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"The Female Companion in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*."

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationships between two female characters in each of the three novels by Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1988), *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). It identifies a common pattern that characterises all three protagonists and proposes the term companion to refer to and analyse the other three secondary female characters. This paper harnesses the Jungian notion of the four primary archetypes (Persona, Animus/Anima, Shadow and Self) which will be used as tools to assess the characters and their relationships under the lens of Jung's process of individuation. This paper argues that these relationships present examples of splitting and intertwining of identities, which, with the aid of Adrienne Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum, will come to show the nuances of female relationships and their relevance when it comes to representation.

Keywords: feminism, companion, *The Blind Assassin*, *Cat's Eye*, *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood

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The Female Companion in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*.

0. Introduction

Nowadays, the search for a female identity is a very prevalent concern for the 4th wave Feminism. There is a persistent need to seize new insight into what it means to be a woman and the complexity and multiplicity that can be found within traditional gender roles. Cultural products such as literary fiction and other media are a preeminent vehicle for the exploration and vindication of female identity. In fact, it is key to study the representation of women, not in terms of their existence as individuals, but in terms of the underlying dynamics and nuances that are present within female interrelationships.

One of the most influential feminist writers on contemporary literature (Macpherson ix), the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, has shown a recurrent interest in female relationships in her novels. At times, her characters cross the boundaries of a conventional friendship into that of a lifelong companionship, a connection that permeates all other facets of their lives. In an article written in 1986 for the *New York Times*, titled "That Certain Thing Called The Girlfriend," Atwood defends the pursuit of a literary model that presents "friendships both sensual and platonic," ranging "from the supportive love of sisters, through the enthusiasms of adolescent girls, to sensual avowals of love by mature women" (1). She adds that this personal interest stems from the observation that, in contemporary literature, there has been renewed concern for this topic: "At no time in literary history have women been examined . . . in such micro-scopic detail . . . What turns out to be the latest on the list of unmentionables in female life now seen to deserve mention? Could it be . . . Best Girlfriends?" ("Certain Thing" 1). In this contention, Atwood recasts the point made by Smith-Rosenberg's insightful article "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America.", which claims the complete oblivion of the nineteenth century's not uncommon "long-lived, intimate, loving friendship between two women" in the study of female relationships (qtd. in Atwood 1).

This paper examines three examples of unique female interrelationships in Margaret Atwood's work, focusing on the novels *Cat's Eye* (1988), *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). It identifies a common pattern: a specific prototype of a female narrator, introverted, passive, submissive; who displays strong feelings of attraction, repulsion or identification towards another female character. This female "companion" is, in turn, extroverted, active and subversive. This paper argues that these strong feelings prompt a splitting or intertwining of character identities that stems from the narrator's idealisation of the "companion" character. To this end, this paper mobilises an interdisciplinary methodology: the characters will be analysed by means of a comparative approximation, and theoretical notions taken from Jungian Psychology and LGBTQ+ and Gender Studies will be applied.

The first section of this paper focuses on the concept of Persona and analyses the similarities between the protagonists in Atwood's *Cat's Eye, Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin.*

The following three sections will discuss individually the relationship between each protagonist and their respective 'companion' character in each novel. The second section describes the concept of Animus/Anima as a symbol of the *Cat's Eye* protagonist's relationship with her childhood nemesis. The third section argues that the protagonist of *Alias Grace* has a relationship with her lost friend that is strongly mediated by the concept of Shadow. In the last section of the analysis, the contrasting relationship between the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* and the 'companion' character, her sister, will be likened to the concept of Self.

1. Theoretical Framework

Several notions of Jungian theories underpin the analysis of female companions in this paper. Firstly, the structure of the present essay is structured along what Jung considers to be the four primary archetypes of the psyche: Persona, Animus/Anima, Shadow and Self. Each of the selected characters will be compared to one aspect of the psyche in an attempt to showcase how female identities are interlaced. The paper explores how the same-sex relationships that the narrators profess in each novel convey their own process of individuation, which they achieve by means of identification, differentiation and unification of both the conscious and unconscious sides of the Self.

Carl Jung's theory has been adapted posthumously into the MBTI,[1] a typological personality questionnaire. This test, albeit popular, has been largely dismissed by the scientific and psychological community for its rigidity and use of binary categories for assessment. In this paper, the terms "Introverted" and "Extroverted" have been used as notions that help locate each character on some location of a spectrum, and therefore, their belonging into one or other category is not as important as establishing their position in that spectrum in relation to each other.

According to Jung[2], "introversion means an inward-turning of libido" (Jung 452). He developed that, in cases of active introversion, the subject voluntarily undergoes a disconnection from the object. This can be considered a passive form of introversion if the subject is unable to reinstate the libido or energy back into the object. A recurrent pattern of introversion leads to referring to a person as "an introverted type" (453). Therefore, the extroverted type, as can be inferred, will have the opposite process, which means, an outward turning of the libido.

