of confinement for another. Female irrationality and physicality were extensively represented in both nineteenth century pictorial images and

literature, thus perpetuating the societal belief that the female was weak-willed, weak-minded and subject to the dictates of her anatomy.

Atwood's *Alias Grace* has to be viewed against this historical background. Grace is represented in the text as a 'hysteric' by some, and her sexuality is open to abuse and scrutiny because of her societal position and class. Grace's 'madness' would seem to be perfectly structured by the discourses current in nineteenth century life and literature, and her incarceration in both the asylum and penitentiary relates to how madwomen were represented.

In the literature and art of the nineteenth century mad women are represented surrounded by the walls of the attic, the closed room, or the asylum. This enclosed and claustrophobic environment becomes the representation of female madness in literature. This is in stark contrast to The Ship of Fools image that Foucault used to represent the madman at the end of the Middle Ages. The madman is given a mobility that the mad woman lacks. She is locked into her domestic environment, stifling in its inanity, and silenced by its walls of masculine authority. Unlike the male, she is not regarded as a free-floating traveller, but as an emotionally unstable creature within which swirl forces of both creation and transgression. She becomes enclosed, passive, locked in her mind and deeply furious at the world and life:

It is precisely the cause of her rage (or its suppression) which distinguishes the nineteenth and twentieth century fictional mad woman. She suffocates in a patriarchal world in which she is bound to the traditional female role both through her own allegiance to "femininity" and its enforcement upon her (Wells 1976 :2-3).

Wells attributes the rage of the mad woman to an over-arching and governing conception of 'patriarchy' that she sees as having imposed both traditional roles and the ideal of femininity upon women. Patriarchal control and female biology are also used in Phyllis Chesler's work *Women and Madness*. In this work Chesler says that 'female sacrifice in patriarchal and pre-scientific culture is concretely rooted in female biology' (Chesler 1972:30). Female biology, notably reproduction, becomes one of the determining aspects of women's oppression. She is seen as bound to the

reproductive function of her body which ties her into a role of domestic provider and nurturant. This enforces the belief that women have intrinsic ties to nature, the body and natural forces, which has been a method of objectifying women for centuries.

However, the concept of essential feminine attributes, whether biological or intangible, such as tenderness, nurturance, gentleness, emotionality, overlooks how gender is constructed and specific subjects are produced. As Foucault observed, systems of power produce the subjects that they come to represent. Therefore, subjects are regulated by structures and are formed and reproduced to accord with needs of those structures. This can be related to the structuration of the mad subject by the cultural and social forces that surround and dominate the time period in which the subject exists. As Judith Butler indicates:

If this analysis is right, then the juridical formation of language and politics that represent women as “the subject” of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics (Butler 1990 :2).

If the system produces gendered subjects some of whom are given dominance and labelled male, the system is problematised, as the label ‘women’ and the label ‘mad’ are produced by the same system and power structures. The subject becomes a creation of power structures in order to validate the power structure’s own legitimacy. It is through these self-same structures that women are trying to obtain emancipation and these structures are those which objectify women and incarcerate the mad.

For Butler the structures of language and politics control the current fields of power and she believes that there is no position external to these fields. Criticism would then have to come from within the fields and call into question the legitimacy of the power and knowledge instituted by these fields. Both medical and popular discourses, or fields of power, have, according to Ussher, constituted the female form, ‘in various conflicting, and often misogynistic ways’ (Ussher 1997 :229). These self-same medical and popular discourses have also constituted what is regarded as ‘madness’ and the ‘mad’. Discourses are seen to regulate and discipline cultures through the

creation of knowledge, truth and subjectivities. The embodied subject is positioned within the discourse and is subjected to reifying judgements. It is this structuring that Atwood so carefully exposes in *Alias Grace* and is an aspect of Grace's situation that I shall explore.

In the case of the mad woman, nineteenth-century literature and art started the manufacture of beliefs and tales about woman's close ties with madness. According to Gilbert and Gubar,

[the] mad woman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage (Gilbert & Gubar 1984 :78).

In their analysis of *Jane Eyre*, Gilbert and Gubar attempt to make Bertha Mason the foil to Jane, a feature they suggest, in the above quote, is not found in female literary presentations of the mad woman. However, they seem to make the error of attributing and conflating the viewpoints of an author with those of a fictional heroine. Gilbert and Gubar indicate that a female writer should try and 'transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated' (1984 :17). They then appear to polarise Jane and Bertha into 'angel' and 'monster', where Jane becomes the 'sane version of Bertha' (1984 :366) which is opposed to the figure of 'loathsome Bertha' (1984 :369). This can be seen as merely a perpetuation of nineteenth-century attitudes to women and madness.

The nineteenth-century evocation of women and madness can be seen to have its roots in Shakespeare's Ophelia, whose tragic figure developed a cult following. Ophelia was seen as the ultimate personification of the lovelorn, irrational and mad female who was easily subjected to male rationality. Shakespeare's mad Ophelia makes explicit sexual references and her free-flowing hair and her association with flowers are all a suggestion of an improper sexuality (Showalter 1987 :11). The nineteenth century invested the figure of Ophelia with sensuality and an abundant sexual energy. In nineteenth-century art and literature, Ophelia became the prototype not only for the deranged, hysterical woman but also the sensuous, sexual siren. This darker sexual

aspect of Ophelia is represented by the figures of Judith, Lamia or Salomé. The representations of the femme fatale, siren, mermaid or monster depict the violent seductress with her sexuality on blatant display and aimed at the murder or entrapment of the male. These women escape from the socially confining female role through violence or physical mutation and an empowering madness, which links them to the rites of the Dionysian maenads. The maenads were a secret female cult devoted to the worship of Dionysus. They engaged in ecstatic, bestial rituals closely linked to nature and which aimed to achieve liberation and allow them to experience rapturous union with the God. The depiction of the nineteenth century mad woman in her guise as the sensual Ophelia or as the violent, seductive femme fatale has pronounced affiliations with the violent, rebellious and transgressive maenad who is consumed by the force of the Dionysian. The powerfully transgressive nature of the Dionysian is explicated in Nietzsche's work *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian and Apollonian forms an intricate adjunct to the relationship between madness and literature. For Nietzsche there is a conflict between instinct and consciousness, art and morality and emotions and rationality. These opposing forces are represented by the Dionysian and Apollonian, which are symbols rather than concepts. The Apollonian is formalist, drawing boundaries around forms or bodies. The Dionysian stands in opposition to this, being formless and transgressing boundaries, thereby ensuring that states of existence do not stultify or congeal. Apollo is the god of illusion and dream, hiding the reality of humankind's miserable existence. Nietzsche sees culture as the ultimate illusion created by the Apollonian. The Dionysian constantly tears at the veil of illusion but the Apollonian continually reasserts control and illusion returns. The interplay of the Apollonian and the Dionysian creates a constant cycle of transgression of boundaries, change, absorption and reaffirmation of boundaries. Thus the two forces are interconnected, needing one another to exist. It is this co-dependency of the two forces that is central to Foucault's conception of the relation between 'madness' and 'sanity'.

This relation of the Apollonian and Dionysian has parallels to Kristeva's previously discussed conception of language and the interaction between the semiotic and symbolic. Like the Apollonian and Dionysian, the semiotic and symbolic cannot exist without one another and are in constant interplay with one another. As Kristeva says:

“Pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, day dreams, dreams and death become part of the narrative” (Kristeva 1980 :83). For Kristeva, the conflict in literature between the semiotic and symbolic enacts conceptual splits or contradictions and literature is constantly in the process of reconstituting new types of rationality through the battle between the semiotic and symbolic.

It is this conflict between the ‘irrational’ and the ‘rational’, the semiotic and the symbolic, that can be seen at work in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Atwood’s *Alias Grace*. In Brontë’s nineteenth-century novel a contrast is enacted between the figure of the Dionysian maenad, Bertha Mason and the Apollonian figure of control represented by Jane Eyre. Bertha is presented only from the viewpoints of Jane and Rochester, a representation aided by the first person narration, which allows for extensive identification with the heroine. Jane’s vindication of Rochester as being a part of her own soul, links his viewpoint to hers. However, Bertha overflows her boundaries and is a far more important character than critics have allowed. Grace will reveal similar maenad tendencies to those of Brontë’s Bertha. Yet, at the same time, Grace will be shown as cast in the role of innocent like Jane. I will explore how Atwood plays with the illusion of appearance and ‘reality’ and how Grace is shown to utilise this to transgress societal expectations. Atwood’s depiction of Grace is heavily indebted to Brontë’s work, in particular to Bertha and her transgressive power.

Bertha is far from being a powerless force, even though she has apparently been incarcerated within an attic. She, in fact, spends more time out of confinement physically wandering around Thornfield and her laughter and murmurs chuckle and echo freely through the corridors of Thornfield. Complex relations of power are explored, where madness need no longer represent a powerless regression. Though Bertha appears to be locked away in the attic, she also possesses a powerful freedom. This freedom is both the physical ability to move around the hall under the cover of night, and a mental freedom. Thus she achieves a transgressive freedom that would be more associated with Foucault’s Ship of Fools than with the attic or the asylum. Her transgressive nature, which subverts Rochester’s power of enclosure, reveals Bertha as a free agent with her own power. As Foucault has pointed out, relations of power rely on a certain freedom:

One must observe that there cannot be relations of power unless the subjects are free. If one or the other were completely at the disposition of the other and became his thing, an object on which he can exercise infinite and unlimited violence, there would not be relations of power. In order to exercise relations of power, there must be on both sides at least a certain form of liberty (Foucault 1988b :12).

The fact that Bertha can bring about the downfall of both Thornfield and Rochester, on her own terms, is indicative of complex power relations and an inherent freedom. Rochester's control is not supreme and this sets up the power relations that exist between he and Bertha. Bertha has an inner freedom and she also freely roams Thornfield at night. Rochester has the liberty of trying to enforce Bertha's confinement and she has the liberty and strength to defy his control. Brontë's mingling of madness and power undermines the force and disciplinary nature of confinement and the links that these both have to masculine discourses of control. Beattie sees madness and confinement as presenting Brontë with, 'a powerful analogy for patriarchy's reception of female rebellion; at once active and passive; dangerous and containable, meaningful and meaningless' (Beattie 1996 :496). Here Beattie herself falls into the same trap that she accuses Gilbert and Gubar of doing: that of the conception of an overarching patriarchy that governs and monitors the place of the feminine. The dominant patriarchy is shown as having an ambiguous approach to the mad and rebellious woman. It sees her as being both dangerous and yet passive and thus easily containable. This division between the active and the passive sets up a liminal spatial area where women can resist masculine labels and efforts to control them. This liminal spatial area of resistance mirrors that of the liminal position occupied by the mad.

Bertha is seen as representative of a pathological state of female sexuality. Madness and feminine sexuality were directly bound together in nineteenth-century ideology through the discourses made manifest in iconography, novels, medicine and law. In *Jane Eyre* madness is deployed to foreground feminine rebellion against male dominance and the constraints of society and not merely as a mental means for Bertha to subvert Rochester's authority. This is accomplished through the juxtapositioning of

Bertha's 'insanity' to the 'sanity' of Jane and Rochester. Reason is unable to subjugate unreason and this results in a revelation of how language and the unconscious constitute subjectivity. The links between madness, femininity and the female body current in the nineteenth century are apparently being challenged. This challenge appears to predate and insightfully mirror Foucault's later work on madness as a behavioural and word disorder, which causes deviation from the practices and beliefs of society. Insanity is the foil used to validate the triumphant representation of societal 'sanity'. Bertha is the pivotal representative of this continual challenge to representative societal norms. Here she opposes the representations that both Jane and Rochester foist upon her and her state of being.

Physically Bertha is described as being a 'big woman' and 'corpulent besides' (Brontë 1966 :321). Rochester represents her as sexually lascivious, 'at once intemperate and unchaste' (Brontë 1966 :334). This lack of sexual chastity he attributes to Bertha's Creole origins. Bertha no longer 'speaks' but growls and laughs. These growls and her laughter are her evasion of Rochester's authority. The masculine presence that is able to silence all the other women in Thornfield cannot silence Bertha. Laughter and growls mean that Bertha has reverted to signifying at Kristeva's semiotic level, challenging the syntax of language and disrupting the symbolic. Laughter is an expression of transgression, and for Bertha it represents a flight outside a world whose rules and laws are alien to her. Yet, physically she is trapped inside the confines of this world provided by the representative of those laws in the form of Rochester. Her laughter is an explosive and haunting means of escape, which in Kristevan terms is a method of dealing with her abjection.

Bertha thus opposes the societal position enforced upon her through the restrictions of gender, class and race. To emphasise this opposition she takes her life on her own terms. Burning Thornfield is her final refusal to live a life incarcerated and upon Rochester's terms. Her death is as excessive as her life as her body spills outside its boundaries and her blood and brains bestrew the stones upon which she hurls her female form. Thus there is no easy watery Ophelian death for this free spirit. Bertha is the apotheosis of the nineteenth-century maenad in celebrating her transgressive madness that releases her from being bound to masculine domination and ideology.

