



Universitat de Lleida

The Angel in the House and the Fallen Angel:
Female affiliation versus Heterosexuality in
Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* and Sarah
Waters' *Fingersmith*.

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“My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.”
(Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.8)

“But, here was a curious thing. The more I tried to give up thinking of her, the more I said to myself, 'She's nothing to you', the harder I tried to pluck the idea of her out of my heart, the more she stayed there.”
(Waters, 2002, p.136)

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Abstract

The figures of the angel in the house and the fallen angel have been used in women's literature to portray the horrors that women had to suffer in patriarchal society. Their legal helplessness implied that their safety remained in the hands of men, who even had the power to declare them insane and, therefore, confine them to a madhouse. *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) by Mary Wollstonecraft, an illustration of her previous philosophical work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), is a clear representation of how women at that time sometimes found comprehension and friendship among their own sex rather than in their husbands. Female affiliation as an alternative to heterosexuality is also clearly represented in the Neo-Victorian novel *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters, a contemporary novel portraying the Victorian world. This essay attempts to demonstrate that, despite the importance given to marriage at that time, women found themselves prisoners of their husbands and female affiliation was sometimes a better option to escape that fate. These novels illustrate the concern about the oppressive situation of women at that time and how female affiliation worked as a strategy to overcome such oppression. Nowadays, feminism is already part of modern society, but it is interesting to see how it started to flourish in the 18th century through female writers like Wollstonecraft, who argued that women were not naturally inferior to men, but that they appeared to be so because of their lack of education. Waters provides contemporary readers with an alternative representation of Victorian society in which the main characters represent the invisible and marginalized homosexual women as a metaphor of their condition. In order to analyse this, I will focus on feminist theory to examine social and gender roles, cultural ideas about proper feminine behaviour, the treatment of madness in women, and the genre of the female gothic as a tool to criticise patriarchal ideas.

Key words: Sarah Waters, Mary Wollstonecraft, Feminism, Female Affiliation, Gender roles, Female Gothic.

Resum

Les figures de l'Àngel de la Casa (the Angel in the House) i l'Àngel Caigut (the Fallen Angel) han estat utilitzades en la literatura femenina per il·lustrar els horrors que les dones han patit en la societat patriarcal. L'absència de suport legal implicava que la seva seguretat restava en mans dels homes, qui fins i tot tenien el poder per declarar-les mentalment inestables i, per tant, tancar-les en un manicomi. *Maria* (1798), escrita per Mary Wollstonecraft, és una clara il·lustració de la seva obra filosòfica prèvia *Vindicació dels Drets de la Dona* (1792) a més d'un exemple clar de com les dones trobaven de vegades comprensió i amistat entre el seu propi sexe que no pas en els seus marits. Els vincles d'afecte entre dones es presenten també com una alternativa a les relacions heterosexuales en la novel·la Neo-Victoriana *Fingersmith* (2002), escrita per Sarah Waters, una novel·la contemporània que descriu l'època Victoriana. Aquest assaig tracta de demostrar que, malgrat la importància que es donava al matrimoni en aquella època, les dones sovint se sentien presoneres dels seus marits i l'amistat entre dones era una millor opció per escapar d'aquell tràgic destí. Aquestes novel·les il·lustren la preocupació sobre la situació opressiva que patien les dones en aquella època i com les relacions d'amistat i afecte entre dones funcionaven com a estratègia per superar aquesta opressió. A dia d'avui el feminisme ja forma part de la societat moderna, però és interessant explorar com va néixer al segle XVIII per mitjà d'escriptores com Mary Wollstonecraft, qui argumentava que les dones no eren naturalment inferiors als homes, però que podien semblar-ho per la falta d'educació que rebien. Alhora, Sarah Waters presenta una imatge alternativa de l'època Victoriana vers els seus lectors contemporanis en la qual els personatges principals representen les dones homosexuals, invisibles i marginades, com a metàfora de l'opressió de les dones. Per analitzar aquests aspectes, em centraré primer en la teoria feminista per examinar els rols socials i de gènere, nocions culturals sobre el comportament femení adequat, el tractament de la bogeria en les dones, i el gènere del gòtic femení com una eina per criticar les idees patriarcales.

Paraules clau: Sarah Waters, Mary Wollstonecraft, Feminisme, Amistat entre dones, Rols de gènere, Gòtic Femení.

1. Introduction

Feminism is an ideology that advocates for women's rights on the ground of equality between sexes, but women had long been denouncing their precarious situation through literature. My aim is to analyse the role of women in the novels *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) by Mary Wollstonecraft and *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters. In these novels, I will identify the legal situation of women, how madness was associated to the female sex, how the Female Gothic illustrates women's situation, and female affiliation as an alternative to heterosexual relationships.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how fiction is used to describe a general situation. Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985) will be the source used to contrast fiction with a study on cultural ideas about 'proper' feminine behaviour in relation to the definition and treatment of female insanity. Moreover, I will discuss the ideas presented by Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to illustrate her views on the importance of education to instruct women and get to equality between sexes.

These two novels have been previously analysed separately by many researchers (for example, Knutsson 2013 and Jones & O'Callaghan 2016), but there is a need to analyse them together in order to explore common aspects and differences between them. My aim is to reflect how women found an alternative to heterosexual marriages by friendship or love among their own sex. In the following sections, I will use the novels to show how women could hardly have an equal relationship with men because they would be never understood: they would have to assume their domestic role and live under the rules of the patriarchal world.

I have chosen this topic because I am interested in gender and women's studies. During my degree, I have not been able to deal with these two novels and, although there is a huge difference of time between them, I have found many similarities. Reading these novels from several points of view is important to understand many hidden aspects that may not be relevant if the novels are analysed separately, especially in order to understand why some women chose to reject marriage and find companionship in another woman.. It is important to explore how women used fiction to give voice to their concerns: society and the law did not give them any voice since they were objects at the mercy of men.

In order to understand better the topic analysed, I will explore the biographies of the authors, basic aspects of each novel, *Vindication* and feminism, the legal situation of

women, women and madness and the Female Gothic. My intention is to explore all these aspects in each novel, to show how women's fate was conditioned by patriarchy and how they had to survive by relying on each other, finding love and comprehension through female affiliation.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Sarah Waters write at different points in history, but their characters share a world in which appearances are above all and women must fit into submissive gender roles. They provide the opposites of poor and wealthy women and how patriarchy in each sphere affects them in the development of events.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Primary sources

The first novel that will be analysed in this paper will be *be Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) by Mary Wollstonecraft, who was born in 1759 in London. She was brought up by an abusive father and her mother died in 1780. She dedicated her life to writing and worked as a teacher in a school that she established in Newington Green in 1784 with her sister Eliza and her best friend Fanny. From these experiences as a teacher, she wrote the pamphlet *Thought on the Education of Daughters* (1787). (*Mary Wollstonecraft Biography*, 2014).

Wollstonecraft worked as a governess for the Kingsborough family in Ireland, but she left three years later to become a translator for Joseph Johnson, who published radical texts. Later on, she became a contributor to Johnson's *Analytical Review* in 1788, publishing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. In her book, Wollstonecraft breaks with the notion of women as just ornaments of the house, who feel frustrated and become tyrants over their children and servants. Her proposal was raising women with the same opportunities of education as men: at that time her work was regarded as revolutionary and controversial. Later on, she wrote *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), in which she put into fiction what she had described in her previous work. In the novel, she described what happens to a woman without a proper education, thinking only of romance and falling prey to a wicked man. The novel also revealed that women also had strong sexual desires and that it was immoral to think the other way round. (*Mary Wollstonecraft Biography*, 2014)

Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman was published by Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, since she left the work unfinished when she died in 1797. The protagonist of this novel is a middle-class woman called Maria Venables who tells her story, a typically arranged marriage to escape from her unhappy life at home in which her brother Robert ruled over the rest of siblings. Maria had to endure having sexual encounters with her husband George even though she did not want to, while she could not escape his nasty behaviour and character. Her husband tried to get rid of her by paying a man to seduce her so that he could accuse her of adultery. She tried to escape from him but, wherever she went, he found her. At the end, she was committed to a private asylum after trying to escape from England with her baby and a fortune she had inherited from her deceased uncle.

Apart from Maria, other women characters appear in the story representing individual, social and legal "wrongs" committed against women. An outstanding character is Jemima, who plays an important role in the protagonist's life and who is a servant and former prostitute. Jemima is Maria's attendant in the insane asylum where she is committed, having been separated from her child by her husband George. Maria and Jemima eventually become close friends after she realizes that Maria is not mad. There is another inmate in the asylum, a man called Henry Darnford, who has been unfairly incarcerated and with whom Maria eventually falls in love. Jemima, a working-class woman, also tells her tough story, being a victim of men who had owned her, starting from her childhood when her mother died. Her father treated her as a servant; afterwards, her master beat and raped her, having a bastard child as a consequence and being fired after the master's wife had discovered the pregnancy. Later on, she became a prostitute after aborting that child and then became the mistress of a wealthy man who died, and she finally arrived to the asylum in which Maria was imprisoned.

The second novel that will be analysed in the following pages is *Fingersmith* by Sarah Waters. She was born in 1966 in Pembrokeshire, Wales. She studied English Literature, studying a Ph.D. in lesbian and gay historical fiction. She wrote articles on gender and sexuality in history, which were published in numerous journals. She became increasingly interested in London life of the 19th century and began writing fiction and this is why some of her novels are set in Victorian England. Now, she is a full-time fiction writer even though she had been an associate lecturer for the Open

University and had also been tutoring Creative Writing programmes. (British Council, 2019)

Her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet* was published in 1998, with a lesbian love story as the main plot, becoming adapted into a drama serial and broadcasted on BBC TV in 2002. *Fingersmith* was published in 2002: it is a thriller and a love story set in the London of the 1860s with Susan, a pickpocket, as the protagonist. The main themes in this novel are betrayal, secrecy and dishonesty. (British Council, 2019). Set in the 1860s Victorian England, the novel narrates the story of Susan Trinder, an orphan girl who works as a thief. One day, a gentleman offers her a secret plan to get a woman's fortune, Maud Lilly. Susan has to be Maud's assistant and convince her of marrying the gentleman. Once they would get married, Maud would be committed to an asylum and the gentleman would share a fair part of her fortune with Sue. Susan adopts the surname of "Smith" and leaves London for the first time to an old mansion in Briar.