In his archetype theory, Jung severed the Self into different parts. The Persona is a Latin term that was used to refer to the theatrical masks worn by actors so the public would see the roles they were depicting instead of their real faces. The origin of the term can help illustrate the meaning Jung gave to this part of the Self. It is the artificial and pragmatic construction that serves a person to adapt and survive in an environment, thus fitting into the roles and expectations imposed on the person by external observers and society. For the sake

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[1] Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI is a self-report questionnaire that classifies each person into one of sixteen personalities based on the dominant and inferior functions with which that person interacts with the world. It is largely based on Carl Jung's theory regarding the four principal cognitive functions he called: sensation, intuition, feeling and thinking.

[2] When not indicated otherwise, the references to Carl Jung have been extracted from *Psychological Types (1951)*, particularly the section of "Definitions" that can be found in the Appendix.

of social acceptance, this archetype of the psyche attempts to conceal the deep and repressed unconscious desires so that in spite of being a natural strategy of the Self, it does not portray the 'true' Self, but rather a dummy social version of the Self.

To give a basic explanation of what Jung deemed the 'Animus/Anima' archetype, these notions are related to the attributes associated to each gender in the collective unconscious. The Animus, as can be found in Carl Jung's *Symbols of Transformation: Two ()*, stands as the "personification of the masculine component of the women's personality" (Jung 183), while the Anima would be the female component of the male's personality. Jung defines 'masculine component' as having "logic and objectivity" as predominant outer features and as values regarded as ideals for "masculinity". "Feminine component" for Jung is reduced to "feeling" and a "womanish weakness and impressionability" (Jung 469).

The Shadow archetype was defined by Jung as the dark side of the Self, which means, the composite of all repressed feelings, desires, impulses and behaviours that society looks down on. It is an inferior part of the personality and arises simultaneously as the Persona takes form. This means that if there were not a repressive side of the personality to modulate the person's actions to successfully adapt to the social environment, there would not be a repressed side that comprises all violent or vengeful tendencies, rage, envy, sexual desire and every other evil-minded instances.

Finally, the Jungian archetype of the Self can be understood as the harmonious coexistence of the conscious and unconscious parts in a person's psyche (Jung 460). The Self is a symbol of unity between opposites and about embracing contradictions.

The main contribution from LGBTQ+ Studies adopted in this analysis is Adrienne Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum, which she coined in her notorious 1980s' essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Rich harnessed the lesbian continuum as an act of resistance to the "clinical and limiting ring" associated with 'lesbianism' (648). She contends that, by delineating 'lesbianism,' "we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself, as an energy . . . the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic" (650). Understanding women relationships as a multi-faceted lesbian existence gives way to a new view of that "primary intensity between and among women," that "sharing of a rich inner life" which is not restricted to "the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (648).

There are some terms that have been borrowed from the critical field of Gender Studies, namely the "angel in the house" and the "fallen woman" which are mainly ascribed to the analysis of the Victorian conception of the feminine ideal. The origin of the use of the "angel in the house" expression can be located in a poem by Coventry Patmore first published in 1854. The expression was popularised after Virginia Woolf used it in her essay "Professions for Women" (1931). Later, Elaine Showalter would use it in "Killing the Angel in the House: autonomy for Women Writers" (1972).

1. The Persona in *Cat's Eye*, *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*.

There is something eerie about Atwood's narrators. On the surface, it may seem as though there is nothing in common between Elaine Risley, Grace Marks and Iris Chase. Each of these three women has completely different life circumstances. On the one hand, Elaine Risley, from *Cat's Eye*, is an old female painter who returns to her hometown for a retrospective of her artistic career, and this experience forces her to relive all the childhood memories she had gladly left behind. On the other hand, *Alias Grace*, set in the 19th Century, presents the character of Grace Marks, a young and attractive girl that has already spent some years convicted in prison. She attempts to gain her pardon by convincing a newly-arrived psychiatrist of her innocence with regards to her participation in the murders of her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper and lover, Nancy Montgomery. Finally, Iris Chase, from *The Blind Assassin,* is an eighty-year-old woman and one of the few surviving members of a once-wealthy family in Canada. Iris decides to write a memoir and reveal many long-kept secrets about her relationship with her sister and her unhappy marriage with the wealthy businessman, Richard Griffen.

Nonetheless, as one reads through the novels and pays attention to their patterns of thought, it is inevitable to feel that there is some uncanny resemblance in how they operate and view the world, that is, when it comes to analysing their psyches. This phenomenon has indeed been noticed by some Atwood critics/commentators. Writing for the London School of Journalism LSJ, a contributor named Justine suggests that "Atwood teaches through negative examples. The protagonists are not really heroic heroines at the beginning, and usually by the end, nothing has changed." She also highlights a certain "submissiveness" in common that, however, "takes a different shape" in each case. There are others that even question whether Atwood's central characters can even be referred to as 'heroines,' as they are "ambiguous and morally suspect, often . . . clueless . . . and Atwood herself seldom appears to 'like' any of them very much at all" (Bloom 59).