It is through the peripheral, ghostly Bertha that Brontë has most powerfully explored how language structures social discourses. Bertha's character seems to question the relation of gender to madness, sexuality and class, in an attempt to reveal how these have been structured through the use of language. It is these aspects that have made *Jane Eyre* the foundational text against which future writings on female madness both base and contrast themselves. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood seems to use many of the ideas and themes to be found in Brontë's work, which is why I have undertaken such a close reading of *Jane Eyre*. Atwood appears to use the Gothic genre exemplified by *Jane Eyre*, to conduct an exploration into the literary and iconographic representations that attempt to structure the female form and madness. Both Atwood and Jean Rhys explore the relation between language and madness that is visible in Brontë's figure of Bertha. I shall now explore Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and its relevance to *Alias Grace*.

Wide Sargasso Sea is Jean Rhys's account of the life of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason before she became incarcerated in Thornfield Hall. Bertha or Antoinette as she is called, becomes the narrative subject of the work, creating an immediate contrast between this work and *Jane Eyre*. In Charlotte Brontë's work, Bertha is unable to use language and is therefore presented only through the words of others. Yet, as I discussed, we can consider this muteness as confined only to the level of language or the Kristevan symbolic, since Bertha speaks through grunts, growls and laughter. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette uses her own voice, narrating her own story, and using the language of the symbolic. Yet, there will be a moment when Antoinette reverts to silence. Atwood allows Grace to narrate her own story in the same manner as Antoinette, using the code of the symbolic. But Grace will also revert to silence. It is this relation of language to silence and madness, as expressed by both Bertha and Antoinette, which I shall explore further in *Alias Grace*.

Rhys's text is the story of Antoinette's childhood and marriage to Rochester, before her incarceration in Thornfield. The narrative thus reads between the lines of *Jane Eyre*, allowing Rhys to propose alternative reasons for Antoinette's madness than those which are ascribed to her in Brontë's text. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the causes appearing to underlie Antoinette's descent into madness are her mother's rejection

and the unfulfilled promise of her marriage. Her status as a Creole has placed her in a liminal social position, which has been exacerbated by being the daughter of an apparently 'mad' and 'loose' woman. This situation, along with her mother's rejection, has resulted in Antoinette developing a fluid, centreless and non-unified self. Antoinette places all her hopes of regaining a unified self on her marriage to Rochester. However, Rochester's interest in her is purely economic and Antoinette is merely a means for him to attain the wealth and prestige that he covets. Antoinette is shattered by Rochester's rejection of her. She realises that her ideal of wholeness will not be achieved with Rochester. He fails as the mirror in which she hoped to see a reflected unified self. He fails even further by being unwilling to reciprocate her love and being repulsed by her sensuality. He sees her only as a lucrative chattel and this starts her spiral into 'insanity'.

Rochester not only subsumes Antoinette's wealth, he attempts to subsume her identity too. This he tries to do by calling her "Bertha" which is his effort to reconstruct her to conform to his own needs and values. Antoinette rejects this saying, 'You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another's name' (Rhys 1997 :94). Antoinette thus denies Rochester's language of objectivisation and eludes his efforts to entangle her within his own structures of power, made manifest in his use of the word "Bertha". Atwood allows Grace, in a similar manner to Antoinette, to reject and circumvent all the different structuring tags applied to her. This is notable in the title that Atwood gives to the novel, '*Alias Grace*', which seems to provide Grace with a fluid identity.

It is in the interaction between the Foucauldian discourses of power and knowledge that Antoinette's 'madness' develops. She can be seen to be a liminal person moving between the societal norms of her native Jamaica, where she was never truly accepted or acceptable. She is also totally outside the norms of Rochester's social and cultural background. Like the 'insanity' that she is credited with she moves between outside and inside, an 'inbetween' creature. In *Alias Grace* a similar liminality and movement between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of madness will be explored.

Rochester is initially fascinated by Antoinette's obvious 'otherness' as a woman and of her possession of the knowledge concerning the customs of the Caribbean island,

where he is the outsider. He soon comes to reject and be repulsed by both the sensual islands and by her 'otherness' and endeavours to control, belittle and marginalise her. This he accomplishes through objectivising her actions and personage against his own needs and beliefs, resulting in his declaring her 'insane'. This declaration is facilitated through the knowledge that her mother was considered insane. Rochester makes use of the nineteenth-century medical belief that 'madness' was hereditary to reject Antoinette. She reacts to his rejection by behaving like a mad demon; barefoot and shrieking like an enraged fury. Her demeanour is the apotheosis of the Victorian conception of the female hysteric as a mad maenad:

Then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body, and it was like a dream in the large unfurnished room with the candles flickering and this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me (Rhys 1997 :95).

It is this behaviour and Rochester's aversion to the sensuality and 'otherness' of the islands, which he sees incarnated in his wife, which cause him to go back to England. Antoinette's ability to elude and defeat Rochester's power is weakened by her removal to England. This expatriation indicates the lack of autonomy and power that she possesses and her island life of open spaces and sensuality now gives way to that of the life of the 'mad' Victorian woman; a life lived within enclosed spaces. This representation of the Victorian maenad in her many forms and her relation to madness will be carefully explored in my study of *Alias Grace*.

The first enclosed space is the ship's cabin where she is incarcerated for the voyage to England. Here is Foucault's image of the Ship of Fools being applied to female madness. Again the fluidity and freedom of the original madman and the Ship of Fools has become an enclosed and confined female space. This trip that Antoinette is taking to the other side of the world is not undertaken with any modicum of freedom attached to it. Instead, she is locked into the cabin and kept there under sedation. This furthers her descent into the state of the dream and her inability to acknowledge the present or 'reality' that others see. Rather, the knowledge of her dream world and her 'insanity' allow her to slip from the present into the past as though they were coterminous time periods. This Ship of Fools image will be discussed in relation to

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*. In this text it is also related to an enforced trip to the other side of the world which can be seen to impact on Grace's 'sanity'. When she arrives in England Antoinette becomes the ghost of the rooms to which Rochester confines her and where she appears as the enraged and incarcerated archetypal mad woman of Victorian literature and history. Yet, Antoinette continues to circumvent Rochester's control through her will to oppose him and her use of the loopholes in his system of incarceration.

The way that Rhys exposes the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette allows her to question the way that Bertha's madness is represented in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys never assigns the cause of Antoinette's 'insanity' to any single 'true' cause. The fire in *Jane Eyre* is provided as proof of Bertha's 'insanity', there being no other details to confirm or deny this belief. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys uses the scene to reveal far more. Rhys links the burning of Thornfield to the earlier burning of Antoinette's family estate, Coulibri. Freed slaves as an expression of their rage at their exploitation and loss of their original homelands start the fire. Antoinette's burning of Thornfield can be seen as her expression of a similar rage against her exploitation and exploiter, as well as her expatriation from her cultural environment. Dislocation and exploitation are aspects that will be explored in relation to Grace. She too is an emigrant forced to leave her homeland. She becomes subject to both the exploitation of the class and gender system. Her position as a domestic servant and a woman expose her to blatant sexual discrimination from her male employers and custodians which will finally erupt into rage, madness and murder. Thus Rhys exposes the colonial system and its relation to madness, rebellion and rage. This work provides an interesting mirror for Atwood's own colonial experience that is seen in *Alias Grace*. Both Rhys and Atwood's texts are colonial works revealing how the system has caused madness, revolt, anger and lack of freedom. In this they oppose the solid belief in empire that is expressed in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Wide Sargasso Sea is divided into three sections. The first section is a first person narrative where the older Antoinette details the life of her younger self. Rochester is the narrator of section two. However, the narrative is interrupted on two occasions by the voice of Antoinette. The interruption is an attempt to gain a foothold in the narrative and destroy her creation by Rochester as the 'other' or as an 'object' against

which he can define his supremacy. This interruption can be seen as a manifestation of Antoinette's subversive and rebellious effort to present a different perspective, one from the other side that will allow her to circumvent Rochester's attempt to control who she is. Rochester regains control of the narrative, just as he seems to obtain control over Antoinette by incarcerating and defining her as 'mad'. Antoinette reverts to one of the states Foucault associated with the 'mad' and which is associated with hysterical women. As Rochester pointedly observes: 'She was silence itself' (Rhys 1997 :109). In section three the voice which commences the narrative is that of the guardian Rochester hires to attend to the incarceration of Antoinette. This soon moves into the form of an internal dreamlike monologue conducted by Antoinette. This dreamy fluidity is what allows her to defy Rochester's control, not only by moving around the inside of Thornfield but freely through time and place. Yet, all the sections of the novel are written in a fluid almost 'mad' stream of consciousness style of narrative in which Rhys manages to keep the voices of Rochester and Antoinette distinct. I shall explore a similar stream of consciousness style in *Alias Grace*, this fluid style being used by Atwood to emphasise Grace's transgressive nature, which defies, as Antoinette does, the control of those who wish to ensure her subjection to their beliefs and norms.

Rhys has developed aspects of the story of *Jane Eyre* but at the same time combined them with preoccupations of the modern era such as an emphasis on psychology, sexuality and human estrangement. Though the reader is placed in the nineteenth century this 'reality' reflects almost unchanged the same social system current in the twentieth century. Rhys uses both historical and literary backgrounds to explore and enhance her exploration of the human condition, yet the underlying feeling that accompanies her text is of a very contemporary understanding. The importance of Rhys's work to a study of *Alias Grace* resides in her exploration of language, expatriation, power, knowledge and the 'reality' of madness.

Atwood's *Alias Grace* demonstrates a similar use of historical and literary background to that of Rhys's work. Atwood brings Grace's nineteenth-century situation into a postmodern focus. In doing this Atwood is clearly exposing the discourses of the nineteenth century and setting up a relation to the discourses and ideologies of our contemporary times. Sexuality, medicine, law, literature and religion

are discourses that are still being played out within our society. By juxtaposing the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Atwood is enticing the reader to question how the discourses have changed or whether they have remained static and how historical time affects them. It is Grace's relation to these discourses, and how they try to define and order madness that will be explored. I have devoted extensive analysis to both Brontë and Rhys's texts as I felt that it was necessary to establish reference points for female representations of madness. Brontë's work has become the archetypal reference when dealing with the mad woman. Yet, Rhys's recreation of Bertha before the fall provides a different insight into the causes of female madness. As a work dealing with a colonial territory, I felt that Rhys's text would read into Atwood's *Alias Grace*. Both Brontë and Rhys provide invaluable insight into the mad woman and thus into the madness of *Alias Grace*.

CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter I shall be outlining how Atwood has explored madness in two of her previous novels, *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*. This will then lead into a discussion of *Alias Grace* covering Grace's journey to Canada and how this voyage is informed by the image of the Ship of Fools. It will then examine her position as a maidservant and its effects upon her psyche. The exploration of the state of madness will consider Foucauldian and Kristevan conceptions of how madness and language are interrelated and reveal the gender implications associated with madness and language.

Atwood's texts are replete with postmodern and feminist concerns and methods. Postmodern fiction regularly makes use of features like parody and self-reflexive metafiction in an effort to try and explore the concept of the 'self' and the discourses that seemingly construct and fragment it. Atwood's fiction explores the problems of how ideology and politics structure female identity and how these discourses govern and cause the power relations between male and female. Ideologies are extensively underscored and criticised in her works and revealed as structuring concepts. The postmodern 'self' that Atwood depicts is one of multiplicity and fragmentation, or the split-subject, which according to Kristeva (Kristeva 1980 :83) is a pathological state. This split-subject with its multiplicity, slippage and fragmentation is inherent in the representation of madness in modern literature. Here, according to Showalter, the 'schizophrenic woman' stands for the alienation of our age (Showalter 1987 :19). Many of Atwood's novels show women in various states of physical or mental 'disorder' or 'unreason'. These states are shown as means of escaping or altering 'reality' to conform to the women's needs while simultaneously calling into question the idea of a solidly based identity. This allows for flux and movement between established boundaries.

In Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman*, the protagonist, Marian, is threatened by the objectification of her boyfriend Peter. To counter this threat Marian adopts an unconscious strategy of self-preservation; she becomes anorexic. Marian assumes the conventional feminine social position of passivity, yet at the same time she wishes to rebel against social ideology. This splits her subjectivity in two. Her rebellion becomes centred on her body in the form of dispossession of the corporeal and a disgust and rejection of food. Anorexia represents a struggle for control of the self as well as a means to establish an identity. However, it is also a rejection of that part of the self that wants to become self-determined. Anorexia provides a means to fight the dominant ideologies even if it is only through the control of the person's own body. For Atwood, female subjectivity is defined and constituted by the male gaze and its manipulation. Peter's perception of Marian obscures who she actually is as he has made her merely a construction of his own expectations and ideals. This objectivisation of Marian is further revealed in the narrative by a change of voice from the first to the third person. Anorexia can be considered a form of 'female disorder' or madness', similar to female 'hysteria' of the nineteenth century, and produced through the ideological constructions imposed in the late twentieth century. Anorexia appears to be an emaciated parody of the late twentieth century's ideal of the hyperslender or androgynous female form. Though it is a possible form of rebellion, it appears to create a docile female body, which conforms to the ideology forced upon it. It mirrors the fall into madness of the mad woman of the nineteenth century, which was an escape from repression and from the state of the 'other'. Both states of 'madness' are passive forms of resistance that offer no actual means, to women, of getting out of their situation. Though Marian appears to overcome her anorexia, it is left uncertain as to how long she will manage to continue resisting the ideological system that surrounds her. It is this same need to overcome and resist structuration by societal systems that informs the novel *Surfacing*.