Both protagonists belong to opposed social classes. Mrs Sucksby is the adoptive mother of Sue, who lives with other orphans, illegitimate children and thieves. Sue remains as a thief apprentice until the age of seventeen, until Richard Rivers offers her the plan to get the fortune of a wealthy heiress and declare her mad after having married her. Maud is an orphan who lives with her uncle, Christopher Lilly, who is obsessed with his huge collection of pornographic texts. He made Maud believe that her mother was a lunatic and that she died in childbirth in the mental asylum, where Maud spent the first eight years of her life. (Onega, 2015)

The main difference between Sue and Maud relies on education. Sue is brought up completely illiterate, until she becomes Maud's maid and she teaches her to read. On the other hand, Maud had been taught first by the matrons in the mental asylum and then by her uncle in order to become his secretary. The two girls finally discover that they had been exchanged at birth, so that Sue was in fact Marianne Lilly's daughter and Maud was Mrs Sucksby's biological daughter. Both mothers secretly exchanged the babies on purpose and they agreed not to tell them until they turned eighteen, when they would recover their identities and each would inherit one half of Marianne's private fortune. However, Mrs Sucksby never intended to respect the pact and all her actions were intended to secure the title and status for Maud instead of Sue. When Sue accepted to take part in Mr Rivers's plan, she did not know that the real intention was to switch

back Sue's and Maud's identities and intern Sue instead of Maud in the mental asylum. (Onega, 2015) Narrators are unreliable and, even though we have first person narration, there is a shift between narrators corresponding to both Sue and Maud. What Sue did not expect in her plan was to fall in love with Maud. They experience a deep passionate love story and, finally, Maud teaches Sue to read the stories that she writes, containing pornography. Waters provides an alternative representation of Victorian society in which the invisible and marginalised homosexual women occupy the centre of the narrative. There is a crossing of the class, gender and moral boundaries that determine the roles of men and women in a power structure of domination and subservience whose cultural expression is Victorian pornography. (Onega, 2015)

2.2. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Feminism*

As a secondary source, and in order to understand Mary Wollstonecraft's novel *Maria* (1798), it is essential to read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a contribution to the Enlightenment principle of "the rights of man", extended to "the rights of woman". The tone used in this book is "confrontational, instructive, harshly critical, sarcastically funny, idealistic and visionary." (Enciclopedia.com, 2016). Wollstonecraft's main argument is that "women deserve an education equal to men's on the human duty to use God's gift of reason". (Enciclopedia.com, 2016). She establishes a connection between slaves and Western women, exposing how "masters" of women benefit from creating a subhuman female to fulfil their purposes. Therefore, she relates the public political systems and the divine right of kings to the private personal systems and the divine right of husbands. (Enciclopedia.com, 2016).

I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body (p.8). "The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. (...) - the only way women can rise in the world, - by marriage. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.9)

Wollstonecraft deals with women's material dependency to examine the reason why they usually play along with the prejudices that are held against them. Her aim was to improve philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational philosophy, who asserted that the goal of education is to learn how to live but was clearly unfair in the question of women's education:

Rousseau declares, that a woman should never, for a moment feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a *sweeter* companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.25)

She insisted that females had not just been created to complement males and stresses the importance of educating children of both sexes in principles of reason. Wollstonecraft claims that knowledge must be a process of life experiences, not something to be acquired and owned (Enciclopedia.com, 2016):

(...) my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of a man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue. (...) If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering moral and civil interest of mankind. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.2)

Wollstonecraft rejected marriage as an institution and saw female sexuality as an ideology and practice used by the hegemonic order to oppress women of all classes (Kelly, 1997). She advised women not to marry for love, believing that physical attraction will not be enough to sustain a marriage. In order to succeed in a marriage, she suggests that there has to be admiration and mutual respect:

This passion, naturally increased by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its accustomed state, and exalts the affections; but the security of marriage, allowing the fever of love to subside, a healthy temperature is thought insipid, only by those who have not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness. This is, must be, the course of nature—friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love. And this constitution seems perfectly to harmonize with the system of government which prevails in the moral world. Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal momentary gratification, when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.29)

Wollstonecraft goes over and over the same issues, establishing their importance by examining them from different angles. She argues that neither the soul nor the mind has a sex. Moreover, she acknowledges that men are generally physically stronger while women are more likely to please and relate (Enciclopedia.com, 2016): “In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male”. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.7) In short, she defends females as full human beings and who deserve the same education as men receive. She

tries to persuade readers that serious social harm can be the result of limiting women's mental and moral abilities, the consequences of which are illustrated in her novel. (Enciclopedia.com, 2016)

Wollstonecraft was not a conscious feminist, but she was actually an inspiration to feminism, one of the most important social movements in history that has brought an enduring and progressive transformation of society on a global scale. Her work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which was written at the height of the French Revolution, both criticises patriarchal society and its result: women who remained soft and emotional and who became superficial beings without using intellect or reason. She advocates for a better education for women based on the dignity, potential and intelligence of the female sex, but not for the granting of equal political rights. This means that feminism as such did not start with Wollstonecraft, but with the suffragettes in the early 1880s. (Buchanan, 2011)

Despite this movement's main goal is achieving equality between sexes, today this term has evolved into many different meanings. The origins of this movement belong to the 19th century, in which feminism was a movement that sought the emancipation of women. It was in the 1880s when the term 'feminism' was officially coined and, before that, it was referred to as 'women's rights', fighting against the inequality of women in society. (Buchanan, 2011)

Although many thinkers have placed the roots of feminism in Ancient Greece with Sappho, this movement has been divided into the First, Second and Third waves of feminism. According to Martha Rampton, a social history professor, the first feminist wave emerged out of urban industrialism and the liberal, socialist politics in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The main goal of this wave was to achieve opportunities for women thanks to the right to vote. The first wave officially began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when both women and men campaigned for the equality of women. (Rampton, 2015)

The second wave started in the 1960s in a period in which many minority groups started arising self-consciousness all around the world. The tone of the second wave was increasingly radical, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and most of the movement's effort was passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution to guarantee social equality among sexes. This movement was

complementary and assimilated to other social demands asking for civil rights such as Black Power, the efforts to end the Vietnam War and the hippie movement. Feminists created consciousness-raising groups formed only by women. This wave was mostly theoretical, based on a fusion between neo-Marxism and psychoanalytical theory. They criticised patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as a wife and a mother. The distinction between the terms gender and sex aroused, using the latter to refer to the biological condition and the former as a social construct that varies depending on the culture. (Rampton, 2015) The main difference between the second wave in relation to the first wave is that the latter was led, among others, by Susan B. Anthony and Marie Stopes, and it was highly concentrated on social and political equality through the vote. The second wave was led, among others, by Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, and it was more focused on social and political equality, seeking improvements in salary, maternity leave, child care and ending with all sorts of sexism and discrimination. (Rampton, 2015)

The third wave of feminism began in the mid-90s, based on post-colonial and post-modern thinking and seeking to break with boundaries. In contrast to the previous movement, feminists readopted feminine accessories like make-up, which had been considered oppressive, seeking the possibility of being feminine and feminist at the same time. They defined their own feminine beauty for themselves as subjects and not as objects of a sexist society, creating a strong and empowered image of women. Many women of the third wave refuse to be called 'feminists' since they consider it limiting and exclusionary. (Rampton, 2015)

2.3. The legal situation of women

Feminist studies have identified three figures that represent cultural images of women in different ways: The New Woman, The Fallen Woman and The Angel in the House. The New Woman represents female emancipation and suffrage. The Fallen Woman is the opposite to the Angel in the House, which represents a kind of domestic goddess, the perfect housewife in the 19th century. "The Angel in the House" (1854) is a poem by Coventry Patmore and it was inspired by his love towards his wife. He describes wonderful qualities to depict the protagonist as the perfect bride. She is described as chaste, modest and innocent among other qualities. She loves and supports her husband and she is a caring mother, becoming the ideal Victorian housewife. (Kühl, 2016, p.171-173)

Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.

(Patmore, 1854)

On the other hand, women who lost their respectability were shunned and they had to work as prostitutes or become servants. At that time, the term “prostitute” was not only used to refer to sex workers but everything related to what society considered as non-respectable – like unmarried women having relationships with men, unmarried mothers, unfaithful wives and even models and actresses. (Kühl, 2016, p.172)

Marriage was the main goal of women at that time and, once they got married they were under the complete supervision of their husbands, who directly owned their possessions. Women were forced to satisfy their husbands’ physical needs since a refusal of sex could be considered a fair reason to overturn the marriage. Since the husband had the right to possess the woman’s body, he could rape or beat her without fearing any persecution or legal consequences. (VL McBeath, 2019) When women were single or widowed, they were allowed to take care of their possessions, but, as soon as they got married, all their properties and money were transferred to their husbands. The same happened with children since, in case of divorce, the man could claim the custody of the children. Marriage was seen as a way out of poverty and single women could hardly survive at that time without a job, while availability of jobs was very limited for women. It was not until 1870 when the Married Woman’s Property Act came into

effect, allowing women to keep their possessions acquired after marriage, but it was not until 1882 that women could retain what they owned at the time of marriage. (VL McBeath, 2019) Having children was one of the main expectations along with getting married at that time. Sexual relationships without the purpose of having descendants were seen as revulsive and scandalous. Under the period's religious beliefs, virtuous women had to be free from sexual passion and gratification. In order to get divorced, women had to prove adultery and a desertion of at least two years. If a woman could prove it, the husband would have to give her back her property rights as a single woman. (VL McBeath, 2019)

In the 18th century women started to demand the right to higher education but it was not until the mid-late 19th century that some progress started to take place. In the 1840s Queen's and Bedford Colleges at London University offered women higher education. In the late 1860s and 1870s, colleges for women were created in Oxford and Cambridge, but women were still not allowed to study a degree. In 1878, London became the first university in the UK to allow women to get a degree. (VL McBeath, 2019) Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to graduate from medical studies since women had been always treated by men, being a male-dominated profession. In 1894, female doctors were allowed to join the Medico-Psychological Association. (Sigurdardóttir, 2013, p.4)

