Is There a Woman Behind the Veil?

The Use of Clothing, Textiles, and Accessories
in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood

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My parents read for me from an early age, and I owe my interest in literature to them. When I was sixteen, my mother recommended a Canadian novel called *Alias Grace*. I was as old as Grace was when she was convicted for murder when I read her story, and I fell in love with both Grace and Margaret Atwood at that moment. Professor Jeannette Lynes, writer in residence at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada, later inspired me to take a second look at *Alias Grace* and she helped me develop the early ideas for this thesis. I would like to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Rebecca Scherr for her interest in this project, her help, her ideas, and her patience. Rebecca Scherr also suggested *Lady Oracle*, which was perfect for my thesis. Scherr's guidance has been of the utmost importance for my work.

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Introduction

> The basic Female Body comes with the following accessories: garter-belt, panty-girdle, crinoline, camisole, bustle, brassiere, stomacher, chemise, virgin zone, spike heels, nose-ring, veil, kid gloves, fishnet stockings, fichu, bandeau, Merry Widow, weepers, chokers, barrettes, bangles, beads, lorgnette, feather boa, basic black, compact, Lycra strech one piece with modesty panel, designer peignoir, flannel nightie, lace teddy, bed, head. (Margaret Atwood, *Good Bones*)

When asked to write about the subject of the female body, this quote was part of Margaret Atwood's answer. Atwood observes how the female body is shaped by a variety of garments and accessories, and how these accessories shape the female identity. The way we dress is undeniably a way of expressing ourselves. We can either reveal or withhold information about ourselves through clothing. We are able to communicate our individuality with the help of fashion, to stand out from the crowd, or quite the opposite. Dressing in a certain way also helps us escape from unwanted attention. To be accepted in a particular society, one dresses according to the other members. Uniforms are used in several professions, including a wide range from the military to shop assistants. A uniform often signifies authority and power. The teenage daughter rebels against her parents by dressing in black, painting her eyes and coloring her hair pink. Political views have for centuries been expressed by wearing certain accessories. "Bluestocking" refers to politically active women from the mid Eighteenth century, an expression which has resulted in the term "redstocking", which is associated with feminists from the 1970s and is still associated with feminism. An actor often wears a costume on stage when playing another character. When removing the makeup after the night is over, the actor removes the character he or she has been playing. Clothing is powerful. Clothing is both liberating and restricting.

Clothing is also one way of forming the body, and is used to underline and exaggerate the physical differences between the genders. The female body in particular has been the victim of the fashion industry, constantly being forced to change according to the various trends. For example, during the Nineteenth century, a woman of some significance had to dress decently, which meant wearing a corset and crinoline, in addition to the right accessories such as gloves and hats. Her body did not only have to be covered up, it also had to be laced tightly to meet the standards of the time. By restricting her movements, she became a passive prisoner inside her cage of garments, not only physically but also mentally passive. Today as well, women shape their bodies with the help of clothing, making

themselves more feminine, enlarging certain body parts and minimizing others. Clothing does not only fashion the body, it is also part of forming the mind. Regarding femininity, Mary Ann Doane claims that "[w]omanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed" ("Film and the Masquerade" 185). In other words, femininity is like an attribute or a garment which one can dress oneself in. As the actor's costume is part of the performance, a woman's clothes help women perform their roles as women and as sexual objects.

Concerning literature, clothes often express and symbolize a character's state of mind. Clothes are also used as an effective time marker, and by describing the fashion of a particular time period, the author is able to reflect not only a character's identity, but also a society's values. Fashion varies from country to country; each part of the world has its own specific rules and norms when it comes to clothing. Cynthia G. Kuhn states in *Self-Fashioning in Margaret Atwood's Fiction* that "[c]lothing communicates, but not as a system of direct correspondences. Rather, individuals construct sartorial identities or performances which audiences interpret through their own understanding of cultural codes, which affects the outcome" (4). In making this comment, Kuhn argues that clothing is indeed communicative, but how various garments are perceived depends on background and culture. In the field of literary studies, I believe that clothing has not been given much attention. The use of clothing in literary texts is a relatively undiscovered area. What is more, clothing and identity are intertwined, and need to be further examined.

This thesis will deal with the importance of clothing, textiles, and accessories and their relation to female identity and the female body in *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *Alias Grace* (1996) by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood. Although Margaret Atwood is an acclaimed author, she is seldom taught at Norwegian universities. Canadian literature in general is rarely taught at Norwegian universities. Canada is a nation which has been overlooked for centuries, and Canadian literature has only recently been receiving its rightful place in the literary canon with writers like Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, Yann Martel, and of course, Margaret Atwood. Struggling with identity problems and what it means being Canadian, Canadian authors tend to return to this subject, and Atwood is no exception. However, I will not focus particularly on Canadian identity and what makes *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* Canadian in this thesis, but rather the problems concerning female identity, a recurring issue in the Atwood world of fiction. Concerned with what it means being a female artist and how women are forced into the part of the other, both as women and as artists, how their bodies are viewed as grotesque and needing to be improved and accessorized, Atwood demonstrates how women struggle with prejudices regarding femininity, and how they often fail.

Margaret Atwood (born 1939) is one of Canada's most acknowledged writers. She does not only write novels, but also poems, short stories, children's books, television scripts, and non-fiction. With novels like *Surfacing* (1972), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *The Robber Bride* (1993), and *The Blind Assassin* (2000), she has become known world-wide. Although Atwood is often associated with feminist issues and female identity, Atwood is also concerned with environmental issues and technology, having written several dystopian science fiction novels. Furthermore, she has written about the subject of Canadian literature in her book *Survival* (1972), and albeit criticized by scholars and writers, *Survival* is an important book regarding Canadian literature and identity. According to Atwood, Canadian literature is preoccupied with survival, and Canadians struggle with finding their identity, as women have struggled with finding their identity throughout different time periods. Concerned with feminism and how women are objectified within patriarchal culture, Atwood brings women's voices from the margin and allows them to have a space and will to speak, which is the case in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. Not only is Atwood herself preoccupied with clothing and costumes in these two novels, her female protagonists actively use clothing to play different characters. Clothes are for instance borrowed, stolen, and destroyed. Furthermore, *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* demonstrate how women are othered through clothing, and how women's bodies are seen as both sexual objects and as monstrous.

In *Lady Oracle* a writer named Joan Foster is a struggling artist growing up in 1970s Canada. Throughout the novel, she is seeking her identity, constantly changing names and clothes. Trying to find her place in society as a woman and as a writer, she feels that Joan Foster is not enough for her. Joan goes through several metamorphoses during the novel. Growing up as an overweight child, compulsorily eating out of fear of disappearing and to defy her mother, she decides to lose weight and transforms into a thin, young woman whose body is acknowledged as desirable. Working as a writer under the name of her aunt, Louisa K. Delacourt, Joan writes what she calls costume gothics, written for the mass market with an emphasis of clothing, sex, and horror. *Lady Oracle* consists of several fragments from Joan's novels, in addition to excerpts from her poems, which she writes under her own name. Battling with her different identities, she eventually stages her own death and escapes to Italy. Although she tries, once again, to create a new character, she fails. Her past and previous identities haunt her, and even the attempt to bury her old clothes is unsuccessful, indicating that she cannot escape.

Alias Grace is based on a historical case where Grace Marks was convicted for the murders of her employer Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery in 1843.

However, Grace Marks was never hanged, but reprieved and set free after thirty years. She was considered to be mentally ill and put in an asylum before being placed in a penitentiary. In the novel, Grace is unable to remember anything about what actually happened when her employer and his housekeeper were murdered. A doctor named Simon Jordan comes to see Grace in an attempt to make her remember and to do research on mental illness. Simon begins studying Grace as an interesting object, not a human being. Grace, a most talented seamstress, is preoccupied with clothes, both her own and others. *Alias Grace* consists of Grace's own accounts, written in first person, and Simon's reflections, written in third person, as well as poems, newspaper clippings, and excerpts from various books. The theme of quilting is significant for several reasons. The novel is organized as a quilt, with drawings of traditional quilt patterns in addition to the various fragments. What is more, Grace sews several quilts for other women in the novel, but her biggest wish is to be able to make her own quilt, as a free woman, something which she also does in the end. Atwood does not give any answers to the murder mystery, leaving the reader wondering whether Grace actually participated in the gruesome acts.

Although Joan and Grace are from respectively the Twentieth and Nineteenth century, they share several common features. They are both artists, Joan is a writer while Grace is a seamstress. Quilting, for example, is not only a popular craft, but women have also been able to express themselves through quilting. They have expressed their creativity and individuality, and quilting has become a way to speak. By contrast, Joan expresses her thoughts, fears, and nightmares through her writing, while Grace is not able to express herself through words. Hence, she does it through sewing. Furthermore, both women create various identities for themselves, and they act out their roles according to what kind of audience they have. Acting is mentioned several times in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. Grace mentions for instance that she plays the role as a maid, something which underlines the theme of performance in the novel. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan performs the obese clown in front of her mother to make her notice her. The way Joan and Grace are performing throughout the novel, is linked to Judith Butler's theories regarding performativity, which I will comment upon later.

Textiles in general are used in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* both as an overall metaphor, and as something which covers up the body, mainly the female body. In *Alias Grace*, the quilt metaphor is significant because it both comments upon the structure of the novel, as a quilt itself, and upon Grace's identity. Grace's personality consists of fragments, of little pieces which the reader has to put together. By contrast, in *Lady Oracle*, the maze is used as a narrative technique. The novel itself is constructed as a series of retrospective

episodes where Joan's past is revealed, in addition to excerpts from her own texts. Joan also drapes herself in various textiles, already as a child, and different kinds of fabric engross her mind. A recurrent image in *Lady Oracle* is the cloak, and Joan fantasizes about men in cloaks, which for her represents masculinity, adventure, and heroism.

Several critics have interpreted the use of quilt and quilting as a metaphor for Grace's psyche, in addition to exploring the importance of sewing and textiles. Although the significance of the quilt has previously been analyzed by literary scholars, this is still important to mention because of the relevance to my thesis. I will compare the art of quilting to the art of writing, and assert the similarities between these two techniques, and how they are both a way of expressing oneself. While critics have focused on Grace's possible guilt and mental state, trying to solve the mystery, I will focus on the importance of textiles and clothing in the novel. By offering solutions and possible answers to Grace's unstable identity, the scholars make the same mistake as Simon Jordan who wants to "crack [her] open" (*Alias Grace* 357). For instance, Anne Geddes Bailey suggests that Grace Marks is actually Mary Whitney, Grace's friend who supposedly died after having an abortion, in her article "'Sew and snip, and patch together a genius': Quilting a Virginal Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*". By not revealing Grace's secrets, Atwood implies that there is no truth, and she questions the male method of wanting to penetrate Grace as a box, demanding answers regarding her identity.

Critics tend to focus on the gothic elements and the use of myths in *Lady Oracle*, as well as Joan's uncontrollable eating. Even though Joan's multiple personalities are often mentioned by the critics and the significance of for example the costumes in the novel, the theme of clothing has been of minor interest. Moreover, most critics tend to read Atwood from a feminist perspective, a perspective I agree upon and which I will use in my analyses as well. Since Margaret Atwood not only writes about women and their experiences in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, but also concentrates on the difficulties regarding female identity, it is only natural for me to have a feminist focal point.

I want to compare these two novels because they are set in two different time periods, *Lady Oracle* from the 1970s and *Alias Grace* from the mid Nineteenth century. The contrast between women's clothing from the two different time periods is significant, not only because of the parallels between body ideals, but also because of the similarities and differences in how the clothes signify gender and class. By comparing *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, I want to uncover what Atwood is saying about the correlations between female identity, femininity, the body, and clothing. What does it mean being a woman in the Nineteenth century

compared to being a woman in the 1970s? In which way are Joan and Grace's experiences related? How do Joan and Grace become the other in their respective societies?

Regarding the use of theory and secondary literature in this thesis, I have chosen to use theory which is not mainly literary theory, but theory which focuses on clothing, accessories, and the female body. By using the theories of Butler, I will discuss how Atwood comments upon performance and the female body in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. In Butler's book, *Gender Trouble*, she deals with issues regarding gender, sexuality, and performativity. Although Butler's theories regarding performativity are categorized as queer theory, and there are few queer elements in Atwood's fiction, they are still applicable to Atwood's novels because of the many incidents where the main characters perform their gender. Butler asks: "[W]hat is a woman, what is a man?" (*Gender Trouble* xi), and she claims that gender "is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (*Gender Trouble* xv). In addition, Butler maintains that one performs one's gender, and that gender "is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender Trouble* 45). For example, one learns certain gestures which are believed to be "natural" for one's gender, and by learning these and repeating them, they become "natural" to perform for one's body. Furthermore, gender "is always a doing" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34). In other words, performing one's gender becomes "a ritual" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). When discussing how gender is constructed, Butler uses drag as an example. According to Butler, drag is a way of performing gender, and "[i]f one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the 'reality' of gender: the gender that is introduced through the simile lacks 'reality,' and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance" (*Gender Trouble* xxiii). Basically, Butler questions the idea of "gender reality", and she also questions that one's true gender is hiding beneath a costume. In *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, Atwood questions both gender and identity reality. The emphasis on how the protagonists perform a variety of roles depending on who is in the audience, further implies that there is no reality behind the mask. However, "[g]ender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted" (Butler, "Critically Queer" 22). What Butler is saying, is that these roles are not a choice, and one plays them because one is expected to. Atwood demonstrates in her novels how her protagonists are forced to perform their gender because of society's powerful rules through the use of clothing.

In addition, I will use *The Fashioned Body* by Joanne Entwistle and *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* by Diana Crane. In *The Fashioned Body*, Entwistle comments upon how bodies which "do not conform … and go without the appropriate clothes are subversive of the most basic social codes and risk exclusion, scorn or ridicule" (7). While Grace in *Alias Grace* wants to wear the appropriate garments of a lady, Joan in *Lady Oracle* violates these norms as a child and teenager, both in body shape and in clothing. Because she is obese as an adolescent, and does not have the expected form, she is indeed ridiculed. What is more, Entwistle examines the relationship between body, dress, and identity, saying that "bodies are socially constituted, always situated in culture and the outcome of individual practices directed towards the body: in other words, 'dress' is the result of 'dressing' or 'getting dressed'" (11). The body has to be viewed according to its culture. Getting dressed is an activity, it is not static. Looking further at fashion and gender, Entwistle argues that femininity is something which is constructed, and how clothing and textiles are associated with femininity since women were often the ones who were responsible for the making of clothes.

Crane focuses on specific garments and fashion through two centuries in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*. Crane writes, "[i]n previous centuries, clothing was the principal means for identifying oneself in public space. Depending on the period, various aspects of identity were expressed in clothing in Europe and the United States, including occupation, regional identity, religion, and social class" (1). Is this different from today? One still dresses according to profession and class, but the lines are more blurred than before. However, as Atwood articulates in *Lady Oracle*, certain outfits are still associated with wealth. Interestingly, in *Alias Grace*, Grace experiences how fashion changes and how the differences in clothing between the social classes become less obvious and more easily imitated than previously. What is more, Crane claims that "we dress for others not for ourselves" (237), indicating that we dress in order to be seen by others. That is to say, what is important is how others interpret our clothing. In *Alias Grace*, as already mentioned, Grace is preoccupied with looking decent. She wants to play the lady, not only for herself, but because she wants to be perceived as a lady by society.

In *Self-Fashioning in Margaret Atwood's Fiction*, Kuhn explores the use of clothing in Atwood's novels, with a focus on *The Robber Bride* and *Alias Grace*. Acknowledging the importance of clothing regarding a character's identity and femininity, Kuhn concentrates on the elements of performance, and how for example Grace borrows not only another character's clothing, but also their bodies. "Clothing articulates the body, framing gender

within a cultural context" Kuhn writes (5), which further underlines how clothing is part of constructing gender. This implies that gender is part performance, part culture. What is more, Kuhn comments upon how the characters in Atwood's fiction construct a variety of identities using clothing as survival. It is "a technique of survival" (Kuhn 29), which is noticeable in both *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. Joan and Grace protect themselves behind different kinds of shells, made by cloth and flesh, in order to survive. These actions also reflect how the two women struggle with how to become a woman and it is a reaction to the limiting gender norms in society.

Using Butler and Entwistle, who write from a feminist perspective, I will also draw on *The Psychology of Clothes* by J.C. Flügel as a contrast. Flügel does not only tend to objectify women and their bodies, he is concerned with the differences between men and women, in addition to individual differences, and debates why their clothes differ. Referring to psychoanalysis, Flügel is preoccupied with the sexual symbolism associated with clothing. For instance, the mantle is according to Flügel a phallic symbol, while the girdle is a female symbol. Moreover, one of the main arguments in *The Psychology of Clothes* is that "clothes serve three main purposes – decoration, modesty, and protection" (16). He further develops these three purposes, exploring the different aspects of decoration such as deformation, categorized as external, where corsets are mentioned, and how corsets deform the female body in order to make it sexually attractive and feminine. Other kinds of decoration are used to signify for instance class and nationality, but Flügel describes the sexual motive as the most important one. According to Flügel, "clothing originated largely through the desire to enhance the sexual attractiveness of the wearer and to draw attention to the genital organs of the body" (26). The essence of Flügel's argument is that one wears certain types of garments, painting or tattoos in order to become desirable for one another. Regarding modesty, Flügel points out the importance of being properly dressed in order to avoid discomfort or shame in a social setting, "whether one is 'over' or 'under' dressed" (55). Flügel lists five different variables of modesty, and argues that "[m]odesty varies of course not only in time but in space" (67). In the Western world, women's legs have been hidden in previous centuries underneath dresses, while in other parts of the world, other body parts are hidden behind for example veils. The last purpose, which is protection, is a highly practical one. One wears a variety of garments to be able to protect oneself from either heat or cold, in addition to attacks from humans and animals.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: Clothing, Textiles, and Accessories. I will compare and contrast *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* in all three chapters, looking at a selection

of garments, costumes, cloth, and attributes. In Chapter One, I will discuss the use of clothing and costumes. While Grace is preoccupied with looking as respectable as possible, and performing a lady at several occasions, Joan is obsessed with costumes already as a child, and I will address both the significance of Joan's own costumes and the use of costumes in her novels. I will draw on Kuhn's theories regarding clothes and identity in *Alias Grace*, and how Joan's flesh in *Lady Oracle* becomes a costume which she hides behind. In addition, I will deal with the significance of stealing, borrowing, and the destroying of clothes, and how these actions are related to identity and performance. Furthermore, the changes in fashion are significant in both novels. Chapter Two will focus on the use of textiles in both novels. I will address the quilt, which is used both as a structure in *Alias Grace*, as well as it is a comment upon Grace's identity, in addition to the significance of Grace as a quilt maker. By contrast, in *Lady Oracle*, textiles are used somewhat differently. Joan wraps herself up in various textiles, fantasizing about another world. Also, her mother uses plastic to cover up the furniture and the carpets in their home. Regarding the structure of *Lady Oracle*, I will discuss the similarities and differences to that of the quilt in *Alias Grace*, and the use of the maze as a metaphor and the relationship between the maze and cloth. Chapter Three will investigate the variety of accessories in the novels. I have chosen to categorize accessories as gloves, cloaks, veils, shoes, names, hair, and makeup. Gloves for one thing, are not only a sign of wealth in the texts, but they also signify femininity, especially in *Alias Grace*. The shoe image in *Lady Oracle* refers to a fairy tale by H. C. Andersen where a girl sacrifices her purity for a pair of red shoes. Joan relates to this story, interpreting it as a tale about a female artist who has to choose between art and love. Regarding veils and sheets, they are used to hide the female body, which is perceived as grotesque. All three chapters will include a discussion of the female body, and how Atwood reveals the society's view of the female body as something monstrous and dysfunctional.

Atwood is exploring femininity and different forms of femininity, the female body, and the female experience in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. What is the relationship between the exterior and the interior? How is clothing connected with identity? What is Atwood saying about female identity? Who is the woman behind the veil? Furthermore, by demonstrating how women are othered in two different centuries and by giving these women a voice, Atwood gives women an alternative, a way of expressing themselves regardless of the patriarchal society. Atwood suggests that identity is fluid, and I will look more closely at how the concept of identity emerges in the texts. This is significant because identity is often believed to be something stable, along with gender. However, Atwood implies that femininity

is merely an act, a performance. Atwood's female protagonists are unable to escape clothing and its effect on their bodies, and they are unable to escape society's restraining demands regarding femininity.

Chapter 1: Clothing

> The visitors wear afternoon dresses with rows of buttons up their fronts, and stiff wire crinolines beneath. It's a wonder they can sit down at all, and when they walk, nothing touches their legs under the billowing skirts, except their shifts and stockings. They are like swans, drifting along on unseen feet; or else like the jellyfish in the waters of the rocky harbour near our house, when I was little, before I ever made the long sad journey across the ocean. They were bell-shaped and ruffles, gracefully waving and lovely under the sea; but if they washed up on the beach and dried out in the sun there was nothing left of them. And that is what the ladies are like: mostly water. (*Alias Grace* 23 – 24)

> I was wounded, desolated in fact, when it turned out that Miss Flegg wanted me to remove my cloudy skirt and spangles and put on one of the white teddy-bear costumes the Tensies were using for their number, "Teddy Bears' Picnic." (*Lady Oracle* 48)

Atwood demonstrates how clothing deforms female bodies, and how women have been made into sexual objects with the help of clothes in *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*. Moreover, clothes influence the mind as well. By putting women in a cage of textile and stays which restrict their movements, they become passive, which is believed to be appropriate behavior for ladies. They perform their roles as women, and they learn how to behave according to custom. In other words, behavior which is believed to be typically feminine is not something which is natural, but it is learned behavior. According to Crane, "[c]lothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a major role in the social construction of identity" (1). Clothes are important for most people because it communicates who we are. Clothes reflect class, social status, gender, and identity. By choosing what to wear, one is able to change one's identity, something which the characters in *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle* take advantage of when they redesign themselves again and again.

The quote from *Alias Grace* illustrates how women in the Nineteenth century were forced into roles as fragile ladies who could barely sit down because of their dresses and underwear. The quote from *Lady Oracle* underlines the idea of masquerade and costumes as linked to female gender roles. "To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image" Doane writes ("Film and the Masquerade" 185), and her point is that one uses masquerade to act out what one is essentially not. *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle* exemplify how femininity is an act, and how clothes are closely related to this act. One's identity is linked to the clothes one chooses or is obligated to wear.

This chapter will deal with the treatment of clothes which are mostly borrowed, stolen, and destroyed by the characters, and how Atwood tends to come back to this theme in her novels. In the section about class, *Alias Grace* will be in focus since the novel is set in the 1850s, and there was far more focus on class distinctions in society in the Nineteenth century than in the Twentieth. What is more, Atwood articulates how women are expected to wear certain types of clothing and how they are expected to learn the act of how to be a woman. Fashion and costumes are also recurring elements in *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, and while Grace is preoccupied with the time's fashion, Joan is obsessed with costumes and how they help her escape reality.

Borrow, Lend, Steal, and Destroy

In *Alias Grace*, borrowing, lending, and stealing clothes are significant actions because they imply Grace's fluid identity. Atwood observes how Grace performs different characters, as well as performing gender, with the help of clothing. This is related to Judith Butler's theories concerning performativity. According to Butler, gender is performed, and it is not a natural state. When Butler contends that "gender proves to be performative", she explains that it is "constituting the identity it is purported to be" (*Gender Trouble* 34). Butler questions for example the idea that "a person *is* a gender and *is* one in virtue of his or her sex" (*Gender Trouble* 30). In other words, does a woman automatically inhabit the quality of gentility just because she is biologically a female? In the Nineteenth century, as Atwood illustrates in *Alias Grace*, women were believed to be naturally tender creatures. Grace, however, does not act up to these expectations. The possible guilt of murder contributes to the image of Grace as more complex than the usual representation of a Nineteenth century woman. Furthermore, Atwood paints an ambiguous picture of Grace as somewhat crafty because she takes on various roles according to whom she interacts with. The borrowing, lending, and stealing of clothes, acts mostly performed by Grace, emphasizes the importance of clothing and how essential garments are when constructing a variety of identities, even though she does not always succeed. Grace is not only performing diverse personalities, depending on her audience, but she is also performing her gender and class. Atwood suggests that there is no truth or reality to Grace's identity, just as Butler questions the reality of gender.