In fact, rather than following the hero's journey, these characters recurrently play a role of victim within the story, which casts them into a state of passivity. In Atwood's *Survival* (1972), she defined a system of four different categories within the role of victim, a model that can be applied to every power struggle situation, although she designed it with a colonised setting in mind. Jane Sellwood summarises Atwood's categories: "one, to deny the fact that you are a victim; two, to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim . . . ; three, to acknowledge that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable; position four is to be a creative non-victim" (265). Despite the possibilities proposed by Atwood, the three characters that have been chosen for this analysis fit into the second category. This must not be mistaken for a coincidence, as the similarities between the three women go far past that: they all fit into the "image of the woman as fabricator, seamstress, weaver, spider", which ends up colliding with that of the "tale-teller, writer" (Bloom 60). The creative abilities for these women – Grace's quilting, Elaine's painting, Iris' writing – serve as a way of sublimation of their powerful inner feelings. The images of "creator" and "victim" are superposed to other images that are commonly related to women: the image of "innocent" and "caregiver". Examples of these can be seen respectively in Grace's portrayal of herself as innocent of any crime, naïve and kind-hearted, as well as in Iris self-imposed role of caretaker, supervisor, even extrajudicial guardian of her younger sister.

A further nexus between these three characters would be the process Jung referred to as “introversion.” As has already been mentioned, Jung defined a character as introverted or extraverted depending on whether their “libido” or energy, was facing inwards or outwards. This contraposition of personality types is very evident between the characters that will be analysed. For example, it has been said that in *Cat’s Eye,* Cordelia’s character, functions as an “extroverted vampire;” while Elaine, the protagonist, “represents the introverted melancholic made glamorous” (Potvin 648).

For the three protagonists that are being discussed, the Persona seems to have taken over their whole lives, dictating their paths and even influencing their internal monologue as it is reported to the reader. These characters have become so self-aware of their social requirements, so influenced by the perception others have of them and so dependent on portraying the expected role, that there is little left of their ‘true’ Selves.

In the case of Elaine Risley from the novel *Cat’s Eye* (1988), there seems to be an underlying problem of inferiority complex that cripples her from a very young age, particularly in matters related to gender. She spends her early childhood travelling with her parents and brothers. Her knowledge of what a girl is seems quite limited, nonetheless causing her an extreme fascination: “I draw them in old-fashioned clothing, with long skirts, pinafores and puffed sleeves . . . This is the elegant, delicate picture I have in my mind, about other little girls” (Atwood *Cat’s Eye* 33). She adds that she would be at a loss if she had to actually talk with any girl. This helps clarify the vision Elaine has of ”girls” as mythical creatures, a label that would not fit her. In fact, at her arrival to a formal school, she is suddenly confronted with the need to decipher and process the intricacies of social behaviour, specifically the behaviour that is expected of her as a girl. She explains that “Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I’m only doing an imitation of a girl” (60). She is further unsettled as she sees that the boys and girls in her new school have to go through different doors to enter the building. This becomes a conundrum for her as she wonders “How is going through a door different if you are a boy? . . . The boys don’t have a separate classroom, they’re in with us. They go in the BOYS door and end up in the same place we do” (53). Her questioning of these signs is simply a materialisation of the social segregation and differentiation based on gender. She will struggle with attempting to conform to gender norms during her years at school. This inferiority she feels towards other girls will make her willingly endure bullying at the hand of her supposed girlfriends. Further on, during puberty, she will admit that her “relationships with boys are effortless” (279); in contrast, it is rather towards girls that she feels awkwardness and a need to defend herself.

Despite her disinterest towards boys, she asserts: “I have a boyfriend as is the fashion” (239). This statement reveals that the only reason she has a boyfriend is because it is the “normal” thing to do. Martocci depicts Elaine as “anxious to be a girl, a real girl, [she] scrambles to accommodate every prescription passed down by her new girlfriends” (150). Her willingness to suffer abuse will later turn into passivity, fear and victimisation, which, funnily enough, will grant her partial admission into this ‘girl world’ (Martocci 150). It is rather late that the next realisation comes to her: “I see I don’t have to do what she says, and, worse and better, I’ve never had to do what she says” (Atwood 228). Much later, she will still struggle to recognise that she is holding onto feelings that are not her own, but rather come from her childhood

friend, Cordelia (495). Whether this is a trauma response or a personality trait intrinsic to Elaine, it is clear that in the novel there is “an early withdrawal into a self-imposed state of impersonality in order to evade an intolerable situation” (Bloom 175).

In the case of Grace Marks in the novel *Alias Grace* (1996), her role as a storyteller within the story partly explains the way in which the Persona Archetype dominates her discourse and actions. Making a good impression on Dr. Simon Jordan is a crucial step towards finding freedom from her sentence to life imprisonment (Bloom 128). Self-consciousness and cunning is what dictates each of her movements. She admits, “I have a stupid look which I have practised” (Atwood *Alias Grace* 43). At another instance, when she is given a piece of fruit by Dr. Jordan, she privately confesses to the reader: “The truth is I don’t want him watching me while I eat. I don’t want him to see my hunger. If you have a need and they find it, they will use it against you” (44). It has been pointed out by critics such as Gillian Siddall (Bloom), that Grace’s profound understanding of herself as one built up by the opinions and perspectives of others goes as far as needing a “new arrangement of the face” when the public view shifts from seeing her as a “celebrated murderess,” to an “innocent woman wrongly accused” (Atwood 513). There are many voices that hold an influence over Grace, as Fiona Tolan asserts, it seems that ‘Grace assimilates the voices of others to the detriment of her own” (231). From this collection of voices, the most recognisable and recurrent appears to be Mary Whitney, a girl Grace meets at her first post as a maid. At times, Grace expresses what she would like to do, which often correlates with what Mary would have done in her case. However, in most instances, Grace ends up withholding herself: “Take your hand off my tit, you filthy bastard, Mary Whitney would have said, but all I could say was Oh no, Oh no” (Atwood 38).