The inconsistency and hypocrisy of patriarchy is shown in the fact that working class women worked for long hours to contribute financially to the running of the household, proving that they could put it up with a hard job for long hours and still take care of the house and their children. Working-class women were paid a lower salary than men for the same job, and most of the times they worked as servants, housemaids, nursemaids and cooks because available jobs for women were very limited. However, middle- or upper-class women were not encouraged to work because it was believed that this would damage their health and nervous condition. (VL McBeath, 2019) Despite this gradual progress in women's education and professional opportunities, the medical profession confronted women's demand by arguing that the physical demands of menstruation and the intellectual demands of education and profession were incompatible. They believed that if women were allowed to study and work, children would be neglected and they would become weak and sick. (VL McBeath, 2019)

2.4. Women and Madness

Patriarchy has associated the term madness to women, assuming that they are conditioned to disease by their reproductive organs. Biologically, their hormones were believed to control their actions, making them totally irrational and mentally ill by nature. Moreover, the legal system supported this belief, allowing husbands to commit them to madhouses. After the Industrial Revolution, there were medical advances like the birth of psychiatry in the 1830s. In the Victorian period, new asylums were built and they were seen as progressive and efficient institutions aimed at the middle and lower classes, since the upper classes had their own private doctors. (Sigurdardóttir, 2013, p.1-2)

At first, asylums were horrific places where insane people were treated like criminals, but in the 19th century mentally ill people were increasingly seen as sick people needing help and care. Women started to be treated from hysteria and neurasthenia, exclusively attributed to their gender for having a reproductive system, connected to the female hormones as Showalter notes,

the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional and rational control [...] Theories of female insanity were specifically and confidently linked to the biological crises of the female life-cycle – puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause – during which the mind would be weakened and the symptoms of insanity might emerge. (Showalter, 1985, p. 55)

Women in asylums usually did housework, which was considered therapeutic: as Showalter explains, “A more prosaic view of feminine nature as suggested by the primary tasks of women in the asylum: cleaning, laundry, and sewing [...] The women’s work most highly touted by the Victorians for its therapeutic effects was laundry.” (Showalter, 1985, p.82)

Silas Weir Mitchell invented a new therapy for treating women’s disorders, the rest cure, which consisted in rest and a fattening diet, since the patient tended to be very thin and anaemic. The patient was not allowed to move from bed without the doctor’s approval and she had to receive a daily massage from a nurse. In his work *Fat and Blood* (1877), Mitchell describes the rest-cure as an incentive for women to stop avoiding their housework: “The rest-cure could be used to discipline women whose

illness became a means of avoiding household duties.” (Stiles, 1873-1925, p.4; quoted in Sigurdardóttir, 2013, p.4)

Therapists used to declare a woman mad when she asserted herself sexually, economically or intellectually. In her book *Women and Madness* (1972), Phyllis Chesler, a psychologist and a feminist, criticized psychotherapists and their institutions in relation to the condition of women in a patriarchal society. She states that in the male-dominated professions of psychology and psychiatry and in a society in which women are devalued, judgements about mental health and mental illness, forms of treatment and definitions of cure, are necessarily patriarchal. (Rich, 1972, p.1) Similarly, as Showalter asserts, “there were no female medical officers to speak about the psychology of women, and the few women who seem to have had significant careers as matrons or proprietors of private asylums have not left records.” (Showalter, 1985, p.60)

Quoting Phyllis Chesler (1972), Adrienne Rich claims in her article “Women and Madness” that a woman is classified as healthy, neurotic or psychotic according to a male ethic of mental health. The normal woman is considered a neurotic person: for example, non-aggressive, timid, passive and submissive subjects are clinically viewed as neurotic or psychotic. Once they are hospitalized, they tend to become depressed or try to commit suicide, suffering from anxiety, paranoia or compulsive sexual behaviour. Women who have difficulty in living as wives and mothers were more likely to be hospitalized or to be rejected by their husbands. According to Rich, Chesler (1972) finds this rate of depression and neurosis in women as conditioned female behaviour: self-devaluation, inability to express anger and self-destructiveness. A woman is considered to be cured once she can function as a wife and mother or if she is able to enter into a heterosexual relationship. In Sylvia Plath’s words, the cured woman learns “the courage of the shut mouth” and continues with her normal life. (Rich, 1972, p.1)

Gender roles established separate spheres and women were required to fulfil cultural stereotypes of femininity like the figure of the “Angel in the House”. Women were expected to be domestic goddesses who remained chaste as wives and mothers and sanctified the home as a family refuge from the public life. If they did not fulfil these expectations, they could be committed in an asylum by their husbands, who could declare them lunatics with the support of doctors who associated illnesses like hysteria

to women. Female writers like Mary Wollstonecraft started to ask for equal rights between both sexes like education for women, while other contemporary writers like Sarah Waters also use female affiliation as an alternative to heterosexual relationships. Both writers use the Female Gothic to illustrate the general situation of women and provide female companionship as an escape to the cruelty of their male partners.

2.5. The Female Gothic

Feminism has reassessed the Female Gothic as a form of resistance to patriarchal power by articulating women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal society. According to Ellen Ledoux (2017), Ellen Moers coined the term "Female Gothic" in her novel *Literary Women* (1976) "to describe how 18th and 19th century women novelists employ certain coded expressions to describe anxieties over domestic entrapment and female sexuality." (Ledoux, 2017, p.2) This genre explored the urgency and persistence of certain themes in women's writing and lives. Moers' work and that of many other second-wave feminists "reclaimed a wealth of textual material written by women and created a place for it within the canon." (Ledoux, 2017, p.2)

The category "Female Gothic" reflects the ideological goals of second-wave feminism. The main themes are domestic imprisonment, threats of sexual violence, a distressed and vulnerable heroine, and anxiety about monstrous or absent mothers among other issues. (Ledoux, 2017, p.2) This sub-genre allowed female writers to express their fears and displacements about femininity and the role of women within society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Apart from allowing female characters to move away from their typical submissive roles within patriarchal society, it also displays typical feminine plots like romance or marriage, but containing the horror of imprisonment by their own husbands or the men who own them. This genre explores how the domestic space, which was thought to be the ideal place for women, is regarded as a prison. (Rochat, 2017, p.4) Carol Margaret Davison, a specialist in Gothic and Victorian literature, describes the Female Gothic by saying that it "centres its lens on a young woman's rite of passage into womanhood and her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood." (Davison, 2010, p. 48) Ellen Moers (1976) similarly asserts that the Female Gothic represents "women's fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body, most terrifyingly experienced in childbirth." (Wallace & Smith, 2009, p.1) She considered *Frankenstein* as an example of the Female Gothic, arguing that the

novel had been shaped by Mary Shelley's own experience of womanhood, especially of childbirth. She supports that the word Gothic is related to fear and that the main goal of this genre is to scare the audience by using fantastic and supernatural elements. (Moers, 1974, p.1)

According to critic Diana Wallace, the Female Gothic provided female writers a chance "to express fears and power struggles that they were not able to write into realist texts, focusing on the correlation between women and hauntings in the home." (Wallace & Smith, 2009, p.14) Vanessa Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (1996) suggests that women were drawn to the form because "the ghost corresponded more particularly to the Victorian woman's visibility and invisibility, her power and powerlessness, the contradictions and extremes that shaped female culture." As she argues, "it was finally not men's but women's ghost stories that truly treated the return of the repressed and the dispossessed; ghost stories could provide a fitting medium for eruptions of female libidinal energy, of thwarted ambitions, of cramped egos." (Wallace & Smith, 2009, p. 14) Nowadays, the contemporary approach towards the Female Gothic is that it negotiates the troubled relationship between women and the domestic, an emerging feminine agency or sexuality, and supernatural or horrifying elements that tie it back into the Gothic tradition. (Rochat, 2017)

The Female Gothic represented the voice of those women who denounced their legal, cultural and social status in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is essential to have consciousness of the situation of women at that time in order to understand Wollstonecraft's *Maria* and Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*, who has two women protagonists that are manipulated under the power of men. Women were treated as a property, always under the control of a man: they were seen as emotional and unstable due to their reproductive system. They were considered incapable of making rational decisions and that was the reason why they always had a male tutor, a relative or a husband. Patriarchal society considered men to be superior to women both physically and mentally and that was the reason why men were allowed into the public sphere while women were restricted to the private sphere. The governing sex was seen as having the capability of reason, action, aggression, independence and self-interest, while women were seen as irrational, sensitive, submissive and dependent. (VL

McBeath, 2019) It is then not strange that some women looked for alternative options to marriage.

2.6. Female Affiliation

Female affiliation has often been presented in literature as an alternative to the submissive roles of patriarchy. Authors like Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Gaskell and Ellen Glasgow, as Emma Domínguez-Rué asserts, “emphasize the circle of powerlessness that evidences the daughter’s inability to escape her mother’s fate” and look for “empowering possibilities of female affiliation to avoid that fate”. For example, these authors provide their Gothic heroines with the help of another woman. (Domínguez-Rué, 2013, p. 2)

Female friendships were often romanticized and allowed women more freedom to express feelings for each other; however, not all friendships developed into homosexual relationships. According to Amanda E. Herbert (2014), women themselves challenged the boundaries of acceptability by calling each other ‘husband’ and ‘sweet wife’, even if their relationship did not imply physical intimacy. This implied, in a way, that female friendship trained women to be good wives by teaching them particularly feminine ways of loving. This emphasizes the idea of sexes being opposites even in the expression of feelings. For many women, friendship among their own sex allowed them to express themselves in a more socially acceptable environment. The concept of love was used by many women to define a close bond with another woman, despite the fact that it referred to friendship, not to attraction. (Miller, 2017)

In *The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft hints to an alternative option of female bonding instead of depicting the conventional romantic encounter between lovers. Maria, her daughter and Jemima “find the affection they crave without the constraints and the loss of independence that marriage and heterosexual love entail.” (Domínguez-Rué, 2013, p.3) As Domínguez-Rué remarks, Wollstonecraft “challenges the conventional patriarchal discourse by reuniting Maria and her daughter and establishing a female community in which both women finally find a form of affectionate bonding that does not imply oppression or denigration.” (Domínguez-Rué 2013, p.10-11)

Fingersmith is a clearly lesbian story beyond the limitations of heterosexual paradigms. Like in Wollstonecraft’s story, Maud and Sue find happiness together without the need

of a man; in this case men are even presented as an impediment for them. Waters presents a relationship based on respect and acceptance since, for example, Sue accepts Maud's hobby / profession as a pornographic writer. Waters herself is a lesbian author; she has been married to Lucy Vaughan for 12 years and might have recognised or even experienced similar limitations to the ones she describes. In an interview with Tim Teeman, she talks about lesbian women in the 1920s and the difference with gay men:

'Moving into the 1920s, we know there were lesbian networks and communities,' Waters says. 'Authors like Marie Stopes were talking about it. Daphne du Maurier and her sisters all seem to be raving lesbians—they were all having affairs with women when they were quite young. In some circles of the Bohemian upper classes it seems to have been a fact of life.' 'But there was no proto-lesbian scene as such?' 'It was much more domestic for women,' says Waters. 'Gay men's sexuality has always been played out more in public—bars, cottages (tearooms). Women may have frequented bohemian bars, but on the whole it was friendships and private networks.' (Teeman, 2014)

In the next section, I will illustrate how both novels, *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* and *Fingersmith*, illustrate patriarchal constraints against women. I will focus on the helpless legal situation of women, how medicine linked madness to the feminine condition, the ways in which the female gothic was used to express women's fears, and female affiliation as a potential escape from patriarchy.

