

**WRITING MISSING LINKS:
REWRITING WOMEN'S HISTORY THROUGH LITERATURE**

by

Brenda Koller

B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2010

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
ENGLISH**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 2012

© Brenda Koller, 2012



Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-94121-8

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-94121-8

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Abstract

Throughout history, women's achievements and struggles often went unnoticed and underrepresented by literature and historiography. "Writing Missing Links: Rewriting Women's History through Literature" discusses ways in which contemporary women novelists revise and rewrite histories by providing counter-narratives to established mainstream historical and political discourses. These creative projects of dismantling and questioning history, truth, and objectivity unearth women's history occluded by patriarchal Master Narratives. Three historical novels that redefine literature and history from a woman-centred perspective frame this thesis: *Alias Grace* (1996) by Margaret Atwood, *My Dream of You* (2001) by Nuala O'Faolain, and *The Sealed Letter* (2008) by Emma Donoghue. My theoretical approach focuses on the feminist concept of narrative voice that asserts a woman-centered point of view, as well as feminist criticism's relationship to other critical discourses such as postmodernism, historiography, (post-)colonialism, and neo-Victorian studies.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
Wife, Maid, Madwoman, Whore: Female Agency and Nineteenth-Century Gendered Discourses in Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i>	16
Chapter Two	
Almost Forgotten: Women's Voice, History, Truth, and Fiction in Nuala O'Faolain's <i>My Dream of You</i>	42
Chapter Three	
Private Lives, Public Transgressions: Emily Faithfull and the Doctrine of Separate Spheres in Emma Donoghue's <i>The Sealed Letter</i>	68
Conclusion	94
Bibliography	100

Acknowledgements

A number of individuals and organizations have supported me during the course of my studies. Firstly, I owe much to my mother, Mary Koller, who without calling herself a feminist, taught me independence and strength of will; my son, Oliver Massini, who I could rely on to prop me up when life as a student seemed overwhelming; and my many friends and colleagues, both at UNBC and across the globe, who journeyed with me throughout my academic career and offered invaluable practical and moral support.

This thesis represents a team effort, and it would not look the same without the guidance and expertise of my supervisor, Dr. Maryna Romanets, as well the invaluable input of my committee members, Drs. Kristen Guest and Angèle Smith. I extend heartfelt thanks for having had the privilege of learning with them, for their belief in my abilities, and for their capacity to inspire and encourage.

I wish to gratefully acknowledge that my research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Government of British Columbia, and the University of Northern British Columbia.

Finally, to the countless women who have forged a path that has made my journey as a scholar and a woman easier, and whose stories and scholarship I have borrowed from, I am forever indebted.

Introduction

What unites and repeatedly invigorates feminist literary criticism [...] is neither dogma nor method but [...] an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance; the consequences of that encoding for women—as characters, as readers, and as writers; and, with that, a shared analytic concern for implications of that encoding not only for a better understanding of the past, but also for an improved reordering of the present and future as well.
—Annette Kolodny, “Dancing Through the Minefield”

We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.
—Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*

Why are there missing links in women's history and why do they need to be written?

These are the fundamental questions I set out to answer in this study of three women's historical novels. While focusing on this genre as a productive site for re-negotiating women's historical agency, my thesis, “Writing Missing Links: Rewriting Women's History Through Literature,” discusses ways in which women novelists revise and rewrite histories through a female-centred lens, thereby expanding readers' vision and producing new ways of seeing both historical and contemporary women and the world. The writers whose works I examine represent a distinctly contemporary wave in women's literary production. Furthermore, as Diana Wallace asserts, while being one of the most important genres of the twentieth-century women's reading and writing, the historical novel has been underrated and critically neglected (ix).

I begin with the premise that throughout history women have been oppressed by multiple structures including literature, which to some degree reflects and influences—among other discursive practices—our views of society. Various feminisms—for feminism is not a single category—share not only a focus on women, but certain assumptions and concepts, such as the basic view that “Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal,” and

that gender traits are social constructs generated, for the most part, by patriarchy (Abrams and Harpham 111). The ideology of patriarchy, or the ‘rule of the father,’ restricts women from reaching their full potential. Feminist literary theory¹ maintains that patriarchal ideology pervades the literary tradition; the pen has been defined as a male tool since the craft of writing began. Conversely, since women took up the pen, they have been actively engaging in redefining literature and history from a woman-centred perspective.

Feminist literary theories represent heterogeneity of feminist thought. As Annette Kolodny once famously emphasized, feminist criticism is pluralistic in its literary methods and theories, stating that only by employing a plurality of methods will critics protect themselves from the “temptations of oversimplifying any text” (34). Borrowing from and intersecting with other critical discourses, feminist literary theories always remain woman-centered, forcing us to reconsider many of the basic assumptions on which the study of literature was originally founded. Feminist literary critics and writers provide alternate forms of writing and reading of texts, exposing, with a necessary urgency, the stereotyping and marginalization of women through various representational paradigms in society. Amongst other concerns, feminist critical theory examines multiple ways in which gender alters the way we respond to literature. It seeks not only to interpret the world, but also to positively change women’s lives through the relationship of readers to what they read. In Judith Walzer’s words, “it produces thoughtful links between the reality of readers’ lives and the literature” (105). Effective feminist research, nevertheless, must consider “gender issues in

¹ “As a term, feminist literary theory only gained currency from the mid-1980s. Previously, feminist literary criticism was used. Traditionally, criticism refers to the practical aspect of literary study—the close reading of texts—while theory examines the philosophical and political underpinnings of interpretive and evaluative practices, including the construction of the category of ‘literature’. Today, criticism and theory appear simultaneously in the titles of several feminist anthologies, and feminist literary theory includes both practical and theoretical approaches to literature” (Code 306). The terms are used interchangeably here.

relation to larger sets of questions” (Cvetkovich et al 245). Accordingly, literature must be placed within historical, social, political, and cultural contexts, while also recognizing the interplay of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In investigating women as historical subjects, Joan Wallach Scott indicates that “[p]atriarchy and class are usually assumed to be the contexts within which nineteenth- and twentieth-century women defined their experience” (19). Further, women are not a homogenous group; thus we must be aware of the potential tensions, gaps, and diversity within groups, and the dangers in legitimizing false universals.

There are many definitions of and ways to exert power. Carolyn Heilbrun succinctly states that “[p]ower is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter” (18). Reading, writing, and studying novels is one way in which women continue to engage in empowering discursive practices and in the construction of female selfhood, to consider their place in society and the world at large, and to ensure that their voices are heard. In espousing feminist literary theory, I wish to underscore a point made by Ruth Robbins:

Reading is part of the process of learning to be, of writing the self, as it were, into its social roles. The move towards ‘reading differently’, then, which feminists prescribe, offers the possibility of alternative modes of ‘being’. Literature is not some transcendent space in which the contingencies of everyday life are elided or absent. In literate cultures, literature is *part* of reality. (15)

How then, do we read (and write) differently? One of the ways is “[t]he recovery of ‘herstory,’” which according to Wallace, “had begun with the second-wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s, [and] was politically motivated, partly through the desire to find suitable role models” (177). Historical fiction is instrumental in staging a dialogue between women across generations and in acknowledging women’s societal contributions by bringing

to light those women whom history has diminished or forgotten. The historical novel is a vital continuation of women's literary tradition; it is "a discourse within which women can be made central" (Wallace ix), despite their traditional exclusion from official 'history' in male-dominated society. At the same time, contemporary feminist historical fiction is reshaping historical boundaries, and in the process demonstrating not only their malleability, but also "draw[ing] attention to the construction of the text and to history itself as a construct" (Wyile 139). Linda Hutcheon asserts that societies create meaning through past events "not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (*Poetics* 89). Gender is an essential factor in the construction and representation of 'facts.' Gender has shaped history, as patriarchy has shaped gender in western society; it is the system of patriarchy that has had the greatest impact on how history has traditionally been represented.

The focus of my research is three novels: *Alias Grace* (1996) by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, *My Dream of You* (2001) by Irish writer Nuala O'Faolain, and *The Sealed Letter* (2008) by Irish-Canadian writer Emma Donoghue. The choice of novels, which can be loosely termed as historical, or rather neo-historical and neo-Victorian specifically, allows inquiry into various ways in which contemporary women writers call into question the procedures of representation implemented by canonical male-dominated traditions and how they reshape the genre within which such representations, images, and discourses circulate. All three novels feature strong, independent female characters who debunk gender stereotypes. The female protagonists explore their internal struggles as they attempt to deal with society's expectations and the limitations imposed upon them, and at the same time redefine the possibilities for women. A predominant theme shared by all of them is the strong

unions forged between women and in some cases the wanting of unions. Each author grants power to restrictedly represented women's histories by assigning Grace Marks, Marianne Talbot, and Emily Faithfull—both as historical figures and fictional characters—textual centrality within a wider network of relationships among women. These women's histories would have gone unnoticed had they not made their way into historical records because of their transgressions—as the vilified objects of sensational and scandalous legal cases, denied any agency otherwise. These novels underscore the many ways women have historically been oppressed by patriarchy, yet at the same time they spotlight both individual and collective women's agency. Shifting the focus from constraints placed upon women to the agency they exercise is crucial, as viewing themselves as victims, or accepting themselves as simply oppressed, women further undermine their capabilities, and in turn limit their agency. Viewing women in this light serves a dual purpose, since, in Jeannette King's words, “[b]y making female experience central to their narratives, such novels [give] women back their place in history, not just as victims but as agents” (3).

While historical novels are works of fiction, the texts examined here are based on real people and real events, and revolve around legal trials: a murder and two divorces, and accordingly, the stories are extracted from extensive historical and legal reports and records. All three authors blur the boundaries between history and fiction, and moreover, as Herb Wyile writes elsewhere, “foreground the illusoriness of an objective, unified, detailed view of history” (139). By re-imagining missing pieces of their respective puzzles, all three novelists draw the reader into confronting the inescapability of the past, as well as the collision of the past with the present. At the same time, all three authors challenge “the

centered and centering discourse which is not, in fact, usually granted woman in our male western tradition” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 85).

One of the defining characteristics of historical fiction, Jerome de Groot asserts, is its “intergeneric hybridity and flexibility” (2). Indeed, the novels under consideration creatively incorporate the literary, feminist, postmodern, postcolonial, romance (including lesbian), counterfactual, and other, as de Groot terms them, “fictional locales” (2). Further, de Groot points out that historical novels have the potential to challenge historiographic conventions by highlighting the subjectivism of historical narratives. In her analysis of traumatic experience in *My Dream of You*, Ann Heilmann adds to this discussion: “Confronting character and readers alike with the unwieldiness and instability of legal and documentary evidence, the novel problematizes conceptualisations of authenticity, appropriation, textuality, and genre (autobiography, historiography, neo-Victorianism, the postmodern text)” (285). It is my contention that the three novels examined here inject a feminist counter-discursive drive conceptualized by Sandra Gilbert as the “revisionary imperative,” which she sees as an essential part of women’s literary tradition, a “crucial antidote” to cultural alienation and marginalization of women (50), and a shared agenda of feminist criticism that explores “social, rhetorical, or psychological strategies of writing” (58). Thus, these novels fill gendered gaps by privileging marginalized voices and challenging conventional notions of history, truth, and fiction.

Alias Grace rewrites the life of the young, Irish immigrant servant Grace Marks, “celebrated murderess” (Atwood 23) of a wealthy Canadian and his housekeeper. Sentenced to life imprisonment in 1843, some believed Marks was innocent, while others like the influential writer Susanna Moodie (who visited the incarcerated Marks), portrayed her as

insane and evil. Atwood returns to the past to rescue Marks' reputation from the sensationalized public record, not to determine her guilt or innocence, but rather to give her a voice. One of the ways she accomplishes this is by focusing on the politics of public discourse, including repressive Victorian ideologies of class, race, and gender that limited women's roles in society.

My Dream of You is based on a nineteenth-century public scandal ignited by the alleged affair between Marianne Talbot, the wife of an Anglo-Irish landlord, and her Irish servant during the Great Famine. The events of this novel surround two unusual women—one historical and one fictional. When travel writer Kathleen de Burca, a twentieth-century Irish expatriate living in England, returns to Ireland and begins to unravel the 1849 Talbot divorce case, she attempts to pen an historical novel based on her findings. Limited and contradictory documents force Kathleen to consider the interplay between fact and fiction, and to subjectively (re-)create Marianne. At the same time, she narrates her own life story as part of her search for self, including the ways in which Ireland's colonial history continues to haunt Irish women.

Centered on the notorious 1864 British divorce case Codrington vs. Codrington, *The Sealed Letter* opens up the life of pioneer feminist Emily "Fido" Faithfull (1835-95). After a long absence abroad, unhappily married Helen Codrington returns to London and rekindles her intimate friendship with Emily, who subsequently becomes embroiled in Helen's sensationalized divorce case and the media frenzy that ensues. The collision of Helen and Emily's lives allows Donoghue to address Victorian notions of separate spheres, womanhood and its bearing upon women's meaningful work, as well as the centrality of women's friendships and unease over same-sex desire.

A key theme in all three novels examined here is nineteenth-century gender relations from a contemporary perspective, tied to the notion of gendered public and private spheres and women's agency. The female protagonists dispel the ideology of completely separate private and public spheres, challenging the perception that women were not active forces in society. Before their private lives are opened to public scrutiny through scandal, the historical female protagonists in all three novels already exist in the public sphere: Grace Marks in the "Irish Question"; Marianne Talbot in the role of colonizer; and Emily Faithful in numerous activities advocating for women. All three women are publicly implicated in courts of law and the press as objects of cultural anxiety and fascination, including social questions about gender and sexuality and the "Woman Question." One of the major differences between the private and public roles of the protagonists is that Faithfull consciously chose her public role as a working woman, thus thwarting gender conventions, while Marks and Talbot reject their public roles, never to be heard from again in the public sphere. Both Marks and Talbot are labeled as mad, justifying their exclusion from history. All three novels engage with women's story, voice, and agency, seeking to rectify the exclusion and marginalization of women from history.

Collectively, *Alias Grace*, *My Dream of You*, and *The Sealed Letter* tell the stories of historical women who lived in the rigidly stratified early to mid-Victorian period in Upper Canada, Ireland, and England, respectively. The novels are set during the Great Age of British Empire, which engaged in redrawing the world map, consolidating control over its dominions, and in forging new gender and sexual identities. It is also in the Victorian era that the first-wave feminist movement emerged, and "it was precisely in this period that gender was articulated as a problematic issue" (Scott 56). The era was marked by pressing social,

economic, religious, political, and intellectual issues, and while the scope of this thesis does not permit a detailed investigation into all of these areas, I delve into issues that are essential to historical positioning and to my argument. For example, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 changed misogynist matrimonial laws, resulting in improved access to divorce for some women. In turn, changes in divorce laws opened up a new system of law reporting, thus providing the public with titillating reports of prominent cases.

While feminist literary theory is my point of departure, I engage with other theoretical models and fields of study, including historiography. We interpret the present through the past, and “history’s representations of the past help construct gender for the present” (Scott 2). While historical novels disrupt certain established conceptions of history, questions arise in the consideration of historical fiction and the interplay of history, truth, and fiction. How far do we trust the various documents included in the novels: newspaper clippings, court reports, letters, records, eyewitness reports, and confessions? As Magali Cornier Michael suggests, when juxtaposed, historical documents with fictionalized narration “challenge one another’s authority as well as any universal notion of ‘truth’” (421). The subject matter of all three novels filled newspapers of the day with stories of intrigue, deceit, complex relationships, and love affairs gone wrong. It is commonly accepted that newspapers have their own political agendas, that confessions can be forced, eyewitness reports contradictory, judges and juries biased, and records and documents manipulated. Historian Lynn Hunt explains that “documents tell no one true story; that documents themselves are produced by a process of sorting, sifting, shaping, and suppression; that what is written on paper cannot be automatically trusted” (1519). Judith Knelman backs up Hunt’s assertion when she states that “newspaper articles are primary sources that do no more than record what people think is

happening. They are not conduits to any hidden ‘truth’ or ‘history’ but simply blurry images of retreating reality captured from different perspectives” (684). Much of society willfully accepts what is recorded by the media as ‘Truth,’ thus constructing and shaping ideologies based on potential falsehoods. Wylie posits that intertextuality is one of the key areas in which the borders between history and literature and the genre of historical fiction are being reshaped (8). In the novels examined here, all three authors produce multilayered narratives that include official documents of the time. Written primarily by men, the documents represent female characters through the hegemony of masculine discourse and misogynist laws; yet, in their re-memorated accounts the documents acquire new dimensions and levels of authority. One exception, however, is the writer Susanna Moodie’s account of Grace Marks, which demonstrates how women can undermine each other in order to suit hidden agendas (to sensationalize Grace’s story in Moodie’s case). Moodie also reveals how women internalized societal assumptions and gendered constructs of their time.

While writing missing links in women’s imaginary histories, all three authors create conceptual counter-sites that question received history and the idea of a singular ‘Truth.’ This has become one of the cornerstones of dismantling what Jean-François Lyotard calls “the grand narratives of history.” Lyotard’s postmodernism questions large-scale theories of the world that do not adequately represent differences and diversity. Postmodern skepticism points towards history as narrativization rather than truth, and challenges ideas about textual hierarchy, legitimacy and authority. One postmodern implication of the Victorians’ penchant for maintaining binaries is suggested by Bernd Engler and Kurt Müller who state that “it is also the expression of the post-modernist mode of thought that disputes the traditionally accepted line of separation between fact and fiction” (9). To approach literature from a

postmodernist perspective is not to repress the past, but to analyze and reflect upon it. By questioning and making problematic the desire for order or Truth, the authors bring awareness to firmly held assumptions about gender, class, culture, and sexuality.

It is evident that feminism and postmodernism strategically inform my interpretation of the three texts. In addition, the novels lend themselves to neo-Victorian sensibilities: re-imagining the nineteenth century to critique gender relations. As Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox assert, “the work being done on gender and feminism in neo-Victorian studies shows a diversity of thought with a common connection: the power to narrate one’s own stories—and re-evaluate, redress and re-write those of the past—is deemed essential to constructing a more liberated present and future” (10). By dissecting and re-imagining nineteenth-century history, Atwood, O’Faolain, and Donoghue suggest we can better understand how the Victorians continue to influence contemporary society. In bringing to life historical women in order to question the exclusion, subordination, and agency of women in Canada, Ireland, and England respectively, these authors rewrite the past from a woman-centered perspective. By dismantling and reevaluating what was thought to be representative of the period, the nineteenth-century imaginary history reconstructed in these three novels becomes instrumental in critiquing gender and social relations in both the past and the present.

I also examine some of the ways that British colonialism muted and marginalized the Irish and Irish immigrants, particularly Irish women. In doing so, I build on the observation that as a form of patriarchy the experience of colonization is gendered, that “colonial domination has produced ideologies and cultural practices which buttress patriarchy” (Moane 12). Britain’s broad colonial expansion impacted all classes of women, both within the

motherland and in its colonies. Belonging to the former imperial ‘margins,’ Ireland and Canada’s colonial histories add yet another dimension to patriarchy, even as they make history more unstable and open to contestation. The Great Famine is a key historical event that both defines Ireland’s history and the lives of the female protagonists in *Alias Grace* and *My Dream of You*. While it caused immense suffering for millions and led to mass emigration, Atwood and O’Faolain underscore how it affects Irish women, both in the Victorian era and today.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of women representing divergent political and social ‘geographies’: an Irish immigrant servant; an Anglo-Irish upper-class colonizer; and a British middle-class women’s rights activist. Considered far from remarkable, Grace Marks sets *Alias Grace* apart from the other novels under discussion. This is significant since by coming to know the daily lives of ordinary women, rather than focusing on an elite group, we avoid a distorted image of women’s experience and some of the problems associated with homogenization. The centrality of an impoverished, servant-class immigrant subject addresses some of the criticisms of those feminists who assert that too much emphasis has been placed on the experiences of white, privileged middle-class women. While I do not wish to be exclusionary, this is also the privileged position from which I write. By exploring what it means to be a feminist and a woman, I am engaging in my own process of self-discovery. My intention for choosing this area of research is well articulated by Scott:

My motive was and is one I share with other feminists and it is avowedly political: to point out and change inequalities between women and men. It is a motive, moreover, that feminists share with those concerned to change the representation of other groups left out of history because of race, ethnicity, and class as well as gender. (3)

To the above groups I also include those left out of history because of sexual orientation.