The three main female characters, Grace, Mary, and Nancy, are all connected through the borrowing, lending, and stealing of clothes. As Kuhn points out, "Atwood creates a complicated scenario in which Grace, Mary, and Nancy are linked through dress" (99). For instance, Grace borrows Mary's nightdress at one point, a simple but symbolic gesture, which

underlines their close friendship. When Mary dies, Grace does the same favor for her and lends her own nightdress for Mary's dead body: "She asked if there was another nightdress for Mary to be dressed in, and I said there was, because Mary had two; but the other one was in the wash. Then I said I would give her one of mine" (*Alias Grace* 206). Simply put, Mary is buried in Grace's clothes. This is significant since it implies that Mary takes a part of Grace with her because of the strong link between identity and clothing. Moreover, it is also a foreshadowing of later events, but the difference is that Grace steals the clothes from Nancy's corpse. It is mostly Grace who either borrows or steals other women's clothes. When Grace is working for Mr. Kinnear, Nancy sometimes lends Grace her clothes: "[S]he said she would lend me a dress of hers, which she did, though she took care that it was one of her second best, and not so fine as what she herself put on" (*Alias Grace* 292). Grace exchanges clothes with both women, and in addition, the handkerchief which is used to strangle Nancy was originally Mary's handkerchief. As mentioned previously, Grace steals some of Nancy's clothes after she has been brutally murdered, but she manages to justify this by saying to herself that "[t]here is no need for them to go to waste, poor Nancy has no further use for them" (*Alias Grace* 387). However, by taking Nancy's clothes, Grace divulges her wish for being in Nancy's position, and to climb the social ladder and become one step closer to being a lady.

Grace's actions also emphasize her practical qualities. According to Kuhn, "Grace's borrowing of the freshly murdered Nancy's clothes is, on one level, somewhat pragmatic. On another level, it underscores the power of her desire to present a 'decent' appearance despite the public's understandably horrified response to her self-fashioning efforts" (95). Kuhn is surely right about Grace wanting to give an impression of herself as a lady, and the fact that she does not have her own wardrobe because she has burnt her own clothes, implies that Grace steals Nancy's clothes partly because she needs them. It is furthermore an interesting observation that Grace is taking the dresses because of the importance of looking decent. Nevertheless, Kuhn does not see the possibility of Grace being jealous of Nancy and her clothes. Grace has previously borrowed Nancy's clothes, and acted a lady for short time periods, but she had not had the possibility of wearing them as she pleases. In the trial, Grace wears Nancy's clothes, and this act is what makes her guilty in the eye of the public. Her own lawyer, who believes Grace is responsible for Nancy's death, tells Simon about how "'[t]he foolish girl could not be dissuaded from dressing herself up in the murdered woman's finery, an act which was viewed with horror by the press and public'" (*Alias Grace* 436). The reaction from the public underlines how one imagines clothing as personal belongings, and

stealing such items from a dead person therefore provokes strong reactions. However, Grace has destroyed her own clothes, and she believes that she has thrown away her previous identity and the role as Grace the maid. It is noteworthy that she actually wears Nancy's clothes in court during the trial because it implies that Grace believes that she has now successfully created a new identity. Although she does not further elaborate her choice of dress, it is likely that she believes she will gain credit for being dressed as a lady, and be taken more seriously than she would have been if dressed as a maid. The disconnect between this and the public views are the different approaches to dress. Atwood articulates the troubles with being improperly dressed, and how Grace fails in her attempt of creating a new self.

Grace's own identity becomes fluid with the help of clothing. What is more, "[t]hrough such active engagement with dress, Atwood's characters demonstrate how clothing is a fluid boundary that can both celebrate and complicate the internal world of the character" (Kuhn 28). Significantly, Grace burns her old clothes after the murders: "I didn't like the thought of wearing them ever again, as they would remind me of things I wished to forget. It may have been my fancy, but a smell went up from them like scorching meat; and it was like my own dirtied and cast-off skin that I was burning" (*Alias Grace* 388). By burning her clothes, Grace believes that her old self will disappear as well. As several critics have noted, clothing is often viewed as a second skin, implying that clothes are a continuation of one's body. The image of her clothes as meat, further contributes to the idea of garments as a second skin. The experience of clothing smelling like a corpse is similar to Joan's experience in *Lady Oracle* when she associates her clothes with her previous identity, an identity she tries to part with and bury. Both women fail in their attempts.

Similar to Grace in *Alias Grace*, Joan uses costumes to escape from her everyday life, trying desperately to find a new identity she can be comfortable with. Joan is constantly performing throughout the novel, and she plays different roles with different people. Calling herself an "escape artist" (*Lady Oracle* 334), she continually tries to escape from reality by creating fairy tale versions of her life. Through a variety of costumes, Joan creates several characters, and in Kuhn's view, "Atwood's protagonists can be seen as performing artists, designing an identity through dress and storytelling as a technique of survival" (29). Basically, Kuhn is saying that Atwood's characters need to fashion several identities, using clothing, to be able to survive. Atwood demonstrates this in both *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, and because both protagonists are women who struggle with their identities, Atwood illustrates the difficulties regarding female identity, the female body, and performing the female gender according to the norms. Butler's argument regarding "female" and "woman" as

unstable, is linked with identity, and in *Lady Oracle*, Joan's multiple identities are slippery. Joan's performances become rituals, and she repeats these performances, although not always successfully. As mentioned previously, costumes are crucial for Joan's identities, and she believes that if she can destroy an outfit or a whole wardrobe, she will kill the identity which is associated with that particular costume. Joan also develops personalities by creating a wardrobe for them. By contrast to Grace who burns her garments, Joan tries to bury her clothes, but they come back to haunt her. Because Joan is unable to free herself from previous identities, it implies that Joan has to accept her past before she can move on. Joan makes the same mistake as Grace who imagines she burns her old identity when she sets her clothes on fire. However, Grace discovers that she is punished for wearing someone else's clothing, and that her time for acting the lady has not yet come. Joan realizes that she cannot deny her past life because it comes to back to her, in the form of buried clothes, and disturbs her new identity.

One important part of Joan's staging of her own death, and the attempt of gaining a new identity, is the act of burying her old clothes. Because she actually buries the clothes she wears when she pretends to drown, it indicates that she tries to hide her former identity. Opening the plastic bag containing her wet clothes in Italy, Joan recognizes the smell as the stench "of [her] death, of Lake Ontario, spilled oil, dead gulls, tiny silver fish cast up on the beach and rotting" (*Lady Oracle* 19). The smell of the clothes is similar to the odor of a corpse. Furthermore, Atwood emphasizes the fact that Joan's jeans and T-shirt represent her previous identity when Joan calls the clothes "my funerary costume, my former self, damp and collapsed, from which the many-colored souls had flown" (*Lady Oracle* 19). However, "[t]he idea of death as self-constructed and – controlled performance, does not evoke threat, but rather ridicule, an effect enhanced by the concluding hint that the performance might have failed" (Becker 153). Although Joan manages to bury her clothes, they are returned to her by her landlord, "neatly washed and pressed" (*Lady Oracle* 324). Joan believes that she has managed to disguise herself behind the clothes of a tourist, in addition to sunglasses, but she discovers that the locals have recognized her during the whole visit when her landlord states that "'[t]hey do not understand why you have put your clothes beneath the house. They know of this. They do not know why you have cut off your so beautiful hair, that everyone remembers from the time you are here before, with your husband; you wear always the dark glasses, like a bat, and you have taken another name'" (*Lady Oracle* 325). According to Roxanne J. Fand, this episode is "a satire on the rebirth theme" (193). While trying to give birth to a new identity, Joan fails and is revisited by her former self. These clothes are not the

only ones which are hidden and found again. Joan instructs her fellow conspirators to throw away the dress she wears on the boat trip before her change of costume. Nevertheless, the police find the dress in the boat, which further underlines that Joan cannot escape. Joan's new self as a tourist is uncomfortable, and she is not able to fully adapt to her new role. "Wearing her was like wearing a hair shirt, she made me itchy" Joan reflects (*Lady Oracle* 319), indicating how a new identity is worn like a set of garments. What is more, it implies that Joan sees her latest identity as an alien substance, something which is forced on her, even though it is her own choice. She cannot accept the new Joan because she does not feel right to her. Joan's imaginary hair shirt is also a metaphor for gender norms, and how these are forced upon her by society.

Joan chooses to wear jeans and a T-shirt when pretending to drown, an outfit she normally does not wear, but she hopes to blend in with the crowd. Joan believes in the transformation of clothing, and she goes through a ritual at the airport changing clothes so that no one will recognize or notice her: "First I bought a skirt and blouse so I'd been wearing clothes on the plane that no one had ever seen me in … I bought the pink Mountie scarf and some dark glasses, changed into my new outfit in the ladies' can, covered up my hair, and got a Hertz Rent-A-Car, a bright-red Datsun … I went to the ladies' can again, changed back to my old clothes and drove away" (*Lady Oracle* 299). Atwood demonstrates how Joan once again uses clothes as costumes, and how she carefully has thought of every detail when constructing her metamorphosis. Even so, these clothes are not able to fully transform her. Instead, Joan becomes fragmented, unable to find an identity she is comfortable with. Atwood underlines how Joan, throughout the novel, is unable to live with herself as she is, and only by acknowledging herself and her past, especially her previous self as an obese child, will she be able to create a new life for herself.

By repeatedly coming back to theme of borrowing, lending, stealing, and destroying of clothes in her novels, Atwood suggests not only the significance of clothes when destroying and building new identities, but also that one's identity is fluid and in constant change. While Grace tends to borrow or steal clothes belonging to other women trying to create new identities, Joan buys different outfits for her different characters and she even buries her old self by burying the clothes belonging to this self. All the same, Atwood's characters have several problems creating new personalities, and they seem to believe that they can forget their past, and that the past will forget them, by simply destroying their old clothes. The significance of this failure to become someone new is that Atwood implies the difficulties regarding the female identity and the expectations with being female. Grace and Joan want to

become someone else, but experience that they cannot escape the gender norms. They cannot live up to the demands from society, and they try to break away from the female standards, only to discover that they are inevitable.

Class

Clothing functions as a class marker in all aspects of life in general, something which Atwood stresses in *Alias Grace*. In the Nineteenth century, "[d]ress and appearance were already implicated in a hierarchy of power representing economic and social status" (Mattingly 10). One was defined by one's clothing. As a result, clothes indicated one's position in society. Interestingly, the novel is told from the perspective of a maid, a girl from the working class, who works with textile and is genuinely interested in both her own and other people's clothes, and who is aware of the effect of certain types of garments. Grace often compares her own dresses to other female characters' dresses in the novel, something which underlines Grace's own position in society. By wanting to wear the clothes of a lady, she expresses a wish for becoming a lady and escaping her own situation as a maid. With envy, Grace comments upon Nancy's clothing several times, underlining that her dresses are too elegant for a housekeeper. Nancy does not only fail to live up to the expectations of her class since she overdresses. Additionally, her fine clothing implies a relationship between herself and her master: "Nancy was in Toronto to make some purchases at a dry-goods auction down at Clarkson's stores; she showed us some very pretty crimson silk which she'd bought for a winter dress, and I wondered what a housekeeper would be wanting with a dress like that" (*Alias Grace* 232). It is not only Grace who is suspicious of Nancy's fine clothing; the towns' people also gossip about the possible romance between Nancy and Mr. Kinnear. Grace calls Nancy's "fine dresses and the gold earrings" for the "wages of sin" (*Alias Grace* 296), indicating that her garments and accessories are payment for sexual favors. Nancy moreover wants to widen the difference in class between herself and Grace. By lending Grace her clothes for only short time periods because she "was concerned that they might get soiled" (*Alias Grace* 295), Nancy demonstrates her position as the housekeeper and she illustrates her power over Grace. Flügel views it only as "natural that the wealthy should seek to distinguish themselves" (32) by wearing decorative clothes which communicates wealth. Crane, on the other hand, observes how this becomes a problem in society because clothes become "a form of social control: people were often required to dress in a certain manner that indicated particular aspects of their social identities" (67). In *Alias Grace*, Atwood observes the limitations with such a society where the lower classes continually have to act and dress according to these

rules. Nancy is fully aware of what she is doing when marking the difference between Grace and herself, and she controls Grace by underlining their difference in position.

In prison, Grace is not in the position of having her own clothes, which further underlines her restricted freedom. She no longer owns her own body. What is more, Grace comments upon the feeling of sleeping with her clothes on, saying how it "makes you tired. The clothes are crumpled, and also your body underneath them. I feel as if I've been rolled into a bundle and thrown on the floor" (*Alias Grace* 37). Only someone who is at the bottom of the hierarchy has to sleep with his or her clothes on. Grace is aware of the fact that her clothes mark her as a prisoner: "[T]he people [are] staring because it's obvious where we have come from, they can tell by my clothing" (*Alias Grace* 73). This makes Grace uncomfortable, especially since her major concern is how to make "a 'decent' presentation" (Kuhn 95). Grace mentions how "[p]eople dressed in a certain kind of clothing are never wrong. Also they never fart" (*Alias Grace* 36). With irony, Grace comments upon how people in specific garments expect to be respected, and that they have certain privileges which she does not have. However, Simon enjoys Grace's respect because of his clothes. "[M]en who are dressed in clothes like his cannot be mad" Grace thinks (*Alias Grace* 44), perhaps giving clothes and appearance too much credit. Flügel, who writes that "the decorative aspects of dress have very frequently had some connection with wealth" (32), points out that the more decorative a dress is, the more it reflects this person's wealth, and the other way around.

The clothes in *Alias Grace* further signify the class distinction between women and men. In relation to the man, "the dress of the Victorian upper class and bourgeois lady symbolized her subordinate position, symbolic of her role as 'man's chattel'" (Entwistle 161). Because clothing limited a woman's movements, she became secondary and functioned mostly as her husband's ornament. Entwistle further writes that "the Victorian woman's dress was an important indicator of vicarious leisure: the clothes made her obviously incapable of work and were testimony to her distance from productive work as well as her consumption of leisure" (162). The distinction between Grace in her "conventional dress of the Penitentiary, with a striped blue and white skirt" (*Alias Grace* 68) and the ladies who visit the Governor's wife in the house which she works, is marked by their clothes. Grace is used to wearing a servant uniform, which "indicated status boundaries" (Crane 90), and the uniform she has to wear in the Penitentiary has the same function. In addition, Grace mentions that "[t]he visitors wear afternoon dresses with rows of buttons up their fronts, and stiff wire crinolines beneath" (*Alias Grace* 23 – 24), and she asks how they are able to actually move at all. These women are restricted to "the domestic sphere" (Mattingly 8), and their clothing was a way of

controlling them, something which will be dealt with later in this chapter. What is more, Grace discovers how the gap between the clothes of the working class and the ladies of the upper- and middle class decreases during time. Leaving prison at the end of the novel, Grace is told that she looks like a "real lady, which is possible, as there is less difference in dress between maid and mistress now than there used to be, and the fashions are easily copied" (*Alias Grace* 517). It therefore becomes easier to perform a lady because of the changes in fashion, although the clothes were still used to demonstrate the differences between the genders.

Class markers in *Lady Oracle* include the navy blue suit as well as body fat, or the lack of it. As Joan says, "nobody regarded being fat as a misfortune; it was viewed simply as a disgusting failure of will" (*Lady Oracle* 90). In other words, when Joan is not able to keep her body in shape, her fat becomes a symbol of laziness in addition to being non-feminine. She is thus not as worthy in her mother's or society's eyes. Contrarily, Joan's mother Frances, with her slim body and her blue suit, is the image of a successful woman. When wanting to mark her social position in addition to her gender, Frances dresses in specific garments, and the blue suit is also the outfit she wears when haunting Joan. Joan sees her several times after her death, "dressed in her navy-blue suit with the white collar; her white gloves, hat and shoes were immaculate" (*Lady Oracle* 173). Frances' suit, along with her slender body, becomes her costume which mocks Joan's own body and style of dress. Frances establishes herself as "the perfect 1950s Woman" (Becker 162). She embodies both femininity and a high status. Atwood illustrates how Joan cannot escape the feminine ideal, and she further implies how women in general are haunted by the restricted female gender roles which still exist today. These ideals destroy one's self esteem, as they do for Joan. Frances becomes a reminder of the impossible ideals which are intertwined with the idea of being a woman. Indeed, "women learn to see themselves and other women through men's eyes, thereby becoming accidental policemen of the very power structure that excludes them" (Davies 62). Frances, who sees it as her ultimate goal to always present herself with spotless makeup and clothes along with keeping her figure under control, does not want to leave her daughter alone, and insists on transferring these values to Joan.

In Atwood's fiction, class distinctions are signified effectively by the differences in clothing. Atwood articulates how Grace, a maid in the Nineteenth century, aspires for becoming a lady since this will give her both higher social status, and she will wear clothes which make her more feminine and therefore make her more of a woman. The society in the Nineteenth century was a society were bodily differences between the genders were

exaggerated, and these differences were idealized. Grace discovers how she is marginalized because of her clothes as a maid, as Joan is marginalized because of her body fat. Interestingly, dressing in fine clothes become liberating for Grace since such clothes represents freedom for her. It also suggests that Grace cannot break free from the values of her time. Atwood complicates the subject of clothing as both restricting for women and liberating at the same time. Atwood articulates how certain class values linger in the late Twentieth century, presenting Frances as the guardian of these values with her sylphlike body, blue suit, and pearl necklace. In *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, Atwood uses clothes to demonstrate how certain garments communicate class, and how such garments often are used to oppress those who belong to the working classes, although the differences are more blurred now than in the Nineteenth century.

Femininity and Performativity

In *Alias Grace*, Atwood emphasizes how the female characters perform femininity and how they are expected to perform these roles, often with the help of clothes and underwear. Set in Canada in the 1850s, the novel reflects the fashion of the time period in Canada, and how women are othered through their clothing. In "Dress Reform in Nineteenth-Century Canada", Barbara E. Kelcey writes that women's "[s]kirts were rigid, gored, and pyramidal in shape. These skirts were supported by cage-like crinolines or hoops which were extremely difficult to manoeuvre" (230). In other words, women had trouble moving in their dresses, something which Grace also comments upon. Clothing is used as a symbol of restriction of women in *Alias Grace*. Grace reflects upon this limitation, comparing crinolines with "birdcages" which keeps women's legs from "rubbing up against the gentlemen's trousers" (*Alias Grace* 24). Women's sexuality is seen as something frightening and dangerous, and a woman must be kept in a cage of corsets and crinolines which also shape the female body. Showing one's legs was "considered improper, immoral and licentious", and that was also the reason for why women had to wear skirts and not trousers since "[r]espectability was so closely tied to sexual propriety" (Entwistle 168). Any garments which even hinted at what women had between their legs were not viewed as suitable since women were not supposed to have a sexual urge. Women's clothing was not only uncomfortable, "[t]here was also some real physical danger because the lightweight fabric from which these skirts were made was highly flammable" (Kelcey 230). Forcing women to wear garments which are in fact dangerous confine women even further. Flügel, on the other hand, disagrees when he writes, "[t]he skirt, in fact, tends, very strikingly, to increase the apparent height of the body, and adds a corresponding dignity"

(46). Flügel views the long garments which cover the legs as nothing more than making the female body more attractive, and because a woman's movements are restricted, she automatically gains a walk which communicates dignity because there is "no need to hurry" (49). However, he fails to see how the skirt makes the woman a passive object who is actually not able to run because of her clothes.

Another garment which is used to form the female body, and make the women unable to move properly, is the corset. In order to get the correct shape, the hour glass figure, tight lacing was necessary. What is more, "the correctly dressed woman wore a corset" (Kelcey 234). The idea behind corsets is further elaborated in *Alias Grace*. Although Simon finds his own clothes uncomfortable and limiting, he is thankful for not being a woman: "At least he isn't a woman, and thus not obliged to wear corsets, and to deform himself with tight lacing. For the widely held view that women are weak-spined and jelly-like by nature, and would slump to the floor like melted cheese if not roped in, he has nothing but contempt" (*Alias Grace* 83 – 84). Simon questions why women have to wear corsets, commenting upon the general view of the female body in the Nineteenth century. Grace also makes observations concerning the female body, saying that women are like "jellyfish" and that they consist of "mostly water" (*Alias Grace* 24). Atwood suggests that since the female body was physically seen as weak, comparing it with jelly, this was partly the reason for why women had to wear corsets. A woman without a corset was "considered to be morally deplorable" (Entwistle 20). Namely, the corset was also a sign of good morals in a woman, and it was hence a psychological aspect to that particular item of clothing in addition to the physical. The corset is an example of how "dress operate[s] to discipline the body" (Entwistle 20) as well as disciplining the mind. Furthermore, the medical side effects from wearing corsets were serious, and women suffered from "weakened muscles, chronic shortage of breath, and compression of the internal organs also meant constant fatigue, fainting spells, headaches, digestive problems, and general debility" (Kelcey 235). Because of women's health problems caused by their underwear, they became mentally as well as physically passive. They were unable to escape this image because of their clothing. For the Victorians, being feminine was synonymous with being pale and sickly, unable to move properly. Grace criticizes the feminine ideal in a conversation with Nancy, saying that "the young ladies nowadays were starving themselves because of the fashion, which was to be pale and sickly, and they laced their stays in so tight they fainted as soon as looked at" (*Alias Grace* 315 – 316). Women's corsets in the Nineteenth were literally cages which made them into prisoners.

In addition, the corset is further "associated with notions of propriety and restraint, on the one hand, and erotic pleasure and fetishism, on the other" (Warwick and Cavallaro 61). The corset contributed to objectify women, ironically making them into sexual objects. Even though Simon has previously discovered, when performing autopsies on women, that "their spines and musculature were on the average no feebler than those of men" (*Alias Grace* 84), he still erotizes the corseted body. Grace remarks on the corseted female body, underlining how a corset manages to form the body: "She was an imposing figure of a woman, and a very different shape out of her corsets than in them; but when she was firmly laced in, her bosom jutted out like a shelf, and she could have carried a whole tea service around on it and never spilt a drop" (*Alias Grace* 170). Atwood demonstrates how Mrs. Alderman, Grace's previous employer, has to form her body to become more similar to the ideal hour glass figure. Her body is shaped into what is considered to be respectable, but at the same time, her body becomes more sexually attractive. Grace emphasizes how her breasts "jutted out like a shelf", implying how the corset literally both "*contains* the body in order, paradoxically, to turn it into a public spectacle to which others may *relate*" (Warwick and Cavallaro 61). Mrs. Alderman's bosom becomes a spectacle when she is laced in properly. The corset frames her body as well as it exaggerates the size of her chest.