3) Analysis

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*

a. Legal situation of women

Moving on to the analysis, I will analyse each novel according to the issues discussed in the previous section. First, I will analyse *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, the work that puts into fiction all of Wollstonecraft's theory in *Vindication*. Unconsciously, she provided an explicit and comprehensive feminist program and she was the first to transform gendered fiction for feminist purposes. Rather than just telling a personal story with gender-specific oppression, Wollstonecraft's novel shows that the rejection of theoretical elements would have made difficult the introduction of feminist concerns from the private sphere to the political, philosophical and public sphere. (Wallraven, 2019)

In the eighteenth century, during the Enlightenment, Jean Jacques Rousseau, a French author and philosopher, claimed that women were inferior to men by nature, and that the “emotional woman” was the perfect complement to the “rational man.” Wollstonecraft rejected this claim and argued that if men were denied to develop their rationality and become moral persons with “commitments beyond personal pleasure”, they would also turn into emotional beings. She argued against the idea that women were inferior to men, considering them as equals. Moreover, she opposed the belief that a woman’s nature is a consequence of her reproductive role, which was used as an excuse to subordinate them. (Knutsson, 2013, p.4-5)

Women were excluded from the public sphere and confined to the domestic sphere. They were encouraged to be submissive and dependent on men and they were considered as emotional and irrational beings. Wollstonecraft suggests that the only difference between both genres is the range of opportunities and education, which is not within the reach of women. Maria’s husband, George Venables, represents the power that men had over women in the 18th century. As Maria explains, “Married when scarcely able to distinguish the nature of the engagement, I yet submitted to the rigid laws which enslave women, and obeyed the man whom I could no longer love.” (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.171)

Women had very little legal rights and they were seen as a complement to their husbands. They were not allowed to decide over themselves and they could not become independent. Marriage was an important aspect at that time and it was one of the main concerns for women, regardless of their feelings. Arranged marriages are mentioned from the very beginning of the novel like in the case of the protagonist. At the beginning, Maria is happy but with the passing of time she regrets the marriage and develops negative feelings towards her husband: “discovering when too late, that I was united to heartless, unprincipled wretch.” (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.123) Wollstonecraft stated that marriages should be based on friendship, mutual respect and free choice. Instead, she portrays arranged marriages to denounce the suffering of women without legal help and support. (Knutsson, 2013, p.21-22)

The marriages that Wollstonecraft describes are similar to a nightmare, with the help of the Female Gothic. She describes a loveless, unhappy and horrible relationship in which the husband is seen as a monster, like in the case of Maria and Jemima, who have

suffered throughout their lives because of the mistreatment of the men whom they have come across with. Maria is married to George, who mistreats her and gets to the point of trying to “prostitute” her. She decides to escape with her daughter and she is hunted as an animal and treated as a criminal, showing that married women could not make their own decisions:

After leaving, what the law considers as my home, I was hunted as a criminal from place to place, though I contracted no debts, and demanded no maintenance – yet, as the laws sanction such proceeding, and make women the property of their husbands. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.172)

Once she is about to leave the country, she is drugged and her child is taken from her. Then, she is locked into a private madhouse and there she falls in love with Henry Darnford, which means that she still believes in love and marriage: “She wished to avow her affection to Darnford, by becoming his wife.” (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p. 169) Wollstonecraft creates a strong and independent character who is not afraid to speak her mind and fights to get a better future even if it involves escaping. As women had limited legal rights, it was unusual for women to seek divorce since marriage was seen as a sacred institution and there were few laws regarding divorce. Maria risks her life and leaves her husband with courage (Knutsson, 2013, p.22):

I pulled off my ring and put it on the table ... and that I mean immediately to quit his house, never to enter it more. I will provide for myself and my child. I leave him as free as I am determined to be myself – he shall be answerable for no debts of mine”. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.143)

Was it possible? Was I indeed, free? – Yes; free I termed myself, when I decidedly perceived the conduct I ought to adopt. How had I panted for liberty – liberty, that I would have purchased at any price, but that of my own esteem! (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.144)

There may be advocated for matrimonial obedience, who, making a distinction between the duty of a wife and of a human being, may blame my conduct (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.144)

Thanks to the combination of theory and fiction, Wollstonecraft succeeds in conveying explicit feminist points without needing to use the male-dominated theoretical treatise. In *Vindication*, she uses abstract theses and generalizations, while in *Maria* she deduces the situation of womankind in general from the testimonies of Maria, Jemima and the other women mentioned in the novel. The audience is encouraged to draw a moral from the story for the whole womankind and reach a conscious awareness of women oppression rather than just feeling identified with one

particular case. In the case of the protagonist, Maria is urged to generalize from her own experience and thereby detach herself from her personal experience of misery and oppression. She becomes aware of her situation as that of a prototypical woman in a patriarchal society instead of herself as an individual suffering. (Wallraven, 2019) In the following lines, she leads herself and the audience to an understanding of society's sexual politics and her own mental emancipation:

My present situation gave a new turn to my reflection [...] Had an evil genius cast a spell at my birth; or a demon stalked out of chaos, to perplex my understanding, and enchain my will, with delusive prejudices? I pursued this train of thinking; it led me out of myself, to expatiate on the misery peculiar to my sex. (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p. 146)

Maria progresses mentally by becoming a heroine instead of a victim. She experiences her own power through determination and resistance and leaves her own self-pity to get a broader view on the situation of women. She leaves her emotions aside and uses her intellect to reach a more comprehensive political awareness from examples of women she knows. (Wallraven, 2019) Likewise, the story of Jemima does not seek for compassion but awareness: "yet you will allow me to observe that this was a wretchedness of situation peculiar to my sex." (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.146)

According to Colleen Fenno, "Wollstonecraft emphasizes the legal disadvantages of gender by depicting Maria's incarceration as an effect of coverture, which excluded women from owning property, making laws, being tried by a jury of their peers, or entering the legal profession." As she claims, critics have noted that "Maria's written testimony at the end of the novel challenges women's exclusion, based on property rights, from participation in the justice process and underscores the importance of granting individuals the right to be heard in a legal setting." (Fenno, 2012) The novel points to an issue that Wollstonecraft had already discussed in *Vindication*:

I exclaim against the laws which throw the whole weight of the yoke on the weaker shoulders, and force women, when they claim protectorship as mothers, to sign a contract, which renders them dependent on the caprice of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.171)

I wish my country to approve of my conduct; but, if laws exist, made by the strong to oppress the weak, I appeal to my own sense of justice, and declare that I will not live with the individual, who has violated every obligation which binds man to man. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.173)

Fenno argues that Wollstonecraft's novel also "draws readers' attention to working-class women victims disenfranchised from the criminal justice system because of class, gender, and the nature of the crime committed against her." (Fenno, 2012) In this case, Jemima represents female victims in criminal law who were overlooked and dismissed by the system. Fenno supports the idea that Wollstonecraft was "concerned with marginalized victims and sought an equitable, participatory justice system". She claims that "*Maria* comes during a historical moment of both broad criminal justice reforms and specific to victims and the novel recognizes the way that working-class women victims were already severely disenfranchised from the justice process." (Fenno, 2012) As Jemima argues,

'How often have I have heard', said Jemima (...) that every person willing to work may find employment? It is the vague assertion, I believe, of insensible indolence, when it relates to men; but, with respect to women, I am sure of its fallacy, unless they will submit to the most menial bodily labour. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.102)

Wollstonecraft uses Jemima's narrative to recognize crimes committed against an individual and suggests the need of a public space to acknowledge abuse in order to expose and correct legal and social injustice. (Fenno, 2012) When Darnford and Maria listen to Jemima's narration, they start to reflect on the poor and how they have not been trained to think of principles and they are just happy in their ignorance:

'As far as I have been able to observe', replied Jemima, 'prejudices, caught up by chance, are obstinately maintained by the poor, to the exclusion of improvement; they have no time to reason or reflect to any extent, or minds sufficiently exercised to adopt the principles of action. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, 102-103).

If the poor are happy, or can be happy, things are very well as they are. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.103)

On the other hand, Fenno claims that Wollstonecraft also "conveys her belief in the social nature of repairing harms in the way she depicts Maria, Darnford and Jemima, as a community listening to, and interacting with each other." (Fenno, 2012). After Jemima narrates her story, Maria shows her comprehension and support by taking her hand and Jemima experiences kindness for the first time: "Maria took her hand, and Jemima, more overcome by kindness than she had ever been by cruelty, hastened out of the room to conceal her emotions." (Wollstonecraft, 1798, 107)

Maria and Jemima draw attention to the fact that their personal experiences have to be read from a different perspective. Their stories are representative and theoretically and politically relevant, and they must be treated in a feminist way. The narrator uses Maria's experiences as a basis to understand the general problems of patriarchy: "Thinking of Jemima's peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of women." (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.120) The subjective experiences of both characters lead to a more general theoretical reflection and consciousness-raising. Their stories cannot be just read as personal unfortunate stories, but relate to a general situation of women in patriarchal society and women's oppression. Jemima's and Maria's stories could be just read as individual stories, but by theorizing through feminism, it is possible to recognize a universal concept of women's oppression (Wallraven, 2019), which Wollstonecraft illustrates by using traits of the female gothic and the image of women's imprisonment in a madhouse.

b. Women, Madness and the Female Gothic

The Wrongs of Woman can be read as a Female Gothic novel and at the beginning of the novel we can see how Wollstonecraft describes Maria's desperation as if in a horror story:

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavoring to recall her scattered thoughts! (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p. 69).