My opening remarks emphasize the pervasive and repressive nature of patriarchy, yet Mary Daly affirms that although “patriarchy grinds women down physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually,” oppression “can spark a tremendous uprising of women, such as building self-confidence, developing a sense of history, cultivating creativity, making connections and fostering solidarity” (ix-x). Historical novels provide numerous examples of women throughout history who have demonstrated precisely these self-affirming actions. The novels I have chosen demonstrate that, above all, women are incredibly capable and resilient.

While most of the issues I discuss in this thesis cut across all three novels, each chapter showcases one novel and focuses on aspects that I consider productive for highlighting textual strategies devised by a particular author. I address a variety of recovery-of-history modes to demonstrate the complexities of women writers’ historiographic projects as every text is a locus of multiple and variegated kinds of relationships: thematic, ideological, discursive, political, and artistic. The issues I address all work together to decenter the presumed privilege of a normative male/imperial subject and its master narratives, while at the same time highlight the scope of women’s oppression and restore women’s agency. Furthermore, as the novels themselves are self-reflective and open-ended, my analysis similarly charts certain trajectories, some examined in more detail, and others left open for further investigation.

Chapter one, “Wife, maid, madwoman, whore: female agency and nineteenth-century gendered discourses in Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*,” addresses some of the ways nineteenth-century women were marginalized or absent from public discourses. *Alias Grace* lends itself to an inquiry of how medical discourses and language reinforce patriarchy. In addition, I examine how media representations and conduct books strongly contest, affirm,

and colonize discursive roles for women. Finally, I explore how gender, race, and class work together to limit women's agency and how women manipulated societal discursive regimes in their favour. I suggest that ordinary women such as Grace Marks gained power through self-awareness and in the domestic sphere.

Chapter two, "Almost forgotten: women's voice, history, truth, and fiction in Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You*," asks the crucial questions: what constitutes historical 'truth,' and who decides how history is remembered? Through an examination of historiography and by highlighting the novel's postmodern concerns and its metafictional and intertextual devices, I discuss how the boundaries between historical fiction and historiography are becoming increasingly blurred. As I focus on the interplay between two temporally distinct female plot lines, I also explore how they intersect with official legal records, issues of Ireland's colonial and postcolonial condition, and Irish sexual politics. While reconstructing the life of a real but forgotten historical woman, O'Faolain reveals the effects of the past upon a contemporary woman, and the provisionality of all histories.

Chapter three, "Private lives, public transgressions: Emily Faithfull and the doctrine of separate spheres in Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter*," inquires into the implications of the Victorians' penchant for dichotomizing gender roles and how women such as Emily Faithfull contested gender boundaries. I contend that Donoghue juxtaposes two historical female characters, Helen Codrington and Emily Faithfull, and explore the novel through the lens of Victorian private/public and passive/active binaries, focusing on how these binaries manifested themselves in society. I further inquire into how this nexus of public and private spheres manifests itself in the friendships between women, including same-sex desire whose representation reclaims marginalized lesbian identities. In my analysis, I utilize the concepts

of parody and pastiche (which are themselves structured on binarism) as methods of feminist critique. All these issues are examined against Victorian sexist mores and misogynistic divorce laws that limited women's agency and crippled their subjectivity.

My work will contribute to the ongoing examination of women's imaginary histories in feminist scholarship. While Atwood's novel received considerable critical attention (see, for example, Hunt, Knelman, Lovelady, Michael, Rogerson, Siddall, Staels, Tolan), the discussions of O'Faolain's and Donoghue's work are as yet virtually limited to book reviews; therefore, my thesis facilitates their entry into a scholarly debate.

Chapter One

Wife, Maid, Madwoman, Whore: Female Agency and Nineteenth-Century Gendered Discourses in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*

[M]en have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the center of discourse.

—Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*

That wretched being James McDermott, who, with Grace Marks, was convicted of the murder of Mr. Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery, was executed yesterday, at the New Gaol in this City, at twelve o'clock. An immense crowd was assembled to witness the awful scene. [...] A full account of his confession and execution, as well as the confession of Grace Marks, with the particulars of the trial, is now on sale at this Office, in pamphlet form, and in other parts of the city. Grace Marks was sent to the Penitentiary on Saturday night.

—“Execution.” *Toronto Star*, 22 Nov. 1843

Alias Grace fictionalizes the life of the Irish-Canadian historical figure Grace Marks, and the events surrounding her trial for the murder of her master, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery, in Richmond Hill, Upper Canada in July 1843. In a highly-publicized trial, Marks, only sixteen years old, was convicted of helping fellow servant James McDermott slay Kinnear and was incarcerated for twenty-nine years while McDermott was hanged. Margaret Atwood rewrites the double murder through Grace's voice as she narrates her life story while simultaneously reclaiming her agency.

Grace Marks lived in a society dominated by gender, class, and race discrimination. The “rule-governed nature of discourse” (Mills, *Discourse* 6) limited opportunities for women in the nineteenth century, confining them to the private sphere in their roles as wives and mothers, or, in the case of the lower classes, as household servants. Grace's triple marginalization, complicated by her status as a young, motherless immigrant, radically restricted her prospects. Growing up poverty-stricken in Ireland, she was denied a formal education, and as a domestic servant her only education took place in the household in limited interactions with others. It is in the domestic setting that Grace gathered profound

self-awareness and insight, along with the ability to contest and break down discursive barriers. Grace is representative of servant-class domesticity, marginalized and absent from public discourses. Atwood, however, ensures this sphere is visible by making it essential to the novel, specifically by focusing on sewing as both a valuable skill and a political tool. In examining gender and discourse theory, I discuss how nineteenth-century medical discourses, the media, conduct books, and language contested, affirmed, and colonized discursive roles for women. I demonstrate that nineteenth-century women's agency is rooted in self-awareness and the domestic sphere, and that even seemingly powerless women such as Grace Marks could maneuver their own concerns in line with societal discursive regimes.

Discourses embody our beliefs and values, fundamentally influencing our thoughts and actions, shaping who we are as individuals, how we look at the world, and how social relations and institutions are organized. Discourses, nevertheless, do not exist in a vacuum and their boundaries are not rigid. Examining gender discourse, Sara Mills suggests that “discursive frameworks demarcate the boundaries within which we can negotiate what it means to be gendered” (*Discourse* 16), and at the same time discourses are “always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions” (12). *Alias Grace* stresses the conflictual nature of discourse as it critiques the imposition of Victorian gendered discourses upon women.

Mills further states that femininity as a discourse is fundamental wherein “women are not portrayed as simple dupes of an ideology, but rather as actively constructing positions for themselves [. . .] In this way, women who seem to be displaying their femininity can be viewed as agents rather than simply as the passive victims of oppressive ideologies” (*Discourse* 82).² Rather than associating ‘sanctioned’ feminine behaviour with

² It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine discourse versus ideology. There exists variability in how scholars use and differentiate the terms, and at times they appear to be used interchangeably. For the purposes

powerlessness, women embraced such behaviours to enhance their power. It is through a complex web of power relations that individuals define themselves as gendered subjects and come to understand 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of feminine and masculine behaviour. Grace Marks demonstrates how women could negotiate their positions by varying degrees of acquiescence or contestation within their assigned roles and thus redefine the discourse of feminine behaviour.

One of the ways in which Grace displays 'acceptable' feminine behaviour is through her sewing skills, for which she is highly praised and valued. Sewing is a skill that Grace learned at the age of four from her mother, whose sewing helped to support their family in Ireland. A way for women to earn a respectable living, "sewing was synonymous with economic survival as well as being soothing" (Rogerson 7). Grace understands that her skills as a seamstress are vital to her survival, both economically and psychologically, and that an innocuous skill such as sewing can be used to gain power.

Providing the framework for *Alias Grace*, Grace's psychoanalytic sessions with Dr. Simon Jordan take place in the sewing room of the governor's wife, where Grace 'spins' her tragic life story as she calmly sews. So while Dr. Jordan is preoccupied with his own rational thoughts, the medical discourse of suggestion by association, he fails to detect Grace's contemplative practice, "associations that derive from her practice of the needle" (Rogerson 6). This accords with nineteenth-century discourses that personified science as male and nature as female and controllable. As Jane M. Ussher explains: "Through their use of the tool of science men could uncover and control nature, and, by extension, uncover and control

of this discussion, discourse is useful in that it "connotes a greater fluidity and less rigidity than 'ideology'" (C. Morgan 15). In respect to gender, Mills states that "an ideological analysis, because of its view of power, is forced to characterize the female subject as powerless," while "a discourse theory view characterizes subjects engaging in their own constitution" (*Discourse* 40-41); I focus on the latter.

women" (69). Dr. Jordan's disinterest in the therapeutic value and 'language' of sewing leads him further away from understanding or 'uncovering' Grace and her intuitive ability.

Additionally, Dr. Jordan dismisses his mother's suggestion that he invest in home sewing machine manufacturing, a new invention of the day. Mrs. Jordan states, "I am certain that a Sewing Machine would relieve as much human suffering as a hundred Lunatic Asylums, and possibly a good deal more" (Atwood 56). She is well aware of the value of women's domestic work with textiles, equating sewing with therapeutic value. In the nineteenth century sewing was "recognized in the areas of medical and social rehabilitation" (Rogerson 6), as well as economic power.

A domestic servant had little time and means to engage in leisure activities. Even though quilting was not taken seriously as an art in the nineteenth century, it is a form of self-expression that leads to self-discovery and self-confidence. Sewing is one of the few ways in which Grace could both express her creativity and engage in a form of therapy. By focusing on sewing, a 'sanctioned' activity that instills confidence, she becomes more relaxed and self-assured in her discussions with Dr. Jordan. As she sews, Grace appears innocent and quaint; her sewing, however, is not a form of acquiescence. Atwood herself is engaging in a form of discursive sewing as she 'weaves' a quilting metaphor throughout Grace's story, each of the fifteen sections of the novel represented by a quilt pattern and a corresponding account of Grace's life. Skilled at quilting and well versed in the symbolism of quilts, Grace pieces together fragments of her history; the quilt patterns are metaphors for her circumstances and predictions for her future. For example, the first section that begins Grace's tragic story is titled "Jagged Edge," while in "Pandora's Box" Grace is hypnotized and reveals her role in the murders through her friend Mary Whitney's voice. In choosing

quilting as a metaphor, Atwood provides an alternative, feminine discourse, and participates in “a revaluation of a form traditionally associated with women and disassociated from the serious and valued realms of official history and art” (Michael 426).

At the Governor’s house, Grace is permitted to sew only the quilting blocks, not to help with the final piecing together of the quilts at the quilting parties. The domestic task of completing the quilts is the motive behind the parties, and aside from the sense of accomplishment of a finished quilt, the activity provides an opportunity for women to engage in feminine discursive exchange—sharing secrets and bonding with one another. The final section of *Alias Grace*, “The Tree of Paradise,” is named after the quilt that Grace imagines she would sew if she could make a quilt for herself. In the last chapter, when Grace, finally freed, marries and becomes the mistress of her own home, she is able to realize her dream and sews the first quilt that she has ever made for herself—a “Tree of Paradise.” The quilt is symbolic in a number of ways: the piecing together of the sections of her story is like the piecing together of history; domesticity, specifically Grace’s talent at sewing, has shaped her life, both in work and in imagery; and her life after incarceration is comparable to a kind of paradise.

The “Tree of Paradise” quilt pays homage to Grace’s past and anticipates her future: “I intend to put a border of snakes entwined; they will look like vines or just a cable pattern to others [...], but they will look like snakes to me; as without a snake or two, the main part of the story would be missing” (Atwood 551). In “Reading the Patchworks in *Alias Grace*,” Margaret Rogerson argues that “quiltmaking, as a form of female discourse, empowers Grace to speak in a language that is not universally accessible” (6). Grace’s quilt talks back to the many individuals who harmed her, and the stories written about her. It is not, however, for

public consumption, as it is only Grace who is able to 'read' her quilt. Despite Grace's troubled past, or perhaps because of it, the pattern becomes her free choice, the quilt finally something private for herself—something that was always denied her in the past. She is able to use her past to strengthen her future.

But three of the triangles in my Tree will be different. One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney's; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cotton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away. I will embroider all around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern. And so we will all be together. (Atwood 552)

Grace's quilt represents her fate and the fates of Mary Whitney and Nancy Montgomery, and the red feather stitching alludes to the bloodshed that brought all three women together, and eventually brings Grace to her current place in life. Pieces of cloth from the women's pasts—all three domestic servants—symbolize quilting parties they could not participate in; oppression of working class women; desire for harmonious women's bonding; and strength that can be gleaned from self-awareness. The three pieces of cloth signify the inescapability of the past and how the past shapes the future. Without the three pieces of cloth Grace's quilt and her life story would remain incomplete. Grace becomes the creative narrator of her history, told on her own terms through the quilt patterns she sews for herself.

The value of sewing as a sanctioned domestic skill is contrasted with Grace's understanding of her limited alternatives for survival: "I was indeed curious to see the women who made a living by selling their bodies, because I thought if worst came to worst and if starving, I would still have something to sell" (Atwood 176). Prostitution, a transgressive form of feminine behaviour that was perceived as "[t]he Great Social Evil" of Victorian society (Logan), is juxtaposed with sewing, an 'honest'—albeit economically

challenging—way to make a living. By sympathizing and identifying with oppressed women, Grace draws attention to the angel-whore dichotomy, thus problematizing unquestioned binaries and oppressive ideologies that limited women's choices. At the same time, she is acknowledging prostitution as a form of self-possession; selling her body is a last resort means of survival available to her—an undesirable yet viable option. As Stephanie Lovelady explains, Grace makes the most of the roles thrust upon her:

Wife, maid, madwoman and prostitute/criminal are the cultural roles open to Mary and Grace. [...] Grace inhabits all four female roles within her lifetime, beginning as a servant, thrust into the national spotlight as a celebrated murderess and suspected paramour, descending into (or feigning) madness, recovering and ending as a quiet, moderately prosperous wife. What makes her remarkable is her ability to move through these roles, between the private and public sphere, to emerge from madness and sexual scandal and turn these common narrative ends into a mere interludes [sic] in her life, phases she can move beyond. (9)

Victorian discourses suggested that the public sphere was a dangerous space reserved only for men. Those women who dared cross the boundary from the private to the public risked being redefined from sanctioned roles of wife and mother or maid to that of whore or madwoman. While Grace learns to subvert discursive controls and is eventually pardoned and set free, the future holds little promise without economic security. Her arranged marriage to Jamie Walsh and subsequent pregnancy reinforce the “cult of domesticity,” the idealization of woman's role as wife, mother, and guardian of the home.

The discourse of nineteenth-century marriage portrayed it “as the symbol of women's fulfillment,” and although “a happy marriage was held up as an ideal [...], matrimony itself was not necessarily presented as being synonymous with happiness and harmony between men and women” (C. Morgan 147). Grace does not romanticize life, nor veer far from its harsh realities. She is, after all, married to the man who helped convict her. She admits that her marriage is not the romantic ideal that young girls might imagine; rather, it is a domestic

“bargain” the two have entered into (Atwood 543). Again, Grace is able to carefully negotiate power in the domestic setting in how she manages her new household, and in her relationship with her husband: “I have prevailed on Mr. Walsh to trim his beard somewhat and to indulge his pipe smoking only out of doors, and in time perhaps both of these things, the beard and the pipe too, will disappear altogether, but it’s never a good idea to nag and push a man, as it only makes them the more obstinate” (Atwood 543-44).

Along with Grace’s insightfulness and abilities as a seamstress, she possesses remarkable abilities as a storyteller and conversationalist; sewing and storytelling go hand-in-hand in *Alias Grace*. Mills explains how women are able to use conversation as a discursive resource in their everyday practice of resistance:

Rather than seeing women as victims, for example in conversation, feminists have been able to challenge the notion that there is a form of language which is powerful and which is only available to men . . . this idea of women using the resources available at hand in conversation to challenge inequalities in status has been very influential and has challenged the reified notion of power as a possession. (*Discourse* 71-72)

Mills’ theory can be productively applied to the conversations between Grace and Dr. Jordan. Grace subverts the assumptions underlying the relationship between the two. She is a poor, immigrant servant, and the object of the ‘expert’ scientist’s quest for ‘truth’ and knowledge. He is representative of the puritan bourgeoisie, and is also empowered both by his profession and by medical discourses of the day. While he suggests that his “interest is purely scientific” (Atwood 45), he has a hidden agenda related to his career and life course. Yet Grace will not allow herself to be used by Dr. Jordan; she is fully aware of the fact that he is not motivated merely by science or by benevolence. When he offers to help her, Grace understands his motives and hidden desires. She uses their conversations as a diversion from the drudgery of prison, and to challenge his power:

Help is what they offer but gratitude is what they want [...] He wishes to go home and say to himself, I stuck in my thumb and pulled out the plum, what a good boy am I. But I will not be anybody's plum. I say nothing [...] He's using a kind voice, kind on the surface but with other desires hidden beneath it. (Atwood 45)

Grace craves conversation, and speaking with Dr. Jordan becomes an escape from prison, both physically and psychologically. As Atwood explains, she "is a storyteller, with strong motives to narrate but also strong motives to withhold; the only power left to her as a convicted and imprisoned criminal comes from a blend of these two motives" ("In Search" 1515). Grace deliberately censors information she releases to Dr. Jordan, carefully gauging what details of her story to divulge and what to hold back. By controlling what she reveals and conceals and how she responds to his questioning, she manipulates the situation so that she eludes him: "She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's following" (Atwood 488).

In "Between Speech and Silence," Susan Gal discusses the paradox between the feminist concern with giving women voice and the power of silence. While "silence is generally deplored, because it is taken to be a result and a symbol of passivity and powerlessness," on the other hand, "it is the silent listener who judges, and who thereby exerts power over the one who speaks" (Gal 175). Silence as a discursive action can also "be a form of resistance and protest" and "powerful resource in interaction" (Thornborrow 32). Grace is described as "Our Lady of the Silences" (Atwood 447) by her lawyer, Kenneth MacKenzie, and she learns that silence can sometimes work to her benefit. She uses silence on various levels: to protest unjust treatment by the doctors and matrons at the asylum who will not listen to her; as a response to newspaper accounts and negative public opinion; as a form of protest against Dr. Jordan's motives and medical discourse; as a way to keep something private for herself; and as a way to avoid abuse while incarcerated and as a

servant. Silence, instead of talking back, becomes a more powerful tool in particular contexts and it is a discursive skill that Grace learns early in life. She circumvents her abusive father by removing herself and her siblings from the home in order to avoid his drunken wrath. After her mother's death, Grace becomes the focus of his anger and abuse, and despite concern for her younger siblings, she surmises that she must leave home and start a life on her own: "My father was not at home when I left," she explains. "It was just as well, as I am sorry to say it would most likely have been curses both ways, although silent on my part. It is always a mistake to curse back openly at those who are stronger than you unless there is a fence between" (Atwood 149). As a servant, she understands the necessity of holding back her views, no matter how well grounded, from those who assert authority over her: "I would always tell him, Very well Sir, because there is nothing such a gentleman would wish to get rid of sooner than a discontented servant—you are paid to smile, and it does well to remember it" (Atwood 303).

As a storyteller Grace not only captures Dr. Jordan's attention, she subverts gender relations to gain power. Grace clearly understands Dr. Jordan's motives for bringing fruits and vegetables to their sessions—to evoke associations with the root cellar where the murdered corpses were hidden—but does not reveal her insight. When he brings her a radish at her request, she rewards him with a story: "I set to work willingly to tell my story, and to make it as interesting as I can, and rich in incident, as a sort of return gift to him; for I have always believed that one good turn deserves another" (Atwood 291). The irony is that it is the incarcerated Grace—who is escorted by two guards to her daily sessions with Dr. Jordan—who is in control of their conversations: "This is not quite true, but I wish to see if he has really been listening to me, or just pretending to" (Atwood 229). When he first meets

Grace, Dr. Jordan's instinct tells him that she is in command of the situation, "as if it were he, and not she, who was under scrutiny," yet he dismisses the thought as "melodrama, and an overheated brain" (Atwood 67). As a scientist, he disconnects himself from "unknown forces that challenge his rational capacity," relying instead on his "homogenizing medical discourse" (Staels 445). Dr. Jordan uses rationality to formulate his opinions, which C. Morgan states elsewhere, are "constructed and understood as a masculine trait and also perceived as essential to the very definition of masculinity itself" (146). Conversely, Grace identifies with each situation, and uses self-knowledge and carefully considered observations of others combined with intuitive abilities to make judgments. It serves her well to mistrust medical discourse, rationality, and preconceived discursive structures.

Atwood illustrates the struggle over language, the chasm between feminine and masculine discourse, and how language manifests itself in terms of class. When at a loss for words, Grace often tries to think of what her deceased friend, Mary Whitney, might say. More so than Grace, Mary embodies quick-wittedness and rebelliousness. While both are respectful and know their place in the domestic hierarchy, Mary is bold in her speech, shocking Grace's sensibilities while also paving the way for Grace to experiment with powerful language.