The importance of her physical aspect, the careful choosing of every word, all demonstrate an increasingly active Persona that Grace is trying to embody. She has been trying to embody this for so long, that she arguably has lost track of the real Grace Marks, and of reality itself. This can be seen in the way she still holds a victimised, innocent discourse even when not talking to Simon Jordan but to herself. Her self-perception is clearly opposite to those that consider her “a monster . . . , a wild beast” (36), “a cunning one” (73), “a devious dissembler” (38). She rather sees herself as innocent of all the crimes she has been falsely accused of: “although I felt myself innocent, I knew appearances were against me” (394). Moreover, the tale she presents to Jordan can be seen as a constant appeal for empathy and commiseration. At first she presents herself as a child that was abused by her father and had to take care of little children and a household because of her mother’s death. Then she transforms into a young maid who was taken advantage by her master, ended up in prison because of a filthy murderer who threatened and forced her. Finally, she turns into a poor mistreated woman, preyed on by prison guards, doctors, nurses and prevented unfairly from having a regular life.

She frequently attempts to appear humble, appeasing and harmless: “It was not my place to want to say anything” (77), “I could not have acted so heartlessly” (383), “as a rule I say nothing” (37), “I’m sure I would never do such a thing” (38). Despite this insistence of an innocuous appearance, she repeatedly showcases what could be referred to as Freudian slips. For example, after thinking about frightening the prison guards, she clarifies, “I never

do such things, however. I only consider them. If I did them they would be sure I had gone mad again" (37). In this sense, there is a proactive attempt on Grace's part to accommodate to the Victorian model of woman, the "angel in the house," an image of virtue, purity, submissiveness and devotion. In fact, it seems as if her desperate attempts to fit this description of a woman are due to her past experiences, having seen the effects that the opposite myth can have on women. "The fallen woman" is an image of corruption, promiscuity and illegitimacy that Grace sees reflected in the tragic ends to the lives of Mary Whitney and Nancy Montgomery.

Regarding the case of Iris Chase from the novel *The Blind Assassin* (2000), the Persona archetype materialises in the form of a mask that prevents her from having a personal opinion, acting against the wants of other people or even questioning the governing social norms. It has been asserted that Iris, as a member of the upper class, "has internalised the rules governing her class and gender during her formative years" (Bouson 69). Nevertheless, despite her sister Laura having been instructed the same way, it cannot be said that Laura shows the same acclimatisation to social rules and expectations. The way that Iris disguises herself in the various levels of narration that compose the novel and the novel within the novel is also striking. The masking that takes place can be best described as such: "Iris masquerades in her autobiography as in her life as a genteel woman who plays by the social rules imposed on her" (92). Although "masquerading" gives a notion of intentionality and purposefulness, when in reality, Iris sits back and waits for the others to take care of her. Alan Robinson goes as far as defending that "her belief in her capacity for self-determination has been buried beneath the 'false self' which she has constructed to secure the love and approval [of others]" (349).

Both in her youth and old age there is a clear stance of passivity and a dynamic of being ordered around and taken care of by other people. The older Iris, narrator of the story, jumps around between events that happened decades ago and the routines and events that happen to her on a day-to-day basis. At present, it is Myra that takes charge of where Iris is to go, and what she is to do or avoid doing. Iris talks of Myra's never-ending reprimands and warnings, "I shouldn't be making the bed, says Myra; I shouldn't be carrying heavy baskets of soiled clothing down the rickety steps to the cellar" (Atwood *The Blind Assassin* 448). She also explains how she is driven around by Walter, her chauffeur, who pays little attention to where Iris may want to go: "Walter said he'd take me to lunch . . . I expect Myra had put him up to this" (358). There is also a clear imagery of Iris functioning like an inert object: "Walter levered me out of the car" (362). At first glance, this may be taken as a result of her advanced age, but, looking deeper, one notices that this metaphor is also applied to the young Iris. A clear example of this is the repeated notion that Richard, her husband, directs her where he wants her to be: "He steered to the table he'd reserved. He ordered a martini for me and one for himself. He said the martini would fix me up in no time flat" (298). Furthermore, Iris is stranded of her right of choosing one or other drink, or even choosing not to drink. After being "unceremoniously slotted into [Richard] Griffen's Toronto life . . . Iris is quickly rendered inert. She smiles, does her wifely duty, fades into the furniture" (Smith 21). Indeed, during her marriage, Iris goes through a process of depersonalization. Furthermore, Richard's sister Winifred also takes it upon herself to control Iris' life; she is the one who redecorates the new house as the married couple is on their honeymoon (Atwood 373), she chooses the clothes Iris

is to wear (298) and even decides that gardening is the hobby that Iris must take up (362). All of these enforced requirements, Iris follows without hesitating. She compares her situation in the house to a mouse living between tigers: “I thought I could live like a mouse in the castle of the tigers, by creeping around out of sight inside the walls; by staying quiet, by keeping my head down. No: I give myself too much credit. I didn’t see the danger. I didn’t even know they were tigers” (406).