In this novel, we have a heroine trying to achieve independence by escaping her husband. Unluckily, she is drugged and incarcerated in a madhouse: her only crime is that she had left her husband to save her daughter. As she writes, "To force me to give my fortune, I was imprisoned – yes; in a private mad-house." (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.171) Fenno suggests that Wollstonecraft "reveals the way that solitary confinement can contribute to a stronger propensity for defiant behaviour or cause emotional damage when she depicts the sullen, resentful, and even angry attitudes that Maria and Darnford develop during the early part of their imprisonment." (Fenno, 2012) For example, when Maria asks Jemima about Danford, she describes him like a strong fearful man: "he has an untamed look, a vehemence of eye, that excites apprehension. Were his hands free, he looks as if he could soon manage both his guards." (Wollstonecraft, 1798, 79)

Similarly, in the first chapter, Maria rejects to eat when she gets to the madhouse and Jemima says that just madness can produce disgust towards food:

‘I have no appetite,’ replied Maria, who had previously determined to speak mildly; ‘why then I should eat?’ (...) ‘Could anything but madness produce such a disgust for food?’ (Wollstonecraft, 1798, 71)

Anorexic tendencies like in the case of Maria at the beginning of the novel were symptoms of madness in psychology, as Showalter shows: “The first of the female nervous disorders to be labelled during this period was anorexia nervosa, which was identified in 1873 as a new clinical syndrome among adolescent girls in both England and France.” (Showalter, 1985, p.127). Any indication of abnormal behaviour in the female role was enough to imprison a woman and it was the perfect excuse for husbands to get rid of their wives.

There was a biased, prejudiced interpretation of the biological and physiological differences in women’s bodies as proof of their “natural” inferiority, which implied the need that they fulfil their “natural” roles as wives, mothers and domestic servants:

Female intellectual inferiority could be understood as the result of reproductive specialization, and the “womanly” traits of self-sacrifice and service so convenient for the comfort of a patriarchal society could be defended in evolutionary terms as essential for the survival and improvement of the race. (Showalter, 1985, p.122)

Those women who were committed to an asylum could be women who did not follow the feminine roles established by patriarchal society; the connection between madness and women would represent the incapacity of women to conform to a subordinate position. In order to regenerate the female patients, asylums reinforced domestic duties, which is a clear symptom of medical institutions and practitioners’ diagnoses being obedient to patriarchal values.

Maria spends the whole novel lamenting the fate of her daughter, whom she believes to have died. Once in the asylum she laments her and her daughter’s condition as women “Why was I not born a man, or why was I born at all?” (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.123) She writes her memoirs addressed to her daughter, while Jemima narrates her hard experience not only as a woman but as a poor woman. She illustrates the case of a victimised and disempowered woman whose feminine sexuality is at the centre of her suffering, having been abused and raped by her master at the early age of sixteen. She

lacked affection as a child and she was also forced to have an abortion. After Jemima's master's wife discovered his betrayal, she was thrown away and forced into prostitution since she had been prevented from undertaking any respectable job. Finally, she got the guard position at the asylum, where she met Maria and told her about her life story. (Caviness, 2013, p.11-12)

Lead your imagination into all the scenes of wretchedness and depravity, which I was condemned to view; or mark the different stages of my debasing misery. Fate dragged me through the very kennels of society; I was still a slave, a bastard, a common property (...) Detesting my nightly occupation, though valuing, if I may so use the word, my independence, which only consisted in choosing the street in which I should wander. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p. 98)

In the case of this novel, we have men as the predators and women as the victims although there are some exceptions. Darnford does not fulfil the role of the tyrannical man since he falls in love with Maria and offers her the protection that women lack in society. On the other hand, there are women who accept the beliefs of patriarchal society and remain hypocritically quiet, accepting their role as women and even criticizing women who escaped from an unhappy marriage. As Wollstonecraft writes, "A false morality is even established, which makes all the virtue of women consist in chastity, submission, and the forgiveness of injuries." (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.172) Both Maria and Jemima have common experiences as oppressed women; their fate had always been in the hands of men and the patriarchal law, who treated them as unable to make their own decisions. For example, at the end of the novel, the judge, after summing up the evidence, claimed:

If women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality (...) it was their duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could do for herself. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p. 174)

Maria had inherited a fortune from her uncle and, in order to make her give in her fortune, she had been incarcerated in a madhouse. Moreover, her husband had paid a man to seduce her but, when she fell in love again, she was accused of adultery. Wollstonecraft tries to encourage women to actively change their fate by demanding the same privileges and rights that men receive by nature. If women do not fight for their rights, being born a female will continue to be a life sentence of slavery and victimization and they will remain imprisoned by patriarchal rules. Wollstonecraft narrates the experiences of two Gothic heroines who share the pain that women are heir

to and how they go ahead by joining forces and escaping the madhouse to get a better future together. In the courtroom, Maria gives voice to all women who remain silent and, even though this does not achieve any legal change regarding women, she denounces their suffering and the abuse of men over them.

The asylum, paradoxically, becomes Maria's home since she finds there her future family. Jemima not only takes care of Maria during her stay in the madhouse, but she also helps her to escape and to get her daughter back so that they can both bring her up together. At the end of the novel, Maria discovers that her daughter is indeed alive and this gives her strength to go on with her life and fight for her. Maria breaks with the stereotypical constraints of her sex and challenges the laws of patriarchal society. Although Jemima has gone through such horrible experiences because of the rest of society, she still has a hope and she still wants to help others.

The Female Gothic often portrays madhouses and incarceration to describe women's imprisonment in patriarchal roles and many women became mad once they were trapped in the asylums. *The Wrongs of Woman* describes a nightmare, a horror story in which women are the victims of what patriarchal society considers the ideal place for women, the domestic. Men and husbands are made to perpetrate the separation of spheres between sexes and 'protect' them, becoming their oppressors. By putting into fiction the reality of women, Wollstonecraft tries to make the reader reflect not only on particular bleak life stories, but reflect on the injustice and differences that patriarchal society creates between sexes. In short, Wollstonecraft uses the Female Gothic and the image of incarceration in a madhouse to portray the horrors of women's oppressive reality, which do not come to an end even when she leaves the asylum.

c. Female Affiliation

Women were able to express a certain amount of sexuality through passionate friendships with other women; these female friendships allowed women more freedom to express feelings for each other. However, not all of these friendships developed into homosexual relationships: for many women, friendship with other women allowed them to express their feelings and find comprehension among their own sex. The term "love" was used to describe a strong bond with other women, not necessarily referring to attraction. Society accepted that intense kind of friendship in which women kissed,

embraced and exchanged intensely romantic letters: therefore, lesbian relationships could pass unnoticed. This kind of passionate friendship could sometimes lead to sexual relationships in which there was a dominant role marked by masculine traits or appearance. In those cases, there was a significantly male-influenced identity and a submissive feminine one. For example, in 1830, Anne Lister was a businesswoman who entered politics and had affairs with women. She was given a cruel nickname regarding her masculine appearance, “Gentleman Jack”. Moreover, she has been considered to be the first modern lesbian and she had a strong relationship with Anne Walker. (Miller, 2017)

Maria and Jemima develop a strong friendship in the asylum based on respect and admiration, although their relationship is not openly lesbian. Maria represents the weaker and more feminine role and Jemima the stronger and more masculine one: “Maria’s conversation had amused and interested her, and the natural consequence was a desire, scarcely observed by herself, of obtaining the esteem of a person she admired.” (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.74) Since Jemima has never opened her heart because she has been harmed all over her life, she struggles to open her feelings and trust Maria:

Jemima had evidently pleasure in her society: still, though she often left her with a glow of kindness, she returned with the same chilling air; and, when her heart appeared for a moment to open, some suggestion of reason forcibly closed it, before she could give utterance to the confidence Maria’s conversation inspired. (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.77)

At first, Jemima considers that Maria’s intention to escape is crazy, but, in the end, she will be the one to escape with her:

Maria alluded to the possibility of an escape (...) Jemima’s countenance, and dark hints, seemed to say, ‘You are an extraordinary woman, but let me consider, this may only be one of your lucid intervals.’ (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.75-76)

‘I am prepared then, said Jemima, to accompany you in your flight.’ (...) ‘I have perhaps no right now to expect the performance of your promise; but on you depends to reconcile me with the human race.’ (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p. 166)

Moreover, Jemima helps Maria to know more about her daughter, who seems to be dead, and finally she is the one to discover that Maria’s husband and her brother had been keeping her daughter in secret:

In the evening, Jemima informed the impatient mother, that on the morrow she should hasten to town before the family hour of rising, and received all the information necessary, as a clue to her search. (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.108)

‘Behold your child!’ exclaimed Jemima. (...) ‘— let me suspect, that your husband and brother have deceived you, and secreted the child.’ (Wollstonecraft, 1985, p.177)

“Motherlessness” is a quality used by Wollstonecraft to characterize her female characters and show the wrongs done to them that force them to become “monstrous”. Maria is monstrous for the society; she has been placed in an asylum as a social outcast for not fitting in normal society. She commits adultery and attempts to divorce her husband, breaking with the norms of a correct woman. The loss of her daughter is the result of her search for independence and she becomes the friend of a more monstrous woman, Jemima. Her mother died a few days after she was born, she was rejected by her father and society rejects her because she earns a living from her body, breaking with morally acceptable behaviour. (Caviness, 2013, p.12-13)

Motherhood was a key part of female identity in patriarchal culture: since most women remained at home and had no jobs, the upbringing of their children was the central part of their lives. However, there were children who had no feminine guidance from their mothers who were in charge of teaching them how to fulfil the expectations of society. (Miller, 2017). The importance of education in women, provided by mothers and highlighted by Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*, is appreciated in the novel since Jemima provides Maria with books to read and she writes her memoirs and letters to Danford. Maria reads books and authors like Dryden’s *Fables*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Rousseau, and some others dealing with the powers of the human mind. Jemima also reflects on the importance of the role of a mother: “And if she be a mother, and in the present state of women, it is a great misfortune to be prevented from discharging the duties, and cultivating the affections of one” (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.136).