I was often astonished at the words that came out of her mouth, as many of them were quite coarse; it wasn't that I'd never heard such language before, as there was sufficient store of it at home when my father was drunk, and on the ship coming over, and down by the harbour near the taverns and inns; but I was surprised to hear it from a girl, and one so young and pretty, and so neatly and cleanly dressed. (Atwood 173)

By appropriating the discourse of working-class men, Mary empowers herself with masculine language, breaking one of the many unwritten regulations of femininity, while at the same time undermining the masculine voice. This appropriation contests meanings and

draws on the feminist insight that language is not mere utterance, rather a powerful political tool. It also demonstrates Gal's assertion that "the links between gender, power, and linguistic practices are not 'natural' and can be constructed in quite different ways" (180). Grace learns the nuances of rebellious discourse, and becomes adept at understanding the effects of such language and the breach in discursive rules that it connotes. After Mary's death, Grace gathers the courage to utilize masculine discourse when it serves her needs, such as when fending off the sexual advances of the guards. David Glover and Cora Kaplan state *gender role* "suggests something that constrains or confines," so it follows that those who are restricted by gender roles would call "differences into question, drawing attention to the artificiality of what we think of as 'natural' behaviour" (ix). Grace occupies a unique position in that she is confined both literally and figuratively: in prison, as a domestic servant, as well as in her gender role. These forms of confinement prompt Grace to problematize and transgress what is constructed as 'natural' behaviour of a young woman and to ask about "who has the right to define the usage of language" (Mills, *Discourse* 39).

Grace's sense of self-possession can be contrasted with Mary's disregard for social codes. Mary is outspoken in conversation and understands sexual and class boundaries, yet she goes against her own advice in transgressing those boundaries: "The worst ones are the gentlemen, who think they are entitled to anything they want" (Atwood 191). Sexual exploitation of women goes hand-in-hand with class exploitation. Mary's pregnancy indicates how a double standard existed between women and men, as the gentleman who impregnates her will not acknowledge his part, nor will he marry below his station. Mary pays the ultimate price for her transgression, while the doctor who botches her abortion and the gentleman responsible remain alive and well. Even after her death, however, Mary's

influence over Grace continues. When Grace is hypnotized, Mary's voice speaks through Grace, explaining Grace's unwitting role in the murders and leading to her eventual pardon. By inhabiting Grace's body, Mary reveals the missing pieces of Grace's memory. With Mary's soul finally released, Grace's voice is no longer suppressed; the voice of a 'madwoman' that people would not listen to is finally heard.

Grace is aware that she and many of the other women in the asylum are not insane: "I told them I wasn't mad, that I wasn't the one, but they wouldn't listen. They wouldn't know mad when they saw it in any case, because a good portion of the women in the Asylum were no madder than the Queen of England" (Atwood 33). She is referring to women such as battered wives, who are escaping their husbands' abuse, and homeless women in need of shelter. Feigning madness in order to escape their hardships, they choose the asylum as a lesser evil. In fact, the Victorians considered poverty "one of the moral causes of insanity," and "asylum populations also included many women who were senile, tubercular, epileptic, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, or otherwise unable to care for themselves" (Showalter 54-55). Grace calls attention to the cultural construction of madness, as well as the arbitrary ways in which women were committed to insane asylums. While there is some disagreement regarding historical correlations between women and madness (see, for example, Busfield), Elaine Showalter maintains "the existence of a fundamental alliance between 'woman' and 'madness'" (3). Ussher concurs in asserting that

the Victorian era marked an important change in the discursive regimes which confined and controlled women, because it was in this period that the close association between femininity and pathology became firmly established within the scientific literary and popular discourse: madness became synonymous with womanhood. (64)

If a link could be established between women and madness, then it becomes clear how madness became ‘naturally’ associated as a feminine disease, as the title of Showalter’s study, *The Female Malady*, indicates.

Grace’s alleged insanity is explored throughout the novel. Dr. Bannerling, the previous superintendent of the asylum, believes Grace feigns madness in order to be indulged. Susanna Moodie, who visited Grace Marks in the penitentiary in 1851, reported in *Life in the Clearings* that “the fearful hauntings of her brain have terminated in madness” (170). Moodie, “a very civilized person both by birth and upbringing” and “a respected matron of Belleville” (McDougall viii-ix), undoubtedly sensationalizes Grace’s ‘madness’ in order to entice readers. As Atwood points out, Moodie also possessed a “tendency to exaggerate” (451).³ Grace is cognizant of hidden agendas, such as Moodie’s dramatic slant. By appropriating the voice of madness, Grace plays out the Victorian binary of angel versus monster/whore, and indulges those who “want a monster so badly they ought to be provided with one” (Atwood 36). She also recognizes those who simply want someone to be held responsible for the double murder: “Rightly or wrongly it does not matter [...] People want a guilty person. If there has been a crime, they want to know who did it. They don’t like not knowing” (Atwood 104).

In response to defining discourse Grace engages in performativity. By conveying a stereotype of madness she thereby undermines those who define her as mad: “I look at him stupidly. I have a good stupid look which I have practiced” (Atwood 42). Viewed in this light, Grace transforms madness into agency, allowing her to carve out moments of respite from her dismal circumstances, including her daily visits with Dr. Jordan at the home of the

³ Atwood was initially introduced to the historical Grace Marks through Susanna Moodie’s version of events, and at that time reports that she “did not question it” (Atwood, “In Search ” 1513).

Governor's wife. She possesses a chameleon-like ability to alter her reaction or response to either meet or subvert the expectations of those around her, depending on how it serves her purposes. When the Governor's wife shows Grace her scrapbook of famous criminals, Grace calculates her reaction: "I suppose she wanted to see what I would do; but I've learnt how to keep my face still, I made my eyes wide and flat, like an owl's in torchlight, and I said I had repented in bitter tears, and was now a changed person" (Atwood 27). Inwardly Grace acknowledges that the newspaper articles about her are mostly lies, but she offers a response that satisfies the Governor's wife. In turn, her performance suits her own purposes—to remain a housekeeper as an escape from the penitentiary and ensure that those working on her pardon continue to do so.

Social deviance such as madness is often tied to the notion of confessional discourse in which "the relation between confessing and submitting to a relation of power" serves to deal with women's problems (Mills, *Discourse* 73). Confessional discourse can be viewed as a type of discipline that is not always in a woman's best interest. For example, Grace is convicted as a result of the confession forced by her lawyer, which is subsequently sensationalized by the newspapers. She explains: "This is not really my Confession, I say, it was only what the lawyer told me to say, and things made up by the men from the newspapers [...] They will make up any old thing to suit themselves" (Atwood 114-15). Grace is forced to abandon her incoherent version of events for one that is believable. The question of her insanity is complicated by "Mrs. Moodie's account, which amounts to a confession by Grace, of having actually done the deed" (Atwood 88). Confession, however, can also act as a form of empowerment. Just as the confessional may be used against women who do not meet societal demands for compliant behaviour, it is possible for women to

generate resistance and become empowered by the confessional. Not only is she speaking out, but while telling Dr. Jordan about her life, she reframes her story so that, as Mills describes elsewhere, “different causes and different trajectories could be formulated” (*Discourse* 74). In essence, Grace recasts her confession to reflect societal problems rather than accepting individual blame for her situation, and thereby accruing power to herself. Confessional discourse enables Grace to speak, despite her possible insanity.

Grace’s performance continues in her married life with Jamie Walsh. Her discursive power includes narrating her past in a way that generates expected emotions and reactions, thereby manipulating her husband through her stories. She indulges his sexual fantasies that are associated with her past suffering: “As for Mr. Walsh, after I have told him a few stories of torment and misery he clasps me in his arms and strokes my hair, and begins to unbutton my nightgown, as these scenes often take place at night; and he says, Will you ever forgive me?” (Atwood 548). This passage is from a imaginary letter that Grace is writing to Dr. Jordan, with the pretense of updating him on her life after her release from prison. She is, however, informing him of her performance and the agency it affords, both in the present and their past sessions together. Grace’s compliance with her husband’s sexual fantasies may, on the surface, be seen as a response to nineteenth-century ‘requirements’ for female submissiveness. But it also implies that Dr. Jordan’s sexual fantasies of Grace are being played out with her husband, and that she used Dr. Jordan’s visits as a break in her days at the penitentiary for her own benefit. Grace’s letter, the final part of her story, ‘writes back’ to Dr. Jordan and the many letters and newspaper stories that he and others—primarily men in positions of power—used to discursively construct her. It represents the end of her former life as an incarcerated/servant woman and the beginning of her new life as a married woman

in the private realm. (The historic Grace Marks was never heard from again.) Her retreat from public to domestic discourse brings her story full circle; Grace has the last word.

Both discursive and institutional structures oppress women, and since women are not a homogenous group but uniquely individual, “some women negotiate for themselves positions of institutionalised power and others accrue power to themselves by negotiating with the seemingly powerless positions which they have been allotted” (Mills, *Discourse* 84). On the surface, an Irish servant girl might appear powerless; yet, I have demonstrated that Grace carved out a position of power for herself within the domestic sphere. The boundaries of institutional status, however, are rigidly defined, and “have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think” (Mills, *Discourse* 55). For instance, Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson point out that gender and class assumptions influence the formation of media and legal opinion and that “women in the Victorian period often found their evidence less valued than that of men, especially where it was the uncorroborated testimony of a woman from the lower classes” (38). Despite the difficulty in negotiating institutional status, Grace exercises agency through the media.

Media representations strongly contest and affirm discursive roles for both women and men. As the epigraph from the *Toronto Star* indicates, the Kinnear-Montgomery murders provided shocking subject matter that filled newspapers of the day with sensationalized stories. The media constructed a number of narratives of how and why the murders took place, including speculation about McDermott and Grace’s individual characters, their relationship with one another, and their roles in the sequence of events. Cecilia Morgan states: “The opinions and arguments expressed in the Upper Canadian press present, not a static or monolithic ‘body of opinion,’ but many discursive fields in which the construction

of images of masculinity and femininity, categories of manhood and womanhood, may be found" (15). Indeed, Gillian Siddall emphasizes, "public representations of Grace [...] are not opinions reserved for this particular murder case or this particular woman; rather, they are symptomatic of broader Victorian ideas of femininity and sexuality, and Grace becomes a titillating figure through which the public can articulate and consolidate those ideas" (84-85). The media acts as a support mechanism by allowing statements to be kept in place, thereby giving them force and shifting discourse from the private to the public. Atwood points to the division between truth and falsehood within the public domain and questions the assumption that 'news' is an accurate representation of events. Grace ponders all of the contradictory stories about her that the newspapers published and asks, "how can I be all of these different things at once?" (Atwood 23).

Judith Knelman responds to Grace's question with a question of her own: "Can we believe what the newspapers tell us?" (677). If we recognize that newspapers sensationalize and politicize as a matter of routine, and if we understand, like Grace, that "like everything men [sic] write down, such as the newspapers, they got the main story right but some of the details wrong" (Atwood 551), the obvious answer is, of course, *no*. Knelman comments on the subjective nature of news items thus:

Newspaper *articles* [my italics]⁴ are primary sources that do no more than record what people think is happening. They are not conduits to any hidden 'truth' or 'history' but simply blurry images of retreating reality captured from different perspectives. There are gaps and overlaps, details missing and details contradictory: as with any set of eyewitness accounts, the observations are not entirely consistent or coherent. (684)

⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* etymology of the word *article* is rooted in religion and the law, connoting faith and justice. The *OED* defines "(newspaper) article" as "A non-fictional piece of writing forming part of a journal, encyclopaedia, or other publication, and treating a specific topic independently and distinctly ("article" def. 7). If "non-fictional" connotes 'truth,' while newspapers are merely recording 'thoughts,' then perhaps rather than referring to newspaper 'articles' we should refer to newspaper 'stories.'

That newspapers are not agents of ‘truth’ is accurate; however, what Knelman overlooks is that much of society willfully accepts what is recorded by the media as ‘truth’ without further enquiry, thus perpetuating the institutional nature of discourse while at the same time constructing realities based on potential falsehoods. Knelman further asserts that “it is unfair to impugn the reliability of newspapers as historical documents just because they don’t tell one consistent story” (685). Newspapers, nevertheless, are only historical documents in the context of the past. When viewed in the context of the present, they not only reflect public opinion, they sway it, and public opinion is a powerful discursive tool, as Grace’s lawyer responds when Dr. Jordan asks about the likely outcome if Grace had also been tried for the murder of Nancy Montgomery: “I couldn’t have got her off. Public opinion would have been too strong for me. She would have been hanged” (Atwood 454).

If newspapers are “valuable for the things they tell us incidentally and incrementally about customs and attitudes and problems and coping strategies in days gone by” (Knelman 685), conduct books and magazines are an even stronger marker of the problems and attitudes faced by women. These publications sanctioned the discourse of femininity—the behaviours that were considered acceptable for middle-class womanhood, as well as reinforcing the “cult of domesticity,” an ideal that restricted women’s opportunities outside the home. Mills points out, however, that rather than being simple markers of women’s oppression, conduct books can be seen as both indicators of the scale of the subjugation of women, and indicators of women’s resistance: “It is clear that women were *not* the compliant subjects these books tried to produce . . . these discourses of advice were not successful” (*Discourse* 81). Certainly, women’s conduct was not always in accordance with the ideals of a ‘proper’ Victorian woman. Facilitated in part by the spread of literacy and the printed word,

conduct books and magazines offered another way for women to empower themselves, to refute claims that reading was ‘dangerous’ and intellectual pursuits unsuitable for women.

Atwood alludes to the “Godey’s Ladies’ Book” that Nancy Montgomery liked to read. Grace notes that even Kinnear would “read the articles on how a lady should behave, which I would often catch him chuckling over” (381-82). The *Godey’s Lady’s Book* was “one of the most popular lady’s books of the 19th century” (*Godey’s Lady’s Book Online*). Issues were filled with fashions, crafts, poetry, fiction, as well as stories and editorials relating to the intellectual and moral influence and conduct of women. Although some stories espouse excessively strict codes of etiquette, the “Editor’s Table” in the January 1850 issue indicates the changing discourse on female intellect:

What a wonderful change in public opinion concerning the powers of the female mind has been effected since our journal was first published! Then—that is, twenty years ago—very little interest was taken in female education [...] We intend to go on, sustained and accelerated by this universal encouragement, till our grand aim is accomplished, till *female education* shall receive the same careful attention and liberal support from public legislation as are bestowed on that of the other sex.

While this passage indicates that discursive barriers were being broken down in terms of women’s education, the editorial goes on to describe a blooming rose as a metaphor for the female mind: “Gently to unfold this flower, as the sun’s rays in the spring warm and expand the rose till its beauty is seen and its sweet incense induces the admirer to preserve it for its virtues as well as its loveliness.” Such narratives suggest that a woman’s intellect cannot be valued apart from physical beauty. The association between women’s physical and intellectual characteristics is reflected in the 1843 court report, *The Trials of James McDermott, and Grace Marks*, in which George Walton describes Grace: “The female Prisoner is rather good-looking than otherwise, she appears totally uneducated, and her countenance is devoid of expression” (8). While Walton’s description of Grace’s physical

characteristics can be read as an objective observation, it can also be interpreted to suggest that a young, pretty, servant-class woman cannot be educated, thereby disassociating the female gender and servant/working classes from education, ultimately underwriting social inequality. Conduct books also indicate that many of the problems that women faced were not individual problems; rather, they were societal problems in which compliant behaviour was expected, and which in turn was often dictated by class.

Those who are not privileged within the class system lack access to education and other resources. Born to working-class parents in poverty-stricken circumstances, Grace ekes out the most she can from her situation. Although she does not have a formal education, Grace nevertheless understands the value of education and accesses it when she can:

They said in the newspaper that I was illiterate, but I could read some even then. I was taught early by my mother, before she got too tired for it, and I did my sampler with leftover thread, A is for Apple, B is for Bee; and also Mary Whitney used to read with me, at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's, when we were doing the mending; and I've learnt a lot more since being here, as they teach you on purpose. (Atwood 28)

The importance of education and knowledge is not only linked with success, but also with morality, which the Irish greatly valued, including Irish peasants in the pre-Famine period (Lynch-Brennan 42). Poverty does not preclude a hunger for knowledge, and even though Grace could not disassociate herself from the stigma of poverty associated with Famine immigrants, it is clear that she values her education. Ironically, the primary institution of her 'schooling' is the penitentiary.

Working-class women had little opportunities and were subjected to discursive codes of conduct. Indeed, it is highly likely that "notions of class and gender in nineteenth-century Canada enacted a kind of discursive violence against women that often had a profound impact on their day-to-day-lives" (Siddall 88). At the same time, working-class women were

not repressed in the same ways as middle-class women. In fact, they were free from certain strictures that the status 'lady' demanded. As Cecilia Morgan explains:

For those women who were constructed and represented as 'ladies,' the image would symbolize constraints, but it also could be deployed strategically to challenge 'women's sphere.' [...] For native, immigrant, and working-class women, the trope of the 'lady' might be seen as a badly flawed ideal that had little meaning for their lives. (229)

Grace is able to use her working-class status to her advantage, as she explains to Dr. Jordan during one of their sessions: "'I have no reason not to be frank with you, Sir,' she said. 'A lady might conceal things, as she has her reputation to lose; but I am beyond that'" (Atwood 103). As a convicted 'murderess' and 'madwoman,' who has crossed almost all possible limits, she does not have a reputation to uphold. As such, Grace is able to speak freely when she so chooses, or conversely, to conceal when she deems it useful, without regard for social standing. She does not have to uphold ladylike appearances, which gives her both a distinct advantage in self-awareness and in an awareness of what is going on around her:

There is a good deal that can be seen slantwise, especially by the ladies, who do not wish to be caught staring. They can also see through veils, and window curtains, and over the tops of fans; and it is a good thing they can see in this way, or they would never see much of anything. But those of us who do not have to be bothered with all the veils and fans manage to see a good deal more. (Atwood 271)

In this passage Grace points out similarities between the classes, noting artificial distinctions that maintain class differences and power relations. Geraldine Moane, for example, explains that the wearing of the veil as a status symbol for married women demarcated class divisions between 'respectable' and 'non-respectable' women (31).

Class divisions lend themselves to the ways in which discourses structure our notions of identity; as Moane urges us to consider: "At the psychological level, control of discourse is directly related to the construction of self and identity, to feelings of self-worth and self-

esteem, to the capacity for self-expression, to imagination and to the sense of belonging in society” (51). Despite the connection between discursive control and identity, the complex nature of power relations also produces subjectivity, thus enabling subjects to map out new, more liberating terrain (Mills, *Discourse* 13). Public concern with race, class, and gender serves to limit Grace’s possibilities, both in Ireland and Upper Canada, but by crossing the globe Grace evades ‘Irish’ colonial discourses to some degree. Class mobility was highly problematic in Ireland, while the frontier of Upper Canada was subject to a less entrenched set of colonial discourses and a less distinct servant class, all of which, as Grace reflects, becomes more liberating:

And also I should remember that we were not slaves, and being a servant was not a thing we were born to, nor would we be forced to continue at it forever; it was just a job of work. [...] And one person was as good as the next, and on this side of the ocean folks rose in the world by hard work, not by who their grandfather was, and that was the way it should be. (Atwood 181-82)

From a young age Grace accepts her working-class status: “that the domestic sphere, whether in her own home or those of others, is her realm, never questioning this fate or even wishing it could be otherwise” (Lovelady 35). Domestic servants, however, were not powerless. Domestic work provides the opportunity for Grace to map out a future for herself, as she understands that it is within her prospects to earn enough money to save, eventually marry, and have a household of her own. Egalitarian notions allow Grace to equate domestic work, typically synonymous with drudgery, with agency instead. She recognizes that the ability to perform domestic duties is both a job and a survival skill; it is also a set of skills that most wealthy people are lacking, so that “if they were to lose all their money tomorrow and be thrown out on the streets, they would not even be able to make a living” (Atwood 182). Grace uses the metaphor of washing the dirty linen as a means to knowing everything

that goes on in the household, which gives the servants the advantage of insight into the secrets of their employers—a relationship that is not reciprocal (Atwood 183). Grace's ability to understand her place in the domestic sphere, to become empowered by it, and to transfer it to the public sphere is embedded in her working-class roots. Rather than view this situation as a disadvantage, Grace exploits it to her gain.