In Atwood's novel *Surfacing* the narrator creates elaborate fictional versions of her past, which allow her to deal with her repressed pain. Her unsuccessful affair with a married man and her subsequent abortion are reinvented as a divorce and a child left behind with its father. These false versions of her life story make the reader aware of how language can be used for fictional construction. The narrator's creation of dual and multiple selves undermines her association with reality. The emphasis on this

fragmentation and alteration of character shows how subjectivity is neither an essential nor a predetermined entity. The narrator's dissolution of self is both a protest and a resistance, but causes a fractured identity of divided selves. Atwood's questioning of identity through this fragmentation of selves represents an effort to transgress the limiting definitions of individuality.

In the first section of the novel the language used by the narrator is cool, distanced and logical and she reveals an inability to feel, indicative of a repressed and excessively structured subject. Yet, she is equally incapable of controlling the disorder of selves that she has writhing within her. This inner turmoil leads to her descent into irrationality, timelessness and speechlessness in an irruption of repressed desires that causes her 'self' to deconstruct. The narrator's movement out of time and speech can be seen to mirror Julia Kristeva's usage of the symbolic and semiotic. In society all rules, linguistic and cultural, are codified in the symbolic. Underlying the symbolic is the semiotic, a state that exists prior to syntax and words and which is disruptive of symbolic language. The dissolution of the narrator's 'self' shatters the socially-defined conception of personality and identity. The 'self' is seen as having overstepped the defining boundaries of individuality, much as in *Jane Eyre*, where Bertha's body oversteps its physical boundaries. The identification between the narrator and her natural surroundings to the point of animalism is a characteristic evocation of madness in literature. This state is associated with insights that undermine and transgress the ideological beliefs and knowledge of society. Atwood sees women on the margins of culture, which allows them to subvert, transgress and disrupt the symbolic order. This position that women occupy in Atwood's work can be seen as corresponding to Foucault's conception of the madman of the Middle Ages as being on the margins of society, of madness as a liminal and transgressive state. The narrator of *Surfacing*, with her animalistic return to nature, could be viewed as resembling a wild, ecstatic maenad, expressing a Dionysian need for liberation from the ideological constraints of society.

At the end of *Surfacing*, the narrator re-enters the symbolic. This has to be accomplished otherwise she would merely dissolve into the inchoate mutterings and syntax of madness. The circle has been completed. The movement from the symbolic

or Apollonian to the semiotic or Dionysian with a return to the symbolic or Apollonian has been effected. The narrator has surfaced into an acknowledgement and better understanding of her 'self'. Her plans for the future are to try and live outside the guilt and rigidity associated with ideologies, but like Marian in *The Edible Woman*, there is no certainty that she will be able to achieve this.

The ideas and concepts that Atwood has developed in these two previous novels culminate in her construction of Grace Marks in her novel *Alias Grace*. Here Atwood extensively explores ideas and concepts such as the ideological construction of the female body by society, forms of madness, split subjectivity, elaborate story telling, dreams, use of language and the liminal position that women occupy in society.

In *Alias Grace* Atwood has written an historical novel based on the life of the Canadian murderess Grace Marks. Atwood creates a protagonist who shares the multiple selves so characteristic of the female characters in her other novels. At the time of her trial and afterwards, Grace was represented by the media in many ways: as innocent, evil, shrewd manipulator, insane or merely as a victim. The people who wrote about Grace projected onto her all the nineteenth-century assumptions about women, criminality, insanity, servitude, class and sexuality. The many representations of whom and what Grace appeared to be, were instrumental in forming public opinion, belief and the historical depiction of Grace. Atwood is questioning 'truth' through a satirical exploration of the discourses that 'created' this Grace. However, Atwood is also creating a version of Grace in the form of a narrative discourse that constructs Grace for the reader. At the same time Atwood uses this narrative to subvert this construction.

The narrative of *Alias Grace* is built upon Grace's reconstruction of her life story as told to the psychologist Dr. Simon Jordan. Grace endures an enforced emigration from Northern Ireland to Canada by ship. Grace's description of the ship and the voyage as "like being a suffering soul in Hell" (1997:134) relates this ship to the Ship of Fools that Foucault depicts in his work *Madness and Civilization*. However, though both ships move across the water to a far destination, one is idealised and the other according to Grace is 'only a sort of slum in motion' (1997:134). Yet, the mismatch of inmates aboard the vessel could be seen as mirroring the mad of the Ship

of Fools. The inmates of Grace's ship, like the mad, represent unwanted elements of society placed aboard a ship and sent out to sea to seek their destiny or reason elsewhere. They are thus subject to a form of social control and have been confined to a ship from which there is no escape. As Grace observes: 'Once they had raised the gangplank and there was no way back to land' (1997:131). The ship's inmates are trapped, surrounded by water and enclosed in confined quarters. Death and madness lurk on the ship as it cuts across to the other side of the world. The journey of the Ship of Fools was a psychic one where the destination became the shores of reason. In Grace's case the voyage becomes one of 'unreason' as a tearing split occurs within her psyche aboard her Ship of Fools. This Ship will become the representative of her state of transgressive 'madness' when she will be seen to voyage between 'reason' and 'unreason' and 'consciousness' and 'unconsciousness' with amazing fluidity.

It is death that will split Grace's subjectivity on this voyage as it is on the ship that her mother dies. It is a death outlined in ice and neglect. The attitude that is expressed towards Grace's mother prefigures the attitude expressed towards her future friend Mary Whitney. Both women die through the negligence and neglect of male doctors and men who were supposed to care for and love them. Grace experiences no direct emotions; it is as though the surrounding ice has frozen her feelings. She says, 'I did not cry. I felt as if it was me and not my mother that had died, and I sat as if paralyzed' (1997:139). This death of feelings and dissociation can be seen to represent the hidden fissure that will explode into her later 'hysteria' or 'insanity'. According to Foucault, madness was seen as a danger simply because of extreme cases where there were only 'a few minute fissures, minuscule murmurings' that then 'explode into a monstrous crime' (Foucault 1980:205). As Foucault notes, this idea was used to construct the diagnosis of homicidal mania. In her grief and disturbed state Grace believes that her mother's enraged soul has been trapped in the ship's hold to sail forever over the seas. The dead, angry woman is trapped into her attic, which in this instance has become the hold of the Ship of Fools. This idea of the trapped soul will manifest itself further when Grace is confronted with Mary Whitney's untimely death. For Grace, 'A sea voyage and a prison may be God's reminder to us that we are all flesh' (1997:135). Thus the voyage on the ship is implicitly associated with imprisonment. Not for Grace the apparent freedom of Foucault's madmen and their ship, rather, the Ship of Fools represents death, loss of self and imprisonment in the

role her mother had previously had to play. Like Antoinette in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Grace's trip across the water is the start of her 'madness'. This journey will confine Grace to a role and class with few prospects, a position that Grace's transgressive personality will resist and chafe against.

After Grace arrives in Canada she is taken into service as a maid and comes under the wing of Mary Whitney. Grace and Mary share a room in the attic. This is perhaps an analogy to *Jane Eyre* where Bertha Mason is the mad woman in the attic. As Showalter mentions, 'it was common for crazy women to be kept hidden in homes' (Showalter 1987 :67). Grace and Mary occupy a place with connotations of 'madness' and confinement. This confinement, is however, also theirs by class and domestic servitude. Mary assumes the role of a mother figure for Grace and it is Mary who starts to mould Grace's attitudes and to structure her into her role as maidservant.

Being a maidservant is a marginal situation as servants always move on the boundaries of the lives of their masters. As Grace notes, 'There were few secrets they could keep from the servants' (1997:183). A servant's position was thus both one of marginalisation and at the same time one of privilege. A tension is established between master and servant based upon class. For all Mary's claims to the contrary, Canada was a land of strict class division based on its allegiance to the British crown and class. The structuring edifice that surrounds domestic servitude envelops Grace. Servitude, as Grace learns, comes with a dual face, the one exhibited to the masters and the face revealed when no masters are present:

Mary Whitney was a fun loving girl, and very mischievous and bold in her speech when we were alone. But towards her elders and betters her manner was respectful and demure (1997:173).

Grace quickly learns to master these faces; the obedient Apollonian and the bawdy, transgressive, Dionysian face found backstairs. Yet, it is to Mary that Grace continually attributes the bawdy and transgressive statements that she sometimes uses. Grace tends to use Mary's words when she is undercutting her betters, either their sexuality, morality, politics or work ethic, 'they may be silk purses in the daytime, but they're all sows' ears at night'(1997 :39). This is always qualified with 'Mary was a

person of democratic views'(1997 :39). Grace also resorts to using Mary when she feels threatened, as when the asylum doctor is examining her, 'Take your hand off my tit, you filthy bastard, Mary Whitney would have said'(1997 :38). Grace seems to be using Mary to hide behind as a shield for her own transgressive tendencies. It appears that Grace likes the façade of gentility and she cannot acknowledge anything subversive or bawdy as stemming from her own psyche. Rather, Grace deflects the blame for this carnivalesque language onto an apparently safe object in the form of Mary Whitney.

Grace is depicted as impressionable and highly wrought being scared of thunderstorms, crying easily and being childishly afraid of sheets hanging in the drying room:

they looked different, like pale ghosts of themselves hovering and shimmering there in the gloom; and the look of them, so silent and bodiless, made me afraid (1997:184).

This perfectly recalled image and feeling will be revived when Grace talks about her waking dream before the murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery. It is almost as if Grace has stored away perfect gothic romance images to entrance Simon Jordan and to enhance the effect of her life story, of which she only expressly mentions *The Lady of the Lake*. However, there are asides that imply that she has read more than just that single work. Mary also jokingly tells Grace that wrapped up in a sheet after her bath she looks 'very comical, just like a mad woman' (1997:175). Poor madwomen were often depicted in Victorian imagery as being clad in sheets in places like Bedlam. This comment of Mary's seems to be a prediction of Grace's future and it makes the reader wonder about Grace's ability to remember, with such clarity, things said so long before and with so many subtle references to her future state. These small occurrences act as pointers to what will transpire in Grace's life story.

It is the death of Mary Whitney that precipitates Grace's tendency to 'hysteria' and her aversion to doctors. Mary undergoes an abortion in which:

The doctor took a knife to her, and cut something inside; and he said there would be pain and bleeding and it would last some hours, but that after this she would be all right again (1997:203).

It is this callous male disregard for the female that Grace encountered previously aboard ship when her mother fell ill and died. It is the disdain of the man who impregnates Mary, combined with the disregard of the doctor, that directs Grace's attitude toward doctors and gentlemen; 'but it is my true belief that it was the doctor that killed her with his knife, him and the gentleman between them' (1997:206). These men wield power and authority. They have the respect of society because of their social standing and status yet their attitude is malign when dealing with women from a class they regard as beneath them. Grace has realised that men dispose of and maltreat certain women with seeming impunity, and yet use them to satisfy their physical needs, be these sexual or merely for personal comfort. At the same time their power and knowledge are reliant upon their interaction with the female or 'other'. It is against this other that they manage to define themselves. As Foucault notes 'between everyone who knows and everyone who does not there exist relations of power' (Foucault 1980:187). These men have used their knowledge in order to determine the conduct of others, most notably women. Yet, these dominant male figures are also constrained within a power matrix, which predetermines all actions and resistance. Power is seen to 'work in specific times and in specific places on subjects who return its pressure' (During 1992:134). Every person has the ability to resist power and this resistance in turn creates an outflow of power, so that there is no power without resistance. Atwood will show Grace using her own power of resistance as a pretty and mysterious woman, to manipulate males into docile bodies prepared to succumb to her charms and do her will.

Mary dies from loss of blood. When Grace wakes she sees 'Mary, dead in bed, with her eyes wide open and staring' (1997:204). This is almost the mirror image of her mother's state of death, 'She was dead as a mackerel, with her eyes open and fixed' (1997:139). Grace has lost both mother figures in similar fashion. Yet, for Mary she manages to weep. At the same time she reveals her transgressive, manipulative anger, which is directed at those in a class above hers. This she does when questioned by her employer about the man involved with Mary saying that, 'Only she said that you

would not like it at all, if you found out who it was' (1997:205). This manipulative statement implies that Grace knows what happened but won't tell. It is this type of knowledge that makes Grace appear dangerous and creates unease in those for whom she works. It is the knowledge and power that servants have over their employers which Atwood shows Grace using in spiteful retaliation.

Whilst she is cleaning up and hiding the true nature of Mary's death, she hears Mary's voice saying, 'let me in' (1997:207), which are the words that Catharine Earnshaw utters in *Wuthering Heights*. Atwood is indicating that Grace's story owes a lot to her Gothic novel reading, which is more extensive than she has let on. The reader and Simon Jordan should question the 'truth' and perfect accuracy of Grace's story, realising that this perfect rendition is narrated with hindsight. Grace is using her knowledge of the present to colour and recreate the past. Yet, Atwood is manipulating past and present in the same manner as her character, as she pulls Grace's story into the reader's present. In her apparent fear of this unearthly voice Grace opens the window into a world that is 'cold as an icicle' (1997:207). Like Grace's mother, Mary has died in the cold. Atwood subtly weaves ice and water together in times when excessive emotions, death and amnesia are present. It is cold and shock that causes Grace to react:

I fell to the floor in a dead faint. They said I lay like that for ten hours, and no one could wake me, although they tried pinching and slapping, and cold water, and burning feathers under my nose; and that 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 gone into the lake, and I needed to search for her (1997:208).