“Motherlessness” is a relevant topic in this novel, since Jemima is brought up without her mother and Maria cannot take care of her daughter, who has supposedly died. Being motherless has a significant role in Maria’s and Jemima’s tragedy, as both protagonists have to cope with the death of their mothers and the arrival of cruel stepmothers. Women become “mad” once they lose their feminine model, their mother; the sufferings of losing a mother develop a trauma considered as “madness” in the

patriarchal world. Jemima attributes her misfortune to the lack of affection from a mother:

I cannot help attributing the greater part of my misery, to the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life – a mother’s affection. I had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.95).

Maria does not get the opportunity to bring up her daughter and she laments not having the opportunity to guide and instruct her in life:

Addressing these memoirs to you, my child, uncertain whether I shall ever have an opportunity of instructing you, many observations will probably flow from my heart, which only a mother – a mother schooled in misery, could make. (Wollstonecraft, 1798, p.110)

Mothers and daughters are key in the Female Gothic. From the beginning to the end, Maria laments the loss of her daughter and how this demotivates her to continue alive. Separating a mother and her child is one of the biggest horrors that someone can experience; this is also a novel about motherhood and the importance of the mother’s role in the education and guidance of a daughter. Both women lack mothers and both find companionship in each other: Jemima recovers Maria’s baby and becomes her surrogate mother in a subversive all-women family. At the end, female affiliation is the alternative that the protagonists choose, rejecting heterosexual relationships and “establishing a female community in which both Maria and Jemima finally find a form of affectionate bonding that does not entail oppression or denigration” (Domínguez-Rué, 2013, p.11):

The ending of the story, far from depicting the conventional romantic encounter between lovers, hints at an alternative option of female bonding which offers Maria, her daughter, and Jemima the affection they crave without the constraints and the loss of independence that marriage and heterosexual love entail. The multiplicity of mother figures and mother substitutes thus anticipates a better future for daughters within a community of women. (Domínguez-Rué, 2013, p.3)

Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith*

Fingersmith narrates the story of two orphan girls who had been cheated by the same man, Mr. Rivers, or Gentleman. Susan Trinder / Sue is a pickpocket whose mother was accused of murder and died hung in front of everyone, so she was left to the care of Mrs. Sucksby. Maud Lilly was rescued by her uncle in the madhouse where her mother, a lunatic, had died at childbirth. Both characters represent opposite types of women in the Victorian Period: Maud is a lady who lives in an old mansion in Briar, while Sue is a poor girl from Lant Street, London. The novel switches between the narrative points of view of both Sue and Maud. According to Jones and O'Callaghan, *Fingersmith* is a clear feminist dismantling of master narratives about women's place in Victorian and contemporary society and culture, a challenge to the patriarchal discourse. (Jones & O'Callaghan, 2016, p.117)

a. Legal situation of women

Sarah Waters is a writer who is aware of women's marginal status in the traditionally patriarchal disciplines of history and historiography. Her writings challenge marginalisation and contribute to the redefinition of "what counts as history worth telling in the first place." She considers that the genre of historical fiction enables female protagonists "a way into history through the back door" so, in a sense, Waters recovers lost or elided women's histories. (Jones & O'Callaghan, 2016, p.3-4)

Like in the case of *Maria*, we find the theme of the inheritance of a fortune and a man who wants to steal it by becoming the husband of the heiress. At the beginning, we assume that Sue and Mr. Rivers have plotted against Maud to get all the money and commit her to the same madhouse where her mother had been enclosed. Once we read the story narrated by Maud, we discover that Sue is the one that will be finally imprisoned and that this will make Maud free.

Waters creates two characters representing proper and improper models of what was considered "femininity" to show the hypocrisy of Victorian morals. Maud is a lady in the eyes of society, but educated with a knowledge of perversity, while Sue is a thief, but good in nature and innocent because of her ignorance. Despite their hard journey, they shape their own destiny but they also have to go through the disempowerment and

vulnerability of their sex. Unless Maud gets married, she cannot access her fortune and leave Briar: “I know you gain nothing unless you marry.” (Waters, 2002, p.224) Mr. Rivers offers her to secretly marry, get half of the fortune and forget each other but, on the way to freedom, another woman must be sacrificed – Sue, who must replace Maud’s identity in the madhouse. Sue keeps insisting on her identity as Susan Smith, but she is said to be mad and pretend to be her own maid. Mr. Rivers is aware of how appealing is to Maud to be free at any cost:

I am offering you something very great and strange. Not the commonplace subjection of a wife to a husband – that servitude, to lawful ravishment and theft, that the world terms *wedlock*” (Waters, 2002, p.226)

She will persuade me, first, into marriage with him, then into a – he hesitates, before admitting the word – a madhouse. But, there she will take my place. She will protest – he hopes she will! – for the more she does, the more the madhouse keepers will read it as a form of lunacy; and so keep her the closer. (...) ‘they keep close your name, your history as your mother’s daughter, your uncle’s niece – in short, all that marks you as yourself.’ (Waters, 2002, p.227)

This is the liberty – the rare and sinister liberty – he has come to Briar to offer. For payment he wants my trust, my promise, my future silence; and one half of my fortune” (Waters, 2002, p.227)

Freedom is also an important topic in this novel, as Maud has been confined in the mansion as the secretary in her uncle’s pornographic library since she was a child. Although she learns how to read and write, which was not at the reach of many women, she lives an unhappy life and Sue is her “ticket” towards freedom. Mr. Rivers proposes Maud the plan in exchange of half of her fortune, but he is indeed following the plan of Mrs. Sucksby, who desires to get her biological daughter, Maud, back to her. At the end, it is discovered that Sue was not Susan Trinder but Susan Lilly, the daughter of Marianne Lilly, Maud’s official mother. Both Mrs. Sucksby and Marianne had exchanged babies twenty-one years before and the latter had left her fortune to both girls. In short, Sue is the rightful owner of Briar.

The story of these girls is not only a search of identity, but a love story. Both young women fall intensely in love with each other and they are happy together, but Mr. Rivers is an obstacle to their love. Mr. Rivers represents patriarchal values, interjecting, objectifying and marginalising the female with and for his own power. He shows how both women, although they believe themselves to be willing subjects in the inheritance

plot, are objects with little control over their destiny. (Jones & O'Callaghan, 2016, p.118) Sue wants to tell her the truth in many occasions, but she is afraid to be denounced for fraud. The same happens with Maud, who does not express her feelings because she believes that Sue has seduced her only because she wants to take advantage from her money. When they get to the madhouse, to her surprise, Sue is incarcerated under the name of Maud and she is thought to be a lunatic who believes to have a different identity.

Once Sue is able to escape from the madhouse with the help of a servant in Briar, she comes back to London and discovers that Maud is living as Mrs. Sucksby's daughter. She confronts all the characters and Mr. Rivers is killed by Maud, although Mrs. Sucksby assumes the crime, for which she is finally hanged. She leaves a letter to be read by Sue in which the whole truth is revealed and Sue goes back to Briar to find Maud, where she lives alone after the death of her uncle. Finally, they come to terms with each other and live happily together.

In this novel, we find two opposite characters, each one belonging to a social class. There is an evident contrast between middle-class Maud and lower-class Sue. In appearance, Maud dresses as a lady while Sue wears a plain brown dress. Maud has been taught to whisper and not show her emotions, while Sue has to be trained to be mannered and please Maud's requirements. The biggest difference is that Maud is taught to read and write to become her uncle's secretary, while Sue cannot even write her name. Maud's uncle introduces her into a sphere that is normally crowded by men.

Maud is not a normal girl and she is told all over the novel that she is not. At the end of the novel, she shows Sue, who thought her to be a simple good girl, that she is different from the standards of a lady:

'Look how I get my living.' (...) They say that ladies don't write such things. But, I am not a lady...' (...) 'You are writing books, like his!' (...) Again, she looked almost proud. 'Why shouldn't I?' she said. I did not know. 'It just don't seem right,' I said. 'A girl like you – 'Like me? There are no girls like me.'
(Waters, 2002, p.547)

The importance of education is also highlighted in this novel since Sue is not able to read the letters that Mr. Rivers sends to Maud, and that is the reason why she falls into the trap:

‘No names! It says; - but I think you know me. Here is the girl who will make us rich - that fresh little finger smith, I’ve had cause in the past to employ her skills, and can commend her. She is watching as I write this, and oh! Her ignorance is perfect.’ (Waters, 2002, p.244)

I do not know yet that she cannot read or write so much as her own name; when I learn it I laugh, in an awful relief. But I don’t quite believe her. ‘Not read?’ I say. ‘Not a letter, not a word?’ — and I hand her a book. She does not want to take it; and when she does, she opens its covers, turns a page, gazes hard at a piece of text — but all in a way that is wrong, indefinably anxious and wrong, and too subtle to counterfeit. (...) I am only amazed. Not to read! It seems to me a kind of fabulous insufficiency — like the absence, in a martyr or a saint, of the capacity for pain. (Waters, 2002, p.244)

Education can be considered as a blessing, but also as a disgrace, like in the case of Maud. She discovers things that trouble her as a lady. She is blamed for being the daughter of a mad woman and she must repress her instincts under her gloves. She does not know how to enjoy life like Sue, who brings happiness and innocence to Maud’s life. She teaches her how to dance and they enjoy time together like sisters: “I know everything. I know nothing. (...) I cannot do, what I have not seen. I cannot, for example, sit a horse, or dance.” (Waters, 2002, p.203) Sue starts to become indispensable for Maud to make her nightmares disappear: “I have begun, in sleeping, to dream unspeakable dreams; and to wake, each time, in a confusion of longing and fear.” (Waters, 2002, p. 280)