In a similar way to how Grace Marks was influenced by the voices of others, Iris’ thoughts are plagued by Reenie’s opinions and warnings: “I didn’t enter a movie theatre until after I was married, because Reenie said the Bijou was cheapening, for young girls by themselves at any rate” (245). As can be seen, Iris’ decisions rarely follow her own opinions, and this not only happens with banal things such as ordering a drink or going to the movies, but also with her marriage, a decision that defines the outcome of her entire life. 35 year-old businessman, Richard, proposes marriage to 18 year-old Iris. Her father, who is in business with Richard, asserts that “a certain amount depends on it . . . Laura's future in particular” (276). Iris sees herself morally pressured to commit to this marriage. Later, Laura will debate the morality of the union: she believes Iris can’t “*want”* to marry Richard. Iris harshly asseverates in response: “What I want isn’t the point . . . It’s the only sensible thing” (289). This attitude of selflessness and will to serve a moral duty will be Iris' downfall; at the end of her life, she will hardly hold any responsibility for what she endured through the years: “Events took their course” (266). Her only comfort will be resignation and the perspective that “Half a life is better than none” (585). In other words, it does not matter living the life someone else wants for you, living on the superficial level, not being yourself, if you can still live. This is a strong statement that highlights the destructive and alienating effect that can be suffered if the Persona takes over the Self.

2. The Nemesis or the Animus/Anima in *Cat’s Eye*.

The character of Cordelia in *Cat’s Eye* is Elaine’s best friend, worst friend and nemesis all at the same time. She is her best friend in the sense that they spent a large part of their childhood and adolescence together, they have a strong connection, play and have fun together. At the end of Elaine’s life, she still fancies reminiscing about her past times with Cordelia and wishes to reunite and reconcile with her. She is her worst friend in the sense that despite considering herself a friend, she psychologically abuses Elaine, almost drives her to death and, even after that, wants to keep controlling and tormenting her. She can also be considered Elaine’s ultimate nemesis, as she is a person with so much power over her that not only defined what Elaine wanted to be, but later became the thing she was most afraid to become. After decades of not seeing her, she walks along her childhood city, completely alert and terrified of walking into her: “Wherever she turns, wherever she goes, she expects to see Cordelia; she is literally waiting for Cordelia to become present again” (Jong 101). Elaine herself asserts fearfully that “She could be within a mile of me, she could be right on the next block” (Atwood *Cat’s Eye* 9). There is an explicit ambiguity in the relationship: Cordelia is to Elaine an object of extreme fear, but simultaneously and just as strongly, an object of desire (Tolan 193). It must be considered, then, how important the connection with Cordelia is to Elaine, to the point that

despite her absence, the ghost of Cordelia haunts Elaine as a lifelong companion or at least the most similar thing to it that she knows, given that Elaine divorces her first husband and is not that much concerned with her second one.

This paper has previously discussed how the system of beliefs that the collective conscious and unconscious have on gender affect Elaine Risley. As noted, her preoccupation regarding gender norms is closely related to the abuse she receives at the hands of her group of friends, Cordelia being the undeniable leader and prime instigator, under the pretext that they are teaching her how to ”be better,” how to fit into those constrained expectations for a girl, and get rid as best as she can of what could be called ”a pronounced Animus”. Martocci notes that “The subsequent campaign (of humiliation), undertaken to ‘correct’ Elaine’s shortcomings, offers chilling insight into tactics employed in the construction of femininity” (151). At their first encounter, the character of Cordelia is enrapturing for Elaine, she radiates an air of maturity and refinement reflected in how she “has a smile like a grown-up’s” (Atwood 82) and her intimidating and “confiding” tone (83). She can turn from condescending to defiant to “remote, unreflecting” (262) in a matter of seconds. Regardless of this negative and frightening perception of Cordelia, at the divine apparition of the Virgin Mary, a hallucinating and freezing Elaine mistakes the approaching silhouette with Cordelia. The effect Cordelia has on Elaine is imposing and weakening, as can be seen when Cordelia calls to apologise for the incident: “This apology, however fake, makes me feel not stronger but weaker” (228).

Moreover, Elaine divides the people she knows into two categories: tame and wild. Cordelia is to her the purest example of what wild things are: “Wild things are elusive and wily and look out for themselves” (154). Fiona Tolan refers multiple times to the “dangerous sensuality” (198) intrinsic to the character of Cordelia. A further reason for which Cordelia is deemed dangerous is related to her connection with “the grotesque, the abject and the semiotic” (194), due to the fascination and repulsion that the female body causes her, specifically breasts. In turn, she is later seen by Elaine herself as a personification of the sexually mature body: “she's no longer angular and rangy, she's grown full breasts and is heavier in the hips... I have a ferocious desire to be older” (Atwood 241). By this time, Elaine and Cordelia start going to High School together and while the former is “silent and watchful”, the latter “plucks her eyebrows into thin lines . . . paints her nails . . . laughs raucously in the halls . . . comes up with new, complicated swear-words . . . takes up smoking and gets caught doing it in the girl’s washroom” (268). In other words, the rebellious and subversive teenage personality that Cordelia displays is presented in opposition to Elaine’s calm, observant nature. This is one of the reasons why Cordelia has been referred to as Elaine’s “doppelgänger” (Nicholson 201), her “dark twin” (Tolan 191). This motif of the doppelgänger originated a while back and was popularised with Gothic fiction. It implies much more than a striking resemblance between two people: the doppelgänger is a dark double of the main character in which we can see reflected the negative traits of the hero. It stands as a physical manifestation of any fragmented identity or duality within the character, which in this case supports both the duality in Cordelia’s personality as well as the invisible and repressed side of Elaine’s personality.