What to contemporary knowledge would be seen as an epileptic fit would then have been regarded as a manifestation of hysteria. Grace's apparent fit would have fulfilled all the preconceived notions of what constituted hysteria. The cold water, slapping and pinching, used in an attempt to revive Grace, were standard measures used to revive hysterics and to restore them to 'reason'. Hysteria was seen as related

to excessive emotional stimulus, which in the case of Grace would be blamed on Mary's death. As Foucault notes, 'The possibility of madness is therefore implicit in the very phenomenon of passion' (Foucault 1988a :88). Language itself can become the area of conflict hiding secret meanings and for a hysteric it can embody the lost object of passion. Passion and 'unreason' are both apparent in a loss of self-control and a blurring of the boundaries that exist between subject and object. This transgression of boundaries, as Foucault realised, involves a limit and this limit and transgression

depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows (Foucault 1977b:34).

Passion is the limit of body and soul, and madness is what transgresses this boundary calling all dualities into question. Transgression and limit, like the Dionysian and Apollonian, become co-dependent entities: one cannot exist without the presence of the other.

Grace appears to revive from the fit and yet is still beside and apparently outside herself. She refuses to believe that she is Grace, believing that Grace has drowned. This dream state apparently represents a psychic tear. Grace seems to be very confused believing that she is her mother who was buried in the water, yet, at the same time, saying that Grace was lost and gone into the lake. This appears to be associated more with the Gothic romance, *The Lady of the Lake*, Mary had been reading to her before she died. Again there is the question of how much Grace is manipulating the storyline from her omniscient position in the present from which she is dragging back the past. The image of Grace in the lake evokes the Victorian image of Ophelia in the water and of madness, an image that will be seen to recur in Grace's dreams.

This image of the woman in the water forms part of both the literary and iconographic tradition of the Victorian period. Atwood is using this Victorian iconography of the female form as mermaid or Ophelia to expose how the feminine was constructed by

men in the nineteenth century to conform to their ideals of the female as having ambiguous, mysterious and demonic powers. Ophelia's death by drowning is associated with the irrational, and the feminine as water is the symbol for women's corporeality, which is composed of blood, tears and milk. The maenad and the mermaid are both forms of the female demon according to nineteenth-century ideology and they possess extensive Dionysian and transgressive capabilities.¹ The split-subjectivity that Grace appears to exhibit seems to be a release of the Dionysian force. This transgressive force is made more obvious by the loss of symbolic control of language, where Grace becomes no longer Grace as subject, but is referred to in the third person as 'her' and as 'lost'. Someone else has usurped the position of subject and Grace has become the lost object. In the displacement of subject and object Atwood has provided Grace with a form of lacuna, which opens up questions about her innocence, guilt and 'insanity'. Grace it seems is lost for a whole day, 'Then I fell into a deep sleep. When I woke, it was a day later, and I knew that I was Grace, and that Mary was dead' (1997:208). Here language has ensured the replacement of one identity by another. Grace has regained the subject position and language has once more assumed its symbolic position; the Dionysian force has been controlled. But a strange and ghostly void exists, a liminal boundary where things slide away as Grace herself comments: 'But I had no memory of anything I said or did during the time I was awake, between the two long sleeps; and this worried me' (1997:209). Grace will appear to lose her memory in similar fashion during the murders of her boss Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery the housekeeper.

Grace leaves her employer shortly after the death of Mary Whitney and moves from employer to employer in search of some form of security. She seems to obtain this from Nancy Montgomery, the housekeeper of Thomas Kinnear's residence. She sees in Nancy a substitute mother figure to replace both Mary Whitney and her mother. As she says, 'She resembled Mary Whitney, or so I then thought, and I'd been depressed in spirits ever since Mary's death' (1997:234). Grace appears to live this depression in what Kristeva calls:

¹ Sources consulted to develop this argument about women in Victorian iconography were, Allen, V. 1983 *The Femme Fatale Erotic Icon* New York, Whitston Publishing Company. Auerbach, N. 1982 *Woman and the Demon* New York, Harvard University Press. Bade, P. 1979 *Femme Fatale* New York, Mayflower Books. Dijkstra, B. 1986 *Idols of Perversity* New York, Oxford University Press.

a wound or deprivation, discovering just the same that my grief is but the deferment of the hatred or desire for ascendancy that I nurture with respect to the one who betrayed or abandoned me (Kristeva 1989 :5).

Grace regards herself as having been betrayed by the men who took Mary away as well as her own father whom she hates. She also sees herself as abandoned by both her mother figures. This depression in spirits is an indication that Grace's frame of mind is precarious, a repression of passion, grief and rage liable to explode under extraneous circumstances.

Grace is met by her new employer and driven to the house. Here she meets McDermott, the stable hand and her future co-accused. She also experiences her first 'slight from Nancy who 'made no move to come over to me; and something squeezed tight about my heart' (1997:242). This is the start of Grace's disillusion with her new employment. This disillusionment is further compounded by the arguments that she has with Nancy. Grace realises that she has not found a woman in whom she can confide, ' I thought that we would be like sisters or at least good friends, the two of us working together side by side, as I had done with Mary Whitney. I knew this was not the way things were going to be' (1997:260). This situation is exacerbated when Grace realises that Nancy and Kinnear are lovers and not housekeeper and Master. This leads to more fighting between Grace and Nancy, as Grace 'lost much of the respect I'd once felt for Nancy' (1997:297). Grace has not found the replacement mother figure that she craves and her sense of abandonment, anger and hatred mounts.

Whilst at Kinnear's, Grace re-meets a peddler by the name of Jeremiah, whom she knew from her previous employ when working alongside Mary. She tells Jeremiah all about the cause of Mary's death and her own reaction to this death after he says, ' I hope you will not end up like Mary Whitney' (1997:308). This selfsame Jeremiah will appear later as the mesmerist Dr Jerome DuPont and the rival of Dr. Simon Jordan. Talking to Grace he says that he believes that she should come away with him and work as a clairvoyant:

I would teach you how, and instruct you in what to say, and put you into the trances. I know by your hand that you have a talent for it; and with your hair down you would have the right look (1997:311) .

Jeremiah plans to use Grace for hypnosis. He seems to believe that she has the ability either to play act extraordinarily well, or is a subject who is easy to place into a trance. In the late nineteenth century, hypnotism and hysteria were seen as closely related by doctors, like Charcot in France, and the study of the two states led to Freud's discovery of the unconscious. The only difference between the two states is that with hypnotism the 'other' is found in the presence of the hypnotists, where as in hysteria the 'other' is an absent presence, 'an imaginary relation that takes place above or below the level of language'(Oughourlian 1991 :161). Both states represent an acute dissociation of the personality resulting in a suppression of any culturally-established dualities and thus every trace of the difference between body and mind allowing for the freeplay of the transgressive Dionysian spirit. This freeplay does away with barriers of cultural restraints, allowing for the melding of opposites, union and ecstasy. It is thus a return to the Kristevan semiotic 'where the pronoun 'I' is no longer seen as divided into 'mind' and 'body' but as making the body as jouissance the material, unrepresentable support of language' (Lechte 1990: 128). Grace's reaction to Mary's death, which she has described to Jeremiah, would reveal to him that she is a possible hysteric and thus a perfect candidate for hypnosis.

Jeremiah also plays upon Grace's aspect as Sybil or maenad. Her auburn hair would have placed her into the Victorian iconography and literary tradition of either the 'monster' or of the femme fatale. Jeremiah is aware that allowing Grace's hair to hang loose would emphasise the image of the mad, staring, prophetic Sybil or maenad. This furthers the analogy with the original, medieval concept of the 'madman' as gifted with the ability to access 'truths' which are denied to the ordinary man. However, there is the indication in ' I would teach you how, and instruct you in what to say' that the trance and the hypnotism are a play act and that Jeremiah believes Grace to be a good actress. This is further revealed in Jeremiah saying, 'For if people wish to believe a thing, and long for it and depend on it to be true, and feel the better for it, is it cheating to help them to their own belief, by such an insubstantial thing as a name?' (1997:311). Hypnotism, like psychology with its discovery of the unconscious and the

talking cure, was a means to alleviate the suffering and sadness of the inner human condition. Hypnotism is seen as a system that inspires belief, a framework of manipulating power and knowledge and Jeremiah depicts it as offering almost a religious or mystical affirmation. He also avoids giving a name to a belief as a lack of name ensures a fluidity and intangibility allowing for marginality and the permeation of boundaries. Without a signifier there is more scope for transgression and challenging of norms. Jeremiah realises that this marginality and transgressiveness appeals to Grace. Atwood is calling into question language and its ability to shape views of the world and responses to life. She is also throwing into relief how discourses, which seem to offer truths and means of escaping the human condition, fashion humankind's existence whilst creating concepts such as 'truth', 'reality', 'faith' and 'belief'. However, these discourses can be subverted by parodying them as Atwood shows Jeremiah doing. Like the Ship of Fools, Jeremiah transgresses the boundary created by structures challenging the existence and meaning of these boundaries. In the characters of Jeremiah and Grace, Atwood is satirically undermining the efficaciousness of the systems that apparently mould humankind.

Jeremiah leaves without Grace, who says that she will think about his proposition. Things continue to deteriorate and Grace's tension increases. She overhears Nancy and Kinneer in his study where Nancy is reading *The Lady of the Lake* out loud to him. Grace's appreciation for the Gothic tradition is overtly revealed in her comment, 'The poor mad woman had just been shot by mistake, and was expiring slowly, while speaking several lines of verse; and I thought it a very melancholy part' (1997:323). It is almost a commentary upon how she would like the world to regard her the poor, melancholy mad woman. Grace then overhears that Nancy is thinking of giving her notice. One of the reasons is that Nancy feels uncomfortable as 'she wondered whether I was quite right, as she'd several times heard me talking out loud to myself' (1997:324). This seems to be an indication that Grace is sometimes outside of herself and this raises questions of her 'sanity' in the eyes of Nancy. However, as Thomas Kinneer insists, 'he often talked to himself' (1997:324). What Kinneer appears to be saying, is that talking to oneself is perfectly normal and that everyone is guilty of doing it at some time or other in their lives. Therefore it is made apparent that so-called 'sane' people are at times open to states of apparent 'insanity' or socially unacceptable behaviour. This shows that even 'sane' people are subject to states of

'insanity'. Here Atwood, like Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, calls into question the notion of 'reason' and 'unreason'. The fact that Thomas Kinnear, a supposedly 'sane', 'rational' man talks out loud to himself, and that Grace who will be considered 'insane' does the same, reveals that 'sanity' and 'insanity' are subjective states and that the borderline between them is very slight. It devolves into a matter of how certain discourses, in different historical time frames, have determined what it is to be 'sane' and what can be considered to be 'insane' behaviour. Grace, as a marginal person has learnt to overhear conversations that will aid and abet her slippage between states of 'sanity' and 'insanity'. As she withdraws from her position as silent listener to Kinnear and Nancy's conversation, a thunderstorm is threatening the household.

Thunder and lightning are tempestuous, Gothic weather associated with boundary transgression in which nature takes on the attributes of 'madness' and 'wildness' of the maenad. It is her fear of the raging storm that causes Grace to feel that 'we would split in two like a ship at sea, and sink down into the earth' (1997:325). The analogy to the Ship of Fools returns but this is a ship run aground burying its passengers alive. The free roaming image of madness has again become an image of enclosure, this time in a heretic's grave. Grace's psychic slippage is once more made apparent in her use of the plural term 'we'. This causes uneasiness in the reader as to whether Grace is referring to the whole Kinnear household or just to herself. If she is referring to herself then 'we' is a displacement of the accepted usage of language and implies that more than one subject is occupying a single subject position. This is seemingly confirmed when Grace hears a voice say 'It cannot be' (1997 :325) and succumbs 'into a fit, because after that I lost consciousness altogether' (1997:325). The voice has again taken over the subject position and caused Grace to lose 'herself'. Yet, before losing consciousness Grace was seemingly aware that someone else was within her. The electrical stimulus of the storm seems to activate Grace's 'hysteria' and split psyche and allows her to flow into a Dionysian state where boundaries no longer exist and the dream takes over.

In her dream state, Grace is aware of what is happening but is unaware that what she believes is a dream is 'real'. As Foucault noted ' To dream is not another way of experiencing another world, it is for the dreaming subject the radical way of experiencing its own world' (During 1992:30). Grace is in effect experiencing a

'reality' but one she thinks is a dream. For her it is filled with portents of impending doom and hidden sexuality. Both dream and madness are referents to a 'reality', yet they cannot be ordered by that 'reality'. The dream and madness access images, which appear to possess a unity or 'reality'. However, this 'reality' shimmers and changes fluidly having no substance and no ability or inherent need to impose reifying systems onto the dreamer or the mad person. Thus this 'reality' is evanescent but lacks any framing devices. But madness, unlike the dream, has a face that is visible to all and which opens madness up to the normative discourses of the society of reason.

Grace describes herself as outside where the world is 'silver' and the moonlight falling over her like water, in an image befitting a mad Pierrot. This image of Pierrot has many nuances as the silent fool made mad by the moon. Silence was seen as perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the insane. The fool is never clearly male or female but an ambiguous being who questions all values and norms of society. Having no values of their own, fools take existing views and turn them upside down and back to front in an outpouring of democratic feeling within an undemocratic system. Grace continually refers to Mary Whitney as having very democratic views. This occurs whenever Grace makes a transgressive comment. Grace seemingly hides behind a mask called Mary, a mask that she uses to manipulate and transgress the system in which she finds herself. The fact that Grace occupies a marginal position within society clearly allies her to the fool, who lived in society without being truly part of it. Pierrot's madness, like the dream Grace experiences, was an expression of the illusions of the unconscious mind. Atwood appears to create an analogy between Grace and the transgressive nature of the mad fools of Foucault's *Ship of Fools*. However, she is also revealing the ambiguity and fragmentary nature of Grace's psyche and how this along with her gender ensures her position as a liminal personage, one who uses masks to conceal the depths of her transgressivity.