Grace discovers that clothes are linked with performance, and she is able to perform her roles with different clothing. For example, several of the male characters suggest that if Grace had worn the right clothes, she would have been able to act the part of the lady: "[I]f he put me in the right clothes and told me to hold my head high and keep my mouth shut, he could pass me off for a lady any day" (*Alias Grace* 324). This is further related with femininity, and Atwood claims that femininity is indeed a performance, and not something natural. Grace's performances are similar to drag, which Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble*. As mentioned previously, Grace performs her own gender. Butler complicates matters further when she questions the reality of gender, stating that "we think we know what the reality is, and take the secondary appearance of gender to be mere artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion" (*Gender Trouble* xxiii). Furthermore, performance and acting are mentioned several times in *Alias Grace*. For instance, Grace states that she acts the part of the servant: "I had now been a servant for three years, and could act the part well enough by that time" (*Alias Grace* 261). However, this is her only choice and had she not acted the servant when she was expected to, she would not have survived in her society. Grace plays her various parts well, in addition to performing her gender and status, which indicates that gender reality does not exist. Grace comments upon how certain gestures are linked with femininity, for example when observing

Nancy. She notices how Nancy ”bent from the hips like a lady, holding her waist straight” (*Alias Grace* 5). This movement, along with Nancy’s “pale dress with pink rosebuds and a triple-flounced skirt, and a straw bonnet that hid her face” (*Alias Grace* 5), gives the impression of Nancy as a lady according to the standards of the Nineteenth century. What is more, the women in the Nineteenth century had to relate to the image of the ideal woman. More specifically, the Angel in the House, which is a poem picturing the woman as the caretaker.

In *Lady Oracle*, Joan tries to perform the female from an early age. Already as a child, she discovers that she does not fit in, and that she is not capable of fulfilling either her mother’s or society’s standards of femininity. During her time in dancing school, Joan becomes obsessed with the different costumes she is going to wear, especially the butterfly costume with the ballerina skirt and the wings. The ballet outfit which is associated with femininity and elegance becomes a symbol of ultimate beauty for Joan as a child. Longing to wear the costume for one of the dances, with “a gauzy skirt, short, like a real ballerina’s, a tight bodice with shoulder straps, a headpiece with spangled insect antennae, and a pair of colored cellophane wings with coathanger frames” (*Lady Oracle* 45), Joan believes she will transform into a butterfly. The wings are what Joan “really longed for” (*Lady Oracle* 45) because they represent the butterfly, and are therefore “the symbolic beauty of self-metamorphosis and the desire to take flight” (Fand 179). Unaware of her obesity, Joan does not realize why she is unsatisfied with herself in the mirror: “Even I was taken aback when she finally allowed me to inspect myself in the three-sided mirror over her vanity table. Although I was too young to be bothered by my size, it wasn’t quite the effect I wanted. I did not look like a butterfly” (*Lady Oracle* 46). Joan is unable to fit into her own picture of what a butterfly should look like, and the contrast becomes even stronger together with the other girls. Looking back at the episode, Joan thinks of her body as grotesque, “a fat little girl who was more like a giant caterpillar than a butterfly, more like a white grub if you were really going to be accurate” (*Lady Oracle* 47). Because the costume looks different on Joan than on the other girls, “[t]his distinguishes and separates her from the other, ‘normal’ girls able to fulfil this part in one of the ‘appropriate plots’ designed for them by their mothers and teacher” (Becker 171). Atwood articulates what Becker is implying; that mothers and teachers instruct their daughters in the art of performing women. Joan’s mother tries to fit Joan into the costume: “My mother struggled with the costume, lengthening it, adding another layer of gauze to conceal the outlines, padding the bodice; but it was no use” (*Lady Oracle* 46). She is

unable to make Joan into her own image, symbolically presented as the mother trying to readjust the daughter's costume.

Joan wants to become the butterfly, but instead of magically transforming into one, she has to play the part of a mothball instead, which underlines the difficulties with not fitting into the ideal female form. Furthermore, a butterfly is a fragile but beautiful insect, implying how Joan craves to gain these qualities since these are associated with femininity. Miss Flegg, her dancing teacher, refuses to let Joan wear her butterfly costume, and decides that she fits better as a mothball. Joan does not live up to the expectations of a slim and feminine girl. Miss Flegg views Joan's body as something monstrous, and it should be hidden inside a ridiculing costume. The incident is indeed a "critical trauma" for Joan (Fand 179), and she is "wounded" and "desolated" when Miss Flegg forces her to "put on one of the white teddy-bear costumes the Tensies were using for their number" (*Lady Oracle* 48). With the mothball incident, Atwood comments upon the female experience through the events concerning Joan and the different costumes, implying that girls at an early age are forced to perform femininity. If they do not succeed, they are viewed as failures and othered by society. "It puzzled me that some of them seemed to like my ugly, bulky suit better than the pretty ones of the others" Joan reflects (*Lady Oracle* 50 – 51), unable to understand why the audience actually enjoys seeing her as the clown in the show. What is more, this episode foreshadows later events. As previously mentioned, the butterfly is a metaphor for a metamorphosis, and Joan goes through several changes throughout the novel. She also continues to play the clown as a teenager, desperately seeking attention from her mother. At the end of the novel, Joan visualizes she is growing wings. In her hotel room in Italy, Joan envisions herself transforming when dancing, hearing the music from the dance show she danced at when she was a child: "I remembered the music, I remembered every step and gesture … Wings grew from my shoulders" (*Lady Oracle* 334). However, this is also an illusion, and she once again discovers that she has not transformed, even though she has become slender and beautiful as an adult. Atwood articulates in *Lady Oracle* how a woman is not capable of reaching the high standards of femininity.

The ballerina costume, as well as the Fat Lady, come back to torment Joan in her adult life. The Fat Lady, who Joan first discovers at the Canadian National Exhibition, and who becomes a symbol of Joan's fear of fat, is soon a part of Joan's returning fantasies. In one of her dreams, she imagines the Fat Lady "wearing pink tights with spangles, a short fluffy pink skirt, satin ballet slippers and, on her head, a sparkling tiara" (*Lady Oracle* 102). The contrast between the Fat Lady's body and ballerina outfit makes an impression upon Joan. Besides, the

color is significant because it implies her rebellion. The Fat Lady wears pink, an indiscreet color which makes her large body even more visible. The Fat Lady violates the gender norms, not only by being fat, but also by showing off her body. Margery Fee states, "[i]f she has a true self, it is inextricably linked to the fat little girl who dreamed of being a ballet dancer, as the grownup Joan's recurrent Fat Lady fantasies prove" (37). However, it is not significant whether Joan has a "true self" or not, and there does not exist a true self according to Butler, but the main point is that Atwood observes how she struggles to adjust to the narrow versions of female identities which are determined by society.

Joan is further reflecting upon her own experience at the dancing school and her fantasies concerning the Fat Lady, picturing what her husband, Arthur would say about it:

> I knew how Arthur would analyze this fantasy. What a shame, he'd say, how destructive to me were the attitudes of society, forcing me into a mold of femininity that I could never fit, stuffing me into those ridiculous pink tights, those spangles, those outmoded, cramping ballet slippers. How much better for me if I'd been accepted for what I was and had learned to accept myself, too. Very true, very right, very pious. But it's still not so simple. I wanted those things, that fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I liked them. (*Lady Oracle* 103)

Atwood is here using irony, mocking the traditional feminist perspective. However, the question is why Joan wants the skirt and the tiara. They represent femininity, and have become too integrated with the female experience that Joan is able to free herself from it. Arthur's theory is too easy and simple for Joan. On the other hand, Joan is aware of how society is forcing her "into a mold of femininity" and albeit she would "rather dance as a ballerina, though faultily, than as a flawless clown" (*Lady Oracle* 286), her wish for being feminine signifies that she is unable to escape the patriarchal view on women rather than being an authentic wish. Afraid of becoming the clumsy clown again, Joan wants to be elegant. The clown represents her former self, the fat Joan who was not taken seriously. Another dream about the Fat Lady reveals Joan's fear of fat since fat makes her invisible to men. In her dream, the Fat Lady is dancing, slowly stripping, "but no one … whistle[s], no one … yell[s] *Take it off baby*" (*Lady Oracle* 251). Since the Fat Lady is not sexually attractive in the eyes of men, she merely becomes a joke. This fantasy mirrors Joan's own experiences and implies why Joan wants the ballerina outfit; she only feels worthy if she becomes a sexual object.

The role of the clown becomes an act which Joan repeats as a young girl. As a teenager, Joan's body and her clothes become the source of arguments between Joan and her mother. Struggling with her weight, Joan refuses to buy clothes which make her even more

invisible, against her mother's wish. "I sought out clothes of a peculiar and offensive hideousness, violently colored, horizontally striped … I was especially pleased with a red felt skirt, cut in a circle, with a black telephone appliquéd onto it. The brighter the colors, the more rotund the effect, the more certain I was to buy. I wasn't going let myself be diminished, neutralized, by a navy-blue polka-dot sack" Joan remembers (*Lady Oracle* 87 – 88). The colors of her clothes are important because they underline the fact that Joan does not want to disappear in a crowd. Her clothes provoke Frances, and Joan takes every opportunity she gets to fight back: "Once, when I arrived home in a new lime-green car coat with toggles down the front, flashing like a neon melon, my mother started to cry … I had defeated her: I wouldn't let her make me over in her image, thin and beautiful" (*Lady Oracle* 88). By refusing to become what her mother wants her to be, and dress according to her mother, Joan believes she has won the battle of her own body. Frances sees Joan as her project, but at the same time, she does not want Joan to be a pretty little girl. Although Joan dresses as a commentary to her mother's preferences and her beauty ideal, Joan's clothes also express what Joan cannot say to Frances. Joan wants her mother to look at her and to recognize her for what she is. Furthermore, Atwood comments upon the fashion industry and how "the dark dresses with tiny polka-dots and vertical stripes [are] favored by designers for the fat" (*Lady Oracle* 87). Women with bodies who do not meet the standards are often not given too many options when it comes to clothes, and their bodies are viewed as monstrous, and should be hidden. Joan rebels against this, but the result is that her mother sees her as even more monstrous than previously.

As well as dressing in bright colors, Joan develops her own walk at home which further contributes to underline her role as the clown. "I had developed the habit of clomping silently but very visibly through rooms in which my mother was sitting; it was a sort of fashion show in reverse, it was a display, I wanted her to see and recognize what little effect her nagging and pleas were having" Joan recalls (*Lady Oracle* 71). Afraid of becoming invisible, Joan deliberately does not only eat to gain more weight, she performs the role of the clumsy daughter in front of her mother. In Fand's view, Joan is "consciously fashioning herself as a buffoon by repeating her programmed mantra of how inept she is" (185). Joan does not act like the buffoon when her mother is not around, it is a performance meant for only a certain kind of audience. She puts on a mask as another attempt to make Frances notice her. Joan does not only perform a role in her mother's house, she is also acting together with her schoolmates, even though this role is somewhat different than the one she performs in front of her mother. "[D]efined by her obesity" (Rosowski 199), Joan "played kindly aunt and

wisewoman to a number of the pancake-madeup, cashmere-sweatered, pointy-breasted girls in the class" (*Lady Oracle* 93). The other fat girls at Joan's school are also acting specific characters, underlining the theme of performance in the novel. Monica, for instance, "had greasy hair, cut short and combed back, like a boy's, and she wore a black leather jacket with silver studs. At noon hour she hung out with some of the tougher, stupider boys in the parking lot … She was accepted by them, more or less, but as another boy. They didn't seem to think of her as a woman at all" (*Lady Oracle* 93). Atwood articulates the difficulties with the female identity. Because Monica does not inhabit the femininity which is seen as natural for girls, she is not thought of as a female by the other boys because "to be feminine is to be a woman" (Sanchez-Grant 79). Monica performs the boy, as well as Joan performs the buffoon. These are not "singular act[s]", but "repetition[s]" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). Atwood questions whether "being female constitute a 'natural fact'" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxxi) or not, since these girls do not live up to the expectations of being female.

Joan's major metamorphosis takes place when she decides to lose weight. Joan transforms as her fat gradually disappears: "At home I spent hours in front of the mirror, watching as my eyebrows, then my mouth, began to spread across my face. I was dwindling … The wide expanse of flesh that had extended like a sand dune from my chin to my ankles began to recede, my breasts and hips rising from it like islands" (*Lady Oracle* 122 – 123). Joan now believes that she has become "a different person" (*Lady Oracle* 141), and that she is reborn. She further wants to establish a whole new identity which fits her new body: "I was the right shape, but I had the wrong past. I'd have to get rid of it entirely and construct a different one for myself, a more agreeable one" (*Lady Oracle* 141). Her childhood has been somewhat traumatic, and she wants to forget her past and her abusive mother. On the other hand, Joan finds it appropriate to create a past for herself which is more suitable for her new look. However, "[b]ecause she looks different, she assumes she *is* 'a different person'; and she willingly sacrifices her own past to the demands suggested by her new appearance" (Rosowski 200). Rosowski implies that Joan cannot become a new person simply by losing weight and changing her clothes. One part of Joan's identity consists of getting a new wardrobe. After losing weight, Joan cannot wear the same clothes again. They no longer fit her, as her past no longer matches her body: "I'd had to discard a whole wardrobe over the year I'd been deflating" (*Lady Oracle* 135). Throwing away her old clothes marks a new beginning for her, and this action repeats itself later in her life. Because Joan believes she has successfully created a new identity partly by getting rid of her clothes, she believes she can do the same thing over again when staging her suicide and moving to Italy later in life.

In her adult life, Joan continues to create a variety of identities with the help of clothes, names, and reconstruction of her past. Joan uses several names, and the use of naming as an accessory will be dealt with in Chapter Three. Constantly afraid of her former fat self, Joan thereby constructs different personalities in order to escape the obese girl she once was. "I wanted to have more than one life" Joan says (*Lady Oracle* 141), underlining the trouble she has with accepting herself. She tries to act the "nurturing and bubble-headed wife, shy and middle-aged author of mass-market fantasies for women, kinkily sexy quondam mistress, and exotic and otherworldly cult 'poetess'" (Hite 162), but she has trouble keeping them apart. There is no option for Joan to be all these women at once, and she has to choose. Atwood is here commenting upon the restricted options for women, and how Joan desperately tries to refashion femininity in various forms since she did not live up the expectations of her mother as a child. Her costume gothic novels are part of her escape, "compensating for the lack she experiences and allowing her to compartmentalise her life" (Sceats 100). What is more, Joan creates her female protagonists as ideal women, embodying the "natural" femininity which she herself searches for but cannot find. They are described as sensual women with clothes which emphasize their typical feminine features. Their dresses are mostly made out of expensive material: "*[T]he bodice of her scarlet dress was cut low, displaying the swell of her white breasts. It was evident that the skill of Bond Street's most fashionable and expensive dressmakers had been lavished on her costume; yet beneath this veneer of civilized sophistication, her body moved with the sensuousness of a predatory animal*" (*Lady Oracle* 31). These women inhabit qualities and have gowns which Joan knows she will never wear. Furthermore, Joan often describes them in their underwear: "*She realized she was wearing nothing but her nightrail; beneath its snowy covering her breasts moved with agitation*" (*Lady Oracle* 188). Joan erotizes her characters, compensating for an erotic nature which she believes she does not have and which she imagines is equivalent with femininity.

Joan's style changes dramatically after her loss of weight, and especially after becoming a well known writer. By dressing in red and orange, she avoids becoming invisible, which is her greatest fear. Performing the part of the feminist poet, she transforms herself: "I put on my apricot velvet gown, piled my hair on top of my head with a few seductive tendrils twining around my neck, and attached some dangly gold earrings" (*Lady Oracle* 286). Joan also dresses up behind closed doors: "I would close the bedroom door, drape myself in silk or velvet, and get out all dangly gold earrings and chains and bracelets I could find. I would dab myself with perfume, take off my shoes, and dance in front of the mirror, twirling slowly around, waltzing with an invisible partner" (*Lady Oracle* 23). Her fantasies become reality

when Joan meets the Royal Porcupine, and he quickly becomes her lover. They discover they have the same passion: Costumes. They develop their own role play and dress up in different kinds of outfits. The Royal Porcupine, who has changed his name and dresses in cloaks and top hats, acts the part of the seducer, and Joan plays along. They spend their time shopping in "junk shops, combing them for vests, eight-button gloves, black satin Merry Widows and formal gowns of the fifties" (*Lady Oracle* 255). When the Royal Porcupine changes back to his birth name and shaves off his beard, wanting to live a life with Joan and without the artifices, Joan leaves him. She wants to remain in their fantasy world and not return to reality. With the character of the Royal Porcupine, Atwood suggests that the fantasy world does not exist, and although one can hide behind costumes for a certain amount of time, it is impossible to escape reality.

Grace, who lives in the Nineteenth century, observes how women from the middle- and upper class are caged inside their crinolines and corsets. Underwear restricted women's movement at that time, and their underwear also gave them severe health problems. They became fragile and passive because they were expected to dress according as such. Joan develops a fascination with costumes as a little girl, but she discovers at an early age that her body does not live up to the expectations of how a girl ought to look like. Obsessed with her fantasy world, she imagines that costumes are able to transform her into a woman, and she creates seducing women in costly costumes in her novels to compensate for what she lacks in femininity. Atwood observes how women are made in *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, and how they were forced into garments in the Nineteenth century which destroyed their physicality and therefore restricted their mentality as well. Interestingly, Atwood renders that women in the mid Twentieth century experience similar difficulties.

Fashion and Costumes

Grace is much occupied with fashion, which further underlines the importance of clothing in *Alias Grace*. When Grace is released from prison, she is partly concerned with sewing new clothes for her new self. Grace discovers that the trends have changed, and the garments she previously associated with being a lady are no longer modern: "My only regret was the crinolines; they'd gone out of fashion and now it was all wire bustles and big bunches of cloth pulled to the back, with ruchings and fringes, more like a sofa to my mind; and so I never would have the chance to wear a crinoline. But we cannot have everything in this life" (*Alias Grace* 516 – 517). Grace's reflections are similar to Joan's in *Lady Oracle*, who wants the

ballerina skirt and the tiara because these garments represent the ultimate femininity. Grace associates the crinoline with the image of being a lady.

All of Grace's belongings and clothes are stored in a box during her stay in prison, but most of it is destroyed: "There were Nancy's dresses, so pretty when fresh, now for the most part ruined, and the things I'd had from Mary Whitney; I'd prized them so much at the time and now they looked shoddy and outmoded" (*Alias Grace* 515). The spoiled clothes symbolize Grace's past and her previous identities. She does not have to play the part of either Nancy or Mary, and her new wardrobe is a metaphor for her fresh beginning and her new life. However, Grace notices how her new clothes are difficult to maneuver. Since Grace is not used to being a free woman, and thus not used to being dressed in the clothes of a lady, she has trouble acting as one as well: "Sitting down and standing up I had some trouble managing my bustle, as a thing like that takes practice, and I am afraid I wasn't overly graceful, it was like having another bum tied on top of your real one and the two of them following you around like a tin bucket tied to a pig" (*Alias Grace* 520). Grace makes fun of her new clothes, although she is finally dressed in the clothes she has desired to wear for years. Even so, she discovers how they restrict her movement, but she soon learns how to play her new role.

The emphasis on fashion in *Alias Grace* also reflects the importance of trends in the Nineteenth century. According to Entwistle, "appearance comes to stand as an important indicator of inner character, then the smallest of details can become important in fixing or establishing identity" (123). As discussed above, the corset indicates that a woman is respectable and decent, and therefore reveals a woman's character as proper. Grace and Simon are concerned with women's clothing, and several of the female characters are interested in fashion. The fashion magazine, *Godey's Ladies' Book*, was essential for every woman who was intrigued with clothes. *Godey's Ladies' Book* plays a minor role in *Alias Grace*, and Grace comments upon the fact that both Nancy and Mr. Kinnear enjoyed reading it: "'[A]lthough Mr. Kinnear always pretended it was only ladies' fripperies, he himself often took a peek at it when Nancy was not nearby, as there were things in it other than dresses; and he liked to look at the new styles of undergarments, and to read the articles on how a lady should behave'" (*Alias Grace* 370). Not only does Mr. Kinnear's reading habit confirm how underwear is often eroticized, but more importantly, Grace points out that the magazine also contained instructions for women's behavior. Kuhn complicates matters further when she writes, "[a]dvice in *Godey's* relates to a desire to be seen as a proper lady, a role that everything in nineteenth-century society urges women to be" (118). Kuhn is right when stating that *Godey's* was not only a fashion magazine, it was also a manual for women in the

Nineteenth century on how to look and behave like a lady, which was of the utmost importance.

The differences between men's and women's clothing are implied in *Alias Grace*, emphasizing how women are othered because of the constant changes in fashion. A woman from the upper- and middle class was expected to pay attention to the different trends, "each new season bringing a new line which changes the contours of the female form, in contrast to men whose dress seems frozen, their clothes unyielding to the fickleness of fashion" (Entwistle 158). Although men's clothing to some extent was uncomfortable as well, something which is underlined by Simon when he states that "he resents his trousers … and all stiff and proper clothing generally" (*Alias Grace* 83), men were not obliged to spend as much time on clothing. Flügel maintains that "the female sex is far more decorative than the male" (103). According to Flügel, women are more narcissistic because of biological differences. Flügel further writes that the dissimilarities between men and women, stating that the "whole [female] body is sexualised", but "in men the libido is more definitely concentrated upon the genital zone" (107). Therefore, "exposure of *any* part of the female body works more erotically than exposure of the corresponding part of the male" (Flügel 107). Flügel represents the masculine and patriarchal view of fashion, and *The Psychology of Clothes* reveals a view of the female body as a sexual object, equivalent to the view of the male characters in *Alias Grace*.

Writing her costume gothics, Joan spends time describing the clothing of her characters, especially the female ones. She refashions traditional gender roles in her novels, presenting women who experience restricted movement because of their dresses, similar to the women in *Alias Grace*. According to Becker, "[i]mages of the ideal feminine as well as female fantasies have traditionally formed feminine gothic texts – especially in terms of gender construction" (161). That is to say, one of the typical characteristics of gothic writing is the idea of natural femininity. The clothes are hence important since they shape the female body into a certain form which is considered to be feminine. After running away from Canada as a young woman, Joan moves to London, and gets the idea of writing gothic novels. Researching costumes, she believes that they are the key to these kinds of novels. "I thought if I could only get the clothes right, everything else would fall into line" Joan thinks (*Lady Oracle* 156), something which also foreshadows the events later in her life, when she several times tries to build a new identity with the help of a new wardrobe. "[T]he name 'costume Gothics' reflects her strong sense of the priority of clothing in the sign system in which where she herself is inscribed" Hite writes (148), emphasizing Joan's passion for clothes. Joan

dresses her characters carefully: "[T]he hero, a handsome, well-bred, slightly balding man, dressed in an immaculately tailored tweed cloak, like Sherlock Holmes's, pursued the heroine, crushing his lips to hers in a hansom cab and rumpling her *pelisse*" (*Lady Oracle* 156), and she follows the same pattern for different types of characters. Their appearance and clothing reflect who they are, or in the villain's case, what he *does* with the female character's clothing reveals that he is a villain: "The villain, equally well-bred and similarly clad, did just about the same thing, except that in addition he thrust his hand inside her *fichu*" (*Lady Oracle* 156). What separates the hero and the villain is which female body part they decide to fondle.

In her novels, Joan establishes the female characters merely as bodies through her clothing descriptions: "The rival female body had a lithe body like that of a jungle animal beneath her exquisitely stitched corset" (*Lady Oracle* 156). Interestingly, Joan uses the word "body" instead of woman, implying her view of the female body as an object. Moreover, Joan likens the female body to that of a wild animal, suggesting that she is out of control, but a prisoner behind the corset. Joan's many descriptions of breasts further underline how she objectifies women. The women either have on so little clothes that their breasts are visible: "*She realized she was wearing nothing but her nightrail; beneath its snowy covering her breasts moved with agitation*" (*Lady Oracle* 188), or their dresses are made to show as much skin as possible: "*[T]he bodice of her scarlet dress was cut low, displaying the swell of her white breasts*" (*Lady Oracle* 31). Presenting her protagonists as sexual objects, suggests her own wish for being attractive. One of Joan's female characters, Felicia, has several similarities with Joan herself. She describes Felicia as a beautiful woman with "*flame-red hair*" (*Lady Oracle* 31), the same hair color as Joan. Furthermore, Felicia is wearing "*a sumptuous costume of flaming orange silk, with blue velvet trim*" (*Lady Oracle* 193), and Joan is wearing orange and red dresses when she becomes the famous author of *Lady Oracle*. Atwood suggests that the similarities between Joan and Felicia are linked to Joan's problems with separating reality and fiction. Joan wants to be the heroine in her own life, but fails in becoming one.