Grace's hardships fuel her agency rather than repress it. She observes the comings and goings of the household and becomes "skilled at overhearing" (Atwood 5). No different from the domestic duties she performs, her awareness of others is a valuable skill. In taking notice of individual personalities and their backgrounds, particularly people in positions of power, and by listening to their stories, Grace reveals her ability to understand others' feelings and motives and how in turn she might be affected. A case in point is when she observes Nancy's severe mood swings and senses that trouble is on the horizon: "But as she blew out the candle she sighed, and it was not the sigh of a happy woman, but of one who is trying to make the best of things" (Atwood 292). After Grace is incarcerated, she has a great deal of time to think, which further develops her attentiveness, as she explains to Dr. Jordan: "Those of us who have been in trouble themselves are alert to it in others" (Atwood 287).

Grace's circumstances enable her to pursue extended introspection—peering inward in order to understand herself as an individual woman and her place in the world. In *Self-Knowledge and the Self*, David Jopling states that self-knowledge is not an attribute one happens to have; rather it is something one must work at through reflective self-inquiry and self-evaluation in order to achieve greater awareness of how we are perceived by others and how our characters and decisions affect others (2). Grace exhibits a high degree of self-knowledge in how she makes sense of herself, her life history, and the ill-fated turn her life

takes, which ultimately enables her to survive traumatic circumstances. It also allows her to draw attention to discursive barriers and how they negatively affect women's lives.

Ironically, in doing so she shifts focus away from the discursive constraints placed upon women to the agency she exercises.

Why were nineteenth-century women marginalized or absent from public discourses?

In the epigraph, Lerner indicates that men have made themselves the center of discourse.

Historically, women have been defined by oppression and lack of agency. Deep-rooted beliefs ensured that many women accepted notions of inferiority, undermining their capabilities and in turn limiting their agency. While undoubtedly the ideology of separate spheres restricted women's opportunities by confining them to the private sphere, it also provided a source of power in which women could earn a respectable living or exercise control over their own homes and families. By analyzing discourse and power as sites of contestation, we can move away from viewing women as simply oppressed, helpless victims, to various ways in which women resist oppressive practices and marginalization in their everyday lives.

Alias Grace demonstrates how nineteenth-century women could manipulate societal discursive regimes that attempted to limit women, including medical discourses, the media, conduct books, and language that reinforce patriarchy. Returning to the past to rescue Grace's reputation from the sensationalized public record, Atwood centralizes Grace's voice. By highlighting the fictional Grace's agency, Atwood forces us to reexamine history and gender relations, to recognize how they are shaped by discourse, and to consider how gender, race, and class work together to circumscribe women's behaviour. Discourse theory allows us to acknowledge not only that sexism exists, but also to recognize that inequalities such as

sexism can be disputed. The disruption of discourses, like any attempt to change established practices, becomes a threat to those who hold power. Atwood proves that women wield considerable power—even those women such as Grace Marks whose possibilities are severely limited.

Chapter Two

Almost Forgotten: Women's Voice, History, Truth, and Fiction in Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You*

I used to wonder whether something that had happened more than a hundred years ago, and that was almost forgotten, could have been so terrible that it knocked all the happiness out of people.

—Nuala O'Faolain, *My Dream of You*

[T]he two things most precious in this world are the sanctity of domestic life and the purity of the administration of justice, and that when the one is invaded, or the other is perverted, it is the business of every man to step forward to their vindication; it is more especially the business of every one who has a wife or daughter to defend . . .

—John Paget, *The Case of Talbot v. Talbot*, 1854

The preface to Nuala O'Faolain's historical novel, *My Dream of You*, explains that “*The passages in italics in this book are verbatim quotations from original source material relating to the Talbot divorce case, which is an actual event.*” That O'Faolain should foreground her novel with a ‘warning’ to the reader is not surprising, considering the blurry divide between history, truth, and fiction. *My Dream of You* is metafiction—a story about a story told from and about women's perspective.

O'Faolain's novel focuses on Kathleen (Caitlín) de Burca, a contemporary travel writer living in England, who returns to Ireland to uncover details of the Talbot divorce trial of 1849. Struggling to define her own identity, Kathleen immerses herself in the past, both her own and that of Marianne Talbot, an Anglo-Irish landowner's wife accused of committing adultery with William Mullan, an Irish groom. In her quest O'Faolain's protagonist discovers contradictory and ambiguous historical documents. A striking absence of both the details of women's lives as well as women's voices disrupt Kathleen's notions of historical ‘truth.’ Kathleen reveals her own tragic past when she creates a fictional narrative to fill in the missing details of Marianne's life.

I posit that it is through the merging of the female protagonists' pasts—within the context of Ireland's colonial history as well as the feminist movement—that Kathleen creates

both self-awareness and recognition for Marianne Talbot, an almost forgotten historical figure. O’Faolain engages in the project of restoring women’s subjectivity through historical fiction’s linkage of the past with the present—between a Victorian and a contemporary woman. Additionally, in examining the intricate intertwining of historical fiction with metafiction and intertextuality, I discuss how O’Faolain underscores history as gendered, narrativized, and variable, and how the boundaries between historiography and historical fiction are becoming blurred. *My Dream of You* addresses a number of complex questions that I analyze through a gendered lens; chiefly, what constitutes historical ‘truth,’ and who decides how history is remembered.

Gender has played a significant role in shaping the field of history. History has primarily been written by men, and women have been excluded from or situated outside historical discourse because of patriarchy. In *Writing Women’s History Since the Renaissance*, Mary Spongberg exposes the bias of male versions of history:

[W]hile women were not entirely absent from the historical record, the traces of womanhood that appear have been shaped by men who were self-consciously reverting to the misogynistic images of women found in the historical texts of ancient Greece and Rome. Moreover, the gender prescriptions of the ancients came to be idealized by male historians, justifying women’s exclusion from the public sphere and the sphere of history. (9)

The practice of neglecting or distorting women’s history has deep origins. Spongberg’s assertion suggests that the private/public divide that so often characterizes the Victorian era dates back to the ancients, indicating that much of what we assume to be associated with a particular period has much deeper roots. We can only understand the present through the past. Inescapability from the past is both a blessing and a curse for women in that it forces writers to address past injustices, yet at the same time leaves large gaps in the historical record that can be problematic to fill.

While Spongberg provides a glimpse into the origins of misogyny, she counters its trajectory with links to the development of feminist discourse: “Women’s engagement with historical writing cannot be understood except in relation to the emergence of feminist consciousness. The study of history alerted women to their unequal status and to assert the moral authority of history in order to achieve women’s rights” (8). Spongberg validates the necessary partnership between the past and the present while lending historiographic credibility to the egression of the women’s movement. She highlights the need for women to challenge gender inequalities, and to insist that by excluding women from history, the past becomes a biased and incomplete story. Not content to sit on the sidelines of history, women relied on their creativity, took action, and wrote in ways that contributed to feminist historiography.

Spongberg attests to the erosion of masculinist discourses by women claiming territory of their own to assert their subject position:

In a very real sense the writing of history can be seen as a feminist activity, as it involved the insertion of women’s subjectivity into an ostensibly masculinist discourse. Like contemporary women’s historians, historians of women in the past used their writings to force women into existing historical narratives, to assert women’s historical subjectivity and to question masculinist historiography. Moreover, they proved truly innovative in their uses of the medium, exploiting acceptable gender norms to create their own historical subjectivity. (8-9)

This passage emphasizes the importance of expressing selfhood through historical writing. Forcing realistic depictions of women, or unearthing historical women and building narratives around women’s historical subjectivity while at the same time questioning male versions of history is precisely what O’Faolain accomplishes in *My Dream of You*. Her protagonist, Kathleen, must first overcome resistance to confronting her own past.

Relying on her research and writing skills as a non-fiction travel writer, Kathleen searches the archives for documents that might allow her to present an unbiased picture of Marianne Talbot and the Talbot scandal. Bound to a degree of accuracy, but “plagued by questions to which there could never be definite answers” (O’Faolain 468-69), she has little choice but to evaluate the few existing documents, conceptualize them in historical terms, and build a fictional narrative around them. As I shall subsequently discuss, the documents are unreliable and provide few details of Marianne’s past. At the same time that Kathleen struggles to reconcile both the contradictory and limited documentation and her personal experiences and feelings with historical events, she begins to understand the narrow biases of received history, and the need to create historical subjectivity for Marianne: “What if I didn’t think of it as the Talbot story but as Marianne’s story? If I came at it from the inside, not from the outside?” (O’Faolain 162). Giving Marianne textual centrality is a key turning point, as it allows her to negotiate numerous roadblocks and continue with the project of filling in the missing pieces of the puzzle. While it appears as if Kathleen may be setting up a false binary (inside/outside), her approach, in fact, blurs the distinction between the two. It also provides Kathleen the opportunity to make valid comparisons between her life and Marianne’s, which in turn allows her to come to terms with her own history: “Could I move beyond some momentary imagining of the past towards finding a meaning for it? Not an explanation but a meaning? And not a meaning in history but in my own life?” (O’Faolain 75-76). It becomes evident that the interplay between the past and the present and between fact and fiction becomes a useful feminist political tool.

In a topical essay titled “Does the Past Have a Future? It turns out h-i-s-t-o-r-y can be spelled many different ways,” historian Kenneth Dewar acknowledges that shifting

sensibilities have caused the boundaries between genres of historical writing to blur. He suggests that we are experiencing “a reordering of relations between past and present” (4). Dewar suggests that one response to the challenges of conventional historiographic practices is the French historian Pierre Nora’s *ego-histoire*, “a marriage of the personal and the historical” (4). Dewar explains:

[*E*]go-histoire represents an explicit departure from the ideal of objectivity and an embrace of what its adherents believe to be an inescapable subjectivity, which alters the relationship of writer and reader, just as it alters the posture a writer assumes toward his or her subject. In doing so, it draws in the reader as a kind of co-investigator [...] In this way, writer and reader participate together in a kind of methodological intimacy so foreign to the historiography of a half-century ago that it would not have been accepted as history at all. (5)

Although Nora and Dewar discuss recording histories by historians, I submit that *My Dream of You* lends itself to *ego-histoire*. O’Faolain foregrounds Kathleen as an ego-historian, the writer of Marianne’s story. While Marianne’s story is an invention, she is an historical figure, and Kathleen’s narrative is based on historical events. At the same time, Kathleen draws heavily on her own past, as well as making valid comparisons between her life and Marianne’s, including her newfound relationship with Shay, a married man, and Marianne’s connection with Mullan. Historical fiction collapses the distinction between history and fiction. O’Faolain collapses the distinction between Kathleen and Marianne, and also between herself, her protagonists and her readers. From all of this we can see that the boundary between Kathleen’s own life, her research and her writing, and Marianne’s life is blurred, like the image she sees in a mirror: “That night in my room I opened my laptop to enter the day’s notes. My eye was caught by the reverse images of my gestures in the wavy old mirror. When there was movement in its aquarium depths, I had often imagined that Marianne was on the other side of the glass, trying to reach me” (O’Faolain 356).

To further exploit the relationship between the past and the present, between objectivity and subjectivity, and between the personal and the political, O’Faolain employs metafiction. Kathleen’s story of Marianne’s life, chapters titled “The Talbot Book” interwoven through *My Dream of You*, is a story within a story. Metafiction concerns itself with discussing the process of its construction, or as Abrams and Harpham explain, it “foreground[s] the role[s] of the author in inventing the fiction and of the reader in receiving the fiction” (232). The following conversation between Kathleen and Shay demonstrates the initial struggle Kathleen encounters in writing Marianne’s story:

I’m a writer, I said. Well, a journalist. I was going to write something about a thing that happened long ago. Inland from here. But I’m finding it hard to get the facts of it straight.

Could you not make them up? he said.

No, I said. I couldn’t make up facts. (O’Faolain 147)

This casual exchange highlights the writing of the text as problematic. Creating a fiction while simultaneously commenting on it are two processes that, as Patricia Waugh states, are “held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between ‘creation’ and ‘criticism’ and merges them into the concepts of ‘interpretation’ and ‘deconstruction’” (6). *My Dream of You* not only foregrounds Kathleen’s role as creator of Marianne’s story, but also as unwitting feminist critic. In investigating Marianne’s past, Kathleen questions the role of feminism and misogyny in her own life: “I did believe, from my experience of life and of looking at the world, that men hated women” (O’Faolain 160).

While Kathleen reflects on her own life and simultaneously interprets and deconstructs history, she does so with the help of others’ input—including that of her readers. The self-conscious tension that metafiction produces encourages readers to become actively involved in the novel, thus prompting questions which are, inevitably, unanswerable. For

example, in a note she pens to Miss Leech, Kathleen asks: “if I gathered the bits and pieces of the Talbot story into a tale, just for my own satisfaction, I wouldn’t be trying to humbug anyone, would I?” (O’Faolain 163). Kathleen’s journalistic instinct in getting the facts of Marianne’s story straight calls into question the difference between fact and fiction. Her trepidation over recurring advice that she must be “very careful with the historical stuff” (O’Faolain 88), combined with her fears about “the fantasy [she] had woven on the theme of the *Judgment*” (332), eventually leads her to determine that it is up to readers to come to their own conclusions about Marianne’s story and its relationship to history, truth, and fiction.

Clearly, O’Faolain encourages readers to identify and sympathize with her protagonists, but particularly with Kathleen as the writer of Marianne’s story. O’Faolain maintains a conversational tone throughout the novel, and one of the ways she achieves this is by focusing on Kathleen’s human qualities and weaknesses. It is, after all, Kathleen’s middle-aged angst that propels her into changing careers, returning to Ireland, and becoming a novelist. The reader can easily empathize with Kathleen’s desperate search for passion, her fear of loneliness and ageing, and her hybridized, in-between status as an Irish expatriate living in England: “On my way to England. Like Marianne. No home, like Marianne. No child, like Marianne. No lover. No occupation. [...] Between places” (O’Faolain 526-27). Focusing on the fictional character and her likeness with the historical character is an effective narrative tool that helps O’Faolain fill in missing details of Marianne’s life, just as Kathleen searches within herself to do the same. The metafictional novel, then, acts as an interlocutor, setting up and mediating a partnership between fictional and historical characters, as well as mediating the various parts that make up the text—the intertexts.

References to separate and distinct texts within *My Dream of You* go hand-in-hand with metafictional concerns as the reader moves between the various intertexts that make up the novel. The key historical document, the Talbot *Judgment*, is the foundation upon which the novel is built. Foundations are built from the ground up, so it is not coincidental that specific excerpts of the *Judgment* appear in the first chapter of O'Faolain's novel. The first passage from the proceedings in the House of Lords of *Talbot v. Talbot* (1856) reads as follows:

The petition presented by one Mr. Talbot of Mount Talbot in Ireland, praying that your Lordships would pass the Bill for divorcing him, as it is called, from his wife, her having or having not been guilty of adultery. (qtd. in O'Faolain 3)

From a critical feminist perspective, immediately recognizable is sexist language of nineteenth-century legal discourse. Marianne Talbot is referred to only as Mr. Talbot's wife, and thus remains not only nameless but also voiceless. Such legal discourse is in keeping with coverture, which essentially denied women legal existence that was subsumed by their husbands upon marriage. As details from the *Judgment* are revealed, the narratives of Kathleen and Marianne's lives begin to take shape. Marianne's voice is no longer muted as Kathleen gradually moves her from the margins to the centre. The second passage from the *Judgment* is introduced after Kathleen returns to Ireland and begins her research in earnest:

... Mr. Talbot married his present wife, Miss Marianne McCausland, in January 1845 and in that same year, some nine or ten months after the marriage, Mrs. Talbot gave birth to a daughter [...] Mr. Talbot lost his uncle Mr. Talbot who was the owner of Mount Talbot in a remote part of western Ireland, a large mansion apparently, and Mr. Talbot and Mrs. Talbot as she was then called took possession of the property. (qtd. in O'Faolain 49)

Contrasting the initial passages, this passage discloses Marianne's identity. Yet Marianne's servitude is simultaneously revealed in the ways marriage and motherhood transformed and

transported her; her identity, like the property in Ireland, becomes the possession of her husband.

Subsequent excerpts from the *Judgment* go on to detail the alleged adultery, including witnesses who “*both say they saw Mullan and Mrs. Talbot lying down together in the straw in one of the stalls*” (qtd. in O’Faolain 4). In the opening pages of *My Dream of You*, the combination of historical documentation and narration overtly foregrounds Marianne’s guilt as an adulteress. Without reading the entire *Judgment*, Kathleen accepts it as true and deems Marianne guilty when she declares, “God! They were bold lovers!” (O’Faolain 4). Kathleen’s reaction occurs in the early 1970s, after she is first introduced to the *Judgment* by her English boyfriend: “You’d be interested in this, Kathleen, he said. Real women’s lib stuff. And it’s Irish. Or, at least, it happened in Ireland” (O’Faolain 3). In her early twenties, Kathleen faces marginalization and psychological angst as a struggling Irish expatriate living in London. She recounts numerous examples of overt and covert discrimination and oppressive practices; from using a false English accent in order to secure an apartment, to sexual exploitation because she is not only a young, naïve woman, but also because she is Irish—judged a lesser person by the English. Kathleen’s internalized sense of inferiority—both national and personal—leaves her open to sexism and reinforces the notion that sexism is ‘natural’: “I just bore with it, as if this were some past century and that was what always happened. The squire and the serving wrench” (O’Faolain 262). Kathleen expresses tolerance of racial and sexual discrimination in her adopted homeland when she states, “I forgot that I’d been saved from Ireland by England” (O’Faolain 35). The discrimination Kathleen faces in England is a lesser evil than the challenges she faced growing up in Ireland and the prospect of confronting her past.

The narrative detailing Kathleen's life growing up in Ireland and exile in England is infused with class, race, gender, and sexual oppression, precisely those issues that were foregrounded by the second wave feminist movement, a time of great flux and monumental gains for women. As Kathleen describes:

It was Catholic Ireland's fault, for sending me out into the world without a shred of inner moral sense, and it was England's fault, for making me feel inferior and unwelcome except when someone wanted to fuck me. It was the fault of the sixties, for inventing the pill and the miniskirts; and it was also the fault of history, for making a world in which everyone had to bow to the bourgeois ideal of fidelity or be punished. (O'Faolain 255)

Kathleen gives readers a glimpse into the forces of history and its psychological impact, including the oppression Irish women faced as postcolonial subjects labeled 'Other' by the English. Only by denying their bodies could women attempt to fulfill the idealized roles of wife and mother. At the same time, Kathleen highlights the contradictions women faced in their everyday lives, particularly women like her who remained unmarried.

It is not until she is almost fifty years old, and after a mid-life crisis of sorts, that the *Judgment* resurfaces in Kathleen's life. It is noteworthy that during the intervening years a shift from the second to third wave feminism occurred, a gradual shift toward postcolonial and postmodern thinking, and a shift that saw the breaking of boundaries (Rampton). Changes in society and in Kathleen's personal life alter her perception of the Talbot case, which in turn paves the way for her to tackle barriers in her life that previously remained undisturbed, barriers that kept her locked in self-destructive, sexually promiscuous behaviour. The missing details of Marianne Talbot's life compel Kathleen to abandon her life as a travel writer in England and return to Ireland to pursue Marianne's story, at the same time re-examining her own painful history. Kathleen's subsequent self-awareness generates feelings of empowerment and a metamorphosis occurs. She takes an active interest in the

Famine, a crucial historical event that shaped the lives of the Irish. She declines Shay's offer to become his mistress, breaking her cycle of unfulfilling, casual sexual relationships, and she takes responsibility for her role in how she affects the lives of other people: "Either take account of other people from now on, or go back to the bad old days" (O'Faolain 510). In addition, not only does she gain confidence and maturity as an individual and a woman, she transforms from a detached journalist of 'canned' travel articles to a writer sensitive to gender politics in society and in Marianne's life.

Kathleen and Marianne's stories allow O'Faolain to address feminist views and practices in representing women's lives. Kathleen's undertakings draw attention to feminist projects of rescuing women's stories from the archives and writing women into history. Kathleen's task of writing Marianne's story, combined with challenges posed by the elderly historian Miss Leech, prompt her progression as an individual and a feminist. This is reflected in Miss Leech's sardonic comment:

[A]ll you feminist types are very weak on class politics. You're well able to analyze the power relations between men and women in great detail, but you never seem to move on from that. You never seem half as acute about power in public life as power in private life. (O'Faolain 434)

This remark is significant as it allows O'Faolain to define Kathleen's project as a feminist undertaking. It also highlights the interconnectedness of gender and class repression, one of the areas in which Kathleen and Miss Leech have opposing opinions. During their discussion of Irish landed gentry, Kathleen becomes frustrated by class politics and is too easily willing to disregard its implications: "The hell with him anyway! [...] Him and the rest of the Anglo-Irish gentry. Any gentry, anywhere, if it comes to that!" (O'Faolain 433). Miss Leech, on the other hand, understands that gender discrimination cannot be understood unless class is also taken into account.