Maud has been trapped in the library during all her life, trying to escape at any cost and that is why she conspires with Mr. Rivers, to become free: “I am seventeen when Richard Rivers comes to Briar with a plot and a promise and the story of a gullible girl who can be fooled into helping me do it.” (Waters, 2002, p.204) Sue, in turn, is trapped by her condition as poor, uneducated and ignorant of her real identity. Maud and Sue are trapped in a tragic life because their mothers tried to save them from the calamities of their sexual condition in each sphere. Each of them seeks freedom by being independent, not willing to stay with a man. Sue cannot seek for legal help when she is incarcerated because she is treated as a lunatic, since she has been enclosed by her “husband” and he has all the power over his wife. On the other hand, Maud’s only way to escape from her uncle’s house is through marriage and Mr. Rivers takes profit from this situation.

b. Women, Madness and the Female Gothic

Queer Gothic describes Female Gothic narratives as ‘queer’ not only in their frequent reference to non-normative sexualities and genders but also, more generally, in foregrounding “a systematic stylistic deviance from perceived norms”. (Palmer, 2016, p.8) As Palmer asserts,

‘Female Gothic’ refers to female-authored works of fiction and their treatment of the problematics of femininity in phallogentric culture. In a groundbreaking essay developing ideas proposed by Ellen Moers, Kahane challenged the way in which, despite the major contribution that women writers have made to the production of Gothic, Gothic critical studies tended to be dominated in the 1980s by both a focus on male-authored texts and a phallogentric viewpoint. She also drew attention to the fact that, although the majority of critical readings of Gothic, predictably ones produced by men, focus on male writers and characters and ‘attribute the terror which the Gothic by definition arouses to the motif of the incest within an oedipal plot’, frequently underlying the representation of paternal authority in the text are references to the maternal and ‘the problematics of femininity that the heroine must confront’. (Palmer, 2016, p.10)

In this novel, the Female Gothic is used to portray the nightmare of being a woman in the Victorian Period. We have two houses that entrap the protagonists, the madhouse and the mansion. Maud is trapped in the library and enters a shady world of pornographic books: these books make her wiser but also an uncommon girl who knows more than what she should at that age. She is chased by the descriptions of human bodies and she is tormented by nightmares. Maud represents a Fallen Angel because of her sexual desire and because of her knowledge, which is beyond the confines of conventional femininity:

Mothers pretend they have no passion, and teach their daughters that women feel no sexual desire, because, in the conventional society, which men have made for women, and women have accepted, they must have none, they must act the face of hypocrisy. (Showalter, 1985, p.64)

While the villains are Mr. Rivers and Maud, the victim is Sue, who suffers the consequences of her ignorance and she ends up in a madhouse, almost becoming mad, as her own mother did. Waters illustrates a common belief of the Victorian period about madness in women: “It is agreed by all alienist physicians, wrote one doctor, that girls are far more likely to inherit insanity from their mother than from the other parent.” (Showalter, 1985, p.67) As an English scholar, Waters may have been influenced by classic English novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, which deals with the

issue of madness inherited from mother to daughter. Bertha Mason is an example of a madwoman who has allegedly inherited her mother's madness and is consequently locked in an attic by her husband, who describes her as a beast.

Moreover, when doctors come to visit Maud, they comment with Mr. Rivers on the risk of high exposure to literature in women, attributing her sickness to her excessive knowledge. Wollstonecraft had already advocated for education on the same terms for girls and boys, and mentions that the education that women is poorly-based since its basis is on sentimental novels and no substantial books:

I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels (...) the education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.9)

Doctors at that time, however, considered knowledge as a threat for women's mental health due to their weakness and their tendency to mental instability:

But, the over-exposure of girls to literature - The founding of women's colleges - His brow is sleek with sweat. 'We are raising a nation of brain-cultured women. Your wife's distress, I'm afraid to say, is part of a wider *malaise*.' (Waters, 2002, p.300)

'You have been put too much to literary work,' he said on one of his visits 'and that is the cause of your complaint.' (Waters, 2002, p.429)

When Mr. Rivers seeks medical proofs to enclose Sue, he plays a trick in which Sue and Maud give their own testimonies but shifting identities. He pretends to be worried for his wife and narrates how his wife has turned mad after getting married: "He takes them first to talk with Sue. Of course, they suppose her his wife, turned mad, thinking herself a servant, speaking in the manner of a maid, keeping to a maid's room." (p. 298) In turn, Maud tries to be convincing by appealing to her own mother's madness: "The servants at Briar would speak of her as a lady not quite right, in the brain. I believe her mother was mad, sir." (Waters, 2002, p.299) Mr. Rivers blames too much exposure to books and therefore fiction, which may have turned her mad: "My wife, he says, was born to a literary life. Her uncle, who raised her, is a man dedicated to the pursuit of learning, and saw to her education as he might have seen to a son's. Mrs. Rivers' first passion was books." (Waters, 2002, p.300) The rejection to marriage and using swear words is seen as an unbelievable and abnormal behaviour when it is referred to a

healthy woman: “‘I noted too, she wears no marriage ring’. (...) Here it is, he says gravely, holding out the yellow band. ‘She put it from her, with a curse. – For she speaks like a servant now, and thinks nothing of mouthing filthy words’.” (Waters, 2002, p.300-301)

Sue starts the narration by saying “my name, in those days, was Susan Trinder.” (Waters, 2002, p.3) From the beginning, we find a character that has lost her identity; she has been mistaken about herself all her life. Moreover, when she is in the asylum, she is about to become really mad:

I had got my own mind back, the house seemed crueler than ever, and I saw how far I had sunk before in growing used to it. Say I grew used to it again, in seven days? Say I grew stupid? Say Charles came back, and I was too funky to know him? The thought nearly killed me. I did everything I could do to keep myself into a dream again. (Waters, 2002, p.455)

Showalter enhances the lack of comprehension and voice that women had in the asylums. This is illustrated in Sue’s experience in the madhouse, since she tries to communicate that she has been fooled:

Victorian asylum superintendents were reluctant to listen to their patients, or to find out how they felt and why (...) were no more interested in entering into the witness of the mad, in negotiating with their testimony, even in exploring and decoding its meanings. (Showalter, 1985, p.61)

I think the padding was so thick; or else, the people that heard me were used to lunatics calling, and had learned not to mind. (Waters, 2002, p.400)

‘Will you listen to me?’ I said. ‘Listen to you? La, if I listened to all the rubbish I heard in this house, I should go mad myself.’ (Waters, 2002, p.404)

Sue is violently mistreated in the asylum by the nurses, physically and verbally. The doctor tries to make her rest as much as possible, but Sue keeps fighting to escape from the madhouse, which she describes as worse than a prison. She is incarcerated and she is called “Maud” repeatedly to convince her, which makes her stay in the madhouse more terrible.

In this story, we have two heroines who suffer the monstrosity of patriarchy reflected in male characters like Mr. Rivers, the main villain, but also other male figures such as Dr Christie, who tries to perpetuate the standards of femininity, or Mr. Lilly, who keeps Maud incarcerated in his library. Both women are made sick by patriarchal control and

find sanity in a lesbian relationship. They will always be like children under the guardianship of men, who treat them as objects and expect them not to show their feelings and stay in the position that patriarchy has established for them. It is only by staying together that they find happiness and rest. Men in the novel do not intend to listen to them, considering women as weak and emotional, which leads them to think them mad once they rebel against the constraints of their condition as women.

c. Female affiliation

Sarah Waters is a lesbian, neo-Victorian novelist who deals with issues like feminism, sexuality and class. As Sarah Waters states,

I've always brought to the books I've written the sorts of issues I know literary departments are interested in talking about: class and gender, sexuality, and playing around with literary tradition. The books lend themselves well to being analysed, I suppose, because I write them with my old literary critical background somewhere still in my head. (Delniece, 2013, p.2-4)

Waters notes that “the historical suppression of gay voices is most often “rectified” through modern literary invention, creating fictional archives of homosexuality where legitimated sources of cultural knowledge—such as Victorian literature—remain silent.” (Doan and Waters quoted in Lee, 2018, p.1) She deals with queer identities and narratives, and she also asserts that Victorian literary plots are heteropatriarchal, authoring the lives of female characters in fix patterns that reinforce rigid behavioural and sexual roles for women. Instead, she challenges not only the content but also the form of Victorian storytelling. (Lee, 2018, p.1) In the novel, reading is revealed as an unreliable means of attaining authentic knowledge, to which only desire and physical love can lead. Waters offers the reader a reflection on the influence of male-authored representations of lesbianism by taking its distance from them. The queer is thus established as a distinct identity with its own potentialities, as opposed to a parody of heterosexual romance. (Delniece, 2013, p.2)

By representing lesbian desire as a metaphorical *chora*, Waters reclaims the relationships between women from the archetype of mother–child and revalues the subjectivity that can be found in relationships between women outside the patriarchal Symbolic Order. Gentleman becomes the repressive phallic signifier attempting to direct Maud’s affections towards him, yet he simultaneously becomes the mirror through which the women’s actions and desires are reflected back to them. He is distanced from any sexual physicality, not only because of his own ambiguous sexuality but because, through his execution of the plan to marry Maud, his desire has been constructed as a story, as a text from which he,

Maud, and Sue are working. This text queers the Victorian master narrative of courtship and marriage and rewrites it in subversive, feminist terms. (Jones & O'Callaghan, 2016, p.122)

Both women trust a man to help them and realise he is only helping himself. It takes them a while to see that the best option is to trust each other. At first, Sue seeks revenge once she is committed to the asylum because she feels betrayed by Maud. Mr. Rivers sells them a dream of a better future by becoming free or economically independent, but he is a heartless fraudster who knows the truth and plays with their feelings. Once Sue discovers the whole truth, she regrets having fallen in love with Maud:

'If I had known – I would have kissed her' – 'Kissed her?' said Dainty. 'Kissed her!' I said. 'Oh, Dainty, you would have kissed her, too! Anyone would! She was a pearl, a pearl! – and now, and now I've lost her, I've thrown her away.' (Waters, 2002, p.534)

'but I mean to find her. I don't care if it takes me all my life' (Waters, 2002, p.535)