The clothes in Joan's novels are often destroyed, either by accident or damaged by other characters. "*There, spread out on her bed, was her good black silk dress, viciously slashed to ribbons. Great gashes had been cut into the skirt, the bodice had been mutilated beyond repair, the sleeves were in shreds. It looked as though some sharp instrument had been employed, a knife or a pair of scissors*" Joan writes (*Lady Oracle* 130), emphasizing the violence in the action by using words like "*viciously slashed*" and "*mutilated*". The clothes are treated like a human body, which also underlines the threat of the action. Joan further

reflects upon how she has treated clothes in earlier novels: "In *The Turrets of Tantripp* someone stuffed them full of hay, like a scarecrow or a voodoo effigy, and floated the down a river. Once they were buried in a cellar" (*Lady Oracle* 132). Again, there is a foreshadowing of later events in *Lady Oracle* when Joan buries her clothes in Italy, implying how her literature and her life are intertwined. Atwood underlines how Joan has troubles with keeping her different worlds apart.

Both Grace and Joan are interested in fashion, although they express their concern with clothing differently. In *Alias Grace*, women's clothing is at the center of attention, with Grace sewing dresses for other women and for herself. The much written about magazine *Godey's Ladies' Book*, appears in the novel to emphasize how women were expected to take an interest in their appearance, and how the magazine also contained advice regarding proper behavior for women. Atwood demonstrates how society constructs rules which women have to comply with, and how these rules become part of their everyday life. Through the character of Joan, Atwood again articulates how the gender norms Grace experiences in the Nineteenth century are standards which Joan struggles with over a hundred years later. The need for a fantasy world with extravagant costumes makes itself felt in Joan's fiction where she depicts female characters as bodies with fancy clothing. The way Joan describes clothes in her novels is interesting because she tends to treat them with violence, which reflects how she treats her own clothes by for instance burying them. Joan and her difficulties with clothing is a recurrent theme in *Lady Oracle*.

The Theme of Clothing

Alias Grace and *Lady Oracle* are imbued with clothes, costumes, and fashion. Clothes are often treated in a violent manner. They are stolen, burned, or buried. Clothes are also used to demonstrate the inescapable restrictive gender norms. Women have been forced into tight corsets which destroyed their physiques as well as transforming them into passive objects. Grace and Joan keep changing their clothes and they even destroy or try to destroy their former outfits, but they fail in creating new characters to a certain extent. The characters' attempt of acting different roles and the constant change of dress imply identity as fluid. Although both women seem to believe they are able to redesign themselves, Grace succeeds to a greater extent than Joan in the end when she is able to create a new life and identity for herself as a married and free woman. However, there are several episodes where Grace as well fails in redesigning herself. The novel focuses on how she is misunderstood by the patriarchy, and how she is branded as either mad or an innocent victim, but Grace manages to

create a new life for herself. Joan, on the other hand, fails in her attempts to create a new life. Atwood illustrates the significant differences between working class and middle class, especially in the Nineteenth century, by comparing the clothes between the upper and lower class. Flügel comments upon how the wealthy ones have traditionally underlined their wealth by using decorative dress. This is evident in *Alias Grace* when Nancy demonstrates her slightly higher status in front of Grace when dressing as a lady and lending Grace her dresses for a few hours at a time. The class distinctions between men and women are also illustrated by the use of gendered clothing in *Alias Grace*, and how certain body features in women are exaggerated and how the female body is put in a cage in order to become man's accessory. Atwood articulates how women are othered in the Nineteenth century with dress in *Alias Grace*, and she renders how Joan is othered in *Lady Oracle* because of her obesity. Since society views overweight women as having lost their femininity and as unable to take care of their bodies, fat become a class marker. Another class marker in *Lady Oracle* is Frances' blue suit which is associated with the housewife from the 1950s, and which also signifies femininity. Regarding performativity, an expression Judith Butler uses in her book *Gender Trouble* where she questions the reality of gender, Atwood demonstrates how both Grace and Joan cannot escape the expectations of how to act like a woman and how clothes are part of constructing womanhood. Butler further states that gender performativity is not a choice, one merely plays the part which one is expected to play. By giving clothing such attention in her fiction, Atwood claims the importance of clothing and how these are part of shaping one's identity and gender identity. Although Atwood observes how garments are able to refashion one's character, creating new identities, her female protagonists fail to see how the expectations regarding their gender are inescapable. The significance of this failure is that society does not accept women who do not fulfill the female standards, and Atwood implies how clothing becomes a prison for women, not allowing them to break free from their restrictive garments.

Chapter 2: Textiles

> And the other quilt was called Attic Windows; it had a great many pieces, and if you looked at it one way it was closed boxes, and when you looked at it another way the boxes were open, and I suppose the closed boxes were the attics and the open ones were the windows; and that it the same with all quilts, you can see them two different ways, by looking at the dark pieces, or else the light. (*Alias Grace* 187)

> The chesterfield had a diminutive purple satin cushion at either end, and these two cushions were sacrosanct, ritual objects which were not to be moved. The chesterfield itself was dull pink, a nubby material shot through with silver threads. It had a covering of transparent plastic, which was removed for entertaining. The rug, which picked up the purple of the cushions, was also covered with a sheet of plastic, heavier in texture. The lampshades were protected with cellophane. (*Lady Oracle* 70)

As textiles are extremely important in *Alias Grace*, both regarding the narrative technique and the symbolical meaning, and because textiles plays a minor, but significant, role in *Lady Oracle*, this chapter's main focus will be on *Alias Grace*. The quilt is the most central image in *Alias Grace*, and the main discussion will therefore center on the quilt and how Atwood uses the quilt as a metaphor for her characters and as a narrative technique. Furthermore, Grace is an accomplished seamstress, and her sewing becomes her way of expressing herself. By contrast, Joan has never learned to sew, but she tries to gain her own voice through writing. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan uses costly textiles to create a fantasy world which is in stark contrast to her mother's sterile world. The quote from *Alias Grace* points out how there is always more than one side to the story, and how Atwood links quilting to storytelling. Joan's mother is concerned with dirt, and the quote from *Lady Oracle* underlines her obsession with covering her house up in plastic. Since plastic is significant for the character of Frances, I have chosen to include plastic as one of the textiles. Textiles are used to cover the female body, but the women in *Alias Grace* also use textiles as a way of communicating. In *Lady Oracle*, textiles are used as a marker for the difference between Joan's fantasy world and the real world.

This chapter will discuss the use of the quilt as a narrative technique in *Alias Grace*, comparing the quilt to the maze in *Lady Oracle*, which is interestingly also connected with textiles. In addition, Atwood's different use of scrapbooks and how they relate to textiles and the female body will be examined as well as how textiles are used as covering up and protecting what needs to remain hidden. In *Alias Grace*, Atwood constructs her female

protagonist as a quilt, emphasizing the importance of the quilt image in the novel and highlighting the complexity of Grace's identity and nature. Both Grace and Joan are excellent storytellers, and they tend to fabricate stories about their past. I have chosen not to deal specifically with the variety of quilt patterns in *Alias Grace* since critics have a tendency to focus on this aspect of the novel. However, the pattern called the Tree of Paradise will be analyzed because of its significance for Grace and the story itself.

The Quilt and the Maze

Atwood reconstructs the story of Grace Marks in *Alias Grace* through multiple discourses which not only contributes to give Grace a voice, but the novel also reflects society's view of her. The novel consists of historical documents, newspaper clips, letters, poems, Simon Jordan's thoughts, and Grace's own life story. Interestingly, Atwood uses parts of Grace's actual confessions, in addition to writing her own story about Grace, something which underlines the idea of the novel as a quilt. Furthermore, *Alias Grace* is divided into fifteen parts, each part with its own theme, and the themes are taken from quilt patterns, again stressing the importance of quilts in the novel and how all the different components are part of Grace's own personality and history. The reader is presented with texts from a number of different origins in each section, before moving on to Atwood's fictional version of Grace which is written as an interior monologue. According to Gina Whisker, "[t]he opening paragraphs both hide and reveal, using various characteristics of the literary Gothic, first person narrative and imagery" (36). Whisker is right that the use of a variety of texts in the opening paragraphs unveils and conceals Grace's mind and character. She becomes even more mysterious when the reader is presented with several possible versions of her nature, especially since Atwood uses some historical sources. Not only is the text a quilt, but it also functions as a secretive veil which Grace hides behind. The veil, which was a common headdress for women during the Nineteenth century, was both an opportunity and a restriction for women. By concealing Grace behind a veil of texts, Atwood suggests how women had to hide their voices and their bodies. I will come back to how the veil functions as a metaphor in Chapter Three. What is more, the idea that the novel is a quilt, a "patchwork of texts" (Edwards 100), stitched together from different pieces, alludes to Frankenstein and his monster, which he has sewn together from different body parts. As a result, both the text and Grace have an element of monstrosity.

The tone is personal and intimate in Grace's confessions, which makes it easy for the reader to sympathize with Grace. Atwood gives Grace her own voice and a will to speak in

her novel. As Fiona Tolan states, "*Alias Grace* seemingly enters into this same project of recovering lost female histories and giving voice to the silenced woman of the past" (222 – 223). However, Grace never reveals the truth about the murders and she is indeed an unreliable narrator. Neither Simon or the reader can fully trust Grace or whether she tells the true version of the story or not. The true version of the story does not perhaps exist at all. In Margaret Rogerson's view, "[t]he reader becomes a quiltmaker in the process of interpreting the novel, and, as with the transformations of the block patterns into a finished quilt, readings will vary according to the individual responses to the materials that have been provided" (9). Atwood does not give away all the answers in her novel, and the murder mystery is never solved. Instead, there are several different possibilities to the crime, and although various critics have tried to solve the case, Atwood's emphasis on Grace's own story underlines that the idea behind the novel is not to give a possible solution to who the murder was, but rather to paint a complex picture of a woman who has been silenced. Therefore, the quilt structure is significant because it relates to the female experience in the Nineteenth century.

For Canadian women in the Nineteenth century, quilting, in addition to other kinds of needlework, was important, and "piecing, patchwork, and quilting … became identified as specifically American feminine art forms in the nineteenth century" (Showalter 223). Although Showalter is here talking of American women, this was also the case for Canadian women. Women "hand-wove some of their materials, knit stockings and made clothing for their families. Quilts and quilting bees were still regarded as worthwhile pastimes" (Conroy 51). This is evident in *Alias Grace*, where Grace's skills as a seamstress and quiltmaker are seen as virtues and appreciated by the other women. Even today, quiltmaking is vital for many women, and Catherine A. Cerny writes that for several modern women, "[q]uiltmaking is one case in which women can draw upon a cultural 'tradition,' largely defined by women, to shape a self-hood" (119). Gaining a voice of their own was a difficult task for women in the Nineteenth century, and quiltmaking was one way for them to tell their story. Furthermore, it was expected of a respectable woman to gain these skills. Needlework therefore became their way of communicating. Because women learned their skills from their mothers or another female relative or friend, it became a tradition and part of the female identity. There were several quilt patterns for different occasions in life, and a quilt consists of contrastive pieces from different fabrics, often from used garments. This was a practical way to recycle fabrics which were not suitable for anything else. A quilt therefore consisted of memories from several different persons, and it was "an album of the female cycle from birth to death" (Showalter 230). *Alias Grace* becomes such an album of Grace's own cycle.

By contrast, *Lady Oracle* is structured like a maze, which is significant because a maze also has a certain connection with textiles. Using the retrospective technique, Atwood recreates Joan's life through episodes, letting the reader get glimpses from her past, which is similar to *Alias Grace*. In addition, there are several abstracts from Joan's novels. These episodes and abstracts function as layers of cloth, revealing Joan's story. Becker claims that the concept of a labyrinth is "a particularly suggestive concept here when seen in its mythical dimensions and in gendered perspective: Ariadne's thread leads the way out of the labyrinth – that she, as Arachne, herself has created" (157). The maze and the labyrinth are somewhat different from each other. Generally, a maze is more intricate than a labyrinth, and it is harder to maneuver through a maze. As well as in *Alias Grace*, Atwood creates a mystery concerning the main character's identity and personal history in *Lady Oracle* using textiles both as a metaphor and literally when guiding the reader through the paths of Joan's and Grace's lives.

The maze is also represented in Joan's novels which further underline the complexity of *Lady Oracle*. "*Meanwhile Felicia was lying in the shrubbery of the maze. She knew the maze was dangerous, but this very fact excited her*" Joan writes (*Lady Oracle* 317), implying her own attraction for this sophisticated system. Felicia, with her long red hair is very much like Joan herself, and when Joan is describing Felicia's fascination for the treacherous maze, she illustrates her own enthrallment. Felicia is not the only one captivated by the maze; Charlotte, who Joan describes entering the dangerous maze, does the same trick as Ariadne: "*She took the precaution of fastening one end of a ball of knitting wool, borrowed from Mrs. Ryerson on the pretext of mending her shawl, at the entrance; she did not intent to lose her way*" (*Lady Oracle* 332). Joan, on the other hand, does not have a ball of yarn and gets lost trying to find her way out of her personal maze. Furthermore, the maze and the labyrinth are typical for gothic literature, which is what Joan writes, and by constructing *Lady Oracle* as a maze where both the reader and Joan tend to get lost, Atwood adds a gothic element to *Lady Oracle* as well. According to Fand, "[t]he maze is the central metaphor of both the embedded fiction and of the framing story of her own life, suggesting a bridge between art and reality" (177). There is indeed a gradual transition between Joan's writing and Joan's life. The maze can further be compared with the quilt because the quilt is also a complex work of art which one has to guide oneself through. While critics interpret *Alias Grace* as a quilt, *Lady Oracle* is often seen as a weave with intertwining layers. The abstracts from Joan's novels and poems contribute to complicate the character of Joan and her personalities. Becker points out the comparisons which have been done between the female body and a labyrinth, and how

"[e]xcess of body thus also structures *Lady Oracle*'s neo-gothic form" (160). Atwood comments on the female body and how it is perceived even in the structure of her novels.

Looking at *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, which are both stories about women struggling with getting their voice heard in two different centuries, Atwood underlines how this is still a problem. This is a major concern for Atwood. Furthermore, Atwood uses the connection between domestic arts and women writing, and women speaking through the art of sewing. However, this is an ambiguous image since the language of sewing is often perceived as silent. Even though some may believe that they are silent, they do indeed speak. Joan, a woman of her time who is not in the least interested in sewing, marks a transition. Albeit we may believe that women are more liberated in our own society, Atwood demonstrates how this may not be the case after all. *Alias Grace* is in general compared to a quilt, and *Lady Oracle* is often associated with a gothic maze. Both novels are in several ways quilts, with a variety of different texts interwoven with each other. By using these narrative techniques, Atwood links her storytelling to an art which is associated with women, underlining how women have their own way of expressing themselves, the importance of this, and how they and their version of storytelling have been underestimated.

Scrapbooks and Photographs

Alias Grace as a novel functions as a quilt, but there are also several quilts within the novel. The scrapbook and the keepsake album are quilts, and they consist of clippings from newspapers, cloth, and pictures: "The daughters put all kinds of things into their albums, little scraps of cloth from their dresses, little snippets of ribbon, pictures cut from magazines" (*Alias Grace* 27). The technique which is used when making quilts is also used when creating a keepsake album. As a quilt is patched together by for example cloths from old dresses and other memories, a keepsake album has the same purpose. They both function as something which their creators keep as a memory of the past, and the use of fabric is essential.

The Governor's wife's scrapbook is somewhat different from her daughters'. By contrast, her book has "famous criminals in it" (*Alias Grace* 29) and the scrapbook has its special place in the parlor. Even though this scrapbook does not contain pieces of cloth, it has a shawl protecting it, which emphasizes that this is a precious item. The scrapbook belonging to the Governor's wife is a collection of crimes, a morbid contrast to her daughters' albums. Moreover, Grace is one of the objects in the book. In Whisker's view, the Governor's wife "shows a gruesome mixed desire to understand the criminal mind and its actions, and to wallow in mementoes of evil, believing that by pasting them into an annotated scrapbook they

are fixed, understood, controlled" (63). Although it is significant that the Governor's wife keeps a scrapbook of criminals, imagining that she understands them, it is crucial that she tries to control Grace, a woman. Atwood demonstrates how society tries to control women throughout the novel, and especially Grace Marks. The Governor's wife is only one of many characters in the novel who wants to understand and control Grace. She believes she knows Grace because of the all the information she has gathered. The newspapers present one version of Grace Marks, the murderess, but Grace does not recognize herself in these descriptions. In her scrapbook, the Governor's wife has unsuccessfully tried to patch together a human being. Grace becomes an object of study, a quilt which the public is trying to interpret, and she is unable to control how others paste her together. Paradoxically, Atwood is also trying to piece together a picture of Grace, but the distinction is that she is not creating a one-dimensional image of Grace, but rather presenting the different versions of her. What is more, in Atwood's fiction, she is concerned with how women are objectified, how they often have to relate to limited labels, and how society pieces them together, forgetting to look at the whole picture.

Grace wonders what she would like to put in a keepsake album: "Should it be only the good things in your life, or should it be all of the things? Many put in pictures of scenes and events they have never witnessed, such as Dukes and Niagara Falls, which to my mind is a sort of cheating. Would I do that? Or would I be truthful to my own life" (*Alias Grace* 445). In the end, she decides to be truthful, and her quilt contains pieces from Mary's and Nancy's dresses, which will always remind her of their deaths. She wants to remember them. Grace's quilt is her version of a keepsake album, or a scrapbook. In a keepsake album, the past becomes a patchwork of events. This is significant because it is one of the few clues in the novel that Grace is actually truthful when telling her tale to the reader. Grace claims that she wants to be "truthful to [her] own life", and since her account of the happenings are indeed a patchwork and is similar to a quilt, this implies that Grace is honest not only when she is quilting, but also when telling her version of the story. On the other hand, because the narrative scheme in *Alias Grace* resembles a quilt, this indicates that the truthful story does not exist since the quilt has a variety of possible interpretations.

The modern version of the scrapbook, the photograph album, appears in *Lady Oracle*, and the scrapbook is also mentioned as a symbol of Joan's own life. She even keeps her own scrapbook, containing articles and reviews of her collection of poems, *Lady Oracle*. In Italy, she imagines that Arthur will throw away this scrapbook "along with all the other scraps of me that were left on the other side. What would he keep, a glove, a shoe?" (*Lady Oracle* 36).

In this quote, Atwood indicates how different garments become significant reminders of a life. Joan has left certain pieces of herself back home, scraps which are interconnected with her character. Furthermore, Joan's mother keeps photograph albums to document her life, but she has the habit of cutting out the pieces which she does not want to remember: "[I]n all the pictures of the white-flannelled man, the face had been cut out, neatly as with a razor blade. The faces of my father also were missing. There was only my mother, young and pretty, laughing gaily at the camera, clutching the arms of her headless men" (*Lady Oracle* 179). Interestingly, it is the men who appear as objects, as merely bodies without their heads. By contrast to Grace, Joan repeats her mother's behavior when reconstructing her own past, keeping the pieces she prefers while forgetting the parts which reminds her of a life she does not want to be reminded of. The pictures of her mother also underline how Frances wants everything to be clean and spotless. This photograph album resembles the "*fotoromanzo*" which Joan buys in Italy, and where "the women and men never had their mouths open their limbs were arranged like those of mannequins, their heads sat on their necks precise as hats" (*Lady Oracle* 184). Their bodies are reduced to nothing more than stiff limbs on a photograph, and they become grotesque and mutilated. Atwood often pictures bodies as bizarre and monstrous in her fiction, mostly female bodies, demonstrating how the female body is often perceived by society.

Atwood uses scrapbooks and photograph albums to reveal how restrictive it is to relate to only one image of oneself, and how Grace is for instance reduced to an evil criminal. The Governor's wife's scrapbook becomes a metaphor for how society tries to control Grace. *Alias Grace* is a scrapbook as well, but Atwood tries to give a multifaceted picture of Grace. Grace believes that she will be true to her life in her album, something she also is when sewing her quilt at the end of the novel. Contrarily, Joan's mother redesigns her past in her photo album, the modern version of the scrapbook, by cutting off the heads in her pictures of men she wants to forget. Atwood tends to describe bodies as grotesque in her fiction, but it is often the female body which is depicted in this way. By using the image with the scrapbook, Atwood suggests how the human mind and life often consist of a variety of scraps, and how these scraps are pieced together, often in an attempt to understand the female mind. However, she is far more complex than that, something which Atwood demonstrates in her novels.

The Tree of Paradise

Through Grace's quilt, Atwood stresses the need for women to create their own voice and history. Grace has read several versions of herself and her story in the newspapers, but she has

been unable to escape society's conception of her and it is not until she is released from prison that she can rewrite history. "While I am sitting out on the verandah in the afternoons, I sew away at a quilt I am making. Although I've made many quilts in my day, this is the first one I have ever done for myself. It is a Tree of Paradise; but I am changing the pattern to suit my own ideas" says Grace (*Alias Grace* 533), emphasizing her role as a creative artist. She is not only free to sew a quilt for herself; she has the freedom to interpret the pattern the way she wants. Grace makes an interesting choice when it comes to sewing the tree because she decides that she wants to use cloths from her nightdress from the prison in addition to pieces from both Mary's and Nancy's dresses:

> 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 around each one of them with red featherstitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern. (*Alias Grace* 534)

In her quilt, Grace tries to be truthful, as she has previously promised herself. By making this quilt with pieces from Nancy's dress and her own dress from the prison, Grace wants to remember the murder of Nancy and her life in prison. Besides, the fact that Grace remembers Nancy and Mary by using cloth from their dresses in her quilt illustrates the significance of textiles in the novel, not only because of their ability to function as memories, but also because of their transformative power. Grace reworks these pieces of cloth into a quilt which is extremely valuable for her.

The Tree of Paradise is a quilt which is mentioned several times in the novel, and it is introduced when Simon asks Grace what kind of quilt she would like to make for herself. Although she does not give him a straight answer, she knows in her mind exactly which kind of quilt she would like to sew, and she has already decided how she wants to embroider the vine border: "On my Tree of Paradise, I intend to put a border of snakes entwined; they will look like vines or just a cable pattern to others, as I will make the eyes very small, but they will be snakes to me; as without a snake or two, the main part of the story would be missing" (*Alias Grace* 534). Interestingly, Grace does not want others to see the snakes, so she makes them as ambiguous as possible. What is more, she knows that these snakes will only give meaning to her, and the most important aspect of this quilt is that it reflects her life, and she is the only one who is able to truly interpret it. Other people will interpret the quilt quite

differently. This is also a comment upon the novel and Grace as quilts, underlining the many possible interpretations of Grace's story. Rogerson comments upon this quilt, saying that "[t]he image of the Garden of Eden appears in the border of the proposed quilt as well as in the central motif of the Tree of Paradise. The border encodes deceit and sexuality: as Freud claims in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, these snakes could be 'symbols of the male member'" (20). The fact that Grace sews these snakes into the quilt is also an acknowledgment of "the phallic dominance of patriarchy" (Murray 80). It further implies that Grace is now married to a man, and she acknowledges his presence in her life. Nevertheless, the snakes might not represent the male figures in Grace's life, even though critics tend to view them as phallus symbols, but another possible interpretation is that the snakes represent the evil happenings and the many deaths in Grace's life. Since Grace intends to remember both the good and the bad experiences, the snakes symbolize the unhappiness which she has gone through.