Kathleen and Miss Leech's friendship underscores how women view feminism through different lenses. As Rampton points out, "There have always been feminisms in the movement, not just one ideology, and there have always been tensions, points and counter-points." Kathleen and Miss Leech's divergent feminist positions underline the significance of differences among women, which is also reflected in their generation gap and class differences. Whereas Kathleen endured a childhood of neglect and abject poverty, abandoning her Irish roots at a young age, Miss Leech gives the impression of a more privileged background, exemplifying social decorum and devotion to homeland: "My family were Republicans, she said sternly. We had no time for ogling the ill-gotten gains of the oppressors. What's more, the Leeches were the last word in respectability" (O'Faolain 433). Both Kathleen and Miss Leech draw from postcolonial experience and ideology, emphasizing the long-lasting effects of British colonialism and the Famine; Kathleen, however, espouses a decidedly postcolonial feminist slant.

While postcolonial feminists assert that colonialism is a form of patriarchy—a gendered system with the aim of domination and exploitation—views on how to interpret British women's involvement in colonialism have dramatically changed. Mills indicates that "post-colonial theory characterizes the colonial period as one where British men were the main actors and where British women only played a subsidiary role" ("Post-colonial" 104). Early feminist postcolonial theory, Mills continues, "set about rewriting this history; it centred on recovering the history of women within the British empire, portraying them in a positive light, uninvolved with the oppression of colonialism, and in many cases trying to resist colonial rule" (105). Further scholarship, Mills explains, "has tried to move away from the tendency to eulogise British women and has concentrated on trying to analyse the

complexity of their positions, both as part of and distant from the power structures of the colonial state” (105). Ann Stoler concurs when she asserts that European women in British colonies “experienced the cleavages of racial dominance and internal social distinctions very differently than men precisely because of their ambiguous positions, as both subordinates in colonial hierarchies and as active agents of imperial culture in their own right” (373). In *My Dream of You*, although Marianne was oppressed by patriarchy, as an upper-class British woman married to a landowner colonizer, she was not excluded from all power structures. These evolving theories raise complex questions that Kathleen and Miss Leech dispute: Was Marianne’s role as a colonizer simply due to accident-of-birth and marriage, imposed on her just as patriarchy is imposed on women? What forms of resistance, if any, did Marianne demonstrate?

Kathleen empathizes with Marianne’s vulnerability, her plight as a young, lonely mother with no role models, friends, or family support. Displaced from England, geographically isolated, and socially marginalized, Marianne had no close neighbors, hence no one to talk to or confide in. For women, a lack of female friends or female family members to bond with is highly problematic. Since she was isolated from other women and from her family, it was easier for Marianne’s husband to ship her back to England and have her locked in a madhouse. Contrary to Kathleen’s view, however, Miss Leech emphasizes Marianne’s role as an immoral, upper-class colonizer—race and class politics that, in her eyes, trump patriarchy:

Idle parasite! she said. They could do what they liked, her kind [...] She had nothing on earth to do except be a proper wife and she couldn’t even do that. She was young, I began.
She was a libertine! Miss Leech all but shouted. (O’Faolain 84-85)

Kathleen has been experiencing consequences of colonization her entire life, as a powerless female subject growing up in Ireland and as an Irish woman in England. While Miss Leech experiences some of the same effects, she insists that Kathleen recognize Marianne's complicity in the Famine and the colonial implications brought about by her story.

Although Marianne was virtually powerless, her standing as an upper-class Englishwoman presumes power over a minor servant such as Mullan. While Kathleen is convinced that Marianne and Mullan's passion led to love, Miss Leech offers a counterargument, calling attention to Marianne's role as the wife of an oppressive and racist landlord. Mills theorizes that "whether one is a colonial representative and thus whether one has power over others" is determined by subject-positions that are "largely determined by external factors" ("Post-colonial" 110). This is an important consideration in that Marianne occupied a complex position as both colonizer and the subject of patriarchal oppression. O'Faolain asks the reader not only to consider women as oppressed by patriarchal tradition, but to consider women's own abilities to oppress. Marianne expresses English perception of the Irish as the Other when she writes to her father in England using the racial slur "*Paddy*" to describe her husband, and indicates that "nothing about Ireland impressed people in London" (O'Faolain 179). Moreover, while Marianne and her child were leading a comfortable life at Mount Talbot, outside its walls the effects of the Famine were unimaginable.

How, then, did Marianne's own actions and omissions play a role in the colonial scenario? Did her isolation and powerlessness draw her to Mullan? Did her position as mistress of Mount Talbot allow her to coerce Mullan into a relationship, or is it more likely that he was a willing participant? Whereas political activities such as demonstrations and

taking up arms are obvious and overt forms of resistance to domination, Marianne's alleged relationship with Mullan can be viewed as a covert challenge to race and class ideologies. Within a rigidly defined colonizer/colonized power dynamics, Marianne liberates herself and challenges the existing order, even as she colonizes Mullan. Kathleen comments on the unlikelihood of a relationship that would have cut across class and race at a time when such boundaries were strictly enforced; yet, at the same time, she notes how passion overrules everything else:

Each of them came from a powerful culture which had at its very core the defining of the other as alien. But they sloughed off those cultures to reach out to each other. They didn't even have a native language in common, yet they pierced through layers of custom and dared every sanction, impelled by the need within desire to express itself. (O'Faolain 67)

The absence of passion and mutual respect in Marianne's marriage combined with the horrors of the Famine leave her lonely, unfulfilled, and frightened. If Marianne and Mullan sought sexual gratification from each other, they would have formed a bond that, for the short term at least, helped them to cope with the web of oppression in which they were tangled, and that subsumed their identities in a number of ways. Isolated yet surrounded by mass suffering, and exhausted from its personal, social and political implications, Marianne is reinvigorated by her passion for Mullan: "That was a thing that had never happened to her with her husband—that gush of heat. She had not known it could happen. There was no one she could tell it to. No one would ever know" (O'Faolain 289). Marianne's lack of power as a woman and subjugation by her husband can be compared with Mullan's lack of power as a colonized Irish servant. Loss of power for Mullan is further enhanced through control and suppression of culture, including the outlawing of native language, which is equated with the

loss of history. Mullan was dispossessed, deprived of his native language, and in turn, his Irish identity.

Kathleen's narrative of Marianne and Mullan's alleged relationship provides insight into the colonial world, and affords her an opportunity to compare it with her own life and her relationships in the postcolonial world—a comparison that underscores patriarchal oppression and sexism through both centuries. Consider, for example, Kathleen's comment that Marianne was “a young London woman to be brought across the sea to this desolation” (O'Faolain 54). Kathleen's experience is the reverse of Marianne's; as a young Irish woman Kathleen transplanted herself to London, where she also faced oppression and the legacy of colonialism. This showcases what Hutcheon refers to as a “double layer of historical reconstruction, both of which are presented with metafictional self-consciousness” (*Poetics* 110). In other words, Kathleen re-writes the past in order to open up the present. For instance, she describes Marianne's sexual relationship with her husband as follows: “If he pulled the bellcord beside the fireplace, then he wanted hot water for shaving now. If he did not pull the cord, he was going to have her” (O'Faolain 166). This can be compared with young Kathleen's sexual relationship with Sir David, her English friend Caro's father: “He decided he could paw me, whereas he'd never paw one of Caro's English friends” (O'Faolain 326). While many of Kathleen's sexual encounters include racial overtones, Marianne's alleged adultery shifts from the private to the public to the criminal. Yet, as Kathleen points out, Marianne's “actions, and mine, and those of many women I had known in my life, were variations on the one theme” (O'Faolain 375). Variations on the overriding theme of the oppression and sexual exploitation of women across the centuries compel readers to consider the ongoing legacy of colonialism.

Variations on the theme of the oppression of women incite investigation into the significance of variations in textual meaning. In discussing destabilized, multiple, and ambiguous textual meaning, Graham Allen argues that “the text not only sets going a plurality of meanings but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning” (65). When Kathleen discovers that *The Northwestern Herald* provides some historical details about the Talbots, she immediately deduces that the newspaper is pro-establishment: “There’d be nothing here disrespectful to the Talbot family” (O’Faolain 30). Not only is it challenging for Kathleen as a researcher to locate relevant historical material, but she must negotiate various biases and contradictions. Allen explains the process of such intertextual engagement:

Whether it be newspaper accounts, diaries, military reports, parliamentary documents, private letters, or any of the vast array of historical documents the historian must depend upon, history is only available to the contemporary historian through a network of prior texts, all infused with the traces of prior authors with their own ideological agendas, presuppositions and prejudices. History exists as a vast web of *subjective* [my emphasis] texts, the new historical account being one more author’s struggle to negotiate a way through an intertextual network of previous forms and representations. (186)

Kathleen is required to wade through historical documents and to weigh competing texts and their inherent biases. O’Faolain challenges readers alike to negotiate contradictory documents and accounts while considering them side by side along with her narrative. And that narrative, as Kathleen specifies, is likewise biased: “I believed that the body was the way to the heart, and the heart was the way to the soul. When I told the story of William Mullan and Marianne Talbot, I would be preaching that belief” (O’Faolain 67). *My Dream of You* mixes fiction and non-fiction, ultimately blurring the divide between the two and offering readers a hybrid. As Kathleen states, “I had given Marianne and Mullan fragments of a past, though the *Judgment* did not” (O’Faolain 200).

Comparing fictional narrative with historical documentation points toward history as a narrativization, and suggests that history is comprised of various competing narratives, none of which can claim precedence over others. It underscores the high value placed on ‘official’ documents—which often reveal few details—and the need to view *all* texts with a degree of skepticism. Consequently, Wylie asserts that contemporary historical novels

have departed in various ways from the traditional historical novel’s aim of realistically depicting historical figures, episodes, or eras and to a great degree reflect the widespread scepticism in historical and literary studies today about historical knowledge and its literary representation. (xii)

Scepticism of ‘official’ history is, of course, healthy; after all, maintaining a critical stance is the foundation of scholarship, necessary in advancing our knowledge of both the past and the present. Take, for example, the Talbot *Judgment*, a model document of patriarchal and colonial oppression. Prior to 1857 ecclesiastical law governed divorce proceedings, granting few rights to women (S. Mitchell 478). As previously stated, it is the main historical intertext that O’Faolain intersperses throughout *My Dream of You*, and in it the Law Lords find Marianne guilty of adultery and pass her husband’s divorce bill. The *Judgment* is not a full summary of all the evidence, as Kathleen discovers; rather it is a summary of an argument that “favored the evidence that made Marianne seem guilty, and gave short shrift to the evidence that did not” (O’Faolain 341). Kathleen infers that prejudices embedded in historical documents may ultimately lead to the creation and enforcement of oppressive ideologies. Further along in her research, Kathleen discovers another historical document, “the Paget pamphlet,” which provides a counter-argument to the *Judgment*. In it, solicitor John Paget counters the *Judgment*, declaring that Richard Talbot intentionally drove Marianne mad. Paget states that he rescued Marianne from the madhouse to which her husband had her committed, and contends that Marianne is innocent:

I believe her to be innocent of all charges, and I have formed that opinion and firm belief, knowing as I do, that such charges were supported by persons wholly unworthy of credit and AS I FRIMLY BELIEVE, BEING THE RESULT OF A FOUL CONSPIRACY. (qtd. in O’Faolain 334)

Paget produces evidence that refutes all previous eyewitness accounts against Marianne in the *Judgment*. He asserts that Marianne was not only oppressed in multiple ways, but that she was the victim of various forms of abuse by her husband, and that he “deliberately drove her mad” (O’Faolain 337). When she discovers the pamphlet, Kathleen declares, “It had never even crossed my mind that Marianne and Mullan might not have been lovers” (O’Faolain 335). Paget’s document sways Kathleen’s views and she begins to believe in Marianne’s innocence. Despite that fact that the pamphlet raises more questions than it answers, Kathleen decides that “[i]f there were no more documents, then I’d have to make a decision about what really happened based on the *Judgment* and the Paget pamphlet” (O’Faolain 419).

Kathleen’s re-reading and reinterpreting of the documents drive the novel forward while at the same time open up the past. The final Talbot-related document that comes into Kathleen’s possession is a newspaper clipping from the 1850s, which details a reporter’s visit to Mount Talbot. The reporter’s investigation concludes that Marianne was not only guilty of adultery with Mullan, but also with another unnamed individual.

Here is a clear case of adultery, of which there is ocular demonstration, taking place in Mount Talbot, and it shows the unhappy state of sin into which this lady had fallen, at a time when she already showed affection and regard for Mullan. (qtd. in O’Faolain 449)

Based on the reporter’s findings, both Kathleen and Miss Leech finally decide that they believe the reporter’s version of events, despite irregularities. It becomes obvious to Kathleen and to readers that “attempting a historical reconstruction of the Talbot scandal” is futile (O’Faolain 80); this frees Kathleen to shape Marianne’s story as a fictional account. At the

same time, Kathleen is not interested in the Talbot story as simply an adulterous love story; as Miss Leech remarks, it is “just the kind of thing an English audience would be interested in. History without the economics, history without the politics, history without the mess” (O’Faolain 114). What O’Faolain makes clear is that history and historical fiction are not straightforward—they cannot be separated from the ‘mess.’ In exposing and deconstructing various intertexts, as well as considering what may have been censored, historical fiction has the potential to create counter-narratives that are rich in significance and offer readers alternative options or reinterpretations that are not merely works of imaginative indulgence.

Intertextuality and metafiction play an important role in creating meaningful feminist historical fiction that carries the potential for powerful social criticism. Metafiction produces, as Waugh articulates, a sense of chaos and impermanence: “Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality and history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” (6-7). I assert that it is only when examined from various angles can we see history as a constructed reality and then begin to question it; only when deconstructed can we grasp its fleeting nature and find new meaning for the pieces. Miss Leech comments that “this story does exactly what a lot of the highbrow fiction coming into the library these days does—it keeps changing as you look at it. You don’t know what to believe” (O’Faolain 449-50). This alludes to the instability of both history and the text, and also lends itself to the features of postmodern texts.

My Dream of You can be analyzed in relation to postmodernism’s skepticism of large-scale theories such as historical knowledge, as well as its indeterminacy and open-endedness. The doubt about grand, unified, and uninterrupted narratives is a guiding concern of the

novel, and it is the message with which the protagonist concludes: “The truth was that I did not know. I could not know” (O’Faolain 472). Kathleen finally comes to terms with the ungraspable nature of truth, and how history is depicted, in whichever form, depends on who recorded it, along with her or his personal biases and hidden agendas.

All histories are situated, both in time and place, as well as in the author’s mind. Lyotard reinforces the situational nature of historical knowledge when he states that “it is impossible to know what the state of knowledge is [...] without knowing something of the society within which it is situated” (13). Kathleen decides to research and write about the Talbot affair because it occurred during the Famine; the time it happened is the most interesting thing about it (O’Faolain 26). Few would disagree that the Famine is deeply rooted, as Sheelagh Conway emphasizes, in the Irish national identity: “The Famine is in our blood. Who we are today cannot be separated from our history” (16). Sorrow is an overriding motif in O’Faolain’s novel, in the lives of her female protagonists inextricably tied to the history of Ireland, shaped by colonization and the Great Famine. In order to research Marianne’s life, Kathleen must delve into Ireland’s colonial history, thus examining her own Irish roots. She is also cognizant of the inescapability of history when she tries to picture the Famine’s devastating effects, not only when it occurred, but through the generations: “The trauma must be deep in the genetic material of which I was made. I cannot forget it, I thought, yet I have no memory of it. It is not mine; but who else can own it?” (O’Faolain 76). Kathleen’s ‘ownership’ of the past can be contrasted with that of her brother, Danny, who admits he knows nothing about the Famine, despite having remained in Ireland. As he tells Kathleen, “I haven’t a clue [...] Maybe Lil’ll do the Famine in school, but until then I know as much about it as the gatepost there” (O’Faolain 219). O’Faolain suggests that Danny’s

(and their sister Nora's) indifference to the Famine is not unusual given the Irish 'conspiracy of silence.' Miss Leech explains that scrutinizing the Famine and England's colonization of Ireland caused rifts in the community when they "started going into what really happened" (O'Faolain 79). More importantly, she reminds Kathleen of their complicity in the Famine:

[Y]ou can be sure that our ancestors weren't out among the cabins of the dying any more than the gentry were. If you and I are sitting here in a warm room having a nice talk, we have to ask ourselves how our own people survived? What did our people do at the time, that you and I came to be born? Anyone who had a field of cabbages or turnips put a guard on it to keep off the starving. We were those guards, Miss de Burca. (O'Faolain 79)

In addition, O'Faolain establishes that Kathleen, Danny, and Nora—siblings raised in the same household—have disparate views of their family history. This relates with Waugh's comment that "[t]he reader is thus made aware of how reality is *subjectively* constructed" (26). While Kathleen's interest in coming to terms with colonization and the Famine serves both a personal and collective sense of responsibility, she admits that confronting the past is painful: "My own past had sometimes pounced on me from nowhere and ripped me open" (O'Faolain 200). Opening up the past is messy as it disturbs the status quo and creates tension.

Insofar as readers reject a unified version of history, they bring certain expectations to historical fiction. In turn, writers of historical fiction carry certain responsibilities. At the same time, we read historical fiction not to assess its adherence to high standards of historical accuracy; as Dewar states of historical novels, "a judgement of their quality [does not] rest primarily on their truthfulness—only on their verisimilitude" (4). Historical fiction engrosses us partly because of our fascination with the past; a willingness to allow a story to take us back in time, to get "a *feel* for the place and the people" (O'Faolain 80), and in order to find meaning in the past that can be applied to our own lives. Appleby, Hunt and Jacob

underscore the importance of meaning when they state: “The human intellect demands accuracy while the soul craves meaning. History ministers to both with stories” (262). Historical fiction, then, represents a harmonious balance between accuracy, personal significance, and an engaging story. Feminist critics would add to the equation the inclusion of women’s voices.

Like anthropologists who conduct salvage ethnography in an attempt to preserve the past by documenting disappearing cultures, writers of feminist historical fiction construct recuperative histories of women. O’Faolain engages readers in recovering the history of Ireland and of Irish women. As Conway stresses, this is significant: “Irish women have been written out of Irish history in Ireland and out of the records of the Irish in Canada. It is mostly men who have presented the accounts of what happened, producing a history that is one-sided and flawed” (18). While it is necessary to take corrective measures to rectify the past, Kathleen demonstrates that depicting the past is a complicated process mired in unanswerables.

While oppressive practices obviously limit women, they also force women to devise creative ways to circumvent barriers. Hutcheon writes that “[w]omen’s writing in particular has led the way in the new explorations of (and against) borders and boundaries” (*Canadian Postmodern* 78). Feminist criticism is forcing us to reconsider how historical women such as Marianne Talbot were marginalized and neglected. After having been convicted of adultery, Marianne’s options are severely limited: “Madness was her only defense, once she had not denied adultery with Mullan. She could only be innocent if she was mad. If she was not mad, who would feed her and clothe her? [...] Where could she have gone if she was not mad? An utterly disgraced and fallen wife and mother?” (O’Faolain 471). Marianne Talbot is

marginalized because she is a vulnerable, young English woman in nineteenth-century Ireland against whom multiple oppressive forces act. Her marginalization is a part of women's collective marginalization that feminist historical fiction serves to bring to light. *My Dream of You* disrupts Marianne and Kathleen's individual marginalization by transferring them from the margins to the centre. It does so in a way that not only enlightens readers, but has multiple repercussions in re-conceptualizing gender and the meaning of history.

While "[w]e do not expect to find arguments about evidence or interpretation in historical novels" (Dewar 4), and Kathleen self-identifies as a 'non-historian,' O'Faolain succeeds in bringing to her historical novel arguments about the act of historical writing. Yet negative bias toward Kathleen's profession as a quasi-journalist travel writer is made evident when Miss Leech derides Kathleen as a writer whose "chief skill is writing travel articles of a popular nature" (O'Faolain 59). Kathleen must defend her abilities against Miss Leech if she is to gain access to helpful archival material:

I've been to university! [...] I did English Literature there. I don't have a degree, but that's only because I had to leave after two years. Literature is full of history. And anyway, lots of journalists write—they know how to organize material, for one thing, which is more than you can say for a whole lot of academics. (O'Faolain 59)

Miss Leech assigns historical writing a higher position than travel writing or journalism.