Grace becomes aware that a man's arms are encircling her and that he is kissing her. Then fear surges through her apparently paralysed body and Grace says:

it was Death himself who stood behind me, with his arms wrapped around me as tight as iron bands, and his lipless mouth kissing my neck as if in love (1997:326) .

This is a very erotic image and brings to mind the medieval iconography of the Dance of Death, which instilled both fear and longing, but whose place was usurped by the state of madness as the 'other'. Death and madness formed an alliance with eroticism. Death, eroticism and madness become joined in the feminine form and in the disorder called 'hysteria'. Hysteria as a 'madness' was continually portrayed in the Victorian time period as embedded in female sexuality and sexual frustration. As Havelock Ellis insisted 'many of the symptoms of hysteria can be traced back to a sexual origin'(Dijkstra 1986 :244). He also believed that this was caused by the negation in women of the rational sexual inhibitions, which were controlled by 'the higher mental and moral functions'(Dijkstra 1986 :244). Ophelia the love-crazed, sexually frustrated and hysterical mad woman seemed to epitomise this belief in the sexual origins of hysteria and thus became the perfect subject for Victorian iconographic portrayal of women's hysteria. Ophelia was generally to be seen floating in water and through this association with water established links with her dark counterparts in the menacing female forms of the mermaid, siren or Lamia, with their promise of death to the male. Death, madness and eroticism became closely allied. Atwood uses words to evoke images and to float between the different forms of visual construction and thereby to call into question their status as structuring devices, which mould 'truth' and 'reality'.

Death is presaged for Grace through images and feelings related to water, ice and whiteness. In her dream state she looks up and sees 'enormous birds white as ice', which then change into angels sitting 'in silent judgement upon Mr Kinnear's house' (1997:327). These birds and angels resemble the sheets in the drying room that Grace had previously described as scaring her. After seeing the angels and birds, fear overcomes her and she loses consciousness in the dream. Awakening she realises that the dream was a 'reality' and that she had been 'walking around outside without knowing I was doing so' (1997:327). Grace's trance-like state would have been seen as somnambulism and indicative of a crisis of 'hysteria'. However, it is markedly epileptic in character and places Grace in a long line of seers, Sibyls, oracles and shamans who have what was termed 'The Sacred Disease'. This trance-like state would transcend the barriers of everyday reality and language, and would grant Grace access to these dreamlike visions.

Grace's waking state brings with it a feeling that 'there was a doom on the house, and that some within were fated to die' (1997:327). This appears more like hindsight and the reader should be questioning such perfectly recalled memories. This should be enforced by Grace's comment upon watching Dr. Jordan writing up what she has said, 'I wonder what he will make of all that' (1997:328). It is as though she is creating the perfect Gothic novel, which is soon to have the blood and weltering corpses typical of that genre. Grace seems to be weaving a gossamer web of words to captivate and imprison Simon Jordan. Her story is a façade, a labyrinth constructed to lure the unwary and yet these words simultaneously express her fragmented self. Again Atwood is calling into question the conception of 'truth' and its possible 'reconstruction'. She is showing how the unwary can be entrapped by the fiction of words and how these words can construct and manipulate a 'reality' into existence.

Grace describes the murders to Dr. Jordan. She says that on the morning of the murders 'there was a film of silver over everything, like frost only smoother, like water running thinly down over flat stones' (1997:367). The fact of death is again presaged by the images of ice and water and this aura occurs before the event of the murder. The previous auras occurred after traumatic events but this one occurs before the event, which seems to imply that Grace knew that McDermott would fulfil his threat to murder Nancy Montgomery and Thomas Kinnear. Grace admits that she remembers nothing of Nancy's murder, 'all that time is dark to me, Sir' (1997 :369). She also states that when she saw the dead body of Kinnear she ran out and McDermott fired a shot after her which caused her to fall 'onto the ground in a dead faint. And that is all I can remember, Sir, until much later in the evening' (1997:372). Atwood is again creating for Grace a dark lacuna, an ambiguous and liminal area that is open to interpretation by both reader and listening psychoanalyst. This liminal space allows Atwood to satirically call into question the established beliefs in 'truth', 'reality' and language. Atwood underscores the provisional and fluid nature of 'truth and 'reality'. Founded upon language they become subjective and open to manipulation.

The narrative changes when it comes to the detailing of the murders. What had been free indirect speech suddenly becomes direct speech. This seems to emphasise the importance of the murders and at the same time to distance and make the narrative

appear objective, almost like a case history or a lawyer's interview of a client. The free indirect speech takes the reader into Grace's stream of consciousness and makes the story more intimate and subjective, allowing for identification with the persona of Grace. In this first person direct speech Grace describes her dreams before the murders. The dreams are a recreation of both the events of the murder and intimations of her incarceration in prison. However, Grace admits that it was her bad 'dreams' that caused her confinement in the asylum, as people said that, 'they were not dreams at all, Sir. They said I was awake. But I do not wish to say any more about it' (1997:365). Here Grace seems to purposely draw Simon Jordan into her dream world, only to deny him access to the 'reality' and the 'truth' for which he is questing. This is Grace at her manipulative best, weaving her story and creating voids that she seems to refuse to explore. This allows her to stay outside the comprehension of her listener, placing her firmly in a liminal position from which she can transgress preconceived notions about who and what she is. This results in Simon Jordan becoming disconcerted as he starts to identify with Grace and begins to lose his much-vaunted scientific 'objectivity'.

Grace's multiplicity is evidenced at her trial for murder, where her story of the murders changes at each telling. Her ability to put on and conform to the Apollonian or symbolic face that the law regards as her only hope of escape, and her best means of defence, saves her life. Though alive she is subject to confinement as an undesirable and disturbing societal element. She enters the world of the gaze of the penitentiary, where everything that she does is monitored and watched and where the gaze is used to coerce her into obedience and conformity.² Grace must learn to follow the moral requirements of the institution or face punishment. She becomes an object, upon which are inscribed morals, religion, labour, medicine and discipline. Her transgressive instinct is wedged further and further into her interior and can only be glimpsed within the stream of consciousness narrative, to which Atwood makes the reader privy. It is in the asylum that Grace learns to manipulate silence and disappear into her interior, thereby avoiding all the tags that the discourses of the penitentiary and asylum attempt to inscribe upon her.

² Reference to the 'gaze' of the penitentiary may be found in Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish*. Prisoners are subject to scrutiny which they cannot return. This disciplinary regime coerces prisoners into self discipline out of fear of the all seeing and punishing 'gaze'.

CHAPTER TWO

In chapter two I shall deal with Grace's confinement in the asylum. This aspect of Atwood's text is very vague and brief, an unarticulated space like that which Bertha occupies in *Jane Eyre*. It is this lacuna that will need to be explored through the persona of Grace, her appearance, her apparent 'hysteria' and her use of language and change of subject position. It is also to be found in the manner in which Atwood changes voices and tenses. Language and madness will be seen to be intricately connected. This chapter will also show how sexuality and madness were represented as intimately connected by the paternalistic structures of the nineteenth century.

Grace's stay in the world of the asylum is, like her episodes of amnesia, a fissure in the fabric of the narrative. It is touched upon in snatches usually by people who had something to do with Grace. Grace, herself, refers to it in seeming brief asides. As she remarks, 'There are some things that should be forgotten by everyone, and never spoken of again' (1997 :29). The most notable commentary Atwood uses is that of the female writer Susanna Moodie who describes seeing Grace in the asylum:

Among these raving maniacs I recognised the singular face of Grace Marks – no longer sad and despairing but lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiendlike merriment (1997 :51).

This graphic description might come from any gothic romance of the time. It is a stereotypical description of how 'mad' women were seen, particularly those afflicted with 'hysteria'. However, there is the obvious reference to the Victorian view of the maenad or evil, uncontrollable woman, a Medea, or a Lady Macbeth, in the use of the word 'fiendlike'. This word with its links to the figure of Lady Macbeth suggests Grace's murderous nature, yet, at the same time her split psyche. Lady Macbeth went mad after she committed murder, her psyche splitting under the strain, and Grace also experiences this splitting and slippage of the psyche. Susanna Moodie depicts Grace as the archetypal hysteric, yet with a twist, as Grace is not seen as lovelorn but as

fiendlike. Grace is presented as needing the control and mastery of the medical world and the institution to ensure her re-entry into society and 'normality'.

The asylum and medicine can be seen as representatives of the paternalistic tradition, which used so-called humanitarian beliefs to enforce domination (Showalter 1987 :50). It is one of these Victorian gentlemen doctors who describes Grace as a devious dissembler who works the system of the asylum to her own benefit,

To speak plainly, her madness was a fraud and an imposture, adopted by her in order that she might indulge herself and be indulged(1997 : 81).

This attitude shows the hardened Victorian medical establishment's view that 'hysteria' was a fraud and that maniacs should be treated like animals, but is also a depiction of a hurt male ego. Grace indicates that this doctor had attempted, what she terms, 'improprieties' with her, when she was 'tied up in the dark with mufflers on my hands'(1997 :35). She had responded to this by sinking 'my teeth into his fingers, and then over we went, backwards onto the floor, yowling together like two cats in a sack'(1997 :38). Grace's independent action in defying the constraints holding her is an assault on both the dignity and the liberties that the doctor feels should be accorded to one in his position. His standing as a mythical, almost godlike figure is called into question and ensures Grace's censure. Grace's reaction places her in the category of evil woman for this staunch Victorian doctor. It also calls into question the belief that hysterics were tractable, lovelorn and passive creatures who were open to exploitation and dependent upon the advice and comfort of the mythical figure of the doctor. Paternalistic dominance was not open to question and reacted with malevolence when faced with rebellion. The good doctor is quick to indicate his doubts that Grace is mad, but he draws upon current Victorian imagery regarding female insanity to explain this assumption:

She amused herself with a number of supposed fits, hallucinations, caperings, warblings and the like, nothing being lacking to the impersonation but Ophelia's wildflowers entwined in her hair (1997 :81).

Here is the image of Ophelia and her wildflowers associated with melancholy and sexual madness. However, the words 'amused', 'supposed' and 'impersonation' show that for this doctor Grace is no mad, gentle, sexually repressed Ophelia. Instead, as he goes on to say she is like 'the Sirens' and is as 'devoid of morals as she is of scruples' having a 'degenerate character and morbid imagination' (1997 :82). The doctor sees Grace as a powerful antagonist and her apparent 'hysteria' is viewed as morally repulsive, manipulative and degenerative, this attitude according with the medical beliefs of the time (Showalter 1987 :133). Grace with her auburn hair, melancholy complexion and bright blue eyes is the perfect model for the Victorian conception of the dangerous woman who seeks to inflict violence upon the male. Grace has become the female monster, the femme fatale, a maenad out to deceive and destabilise the rational and well-balanced world of man. The depiction of Grace's character wavers between sweet innocence and evil, dissembling male hater, which was the popular dichotomy of the Victorian male response to women at that time.

Atwood makes use of Susanna Moodie's testimony to further emphasise and cast judgement upon Grace's character:

Grace Marks glances at you with a sidelong stealthy look; her eye never meets yours, and after a furtive regard, it invariably bends its gaze upon the ground. She looks like a person rather above her humble station (1997 :9).

In this description the image of Grace as being shifty, underhand and manipulative is emphasised. It gives a feeling of dark undercurrents and fluidity. The idea that she is a person who considers herself above her 'humble' position is a class and social judgement. The New World was supposed to offer opportunities where class and social standing were a thing of the past. Grace is classified, dissected and placed within a reified social position by Moodie's description of her. This mirrors the attitude of the doctor who felt at liberty to try and take advantage of Grace because of her so-called class and social position. The reader is made aware of Grace's inner thoughts that confirm that she does not conform to any attempted classification. Atwood shows how social conditioning and discourses can structure and present a

picture of someone that become accepted as 'truth'. As Grace notes about the things that were written about her, 'And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once?' (1997 :25). Atwood indicates in the multitude of descriptions concerning Grace just how fragmentary and subjective notions of 'truth' really are. As Grace remarks to Simon Jordan, 'Just because a thing is written down, Sir, does not mean it is God's truth'(1997 :299). However, as the reader is aware, though Grace pays lip service, she is not religious. So God's truth would also be open to interpretation having been written down in language in the same manner that things have been written down about Grace. Atwood is indicating just how language is a discourse that constructs how people view the world and is ultimately an unreliable and subjective method to convey 'truth' and 'meaning'.

In the asylum Grace quickly realises that what she says is irrelevant and disregarded, 'I told them I wasn't mad, that I wasn't the one, but they wouldn't listen'(1997 :34). However, it is her, 'I wasn't the one' which disturbs. If Grace isn't the one that is mad, who has taken her place and is Grace consciously aware of who the 'mad' subject might be? It is this slippage, this nuance that makes the reader aware that there is something dark happening beneath the surface of Grace's consciousness. Grace's statement uses what Kristeva would term the symbolic or everyday language, however, it implies an irruption of the semiotic and thus a transgression of conscious boundaries. Grace's subjectivity is displaced in favour of someone or something unknown with a loss of Grace's symbolic control over what is said, thought or felt. However, the response to Grace's pleading that she is not the mad one is negative and results in Grace retracting into her interior world. She seems to superficially conform to the medical requirements of that time which determined 'reason' from 'unreason', 'At last I stopped talking altogether, except very civilly when spoken to, Yes Ma'am No Ma'am, Yes and no Sir (1997 : 36). As Hélène Cixous points out, 'Silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech'(Showalter 1987 :161). The mutism that Grace seemingly adopts becomes a symptom of hysteria.