Different readers will also interpret Grace's Tree of Paradise differently. In the end of the novel, the quilt still "remains mysterious and the question remains as to whether the fabrics and the snakes represent an abject and terrified admission of guilt, an innocent desire to create a memorial to the only female friendships that she had ever experienced, or a brazen celebration of a crime for which she feels no remorse" (Rogerson 21). Several critics have questioned Grace's innocence by interpreting her last quilt as a confession. However, the question is not whether Grace is guilty or not, whether she is mad or sane, and whether the quilt reflects this madness and guilt or not, but it is simply Grace's version of herself and her story. The snakes may represent the evil happenings in her life, or they may represent the women in her life who all failed her in some way, but Grace is the only one who knows what they mean, and the reader is encouraged to find his or her interpretation. A biblical analysis of the pattern underlines the image of women as evil because they are tempted by knowledge, possibly even sexual knowledge, and Whisker writes that Grace "imagines The Garden of Eden and Tree of Paradise as patterns she can reproduce. This suggests both dangers of searching after forbidden knowledge, and ways in which Western society consistently indicts women as causing all evil" (78). The women who have died in *Alias Grace* have inhabited sexual knowledge, for example Mary and Nancy who are both sinners because they had sexual relations outside of marriage. Bailey complicates matters further when she writes, "Grace's Tree of Paradise publicly marks her apparently new sexual state; she is unexpectedly pregnant as well, another soon-to-be public sign of her sexual experience" (174). Grace is now a woman with sexual experience, although it is not certain whether she was actually a virgin before she married.

Grace is reborn through her creation of the quilt. Besides, Grace is with child, and her body is able to give life which further implies a new beginning for Grace even though she does not know whether she carries life or death. She does not want to see a doctor because of her fear of them, and she rather decides to wait and see what happens when she gives birth. Grace takes charge of her own life instead of being told what to do. Even though Grace becomes a married woman, she gives herself space to rewrite her identity and history. Albeit Murray states that Grace "is … still a prisoner, she is now the lady in the castle, the lady in waiting, waiting for nothing, sewing her life away" (81) in the end, she does not consider the importance of Grace making her very own quilt, and the fact that she is finally free to interpret the pattern as she wishes to. Grace is not a prisoner, but rather a free woman who is finally in the position of sewing her own quilt. Moreover, the very last line in the novel: "And so we will all be together" (*Alias Grace* 534), implies that Grace is longing for female companionship. The two triangles which are made of pieces of Mary's and Nancy's dresses, and the triangle made of Grace's own prison nightdress, are an allusion to the holy trinity, and Grace's quilt is her version of it. Murray claims that Grace's change of this pattern is to "to substitute a female (essentialist) Trinity for previous male ones" (80). On the other hand, the pieces from the three dresses are also an indication of Grace's three personalities, and she is now sewing them together. Atwood articulates how Grace is now piecing together herself which is noteworthy since this has been done by society a number of times, but this is the first time she has the opportunity to do it herself.

Protective Textiles

Quilts are usually used to cover a bed, and the bed is an ambiguous image in *Alias Grace*, symbolizing both life and death. Conroy stresses the coziness of the bed; "[t]o the men and women who settled Canada, the bed was a symbol of warmth, peace and security" (2). Contrarily, Grace associates the bed with something quite different, and she questions the link between bed quilts and beds in a conversation with Simon:

> [W]hy is it that women have chosen to sew such flags, and then to lay them on the tops of beds? For they make the bed the most noticeable thing in a room. And then I have thought, it's for a warning. Because you may think a bed is a peaceful thing, Sir, and to you it may mean rest and comfort and a good night's sleep. But it isn't so for everyone; and there are many dangerous things that may take place in a bed. It is where we are born, and that is our first peril in life; and it is where the women give birth, which is often their last. (*Alias Grace* 185-186)

Grace makes an interesting point here, indirectly saying that Simon might associate the bed with something relaxing because he is a man, but as a woman, Grace knows that the bed often means death since childbirth frequently killed women at that time. Sex therefore becomes dangerous for a woman because it often leads to children. Since it is women who traditionally make the quilts, it is interesting that they decorate the bed in such a manner since the bed often represents danger for them. Grace's suggestion about the quilt as a warning signal underlines how needle work has been a way of communicating for women. The quilts are "covering what cannot be said aloud" (Bailey 171). Although it is a silent signal, it is a highly visible signal which only women might understand, assuming that men associate the bed with comfort and love.

Sex is a dangerous activity in *Alias Grace*, and it is also an activity which symbolizes how men control women by penetrating their bodies. "And it is where the act takes place between men and women that I will not mention to you, Sir, but I suppose you know what it is; and some call it love, and others despair, or else merely an indignity which they must suffer through. And finally beds are what we sleep in, and where we dream, and often where we die" Grace says (*Alias Grace* 186), stressing the fact that sex might also mean rape. Sexual activities were not spoken of in the Nineteenth century, and especially not the danger of these activities. Even though Murray claims that "Grace's reading of the meaning of the quilts is one that communicates a wary, sceptical view of life" (73), Grace is only being realistic. The women Grace have known, her own mother, Nancy, and Mary, have all been sexually active, and they are all dead. Mary died as an indirect consequence of sex, and she died in bed, in addition to Grace's mother who also died in bed. In *Alias Grace*, "corpses … are predominantly female", and "[i]n each case it is a woman's reproductive ability itself that precipitates her violent death" (DeFalco 777). Grace's experiences with death are therefore connected with sexuality and the danger of beds. Through Grace, Atwood comments on how women had their own, silent language or a code to pass on crucial information to each other. Simon, as a representation for the patriarchy in *Alias Grace*, only thinks of sewing women and their work as a comforting image, and he is therefore unable to interpret their language.

In *Lady Oracle*, Frances uses textiles as protection which emphasizes her neurotic nature. The plastic which she uses to cover her furniture makes her home sterile since she tries to avoid dirt at all cost. As already mentioned, Frances has the ability to sew, although not quite satisfactory, but she is also almost obsessed with decorating projects. Likewise, she is obsessed with redesigning her daughter. Comparatively, Frances expresses herself through her decorating, another domestic art, as Grace communicates through sewing. Joan remembers

how everything had to be in place: "The chesterfield had a diminutive purple satin cushion at either end, and these two cushions were sacrosanct, ritual objects which were not to be moved" (*Lady Oracle* 70). The color of chesterfield is according to Joan a "dull pink" (*Lady Oracle* 70), and Joan marks the difference between this world and her own world with using strong colors such as red, orange, and blue. Furthermore, the sofa had:

> [A] covering of transparent plastic, which was removed for entertaining. The rug, which picked up the purple of the cushions, was also covered with a sheet of plastic, heavier in texture. The lampshades were protected with cellophane. On each of my father's feet was a slipper of maroon leather. My mother's feet and my own were similarly encased, as by this time my mother had made it a rule that no shoes were to be allowed inside the house. It was a new house and she had just finished getting it into shape; now that it was finally right she didn't want anything touched, she wanted it static and dustless and final, until that moment when she would see what a mistake she had made and the painters or movers would arrive once more, trailing disruption. (*Lady Oracle* 70)

Frances' house likens a tomb more than a home. Even her husband and daughter have to be careful when they are at home. It is indeed "a rigorous beauty regime" (Sanchez-Grant 88), both regarding Frances' and Joan's bodies, and her home. Atwood underlines how Frances covers up, not only her body, but also everything around her. The plastic illustrates Frances' cold nature, and how she must be in control of every situation. In addition, it reveals her fear of dirt and anything which does not fit into her own perfect fantasy world. In Joan's description, cleanliness is one of Frances' major concerns. Where Joan designs her fantasy world with passion and clothes it with red, orange, and blue velvet, Frances wraps every piece of furniture with an emotionless material. The plastic underlines her frigidity and implies her as dysfunctional. It is impossible to penetrate the hard surface, and Frances also makes herself untouchable. One is able to see through the plastic and the cellophane, but it is impossible to touch what lies beneath. As mentioned in the introduction, modesty is one of the reasons we wear clothes according to Flügel, and the body is hidden behind garments because of shame. Similarly, the plastic functions as a protection against Frances' shame of her body.

In both novels, textiles are used to cover up what is thought of as dirty, or to protect from dirt. Quilts are used to cover the bed as well as functioning as a narrative technique, but Atwood observes how the bed is associated with something quite different than love for women in the Nineteenth century. In *Alias Grace*, Grace suggests that one of the reasons why quilts are decorative is because they function as a warning signal for women because of the high death rate in childbirth. Although women were often silenced in the Nineteenth century,

they were indeed able to communicate with each other, and Atwood claims that quilting was one of these instruments. Textiles therefore become crucial for women, and quilts do indeed function as more than just a cover for the body. There are no actual quilts in *Lady Oracle*, but Frances uses plastic to cover her furniture to protect them from dust and dirt. Atwood underlines the frigid nature of Frances and her strict rule in the home by using plastic as an image.

Grace as a Quilt

Atwood presents Grace Marks and her story as a quilt, and several different versions of Grace are quoted in *Alias Grace*. These versions contribute to a multifaceted image of Grace. Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings* from 1853 presents one version of Grace Marks as a woman with "an air of hopeless melancholy in her face" and as someone who is "above her humble station" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 21), quoted early in the novel. This is a romanticized and sentimental description of Grace, and Atwood puts the abstract from *Life in the Clearings* together with a poem by Emily Brontë, "The Prisoner", which further contributes to the picture of Grace as a romantic and beautiful heroine: "The captive raised her face; it was as soft an mild/ As sculptured marble saint; or slumbering unweaned child" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 21). However, in the next section, named Young Man's Fancy, Atwood quotes a rather different version of Grace, also written by Moodie. Here, Grace is no longer in prison, but in a mental institution, and she has suddenly changed from the attractive but miserable captive, to a woman who is "lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiendlike merriment" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 51). Susanne Moodie was not the only one who wrote about Grace Marks; William Harrison presents yet another version of Grace in his "Recollections of the Kinnear Tragedy", also quoted in *Alias Grace*: "Grace was of a lively disposition and pleasant manners" (qtd in *Alias Grace* 213). James McDermott presents Grace as a "pretty girl, and very smart about her work, but of a silent, sullen temper" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 273). The confessions of Grace do not reveal much about Grace, and it is not possible to know whether she has been told by her lawyer what to say, or if she actually speaks the truth. However, the fact that Grace states that she suspected a sexual relationship between Nancy and Mr. Kinnear, and that she was "determined to find it out" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 273), reveals Grace as a curious woman, settled on exposing the two lovers. The newspaper clips describe Grace as one who is aware of her own guilt: "The girl, instead of exhibiting any traces of broken rest and a guilty conscience, appears quite calm, with her eye full and clear as though she slept sound and undisturbed" (qtd. in *Alias Grace* 403). The result of portraying

Grace as a beautiful prisoner, a heroine, a cold-hearted murderer, a hysterical woman, and a clever and well brought up girl is a rather confusing picture of both the historical and the literary character of Grace Marks. By presenting Grace as a quilt of contradictory personalities, Atwood comments on how women have usually been portrayed, and how restricting these categories are. Grace is viewed as either a mad temptress or a stunning innocent victim. However, by letting Grace tell her own story with her own words, Atwood emphasizes how a woman has more complexity to her than what was believed.

In the novel, Grace is aware of the different versions that exist, underlining Grace's own confusions regarding her identity:

> I think of all the things that have been written about me – that I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will and in danger of my own life, that I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder, that I am fond of animals, that I am very handsome with a brilliant complexion, that I have blue eyes, that I have green eyes, that I have auburn and also brown hair, that I am tall and also not above the average height, that I am well and decently dressed, that I robbed a dead woman to appear so, that I am brisk and smart about my work, that I am of a sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper, that I have the appearance of a person rather above my humble station, that I am a good girl with pliable nature and no harm is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot. And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once? (*Alias Grace* 25)

Grace is having trouble recognizing herself in the different descriptions, and she wonders who is actually hiding behind these stories. Other people are constantly confusing her with their own interpretations of Grace, and these studies affect her. Even so, Grace also knows how to take advantage of this, and "[b]y appropriating the voices around her, Grace disrupts the boundary of her self, undermining attempts to define her" (Tolan 231). Grace does not want to be defined, and in addition, she "slips away from the reader" (Tolan 228), and the people around her, especially Dr. Simon Jordan. Tolan is right that Grace refuses to be defined, even by the reader. Atwood wants to give Grace a voice, but Grace renders that she does not want to be reduced to an object. In a letter from Dr. Samuel Bannerling to Simon, Bannerling describes Grace as "an accomplished actress and a most practised liar" (*Alias Grace* 81). Dr. Simon Jordan's image of Grace changes throughout the novel. Interestingly, Simon sees a drawing of Grace before he meets her in the flesh, and the woman he sees in the picture is a handsome woman. However, Simon believes that she must have changed, and that she has become "more dishevelled; less self-contained; more like a suppliant; quite possibly insane"

(*Alias Grace* 67). The same drawing that Simon first encounters is the same drawing that the reader is presented with in the very beginning of the novel. The effect is that the reader gets an impression of what Grace looked like in real life, and the literary character and the historical person blend together. However, whether the reader can actually trust the artist, is doubtful. The first time Simon meets Grace, he sees "a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon" (*Alias Grace* 68), but the light has deceived him. When Grace steps out from the dark corner, she changes. Suddenly, Grace is "straighter, taller, more self-possessed" (*Alias Grace* 68). Simon has one image of Grace before meeting her, but she never stops changing.

Atwood suggests that identity is unstable and fluid by presenting all the different versions of Grace Marks. Tolan complicates matters further when she writes, "Grace uses multiplicity as a defence against a world that seeks to define and limit her, and the competing texts of the novel reflect the unstable composition of Grace's character" (230). Even though Reverend Verringer is clearly outraged by the thought of the human as something which is stitched together when he declares: "'We cannot be mere patchworks!'" (*Alias Grace* 471), Atwood presents Grace as a quilt, implying that humans are indeed patchworks. Simon reflects upon this possibility, thinking "how cunningly spirit and body are knit together. A slip of the knife and you create an idiot. If this is so, why not the reverse? Could you sew and snip, and patch together a genius?" (*Alias Grace* 217). It is significant that Atwood uses the word "patch" here, which further underlines the similarities between a quilt and a human mind. Simon's questions cannot only be associated with Doctor Frankenstein and his monster, something which is underlined by Simon's own profession and the fact that Grace is often seen as a monster, both by other people and herself, but when he further thinks about the brain, "that shadowy central den where the human bones lie scattered and the monsters lurk" (*Alias Grace* 217), he suggests that there is a potential monster within everyone. Grace is several times linked with a monster, and she wonders whether she should present herself like the media presents her: "My hair is coming out from under my cap. Red hair of an ogre. A wild beast, the newspaper said. A monster. When they come with my dinner I will put the slop bucket over my head and hide behind the door, and that will give them a fright. If they want a monster so badly they ought to be provided with one" (*Alias Grace* 36). Here, Grace's hair becomes a sign of monstrosity, something which is hiding under her cap, just waiting to come out. Not only is Grace othered through all the dissimilar descriptions of her, the newspapers transform Grace into the monstrous other. Tolan points out that "Grace's different versions of herself take on an independent reality" because she is "[g]rown accustomed to the

appropriation of a multitude of masks" (229). Grace becomes a patchwork, consisting of different patterns and colors, and it depends on how the reader interprets her. Grace is a pattern, and Atwood implies that there is not one truth, but many.

Grace knows how to present herself, and how to make use of the versions that exist of her. In her conversations with Simon, she carefully decides which part of the story she wants to tell him. In the end of the first chapter, Grace states: "This is what I told Dr. Jordan, when we came to that part of the story" (*Alias Grace* 7), something which implies that what follows is only one part of the story, and Atwood questions whether there really is a true story. During one of Simon's visits, Grace sees that Simon is "looking forlorn", and because she wants to please him, she tells him she has "dreamt about flowers" (*Alias Grace* 281). However, there are several details she does not tell him: "I said that they were red flowers, and quite large, with glossy leaves like a peony. But I did not say that they were made of cloth, nor did I say when I had seen them last; nor did I say that they were not a dream" (*Alias Grace* 281). Grace later declares that she wants Simon to bring her a radish, and she gives him an interesting story to show her gratitude: "Because he was so thoughtful as to bring me this radish, 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" (*Alias Grace* 286). Since Grace reveals that she sometimes adds more interesting details, Grace does not become a trustworthy narrator, and it is therefore uncertain whether Grace tells the truth to the reader, or if there is a truth at all. However, she is embroidering the truth like embroidering a quilt. In the afterword, Atwood writes that "[t]he true character of the historical Grace Marks remains an enigma" (*Alias Grace* 539). The literary character of Grace Marks remains an enigma as well.

The title, *Alias Grace*, implies that Grace is sewing together an alias. According to Bailey, Grace "brilliantly pieces together an alias that others will interpret as innocent and virginal" (172). In other words, it was not Mary who died, but Grace, and Mary has taken over Grace's identity. She is revealed at the hypnotism, and "until Mary surfaces at the hypnotism, we believe that Grace is gradually exposing her lost, inner self rather than artfully concealing herself under a textual quilt" (Bailey 172). On the other hand, it is also possible that Grace has a "split personality" and a "double consciousness" (Edwards 107). When Simon, Reverend Verringer, and DuPont are debating Grace's condition, Verringer suggests that Mary has "'been inhabiting the body of Grace Marks'" (*Alias Grace* 470), but DuPont claims that Grace consists of "'two persons'" (*Alias Grace* 471). Edwards comments upon this, saying that Grace "is so haunted by Mary Whitney that she has become Grace's double"

(107). However, the conversation between the three male intellectuals illustrates their need to make a case out of Grace, and to give her possible condition a name. When Bailey and Edwards develop these arguments, and claim that Mary has become Grace, or indicate that Grace has multiple personalities, they do not read this discussion as a critique. The three men represent the patriarchy, and Atwood shows how they other Grace and try to fit her into a category. It is also possible that the hypnotism of Grace is nothing more than an act, something she will not disclose to either the reader or to Simon, and she "uses multiplicity as a defence against a world that seeks to define and limit her" (Tolan 230). Grace refuses anyone to interpret her. Atwood uses Grace as a representation for women, and articulates how Grace rebels against the patriarchy and insists on telling her story the way she chooses.

Seamstresses and Storytellers

Throughout *Alias Grace*, Grace's skills as a seamstress are emphasized, and her talent draws attention to the importance of clothing and textile in the novel. In her book, *The Desire to Desire*, Doane writes about the movie *The Letter*, where a woman, "Leslie Crosbie (Bette Davis) is accused of murdering a man but the 'story' she tells – a story which everyone initially believes – is that the man sexually attacked her and she shot him in self-defense" (110). The interesting aspect of this movie is that Leslie is a lacemaker, and although making laces is different from sewing quilts, both lacemaking and quiltmaking are crafts which are associated with women. As quiltmaking is of great import in *Alias Grace*, lacemaking in *The Letter* "clearly signals a form of narrational power for the woman. For lace figures the intricacy of the woman's story" (Doane, *Desire* 110). Leslie is narrating her own story through her lacemaking. What is more, both Leslie Crosbie and Grace Marks are able express themselves through needlework. According to Doane, "[t]he lace signifies Leslie's control – her control over her own image" (*Desire* 110). Grace is unable to control her own image because there are so many different versions of her, but by making her very own quilt in the end of the novel, she takes charge of her life and her own identity.

The image of Grace as a seamstress has several functions. The fact that Grace is constantly sewing for other people underlines her position as a servant, someone who preferably should not be heard or seen: "Today I will finish the last block for this quilt, after this the blocks will all be sewn together and it will be quilted, it is meant for one of the Governor's young ladies" (*Alias Grace* 112). Her position as someone whose voice is not important or interesting is established from the beginning of the novel. Nevertheless, her skills are appreciated by several of the other women in the novel, both employers and friends:

"[T]hey don't use me for the quilting, only for the blocks because it is such fine work, and the Governor's wife said I was thrown away on the plain sewing such as they do at the Penitentiary, the postbags and uniforms and so forth; but in any case the quilting is in the evening, and it is a party, and I am not invited to parties" (*Alias Grace* 112). Grace is not only a skilled quiltmaker. One of the ladies, Miss Lydia, comments upon Grace's skills: "'Grace has remarkable abilities as a dressmaker'" (*Alias Grace* 99). Although Grace is trusted with the fine work, she "is also painfully aware that she cannot be included in the larger community of a quilting bee, due to her criminal and sexual past as well as her class" (Bailey 171). Grace becomes an outcast, and critics have remarked on how Grace misses female companionship, something which she gains in the end when she sews together pieces from her own, Nancy's, and Mary's dresses. The quilt brings them together.

Quiltmaking and other kinds of needlework also have a different function, which contributes to the complexity of the novel. Quiltmaking is seen "historically as therapeutic" (Whisker 33), something which is also evident in *Alias Grace*. Rogerson states that quiltmaking "is clearly presented as a therapeutic activity during her sessions with Simon" (7). When Grace is talking to Simon, she is "sitting in the sewing room, at the head of the stairs in the Governor's wife's house, in the usual chair at the usual table with the sewing things in the basket as usual" (*Alias Grace* 71), and she is always sewing during their conversations. This is interestingly Simon's own wish: "Dr. Jordan has told them that what he wishes is an atmosphere of relaxation and calm, it is more conducive to his purposes whatever they may be, and so he recommended that I was to be kept in the same daily routine as much as possible" (*Alias Grace* 71). Atwood comes back to the image of Grace sitting in sewing room in the Governor's wife's house a number of times, and it is this image which also recurs in Simon's fantasies about Grace. Atwood underlines the importance of her artistic talents and Grace as an artist by presenting her as a proficient needlewoman. But it is not only a calming and therapeutic activity for Grace to sew while Simon is trying to "crack [her] open" (*Alias Grace* 357), as he puts it. "The image of Grace as a needlewoman is both soothingly domestic and seductive" (Rogerson 7 – 8) for Simon. Simon finds himself attracted to Grace, and her skills as a seamstress contributes to his image of her as an appealing woman: "She was threading the needle now; she wet the end of the thread in her mouth, to make it easier, and this gesture seemed to him all at once both completely natural and unbearably intimate" (*Alias Grace* 105). For Simon, Grace's needlework becomes erotic, and he also becomes a witness to a different world than his own, which makes Grace's actions even more exciting.

Sewing is further linked with writing in the novel. Grace writes her story through quilting. According to Whisker, "Grace's construction work resembles that of women writers, suggesting artifice. Her quilt is a creative product, so too is her story. Quilting connotes sisterhood and speaking out, coded patterns, the opposite of clear messages" (33). Although Grace does not belong to a sisterhood in the novel, except for her friendship with Mary, she is concerned with the codes in the different quilt patterns. Rogerson points out the similarities between quiltmaking and writing, saying that "a patchworker selects small pieces of fabric and sews them together to make a whole; and a writer begins with ideas or images and eventually produces a finished text" (13). Grace carefully selects which parts of her story she wants to tell Simon, like she carefully sews a quilt or a dress, deciding which colors and fabrics to use. Furthermore, Grace associates telling stories to selecting pieces from a rag bag: "I could pick out this or that for him, some bits of whole cloth you might say, as when you go through the rag bag looking for something that will do, to supply a touch of colour" (*Alias Grace* 410). Atwood suggests that Grace is holding back parts of her story, not wanting to reveal too much. It is Simon's and the reader's job to interpret the different fragments she chooses to present. Rogerson compares Grace to Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey*, "who staves off her suitors by delaying the completion of her tapestry, Grace contemplates prolonging her meetings with Simon by presenting him with more pieces of story" (19). Grace knows how to trigger Simon's curiosity, which implies that she wants him to keep coming. Grace's lawyer Kenneth McKenzie, "sees her as a Scheherazade, telling stories where truth or falsehood is irrelevant" (Rogerson 19). Scheherazade, who is the storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, tells her stories in order to survive. Grace has to tell her tales to get attention from Simon, but it is also an opportunity for her to speak. The fact that Grace is such a talented seamstress implies that she is a good storyteller. During her nights together with her husband, Grace tells him stories as well, but although Grace functions as a storyteller with her husband, she does not tell her tales willingly. It is rather Mr. Walsh who insists on this: "He likes to picture the sufferings … and nothing will do but that I have to tell him some story or other about being in the Penitentiary, or else the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto" (*Alias Grace* 530). Even though this situation mirrors Grace's conversations with Simon, the difference is that Grace does not enjoy her role. The main reason is because she feels forced to do it.