Kathleen makes a case for the similarities between the writing of literature and the writing of history and how the two disciplines inform one another. Their argument also underlines artificial distinctions between fiction and reality.

Clearly, disciplines overlap, and academics, researchers, writers, and journalists learn from and critique one another in order to advance knowledge and rectify injustices. Just as the disciplines share characteristics and contradictions, feminists struggle with overlapping

concerns. As Kathleen articulates when she worries about Miss Leech's opinion on the liberties she has taken with the *Judgment*:

If she knew how I'd let myself go! I couldn't think of anyone who would disapprove more completely of the tale I'd woven around the facts of the Talbot divorce [...] If Miss Leech ever discovered the fantasy I had woven on the theme of the *Judgment*, extreme disapproval would be the least I'd come in for. It was even difficult to decide from which standpoint she would object most—as a historian, as an Irish person, or as a woman. (O'Faolain 332)

Ultimately, Kathleen and Miss Leech find a happy medium, bringing the disciplines of history and literature together. Despite their conflicts, Kathleen and Miss Leech offer each other a great deal of support while they unwittingly create dialogue and acknowledge and bridge differences. Kathleen comes to depend on Miss Leech's historical expertise and values her opinions on the Talbot case. Kathleen and Miss Leech's differing viewpoints emphasize the difficulties in recovering women's stories, and Kathleen apologizes "for abandoning the discipline of fact" (O'Faolain 332). Their differences also produce a newfound friendship that calls attention to the importance of women's relationships and support for one another regardless of conflicting standpoints. When Miss Leech becomes seriously ill, Kathleen sets aside their differences: "I said a prayer for her as I went back down the town—a prayer I'd always been easy with, because I thought of it as a woman-to-woman prayer" (O'Faolain 332).

It is crucial to emphasize the corrective nature of feminist historical fiction; as Dewar states, "the worlds of fact and imagination come together with the effect of bringing us closer to their subject" (5). While Kathleen began her quest as a search for truth and passion, she returns to England with only fragments of either. She eventually resigns herself to the ambiguities, contradictions, and omissions of history and truth: "I didn't *know* the truth of what happened at Mount Talbot and I would never know it [...] I could *choose* what to

believe about the Talbot scandal. I *would* choose what to believe” (O’Faolain 512-13). Thus, the author’s objective is not to reach a final destination called Truth; rather, O’Faolain allows readers to chart their own course and make up their own minds. Yet she undeniably succeeds in illuminating Marianne Talbot and the history of Ireland. Kathleen finishes writing “The Talbot Book” only after she confronts the truths of her own life, and only then is she able to move forward. In essence, Kathleen becomes obligated to write Marianne’s story, and at the same time she ‘rights’ women’s history. She is engaged in a historiographic project wherein, as Christian Gutleben explains, “the excluded becomes included, the unheard becomes voiced, the hidden becomes foregrounded, the marginal becomes central” (124). Gutleben concludes that: “To retrieve the forgotten of history and lend them a voice is the very principle of postmodern revisionism” (124).

When Kathleen was a young girl, a historian told her about the Famine—a history she had never known or been taught at school yet a history that had shaped her life. While the seed that he planted in her mind remained dormant until she uncovered the Talbot *Judgment*, she eventually “found a way to link the pictures the scholar put in [her] head to [her] real life” (O’Faolain 5). I have attempted to explore the link between how histories are constructed and how women acquire the status of historical subjects. Marianne Talbot’s story remained marginalized until O’Faolain uncovered the details of her life and wrote the missing links. Contemporary feminist historical fiction must be celebrated for its unwillingness to conform to dominant male paradigms, to continually question and challenge assumptions, perceptions, and ideologies, and to act as a source of collective female energy and creativity.

Chapter Three

Private Lives, Public Transgressions: Emily Faithfull and the Doctrine of Separate Spheres in Emma Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter*

The basic feminist idea that women should work outside the home really has changed everything.
—Emma Donoghue, “Sealed Letter Opens Life”

Loveless marriages and a different standard of morality for men and women are the curses of modern society.
—Emily Faithfull, “Woman’s Needs”; a lecture at Steinway Hall, New York, 1873

Emma Donoghue’s neo-Victorian novel *The Sealed Letter* draws from the infamous 1864 Codrington divorce case and the life of Emily “Fido” Faithfull, a pioneer feminist reformer and businesswoman. The plot revolves around the intimate friendship between the independent-minded Emily and the unhappily married Helen Codrington, and the scandal and divorce trial that ensues after Helen is accused of adultery. Dichotomizing the two characters, just as the Victorians dichotomized gender roles, Donoghue’s novel highlights the significance and complexity of the doctrine of separate spheres.

Female friendships were central to the lives of Victorian women. The suggestion that Emily and Helen’s bond transgressed the boundaries of conventional female friendship allows Donoghue to explore Victorian women’s intimate liaisons. I posit that it was through networks of women’s relationships, including intimate ones, and through meaningful work outside the domestic sphere, including myriad women’s public organizations, that middle-class Victorian women negotiated and subverted prescribed gender roles. It was a result of Victorian women’s agitation and perceived transgressions in challenging the ‘ideal of womanhood,’ and gradually redefining the boundary between private and public, that the feminist movement took root and flourished. Contrary to the historical record, mid-Victorian middle-class women such as Emily Faithfull did participate in and make significant contributions to society, despite ongoing resistance by both men and women. *The Sealed*

Letter examines women's limitations in the private sphere and their participation in the public sphere, while reassessing questions about nineteenth-century middle-class women's agency.

Dichotomizing was one of the main ways in which gender ideologies were formed in the Victorian era. Catharine R. Stimpson asserts: "Using the reductive, double categories of a binary opposition, they [Victorians] wrote up sexual differences as ontological polarity. Men and women were two radically different beings who inhabited 'separate spheres'" (ix). For middle-class Victorians, the public sphere was considered a masculine domain, and conversely, the home was regarded as the domain of women, a private sphere where 'sacred callings' were expected to offer adequate fulfillment for the 'ideal' woman: a loving and devoted wife, attentive mother, and competent household manager. Men were given every opportunity to excel in the public sphere, while women's choices were much more limited, and often more highly scrutinized for fear that they might usurp men's territory and disturb the "norm of middle-class domesticity" (Poovey, "Speaking" 33). Many women were trapped in unsatisfying, conventional marriages in which they were expected to emotionally support their husbands' endeavours, to put them "at the center of life and to allow to occur only what honor[ed] his prime position" (Heilbrun 20-21). Women's efforts in caring for children and managing the household provided the best situation for men: it freed them to pursue self-determination, including careers and other activities outside the private realm. Carolyn Heilbrun points out that "[w]e hardly expect the career of an accomplished man to be presented as being in fundamental conflict with the demands of his marriage and children" (25). The opposite is true for women; while marriage enhanced a man's life, it is more likely

that it would hamper or prevent a woman's aspirations outside the home—if they could conceive of such a path.

While there was immense societal pressure for middle-class Victorian women to follow conventional roles in the domestic sphere, and while many women found fulfillment in marriage, motherhood, and the home, it could be painfully limiting and wholly unsuitable for some women. In *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, Jeannette King maintains that “[t]he ‘woman question’, in particular as it bore on women’s demand for emancipation from the duties of motherhood and family life, was hotly debated throughout the Victorian period” (9). This accords with Simon Morgan’s assertion in *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* that “[t]he social role of women in the mid-nineteenth century was surrounded by ambiguity and uncertainty” (1). King, Morgan, and others propose that while Victorian women’s roles were rigidly defined, ongoing research suggests that they were also in a constant state of flux and hence less regimented than was previously believed. It also indicates a considerable gap between what was defined as the ‘ideal’ of womanhood and many women’s actual experiences.

As Simpson notes above, the belief that it was inappropriate for middle- or upper-class women to engage in meaningful work outside the domestic sphere, or that women were simply incapable, was attributed to women’s ‘nature’ as the perceived weaker, more vulnerable sex. According to Scott, the doctrine of separate spheres integrated the differentiation of sexual limitations by confusing masculine/feminine with male/female:

[T]he former are a set of symbolic references, the latter physical persons, and though there is a relationship between them, they are not the same. Masculine/feminine serves to define abstract qualities and characteristics through an opposition perceived as natural: strong/weak, public/private, rational/expressive, material/spiritual are some examples of gender coding in Western culture since the Enlightenment. There is

nothing in such usage to prevent individuals of either sex from accepting these definitions, nor from reinterpreting them to explain their own situations. (63)

These ingrained beliefs entrenched boundaries between the private and the public, and encouraged women to see themselves as inferior to men so that women have “participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority” (Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* 218).

Oppressive notions are passed from one generation to the next. Determined women activists like Emily Faithfull, however, led by example. Her agitation benefited not only her peers, but the next generation, ensuring daughters, for example, would receive the full advantage of a formal education that was afforded sons. Describing how Victorian women reformers of Emily’s generation viewed their activism, Donoghue alludes to the excitement Emily felt at the prospect of women’s emancipation: “[C]hange like ripe fruit dangling almost within their grasp, fruit for which former, more fearful generations had never dared to reach” (*Sealed Letter* 42).⁵

While Victorian society expected middle-class women to inhabit the private sphere to fulfill their ‘natural’ roles, there existed notable possibilities for creative, independent-thinking women to subvert gender ideologies and wield power in the public sphere. Accordingly, a number of critics have reevaluated the public lives of Victorian middle-class women, contending that public and private spheres were artificial distinctions—that distinct ‘grey’ areas existed in which some women tested and renegotiated their roles. Simon Morgan argues that “women made an important contribution to the emerging ideal of a progressive middle-class,” and that “studies have revealed that women’s opportunities for engagement with the public sphere were far more extensive and often far more politically charged than

⁵ Hereafter: *SL*.

first thought” (2). From philanthropy to voluntary activities to reform campaigns, middle-class Victorian women were far from exclusively confined to the private sphere or invisible in the public realm. In fact, Emily reveals the opposite; refusing to accept prescribed gender norms and a pre-destined fate, she rejects Victorian society’s definition of the female sex as weak, passive, and intellectually void. Emily demonstrates that women did cross the divide from private to public, though without overcoming objections that gender coding instilled:

She had quite a tussle with her parents that ended with her winning their cautious agreement that she was to be treated as a sensible spinster of thirty, with her own modest household, trying to make her way in the literary world. But two years later, when Fido broke it to them that she had taken up the cause of rights for women, and was setting up a printing house as a demonstration of female capacity for skilled labour, Mrs. Faithfull [...] asked whether it wasn’t generally held that a lady who engaged in trade, even with the highest of motives, lost caste. [...] They’d so much rather she were settled in some country town and producing a child a year, like her sisters. (Donoghue, *SL* 14-15)

In highly stratified Victorian Britain, middle-class women did risk loss of caste in taking working-class women’s work such as factory labour. Not only were women not trained for occupations outside the home, “middle- and upper-class women had been taught that work was degrading [...] other than governess, teacher, or amateur artist” (Stone 3-4), and further, such ‘female’ occupations were thought somewhat inferior. Although she had the good fortune to be born into a respectable family with every guarantee of a comfortable future, Emily could not reconcile her birthright with her aspirations and sense of social justice, and was thus willing to risk failure and public scrutiny. Remarking on the broad context for women’s participation in public life, Simon Morgan argues that “it was this sense of duty to society beyond the domestic circle that fuelled the commitment of many women to the early campaigns for women’s rights” (194).

Emily made an unconventional choice at a time when such choices were frowned upon; yet, for her it was much more suitable and fulfilling to pursue work and women's causes than to choose marriage and motherhood. Like her, those women who consciously chose to remain spinsters were regarded as objects of pity or categorized as problematic. While there have always been women who *choose* not to marry, single women were stereotyped as 'old maids,' viewed as unsuccessful at finding men to marry. At the same time, middle-class women who chose careers over marriage faced considerable scorn: "They don't seem to grasp that women have a business already: marriage. Spinsters should be considered as so many bankrupts who've failed at it" (Donoghue, *SL* 290). Emily and her feminist colleagues' lives demonstrate otherwise, as they focused on meaningful work, thus attempting to lay that unrelenting misconception to rest. As Emily states: "Liberty's been a better husband to many of us than love" (Donoghue, *SL* 28).

The historical Emily Faithfull viewed women's employment and education not as a hindrance to caste, but rather as a key to women's economic independence and emancipation. She helped establish numerous publications, committees, and societies, including the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, all advocating for the rights of women, and all evidence of public activities that blur the ideology of separate spheres. As Maria Frawley puts it, "Faithfull's efforts as an advocate for the middle-class working woman are clearly important to historical understandings of the private/public divide in Victorian culture, a divide that has come to be recognized as significantly more hazy than the notion of 'separate spheres' would have one believe" (89). As founder of the Victoria Press, and eventually printer and publisher to the Queen, Faithfull employed women as compositors at a time when, as noted above, there were few 'acceptable' occupations for women. Nevertheless,

socio-economic conditions in mid-Victorian England were favourable to introducing changes in traditional ideas about women's work and public activities, "prompting male observers to redefine and reinterpret both the activities in question and the ideals of femininity themselves" (S. Morgan 8). Industrialization created a shift from domestic labour to workplaces, and while this created a stronger distinction between home and work, it also offered new opportunities and respectability for women. Not only did Faithfull employ women, she set high workplace standards that were an example for all employers, despite resistance on the part of the publishing trade (Stone 51-52).

It was not a simple task for women without independent means of support or supportive husbands and families to put forth an oppositional voice. As previously mentioned, Faithfull's middle-class position allowed her the opportunity to subvert ideological formulations, both for herself and by providing opportunities for working-class women. It is critical to recognize that middle- and upper-class women were in better positions to make inroads as working-class women were preoccupied with the daily struggle to survive. Faithfull's efforts to improve women's position in society nevertheless entailed making women of all classes conscious of their situation. Patriarchy's long history and iron grip, however, ensured that change could only come about one slow and careful step at a time.

Whereas women were anxious for reforms, they understood the tactic of treading cautiously in order to make gains in the public sphere. If, for example, intellectual abilities could be seen as contributing to the benefit of the family, then such endeavours would be much less subject to objection by skeptics. Frawley contends that "[l]ikening the press to a middle-class household, Faithfull's rhetoric enables her to destabilize, even erase, the implied

opposition between the public and private—to ensure that her workplace had domestic appeal” (92). Indeed, maintaining that women’s primary role was rooted in the domestic, Faithfull and others gradually reshaped the private/public divide. Access to the public sphere, through association with the domestic or private sphere, is a pattern women consistently repeated. In a study of the history of feminism, Estelle Freedman suggests that *maternalism*, a term that links women’s public activism with their roles as mothers and hence their families and the home, “endowed women with social power” (65). Thus, early feminists, rather than rejecting the ideal of marriage and motherhood, used their middle-class roles as mothers and keepers of the home to gain rights. As the epigraph taken from Emily Faithfull’s speech indicates, she did not advocate against marriage, but rather was opposed to the subordination of women by their husbands. As Donoghue’s Emily declares, marriage must be “founded on self-respect and freedom” (SL 29).

In *The Sealed Letter*, relationships replicate and destabilize Victorian private/public and passive/active binaries. Donoghue unsettles binaries and challenges Victorian notions of gender and sexuality while simultaneously underscoring the significance of women’s relationships with one another. This configuration can be read as an effect of parody and pastiche; it is not intended to reinforce binaries, but rather to mimic them in order to reject them. “Parody is a perfect postmodern form,” Hutcheon argues, “for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies” (*Poetics* 11). Gutleben provides insight into the effectiveness of the combination of parody and pastiche in neo-Victorian fiction:

If Victorian fiction obviously represents a spellbinding model for the retro-Victorian novel, this fascination does not prevent contemporary fiction from finding faults with its ancestors. At the same time as it pays homage to its Victorian model, the contemporary novel challenges, warps and undermines it. That the neo-Victorian novels both venerate and subvert its [sic] precursors can best be traced in the co-

presence of pastiche and parody. To the imitative impulse of pastiche is opposed the distorting tendency of parody. (89)

Parody and pastiche work together in neo-Victorian fiction to imitate and subvert at the same time. Donoghue's neo-Victorian novel both mimics and deconstructs Victorian gender ideologies. Helen Codrington is characterized as the attractive but neglected wife of the older Vice-Admiral Harry Codrington. Her upper-class idleness as a wife and mother has her days filled with menial and self-indulgent activities, while her husband is preoccupied with military battles. Donoghue starkly contrasts Helen with Emily; while the latter is a plain-looking spinster leading an unconventional public life as a publisher and feminist activist, Helen concerns herself with appearances—attracting attention with the latest fashions.

Contrary to gender ideologies, Emily establishes her identity by rejecting conventional markers of femininity. She dresses in practical clothing, favouring comfort and simple brown cloth over corsets and crinoline. A simple appearance does not distract from Emily's work, affording her the confidence to assert herself in the business world, as she insists, "*I have more pressing business than to wonder who's looking at me*" (Donoghue, *SL* 15). Such utilization of Victorian conceptions of femininity has parodic overtones and demonstrates "serious ideological implications at work" (Gutleben 121). Similarly, Hutcheon claims that "[p]arody is one way of deconstructing that male-dominated culture; its simultaneous use and abuse of conventions that have been deemed 'universal' works to reveal hidden gender encoding" (*Canadian Postmodern* 110). *The Sealed Letter* alerts readers to gender inequalities and sexual stereotyping that were not only prevalent in the Victorian era, but that continue to influence contemporary society. Notably, there remains immense pressure for women to conform to the dominant ideal of physical beauty.

If *The Sealed Letter* engages in a critique of gender constructions and inequalities, Donoghue also addresses female agency and emphasizes women's contributions rather than the limitations imposed upon them. Clearly, this is not a new undertaking; women activists, such as historian Mary Ritter Beard, have long asserted that, although neglected, women have been a vital force in society. Ann J. Lane elaborates Beard's position:

The myth that women were or are only a subject and oppressed sex is not only wrong, she argued, but it is counterproductive, because as women accept that designation of themselves and their pasts, their collective strength is undermined. The very notion of oppression imprisons women's minds and oppresses them. But women can be freed from that ideological bondage by discovering their own powerful, creative history and using that knowledge to create new social relations. (335)

Donoghue reveals how Emily passionately devotes her life to convincing others that women are as capable as men. Emily exercises her agency in both private gestures and significant public undertakings. In her many lectures and writings, the historic Emily Faithfull passed on her knowledge of women's accomplishments and cited like-minded women who, like herself, were ahead of their time. A *New York Herald* article published in 1873 discusses a Faithfull lecture, which calls attention to prominent men and women whom Faithfull knew were helping women's liberation. Faithfull looked to other women as role models, including the successful novelist, feminist, and social activist Lady Morgan, who Faithfull describes in her lecture as "a firm believer in the practice long adopted in the royal family of England, of giving to each of the daughters an accomplishment or trade that they were specially fitted for, that would place them above the adversities consequent upon the accidents of fortune" ("Miss Emily Faithfull"). Associating women in trades with the royal family could strengthen Faithfull's position on the importance of women's education, training, and accomplishments.

While Emily and other Victorian activists championed women's accomplishments, Donoghue's novel reflects on the complexities of societal attitudes towards the 'woman question' and the doctrine of separate spheres. For example, many women felt secure under their husbands' so-called 'protection.' Invested in maintaining the dominant discourses related to women's place in the private domain, they were not in favour of women's liberation. After Helen and Harry's separation, Helen flatly refuses Emily's offer to work as a proofreader for the Victoria Press. Emily understands that "[h]er implication was that work is a humiliating recourse for those surplus females whom no man is willing to support" (Donoghue, *SL* 378). Such rigid class consciousness and shortsightedness, however, could prove detrimental if a husband decided to abandon or divorce his wife. Emily views employment as a viable solution to Helen's economic dependence on her husband; yet, the only power Helen chooses to engage in is sexual. After Helen is convicted of adultery and the divorce is granted, she is left without an income or means of support, and without any rights to her two daughters. Mrs. Watson, Helen's turncoat friend, epitomizes the role of narrow-minded women whose attitudes helped sustain sexist ideologies: "Technically speaking," she declares, "children are a sort of gift a man gives his wife, you see, which he can withdraw at any time" (Donoghue, *SL* 178).