At a certain point, the borders between the Animus/Anima are almost completely blurred: Cordelia’s aggressive, incompliant personality can be interpreted as an overt Animus, while Elaine’s resistance to following the trends and stereotypes of girls her age and retaining

calmness, rationality and control can also be seen as an illustration of Animus. Furthermore, despite Elaine's tendency to avoid conflict and attention, she displays an attraction towards Cordelia "as she breaks the rules, and thus desires to do the same" (Adamo 81). This attraction is at times replaced with confusion because Cordelia "at the same time complies with how they are 'supposed to be behaving'" (81). This makes the power dynamics between them vary considerably, since Elaine's idealisation transforms into disappointment and, later, disdain. For instance, in Grade Eleven, Elaine asserts that the person she uses her newly developed 'mean mouth' the most with is Cordelia: "She doesn't even have to provoke me, I use her as target practice" (Atwood 277). After that, Cordelia will show vulnerability and tell Elaine of her miserable childhood and Elaine will feel "shame . . . guilt and terror, and . . . a cold disgust with" (299) herself. She will go on to avoid Cordelia for a long time, getting angry when she has to visit her in the nuthouse (420) and at her house (305).

Throughout all these ever changing stages of their lives, Cordelia and Elaine share a strong bond that goes further than the limits of friendship and deeply resembles what Adrienne Rich described as the sharing of rich inner experiences between lesbian women. Their intense way of looking at bodily changes and the comparisons that come up between the two during their adolescence also point towards quite a vivid erotic connection.

Another pivotal moment to understanding the mutual exchange of power and the intertwining of identities in Elaine and Cordelia's relationship can be located at Elaine's retrospective show, where she realises: "Cordelia is afraid of me in this picture. I am afraid of Cordelia. I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (267). Bearing this in mind, it follows that Elaine and Cordelia's selves are mutually dependent: Elaine is as responsible for creating Cordelia's identity as "much as Cordelia, in their youth, fashioned Elaine" (Tolan 195). Furthermore, Martocci sees them as "mirror to the other, both are victim and victimizer; subject and object" (158). Each of them represents the Animus/Anima figure for the other, as they function as mutual guides for the understanding of the Self and its relationship with the outside world.

3. The Lost Friend or Shadow in *Alias Grace*.

During Dr. Jordan's interrogation, Grace Marks first avoids talking about Mary Whitney. She seems to want to keep that part of her past to herself: "I think of Mary Whitney, and the apple peelings we threw over our shoulders that night, to see who we would marry. But I will not tell him that" (Atwood *Alias Grace* 44). Nevertheless, when Grace is finally ready to share with Jordan her memories of Mary and her story, she will say about her that she "was once a particular friend . . . I did not think she would mind it if I used her name. She sometimes lent me her clothing . . . Without her it would have been a different story entirely" (117). These assertions show how important Mary Whitney is for the development of the story and the intimate nature of her relationship with Grace during the time they both worked as young serving maids at the Alderman Parkinson's household. Furthermore, the time Grace spent by Mary's side is presented as a "happier part" (169) of the story; a happy place to which Grace will return to in her mind to comfort herself in her future times of suffering: "Oh Mary, I would say, how I long to be back at our cold little bedroom . . . And it did seem to me at times that

little comfort came back to me in return" (416). It must be noted that the episode of Mary's death after a botched abortion left a deep mark on Grace that constituted a potential trauma and would left her feeling remorseful until the end of her days because she did not stay awake the night Mary Whitney was dying (416) and because they had not opened the window fast enough to let her soul out.

At their first encounter, Mary Whitney is described as a "pretty and cheerful girl, with a tidy figure" (172). She is also said to work diligently and quickly, and for this reason she is highly regarded by the housekeeper. She instantly takes Grace under her wing, teaches her way around the house tasks, as this is Grace's first post, and even helps Grace learn how to read (30). They share a room and a bed (170), and their friendship makes the hard winter more bearable (194). They also share stories, tickle each other, try corsets together (184), play games and hold "onto each other and laugh so much I thought we should die" (188). They even fantasise about how they will run together and go "hide in the forest" (173). A lesbian erotic and romantic essence is implicit in the behaviours described, although their relationship is not entirely as straightforward as it initially appears.

However, there is also a crude side to Mary: Grace admits that she "was often astonished at the words that came out of her mouth" (173) and how she "was an outspoken young woman, and did not mince words; and she had very democratic ideas, which it took [Grace] some getting used to" (183). As an example of these ideas that take Grace slightly aback, when Mary talks about the radicals and the rebellion that is taking place (171), she also takes Grace to see the whores (175) and explains plenty of information about them which makes Grace question "how she knew so much about it" (175). When Mary mysteriously receives a gold ring from her lover, Grace suspects that she might have stolen it, as it was not unusual for Mary to borrow and snatch small things around the house.