Joan is not a seamstress as Grace is, but she is indeed a weaver of stories. As a writer, Joan is actually "weaving imaginative constructs, spinning tales" (Greene 180) when composing her costume gothics and her poems. However, she does not dare to publish her costume gothics under her birth name because she does not want her name to be associated

with them, and she is afraid of what her husband might think about her novels. "What was he going to think about it, this unhappy but torrid and, I was feeling now, slightly preposterous love affair between a woman in a boat and a man in a cloak, with icicle teeth and eyes of fire?" Joan wonders (*Lady Oracle* 226), troubled by the thought that Arthur might judge her collection of poems and this new side of her which she has not shown before. Joan's publishers treat her like a product, focusing on the possible sales of the book rather than the importance of the actual content. Moreover, Arthur even wants to look over the poems for her, indirectly trying to silence her voice. This is a comment on the struggles with being a female artist, and how patriarchy reduces women to objects whose voices they are not interested in hearing. Furthermore, Joan is not only a writer of fiction, she even rewrites her own past, recreating it along with designing a diversity of personalities, spinning even more tales. Joan's different lives become a maze which she is not able to escape from. She admits that she has "fabricated [her] life" (*Lady Oracle* 150), and the word "fabricated", which is close to the word "fabric", emphasizes the importance of textiles in the novel. Joan is an expert of coming up with a variety of stories, but she fails when trying to live the lives she has constructed. The lives she create for herself become a weave because they are all interconnected, which is also similar to the idea regarding laces and lacemaking, but Joan does not have success when it comes to being in control of her own image. Although "weaving also has mythological associations with female knowledge and power" (Greene 180), Joan fails when trying to gain this power. She is unable to keep her characters apart, suggesting the difficulties for women to find their place in society when they are not capable to fit into certain roles.

Sewing women do appear in *Lady Oracle*, but it is mostly women who fail in their sewing. By failing in this domestic art, they consequently do not succeed in being women. Joan presents the women in her costume gothics as inhabiting the perfect femininity; they constantly look beautiful and graceful, and they are also pictured with some kind of needlework: "*She'd been sitting alone in the schoolroom, working on the piece of crewelwork she kept for her few leisure moments*" (*Lady Oracle* 162). In Joan's fantasy world, she gives her female heroines the attributes she wants to have. Sewing is also significant when it comes to Frances. As mentioned in Chapter One, Joan's mother sews her daughter costumes for her dance performance, but Frances is unable to transform Joan into a butterfly with her sewing skills. Because Frances dislikes sewing, it implies that she is unable to gain a voice of her own. What is more, Atwood is mocking the image of the classic accomplished woman by letting Joan visualize the Fat Lady be a knitter: "I used to imagine the Fat Lady sitting on a

chair, knitting … She was knitting a scarf, for one of her relatives who had known her from a child and didn't find her strange at all" (*Lady Oracle* 90). The Fat Lady becomes a grotesque imitation of the perfect housewife in *Lady Oracle*. Knitting, a typical pastime nowadays, is still associated with women. Several of the women which appear in Joan's imagination are doing some kind of needlework, underlining that needlework is one of the qualities which Joan associates with femininity. Through Joan, Atwood suggests how Joan cannot escape from the typical gender roles. As Simon finds it calming to watch Grace sew, the image of a knitting woman is soothing as well, but the fact that the woman Joan pictures is overweight disrupts this image because this is not what a woman ought to look like. In society's view, the Fat Lady is a freak, and Joan often feels like a freak herself because of her oversized body. She states several times that she cannot sew, and in school she refuses to take Home Economics because of the shame of her own body: "How could I possibly sit there, sewing a huge billowing tent for myself, while the others worked away at their trim tailored skirts and ruffled blouses?" (*Lady Oracle* 209). What is therapeutic for Grace becomes a nightmare for Joan.

Joan writes of costly textiles in her novels to escape from the real world. Joan discovers her fascination with velvet already as a child. "The stage was cramped and hollow-sounding but was redeemed by velvet curtains, soft purple ones; I felt them at the first opportunity" Joan remembers (*Lady Oracle* 47), revealing not only the appeal to this soft material, but also an attraction to the stage and the imaginative world which takes place on a stage. Previous the dance performance, Joan uses the bathroom curtain to wrap herself when practicing her dancing. Atwood implies how Joan has to have a costume to be able to perform. The different textiles surrounding Joan mark the difference between her fairy tale world and the real world. In her novels, she dresses her heroines, as discussed in Chapter One, in expensive dresses. The cloth is mostly silk or velvet: "*Felicia … was wearing a very costly morning costume of blue velvet, trimmed with white ostrich feathers at the throat and cuffs, with a dashing hat to match. Her hands were concealed in an ermine muff*" (*Lady Oracle* 127 – 128). Trying to create some of her fantasies in her daily life, Joan dresses up in garments with strong colors: "Now I began to regret my closet, my red-and-gold sari, my embroidered caftan, my apricot velvet gown with the ripped hem" (*Lady Oracle* 22). These colors distinguish themselves from her mother's navy blue suit and pink furniture. Joan even creates her own world in her bedroom: "I would close the bedroom door, drape myself in silk or velvet, and get out all dangly gold earrings and chains and bracelets I could find" (*Lady Oracle* 23). By contrast, she chooses a whole different kind of fabric when playing the tourist

in Italy. Joan describes her dresses as shapeless, and one dress is for instance "white … with gray and mauve lozenges on it" (*Lady Oracle* 26). Even a tablecloth is used when Joan constructs a fantasy, but she discovers how reality is inescapable: "The lace tablecloth in which I waltzed with him was turning itself back into a lace tablecloth, with a rip in it" (*Lady Oracle* 267). The spell has broken, and Atwood illustrates how Joan fails in retaining her fantasy world.

In *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, creativity is vital for the female protagonists. Having troubles with finding their place, living up to various expectations and the difficulties with finding their voice, are issues which are expressed through their art of work. Grace tells her side of the story through her quilting, and Joan voices her problems through writing. Atwood is concerned with the female voice in her novels, demonstrating both women who manage to gain a voice and women who fails. Furthermore, Grace and Joan are weavers of stories and they carefully spin tales, which Grace also associates with quilting. By giving Joan the ability to write, and not to sew, Atwood does not only mark the differences in time, but she also gives Joan a profession which has previously been associated with men. Consequently, Joan fails in her femininity even when it comes to her profession. Grace is admired for her needlework, which has an erotic effect on Simon, underlining how men have failed to see the value of this art, merely reducing women to objects. However, Atwood claims the importance of creativity for women, and how art helps them in voicing their opinions.

The Theme of Textiles

Atwood uses textiles in her novels for several reasons. In *Alias Grace*, textiles and sewing are essential for the narrative. Atwood articulates how women are categorized and othered by society, and she creates female characters who struggle with society's expectations to emphasize the difficulties with being comfortable with their identity and gender. In Atwood's novels, the theme of female experience and being a female artist is expressed through the art of sewing and writing. Through the multiple discourses in *Alias Grace*, Atwood presents different versions of Grace Marks, and she gives Grace space to tell her version of the story. Grace, who is an excellent seamstress, experiences how she is able to express herself through her quilting. However, the patriarchic society does not value Grace's way of telling tales. By contrast, Joan tries to communicate through her writing, and although Atwood gives Joan the chance to tell her side of the story as well, Joan struggles with voicing her opinions. While *Alias Grace* is a quilt, *Lady Oracle* has been associated with a maze by several critics. *Lady Oracle* consists of layers of texts, and even Joan tends to get lost in her own story. Another

version of the quilt is the scrapbook, where the young women collected their memories in the Nineteenth century. When Grace discovers the Governor's wife's scrapbook, which consists of several newspaper clips about Grace, Atwood demonstrates how this scrapbook contributes to limit Grace, and make her the other because society wants to understand her. Atwood further claims that the human mind is a patchwork, and that identity is fluid. The photograph album becomes a modern version of the scrapbook in *Lady Oracle*, but Frances' albums consist of only selected pieces of the truth. By cutting off the heads of various men, Frances chooses what she wants to remember and not. In *Alias Grace* and *Lady Oracle*, Atwood also make use of textile to cover up what is often left unsaid, as for instance the dangers of sex for women in the Nineteenth century. Grace imagines the quilt on the bed as a warning flag, which further emphasizes quilting as a means for women to communicate with each other. In *Lady Oracle*, there are no such flags, but plastic is instead used to protect from dirt and to stress Frances' regime at home. What is more, textiles signify Joan's fantasy world, and she tends to dress her heroines in costly textiles such as satin and velvet in order to escape from her mother's world of plastic. By the use of textiles in her literature, Atwood draws attention to the world of women. Textiles are used as a metaphor, as a narrative technique, and to describe the female mind.

Chapter 3: Accessories

> Without my magic cloak of blubber and invisibility I felt naked,
> pruned, as though some essential covering was missing. (*Lady Oracle* 141)

> It was only my mother. She was dressed in her trim navy-blue
> suit with the tight waist and shoulder pads, and her white hat and
> gloves. Her face was made up, she'd drawn a bigger mouth around
> her mouth with lipstick, but the shape of her own mouth showed
> through. She was crying soundlessly, she pressed her face against
> the glass like a child, mascara ran from her eyes in black tears. (*Lady Oracle* 329)

> *Murderess* is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell
> to it, that word – musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase.
> Sometimes at night I whisper it over to myself: *Murderess, Murderess*.
> It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor. (*Alias Grace* 25)

Accessories are an essential part of the outfit, and different accessories contribute to a consistent impression of one's identity which is expressed through clothing. During the Nineteenth century, "the true symbol of ladylike elegance was the correctness of every detail of the costume for each particular occasion; in this the face played but a minor part" (Cunnington 460). In other words, to be able to play the part of the lady, it was not only enough to have the proper clothes, the accessories were just as important. It was also expected by society to be correctly dressed according to social status and gender, which is to some extent true in modern society as well. One of the differences between the Nineteenth century and modern society is the importance of makeup, which has become a necessity for women today, something which is evident in *Lady Oracle*. Accessories are more than gloves and shoes. I have chosen to include names, sheets, veils, capes, hair, and makeup in my discussion of accessories in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. For example, Joan uses names as accessories in *Lady Oracle* to complete an identity in addition to the clothes she wears. The name of Grace is interesting because of its many different associations, and the name contributes to a multi-faceted picture of Grace Marks.

The quote from *Lady Oracle* illustrates how Joan's own flesh becomes an imaginary cloak, an accessory she realizes she misses when she loses it since it offers protection. What is more, Atwood observes how Joan's mother is obsessed with being perfectly made up in the second quote. Frances' makeup becomes a mask which she hides behind. In the quote from *Alias Grace*, Atwood demonstrates how Grace is named by the public and how she involuntary has names attached to her, as accessories which are forced upon her. In addition,

gloves have been a signifier of class and femininity, and Atwood comments upon this in both novels, particularly in *Alias Grace* where Grace views the glove as a symbol of the ultimate femininity. Furthermore, this chapter will focus to a greater extent on the use of accessories in *Lady Oracle* than in *Alias Grace* since accessories are more important in *Lady Oracle*. This chapter will deal with gloves and how they for example signify femininity and class, how capes and cloaks are used as masks and to underline masculinity, how veils and sheets are textiles which cover up the grotesque female body, and the significance of the shoe image. Moreover, the importance of names as accessories will be addressed, as well as hair and makeup. The accessories enrich the two texts, and Atwood uses accessories to demonstrate gender roles as restricting, and how the female body must be covered up and improved. Certain accessories are heavy with symbolism, which make them worth investigating since they not only broaden the understanding of the literary characters, but also regarding the time and place where the novels are set.

Gloves

In *Lady Oracle*, gloves symbolize class and femininity, and gloves are especially significant for the character of Frances Delacourt, Joan's mother. Albeit gloves in *Lady Oracle* do not signify the exact same meaning as in *Alias Grace*, partly because of the differences in time periods, gloves are also a sign of class in *Lady Oracle*. Frances' white gloves become a trademark for her, another accessory which contributes to her image of perfect femininity. Frances materializes from time to time after her death, and whether this is just Joan's imagination or if it is actually Frances' astral body is unclear, but nevertheless, Joan always sees her "dressed in her navy-blue suit with the white collar; her white gloves, hat and shoes were immaculate" (*Lady Oracle* 173). This version of Frances reappears throughout the novel, haunting Joan, but Joan is not the only one who sees Frances in this costume. At Joan's wedding, even a stranger suddenly spots Frances without knowing who she is: "'She's a young woman, she's unhappy, she has on white gloves'" (*Lady Oracle* 205). Although Joan does not comment upon this incident, it is clear that it can be no one else but her mother. The gloves become an important part of the outfit, as they are in *Alias Grace*, but by contrast, they function more as a symbol for especially Frances' fear of filth and fear of touching in *Lady Oracle*, an anxiety which Atwood emphasizes by letting Frances cover up her home in plastic as discussed in Chapter Two. As she wants her house to be spotless, she wants her hands to be immaculate. Gloves become an accessory which is primarily interconnected with Frances, and not absolute necessities for a proper lady.

Joan takes every opportunity as a teenager to dress quite the opposite from her mother's wishes, but she actually starts wearing clothes which her mother would have approved of when she begins her new life with her transformed body. When dating Arthur, she for example wears gloves, just as her mother did: "I attributed my success not to the fact that the lobby was empty, but to the white gloves I'd worn as a symbol of adulthood and social status. 'A lady never goes out of the house without putting on her gloves,' said my mother. Aunt Lou lost gloves continually" (*Lady Oracle* 136). Significantly, the white color of her gloves, identical to the color of her mother's gloves, implies that she is unable to escape her mother's influence, although she imagines she has. Furthermore, as Joan mentions, the gloves are a symbol of her maturity, in addition to being a symbol of status. The comment made upon her aunt Lou, who once again is described as violating the codes of femininity, further underlines the differences between Frances and her sister. Louisa's nonchalant treatment of her gloves symbolizes her revolt against the expectations of how a woman ought to behave. Louisa will not cover up her body parts, as Frances believes to be appropriate, neither will Louisa become invisible. Another minor character who, like Frances, uses gloves to emphasize her status is Mrs. Symons who works at the place where Joan and Arthur get married: "The door was opened by a tiny old woman in pink gloves, pink high-heeled shoes, a pink silk dress and a pink hat decorated with blue cloth carnations and forget-me-nots" (*Lady Oracle* 201). The color underlines her femininity in an over the top manner, and her gloves are indeed an essential part of her outfit.

One of the most central accessories in *Alias Grace* is also the glove, which signifies both class and femininity. In the Nineteenth century, accessories were vital, and according to Crane, "[t]he character of a woman's wardrobe was influenced considerably by the types of accessories she was able to use. A stylish appearance was the result of adding items" (51). Atwood stresses the importance of gloves for women in the Nineteenth century through Grace, who considers gloves to be especially precious. Grace reflects society's evaluation of these items. Throughout the novel, her biggest wish is to have her own gloves. Looking down at her naked hands in the beginning of the novel, they reveal her position as a woman from the working class: "I have my hands folded in my lap the proper way although I have no gloves. The gloves I would wish to have would be smooth and white, and would fit without a wrinkle" (*Alias Grace* 23). White is the color of innocence, and the fact that Grace wants to cover up her hands, contributes to the idea that Grace wants to stitch together her virginity again, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Because she wants gloves, and especially white ones, indicates that Grace is guilty of murder. She wishes her hands were clean, and she wants to

start afresh. On the other hand, Atwood's intentions with *Alias Grace* are not to reveal either Grace's innocence or guilt, but rather to give voice to a woman who has previously been silenced. Therefore, Grace's cravings for gloves might not signify her bad consciousness. In the end of the novel, Grace is finally in the position where she can wear her own clothes, which emphasizes the fact that she is now a free woman. She states that she "always wear gloves to town" (*Alias Grace* 529), a personal triumph for Grace. Interestingly, Flügel states that "Europeans, among whom the veil has never enjoyed more than a decorative or symbolic significance, and to whom the face, together with the hands, has usually been the region which is freest from the sense of shame" (67). Thus, according to Flügel, there should have been no need to cover the hands with gloves. However, the fact that gloves were a crucial part of the outfit for a lady implies that hands are parts of the body which needs to be covered and thus controlled. Consequently, Grace's wish for covering up her hands is linked to shame, and the shame quite possibly comes from murdering Nancy.

Small hands signified femininity and "gentility" in the Nineteenth century, and "the glove was therefore tight-fitting, short both for day and evening, and fastened by two or three buttons at the wrist" (Cunnington 461). Hence, the glove had to be "tight-fitting" to show what the hand looked like. The size of Grace's hands is mentioned several times in the novel, and Atwood observes how Grace physically fulfills the demands for femininity and therefore gentility. One of the details which Grace first notices regarding Mr. Kinnear is his gloves: "I did see his gloves though, on his hands holding the reins, pale-yellow gloves they were, soft leather and so well made they fit with scarcely a wrinkle, you'd think they were his own skin" (*Alias Grace* 241). Grace associates gloves with a second skin, which further underlines how garments are often thought of as a second skin. What is more, ill-fitting gloves are a visible sign of performing, someone who tries to act like a person from the upper class. Grace comments upon ill-fitting gloves several times, and when she borrows Nancy's gloves at one point, they contribute to the image of Grace as a respectable lady although the gloves do not fit properly: "And she lent me a bonnet as well, and said I looked very proper; and also let me wear a pair of her gloves, which did not however fit as they should, as Nancy had large hands. Also we each wore a light shawl of patterned silk" (*Alias Grace* 292). Grace implies that Nancy does not inhabit the same female qualities as herself because her hands are larger than what is preferred for a woman.

Gloves are a symbol of artificial femininity in the Atwood world of fiction, and Atwood articulates how female body parts need to be covered up. By comparing the use of gloves in the two novels, it is evident that the symbolism of gloves is somewhat different, but

Atwood renders how gloves are still associated with womanhood in *Lady Oracle*, claiming that society's expectations regarding femininity are inescapable. These unspoken norms repeat themselves.

Capes and Cloaks

Capes and cloaks appear frequently in *Lady Oracle* and are either made out of flesh or textile, suggesting the characters' need for hiding. As the characters in *Alias Grace* hide behind veils and sheets, several of the characters in *Lady Oracle* use some kind of cloak to conceal themselves behind and to help them perform an extreme version of their gender. During Joan's years as a teenager, she uses her body fat as a cloak. Joan's flesh saves her from being noticed by the public, especially men. Paradoxically, she eats to become more visible, but at the same time, her obesity makes her invisible. Joan notices that "fat women are not more noticeable than thin women; they're less noticeable, because people find them distressing and look away" (*Lady Oracle* 82). Atwood observes how women who do not fit in are perceived as freaks because the skinny body is "a contemporary ideal of specifically *female* attractiveness" (Bordo 205). What is more, Bordo claims that women have been the ones who were supposed to be in control of their sexuality and of their hunger, and how this is "culturally constructed and coded as female" (206). Therefore, when a woman who for instance is obese, she is labeled as less feminine and her body becomes disturbing because she no longer inhabits this constructed femininity. Losing weight, Joan is no longer "a huge featureless blur" (*Lady Oracle* 82), and she becomes insecure when she discovers that strangers notice her. "Without my magic cloak of blubber and invisibility I felt naked, pruned, as though some essential covering was missing" Joan reflects (*Lady Oracle* 141). According to Rosowski, "cloak imagery represents the camouflage of a role, donned to meet others' versions of reality" (201). Joan's body fat is part of her performance as the clown, but now that she has thrown away her costume, she is insecure regarding which role she is going to play. In my opinion, the fact that she can no longer hide behind her previous mask is one of the reasons why she has to create a set of characters to play, and why she begins her search for a new identity.

The cloak made of textile becomes an indispensable accessory in Joan's day dreams of the perfect stranger. "A tall man in a cloak, that was what I needed" Joan states (*Lady Oracle* 277), which underlines her traditional perception of masculinity. Joan does not want reality, but adventures. Living with Arthur, she discovers that he does not live up to her expectations: "I'd given up expecting him to be a cloaked, sinuous and faintly menacing stranger. He

couldn't be that: I lived with him, and cloaked strangers didn't leave their socks on the floor or stick their fingers in their ears or gargle in the mornings to kill germs" (*Lady Oracle* 216). Joan wants Arthur to be a different man than what he is and wear a cloak, which for her symbolizes an escape from everyday life. Furthermore, the first time Joan sees the Royal Porcupine, she notices that he is wearing a cape: "He was wearing a long black cloak and spats, and carrying a gold-headed cane, a pair of white gloves, and a top hat embroidered with porcupine quills" (*Lady Oracle* 239). According to Flügel, "the mantle may be [a] phallic [symbol])" (27), which suggests that the Royal Porcupine uses cloaks to emphasize his masculinity. Joan's statement regarding her need for men in cloaks also implies that she wants a man who is able to fill her expectations of what she believes is masculine.

Capes are one of the most used garments in Joan's novels. Although the characters in her novels are quite flat, they are often deceived by each other. The capes in Joan's novels signify mystery, and they tend to hide themselves behind these pieces of cloth. These accessories are also part of Joan's gothic world: "*The cloaked figure plunged into the entrance-way and disappeared; from somewhere came a low laugh*" (*Lady Oracle* 187). The ideas of capes and cloaks which one can wrap around oneself and hide are explored in both Joan's novels and in *Lady Oracle*. Capes become a metaphor for safety, and the use of capes is similar to that of masks. Masks are worn out of fear for showing what is hiding underneath the mask, like a veil. In addition, capes serve the purpose of decoration, as a number of accessories and garments do, and "[t]he essential purpose of decoration is to beautify the bodily appearance, so as to attract the admiring glances of others and fortify one's self-esteem" (Flügel 20). In *Lady Oracle*, capes both serve the purpose of protection and as a beautification. The Royal Porcupine performs his masculinity by using a costume, which includes a cape, as Joan and Grace perform femininity by using certain clothes and accessories. Atwood articulates how masculinity and femininity are roles which are performed and not a natural state. Capes made of textile signify heroism which is associated with masculinity, while the capes of flesh turn women grotesque and automatically less feminine.

The cape, a piece of clothing often associated with the masculine hero, is important because it reveals Joan views on gender roles as somewhat traditional and restrictive. She longs for a man with a cape with whom she can create a fairy tale with. Moreover, Joan views her body flesh as a protective cloak, and she discovers how she suddenly becomes sexually attractive when this is removed. Atwood renders how the cloak functions differently depending on which gender it is attached to, albeit Joan has a cloak of flesh and the Royal

Porcupine has a cloak of cloth. Drawing on Flügel's theories regarding cloaks and phallic symbols, the Royal Porcupine wears his cloak as a symbol of his masculinity and to be able to play the part of the hero. Joan's cloak on the other hand, is far from underlining her femininity, but rather turns her into the other.