Freud saw 'hysteria' as a bisexual state where the hysteric identified with members of both sexes without being able to form a single sexual identity. This sexual ambivalence can be related to the original fool evoked in Foucault's Ship of Fools, who was neither clearly male nor female. The fool was usually sane but could at times

behave like a lunatic, rejecting established structures of emotion and thought and the norms and values of daily life. Ambiguity was a feature of the fool's social and political criticism. Grace's apparent hysteria and mutism can be seen to link her to this traditional folly, as does her obviously ambiguous nature. Grace's mutism can be regarded as a rejection of language, what Kristeva has termed the symbolic, and therefore, a rejection of the power of the father or, in this instance, the medical institution in the form of the male doctor. The medical institution of the asylum represents the rational, male logic that tries to classify and force everything to conform to its beliefs and standards of accepted behaviour. What refuses to conform to these rules and standards becomes regarded as 'other', 'alien' and dangerous and is forced into a space outside the solidity of the rational. Grace's 'unreason' is a refusal to enter into the world of rationality that the asylum and its representative, the male doctor, uphold. Her 'mutism' and her linguistic and psychic slippage are a radical protest and subversion of masculine reason and so-called 'normality'. This radical subversion is an escape from the imposition upon Grace of what the institution and doctor regard to be women's position and role in society. Like Bertha and Antoinette, Grace is using language, silence and madness to escape the bounds on the imposed female roles that society, the institution and the male doctor regard as being assigned to the female as a birthright. However, although Grace has opted to mask herself with the Apollonian façade required by the institution, beneath this she is in touch with the state of the semiotic or Dionysian. As she remarks to Simon Jordan, 'I can say anything I like; or if I don't wish to, I needn't say anything at all' (1997 :104). Grace knows what to say and when to say it, yet she also knows that silence has great power and can afford her protection. She is aware of the manipulative powers of silence and the secrets it can expose or cloak.

Yet, as Showalter has noted 'Victorian women were not easily silenced' (Showalter 1987: 81) and their 'talkativeness' represented a 'violation of conventions of feminine speech' (Showalter 1987 :81). This self-expression can be regarded as one of the reasons they would have been called 'mad'. In Grace's case it has been noted that 'sometimes she talks to herself and sings out loud in a most peculiar manner' (1997 :26). However, Grace exhibits a split-consciousness. On the one hand she manipulates through silent control and on the other she unconsciously talks and sings in a form of Kristevan 'semiotic' babbling. Cixous regards hysteria as a kind of female language

that opposes the rigid structures of male rationality and thought (Showalter 1987:160). Silence like hysteria can be seen as a form of rebellion exercised against the male establishment and can be viewed as transgressive and Dionysian. Grace's silence and 'madness' become radical forms of defence against the doctor in the asylum, who attempts to force her to yield to his attentions and authority.

In Foucault's view 'madness' is a state of silence caused by doctors who regard it as an illness and thereby deprive this state of any meaning. The 'mad' only relate to truth through the examples that they provide for the doctor's scientific discourse (During 1992 :40). Madness is medicalised and any single act- like a murder - is seen as a case for a diagnosis of 'insanity'. This diagnosis would be one of moral insanity, where madness is not a loss of reason but deviance from socially accepted behaviour. Yet as Grace comments, 'when you go mad you don't go any other place, you stay where you are, and somebody else comes in'(1997 :37). This description of what it feels like to go mad is an admission that Grace is aware of what happens to her. This fluid movement between reason and unreason becomes, in turn, a fluid movement between subjects, one subject usurping the place of the other. As Foucault observes, the structuration of the persona through language becomes intricately linked to madness where language speaks:

of itself in a second language in which the absence of a sovereign subject outlines its essential emptiness and incessantly fractures the unity of discourse (Foucault 1977b : 48).

Madness transgresses the structuration of the persona that language enforces within the Kristevan symbolic. This transgression is fluid and Dionysian. In Grace's madness there appears to be no sovereign subject, but a constant fluid movement between different states of subjectivity.

This fluidity of movement between subjects is noticeable in the fracturing and irruption into Grace's narrative discourse of the 'somebody else' and of carnivalesque statements, normally attributed to Mary Whitney, but which are at odds with Grace's Apollonian and prudish mask. At this level,

language is pure “transgression” for, though it is not a psycho-pathological category like delirium, it is delirious in having an ungrounded and ungroundable structure (During 1992 :69).

Thus Foucault argues that madness reveals the void that language locates within itself. Grace speaks in a broken language, where the semiotic is continually transgressing the symbolic and revealing the void that hides at the core of language and which both creates and disperses the notion of the ‘subject’. The subject disappears when it suffers a ‘dispersion in a language which dispossesses it while multiplying it within the space created by its absence’(Foucault 1977b :42). Language becomes absent when it crosses the virtual or psychic space where it develops into a mere image of itself. The ‘subject’ is constructed upon this spatial absence and mirrored shadow, yet language transgresses and discards the notion of the ‘subject’ thus allowing for the possibility of the mad person. Madness becomes an interior state, which is not apparent to the rest of the world. Yet, as in Grace’s case, there are the symptoms the ‘minute fissures, minuscule murmurings’ which can ‘explode into a monstrous crime’(Foucault 1980 :205). Madness becomes dangerous because even those in positions of power who claim to work with it and understand it are unable to predict its occurrence. Madness cannot be structured by any discourse, but moves freely over boundaries and limits, defying control.

The rise of the medical discourse of psychology in the nineteenth century turned sex into the major secret that lurked underneath the conscious, rational mind and implied that it was one of the primary causes of madness. Therefore madness and sex seemed to share common characteristics and the medical discourse of psychology was adopted to deal with both. This ensured what Foucault regarded as ‘the intrication of two great technologies of power: one which fabricated sexuality and the other which segregated madness’(Foucault 1980:185). Yet, under the guise of caring for the mad, the two discourses co-join in the persona of the doctor. The doctor’s subjective interpretation and application of the values, beliefs and knowledge are what construct both his outlook and his position in historical time.

The doctors in the nineteenth century thought that the domestication of insanity in the asylum would socially re-educate the mad woman and provide her with work to do

(Showalter 1987 :31). The asylum became a regulatory institution where domination was practised. Women were regulated through domestic routines and enforced moral values like silence, decorum, piety and gratitude. This ideal of gratitude is commented upon by Simon Jordan in relation to Grace: 'the emotion she expresses most openly towards him is a subdued gratitude'(1997 :422). Yet, Simon is well aware that the 'gratitude isn't real' (1997 :422) but a learnt, social response used to manipulate and control the response of men. Grace has adopted it to conform to the social requirements of the penitential institutions in which she is incarcerated. The asylum, like the penitentiary, was a disciplinary power moulding the bodies inside to conform to social requirements. Sexuality was seen as a moral issue and was 'displaced by practices and modes of thought that construct norms and impose them as respectable, natural or normal' (During 1992 :169). In the nineteenth century, women's bodies were hystericised and seen as 'saturated with sexuality' (During 1992 :169). Grace is a victim of this sexual discourse. She is subjected to the asylum doctor's advances when tied up in a strait jacket and alone in a darkened room:

Remain quiet, I am here to examine your cerebral configuration, and first I shall measure your heartbeat and respiration, but I knew what he was up to. Take your hand off my tit, you filthy bastard, Mary Whitney would have said, but all I could say was Oh no, oh no (1997 :38).

Here the split-consciousness of Grace reacts under fear and the Dionysian response of Mary comes to the fore, a carnivalesque response to the situation in direct contrast to Grace's pathetic 'Oh no'. Yet, Grace is aware that the doctor's actions are far from innocent and she reacts with animal-like ferocity, biting him. This transgressive, Dionysian reaction is an indication that she is not a docile body that has been moulded to conform to the requirements of the disciplinary power of the doctor or the institution.

Another institution that Grace finds sexually prurient is that of the church. She is scathing of religion and its manipulative ways with its lust for confession, conformity, penance and prurience:

Shed tears of remorse. Confess, confess. Let me forgive and pity. Let me get up a Petition for you. Tell me all. And then what did he do? Oh shocking . And then what? The left hand or the right? How far up exactly? Show me where (1997 :39).

This response wavers between the acknowledgement of her sexuality and her need to confess her sins. The Church originated the sexual confessional, which makes it far more manipulative than the overt actions of the doctor. Yet it aims finally to make Grace conform to the socially accepted veneer of morality, whilst vicariously indulging in the experience of her sexuality. It is a form of voyeurism, which masks itself behind the expression of an apparent forgiveness, love and pity. Grace's sexuality is revealed as the focus of most of the discourses working upon her.

As Grace's narrative progresses and Simon Jordan gets sucked in, both by her story and her beauty, he too starts regarding her as a sexual creature:

There is a passion in Grace somewhere, he's certain of it, although it would take some hunting for it. And she'd be grateful to him, albeit reluctantly (1997 : 452).

Here Simon Jordan falls into the trap of looking for 'gratitude' from Grace where previously he rejected the idea of women's gratitude as being only a socially inspired ruse that they hide behind. Grace's gratitude would be inspired by his sexual dominance, which would neatly mould her into the object of his desire. He is projecting his needs upon Grace, his need for sexual passion and his belief that he could evoke it in Grace. This is also a class distinction as for Simon women of the better classes are for breeding purposes and not subject to unladylike 'sexual' passions. They are there for sexual release and a comfortable home life. Grace, however, has the allure of coming from a class beneath his own and thus being open to sexual exploitation. Grace's sexual allure has the added frisson of violence that comes with her title of murderess. Grace has the further added mystique of being unattainable, self-contained and distant, yet in seeming need of a knight in shining armour to rescue her from herself and her position. However, at the same time Simon Jordan sees Grace as the mermaid:

I have cast my nets into deep waters, though unlike him, I may have drawn up a mermaid, neither fish nor flesh but both at once, and whose song is sweet but dangerous (1997 :490).

The mermaid in Victorian iconography was related to the Lamia and was seen as having a hybrid and ambiguous nature. She was mysterious and evocative of the demonic natures and powers of womanhood. Grace is thus seen by Simon as the epitome of the ambiguous, demonic femme fatale, the female maenad whose aim is to destroy men. Yet simultaneously, Simon has the need to make Grace jealous of him, to possess her soul in some manner and thus to have her in his power. However, as Simon is aware 'it's Grace herself who eludes him. She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's still following' (1997 :473). Grace appears to be leading him on, but her fluidity and ambiguity prohibit Simon from grasping and being able to control her. Grace's transgressive nature is never more apparent than in these images of the mermaid and maenad, elusively leading Simon ever deeper into a watery, unstable world. In this world his objectivity disintegrates and his preconceived notions and structured discourses become meaningless as aids in the attainment of the 'truth' for which he is questing.

Water is an element normally associated with cleansing and purification. However, for Grace it is mainly associated with death. In her fluid dream state she sees:

my mother in her winding sheet, drifting down through the cold water, which was blue-green in colour, and the sheet began to come undone at the tope, and it waved as if in the wind, and her hair floated out, rippling like seaweed (1997 :193).

The imagery evokes a dead Ophelia or the image of the Victorian mermaid, with rippling seaweed hair. It is more like a birth than a death, even though the body is seen as being in a winding sheet. This sheet is peeling back to allow the transformed body to emerge. Thus a sea change has occurred. In Victorian iconography this image would be closely associated with the fluidity of the female and her links with water. It would also represent the mermaid who lurks in the cold blue-green sea ready to pull

unsuspecting and infatuated males to their death. Mermaids are seen to submerge themselves, which is not a negation of power but a concealment of power. They are creatures of transformation and represent the secrecy and spiritual ambiguity of women. Atwood uses this iconographic imagery to show how women have been constructed as creatures associated with water and its life giving and death giving properties. Men fear drowning in water as a return to the state of nothingness and carefully construct a belief that women are closely associated with water in its ambiguous, shapeless otherness. Atwood uses this watery imagery to indicate how women have been ideologically stereotyped as water creatures which are at odds with the earthy, rational masculine world. Women are set up as objects to be gazed upon and incarcerated in masculine discourse, yet at the same time their ambiguity allows them to resist and slip through the rigidity of the discourses. This watery otherness has close ties with the fluidity and evanescent nature of madness, with its ability to slide through boundaries and to not be definable by any discourses. Simon Jordan identifies Grace with the stereotypical idea of the feminine relation to water when he says, 'she may want to stay in the water, in the dark, in her element. She may be afraid she won't be able to breathe' (1997 :374). The implications are that Grace is some form of fish or mermaid and that her natural habitat is the water.