In addition, there is a fierceness and resoluteness in the way Mary manages things, for example, when Grace's father came to take her money, "Mary set the stablehands onto him" (181). This protective side of Mary is also noticeable in the way Grace often finds herself being comforted by Mary. When Grace gets scared of dying because of the arrival of her first period, Mary "put her arm around me and comforted me" (190). Mary also has a clear affection for Grace, as she gives her a hug and a kiss at Christmas (197), declares her "the best friend she ever had" (204), retorts to her when she is in "in great need of confiding in someone" (200), and finally, leaves all of her scarce possessions to go to Grace after she dies (202).

Some critics have doubted whether Mary is real or she is just "the projection of all of Grace's own feelings of rage and hostility" (Bloom 32) or that she "signifies a less socialised, freer, irreverent, and possibly revengeful aspect of Grace that she seems to repress" (Bloom 86). These theories gain momentum if we take into account the episode where Grace is allegedly hypnotised by her old friend Jeremiah and Grace's body is apparently taken over by the spirit of Mary Whitney that will admit to having committed the murders. She will present herself as "the opposite of Grace. She is loud, crude, without remorse and perversely evil" (Knapp 17). Mary's apparition also gives reason to Grace's amnesiac lapses, her hysteric fits in the asylum, where Mary confesses that she "could talk out loud there" (Atwood 468). Thus, Mary Whitney in *Alias Grace* comes to embody the Shadow part of Grace Mark's repressed identity.

It has also been asserted that, in *Alias Grace*, Atwood leaves the story open for the possibility to interpret that Grace is indeed suffering from a psychological response to trauma. This psychological response accurately fits in the description of Dissociative Identity Disorder according to the DSM-V (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition)*: "Dissociative identity disorder is characterised by a) the presence of two or more distinct personality states or an experience of possession and b) recurrent episodes of amnesia" (291).

This would mean that there is no paranormal activity going on, Mary's soul is not really trapped inside Grace's head, but rather "Grace, in her emerging split personality, adopts the feisty Mary persona as her criminal alter ego" (Kumamoto 382), and therefore, "is free to articulate anger denied to her as herself" (Tolan 234). Tolan puts forward the suggestion that Mary is a double onto which Grace projects "her own repressed self into the figure of Mary" (239), which she connects with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's theory from *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). This book had a seminal role in the development of feminist literary studies and the analysis of representation of female characters. According to their theory, doubles are understood as "fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their author's submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable" (qtd. in Tolan 239). Tolan also suggests that Grace has transformed Mary's neat and efficient character while in life into "the monster woman… who seeks the power of self-articulation" (qtd. in Tolan 240), which is precisely what Grace needs: a Shadow that can hold the suppressed needs of the Persona.

4. The Sister or Self in *The Blind Assassin*

There are several radical differences between Iris and Laura Chase in *The Blind Assassin* (2000). After having examined Iris' passivity and selflessness, it is easy to recognise Laura as a figure of contrast with her "active initiatives of escape or rebellion" (Robinson 349). If Iris can be understood as "inert", then Laura would be the one that "has the most life" (Smith 21). If Iris learns in her childhood the benefits of keeping quiet (Atwood *The Blind Assassin* 105) and the virtue of "silent resistance" (203), then Laura can be defined as having "a mouth full of questions" (Smith 21), "the ability to subtract herself in the blink of an eye" (Atwood 200), the head "full of ideas" and the attitude that what other people think or talk about "is their own concern" (244), not hers. While Laura gets lost in existential wonderings about God, Iris is seen as "the practical type" (258). Furthermore, Iris struggles with the process of individuation as she remains too close to her sister. One example of this is how Laura associates herself with the letter "L", while Iris feels like she cannot have a favourite letter "because I was everybody's letter" (110). The birth of Laura represents a critical event in the course of Iris' life: from that point on her mother does not seem the same, "it was as if my former mother had been taken away by the elves" (105). And when the mother finally dies asking Iris to take care of Laura, Iris rues bitterly how she "didn't know I was about to be left with her idea of me" (117). Therefore, carrying this burden of responsibility, Iris' feelings towards Laura are ambivalent: there is anger and protectiveness, there is rivalry and identification (Robinson 353). Surprisingly, there is even an inversion within the hierarchy: Iris feels like Laura is "talking to me as if I was the younger sister" (Atwood 519), and when she

reencounters her sister after she has been disappeared for years, she explains: “I’d expect I’d be consoling Laura . . . Instead she was lecturing me. How easily we slid back into our roles” (519).

At the end of the day, what angers Iris is the feeling that she has to exist for the sake of taking care of Laura, while Laura can simply exist on her own. During Iris’ retelling of her childhood, the two sisters seem almost inseparable: “Reenie said we were together too much” (174). The ‘we’ becomes synonymous with the ‘I’: “We were left . . . We learned . . . We peered . . . Holding our breaths” (170). Much later on, when Iris finds out that Laura has been hospitalised and is claiming that Iris’ baby is hers, she will explain: “She [had never] been a respecter of territories. What was mine was hers: my fountain pen, my cologne, my summer dress, my hat, my hairbrush. Had this catalogue extended to include my unborn baby?” (538). Tolan recognises that this crossing of boundaries between sisters goes both ways (265), as Iris reports that “seeing her from behind gave me a peculiar sensation, as if I were watching myself” (Atwood 477).