Veils and Sheets

In *Alias Grace*, there are no cloaks, but the veil is used as a metaphor for revealing both the body and the psyche throughout the novel. Veils and sheets are also used to cover up the body, and in *Alias Grace*, it is the female body which is camouflaged in these textiles. What is more, Flügel associates the mask with the veil, and he writes of the problems communicating with a person who is hidden behind a mask: "If we are ourselves unmasked, we feel at a distinct disadvantage in talking to a masked person. To some extent the same effect may be produced by any garment (such as the veil) that tends to conceal the face, and even by spectacles or eye-glasses, since these make it more difficult to note the direction and movements of the gaze" (52). Viewing the veil as a mask, suggests that the veil is an accessory which gives one the opportunity to change personality. Using a veil restricts a woman's eyesight, but Grace also presents another aspect to veils:

> 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. (*Alias Grace* 267 – 268)

Grace suggests that ladies view their world from a slightly different angle due to their veils. These ladies are indeed able to see, despite the different accessories which cover them up. The veils also give them an opportunity, as Flügel says, to "be freer and less inhibited, both in feeling and in action, and can do things from which he might otherwise be impeded by fear or shame" (51). The veil therefore becomes ambiguous in Atwood's text, and what is seen as restricting at first glance is also liberating.

For Simon, veils and sheets are linked with eroticism and the female body. Simon has a recurring dream concerning women and sheets. At several occasions, he dreams of the female body enveloped in textiles: "But under the sheet there's another sheet, and under that another one. It looks like a white muslin curtain. Then there's a black veil, and then – can it be? – a petticoat. The woman must be down there somewhere; frantically he rummages. But no; the last sheet is a bedsheet, and there's nothing under it but a bed" (*Alias Grace* 408). For

Simon, the female body is an object which he tries to penetrate, as well as the female mind. Somewhat later in the dream, Grace appears, and the dream culminates in an intercourse between the two of them, which emphasizes Simon's sexual desire for Grace. As previously mentioned, women are able to see through their veils, but it is also a way of hiding, and it is harder to spot what is going on inside a veil than the other way around. Simon is unable to understand Grace's secrets, and his frustrations are mirrored in his dreams. Kuhn points out that "[i]n Simon's dreams, he is most often in the position of voyeur" (107). Furthermore, as a doctor, one of Simon's many tasks is to perform autopsies, which is mentioned several times in the novel. Cutting up a body, exposing the internal organs behind layers of skin and flesh, is associated with the uncovering of clothes and sheets. In the same dream which is mentioned above, what Simon believes is a dead body appears: "He must lift off the sheet, then lift off her skin, whoever she is, or was, layer by layer. Strip back her rubbery flesh, peel her open, gut her like a haddock. He's shaking with terror. She will be cold, inflexible. They keep them on ice" (*Alias Grace* 408). Atwood underlines Simon's ambiguous feelings concerning the female body, and although there is an erotic element to this description, Simon also feels fear and disgust. Through Simon, Atwood articulates how women are not only viewed as objects which the male sex is eager to figure out, and the female body is also an object which is gruesome. When Simon wakes up, he finds his landlady lying beside him in the bed, and he discovers that they have had sex. She has been silent during the act, and Simon wonders whether she is alive or not, underlining the similarities between a corpse and the female body.

Sheets, which are used to cover the mattress in the bed, also function as plain caskets. Quilts are often used to cover the bed, as discussed in Chapter Two, and these quilts are a comment on the actions which take place under the quilt. Likewise, the sheet is an accessory which comments upon life and death. When Grace's mother dies, they wrap her up in one of their sheets: "And one of the sailors, who was an expert at such things, tucked the sheet around her very neatly, and sewed it up tight, with a length of old iron chain at the feet, to make her sink" (*Alias Grace* 140). Her mother becomes all covered in textile, and this image of her mother inside the sheet haunts Grace: "I dreamt of my mother in her winding sheet … but the hair was over her face so I could not see it, and it was darker than my mother's hair had been; and then I knew that this was not my mother at all, but some other woman, and she was not dead inside the sheet at all, but still alive" (*Alias Grace* 193). Grace's dream foreshadows the death of both Mary and Nancy. Grace is not able to see the woman's face because of her hair, so she cannot figure out who the woman is. It is also possible that the woman is Grace herself, although Grace's hair is red, or even Mary, who everyone believes is

dead, but who Atwood implies is still living inside Grace. The dream recurs when Grace is finally pardoned: "I recalled my poor mother in her shroud, as they were sliding her into the sea, and how I thought that she had already changed inside the sheet, and was a different woman, and now the same thing happened to me" (*Alias Grace* 513). Grace is both scared of death, and of how one is not able to see through the fabric which covered her mother. It further discloses Grace's unstable identity and her fear of changing, both physically and mentally. Curiously, Grace's images of her mother under the sheet are similar to Simon's dreams of the veiled lady, suggesting not only her fluid identity, but also how either Simon or Grace is able to figure out who the woman behind the sheet is. The sheet becomes a metaphor for the mask which is worn to hide one's identity, and Atwood questions who the person behind the mask actually is. Furthermore, Grace plays a variety of characters, but she keeps her secrets and her thoughts for herself, only revealing the ones she thinks appropriate for Simon and the reader.

During the séance towards the end of *Alias Grace* where Grace is hypnotized, her head is concealed behind a veil which makes her resemble the faceless woman in her own dream. Simon, who is in the audience, thinks that the veil is almost identical to a shroud: "Now there's only a head, with merest contour of a face behind it. The suggestion of a shroud is unmistakable" (*Alias Grace* 462). The audience can no longer see Grace's face, which contributes to making the séance altogether more mysterious. In addition, Simon is again associating the female body with a corpse covered in textile. The image of Grace with a veil is also similar to the incident where her mother's dead body is wrapped in a sheet. "As soon as the sheet was over her face I had the notion that it was not really my mother under there, it was some other woman; or that my mother had changed, and if I was to take away the sheet now, she would be someone else entirely" Grace reflects (*Alias Grace* 140), revealing her fear of the unknown, of what she cannot see. Grace's thoughts regarding that there might be another woman hiding underneath the sheet, foreshadows the séance where the audience believes that there is another woman under the veil who has possessed Grace's body. These events contribute to the idea that the identity is fluid, and although Grace is only imagining another woman inside the sheet and the reader never learns the truth regarding Mary's alleged possession of Grace, Atwood implies the boundaries between the various bodies as fluid by presenting these options. In Kuhn's view, "Grace claims a veiled consciousness whenever Mary is supposed to have possessed her body, and the environmental veiling may be part of the cycle" (112). Basically, Kuhn suggests that Grace is performing during this séance, and that she uses the veil to hide behind. Furthermore, "the veil gives Grace an audience and

underlines the ambiguity of boundaries in performance" (Kuhn 112). If Grace acts the character of Mary Whitney when, or if, she murders Nancy, is she then guilty? Grace maintains that she does not remember what happened with Nancy and Mr. Kinnear, and the reason for this is that she has claimed a "veiled consciousness" when committing the act. She therefore considers herself to be innocent. The gaps in her memory become a metaphor for an imaginary veil. This episode is also one of the best examples of Flügel's theories regarding masks. Grace is indeed freer to act out this performance under the veil, and the veil gives her the freedom to become a different person. Although Grace (or Mary) comes with a confession during the séance, she is not held responsible for this since the audience actually believes that it is Mary who has possessed Grace's body. Since Atwood describes Grace as a woman who is at all times aware of which character she is playing with whom, it indicates that Grace is acting during the séance, although she claims not to. As mentioned previously, "what we may do in our masked state cannot be brought up as evidence against us when we resume our normal unmasked lives" (Flügel 51). By contrast, Butler believes that there is no such thing as an unmasked life, and that one is constantly performing because one is forced to. This is evident in *Alias Grace*. As soon as Grace takes off her veil, or is unmasked, she returns to who the spectators believe is Grace, or the Grace she usually performs and is expected to perform. The veil becomes a costume for Grace, a piece of garment which functions similarly to her clothing, which was discussed in Chapter One. As mentioned in Chapter One, Butler asks what gender reality is and Atwood asks the same question in addition to complicate what identity is and how one designs different identities by using textiles and clothes.

Atwood depicts the cloak in *Lady Oracle* and the veil in *Alias Grace* as somewhat similar images. Both function as accessories from which one can easily hide behind and both are associated with a certain gender, the cloak with the male and the veil with the female. What is more, the cloak and the veil are also versions of the mask, and as Flügel mentions, one tends to behave quite differently when one is unmasked. As for instance Grace does during the séance, albeit it is uncertain whether she is acting or if it actually is Mary Whitney who has possessed her body. Sheets are used to cover the female body in *Alias Grace*, suggesting the female body as something monstrous. The recurring image of the unknown woman behind the sheet implies that Grace and her secrets will remain hidden, and that Grace never removes her mask.

Shoes

An important accessory in *Lady Oracle* is the shoe. The shoes Joan buys together with the Royal Porcupine do not fit properly, which suggests her growing discomfort with the fantasy which she and her lover shares: "Unfortunately the lace-up black ankle boots gave me severe pains in the feet if I wore them for more than half an hour; but it was enough for a couple of good waltzes" (*Lady Oracle* 255). Trying to play yet another character together with the Royal Porcupine, she fails again. The shoes are not only accessories which do not fit, but it is also a metaphor for a character which does not fit. As previously discussed in Chapter One, Joan plays the part of the clown in front of her mother as a teenager, and her slippers underline her role as the buffoon: "My slippers were large and furry; they made my feet look twice as big" (*Lady Oracle* 71). Her slippers are unmistakably similar to the shoes of a clown, and they therefore automatically give Joan a clumsier walk than she has. Furthermore, Joan calls this demonstration a "fashion show in reverse" (*Lady Oracle* 71), mocking her mother's fanatical relationship with fashion. Joan wants to make a statement with her furry slippers, and to emphasize and exaggerate her size. These slippers are in a stark contrast to the red shoes which is a significant image in *Lady Oracle*.

There are several fairy tales which use shoes as a symbol of a character's metamorphosis, and "[o]ne need look no further than Dorothy's red shoes or Cinderella's glass slipper to admit the transformative power of the accessory" (Kuhn 2). A pair of red shoes is a recurrent image in *Lady Oracle*. Joan is fascinated by the movie *The Red Shoes*, which is an adapted version of the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. In Andersen's story, the plot revolves around a little girl who falls in love with a pair of red shoes, and insists on wearing them although it is not considered appropriate. However, the red shoes force her to dance, and she eventually has to have her feet cut off to stop dancing. The red shoes have been interpreted as a metaphor for sexual knowledge and the difficulties with being a female artist. Joan is frustrated with these restricted rules for women, and at the same time, she is unable to free herself from this female ideal:

> Perhaps, I thought, I had no soul; I just drifted around, singing vaguely, like the Little Mermaid in the Andersen fairy tale. In order to get a soul you had to suffer, you had to give something up; or was that to get legs and feet? I couldn't remember. She'd become a dancer, though, with no tongue. Then there was Moira Shearer, in *The Red Shoes*. Neither of them had been able to please the handsome prince; both of them had died. (*Lady Oracle* 216)

Unsure of what she has to give up in order to gain love, Joan knows that as a woman, she is forced to choose between having a voice and having a man.

Although Joan does not mention the fairy tale "The Red Shoes" by Andersen, she ponders over "The Little Mermaid", another story by the same author. The mermaid is also a figure who sacrifices her life as a mermaid in order to be with a man and to be sexually active. By contrast, the little mermaid gets feet, but she is not forced to have them chopped off as the girl in "The Red Shoes", even though she dies in the end. Interestingly, the mermaid trades her fish tale for her tongue. In other words, she is unable to speak, but instead of talking, she performs dances which the prince enjoys watching. The mermaid, the little girl, and the ballet dancer all end up dead or mutilated. As Kuhn observes, Atwood uses the image of the red shoes, not just in *Lady Oracle*, but in several of her other literary works, and she suggests that "Atwood's regular use of the red-shoes motif suggests that her female protagonists perform a similar dance; red shoes become shorthand for the confrontation and consequences of culturally defined ideas about femininity" (34). By using this image, Atwood underlines the regulated role of women. Joan literally gets her red shoes in the end: "I washed my feet in the bathtub; the soles looked as if they'd been minced. The real red shoes, the feet punished for dancing. You could dance, or you could have the love of a good man" (*Lady Oracle* 335). Atwood articulates the harsh reality of a female artist, or the belief that a female artist has to choose between love and art. Joan is trapped within this image, as her mother is trapped in her beauty. Although critics tend to agree upon Joan's incapability of performing her roles, they have overlooked the fact that Joan survives in the end, which implies that Joan might be able to execute the role as an artist. Moreover, because she meets a new man who already knows about her past in the end, there is a possibility that Joan might find a life which she is comfortable living. As shoes tend to have a "transformative power" (Kuhn 2) in *Lady Oracle*, veils have the same function in *Alias Grace*. The difference is that Joan is not able to transform herself successfully, and Grace succeeds to a great extent during the séance.

The ankle boots, the furry slippers, and the imaginary red shoes do not fit Joan. The red shoes in *Lady Oracle* and the veil in *Alias Grace* are also linked to femininity and performance, and especially the red shoes are associated with certain expectations regarding women. Furthermore, shoes which do not fit appropriately become a metaphor for a failed attempt in creating a new character. When Joan is unable to find clothes she feels comfortable with, it signifies her troubles establishing a new self. The red shoes which appears in *Lady Oracle* is also a significant image because Atwood links the red shoes with the struggles of a female artist, a theme she tends to come back to in her fiction. By giving this subject such an amount of attention, Atwood emphasizes the difficulties with being a female artist and how

restrictive it becomes for Joan trying to orient between becoming a housewife and being a writer, since society claims she cannot be both.

Names

Atwood uses naming to comment upon female identity, and how women struggle with the high standards regarding femininity and beauty. Joan "put[s] [names] on and off like costumes" (Howells 57), and one of the reasons for doing this is that Joan cannot live up to her own birth name, which her mother gave her. Frances names her daughter after Joan Crawford, the famous American actress. Joan wonders why her mother did this: "Did she name me after Joan Crawford because she wanted me to be like the screen characters she played – beautiful, ambitious, ruthless, destructive to men – or because she wanted me to be successful?" (*Lady Oracle* 42). Joan Crawford becomes a symbol of beauty and success, something which Joan is not able to live up to. Again, Joan falls short when trying to live up to her mother's standards. "Did she give me someone else's name because she wanted me never to have a name of my own?" Joan further wonders (*Lady Oracle* 42), implying that Frances did not want Joan to develop her own personality. Furthermore, Joan Crawford's birth name is Lucille LeSeur, and as Joan Crawford, Joan changes her name, and she even develops several personalities with different names. The fact that Joan is named after Crawford, an actress and female artist, foreshadows Joan's destiny as a performer and her inability to settle down with one identity and one name. However, taking on a variety of identities and names also suggest that there are always several sides of a person. Although Joan Crawford is successful and beautiful, she does not only inhabit these qualities: "There's more than one side to Joan Crawford, though. In fact there was something tragic about Joan Crawford, she had big serious eyes, an unhappy mouth and high cheekbones, unfortunate things happened to her. Perhaps that was it. Or, and this is important: Joan Crawford was thin" (*Lady Oracle* 42). By letting Frances name her daughter after Joan Crawford, Atwood renders the crucial beauty ideal for women, and she comments upon what kind of women young girls have to compare themselves with.

Joan uses different kinds of names and pseudonyms which further suggests her instability regarding her identity. Fee writes, "[n]ames, generally a sign of an individual identity, fail Joan in her quest … When she herself picks up a pseudonym, it is her aunt's name. Neither her own name nor her aunt's provide her with a distinctive identity, and, of course, taking Arthur's name doesn't either" (64). The reasons for choosing her aunt's name as a pseudonym are complicated. Frances dislikes her sister, Louisa K. Delacourt, for several

reasons, for example because Louisa is overweight and because she works with public education. Both Louisa's job and her looks make her unattractive in Frances' eyes and Louisa does not act up to how Frances considers a woman ought to be like. Since Joan feels accepted by her aunt, and because she feels companionship and they share an understanding with each other, Joan wants to honor her aunt by using her name. Joan actually feels like she is two persons: "I was Joan Foster, there was no doubt about that; people called me by that name and I had authentic documents to prove it. But I was also Louisa K. Delacourt" (*Lady Oracle* 213). In addition, having two personalities and two names give Joan the freedom to develop different sides to herself without being restricted by the expectations to only one of her identities. On the other side, since Joan feels the need for having several identities, it also reveals her insecurity and her lack of confidence.

There are several characters who change their names in *Lady Oracle*, acts which emphasize their need for performing. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Royal Porcupine, naming himself after an animal, changes back to his birth name, Chuck Brewer, because he wants to abandon the fantasy life and start a real life together with Joan. The use of porcupine in his name further suggests that he uses his name as a cloak, as porcupines have spines which they can defend themselves with. Removing his fake name and his cloak, he becomes vulnerable, and therefore unattractive to Joan. What is more, when Joan marries Arthur, the woman who weds them is Leda Sprott, a spiritualist Joan met as a teenager. However, Leda Sprott is now Eunice P. Revele, something which confuses Joan:

> [E]ither she was really Leda Sprott, in which case the ceremony would be invalid, or she was really Eunice P. Revele; if so, why had she used another name at the Jordan Chapel? But then, I thought, men who changed their names were likely to be con-men, criminals, undercover agents or magicians, whereas women who changed their names were probably just married. (*Lady Oracle* 203)

For some reason, Joan seems to forget that she as well has another name, and she discloses that she views women who change their names differently than men who do the same thing. This also indicates that Joan fails to reflect over her own situation, and she denies the fact that she withholds information about herself to Arthur since she does not want him to discover that she has been fat in her youth and that she writes costume gothics. She fabricates a new personality for Arthur, a character created to please him.

Albeit the title of the novel, *Lady Oracle*, is not a name, it still becomes inexplicably linked to Joan's identity. Lady is associated with femininity, and signifies a female ideal

which Joan is unable to comprehend with. *Lady Oracle* is not only the title of Joan's collection of poems, but it also implies that Joan is an oracle. An oracle is someone who comes with prophesies and whose voice is heard. Joan, on the other hand, is incapable of getting her voice through. Conversely, in her book, *Margaret Atwood*, Coral Ann Howells maintains that "[t]he most interesting thing about an Oracle is that it is a voice which comes out of a woman's body and is associated with hidden dangerous knowledge, but that it is not her own voice" (56). Joan's poems are the result of what she experiences as automatic writing, and she claims that she is somewhat unconscious when writing. Drawing on Howell's argument, it is therefore not Joan who speaks in her poems. According to Howells, Joan has therefore several similarities to an oracle, and because "[t]he role of a prophetess is … in danger of being reduced to the role of the hysteric" (56). The "hysteric" has been associated with the female, reducing her to someone who lacks control of herself. Her publishers are more interested in preventing Joan from cutting her hair, than in what she actually writes. However, her poems receive great reviews, and she becomes popular with the women's movement, but Joan is not comfortable in the role of the successful poetess either. As a result, the oracle becomes yet another alias for Joan in which she fails to perform.

The idea of naming is also linked with identity in *Alias Grace*, and the names Grace are given and the names she gives herself are part of her multiple personalities. When running away with James McDermott, Grace presents herself as Mary Whitney. "I did not think she would mind it if I use her name. She sometimes lent me her clothing, too" Grace says to Simon (*Alias Grace* 117), when he wants an explanation for the incident. Grace implies how she uses names as clothing, and how she is able to change between different names, clothes, and thereby personalities. Furthermore, this is based on the actual happenings. The drawings of Grace and McDermott which are printed at the beginning of the novel, and where it says "Grace Marks alias Mary Whitney", were according to Atwood, published by the newspaper *Toronto Star and Transcript*. The title of the novel, *Alias Grace*, does not only indicate that Grace has several personalities lurking beneath the surface, but it is also an allusion to the historical picture of Grace. When getting married, Grace changes her name again, which is not only the custom, but it is also a possibility for Atwood to emphasize that Grace is starting a new life with a new name and a new identity. Grace now plays the role of Grace Walsh, the wife. However, "although Grace literally has a new name by the end of the novel, the title also reinforces the fact that Grace's identities are fluid; by hiding her 'true name' (456), she is essentially to remain a Veiled Lady – metaphorically – forever" (Kuhn 113 – 114). What her so called "true name" is will never be revealed. Grace uses names as protection, and a name

becomes a veil which she hides behind. Atwood uses names as accessories in her fiction, observing how names are similar to accessories which complete an outfit.

The name "Grace" is interesting because of the many possible interpretations and the name therefore suggests the variety of qualities to Grace. Some of the different meanings to the word grace are for example elegance, mercy, and a prayer. Grace's beauty is mentioned several times, especially by the male characters, in addition to her ability to act elegant when dressed in the garments of a lady. The Three Graces were "goddesses who bestowed beauty and charm and were themselves the embodiment of both" (*Brewer's Dictionary* 1071). The religious connotations to grace add another supernatural element to the novel. The phrase "state of Grace" means to have the grace of God, or to have God's or someone else's approval. However, the meaning of the phrase "fall from grace" is to lose this approval. Furthermore, rue is often called the Herb of Grace because of "its extreme bitterness" and it is therefore the "symbol of repentance" (*Brewer's Dictionary* 513). In other words, grace indicates sorrow and regret, implying Grace's possible remorse. Although it might not be regret over the potential murders she committed or participated in, she feels bitterness over the way life has turned out. However, she indeed regains her grace towards the end when she gets her freedom back. Grace is an ambiguous character, and her name contributes to her ambiguity. The name has both positive and negative connotations, and the reading of her name is similar to the interpretation of a quilt, and it depends on whether one looks at the dark or light pieces.

Grace reflects over the fact that she has been named "*Murderess*" (*Alias Grace* 25) by society. Since she is seen as a "celebrated murderess" (*Alias Grace* 25) she must take this role to please the ladies who come and see her. Nevertheless, Grace is fascinated by the status she is given: "*Murderess* is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word – musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase. Sometimes at night I whisper it over to myself: *Murderess, Murderess*. It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor" (*Alias Grace* 25). Grace associates the name with taffeta, an expensive fabric usually made of silk. By linking naming with cloth, it further underlines the idea of naming as a piece of garment, and how names are used as costumes. Naming is emphasized as powerful in the novel and even though Grace is aware of the image of her which is created by the newspapers and society, her power is limited and she cannot change the world's conception of her. Grace also feels imprisoned by the name, as she is imprisoned by her garments. By naming Grace "*Murderess*", she becomes an object of attraction, an interesting case which is studied not only by the ladies in the city, but also by Dr. Simon Jordan. Simon is fascinated by Grace's

status as a murderess: "*Murderess, murderess,* he whispers to himself. It has an allure, a scent almost. Hothouse gardenias. Lurid, but also furtive. He imagines himself breathing it as he draws Grace towards him, pressing his mouth against her. *Murderess*. He applies it to her throat like a brand" (*Alias Grace* 453). Simon has several of the same associations with the name as Grace has. Simon is branding Grace "*Murderess*" in an attempt to control her and his fantasy also involves sexual control. For Simon, "*Murderess*" smells like flowers in a hothouse, and this hothouse symbolizes Grace's own situation as an imprisoned woman.

Simon does not only want to brand Grace with the name "*Murderess*", he also wants to give her different names. Fantasizing about Grace, he imagines how she will be "[n]ot only his housekeeper: his locked and secret mistress. He'd keep her hidden, under a different name" (*Alias Grace* 452). Simon wants Grace to be his own secret, reducing her to an object which he can rename as he pleases, robbing her of her own identity. Later, he envisions how he will marry his landlady Rachel and live with her in the States, but Rachel will be "without a name. She'll be an unknown woman, of the kind often found floating in canals or other bodies of water: *Unknown Woman Found Floating In Canal*" (*Alias Grace* 476). Associating Rachel with a corpse, Rachel is neither entitled of her own name, underlining Simon's view of women as merely bodies.