Mrs. Watson's comment underscores the sense of urgency Emily and her colleagues felt to reform misogynist laws. Such moves entailed changing both men's and women's attitudes towards women's liberation. While the law ensured a husband's complete control over his wife, including her property, her identity, and their children,⁶ Emily sought to free women from the confines of unhappy marriages. If women were educated and trained for

⁶ A father had the absolute right to custody of his legitimate children; women were not granted custody of children until 1873 (Anderson in S. Mitchell 287).

meaningful paid work, economic independence could allow a choice between marriage and career. As previously stated, however, pioneering women who participated in the public realm recognized that it was only through gradual change that women could gain more rights and freedoms. Feminists such as Emily understood that male Victorian society was vested in maintaining the status quo, and hence the need to cautiously bring about change. Emily's colleague, Emily Davies, sums up their group's position on which causes they should tackle: "We need to get access to higher education first, to prove we're intelligent enough to vote. Let's fight one fight at a time, so that the tainting associations of one don't rub off on the others" (Donoghue, *SL* 114).

If Britain was not ready for women's suffrage,⁷ feminist activists focused their efforts on education, divorce reform, and, in Emily's case, on improving women's employment opportunities in the printing trade. In fact, Victorian feminism began with women's dissatisfaction over the lack of opportunities for education and employment as well as legal issues (Mumford in S. Mitchell 294). The situation prompted Emily and her colleagues to circumvent people and organizations stubbornly resistant to change by cautiously exploiting opportunities that helped advance their cause without seeming to disrupt the status quo. Emily and her colleagues' public efforts helped plant the seeds for the feminist movement to take hold and flourish. Joan Landes argues that "[c]onsciousness-raising groups and feminist organizations provided women with a route out of private isolation and into public activism" (1). Although Landes is referring to second-wave feminism, these opportunities clearly began with the first wave. Faithfull was a member of the Langham Place group (or circle), also known as the Reform Firm, a small group of mostly single, middle-class women determined to achieve social reform. The solidification of the group, headed by Barbara Leigh Smith

⁷ Equal suffrage for men and women did not occur in Britain until 1928.

Bodichon, ushered in organized feminism in Britain (Mumford in S. Mitchell 294). The group took up various causes and pursuits, claiming the right to participate in public life, and demonstrating authority in public spheres while making gains in intellectual and political circles.

In championing the rights of women, Faithfull accomplished a great deal more than she has been given credit for, not unlike many other historical women. Simon Morgan cites a number of Victorian women reformers including Faithfull and other members of the Langham Place group who publicly contested gender boundaries. Such women were strong-minded and in many facets remarkable; however, public activists did not operate in a void, and as Morgan points out, “[a] crucial ingredient was the establishment of contacts with a network of like-minded women” (193). Gerda Lerner connects the emergence of women’s feminist groups and women’s segregation:

Sex segregated social space became the terrain in which women could confirm their own ideas and test them against the knowledge and experience of other women [...] all-female spaces could help women to advance from a simple analysis of their condition [...] to the level of providing not only their own autonomous definitions of their goals but an alternate vision of societal organization—a feminist world-view. (*Feminist Consciousness* 279-80)

While marriage and the private realm could enslave women, the doctrine of separate spheres could also be exploited to women’s advantage. For example, middle and upper-class women could take advantage of increased leisure time to form bonds with other women and create feminist groups and organizations, such as Emily’s “Society for Promoting the Employment of Women” (Donoghue, *SL* 26). Lerner suggests that insofar as women’s sex-segregated social space is rooted in the private realm, opportunities for women in the public realm were initiated through this terrain, and hinged on women’s compatible relationships with one another (*Feminist Consciousness* 279-80).

In *Restless Angels: The Friendship of Six Victorian Women*, Helen Heineman reconstructs the lives of six ordinary, middle-class Victorian women through their lifelong correspondence. Asserting that the circle of women she studied relied upon a supportive circle of friendship that was rooted in the domestic sphere, Heineman underscores the significance of female friendships and bonding, which provided emotional support (particularly in times of distress), intellectual stimulation, and personal fulfillment. Unlike relations between men and women, Sharon Marcus argues, “friendship provided a realm where women exercised an authority, agency, willfulness, and caprice for which they would have been censured in the universe of male-female relations” (62). What all of this emphasizes is that women’s friendships provided more than just an opportunity for socializing: they provided what Lee Chambers-Schiller refers to as “the psychic and sometimes physical room in which to criticize marriage and envision new roles and occupations for women” (338). In Donoghue’s novel the Langham Place group illustrates a network of female friendships that, despite their differences, are united by women’s causes:

Miss Bessie Parkes is Madame’s [Bodichon] chief acolyte and dearest friend, and set up the *English Woman’s Journal*, and edited it till her health obliged her to resign the job to Miss Davies—a new comrade, but awfully capable—so yes, I dare say Miss Parkes could be considered *first among equals* [...] There are certainly bonds of affection between us all at Langham Place, but—Isa Craig is very sympathetic, for instance, but I don’t know that I could count her as a *real friend* [...] old ties have frayed somewhat, and differences loom larger. But our work still unites us. (Donoghue, *SL* 26)

This passage also substantiates Martha Vicinus’s claim that from “the beginning feminism was associated with close female friendships” (71).

Heineman stresses the importance of women’s quest for meaning in their lives outside the private sphere, and their reliance not on husbands but on their women friends to do so:

The single thread that unifies their otherwise disparate destinies is their lifelong quest for self-definition, which centered around finding some serious occupation, either in place of or coexistent with their domestic tasks and assignments. This need to fill their increased amounts of leisure time became their deepest bond with one another [...] All of them found the men in their lives failures at some crucial point, and all sought bonding or sisterhood with other women as solutions. (2)

Not only were unmarried women desirous of engaging in meaningful work in the public sphere—exchanging a marriage plot for a quest plot (Heilbrun 48)—married women increasingly sought selfhood outside the domestic sphere. If Victorian women such as Helen did not question society's expectations that they marry and produce children, or even if they questioned their lot but felt pressure to conform, a strictly defined role as wife and mother could soon become stifling. According to Marcus, female friendships allowed play within the gender system: "The Victorian gender system, however strict its constraints, provided women latitude through female friendships, giving them room to roam without radically changing the normative rules governing gender difference" (27).

What Heineman's study also indicates is that middle-class women's increased leisure time became problematic without adequate avenues to make use of in the public sphere. According to Faithfull's biographer, James S. Stone, Faithfull's bestselling novel, *Change Upon Change: A Love Story*, carried a hidden meaning along with the message of educating and employing women that she so tirelessly advocated:

I believe her real purpose in writing this book was to air a major concern of hers, namely, the plight of unfortunate middle- and upper-class female "butterflies" of the Victorian period: women who were too poorly educated (morally and intellectually) to deal with the real world; idle, often pampered to the point of feeling useless; and able to exercise sexual, but not legal or political power. Given these deplorable conditions the obligation of holding fast to a "higher purpose" was bound to prove too difficult for many Victorian women. (197)

Stone's summary of Faithfull illuminates Donoghue's portrayal of Helen Codrington as one such "butterfly," self-absorbed in all of her domestic idleness: "I pass my days reading,

shopping, and yawning,' says Helen easily" (Donoghue, *SL* 24). So while Helen is characterized as superfluous and remains stuck in a trivial life, Emily exercises her agency by transgressing Victorian gender norms. Perhaps most centrally, Emily recognizes that for middle-class women too much time combined with lack of purpose is akin to intellectual poverty: "She [Emily] toils hard and with pleasure, so that other women may be freed from their set grooves (whether of poverty or boredom, dependence or idleness)" (Donoghue, *SL* 30).

The Sealed Letter underlines the value of women's bonding in both the private realm and in public pursuits. However, Donoghue also emphasizes the Victorians' cautions against "*excessive intimacy*" (*SL* 331). Emily's lack of friends outside of her Langham Place circle, as well as Helen's reliance on her relationship with Emily, foreshadows disaster. Early on it becomes obvious that Helen manipulates Emily, and while Emily is naïvely blinded by love for Helen, she eventually refuses to support Helen's accusations against Harry. In an unexpected turn of events, Emily testifies against Helen in court, shattering Helen's belief that "[w]omen can fly at each other like cats [...] and yet deep down, hidden, there's a bottomless well of love" (Donoghue, *SL* 334). While Donoghue highlights the value of bonding between women, she does not idealize female relationships. Helen and Emily's story also draws attention to cruelty between women that detracts from their agency. There is a limit to women's friendship, we learn, as Emily sacrifices Helen's reputation for her own. Adultery, allegations of rape, and hints of a sexual relationship between Emily and Helen shift their private lives to the public realm. While the contents of Harry's mysterious sealed letter remain private, Emily and Helen's reputations become publicly tarnished. Emily's Langham Place colleagues disassociate themselves from her and the Victoria Press, and

Helen is forced to leave London. The power of the press and public opinion prove to be greater than Emily or Helen realize.

In a study of Victorian (and transitional modernist) print culture and adultery, Barbara Leckie contends that the visibility of adultery in Victorian England is closely tied to the Divorce Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Until this point, ecclesiastical law governed divorce proceedings rendering marriage as all but indissoluble. The Act allowed a man to divorce his wife on the basis of adultery, and a wife the same but only combined with cruelty, bigamy, incest or bestiality. This double standard in unequal grounds for divorce is illustrated in the adage of Emily's mother: "*A gentleman is always a gentleman unless a lady forgets to be a lady*" (Donoghue, *SL* 51). While the Act made divorce accessible, moreover, it remained expensive and uncommon.⁸ As in Helen and Harry Codrington's situation, those cases that did proceed to court garnered a great deal of attention, titillating the public's insatiable appetite for scandal. Adultery was ever-present in English print culture, most notably on the front pages of most of the daily newspapers. Not only were all involved parties subject to public scrutiny in court, the newspapers recounted private details, revealing "the differences between the ideals embedded in the law and the complex reality of marriage as a lived institution" (Marcus 5). Marriage ideals embedded in the law condoned misogyny and, as noted above, upheld double standards between women and men, reinforcing the private/public binary that Victorian society imposed on women. It was commonly understood that men had innate sexual appetites that needed to be satisfied, and although it was silently accepted that men could engage in extra-marital relationships, a double standard ensured that women were forbidden from the same, and persecuted if they followed in men's footsteps.

⁸ The divorce court granted an average of only 148 divorces each year in the decade after 1859 (Shanley in S. Mitchell 224).

Helen articulates how sexual ideologies and the law favour men: “A man’s reputation can survive a string of mistresses, but if I admit to one intrigue, let alone two, I’ll lose everything. My name, my children, every penny of income . . .” (Donoghue, *SL* 185). Of note is Donoghue’s choice of the word *intrigue* for Helen to refer to her extra-marital relationships by coding such actions in an acceptable public discourse.

A ‘domestic crime’ such as adultery shifted sexually intimate details from the private to the public realm, further entrenching the pervasive anxiety over maintaining the divide between the two. As an ideological construct, the idealized home served as a sanctuary from the turmoil of the outside world. While it was generally accepted that adultery should not occur, in some households or circles it was discreetly tolerated as an “open secret” (Donoghue, *SL* 138). Kept private, adultery need not be discussed; once publicized, though, it becomes transgressive. “On the subject of sex,” Foucault notes in “We ‘Other Victorians,’” “silence became the rule” (3). Divorce trials, however, brought to centre stage the paradox of how to publicly express such a subject, and thereby contributed to public fascination with adultery:

The representation of adultery is not permitted and yet these cases are discussed in great detail in journals and daily newspapers. The attempts to reconcile these contradictions demonstrate the enormous social power invested in making a woman’s adultery invisible or nonexistent in the English public sphere. (Leckie 49)

Harry’s neglect of Helen and her subsequent indulgence in forbidden passions manifest themselves in the only form of power available to her: sexual rebellion. Victorian women were often perceived as asexual, and chastity was thought to be a woman’s most noble quality. When women did reveal sexual desire, the medical and legal professions considered it a disease or criminalized it. Harry, for example, uses the term “*criminal connection*”

(Donoghue, *SL* 141) to define Helen's adultery. The term both describes adultery as a criminal act and euphemistically disguises its meaning.

Divorce courts and newspapers alike were participating in shifting private discourse to the public domain, exposing "a deep anxiety about sexuality and the reconfiguration of the boundaries and categories through which the English defined themselves" (Leckie 92). "If sex is repressed," Foucault notes, "that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" (6). Moral transgressions and the exposed secrets of home—that sacred private sphere of protection—all conspired to collapse values and rigidly held beliefs that, ironically, propelled the Victorians more and more into the public domain. The contents of a sealed letter, from which the title of Donoghue's novel is taken (and also a reference to Edgar Allan Poe's detective story "The Purloined Letter"), hints at yet another Victorian taboo: that Emily and Helen's friendship might also "border on the criminal" (Donoghue, *SL* 268).

Scholars have pointed out that those who wish to dismiss the history of same-sex relations claim that "there was 'no language' about erotic passion between women before the late nineteenth century" (Donoghue, *Passions* 2). As a result, they suggest that "the lesbian did not exist in the past" (Vicinus xv). Reinforcing this, the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for *lesbian* as an adjective, "[o]f a woman: homosexual, characterized by a sexual interest in other women," dates from 1890, and as a noun, "[a] female homosexual," dates only from 1925 ("Lesbian"). In *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, however, Donoghue points out that as early as 1732 literature referred to "sexual relationships between women as 'Lesbian Loves'" (3), and that a "1762 translation from

Plato describes two women as ‘Sapphic Lovers’” (4). This evidence suggests that attempts have been made to censor from history both the word *lesbian* and the practice of lesbian love.

While it is implied that Emily and Helen’s friendship is sexual, they may not have used the word *lesbian* to describe their relationship, and accordingly, Donoghue does not use the word in *The Sealed Letter*. In *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*, Vicinus asserts that “[e]ven though they did not use the word *lesbian*, women self-consciously sought to understand their feelings, their actions, and their relationships apart from men” (xiv). Despite the significance and the variety of definitions and connotations for *lesbian*, in order for women to comprehend same-sex desires, they would necessarily be aware of the prejudices they faced through the ideology of heterosexuality—prejudices put forth not only by men who wished to enforce male dominance and tyranny, but also by other women. For lesbian women of the Victorian era it was problematic to live outside normative heterosexual relationships due to the combined forces of social and sexual repression and economic insecurity.

Notwithstanding the enormous challenges same-sex relationships posed for Victorian women, Marcus argues against long-standing interpretations of Victorian female relationships: “[N]ineteenth-century authors openly represented relationships between women that involved friendship, desire, and marriage” she suggests, and “[i]t is only twentieth-century critics who made those bonds unspeakable, either by ignoring what Victorian texts transparently represented, or by projecting contemporary sexual structures onto the past” (75). Through real-life examples of prominent and exceptional Victorian women who had public “female marriages,” Marcus asserts that “the opposition between marriage and homosexuality” is a “recent invention” (194).

I agree with Marcus' assertion that "women's relationships were central to Victorian society" (25), and that contemporary society has diminished the importance of such relationships. Yet, I think that Marcus exaggerates her claims that "female marriages" were readily accepted by Victorian society. I suggest instead that *in some circles* lesbian relationships were acknowledged and accepted although mainstream society was not so open-minded. Marcus references Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's now classic essay, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in which Smith-Rosenberg asserts that it was not the Victorians who dichotomized sexuality; rather, it was a twentieth-century tendency. Nineteenth-century female friendships, Smith-Rosenberg explains, were deeply emotional, often sensual, and socially acceptable: "Emotionally and cognitively, their heterosocial and their homosocial worlds were complementary" (8). The key, I believe, is the positioning of same-sex relationships as 'friendships' in the public domain. For example, upon Mrs. Watson's suggestion that Emily "usurp[ed] a husband's place in his wife's bed" (Donoghue, *SL* 293), it becomes evident that homoerotic relations between women became threatening when "they disrupted heterosexual norms of courtship and marriage" (Vicinus 79). As Foucault asserts, sexual practices were governed by matrimonial relations, and that "[b]reaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation" (38-39). Donoghue states that she has "found no simple answer to the question of whether women who loved women were socially acceptable. It seems always to have depended on the details of a particular woman's story, on the way her life was told" (*Passions* 19). Women could set up house together and enter into marriage-like relationships if the conditions were favourable; yet, Victorian society's unwillingness to acknowledge sexual liaisons between women remained firmly in place. That Emily and Helen are suspected of romantic

involvement implies unspeakable moral transgression: “No one has named that suspicion, in court or in the newspaper. (Not the kind of thing anyone wants to spell out, even in these tell-all times)” (Donoghue, *SL* 316).

Transgression acts as a device to emphasize “the ideology which *demand*s heterosexuality” (Rich 12), and as a symbol of rebellion by marginalized individuals, such as lesbians. Emily is aware that her feelings toward Helen are based on romantic love, and that they transgress the limits of platonic friendship. Her desire for Helen cannot be repressed, yet it is expressed in the guise of a close friendship. When Emily fantasizes about establishing a future with Helen after her divorce, she suggests that it is possible, but not commonplace or unproblematic for women to form conjugal partnerships:

Why not? Women do live together, sometimes, if they have the means and are free from other obligations. It’s eccentric, but not improper. She’s known several examples in the Reform movement: Miss Power Cobbe and her “partner” Miss Lloyd, for instance. It can be done. (Donoghue, *SL* 172)

Emily’s fantasies represent what Paulina Palmer refers to as “a seductive image of the liberated self and the pleasures which she fantasises she would enjoy, were she only free to disregard convention and pursue her desires openly” (120). Palmer draws attention to the power of social convention and Victorian mores, implying that there is a price to pay for transgression. As Adrienne Rich states, “[l]esbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life” (27). This is in keeping with Foucault’s contention that while the “legitimate couple” function as a norm, “the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex” came under scrutiny (38).

It is obvious that Emily and Helen’s relationship transgresses the limits of intimate friendship, and while it is Emily who fantasizes about Helen, Donoghue makes clear that it is the older, experienced Helen who initially seduces the innocent, nineteen-year-old Emily. As

Emily loosens ties with her conservative parents, Helen's life provides an opportunity for her to learn the ways of the world and "the darker games husbands and wives could play" (Donoghue, *SL* 17). Donoghue points to Victorian notions of women's sexual virtue whereby a double-standard categorized male heterosexual activity as 'normal' and female passion as 'deviant.' Related to Helen's so-called 'corruption' of Emily is the fact that Helen has grown up in Italy and India, her foreign upbringing demarcating her as "the most un-English of Englishwomen" (Donoghue, *SL* 12), indifferent to "English rules of propriety" (345). Victorian attitudes toward Italy identified it with "sexual disorder" (Vicus 71), as well as labeling foreignness and Otherness—things decidedly not British—as 'Oriental.' Further, from the nineteenth-century British point of view, the geographies and cultures signified by 'Orient' include not only what is east of Europe and the Mediterranean, but everything east of the English Channel. Edward Said explains that an association between the Orient and sex is "a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient" (188). While Helen is not 'Oriental' per se, she is contaminated and corrupted by the fact that she grew up outside England. Her association with foreignness reinforces the normative vs. deviant binary, an alien and inferior influence serving as an explanation for her sexual appetite and indiscretions with both men and women. Ironically, it is Helen's rebelliousness and unwillingness to obey Victorian society's rules that appeal to Emily and that allow Donoghue to emphasize how ideologies are socially constructed: "[S]he's always waltzed her way around the rules of womanhood. It's a quality that Fido relished even when she was young, long before she ever did any hard thinking about the arbitrariness of those rules" (Donoghue, *SL* 12).

Considering "the historically situated nature of sexual desire" (Vicus xxii), it can be argued that women's same-sex relationships have been marginalized, and even erased from

history. Not only have lesbians' relationships been erased, but the accomplishments of these women have also been overlooked because of their sexuality. Faithfull's involvement in the Codrington divorce case, her biographer says, "proved very damaging to her reputation," and after her death in 1895, her accomplishments were minimized or ignored completely (Stone 23). Spongberg validates Stone's claim when she states that "[t]he invisibility of lesbians in history was compounded by the fact that such relationships were frequently the cause of embarrassment and scandal" (218). Further, Stone asserts that the scandal was "still cause for family shame [even] in the 1970's and 1980's" (ii).

Rich's seminal essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," "challenge[s] the erasure of lesbian existence" (11). Rich argues that compulsory heterosexuality disempowers women, forcing them to assimilate, and that lesbians are perceived as deviant (13). Victorians generally viewed same-sex desire as a form of deviance, and it was not uncommon for lesbianism to be perceived as a criminal activity. While Donoghue points out that "[t]hough Britain had no explicit law against sex between women, writers often described it as a crime against nature or society" (*Passions* 6); in some intellectual circles, "a 'Sapphist' was the label for a woman known to like 'her own sex in a criminal way'" (4). Like Victorian women who had no legal identity under the law, "[b]ecause lesbian sexuality was rarely recognized in law it was possible to pretend that it did not exist" (Spongberg 218).