'Sue,' she said. 'This house is yours.' 'I don't want it,' I said. 'The money is yours. Half of your mother's money. All of it, if you wish. I have claimed none of it. You shall be rich.' 'I don't want to be rich. I never wanted to be rich. I only want (...)' 'I only want you,' I said. (Waters, 2002, p.544)

In relation to their love story, Maud is aware of what she is doing when she intimates with Sue, pretending to be innocent when she is not. On the other hand, Sue's actions are led by her feelings and instincts, falling unconsciously in love. Maud has learnt everything about physical relationships through her uncle's books and she had explored this with her previous maid, Barbara. She is a young girl who is troubled by what she reads and becomes restless: "The books fill me, at first, with a kind of horror. (...) I am thirteen, as I have said. The fear gives way to restlessness." (Waters, 2002, p. 200)

I begin to lie each night at Barbara's side, wakeful while she sleeps on; one time I put back the blanket to study the curve of her breast. Then I take to watching her as she bathes and dresses. Her legs - that I know from my uncle's books should be smooth - are dark with hair; the place between them - which I know should be neat, and fair - darkest of all. That troubles me." (Waters, 2002, p. 200)

Barbara catches her watching and asks her where she learnt such things. When Maud answers that she did from her uncle, she answers back saying: "Oh, you liar! Your uncle is a gentleman." (Waters, 2002, p. 200) In this situation, it can be appreciated that women in the house cannot imagine that a gentleman like Maud's uncle would make

her read such “devilish” things and that she has inherited this kind of language from her own mother: “Speak like a devil, will you?’ She says as she does it. ‘Like a slut and filthy beast? Like your own trash mother? Will you? Will you?’” (Waters, 2002, p.201) Waters evidences that the patriarchal world hides the depravation of pornography under an appearance of morality, while the feelings between both women are seen as perversion:

Your hand shall be my hand. For you come here with naked fingers, while in the ordinary world - the commonplace world, outside this chamber - the men who handle vitriol and arsenic must do so with their flesh guarded. You are not like them. This is your proper sphere. I have made it so. I have fed your poison. (...) ‘I have touched your lip with poison, Maud. Remember.’ (...) ‘The world calls it pleasure. My uncle collects it - keeps it neat, keeps it ordered, on guarded shelves; but keeps it strangely.’ (Waters, 2002, p.199)

The Victorian Era followed a strict social code and there was a strong sense of morality, and an era of contention of female sexuality. Men represent rectitude; moral integrity and appearances were very important. Men use the excuse of books to awaken their darkest sexual desires and curiosities: sex is secretly experienced through pornography, which they keep secret in order to keep a moral appearance. On the other hand, Maud and Sue enjoy natural and free sex driven by their own feelings. As Lee observes, the books of Maud’s uncle enhance the patriarchal bent of Victorian pornography; his directory organizes pornographic women, effectually stripping them of the sexuality they are allowed in this genre. Mr. Lilly is obsessed with cleaning perverted content and normalizes porn as an academic object of study. (Lee, 2018, p.7)

The gloves are used as a symbol to keep Maud from mischief, which reflects the importance of Victorian appearances, hiding the truth and keeping a correct appearance by repressing wild instincts. “‘Thank God she wears gloves, at least,’ I hear her say. ‘That may keep her from further mischief.’” (Waters, 2002, p.201) When she is punished for trying to explore beyond the books and grows up, she suppresses her curiosity and becomes a plain immune librarian: “I understand my uncle’s books to be filled with falsehoods, and I despise myself for having supposed them truths. (...) The restlessness turns all to scorn. I become what I was bred to be. I become a librarian.” (Waters, 2002, p.201) Maud represses her instincts until she meets Sue and that is when she starts to find meaning and sense to her uncle’s books:

I think of the books I have lately read, to Richard and my uncle: they come back to me now, in phrases, fragments – pressed her lips and tongue – takes hold of my hand – hip, lip and tongue – forced it half-strivingly – took hold of my breasts – opened wide the lips of my little – the lips of her little cunt – I cannot silence them, I almost see them. (Waters, 2002, p.280).

She plays with Sue, pretending to be innocent and unaware of what she must do on her wedding night with Mr. Rivers: “I wish you would tell me what it is a wife must do, on her wedding-night.” (Waters, 2002, p.281) She plays being a simple good girl, but she is always aware of what she does and takes advantage from Sue’s ignorance: “After all, this is how it is done, in my uncle’s books: two girls, one wise and one unknowing.” (Waters, 2002, p.281)

When Sue discovers the whole truth at the end, she discovers that Maud had always been aware of what she was doing when they had intimate encounters, that she did everything on purpose and that Sue was the only innocent in that game: ““You said that you knew nothing, when all the time – I did know nothing,’ she said. ‘You knew it all! You made me kiss you. You made me want to kiss you again’” (Waters, 2002, p.545)

Maud is afraid to draw back from Richard’s plot and then lose Sue, because she would go back to London if the plan did not work. Instead of saving her, she acts selfishly and makes her stay because she wants to keep her at all costs: “And so you see it is love - not scorn, not malice; only love - that makes me harm her, in the end” (Waters, 2002, p.285). As Jones & O’Callaghan assert, however,

Although Maud’s own silence may be representative of the patriarchal constrictions on her desires, Waters allows lesbian desire to circulate through the text in its association with the semiotic and in its uncontainability. The reflection of the women’s desire for one another informs the whole narrative through its reflection in their separate sections, allowing female *jouissance* to inform and undermine the narrative set up by Gentleman, hidden but evident. In this ‘semiotization of the symbolic’, then, Waters refuses the phallus as master signifier and lesbian desire becomes the signifier of the destabilisation performed by the text. (Jones & O’Callaghan, 2016, p.126)

On the one hand, Maud is raised by a man who leads her to a dark world of perversion, much different from the education that she would have received from a mother. On the other hand, Sue is an innocent pigeon who considers Maud as a pure pearl without being capable of imagining her dark side. She is sent to her tragic fate by

the person she considers her mother, Mrs. Sucksby. Her real mother renounced to her in order to provide her a better future, but she is fooled by everybody.

Both women are motherless and have been raised by two surrogate mothers, Mrs. Sucksby and Mrs. Stiles. Maud tells Susan that she is an orphan too, something they have in common: “You’ve heard, perhaps, that I am an orphan, Susan; like you. I came to Briar as a child - very young, and with no-one at all to care for me. I cannot tell you all the ways in which Mrs. Stiles has made me know what a mother’s love is.” (p.243) Sue develops a great degree of love towards Mrs. Sucksby; at the beginning she does not want to leave her and she thanks her for taking care of her once her mother was allegedly hanged for murdering a man: “I would rather Mrs Sucksby. She was better by chalks. She had been paid to keep me a month; she kept me seventeen years. What’s love if that ain’t?” (p.12) When she is in the madhouse, her only hope and strength to escape is to see Mrs. Sucksby again, whom she considers her mother: “I heard that and began to think, not of Maud, but of Mrs Sucksby in her bed, the empty place beside her, waiting for me. How long would she wait?” (Waters, 2002, p.402)

Both girls show appreciation for their supposed real mothers. Maud carries with her a necklace with the portrait of her mother and Sue has a very high opinion of her mother as a brave woman as described by Mrs. Sucksby. At the same time, both girls’ tragic story is determined by the lack of a mother and it is their own mothers who are also victimized, since they die leaving their daughters unprotected. Mrs. Grace Sucksby is Maud’s real mother and gives her to Marianne Lilly with the hope of making her a real lady and give her a better future. In exchange, Marianne gives Susan to the guardianship of Mrs. Sucksby to raise her in ignorance of her true family to protect her from the depravity of her uncle, and gives her half of her private fortune. Each mother wanted the best future for her daughter and they both sacrificed themselves for them. In the end, Mrs. Sucksby pleads guilty for the murder of Mr. Rivers and reveals the truth to the girls. In this way, both women reject heterosexuality and choose happiness, love without submission to a man, in an openly lesbian relationship.

4) Conclusion

To conclude, female affiliation is the alternative that women found to the oppression of heterosexual relationships. Due to the separate spheres for men and women and the legal helplessness of women, the latter may have felt more comprehended and loved by companions of their own sex. Women were always under the care of a male tutor and they were punished by the law if they escaped unhappy or abusive marriages.

In *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* and *Fingersmith*, we have Fallen Angels who do not fit the ideal of the Angel in the House. They are invisible to the law and marriage is the only way for them to get a better future, but once they get married, they are expected to remain quiet and stay in the domestic sphere. If they express any sign of disconformity, their husbands have the power to commit them to an asylum so they get rid of them, having legal access to their wives' fortune. Psychiatrists at that time supported that madness was related to the female sexual organs and they used housework and rest as a therapy to 'help' women recover.

The heroines in these novels are motherless and suffer the consequences of not having the guidance of a female referent. They have to deal with men who try to perpetuate the roles and spheres established by patriarchal society. Education plays also an important role in both novels, both in the ability to write and express themselves by some and the disgrace it means for those who cannot.

Elements of the Female Gothic are used to portray the monstrosity of patriarchy and asylums are like the prisons that keep women enclosed to recover from what they consider as improper. Freedom is the main goal of the protagonists, but they must go through harsh experiences in order to get a better future. Moreover, institutions like law and medicine supported the cultural constructions about gender roles and this is why women are punished for trying to escape from their positions of inferiority. In short, both women in both novels are imprisoned by patriarchy in different ways.

Female affiliation is finally the escape route that women find to live a better life since they cannot change society and its rules. The master narrative of heterosexual love and romance "happy ever after" is undermined in both novels. Women in both novels are expected to find happiness in heterosexual romance and marriage, but both novels portray heterosexuality and marriage as sordid, tragic and even life-threatening for

women. Instead, they find happiness and comprehension among themselves and are free to enjoy it secretly, since female companionship was not regarded as inappropriate. Both authors, Wollstonecraft and Waters, provide a happy ending for their protagonists, who live happily together without the need of a man. It is important to bear in mind that, although non-heterosexual relationships are gradually being more accepted nowadays and they are supported by laws and a large part of society, the existence of such relationships was not acceptable or imaginable in the past and had to be kept secret. Novels like these two reflect the existence of women of all times who shared their lives without the need to get married and who had the courage to look for a happier future.

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