In the asylum, water is associated with the chore that Grace is best at – laundry. The doing of laundry by female inmates of the asylum was considered the most therapeutic form of labour. Grace is a skilled laundress having learnt it under Mary Whitney's tutelage. As she remarks, 'there is a great deal of pleasure to be had in a wash all clean' (1997 :262). The domestic routines imposed upon mad women were intended to reinforce the required female household roles, morals and social values. This form of moral management was considered efficacious even for the most deviant forms of female misbehaviour. The labour that was performed by asylum inmates was done without remuneration and Grace conducts her self with propriety and is industrious and a 'profitable and useful inmate of the house' (1997 :54-55). Labour was regarded as morally uplifting. Yet, in Foucault's opinion it was pointless work, being merely 'work for work's sake' (Foucault 1980:42) and was used to shape individuals into the image of the ideal worker, perpetuating social norms and stereotypes.

Atwood shows Grace as caught in the shaping discourses of sexuality, religion, class, gender, moralism and the institution of the asylum. These discourses attempt to regulate and discipline her. They build fields of knowledge with given 'truths' and attempt to construct her subjectivity in accordance with these 'truths'. Grace is placed within the framework of these discourses and becomes the object of their normalising judgements. Medical discourse defined 'hysteria' as a sexual affliction in which sexuality invaded the female body. This medical discourse is another structuring device that normalises Grace into a sexually, depraved female creature. Her social position and class as both woman, servant and murderess provides an open invitation for the predatory sexual behaviour of the men she encounters, whether these be employers, doctors, clerics, prison guards or the lawyer who defended her at her trial. This lawyer intimates that if he had placed a hand on her, 'she would have thrown herself into my arms'(1997 :439). He possesses the culturally inspired and normalised ideology of the fairytale knight-errant, absorbing Grace into his fantasy 'Find a maiden chained to a rock about to be devoured by a monster, rescue her, then have her yourself' (1997 :439). The idea of the rescuer as monster never enters his mind. He merely places Grace into the discourse of his imaginative fantasy trying to trap her and make her conform to the outcome he envisages. Simon Jordan imagines Grace in a similar fashion, projecting his own fantasies onto Grace trying to enclose and enmesh her into his world, 'as he draws Grace towards him pressing his mouth against her. *'Murderess'*. He applies it to her throat like a brand' (1997 :453). Grace is his slave wearing the brand of his sexual desires and wants. In his own fantasy he is entrapping her with a kiss, like the prince in Sleeping Beauty, after which she will be his and there will be a happy ever after where Grace will conform to his ideal of domestic and female stereotypes. Grace's sexuality seems to pervade the minds of all these men and they try to entrap her within their own prurient and lasciviously fantastical discourses.

Grace experiences the same lascivious prurience with religion, which, in the figure of the clergyman, expresses a marked interest in her sexuality but concomitantly a need for her to repent her sins and to conform to the rigid moralism of church expounded beliefs. This moralism is further enforced within the walls of the asylum where she is expected to conform to the hardworking, grateful, upright image of womanhood that was the required stereotypical norm. Once this is apparently accomplished, Grace is

returned to a similar world of power, manipulation and stratification, the institution of the penitentiary. It is in the penitentiary that Grace comes into further contact with the confessional discourse in the form of Simon Jordan and Dr. Jerome DuPont. Though outwardly Grace appears to conform to the interrogation that she undergoes, it is in her narrative to Simon, whilst she is confined in the penitentiary, that reveals her true rebellion of spirit and Dionysian nature.

CHAPTER THREE

Chapter three will explore Grace's imprisonment in the penitentiary and how the discourses of power within this institution mirror those of the asylum. It will show how these discourses mould Grace's presentation of herself to those in power. This outward face of Grace will be contrasted with the interior thought process to which the reader is privy. Grace's split-subjectivity will be discussed in terms of the Dionysian and Apollonian particularly in relation to her interaction with Dr. Simon Jordan. It is in this interaction between Grace and Simon that language, madness and discourse become very tightly intertwined.

Grace's surface appearance appears calm and rational as she is released from the asylum and returned to the penitentiary, exchanging one form of the gaze and discipline for another. The differing forms of social control to which Grace is subject are efforts made to ensure her conformity to the set standard of beliefs in her society. She has transgressed the laws that govern social interaction and has been punished by becoming an object of scrutiny. Her life becomes an interaction of many powerful discourses all aimed at homogenising and sanitising her in an effort to make her conform. Her narration allows her interiorised transgression to escape the confines of her inner self and of the penitential institute and thus rupture the façade of control.

This interaction with institutional power dominates *Alias Grace* and is built around Grace's confession to the psychologist Dr Simon Jordan. Grace's interaction with Simon Jordan is an evocation of how psychoanalysis was originally practised. An intimate conversation was conducted between so-called 'hysterical' women and male psychiatrists. These discussions were dialogues in marked contrast to previous interactions with hysterics, where doctors induced 'hysterical' crises in front of an audience (Showalter 1987 :135). Atwood is revealing how psychoanalysis, through the use of language manipulation, is a form of normative control, subjugation and indoctrination of the patient. Yet, she is also, in the character of Grace, showing how the discourse of psychoanalysis controls the psychiatrist's responses and involvement

with the patient. It is through the combined narratives, the story Grace tells to Simon and her stream of consciousness that Grace's transgressive nature is truly revealed. Throughout Grace's almost perfectly recalled story there are constant fissures that reveal her true attitude and the concomitant inner monologue more fully reveals this disruptive aspect.

Atwood uses the 'realist' novel genre of Victorian times to explore how language can distort, confuse, mislead and alienate both reader and listener. Atwood disturbs the cultural beliefs of the Victorian period she is dealing with, that of a central, fixed and reified personality and the truthfulness expounded in language. Rather, she reveals the fluidity and fragmented nature of both human nature and language, and how the 'truth' is distorted both socially and personally, so that reconstruction of events, as perfectly as Grace seems to do, is impossible. Madness and the Dionysian are revealed extensively in Grace's narrative flashes of transgression. Atwood allows Grace to be a first person narrator of her story, much like Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway, in an attempt to establish an empathy between Grace and the reader and listener. Yet, Atwood provides her readers with more insight allowing them access to Grace's stream of consciousness and interior monologue with herself. Grace is allowed to speak for herself and to control and manipulate her story. Simon Jordan is seen from an omniscient third person narrator's viewpoint. The reader is provided with intricate details about his life and thoughts, very much in the manner of a Dickensian novel. Simon seems to be bound by Atwood into the then prevailing Victorian era, confined to his solid masculine structures and beliefs in a singular solid personality, like a fly in amber. Grace with her stream of consciousness and fragmented split-persona is a creature of both the modern and postmodern novel and sensibility. Atwood has created Grace as an ambiguous, free flowing, fragmented character, who moves timelessly through her recreated history.

Grace ensnares Simon Jordan in her romantically reconstructed narrative. However, Simon's first encounter with Grace in the penitentiary will set the tone that their dialogue and interaction will follow:

The morning light fell slantingly in through the small window high up on the wall, illuminating the corner where she stood. It was an image

almost medieval in its plain lines, its angular clarity: a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon, awaiting the next day's burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion come to rescue her. The cornered woman; the penitential dress falling straight down, concealing feet that were surely bare; the straw mattress on the floor; the timorous hunch of the shoulders; the arms hugged close to the thin body, the long wisps of auburn hair escaping from what appeared at first glance to be a chaplet of white flowers – and especially the eyes, enormous in the pale face and dilated with fear, or with mute pleading (1997 :68).

Atwood shows Simon as having projected onto Grace the Victorian images and beliefs of the time concerning women. The images resemble the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, where the women were portrayed as innocent prizes waiting for rescue, nuns and maidens of unsullied virtue and little sexuality. Then comes the image of the 'hysteric' with her thin body, auburn hair, the lovelorn and mad Ophelia with flowers in her hair and fear in her eyes who also needs to be rescued by a male champion in the form of the doctor. Simon has projected the cultural ideals of what a mad woman should look like onto Grace, before encountering the actual woman. Grace has given an indication of her own relation to the mad woman of literature and iconography when she details her appearance in the mirror she dusts in the governor of the penitentiary's house:

When I am dusting the mirror with grapes I look at myself in it, although I know it is vanity. In the afternoon light of the parlour my skin is pale mauve, like a faded bruise, and my teeth are greenish (1997 :25).

Grace is aware of the relation of the mirror to narcissism, vanity and its revelation of the self as other, but this mirror is framed by grapes with their obvious association with Dionysus and the Dionysian. The reflection Grace sees is that of the othered self in the form of the mad female maenad, the woman as ghoul, ghost or vampire whose triumph is displacing and destroying male authority. This depiction of the mad

woman has parallels in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* where Antoinette sees herself as the ghost in the mirror:

It was then that I saw her – the ghost the woman with the streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her (Rhys:1997:123).

A gilt frame surrounds this mirror which reflects the othered self, Antoinette as mad woman, as the fictive ghost created by Rochester. Simon Jordan's creation of Grace as the woman of his dreams mirrors Rochester's action.

Atwood uses images that recall Victorian iconography in order to emphasise the subjection of women to certain masculine stereotypes which emphasised women's appearance as obedient, frail and open to subjection and domination. Simon's romantic pictorial reverie is altered when Grace steps forward and occupies the centre of the picture:

Her eyes were unusually large, it was true, but they were far from insane. Instead they were frankly assessing him. It was as if she were contemplating the subject of some unexplained experiment; as if it were he, and not she, who was under scrutiny (Atwood 1997 :68).

Simon is immediately placed at a disadvantage. The woman who should have been penitential and gently insane is assessing the person of the doctor with a frankness that women do not normally exhibit. It is as though she is determining what she has to deal with and what approach would be in her best interests to adopt. This encounter sets the tone for the rest of the interaction between Grace and Simon, where Simon perpetually feels as though he is 'walking on quicksand'(1997 :103). Grace continually disturbs the given stereotype of womanly behaviour, transgresses the boundaries that Simon and the institutions have set-up as the required norms. Yet Grace does not transgress boundaries overtly but surreptitiously and under the cover of her mask of propriety.

Grace appears to conform to the monolithic and structuring religiousness and moralism of the penitentiary:

Then I sing a song, just to hear a voice and keep myself company:

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee,
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, Blessed trinity

They can hardly object if it is a hymn (1997 :37).

Grace represses the outward show of her transgressive nature and forces it to become a state of interior turmoil and monologue. She presents an inner defiance to all that would subjugate her individuality. Thus, not only is her transgressiveness contained within the walls of the asylum and penitentiary, but is interiorised. She is presented to the world through the Apollonian aspect of the penitential structures and through the face that she presents to the world. However, she is gleefully satiric in her rebellion against the institution that seems to hold her in subjection when she says that she was brought there to be,

penitent, because this is a Penitentiary and you are supposed to repent while in it, and you will do better if you say you have done so, whether you have anything to repent of or not (1997 :29).

Grace subverts the penitential attributes of the institution through this attitude of pretence and manipulation of the situation. She is well aware of how to play the system to her own advantage. Atwood continually uses a capital letter when reference is made to the penitential institute. This seems to make the institute into an individual subject, giving to it almost a feeling of godhead. This overarching individuality of the institution is a commentary on the domineering 'paternalism' that rules these establishments. Grace satirically deconstructs both the institution and the moralism and piety that it attempts to impose upon her in an effort to reinforce the social norms and conventional female behaviour that would make her acceptable to society.

Grace has learnt to disguise herself to perpetuate the illusion that she is penitential, repentant and a virtual idiot. However, as is revealed she seems to feel that she has little to be repentant about and is far from being 'soft in the head' (1997 :25). It is this disguise that she uses when dealing with Simon Jordan and his continual questions, ' I looked at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practised'(1997 :43). Grace is manipulating her responses and thus Simon. She is spinning a web into which Simon will become resoundingly entrapped. As she notes, ' I set to work willingly to tell my story and to make it as interesting as I can, and rich in detail'(1997:286). Grace has no inhibitions about embellishing or creating a tale that will hold Simon's attention and still appear to follow a 'truthful' line of argument. Simon is aware that something is out of place 'the very plenitude of her recollections may be a sort of distraction'(1997 :215-216). Simon never manages to come to grips with what it is that Grace is trying to distract him away from; rather 'the more she remembers, the more she relates, the more difficulty he himself is having. He can't seem to keep track of the pieces'(1997 :338). Simon, under this plethora of perfect recollection, is drowning and he is losing the ability to keep a perspective on what the 'truth' is and where the boundaries of 'reality' merge with 'illusion'. He has entered Grace's world of disguise, manipulation and intrigue, which conceals the 'truth' and distorts 'reality'.

Simon senses that Grace is leading him astray when he remarks, 'I can't shake the suspicion that, in some way I cannot put a finger on, she is lying to me'(1997 :438). However as the lawyer who defended Grace at her trial indicates, lying is not the correct interpretation and is,

a severe term surely. Has she been lying to you, you ask? Let me put it this way – did Scheherazade lie? Not in her own eyes; indeed, the stories she told ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood. They belong in another realm altogether. Perhaps Grace Marks has merely been telling you what she needs to tell in order to accomplish the desired end (1997 :438).

The lawyer picks an interesting example of a woman who told stories to save her life. These fantasies amused the Sultan and finally her sentence of death was transmuted. At her trial Grace told three differing tales of the circumstances surrounding the murder, which finally led to her death sentence being rescinded. The tales told by Scheherazade and Grace are seen to reside outside the logical categories of true and false, belonging in an alternate realm that places them in a liminal position, one outside the rational and real world of mankind. In this the stories resemble the position of madness which is outside the rational world and is beyond the logic of true and false.