While we consider the norm of heterosexuality and all of its repercussions, Donoghue asks us to re-consider female relationships and same-sex desire in a new light. By parodying the idealization of heterosexual romance through the unhappy relationship between Helen and Harry, and by highlighting the existence and significance of female relationships,

Donoghue challenges both compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy. By choosing the life of Emily Faithfull that places her story in a Victorian context, she incites the reader to reassess long-standing historical views and prejudices, and to consider how they have been manifested in contemporary society. In fact, the origins of our current heterocentrism can be better understood through neo-Victorian research, in which scholars are reassessing the binary thinking that has led to narrow definitions such as “men versus women, and homosexuality versus heterosexuality” (Marcus 1). The neo-Victorian genre in which Donoghue writes takes as its mandate reimagining and rewriting “the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalised voices, [including] new histories of sexuality” (Llewellyn 165). In the twenty-first century, then, Donoghue is intent on restoring to Victorian fiction what, according to Marcus, the twentieth-century diminished—relationships between women.

Public shaming did not prevent Emily Faithfull from continuing to advocate for working women, and despite debilitating asthma she advocated tirelessly—both at home and overseas—for women’s paid work, education, emigration, suffrage, health and welfare, and culture. In 1868 she embarked on a public-speaking career on the condition of women, and between 1872 and 1884 was welcomed in America on three occasions, where she conducted extensive lecture tours. Frawley argues that “Faithfull’s involvement in editorial and journalistic work seems only to have increased in the years that followed the Codrington scandal” (97). Emily lived her life not as a middle-class “butterfly,” but rather at an early age resolved to control her own fate, exercising her agency in the public sphere.

The Sealed Letter offers a glimpse of life in mid-Victorian England, and evokes a clearer understanding of the choices available to middle-class Victorian women, despite

society's resistance to change. Critics are well versed in discussing the private/public distinction as it "provides a valuable lens through which to view issues of gender identity, on the one hand, and feminist politics, on the other" (Landes 3). At the same time, Landes makes an important point about the malleable nature of private and public distinctions, and their relationship to power: "Calling attention to the mutual imbrication of public and private life, feminist theorists appreciate that lines between public and private life have been drawn and will continue to be drawn. However, the very act of description involves power" (3).

When Emily refers to herself as "one of these 'new women'" (SL 10), Donoghue indicates that she consciously chose not to remain in the private sphere, but rather opted to take the path of a respectable working woman, politically and socially active, despite public scrutiny. Emily's concern about women's societal roles, her desire to prove that the private sphere in mid-Victorian England was too restrictive for women, and her strong sense of social duty propelled her into both public and private controversies. By refusing to succumb to the ideological bondage of her time, she helped create a foundation that transformed the lives of women both in her day and today. Contemporary parallels abound in *The Sealed Letter*, and ironically, many of the undertakings that Emily Faithfull and her colleagues struggled with remain applicable for women today.

Conclusion

The past no longer belongs only to those who once lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today.

—Margaret Atwood, “In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction”

The past really did exist. The question is: *how* can we know that past today—and what can we know of it?

—Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*

How can we know the past? How can we know women such as Grace Marks, Marianne Talbot, and Emily Faithfull who lived more than a hundred years ago? It is only by way of narratives that we can come to know the details of individual lives. Yet *all* narratives are biased in one way or another, and in many cases there are very few historical details available. Emma Donoghue explains how she pieced together facts from the Codrington case to construct *The Sealed Letter*: “In creating my own ‘Fido,’ ‘Helen’ and ‘Harry,’ and attempting to solve the ill-fitting jigsaw puzzle that is the Codrington case, I borrowed ideas from [...] historians and others” (“Codrington Case” 12). As Nuala O’Faolain’s fictional writer, Kathleen de Burca, discovers in *My Dream of You*, historical accuracy occupies a slippery slope, and we can never fully grasp truth. In *Alias Grace*’s afterword Margaret Atwood acknowledges that “[t]he true character of the historical Grace Marks remains an enigma” (558). By exploring, dissecting, and re-imagining the past, and as Atwood states in the epigraph above, by infusing the past with meaning, historical narratives suggest we can better understand people and their worlds, and in turn, our world today.

Alias Grace, *My Dream of You*, and *The Sealed Letter* engage in a (re-)discovery of the nineteenth-century women Grace Marks, Marianne Talbot, and Emily Faithfull. Atwood, O’Faolain, and Donoghue give these women a voice and expose how patriarchal structures have historically disempowered women. Though the novels are works of fiction, the aforementioned characters are historical women whose lives provide valuable insight into women’s roles in the past, and how those roles have, or in some cases have not, evolved in

the present. Central to all three novels is how women can overcome tremendous obstacles and survive—even thrive—in the face of oppression.

Atwood, O’Faolain, and Donoghue empower their female protagonists through the bonds established between women, economic independence, and subjectivity. Determined women who form friendships and alliances, whether familial, social, or professional, are capable of accomplishing great things, as Emily Faithfull’s Langham Place Group and successive waves of the feminist movement attest. Fellow servant Mary Whitney takes Grace “under her wing from the very first” (Atwood 174), the two becoming best of friends and supporting one another throughout their adolescent tribulations; even after Mary’s death she helps Grace to expel her demons. Bridging their differences, Kathleen and Miss Leech form a productive friendship that allows them to not only investigate the Talbot case, but to debate the history of Irish women throughout the generations. Conversely, women such as Marianne Talbot, who remain isolated and removed from the folds of female friendships, are more vulnerable to patriarchal oppression. That said, although female friendships are important, Atwood, O’Faolain, and Donoghue do not idealize them. For example, Emily’s relationship with Helen and Grace’s with Nancy Montgomery ultimately prove to be devastating, and Kathleen’s relationship with Caro is fraught with conflict.

Economic independence, particularly through meaningful work, is key to women’s emancipation. Emily Faithfull is an ideal example of a middle-class woman who could have chosen a conventional and comfortable life as a wife and mother, yet instead she valued the importance of providing women’s education and training so that women would not remain economically and psychologically dependent upon men. Emily, the spinster, is easily contrasted with both Helen Codrington and Marianne Talbot, whose upper-class idleness and

dependence upon their husbands spell disaster. Even the young, immigrant servant Grace Marks demonstrates how economic independence translates into power.

Alias Grace also reveals how subjectivity, the process of attaining and expressing selfhood, is essential for women's empowerment. Grace fashioned a meaningful life for herself, despite countless discursive barriers. Unlike Emily Faithfull, who was privileged by her social status, education, and established sense of the value of her Self and the Cause, Grace faced overwhelming odds. Her liberation evolved through emigration, domestic hardship, and ironically, through incarceration—circumstances that allow Atwood to use the historical novel to express Grace's subjectivity. Through actively constructing a position for herself, no matter the circumstances, Grace was able to negotiate power. Thus, Atwood destabilizes the notion of working-class and 'mad' women as powerless, while challenging preconceived discursive structures. Also labeled 'mad' is Marianne Talbot, a victim of nineteenth-century patriarchy. For Marianne, madness was the only escape route from a bleak future of a disgraced adulteress without her daughter and financial means, as madness at least guaranteed that she would be looked after economically. It is through her reconstruction of Marianne's life that Kathleen engages in the construction of her own subjectivity. Creating a metafictional narrative with two temporal plot lines allows O'Faolain to juxtapose historical and fictional characters and compare how women across the generations have been affected by and responded to patriarchy and (post-)colonialism.

In the process of all three authors' negotiations between past and present, history and fiction, they are drawing on various sources. Thus, intertextuality plays a significant role here; every novel under consideration acquires its meaning in relation to other texts, enabling the writers to make comparisons between historical documents and fictionalized narration,

thereby highlighting the subjectivism of historical narratives and questioning the concept of authenticity, and ultimately undermining history's authority.

As I have discussed, critics recognize the many problems associated with historical fictions. While historical truth remains elusive and history unstable and fragmented, neo-Victorian fictions, Kate Mitchell asserts, "are more concerned with the ways in which fiction *can* lay claim to the past, provisionally and partially, rather than the ways that it can not" (3). By bringing to life both exceptional and ordinary historical women in order to question the exclusion, subordination, and agency of women for the purpose of social criticism, contemporary women novelists rewrite the past from a perspective that has historically been denied women in western society. Whereas historical narratives must be viewed in the context of social, political, and cultural placement, they simultaneously link the past with the present. The Victorians continue to fascinate and influence contemporary society, and as Marie-Luise Kohlke points out, neo-Victorian writing "repeatedly raise[s] important questions of social justice and may yet prove instrumental in interrogating, perhaps even changing, current attitudes and influencing historical consciousness in the future" (10). A case in point is the role of nineteenth-century British women; considered to be largely silent, middle-class Victorian women played a more prominent role in public affairs than was first thought. By re-assessing women's historical roles and contributions, neo-Victorian novels can positively influence current attitudes toward women, as well as the role of feminism in contemporary society.

Finally, I have engaged in feminist approaches to the nature of historiography. Just as women are not content to sit on the sidelines of history, historians and historians of women are re-evaluating approaches to history and how they can better address women's needs. As

Alias Grace, *My Dream of You*, and *The Sealed Letter* demonstrate, it is women's voices that are often marginalized and trapped within history's narratives. A crucial objective of these three novels is to recognize the impact of patriarchal oppression and to rectify the exclusion of women's lives from public discourses.

Despite huge gains by the feminist movement, patriarchy remains firmly rooted in society, obliging women to grapple with ongoing challenges in many areas. Unless women are recognized as equally capable as men and provided with equal opportunities in all facets of life, their histories will remain locked in patriarchal notions of subordination, and they will continue to be marginalized. Uncovering male bias creates continued awareness of feminist issues and deepens feminist scholarship, while furthering the possibility of social change. As unresolved issues linger and new issues arise, there will always be a need to critique gender inequality, and to ensure that women are both recognized for their past contributions to society and are given equal opportunities to forge a just future. Historical novels, and in particular those by women for women, possess a subversive potential. Accordingly, if women do not tell and re-tell stories based on women's experiences, the female perspective will remain marginalized, history will remain unbalanced, and the future for women much less promising. Women's stories feed women's lives and allow for new ways of seeing the world—the past and the present—and that is the power of women's historical fiction.

Of the wide array of feminist subject matter I have researched, one recurring theme has made the greatest impression: that by focusing on women's agency and achievements women wield considerable power. Recognizing that can, in turn, further empower women, particularly those women who face incredibly challenging circumstances in their daily living. In the unearthing and recognition of women and their achievements, many difficulties have

arisen, and questions remain that have yet to be answered. It is clear, however, that in writing the missing links of women's history through literature, writers and feminist literary critics, who conceptualize their creative endeavors, continue to do valuable and necessary work, while they engage with historical writing as an effective political tool.

Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. Print.
- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth About History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994. Print.
- "article, n.". OED Online. November 2010. Oxford University Press. 12 March 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11179?rskey=oCx6TL&result=1>>.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*. Toronto: Seal Books, 1997. Print.
- _____. "In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction." *American Historical Review* 103.5 (1998): 1503-16. JSTOR. Web. 4 Oct. 2010.
- Bowler, Alexia L. and Jessica Cox. "Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century: Revisiting, Revising and Rewriting the Past." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 2.2 (2009/2010): 1-17. Web. 27 Sept. 2010.
- Busfield, Joan. "The Female Malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain." *Sociology* 28.1 (1994): 259-277. SAGE. Web. 26 Aug. 2012.
- Chambers-Schiller, Lee. "Restless Angels: The Friendship of Six Victorian Women by Helen Heineman." Rev. *Victorian Studies* 28.2 (1985): 338-39. JSTOR. Web. 7 Jan. 2012.
- Code, Lorraine, ed. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Conway, Sheelagh. *The Faraway Hills are Green: Voices of Irish Women in Canada*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1992. Print.
- Cvetkovich, Ann, Susan Fraiman, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Miranda M. Yaggi. "'Women as the Sponsoring Category': A Forum on Academic Feminism and British Women's Writing." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8.2 (2010): 235-54. Project MUSE. Web. 25 Oct. 2010.
- Daly, Mary. Introduction. *Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation*. By Geraldine Moane. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. ix-x. Print.
- de Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

- Dewar, Kenneth. "Does the Past Have a Future? It turns out h-i-s-t-o-r-y can be spelled many different ways." *Literary Review of Canada* 20.1 (2012): 3-5. *CPI.Q*. Web. 12 Feb. 2012.
- Donoghue, Emma. "The Codrington Case." *The Sealed Letter*. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2008. 10-15. Print.
- _____. *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.
- _____. *The Sealed Letter*. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2008. Print.
- Engler, Bernd and Kurt Müller, eds. *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994. Print.
- "Execution." *Toronto Star*, Transcript and General Advertiser 22 Nov. 1843. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/showcase/marks/index.html>
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 1978. Print.
- Frawley, Maria. "The Editor as Advocate: Emily Faithfull and *The Victoria Magazine*." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31:1 (1998): 87-104. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Oct. 2010.
- Freedman, Estelle B. *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. New York: Ballantine, 2002. Print.
- Garner, Steve. *Racism in the Irish Experience*. London: Pluto Press, 2004. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. *Rereading Women: Thirty Years of Exploring Our Literary Traditions*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Print.
- _____. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 1979. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.
- Gal, Susan. "Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender." *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*. Ed. Micaela di Leonardo. Berkley: U of California P, 1991. 175-203. Print.
- Glover, David and Cora Kaplan. *Genders*. London: Routledge, 2000. *MyiLibrary*. Web. 26 Jan. 2010.
- Godey's Lady's Book*. Philadelphia, Jan. 1850. *Godey's Lady's Book Online*. Web. 18 Mar. 2011. < <http://www.history.rochester.edu/godeys/> >.

- Gutleben, Christian. *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2001. Print.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988. Print.
- Heilman, Ann. "Famine, Femininity, Family: Rememory and Reconciliation in Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You*." *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering*. Ed. Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. New York: Rodopi, 2010. 285-310. Print.
- Heineman, Helen. *Restless Angles: The Friendship of Six Victorian Women*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1983. Print.
- Hunt, Lynn. "'No Longer an Evenly Flowing River': Time, History, and the Novel." *American Historical Review* 103.5 (1998): 1517-1521. JSTOR. Web. 4 Oct. 2010.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- _____. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- _____. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Jackson, Stevi, and Jackie Jones, eds. *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. New York: New York UP., 1998. Print.
- Jopling, David A. *Self-Knowledge and the Self*. New York: Routledge, 2000. MyiLibrary. Web. 3 Feb. 2010.
- King, Jeannette. *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Print.
- Knelman, Judith. "Can We Believe What the Newspapers Tell Us? Missing Links in *Alias Grace*." *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 68.2 (1999): 677-86. Academic Search Premier. Web. 9 Oct. 2010.
- Kohlke, Marie-Luise. "Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1.1 (2008): 1-18. Web. 18 Nov. 2010.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism." 1980. *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2009. 21-39. Print.

- Landes, Joan B. *Feminism, the Public and the Private*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. *eBook Collection*. Web. 15 Mar. 2012.
- Lane, Ann J. "Mary Ritter Beard: Woman as Force." *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*. Ed. Dale Spender. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983. 335-47. Print.
- Lawlor, Alice. "Sealed Letter Opens Life." *Herizons* 22.3 (2009): 47-48. *Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly*. Web. 29 Mar. 2012.
- "Law-Reports." *The Reader: A Review of Literature, Science, and Art* 79.4 (1864): 695. *Google Books*. Web. 19 June 2012.
- Leckie, Barbara. *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999. Print.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.
- _____. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.
- "Lesbian, adj. and n." *OED Online*. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 12 Nov. 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/107453>>.
- Llewellyn, Mark. "What is Neo-Victorian Studies?" *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1.1 (2008): 164-185. Web. 25 Nov. 2011.
- Logan, William. *The Great Social Evil: Its Causes, Extent, Results, and Remedies*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871. *Google Books*. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.
- Lovelady, Stephanie. "I am telling this to no one but you: private voice, passing, and the private sphere in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 24.2 (1999): 35-63. *ProQuest*. Web. 10 Oct. 2010.
- Lynch-Brennan, Margaret. *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2009. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.
- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. Print.
- McDougall, Robert L. Editor's Introduction. *Life in the Clearings*. By Susanna Moodie. Toronto: Macmillan, 1959. vii-xxiii. Print.

- Michael, Magali Cornier. "Rethinking History as Patchwork: The Case of Atwood's *Alias Grace*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 47:2 (2001): 421-447. *Project Muse*. Web. 5 Oct. 2010.
- Mills, Sara. *Discourse*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- . "Post-colonial Feminist Theory." *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. Ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones. New York: New York UP., 1998. 98-112. Print.
- "Miss Emily Faithfull." *New York Herald* 2 Feb. 1873: 3. *Archives of the New York NY Herald*. Web. 28 May 2012.
- Mitchell, Kate. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. *Directory of Open Access Books*. 18 June 2012. Web.
- Mitchell, Sally, ed. *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1988. Print.
- Moane, Geraldine. *Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Print.
- Mohanram, Radhika. *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora, and the British Empire*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. Print.
- Moodie, Susanna. *Life in the Clearings*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1959. Print.
- Morgan, Cecilia. *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996. Print.
- Morgan, Simon. *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. Print.
- Murchadha, Ciarán Ó. *The Great Famine: Ireland's Agony 1845-1852*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.
- O'Faolain, Nuala. *My Dream of You*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2001. Print.
- Paget, John. *Ecclesiastical Courts. A Report of the Judgment Delivered by Dr. Radcliffe, in the Case of Talbot v. Talbot, in The Consistorial Court of Dublin, on the 2nd of May 1854*. London: Thomas Blenkarn, 1854. *Google Books*. Web. 27 Sept. 2010.
- Palmer, Paulina. "Lesbian Gothic: Genre, Transformation, Transgression." *Gothic Studies* 6.11 (2004): 118-30. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 22 Oct. 2011.

- "patriarchy, n." OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. 13 Feb. 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/138873>>.
- Phegley, Jennifer. *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2004. Print.
- Poovey, Mary. "Speaking of the Body: Mid-Victorian Constructions of Female Desire." *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*. Ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth. New York: Routledge, 1990. 29-46. Print.
- . *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988. Print.
- Rampton, Martha. "The Three Waves of Feminism." *Pacific* 41.2 (2008): n. pag. Web. 21 Feb. 2012.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne Cecile. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980)." *Journal of Women's History* 15.3 (2003): 11-48. *Project Muse*. Web. 22 Oct. 2011.
- Robbins, Ruth. *Literary Feminisms*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Print.
- Rogerson, Margaret. "Reading the Patchworks in *Alias Grace*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 35.71 (2000): 71-85. *SAGE*. Web. 27 Sept. 2010.
- Rowbotham, Judith and Kim Stevenson. "Causing a Sensation: Media and Legal Representations of Bad Behaviour." *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage—Victorian and Modern Parallels*. Ed. Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson. Burlington: Ashgate, 2003. 31-46. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978. Print.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. Rev. ed. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. New York: Penguin, 1987. Print.
- Siddall, Gillian. "'That is What I Told Dr. Jordan . . .': Public Constructions and Private Disruptions in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 81 (2004): 84-102. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 5 Oct. 2010.

- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.1 (1975): 1-29. JSTOR. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.
- Spongberg, Mary. *Writing Women's History since the Renaissance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Print.
- Staels, Hilde. "Intertexts of Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 46:2 (2000): 427-450. Project Muse. Web. 5 Oct. 2010.
- Stamp, Robert M. *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.
- Stimpson, Catherine R. Foreword. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. By Mary Poovey. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988. viii-x. Print.
- Stoler, Ann L. "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures." *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*. Ed. Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella. New York: Routledge, 1997. 373-399. Print.
- Stone, James S. *Emily Faithfull: Victorian Champion of Women's Rights*. Toronto: P.D. Meany, 1994. Print.
- Thornborrow, Joanna. *Power Talk: Language and Interaction in Institutional Discourse*. London: Pearson, 2002. Print.
- Tolan, Fiona. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2007. Print.
- Ussher, Jane M. *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992. Print.
- Vicinus, Martha. *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.
- Wallace, Diana. *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.
- Walton, George. *The Trials of James McDermott, and Grace Marks, at Toronto, Upper Canada, November 3rd and 4th, 1843, for the murder of Thomas Kinnear, esquire, and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery*. Toronto: Star and Transcript Office, 1843. Toronto Public Library Special Collections. Web. 27 Sept. 2010.

- Walzer, Judith B. "The Breakthrough: Feminism and Literary Criticism." *Dissent* 55.2 (2008): 103-09. *H.W. Wilson*. Web. 25 Jan. 2012.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990. *MyiLibrary*. Web. 15 Feb. 2012.
- Wyle, Herb. *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002. *ebRARY Reader*. Web. 5 Feb. 2012.