In *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace,* Atwood uses names as accessories and costumes, and naming becomes significant when Joan and Grace develop their spectrum of identities. Both Joan and Grace use pseudonyms, which give them freedom to become these characters. Since names are strongly associated with one's personality, changing one's name, as the Royal Porcupine does, becomes an indication of an tentatively change of character in Atwood's fiction. While Grace borrows Mary Whitney's name when escaping with McDermott, Joan takes on her aunt's name when writing her costume gothics. They both borrow names to perform actions they do not want to perform under their birth name. Furthermore, the different meanings of the name Grace underline the complexity of Grace. By contrast, Joan is named after Joan Crawford, which automatically gives her a set of characteristics to live up to. While Frances brands her daughter with the name of a beautiful actress with a set of qualities she wishes for her daughter to gain, Simon labels Grace with the name "*Murderess*", an attempt which is both erotic and signifies Simon's need for controlling Grace. This is analogous to the Governor's wife's scrapbook which is an attempt of reducing Grace to an object which she can control.

Hair

Hair is an identity marker in *Lady Oracle*. Changing her hair is part of Joan's many transformations. When losing weight, she also decides to grow her hair, which she has previously kept short as part of the uproar against her mother: "All the time I was fat I'd worn my hair cropped short, which emphasized the roundness of my face. My mother kept making proposals for improvement; she'd wanted me to wear a pageboy, then a poodle cut, but I'd rejected everything. Now, however, I'd been growing my hair for a year and it was shoulder-length, dark red and straight" (*Lady Oracle* 136 – 137). Long hair tends to be associated with femininity, and by keeping her hair short Joan is not only rebelling against her mother, but also against traditional femininity. However, by losing weight and growing her hair, Atwood suggests that she is unable to escape the expectations regarding how a woman ought to look like. Furthermore, her new hair alongside her new body, become significant when creating a new identity. In Flügel's view,

> [w]hen hair is cut short or beards are shaved or nails are trimmed, there has taken place a forcible and artificial removal of certain parts of the body. When hair is 'dressed' (note the word as indicating the psychological equivalence of corporal and sartorial decoration) in various styles, either with the help of external instruments (combs, hair-pins, etc.) or by imparting some unnatural shape to the hair itself, there has taken place what is strictly speaking a deformation of this part of the body. (44 – 45)

The essence of Flügel's argument is that hair is as much part of the body as other body parts, and it is therefore significant because it affects the body and one's identity. Cutting and changing one's hair is equal with reshaping other parts of the body. Interestingly, Flügel points out that the word which is used when arranging one's hair is "dressed", which implies a link between dressing one's hair and dressing the body.

With her long red hair, Joan creates a stir and she embraces the typical feminine ideal. When she publishes her collection of poems, she is told several times how a woman should remain mysterious to be sexually attractive, and of the importance of long hair. Atwood reveals the male attitude towards the female body, including the hair, when Joan's former lover tells her that she should keep her long hair: "'If you raise the skirts and cut the hair, it will not sell. They prefer it if the woman should retain her mystery'" (*Lady Oracle* 166). Joan comments upon how the newspapers tend to focus on her hair and body instead of her writing: "[H]air in the female was regarded as more important than either talent or the lack of it" (*Lady Oracle* 14). When described in the newspapers, the journalists focus on Joan's resemblance to a goddess because of her hair: "*Prose-poetess Joan Foster looked*

impressively Junoesque in her flowing red hair and green robe; unfortunately she was largely inaudible … (The Globe and Mail)" (*Lady Oracle* 14). Significantly, she is not able to make her voice heard, but is reduced to an object. Compared to Juno from the Roman mythology, who was called "queen of the heavens" and "protected everything connected with women, from birth to death" (*Women of Classical Mythology* 269), Atwood is here emphasizing the problems with being a female artist, and how one is not taken seriously. What is more, Joan's red hair becomes an accessory which completes her floating and sensual garments. Her hair is part of shaping her identity, as her clothes do as well.

Cutting off her hair becomes an important ritual for Joan when she decides to change her identity again in Italy. Her red hair which had been a "trademark" and signified her role as the feminist poet is now regarded as "evidence" (*Lady Oracle* 14). When changing her hair, Joan believes that she has transformed: "It took me quite a while to saw my hair off, strand by strand. I tried shaping what remained, but it got shorter and shorter, though no less uneven, until I saw that I'd cropped my head like a concentration camp inmate's. My face looked quite different, though: I could pass for a secretary on vacation" (*Lady Oracle* 14). As already mentioned, cutting off one's hair is equal with deformation of other body parts. Furthermore, Joan burns the hair she has cut off, "a grotesque, displaced, ritualistic sacrifice, underlined by melodramatic memories of Arthur" (Becker 183 – 184). Joan recalls how Arthur enjoyed brushing her hair, and she now sacrifices a part of her which Arthur loved, trying to distance herself from her husband. Joan's hair is also a sign of her femininity, which she has now removed. Towards the end of the novel, Joan discovers how the color of her hair gradually disappears: "I washed my hair, humming, as if I were getting ready for a big evening. A lot of brown came out, but I no longer cared" (*Lady Oracle* 334). This incident symbolizes how Joan once again wants to change her identity. The role as the tourist is slowly fading, as her hair color.

Regarding facial hair, which tends to be associated with masculinity, Joan finds the Royal Porcupine's beard and moustache intriguing. "He too had red hair, and he had an elegant moustache and beard, the moustache waxed and curled upward at the ends, the beard pointed" Joan observes (*Lady Oracle* 239). They do not only share the common interest for periodical costumes, they also have the same hair color, which in Joan's view, implies that they have more in common than just costumes. Both his red hair and beard also make him quite different from Joan's husband, Arthur, and Joan sees the opportunity for an adventure in the Royal Porcupine, which she cannot find in her husband. The disappointment is therefore greater when she discovers that the Royal Porcupine has shaved, and become more alike

Arthur: "He'd thought that by transforming himself into something more like Arthur he could have Arthur's place; but by doing this he'd murdered the part of him that I loved. I scarcely knew how to console the part that remained. Without his beard, he had the chin of a junior accountant" (*Lady Oracle* 271). As makeup is a mask, facial hair is also a mask which the Royal Porcupine has hidden behind. Furthermore, the Royal Porcupine has indeed removed a part of his body which made him attractive in Joan's eyes, and without this accessory, she finally sees him without his mask. Atwood suggests that Chuck, which is his birth name, has only performed the Royal Porcupine, and he has now taken off his mask. This episode underlines the theme of performance in the novel.

Hair is a significant accessory in *Lady Oracle* because it signifies femininity. Atwood observes how a woman is expected to have long hair since hair implies mystery, as one of her character puts it. Flügel asserts that hair is similar to other body parts, and how cutting one's hair is equal with mutilating one's body. When Joan cuts off her hair in Italy to create a new identity and the Royal Porcupine shaves off his facial hair, they automatically look different and thus believe that they have also changed their identities. Hair is therefore important for Atwood's characters because it allows them to radically form their bodies into new shapes and therefore imagining gaining new identities.

Makeup

Makeup is a metaphor for a theatrical mask in *Lady Oracle*. Since makeup is painted on the face, it bears several resemblances to different kinds of masks. Flügel mentions painting in his chapter about decoration in *The Psychology of Clothes*, and how painting of the whole body is "to be found at all cultural levels" (41). Using for example lipstick to "intensify the natural colour" (Flügel 41) is not a new phenomenon, and since painting has been used in a variety of cultures for centuries, it can therefore be argued that the use of makeup in the Western world today is nothing more than a development of the use of painting. On the other hand, makeup is used to improve one's facial features. As already discussed, the female body is constantly exposed to improvement, it is "habituated to external regulation" (Bordo 166), and makeup is one of those improvements which women are expected to engage themselves in. Makeup is a mask from which one can hide behind, and Flügel complicates matters further when he writes:

> When we wear a mask, we cease, to some extent, to be ourselves; we conceal from others both our identity and the natural expression of our emotions, and, in consequence, we do not feel the same responsibility as when our faces are uncovered; for it appears to us that, owing to our unrecognisability and the alteration in our personality (*persona* = mask), what we may do in our masked state cannot be brought up as evidence

> against us when we resume our normal unmasked lives. The masked person is, therefore, apt to be freer and less inhibited, both in feeling and in action, and can do things from which he might otherwise be impeded by fear or shame. (51)

The essence of Flügel's argument is that when one puts on a mask, one is able to hide the self, and the mask is also a protection. Furthermore, Flügel implies that wearing a mask automatically hides one's identity. Wearing a mask is linked to performance, and Flügel is here emphasizing how one performs another role.

Atwood comments upon the use of makeup and femininity in *Lady Oracle* by emphasizing the importance of makeup for Joan's mother. Frances Delacourt literally describes putting on makeup as putting on her face. Her makeup is a mask she puts on when playing the perfect housewife and woman. As a child, Joan recalls watching her mother improve her look:

> Some of the things she did seemed to be painful; for instance, she would cover the space between her eyebrows with what looked like brown glue, which she heated in a little pot, then tear it off, leaving a red patch, and sometimes she'd smear herself with pink mud which would harden and crack … Instead of making her happier, these sessions appeared to make her sadder, as if she saw behind or within the mirror some fleeting image she was unable to capture or duplicate; and when she was finished she was always a little cross. (*Lady Oracle* 66)

Joan observes that parts of Frances' ritual are painful, implying how women have to suffer to meet the physical expectations which are required. Frances' makeup is also a mask of femininity. To be able to present herself as a woman, to play the role as a female and live up to the expectations of femininity, she has to for example remove the hair between her eyebrows. Atwood demonstrates how gender "is always a doing" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34) by describing how Frances goes through this physical change when putting on makeup. Frances "personifies the feminine ideal. She is a wife and mother, maintains an immaculately tidy home and performs a rigorous beauty regime" (Sanchez-Grant 88). As she covers the furniture in her home with plastic, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, she wants to keep her own look and face spotless and sterile. The mud Joan refers to, which is probably a face mask, and as the name implies, it is literally a mask. Joan notices how the mask cracks on her mother's face, suggesting Frances' failures regarding performing the female. Joan also remarks on how her mother is not happy with the image she creates, and that the face in the mirror is not the face which she wants to see. The fantasy picture she expects will look back at

her, does not appear. Frances is "trapped within the ideal she embodies" (Becker 163), and is unable to escape.

Frances tries to create and to redesign a character with the help of makeup. Fand comments on the image of Frances sitting in front of the three-sided mirror, implying how Frances becomes a monster in Joan's eyes. The mirror creates "the illusion of a three-headed monster, a Cerberus from hell. Joan's gothic imagination colors this vision, but her eye for satiric detail, which detects her mother's exaggerated lipstick application through which the shadow of her real lip line shows, deflects horror into laughter" (Fand 185). Joan notices how her mother improves her own thin lips by making "a larger mouth with lipstick over and around them, like Bette Davis, which gave her a curious double mouth, the real one showing trough the false one like a shadow" (*Lady Oracle* 68). Atwood underlines Frances' duplicity, and the lipstick also exaggerates Frances' feminine features. The ideal for a woman is to have full, red lips, but since Frances cannot live up to this ideal, she has to fake it with lipstick. Interestingly, a large red mouth is often associated with the clown, and Joan plays the clown several times in front of her mother. The difference is that Joan wants to present herself as ugly for her mother, while Frances tries to become more beautiful. However, they both become grotesque by redesigning themselves as caricatures. By contrast, Frances does not feel freer by wearing the mask of makeup, as Flügel suggests in his theories regarding masks. She is indeed trapped behind her makeup.

The image of the mother in front of the looking glass has several interpretations. Becker suggests that "the looking-glass shows a different image from that desired by the woman in front of it has become an important metaphor in feminist art for the discrepancy between Woman (as produced by the male gaze) and women" (165). Becker further calls the act of putting on makeup as "putting on the face of Woman" (165). Becker's theories are comparable to Doane's regarding womanliness and masquerade. Doane writes, "[w]omanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed" and how "[m]asquerade … involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image" ("Film and the Masquerade" 185). Mrs. Symons, who was previously mentioned regarding her pink gloves, is yet another of the female characters in *Lady Oracle* who is described with heavy makeup which makes her look like a clown. "There was a round circle of rouge on each of her cheeks, and her eyebrows were two thinly penciled arcs of surprise" Joan observes (*Lady Oracle* 201), suggesting that Mrs.

Symons has indeed put on the "face of Woman", but rather amateurish. Together with her pink outfit, she becomes a caricature of a woman.

When all the little girls dress up in their costumes for the dance show, they get their faces painted, as a foreshadowing of their future as women. Joan remembers how "the mouths with dark-red lipstick, the eyelashes with black mascara which stiffened them into spikes. The finished and costumed girls were standing against the wall so as not to damage themselves, inert as temple sacrifices" (*Lady Oracle* 47). The girls have to stand still to avoid the makeup, their masks, from getting soiled. They are given the masks of female adulthood, and Atwood is here implying how women are not only restricted because of their clothing, but also because of makeup. Describing the girls as "temple sacrifices", underline their roles as passive objects. As Butler stresses, "[f]emininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment" ("Critically Queer" 23). This episode is significant because Atwood suggests how girls from an early age are trained for later performances as women, which further emphasizes that femininity is a mask and gender as constructed.

In Atwood's fiction, makeup is one of the strongest and most straightforward images of a mask which is put on and off, in addition to being an example of how femininity is literally painted on the face. One of Bordo's main points in *Unbearable Weight* is that the female body constantly has to be improved, something which is evident in both *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, especially when it comes to shaping the body with the help of clothing. As corsets deform and exaggerate the body features in *Alias Grace*, makeup has the same function in *Lady Oracle*. Atwood observes how makeup becomes the mask of woman and how young girls learn how to act female with the help of their mothers.

The Theme of Accessories

As clothing and textiles are significant when it comes to creating an identity and to hide oneself behind, accessories are just as important because of their ability to shape the female body and compliment the clothes which are part of creating a character. The differences between *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* in terms of accessories are that there were more central guidelines regarding the appropriate details in dressing in the Nineteenth century. Consequently, the accessories in *Lady Oracle* are often treated as metaphors for femininity, masculinity, and the troubles with being a female artist. Gloves appear in both *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, and gloves signify femininity and class in both novels, but in *Lady Oracle*, this accessory is closely related to Frances and her fear of dirt, which was also discussed in

Chapter Two regarding textiles. Capes and cloaks are accessories which comment upon masculinity in *Lady Oracle*, and how capes become an extension of the Royal Porcupine's masculinity. However, Joan also has an invisible cloak, or a very visible one, her body flesh. In other words, capes are not only made of cloth, but both the imaginary and real ones function as accessories from which the characters can hide behind. In *Alias Grace*, veils and sheets are garments which cover up the female body, but the veil is also used as a mask, as the cape is. Simon, who imagines the female body and mind as hidden and mysterious, dreams of the female under all the layers of sheet. He tries to penetrate the female, often pictured as Grace. Through Simon, Atwood depicts how the patriarchy wants to control and enter the female mind, a mind they are unable to understand. Atwood is concerned with the female artist, something which is evident in both novels, and in *Lady Oracle* she returns to the image of the red shoes, claiming how the female artist is haunted by the problems with not being able to gain love and be an artist at the same time. Atwood renders the problems with this image and how it becomes destructive for Joan. Concerning identity, names are significant accessories in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace.* Atwood indicates the strong link between identity, performance, and names, and how the characters believe that they are able to create new identities by changing their name. Both Joan and Grace use pseudonyms to be able to perform tasks they could not have done under their birth name. Joan, who is named after Joan Crawford, struggles with this name's connotations with femininity, and Atwood observes how she is unable to live up to this image of perfect womanhood. Grace on the other hand, has a name which contributes to her complexity. Their names also become masks. Another mask, and perhaps the most striking one, is makeup. In her fiction, Atwood articulates how women are forced into femininity, and how makeup is an important part of shaping and improving the female body. Atwood further implies how women are actually acting women, and how makeup is part of their costume.

Conclusion

> Catch it. Put in a pumpkin, in a high tower, in a compound, in a chamber, in a house, in a room. Quick, stick a leash on it, a lock, a chain, some pain, settle it down, so it can never get away from you again.
> (Margaret Atwood, *Good Bones*)

The female body has suffered from restriction and mutilation. The female body has been caged within clothing and textiles in order to keep the female mind under control. What is more, the female body is viewed as grotesque and must therefore be covered up in garments. Clothing is one of those aspects which shape the female body, exaggerating its features and making the female body passive. As a result, clothes shape female identity. Clothing proves to be extremely powerful.

I asked in the introduction who the woman behind the veil was. Who is hiding behind the various costumes, textiles, and accessories? Does she even exist? The veil is an ambiguous image. It functions as a metaphor for entrapment, and as the quote from *Good Bones* implies, the female body must be locked up, or else it will run away. The veil limits a woman's eyesight, and therefore restricts her movement because she cannot see properly. As a result, the veil functions as an item of clothing which forces women into the role as the other. However, the veil is also a garment which a woman is able to hide behind. She can see things which she is not supposed to see, or view them from another perspective. It is also harder for the outsider to spot who is hiding behind the veil. Grace mentions the many possibilities to interpret a quilt, depending on which point of view you want to choose: "[Y]ou can see them two different ways, by looking at the dark pieces, or else the light" (*Alias Grace* 187). Grace's saying is applicable to the veil as an image. As well as being an image of being jailed, the veil is a metaphor for the narrative technique which Atwood uses in her novels. She covers her female protagonists behind a veil of texts and layers of cloth, hiding Joan and Grace behind their words. Like the veil, the female protagonists in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace* remain ambiguous, and Atwood gives the reader multiple versions of these women's stories and identities.

As such, this thesis has asserted how clothes, textiles, and accessories shape the female body, and consequently the female mind and identity. I have specifically discussed how clothes, textiles, and accessories function in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, and how Atwood uses these elements not only to widen our understanding of her characters, but also to claim

that femininity is constructed and to demonstrate how identity becomes fluid. By comparing *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, which are set in two different time periods, I have looked at the differences and similarities between the protagonists' experiences and how these experiences of femininity are linked to gender and clothing. Several parallels regarding the female experience emerge, although these similarities are expressed differently. Atwood claims that women are othered through clothing, and that the expectations regarding femininity are inescapable. In addition, Atwood articulates the restriction women endure when they are forced into traditional gender roles, and how they try to escape them in order to survive. However, these gender norms only repeat themselves and become unavoidable, which is evident in Atwood's use of clothing. It is presumed of women to dress in a certain way to be perceived as proper women, although these guidelines change. In the Nineteenth century, Grace cannot escape the corset. A woman has to wear a corset under her clothing to be regarded as appropriate, and Grace finds herself wanting specific pieces of clothes in order to become the lady she dreams of. Joan associates femininity with certain garments as well, and dresses according to these norms, as well as losing weight, only to discover that a slender body signifies femininity. Constantly scared of losing her slim body because she will then lose her femininity, she keeps her body in control. Joan's flesh forces her into the role as the other, and like the veil, her flesh functions mutually as a jail and as protection. Both Joan and Grace feel that they do not reach the expectations of femininity, and Atwood observes how these expectations are almost impossible to reach. As Butler claims, "[t]to the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate" ("Critically Queer" 22). Atwood articulates how Joan and Grace are not able to fully manage this "assignment", and she observes how Joan and Grace do not feel adequate, illustrating how they try to survive in a society which confines women by forcing them into restraining garments.

Regarding the narrative techniques which are used in the novels, it is worth mentioning the similarities between *Alias Grace* and the quilt in addition to *Lady Oracle* and the maze, because both the quilt and the maze are connected with textiles. *Alias Grace* is stitched together from various texts, both historical records and fictional, and both Grace and the novel become somewhat monstrous, especially since it is a text about a woman who was considered to be a cold blooded murderess. By structuring *Lady Oracle* as a maze and returning to the image of the maze in the novel, *Lady Oracle* gains a gothic element. Moreover, the novel resembles a weave. Both novels are written in first person, which is

significant because Atwood wants to write these women's stories from their perspectives and recreate their voices since they have been silenced. Grace and Joan are tellers of tales, weavers of stories. Sewing has traditionally been associated with writing, and while the women in *Alias Grace* inhabit the knowledge of how to sew, Joan does not succeed at this, suggesting that she fails in her femininity and in her writing. By creating Grace and Joan as women who consist of a variety of scraps of personalities, Atwood contributes to the idea of identity as fluid, and identity as more complex than first assumed. Joan and Grace are artists, and Atwood explores what it means to be a female artist in two different centuries. They are not acknowledged as artists by the world around them, who view them merely as women. Atwood is preoccupied with the difficulties concerning womanhood, female identity, and women artists in her literature. With her focus on creative women, Atwood underlines the importance of art for women, and how art helps them in gaining a voice of their own; this again links back to the "female" art of sewing. However, writing as well becomes ambiguous since Joan and Grace are often misinterpreted and objectified because of their gender.

Failure is significant in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*. Joan fails in her femininity, as a writer, in her relationships with men, and in her process of creating new personalities. By letting Joan fail in all these areas, Atwood is saying that society's expectations of a woman are inescapable. Albeit Joan goes through several metamorphoses, the most important one is when she loses weight, when she actually changes her body, she still cannot be free from what society expects of her body. Critics have claimed that Joan is insecure. However, it is not because of insecurity she refashions herself, but because she tries to set herself free. One might argue that Grace succeeds to a greater extent in fabricating new identities, but she as well fails. Grace is told that she looks like a lady in the right clothes, and that she physically meets the demands. For instance, she has small hands, which was the ideal in the Nineteenth century. Small hands signified femininity and refinement, but Grace detects that although she tries to take upon the role of a lady, and even though she inhabits the ideal feminine qualities, she fails at becoming the lady. Taking on Mary Whitney's name and dressing in Nancy's clothes do not give Grace the freedom to become another character, because society does not accept her as anyone else than Grace, a maid. Furthermore, the ending of *Alias Grace* is also ambiguous, and whether she carries life or death is never revealed. In other words, there is a possibility that her marriage and her freedom have indirectly led to her death. The reader will never know if Grace actually accomplished refashioning herself or not.

In the Atwood world of fiction, clothing is used as signs, imagery, symbols, as well as it thematizes issues regarding power and gender. Clothing becomes an essential sign of

female performance, but it is an ambiguous sign. Clothing also functions as a mask in *Lady Oracle* and *Alias Grace*, and the veil is of one of the masks which Joan and Grace use to hide behind. However, the veil is an ambiguous garment, and Atwood focuses on the ambiguity in her images and characters. Clothing further signifies writing and the characters redesign themselves through clothing and rewrite their histories by changing between a variety of costumes and covering up in textiles. Atwood gives voice to Joan and Grace through these novels, but they experience how their voices are silenced and misinterpreted. Although they manage to express themselves through writing and sewing, two creative arts which are interconnected, they are misunderstood. Women developed their own language through the art of quilting, a language which has not been acknowledged by the patriarchal society. Atwood demonstrates the ambiguity of writing, and even though Joan and Grace try to set themselves free through rewriting themselves, the power structure of society has an inevitable influence on them. Atwood claims that Joan and Grace cannot escape the patriarchal society, although they are desperately trying to break away from the gender norms. Despite the efforts of trying to escape behind the veil, gender proves to be of critical importance. Consequently, there is no essential femininity that any of them end up inhabiting. In her literature, Atwood uses clothing to demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity of her characters, and to illustrate society's attempt of hiding the female body in a clothed cage.

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