The lawyer sees Grace wanting Simon to delay his 'departure, and make you stay in the room with her as long as possible'(1997 :438). What the lawyer overlooks is that the stories told by Scheherazade were a scheme to foil the Sultan's policy of murdering his wives. In this they were a subversive ploy where language was used to defy death and manipulate a situation. The power of the Sultan was undermined and altered through the power inherent in the words used by Scheherazade. Grace too is using her story to manipulate Simon into seeing her as a romantic, wronged figure. This she does in order to obtain her freedom. She uses words to subvert his logic and has turned his science of words back upon itself. Simon senses that Grace is controlling the situation and is enjoying their conversations as much as 'one enjoys a game of any sort, when one is winning'(1997 :422). Grace's fabrications provide her an escape from reality and are a way of rebelling and avoiding the grasping structures of a society, which wish to demean and remould her into its image. The story Grace unfolds is a mask created by language. Atwood is showing how Grace is transgressing and subverting language and 'truth' in a Dionysian fashion, manipulating the setting for her own benefit and laughing up her sleeve whilst she does this.

This manipulative laughter is revealed when Grace re-encounters Jeremiah the peddler under the guise of Dr. Jerome DuPont. Initially Grace is stunned and utters a 'little shriek' (1997 :354). But, Jeremiah indicates to her that her complicity is necessary by laying his 'forefinger alongside his nose'(1997 :354). When Jeremiah is officially introduced as the doctor Jerome DuPont, Grace almost laughs 'out loud'. Jeremiah arranges with Grace that she must agree to undergo hypnotism. This he does through body language by holding her chin, squeezing it and moving his 'eyes up and

down'(1997: 355). This mute communication and Grace's repressed laughter are a return to the Kristevan semiotic which Atwood is using as an indication of the transgressiveness and subversiveness that link Grace and Jeremiah. This undercurrent of Dionysian transgression is cloaked beneath the ordering Apollonian guise of the symbolic in the conversational language that Jeremiah uses towards Grace. Grace says that she could have 'laughed with glee' over the pact that she has formed with Jeremiah. This is a very elfish, mocking and duplicitous response aimed at her societal betters who have not observed this interaction between Jeremiah and herself. There is however, also a calculated realisation that she could really be placed into a trance where she would not be in control and this brings her 'up short, and gave me pause to consider'(1997 :356). Grace is aware that in a trance she might be manipulated and would be under Jeremiah's power, but she has agreed to the pact and she remembers how he had previously implied that he would teach her what to say and do when in a 'trance'.

Jeremiah orchestrates the hypnotism in order to determine whether Grace was mad when she helped to commit the murders. It is an attempt to overcome her apparent amnesia concerning the events surrounding the murders. Jeremiah as DuPont leads Grace into the room where the hypnotism is to take place. It appears that he has had time alone with her as he says, 'I have explained to her that all she has to do is listen to me, and then go to sleep'(1997 :460). Grace is placed into a trance and a veil is placed on her head which seems to emphasise Grace's aspect as Sybil or mysterious femme fatale. Then a laugh and a voice issue from the hypnotised Grace, a crude mocking voice that throws Simon Jordan off-kilter. He believes that the voice 'cannot be Grace's; yet in that case whose voice is it?'(1997 :465). The voice carries on detailing its sexual conquest of both Thomas Kinnear and James McDermott and its involvement with the murders which occurred. This voice issues 'high erotic moans', titters, sniggers, twitters, chirps, giggles and utters carnivalesque and crude colloquialisms. This is a return to the Kristevan semiotic in which are located laughter, utterances, snorts and sniggers. These wordless explosions are never totally repressed or expelled from the symbolic, rather, they are transgressive irruptions that disturb the boundary of the symbolic. The language that the voice uses to iterate its tale in the wordless irruptions reveals rage, scorn, madness and the transgressive nature that hides within the façade of Grace's body. By challenging the syntax it is

challenging the symbolic and is putting the reader and the listeners in touch with the drives which underpin language and the unconscious. This interruption of the voice has challenged both the idea of the subject and of the societal norms that enclose the listeners. The carnivalesque nature of the intrusion transgresses the ideal of the subject.

The voice responds gleefully when accused under the name of Grace as being deceitful, 'You've deceived yourselves! I am not Grace! Grace knew nothing about it!' (1997 :467). Simon immediately demands who the voice is and is taunted into finally guessing that it is Mary Whitney. The voice then says that it has always been with Grace but that she has never known and that they must not tell Grace as then she would land up back in the asylum. Simon incredulously tells the voice to 'Stop playing tricks' (1997 :468) to which the voice wails that he is 'the same, you won't listen to me, you don't believe me, you want it all your own way' (1997 :368). Here the voice indicts the way 'madness' is rationalised and how it is silenced, or is altered to suit the so-called rationality of the institutional or socially acceptable beliefs.

The voice rightly accuses Simon of wanting it all his own way a cutting commentary upon the rational paternalism that attempts to silence, structure and control what cannot be explained by scientific and cultural discourses. According to Foucault, transgression is where language speaks, 'of itself in a second language in which the absence of a sovereign subject outlines its essential emptiness and incessantly fractures the unity of its discourse' (Foucault 1977b :48). The syntax of the semiotic and subconscious that the voice represents is disregarded and classified as 'mad' because it cannot be understood by the rational symbolic language used by the 'sane'. The voice transgresses language, moralistic beliefs and institutional discourses. Both the penitentiary and the asylum adjudge the voice according to normative categories of rational logic. The voice transgressed these boundaries and Grace's body, which housed the voice, is considered 'insane'. It is the transgressive language of the 'insane', which has no identifiable subject, that poses the problem for rationality based on a subject/object related language. Rather,

[T]ransgressive thought dissolves the subject because it finds its finitude not where an "inside" is separated from, grounded on or

reflects an “outside”, but where the movement towards otherness begins to repeat what is not other – the Same (During:1992 82).

Thus divisions are broken down and what is outside is included on the inside and vice versa. Transgression sees anything that lies outside a totality as also working on its inside. The voice of ‘insanity’ has no individual identity either, rather every difference that has been culturally or scientifically created is suppressed and transgressed by this voice.

However, all of a sudden silence descends and Grace returns. It appears that the ‘rational’ has again imposed its superiority and the boundary of the symbolic has reconquered the influx of the semiotic once more. Both listeners and readers now ponder how authentic the voice has been. Who Grace actually is, whether she is mad woman or manipulator, all that has gone before is cast into doubt. As Simon Jordan muses,

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 (1997: 472).

The ambiguity of Grace’s state has thrown Simon into confusion. Yet, at the same instant he still has the need to ‘prove’ things to make them conform to preconceived social, cultural and scientific ideology. He still wishes to assert societal ideals of ‘sanity’ against societal beliefs concerning ‘insanity’. What Simon cannot see is that madness can be a mask, a way of using deceit for real ends. Rather, he wishes to silence permanently the possibilities that the transgressive ‘voice’ has opened before him, as he realises, ‘He has gone to the threshold of the unconscious, and has looked across; or rather he has looked down. He could have fallen. He could have fallen in. He could have drowned’(1997: 479). Here Simon associates the unconscious with the abyss. Yet, it is also associated with water and thus the female principle or femme fatale in the form of the mermaid. Simon’s fear of this drowning in something that he does not understand and cannot control and regulate causes him to flee. He dreams of Grace as walking on water but as he tries to reach her she ‘melts away like mist’(1997

: 480). Grace has eluded Simon in much the same manner that she eludes the reader and any form of judgement or interpretation of guilt or innocence.

CONCLUSION

Atwood's fiction is characterised by women who assume a multiplicity of roles and positions. This multiplicity represents a resistance to masculine organisational and structuring discourses such as science, madness, literature, from a position that is liminal to the discourses. The second self exhibited by Atwood's female characters is a defence mechanism or projection that allows them to separate from the part of the self that they wish to escape. The splitting of the self acts as a protective measure and a resistance to the threatened annihilation of the self through the subject becoming objectivised by the masculine discourse.

Atwood is very concerned with language and how it structures perceptions and 'truths'. She sets out to deconstruct language in an effort to reveal just how it can be manipulated and be made to conform to a certain version of 'truth' and 'reality' which suits those who have the ability to form and control the social system. For Atwood language is an unreliable form of communication open to misuse and abuse. In *Alias Grace* she explores how language in spoken, written and iconographic form has been used to justify positions and stances taken which have been used to construct an image of women as the 'other' or the 'object' that is subject to the masculine gaze. Man is seen as having objectified women in order to define his own subjecthood and has constructed around this object discourses of control and power such as medicine, sexuality, madness, art, literature and others in an effort to overcome his own fears.

Atwood draws word images that parody the art and literature of the nineteenth century. This pulls the art, along with the ideals that it strives to represent, into the present. Atwood is asking the reader to question how structures, ideals and beliefs mould society. She reveals how these beliefs, ideals and systems change, disintegrate or evolve in different time periods, and the effect that transposing them from one period into another, has on the interpretation of past and present. She seems to purposely call into question the notion of linear time and existence with its solid view of 'reality' and 'truth'.

Atwood's subtle undermining and revelation of how discourses create power relations and cultural ideologies, has much in common with the work of Foucault on discourses, madness, power and knowledge and sexuality that have provided a means to analyse *Alias Grace*. As Elaine Showalter and many other feminist writers have noted, Foucault in his critique of madness "does not take account of sexual difference" (Showalter 1987:6). Judith Butler has pointed out that repression and sexual difference have to be considered in relation to the cultural norms and the creation of the concepts of feminine and masculine. Foucault seemingly ignored sexual difference, as for him it is merely a culturally constructed device. Even so, the work that he undertook on discourses provides not only feminist writers but any writer with a means for reading gender and power relations. Atwood, in a similar manner to Foucault, has explored and undermined the discourses that reify and impinge on the lives of her female characters. Madness in Atwood's novels is intricately interwoven with cultural discourse, female corporeality, multiplicity of self and language.

In my study of *Alias Grace* a central concern has been the exploration of the relation between language and madness. It has been shown how Atwood makes the relation of language to 'reality' problematic by allowing Grace to create alternate versions of the 'truth'. Throughout this study language is revealed as a structuring device that is used to validate or manipulate versions of 'reality'. Central to my examination of *Alias Grace* has been the revelation of how language, in literary and iconographic form, constructed the nineteenth century view of the mad woman. I have shown how Grace is objectified by the institutions in which she is incarcerated and how this objectification is entirely dependent upon language-based discourses.

In this explication of the relation of language and madness I have relied extensively upon the works of Foucault and Kristeva. Using their theories concerning language and madness I have attempted to analyse how Atwood's use of dislocated syntax represents an effort to write Grace's madness. The movement between silence and verbal transgression that Atwood makes Grace undergo can be regarded as a continual challenge of the restrictions imposed by language and its world of reason. Grace's split psyche with its ability to violate the order of language is used to undermine and question the normative discourses of 'reality' that language is instrumental in

constructing. I have tried to relate the constant interplay between language and madness to the interplay between the forces of the Dionysian and Apollonian based on the work of Nietzsche. I felt that madness and the Dionysian impulse shared common aspects in their transgression of limits. Both madness and the Dionysian are to be seen as transgressive forces that are permanently contained within the system that they transgress.

I have utilised the image of the Ship of Fools to further enunciate the idea of the fluidity and transgressive aspect of madness. It is also an image of liminality and of the space that exists between the world of reason and the world of unreason. Grace is shown to belong to this liminal space as her psychic boundaries prove to be shimmery and evanescent. Atwood's choice of title '*Alias Grace*' furthers the notion of ambiguity and fluidity. Identity is normally attached to a unique naming device but Grace's identity is questioned by the use of the word 'alias', which implies that she has more than a single name. This becomes a loophole through which she can slip, passing freely, like the Ship of Fools, between the space of subject and object. Here both the Ship and its incarnation Grace are explored as aspects of madness and its transgression of the structures of language. Grace is shown as inhabiting the liminal membrane that offers up permanent resistance to the surrounding matrix of discourses that attempt to structure life.

A point of issue might appear to be a lack of reference material or quotations from journal articles and monographs on *Alias Grace*. Up until the submission of this dissertation my research has found numerous book reviews and only a handful of journal articles on *Alias Grace*. There have as yet been no monographs written on this book, though there is a biography on Atwood's life available. I am aware that there are other people currently at work on dissertations and theses on this book. However, I submit this dissertation in the knowledge that it is entirely representative of my own interpretation of *Alias Grace*.

I have only tentatively outlined and examined the representation of madness in *Alias Grace*, using Foucauldian and Kristevan theories of language as well as making reliance upon art theory. I feel that an in-depth exploration of Grace's split-subjectivity requires an analysis of the type undertaken by Sonia Mycak in her work,

In Search of the Split Subject. Atwood's novel is a postmodern historical work that uses irony to deconstruct the notion of discourses and I feel that this can be more fully and fruitfully explored than I have managed to achieve in this study. The fact that Atwood is a colonial writer and *Alias Grace* deals with colonial issues opens it up to post-colonial study. It would also prove fruitful to perhaps do a comparison between *Alias Grace* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* from a post-colonial perspective. A further aspect of *Alias Grace* that I briefly touched upon, but could not explore in detail, was that of the carnivalesque. The continual movement between high and low language in Atwood's novel poses fascinating parallels to the study of Rabelais by Bakhtin and to Kristeva's work on Bakhtin's carnivalesque as it pertains and influences language. A study of the carnivalesque in Atwood's *Alias Grace* would add to the exploration of the relation of language to madness and the Dionysian that has fleetingly been undertaken within this study.

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