The sisters’ relationship with men unequivocally blurs the lines between their identities and brings them further together. Their sexual and romantic experiences are deeply connected and intertwined throughout the novel, which further supports their position in the lesbian continuum. Iris states that “Tending Alex Thomas brought Laura and me closer together . . . He was our guilty secret” (264). In this same instance, the sisters are described once again highlighting their differences: “We were Mary and Martha . . . I was to be Martha, keeping busy with the household chores in the background; she was to be Mary, laying pure devotion at Alex’s feet” (264). As for Richard Griffen, Iris’ husband, who repeatedly took sexual advantage of Laura and could presumably be the father of the baby that was stolen from her (Robinson 356), Iris ironically asserts: “I suppose when he married me he figured he’d got a bargain – two for the price of one” (Atwood 617). Concerning the endurance of suffering and abuse that Iris goes through in her relationship with Richard, Laura seems to hold a very similar position to Mary Whitney’s in *Alias Grace.* For example, Iris imagines the rebellious acts Laura would do but Iris is too coward to: “Laura would have sneered at these outfits” (637), “She’d spill something on this house, break something, deface at least a small corner of it” (374). Laura, while being sexually abused by Richard, goes on to impress and take control over him, “it was almost as if he was afraid of her” (438), which is something that Iris never managed to do herself. Furthermore, as with Grace Marks’ Shadow, Laura is hospitalised for having “finally snapped,” . It is reported to Iris that “she remains a danger to herself” and that “Miss Chase will never be strong” (496), when in reality the internalisation of Laura in a mental hospital has happened because she is too strong for Richard’s purposes. Kinga Kolumbán sees a correspondence of this occurrence with Gilbert and Gubar’s aforementioned theory, and declares that Laura is “Iris’ double/alter ego within the text, her sister’s shadow and constant companion” (Kolumbán 96). While Laura arguably corresponds to all these roles, she seems to be something more to Iris’ identity and psyche.

It could be asserted that, in *The Blind Assassin,* Iris finds the materialisation of the other side of herself in Laura, like a reflection in the mirror which seems so similar yet inverted. Reaching for Laura seems to be the path Iris choses to reconnect with the lost parts of her Self. A clear example of this can be found in the way Iris publishes a story about her own affair

under the name of Laura. This retelling of Iris' affair under the name of Laura is precisely with the only man she knew Laura ever loved, Alex Thomas, with whom Iris imagined that Laura also had had an affair. In the narrative, there is an absence of deictic markers (Robinson 356), as well as an absence of the main characters' names, which favours the ambiguity and anonymity of the female lover. At the end of the novel, Iris explains that *The Blind Assassin* (the novella within the novel), was written by both of them; that it is "a left-handed book. That's why one of us is always out of sight, whichever way you look at it" (Atwood 627). Iris continues the metaphor by stating that they are like a fist, "more than the sum of its fingers" (626), which gives reminiscences of an earlier reference in which Iris perceives that "For them I'm only an appendage, Laura's odd extra hand, attached to no body" (350).

5. Conclusion

This paper has analysed three examples of unique female interrelationships taken from Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye, Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*, and has found a specific pattern. In all novels, the protagonist is a female character that shows traits of introversion, passivity and submission and a strong lack of individuation; they all play the role of victim within the story, rather than the heroine, and share a common ground of images such as the creator (Elaine Risley in *Cat's Eye*), the innocent (Grace Marks in *Alias Grace)*, the caregiver (Iris Chase in *The Blind Assassin)*, the observer and taleteller. Furthermore, the way in which these characters have retorted to docility and impersonality in order to adapt to social expectations has been assessed under the light of Jung's archetype of the Persona.

The female "companion" character, with whom each of the protagonists has a strong connection, portrays the opposite traits: extroversion, activity, subversion. The relationship between these characters and the protagonist of each novel has been shown to incorporate the other three primary Jungian archetypes: the Animus/Anima (Cordelia and her imposing gender norms), the Shadow (Mary Whitney's envy and murderous impulses), the Self (Laura's way of uniting Iris with her unconscious side).

These "companion" characters act, both in life and death, as counterparts of the three protagonists. Their intimate connections go as far as defining their lives, by way of a splitting or an intertwining of their identities, corresponding to their deepest repressions, insecurities and struggles. In the end, the "companion" characters are not real people, but rather reconstructions devised by the psyche of the protagonists to fulfil the needed role of subverter. This leads them to reconcile their personalities overtaken by the Persona with the rest of the parts that compose them.

Margaret Atwood, in her quest to create female characters that are subversive and complex, portrays women not only as individuals but, more widely, as agents of intimate and intense relationships. These relationships can be understood as part of the multi-faceted lesbian existence that Adrienne Rich defined, underlining the concept of lesbianism without the limiting it to sexual relationships. This representation of women's characters and relationships is fully aligned with the project of 4th wave Feminism.

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